

*BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT*

**A Desk-based Assessment and
Preliminary Recording of Buildings at 21
- 27 High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton,
West Midlands**

B.U.F.A.U.



Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
Project No. 466
February 1997

**A Desk-based Assessment and Preliminary Recording of
Buildings at 21 - 27 High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton, West Midlands**

by
Lucie Dingwall

For further information please contact:
Simon Buteux, Iain Ferris or Peter Leach (Directors)
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
The University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel: 0121 414 5513
Fax: 0121 414 5516
E-Mail: BUFAU@bham.ac.uk
Web Address: <http://www.bham.ac.uk/BUFAU/>

Contents

- 1.0 Summary
- 2.0 Introduction
- 3.0 Site Description
- 4.0 Objectives
- 5.0 Methodology
- 6.0 Background
- 7.0 Historical Summary
- 8.0 Building Descriptions
- 9.0 Assessment
- 10.0 Recommendations
- 11.0 Acknowledgements
- 12.0 References

Figures

- Figure 1 Location of Bilston
- Figure 2 Location of Study Area
- Figure 3 23 High Street, Bilston - Rear Elevation

Maps

- 1799 Sketch Map of Bilston (Copy by James Sheriff - Staffs CRO D1340)
- 1832 Cholera Plan of Bilston
- 1839 Map of Bilston and Bradley (R. Timmis - Staffs CRO D593/H/3/29W)
- 1887 Ordnance Survey 25" 1st Edition
- 1902 Ordnance Survey 25" 2nd Edition
- 1919 Ordnance Survey 25" 3rd Edition
- 1938 Ordnance Survey 25" 4th Edition

Plates

- 1 21-27 High Street, Bilston - Front Elevations
- 2 21 High Street, Bilston - Rear
- 3 21 High Street, Bilston - Detail
- 4 21 High Street, Bilston - Ground Floor Interior
- 5 21 High Street, Bilston - Attic
- 6 21 & 23 High Street, Bilston - Rear
- 7 21 & 23 High Street, Bilston - Detail
- 8 23 High Street, Bilston - Detail
- 9 23 High Street, Bilston - Detail
- 10 23 High Street, Bilston - Ground Floor Interior
- 11 21 & 23 High Street, Bilston - Cellar
- 12 23 High Street, Bilston - Timber Frame
- 13 23 High Street, Bilston - Timber Frame
- 14 23 High Street, Bilston - Ceiling Beams
- 15 25/7 High Street, Bilston - Interior
- 16 21 - 27 High Street, Bilston - Rear

A DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT AND PRELIMINARY RECORDING OF BUILDINGS AT 21-27 HIGH STREET, BILSTON, WOLVERHAMPTON, WEST MIDLANDS

1.0 Summary

A desk-based assessment and photographic survey was carried out at 21-27 High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton (SMR 9466), ahead of proposed demolition and redevelopment of the site. The standing building at Number 25/27 was found to be largely modern, but Number 21 was found to be pre-1875 in date, and Number 23 was also found to potentially contain pre-1875 elements.

2.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of an archaeological assessment and photographic survey of buildings at 21-27 High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton, West Midlands (NGR 9470 9620, Figure 1), ahead of proposed demolition and redevelopment of the site. The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of the sponsors, Wolverhampton MBC, in February, 1997.

3.0 Site Description

The study area comprises a row of three buildings, numbers 21, 23 and 25/27 High Street, lying opposite the junction with the northern end of Dudley Street in Bilston Town Centre (Figure 2). The buildings are all now unoccupied, but prior to their vacancy were in retail use, as are the buildings in the immediate surrounding area. Wolverhampton Council wish to extend the pedestrianised area in the High Street and to achieve this, demolition of the properties is required.

The buildings are of traditional brick construction under a slate roof. Number 21 is a three-storey building, number 23 a two and a half storey building, and number 25/27 a two-storey building. There are single storey extensions at the rear of 23 and 25/27 and there are a number of small outbuildings located in the rear yard behind 25/27.

4.0 Objectives

The aim of this project was to provide an understanding of the history and significance of the archaeology of the site, including the standing buildings, in order to assess the implications of development proposals, and aid the formulation of appropriate mitigation measures. The assessment was carried out in accordance with a specification prepared by BUFAU (Jones 1997) , and approved by the West Midlands Sites and Monuments record.

5.0 Methodology

The objectives were achieved through a combination of desk-based analysis of available historic and cartographic sources together with on-site inspection and photographic recording of the buildings/structures.

The desk-based assessment focused on the study area itself, whilst the surrounding area was studied at a less intensive level, in order to place the site in its historical/archaeological context.

Photographs, both interior and exterior, were taken of all buildings/structures on the proposed development site, and sets of these photographs will be deposited with Wolverhampton MBC and the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record. Photographs of the interiors were limited to those areas where access could be safely gained. Significant features, fixtures and fittings were photographed and/or drawn to scale (e.g. Fig. 3) and the survey was augmented by written field notes, all held in the archive, which will be deposited with the West Midlands Sites and Monuments Record.

6.0 Background

The medieval settlement of Bilston (SMR 5810) lay approximately along High Street, Church Street, Hall Street and Market Street. The antiquarian, Lawley, using the writings of a 17th century curate, Reverend Ames, describes the location, characteristics and occupancies of the principal tenements of the town ('customary tenements'), which were originally medieval, although his description is not precise enough for the locations to be mapped on the basis of his descriptions alone. Lawley also gives a description of some of the lower status houses in the town centre in the 17th Century and states that 'many or most of these houses were in the folds and alleys that opened on the main street...such as Pinfold Alley, Workhouse Fold, and Homer's Fold' (Lawley 1920, 53).

Along the High Street, to the west of the development site, is a standing medieval timber framed building, the Greyhound and Punchbowl Inn (SMR 443), which was described by the Reverend Ames in 1699 as one of the residences of the Lintons, and the former mansion of the Greenes (Lawley 1893). Roughly opposite this lies the site of the customary tenement which belonged to the Linton family, called Stone Croft House (SMR 8738), described as a 'fine stone building set within its own grounds' (Lawley 1893, 47-8). An archaeological evaluation was carried out in the vicinity of this tenement in 1993 (Jones 1993), but no datable medieval or early post medieval below-ground remains were located. The site of the 19th century workhouse (SMR 2563) lies to the west of the study area. Immediately adjacent to the study area on the southwest is a new office development housing the Job Centre (SMR 5806) and adjacent on the northeast is a row of four inter-war shops (SMR 4791). The oldest of the groups of buildings in the vicinity of the study area appears to be the row of shops on the opposite side of the High Street, to the east of Dudley Street, numbers 8-20

High Street (SMR 9102), which appear on brief external examination to be late 18th - early 19th-century in date.

7.0 Historical Summary

The study area is situated towards the western end of the area believed to be the medieval settlement of Bilston. The map evidence shows this area of the High Street as being developed at the end of the 18th century. The earliest map available for Bilston is the small scale Yates map of Staffordshire dating from 1775, which shows the pattern of the main streets and built up areas of Bilston in the late 18th century, but no detail. By the time of the Ordnance Survey First Edition map in 1887, the town centre had been heavily re-developed, partly as a result of the increasing industrialisation of the town with the advent of the railway, and partly as a result of the extensive slum clearances carried out after the Public Health Act of 1875. Despite this later development, the tenement plot pattern, which probably dates from the medieval period, largely survives along High Street and Church Street, and the plot boundaries of the study area are recognisable from 1839. All the following maps referred to are illustrated at the back of this report.

1799

A later undated copy of a hand drawn map of 1799 shows the major streets of the town, with some land divisions, but there is very little detail of the town centre. Broad areas are demarcated as containing buildings and gardens, but only a few buildings are very simply represented. The area of the development site is included within a large triangular plot stretching from the Greyhound and Punchbowl Public House to the present day Broad Street (adjacent to plot 296 on the map), and marked as containing buildings and gardens. No building footprint plans are depicted within this map.

1832

The cholera map of 1832 shows more detail of the town centre, with the street plan and built up areas represented, but the buildings are heavily stylised and individual property divisions are not marked. The site is shown lying to the northeast of Workhouse Lane, which eventually became Smith Street. Buildings are shown along the frontage, but due to the lack of detail, it is not clear exactly which buildings represent Numbers 21 - 27, and no details are provided of any outbuildings.

1839

The Timmis map of 1839 is the earliest map to show the property divisions within the town centre, and the buildings are represented in such a way as to suggest that they are fairly detailed and accurate representations. The study area is shown as one plot, with three adjoining buildings along the frontage. All three buildings have separate structures immediately to the rear, and there is one small structure along the rear boundary of the plot.

1887

The first edition OS map of 1887 shows structures in roughly the same areas as on the 1839 map. Although the footprints of the buildings are not exactly the same as those on the 1839 map, it is possible that some of the differences may be due to the more detailed and accurate surveying carried out by Ordnance Survey. The main difference appears to be that the structure to the rear of Number 23 now adjoins the frontage building, and there is an alleyway between Numbers 21 and 23. It is possible that at this stage, the frontage buildings are still those shown on the 1839 map.

1902

By the time of the Ordnance Survey map of 1902, it is clear that Number 21 and its associated alleyway has remained the same in plan, whereas Numbers 23-27 have been rebuilt and enlarged. They are now depicted as one building, with the large structure adjoining at the rear in 1887 no longer standing, and they extend further back. Number 21 appears to be set within its own boundary as a separate property.

1919

The layout mapped in 1902 does not appear to have changed by the time of the 1919 Ordnance Survey map, apart from the fact that Numbers 23 - 27 appear to be separate properties again.

1938 - Present

There is no discernible change in the ground plans between 1919 and 1938. Between 1938 and the present (Figure 2), the layout of Number 21 has not changed, but numbers 23-27 extend much further back to the line of the outbuilding at Number 21, and a line of buildings extends down the western boundary of the plot almost to the outbuilding along the rear boundary.

To summarise the map evidence, the building at Number 21 has retained the same ground plan since 1887, whereas the ground plans of Numbers 23 and 25/27 altered between 1887 and 1902, and again between 1938 and the present day.

8.0 Building Descriptions

Number 21 (Figure 2, Plates 1 - 7, 11, 16)

Number 21 High Street consists of a traditional brick-built three-storey building, under a saddle-backed roof constructed of slate at the rear and tiles at the front. It is two rooms deep, with a small toilet at the rear and has a bay window shop front with a recessed entrance and a steel roller shutter. Access to the first floor is from a staircase in Number 23, leading up to a front room and a staircase up to the attic room. There is a gap of approximately 15cm between the frontages of Numbers 19 and 21, which continues along the whole depth of the buildings. The frontages of Numbers 21 and 23 abut each other, but are not bonded together, and there is an alleyway up to 1st

floor level between them. According to verbal reports, Number 21 was a sweet shop until relatively recently, before becoming a bric-a-brac shop.

The front elevation of Number 21 is constructed of small hand-made bricks, approximately 9" x 2.5" in size, in Flemish bond. The first floor window is a modern opening with a concrete lintel, inscribed through the remains of an older, narrow, flat headed opening. The second floor window is a small attic window, probably dating from the early 19th-century (Plate 1).

At the rear, the walls are irregularly bonded, and are built of the same small, hand-made bricks as the frontage. In the roof is a small dormer window and the original chimney stack sits on the edge of the roof, adjacent to Number 23. A later extension built of similar, small hand-made bricks is attached to the rear, with a lean-to roof (Plate 2). The windows of this extension are of a fairly crude and simple Victorian style, the ground floor window having a segmental arch, an uncut single voussoir and a plain sill. The extension may have been added as a primitive service wing after the 1875 Public Health Act, which introduced new building regulations, and it is possible that the bricks have been re-used from an earlier structure. There is an alleyway between numbers 21 and 23, with one half of an arch visible in the brickwork (Plate 3), and part of a window-opening above it. The arch may have been intended for strengthening, to support the wall above the alleyway. A small, single storey extension constructed of machine-made bricks is attached to the rear, and contains the toilet (Plate 2). A door has been inserted above this at first floor level, which presumably was once the access to the first floor. The roofless remains of an outbuilding, present on the 1902 map, survive at the back, and the brick wall running along the northeastern boundary of the plot shows evidence of at least two brick buildings having once been attached to it.

The interior does not reveal a great deal about the date or phasing of the building, since the interior elevations and ceilings of the ground floor are entirely obscured by a layer of artex (Plate 4), and the upstairs rooms could only be briefly inspected for safety reasons. The beam visible in Plate 4 was reportedly installed by the former tenant, who now leases the shop next door. Small sections of the roof were exposed in the attic, revealing a plaster and lath roof (Plate 5), a method of roofing that was used well into this century.

Number 23(Figure 2, Plates 1, 6 - 14, 16)

Number 23 High Street is constructed of brick under a slate roof, lower than the roof level of number 21, with two storeys at the front and three at the back. The ground floor is two rooms deep, with two single storey extensions at the rear. The room at the back, a toilet, can only be accessed from outside. Stairs at the side of the front room lead down to the cellar, and up to 3 rooms on the first floor, from which a staircase leads to the attic. According to verbal reports from the tenant of Number 19, there used to be a well in the floor of number 23. Numbers 23 and 25/27 abut each other.

The front elevation appears to be modern, constructed of machine bricks of Flemish bond and has a modern first floor window with a concrete lintel and a modern aluminium shop front (Plate 1).

At the rear, Number 23 extends much further back than Number 21, and the two are bonded together, as opposed to the frontage where they abut. The top corner of Number 21 is rugged, showing that at some stage the original building adjoining Number 21 was either wholly or partially demolished (Plate 6), and in the alleyway between the two, a remnant of the original wall of Number 23 can be seen, bonded with the wall of the later building (Plate 7). The bricks on the side adjoining Number 21 appear to be newer than the uneven, hand-made bricks on the side adjacent to Number 25/27, and it is possible either that an earlier wall was retained or older bricks may have been re-used in the later rebuilding. The three storey section contains window openings of a segmental arched Victorian style. At a later stage, the rear gable of this building was extended for the addition of a chimney (Plate 8), probably after the implementation of the 1875 Public Health Act, with building regulations requiring service wings. The two flat roofed single storey extensions to the rear are clearly twentieth century additions constructed of machine bricks in Flemish stretcher bond, with modern windows, including one of stained glass (Plate 9).

Inside the building, the elevations and ceilings of the front two ground floor rooms are almost totally obscured with wooden boards (Plate 10). The cellar could not be properly inspected for safety reasons, but it could be seen that it continues under Number 21, and that it is vaulted (Plate 11). Beyond the two front rooms, the single storey extension contains a timber frame in the rear wall (Figure 3, Plates 12 and 13) and a beamed ceiling (Plate 14). The two large cross beams on the ceiling and the large upright beam in the wall appear to be considerably older than the other timbers, and show signs of re-use. The rooms upstairs are either covered in wood panelling or plaster and wallpaper, and the small sections of the roof exposed in the attic appear to be of relatively modern construction.

Number 25/27 (Figure 2, Plates 1, 15, 16)

Number 25/27 High Street is a brick building under a saddle-backed slate roof. The frontage is constructed of modern yellow bricks, with a modern shop front and two modern large paned windows at first floor level (Plate 1). Prior to its vacancy, it was in use as a bar.

At the rear of the building, modern extensions and additions continue down one side, and outbuildings extend all the way to the rear boundary of the plot. Sandstone blocks are arranged in what were probably once garden features at the rear of Numbers 23 and 25/27, and may have been re-used from an earlier building nearby.

The interior of the ground floor is totally obscured by fittings from the former bar (Plate 15), and missing floorboards meant that the first floor was too unsafe to inspect.

9.0 Assessment

Standing Structures

Number 21

This is an example of a low status, late 18th - early 19th-century building, possibly purpose built as a shop. It is in poor condition structurally, and a detailed assessment of the interior survival/condition is difficult, partly due to the limited access (for safety reasons) and partly due to the obscuring of the interior by a layer of artex. This building appears to be the sole surviving fragment of a row of late 18th - early 19th-century buildings both on this plot and on this side of the street, the buildings on either side dating to the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Buildings are probably one of the most significant surviving archaeological and historical resources in Wolverhampton (Dingwall 1995, 10), and examples of pre-1875 urban working-class housing are extremely rare, since almost all of this building stock in the Black Country was removed by slum clearance programmes in both the 19th and 20th centuries (RCHME 1991, 24). It is therefore crucial to ensure that buildings of this type are preserved by record

Number 23

This building is apparently late 19th/20th-century in date, but this can not be stated for certain on the basis of current evidence, since the building has obviously been subject to various alterations during its history. It was common to refurbish frontages and ground floors, as this was the valuable commercial space, and the oldest parts of a building such as this are typically the roof and party walls. There is evidence to suggest that earlier remnants may survive within the building.

The timber frame and the roof beams at the rear of the ground floor are located in a possible modern extension to the building, at some distance from the frontage of the plot. However, it is feasible that the frame could represent remnants of an earlier building which existed in the middle of the plot prior to the 19th century, and its height could be indicative of a single storey backplot building. The stained glass window in this room suggests pretensions to an earlier style, and this could have been prompted by the pre-existence of the timber frame. Alternatively, the timber frame could have been built deliberately using old timbers from elsewhere as part of the 'theme' of the room. At present, there is not enough evidence to prove either theory, but it is clear that the central upright beam and the two large ceiling beams are considerably older than the surrounding brickwork.

Number 25/27

This building appears to be entirely modern, and although detailed inspection of the interior was not possible, there is nothing to suggest that any earlier structure survives within.

Below Ground Archaeology

The study area lies within the medieval settlement area of Bilston, and presuming the existing line of property frontages is broadly similar to that existing in the medieval period, it would be expected that medieval structures once stood along the frontage. There is a fairly deep cellar below Number 23, continuing under Number 21, which will have scoured out remains of earlier structures at the immediate frontage. However, it is not known how far back these cellars extend, or whether there is cellaring under Number 25/27 (although its use as a bar indicates a strong possibility that cellars exist), so there may still be limited areas of potential archaeological survival along the frontage within the study area.

Land to the rear of the frontages may have potential for survival of medieval backplot archaeological remains such as rubbish pits and small-scale industrial workings, outbuildings and property boundaries, although disturbance caused by possible mining would need to be considered.

10.0 Recommendations

No further work is suggested for the standing building at Number 25/27. The following recommendations concentrate on Numbers 21 and 23, and apply only to the demolition of the buildings, not to any below-ground works, which may need to be addressed separately. Subject to any health and safety considerations, further work should be considered to address the following points:

1. To provide details of the earlier build beneath the artex on the ground floor of Number 21.
2. To determine if the timber frame in Number 23 is a remnant of an earlier building.
3. To determine if there is any potential for dendrochronological dating of the three large timbers in Number 23.
4. To establish whether the whole of Number 23 was completely rebuilt in the Victorian period, or whether elements of the earlier building survive.
5. To provide details of the roof structure of Numbers 21 and 23 during removal of the slates.

It is therefore suggested that further recording should be carried out in the form of a targeted watching brief during demolition, aimed at the following specific areas:

1. The ground floor of Number 21.
2. The area of the timber frame in the ground floor of Number 23.
3. The area of the party wall between Number 21 and 23
4. The roof structures in Numbers 21 and 23

The ability to carry out this targeted approach safely would depend on the demolition methods employed by the contractor. A 'Soft Stripping' approach would be an option to consider.

11.0 Acknowledgements

The survey work was carried out by Lucie Dingwall and Lawrence Jones. This report was prepared by Lucie Dingwall, and edited by Alex Jones. The figures were prepared by Nigel Dodds. Thanks are due to Sheila Ashworth and Sue Whitehouse of Wolverhampton MBC for their assistance, and to Steve Litherland of BUFAU for his comments and advice.

12.0 References

Breckon, B. & Parker, J. 1991 *Tracing the History of Houses*

Dingwall, L. 1995 *The Wolverhampton SMR: An Accelerated Enhancement Project* (West Midlands Joint Data Team Arch. Report, New Series No. 4)

Jones, A. 1993 *High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton: An Archaeological Evaluation* (BUFAU Report No. 266)

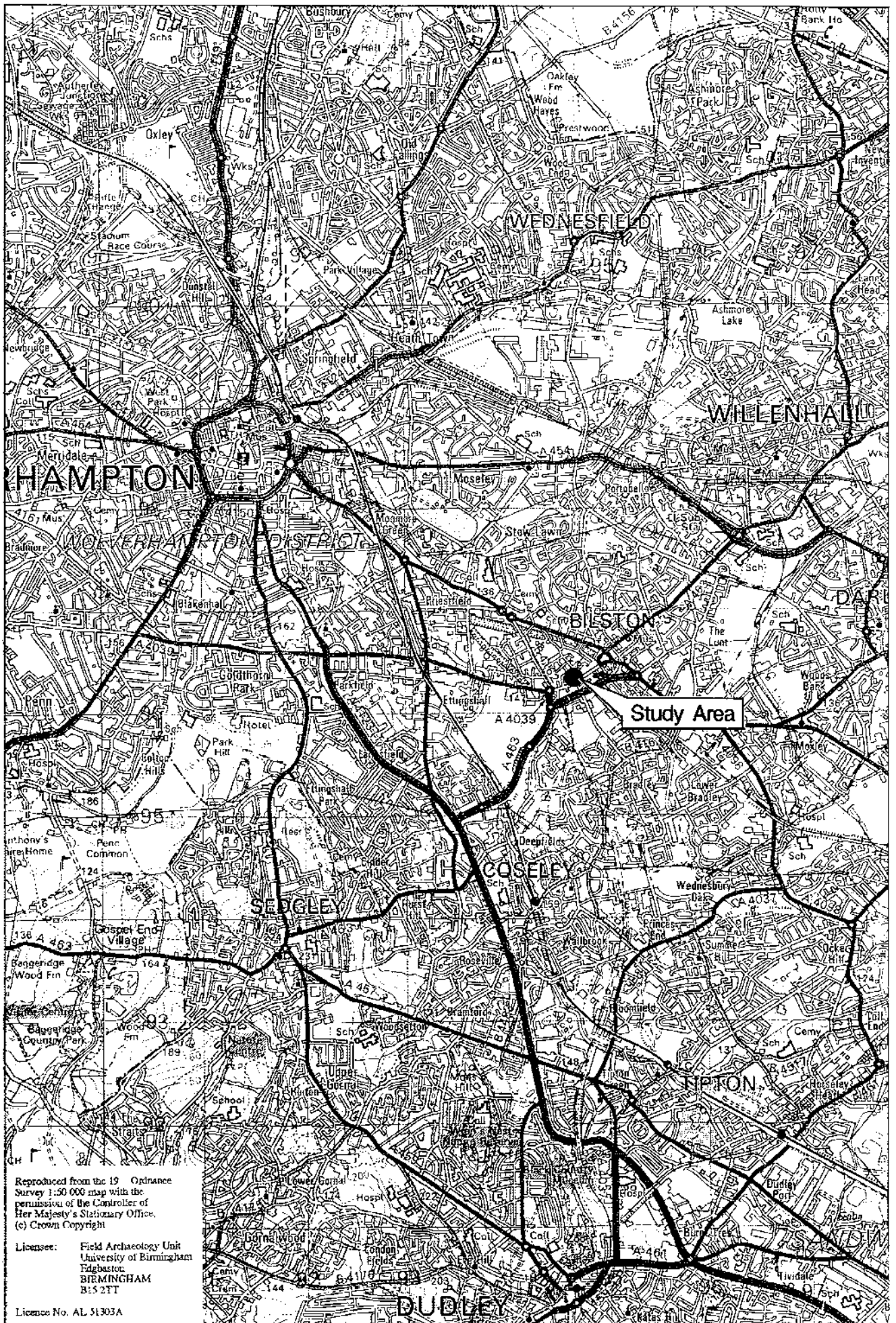
Jones, A. 1997 *21, 23 and 25/7 High Street, Bilston, Wolverhampton: Specification* (BUFAU)

Lawley, G. T. 1893 *A History of Bilston*

Lawley, G. T. 1920 *Bilston in the Seventeenth Century*

Litherland, S. 1996 *A Desk-based Assessment and Recording of Industrial Buildings at the Rear of 9-13 Wolverhampton Road, Bloxwich, West Midlands* (BUFAU Report No. 460)

RCHM(E) 1991 *Architectural Survey of the Black Country Development Corporation Area*



Reproduced from the 19 Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office. (c) Crown Copyright
 Licensee: Field Archaeology Unit, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, BIRMINGHAM B15 2TT
 Licence No. AL 51303A

Fig. 1

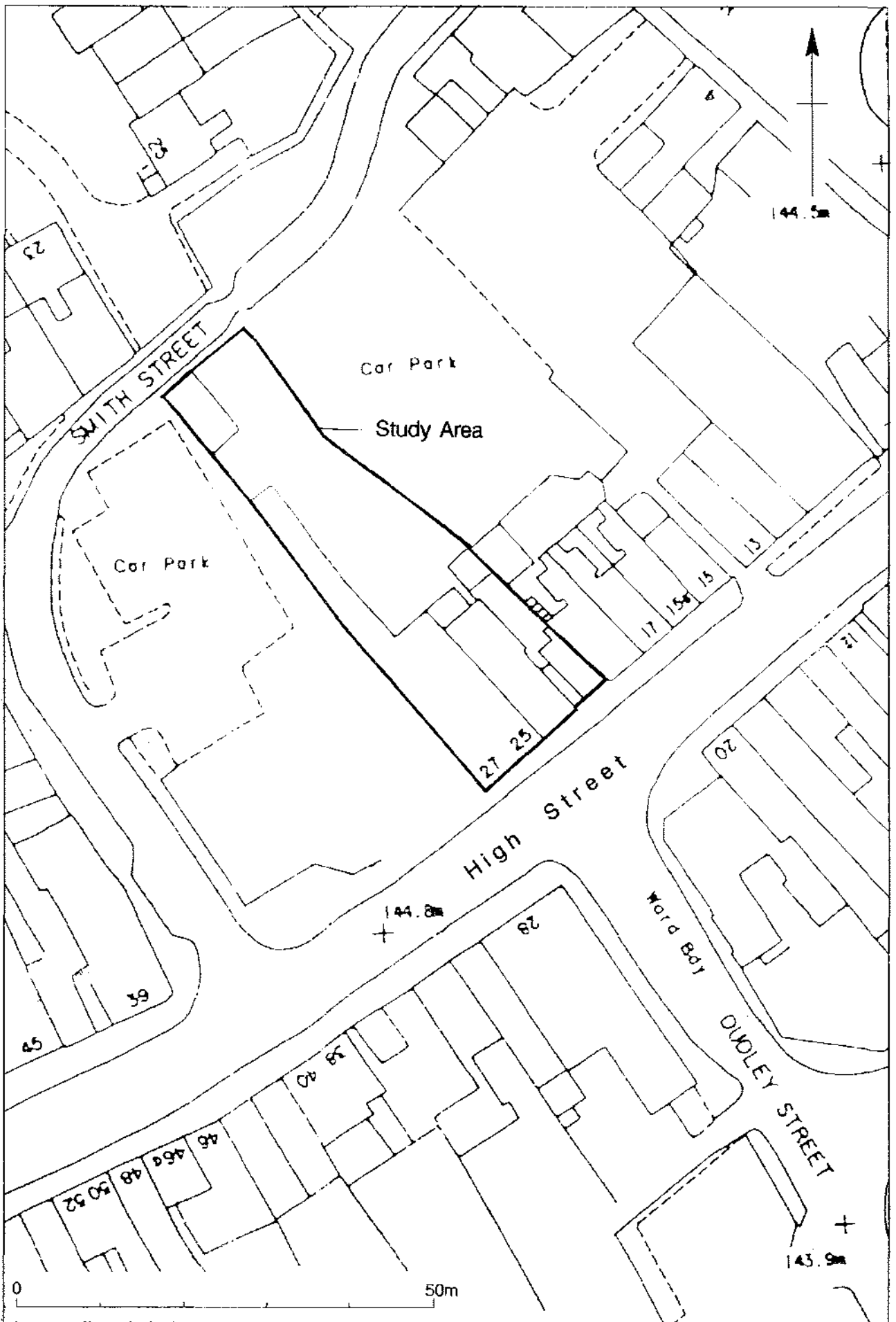


Fig. 2

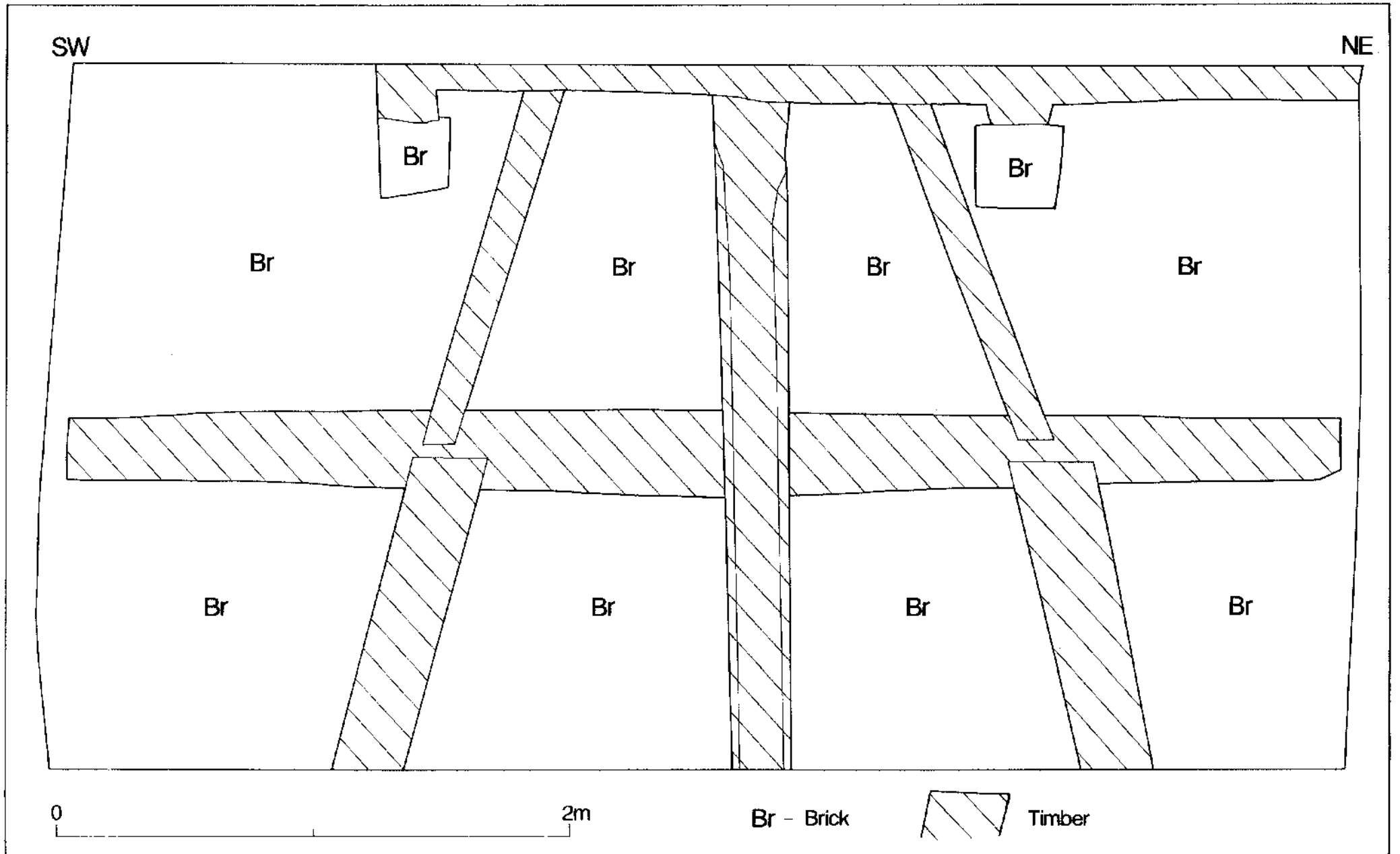
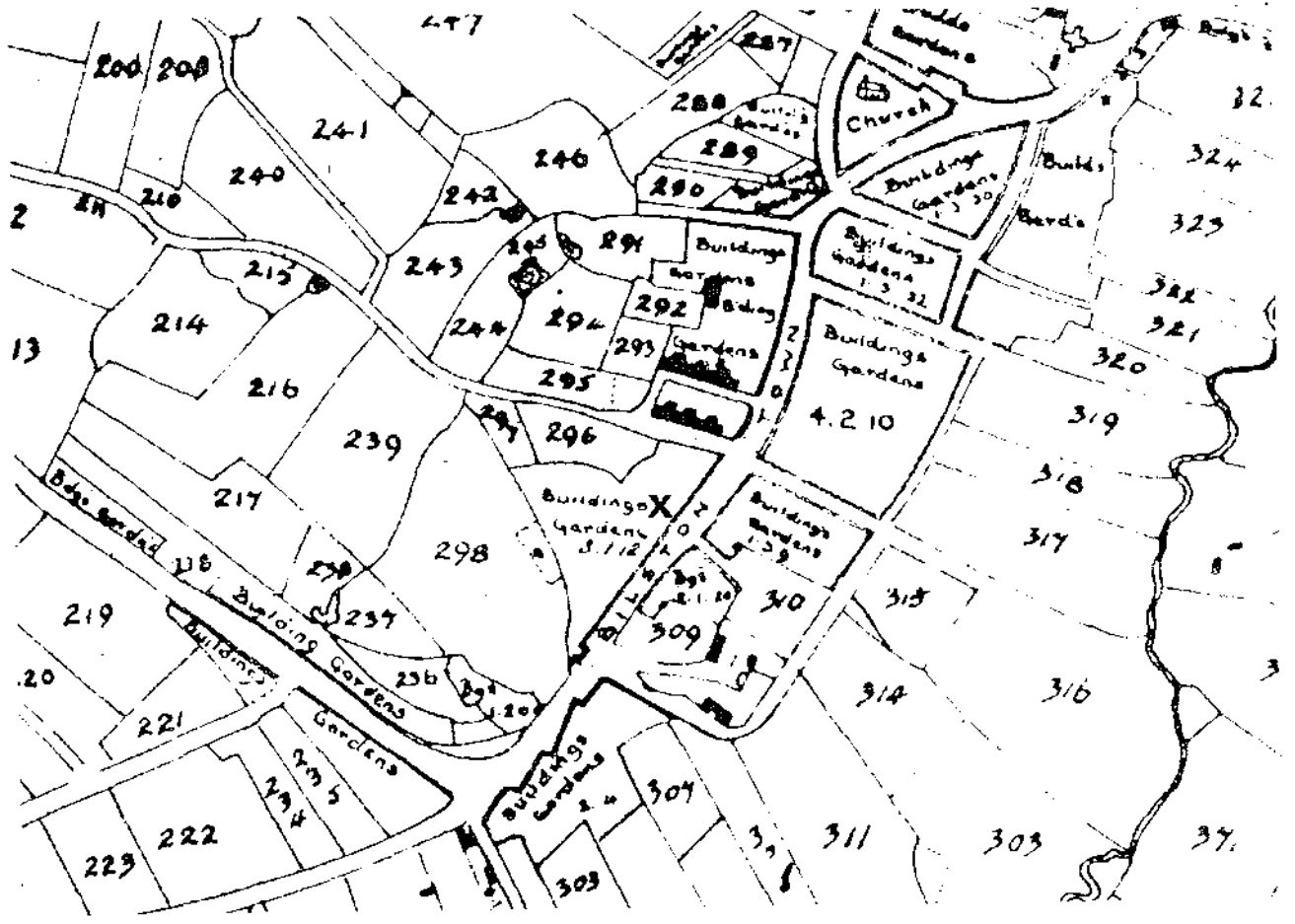
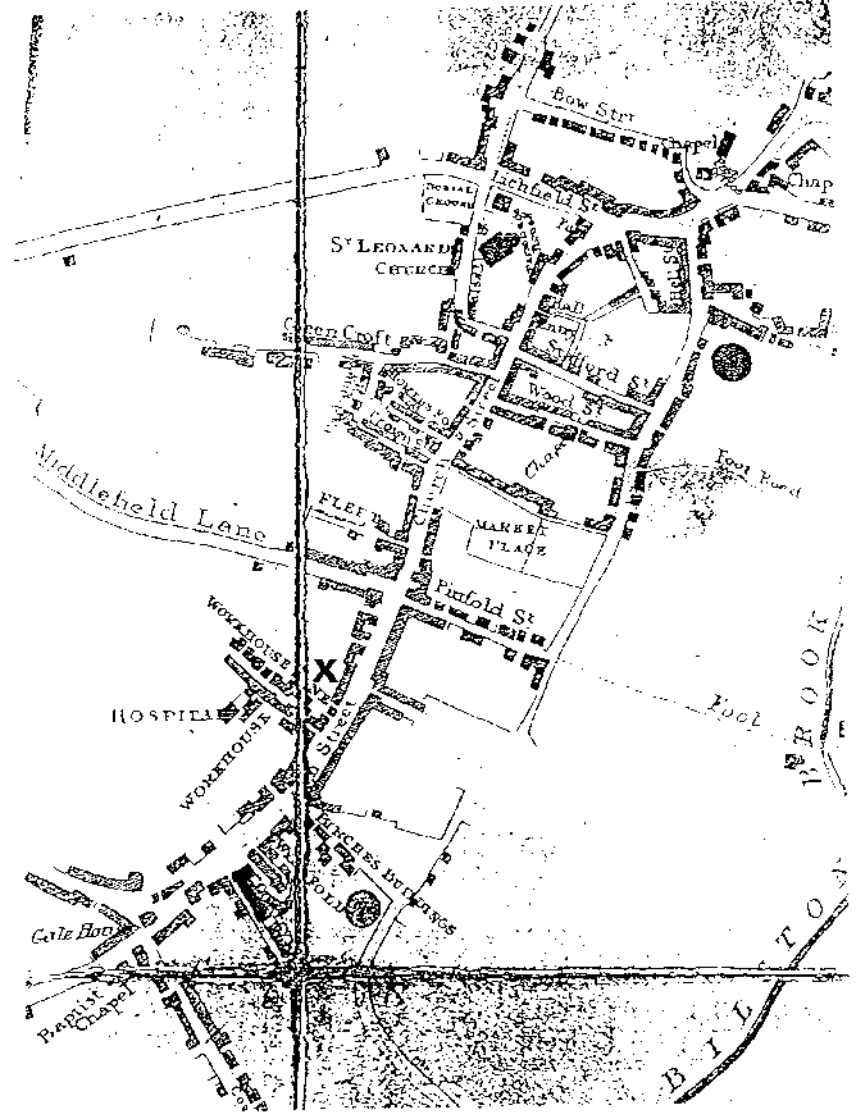


Fig. 3



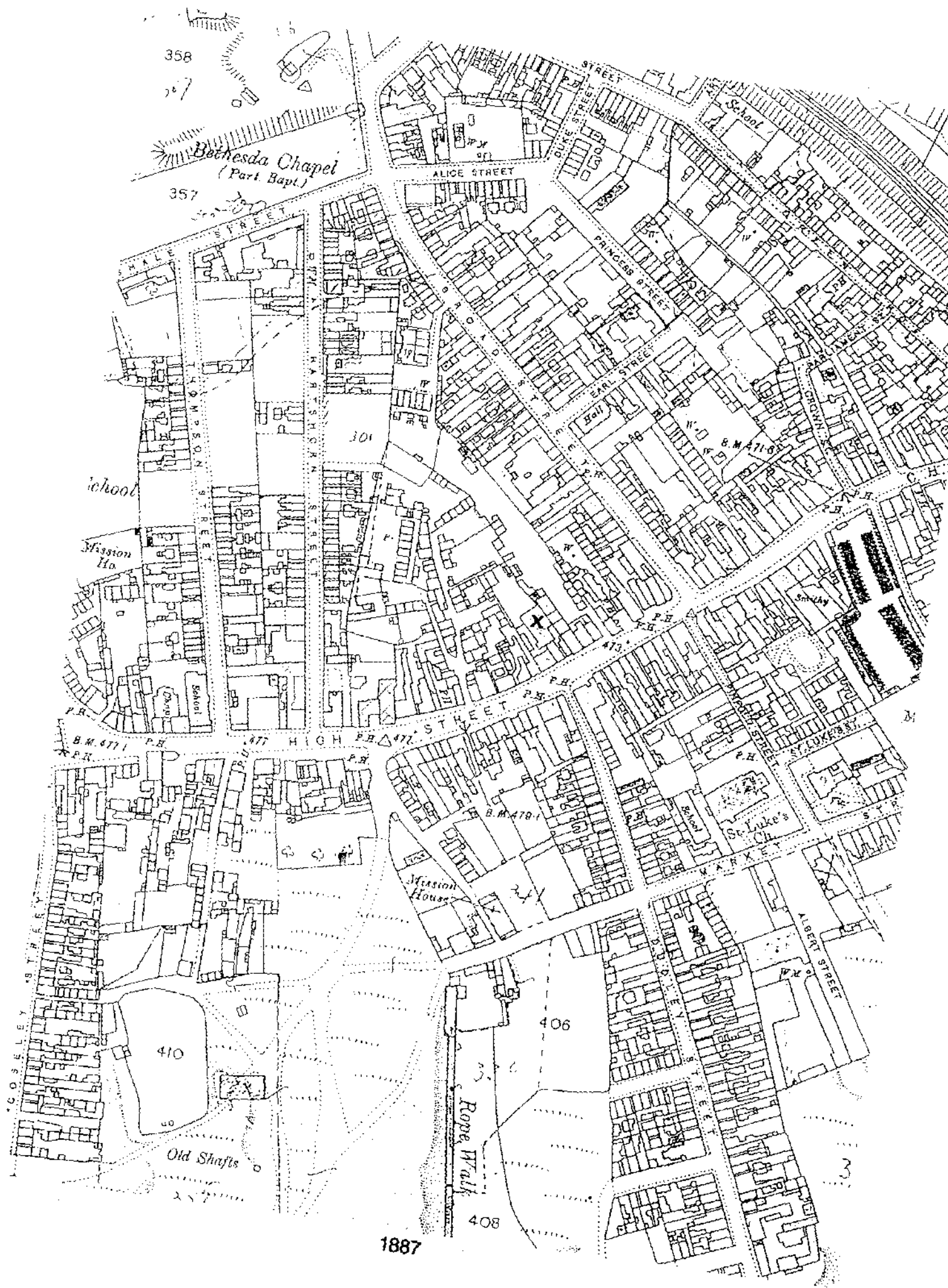
1799



1832



H O F S E D G



358

357

Bethesda Chapel
(Part. Bapt.)

ALICE STREET

School

301

School

Mission Ho.

HIGH STREET

St. Luke's
Ch.

Mission House

410

Old Shaftes

406

Rope Walk

408

1887



271
1-980

272
5-580

273
529

275
707

307
853

306
2-515



1919



Bilston



Plate 1

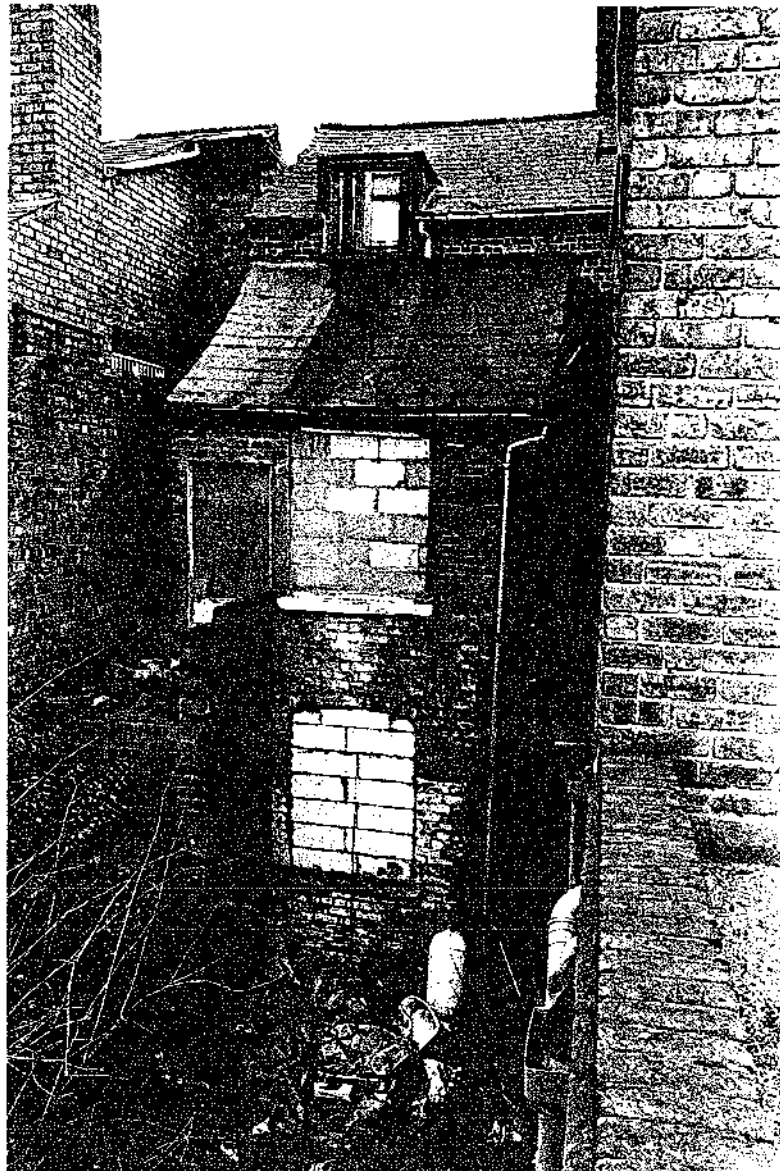


Plate 2

Plate 3

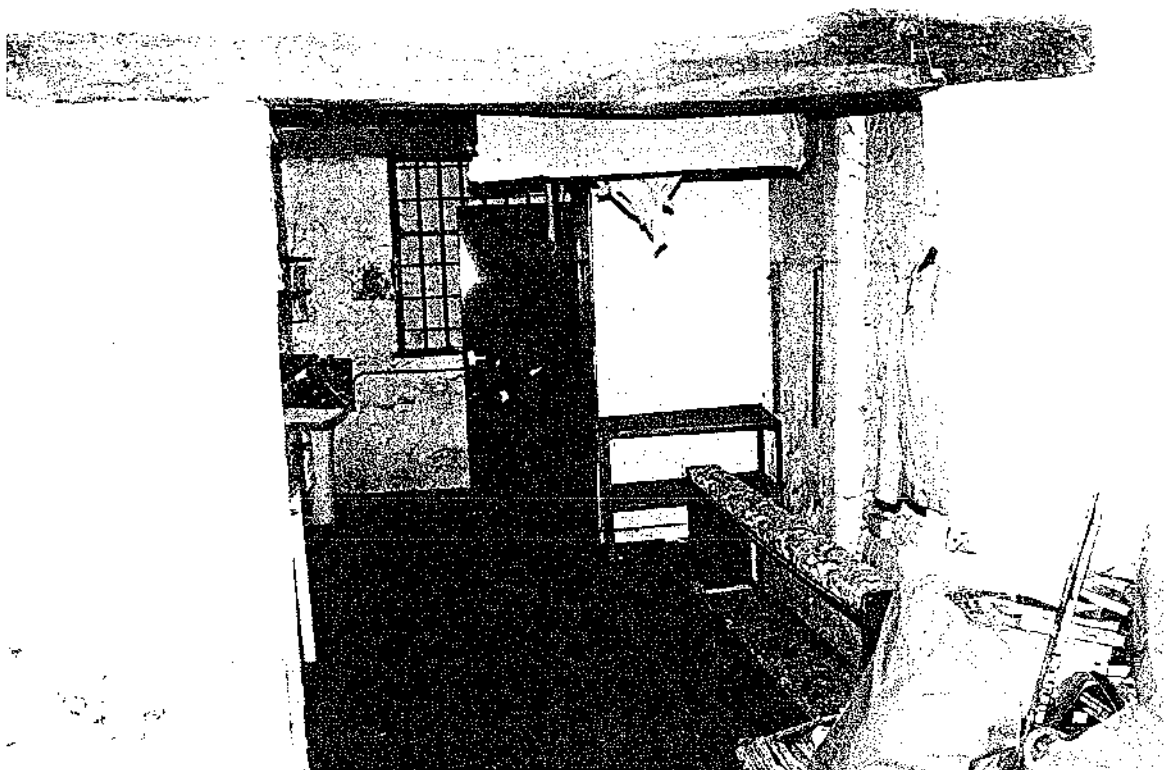
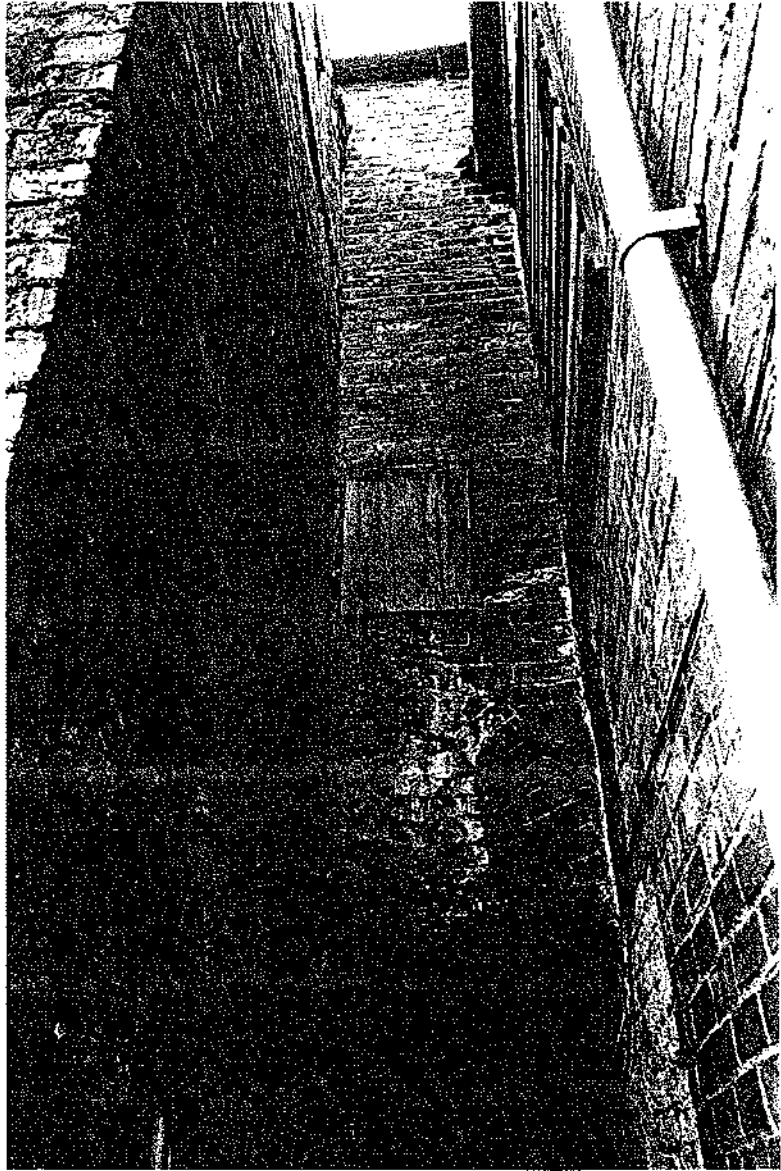


Plate 4

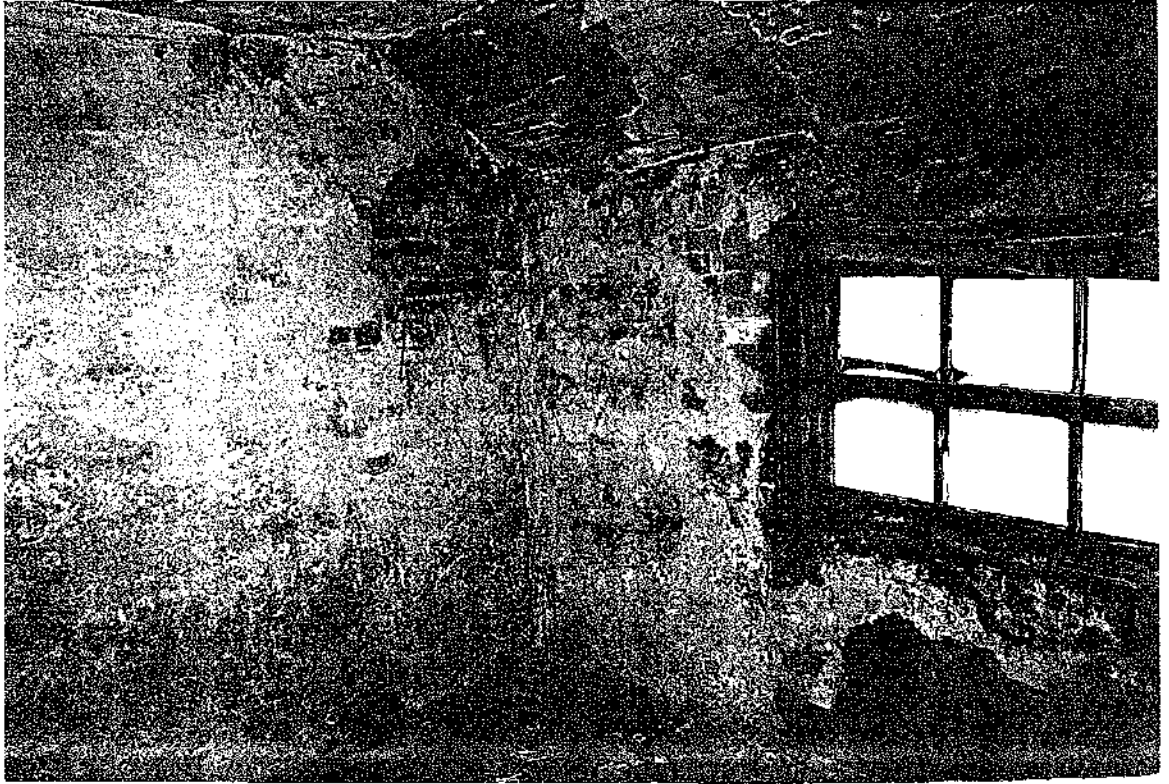


Plate 5

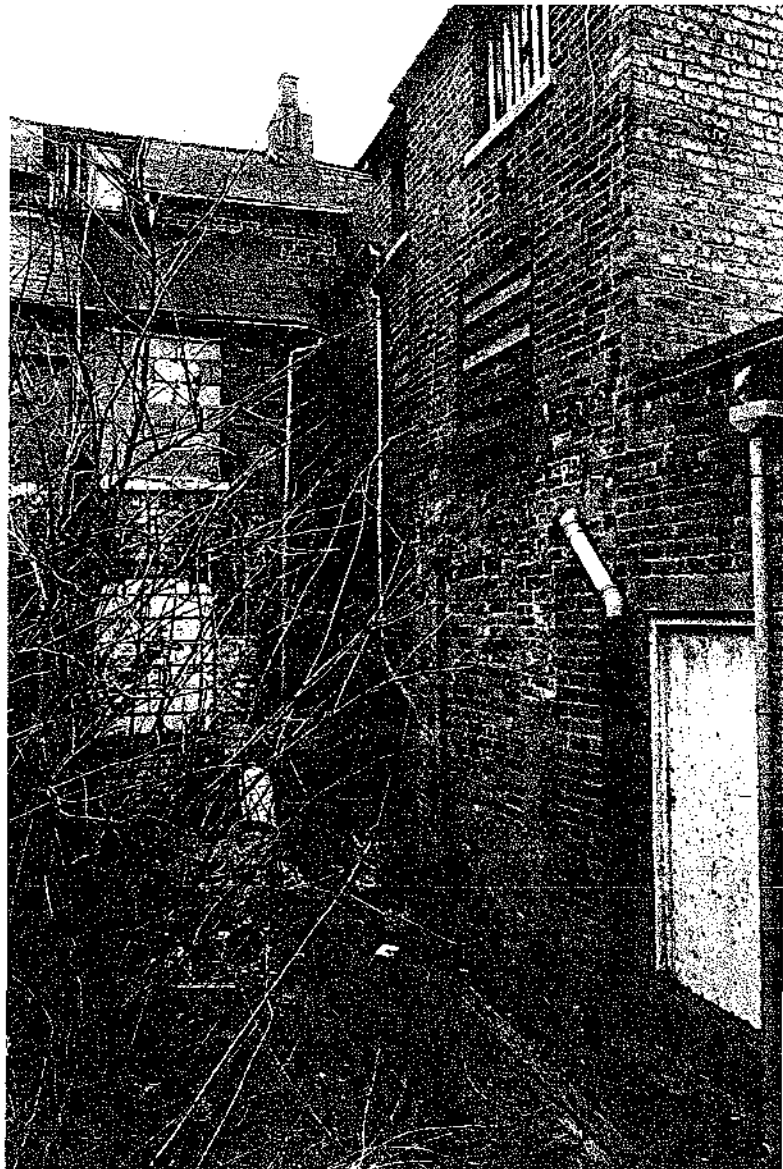


Plate 6



Plate 7

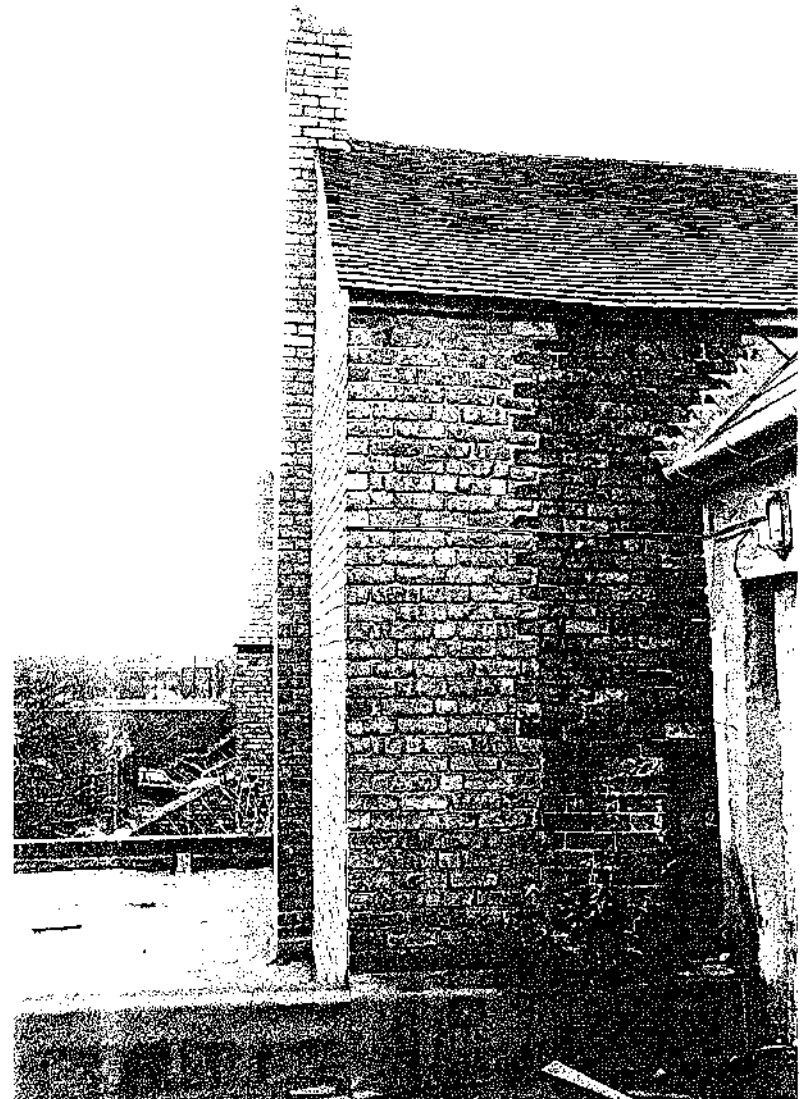


Plate 8

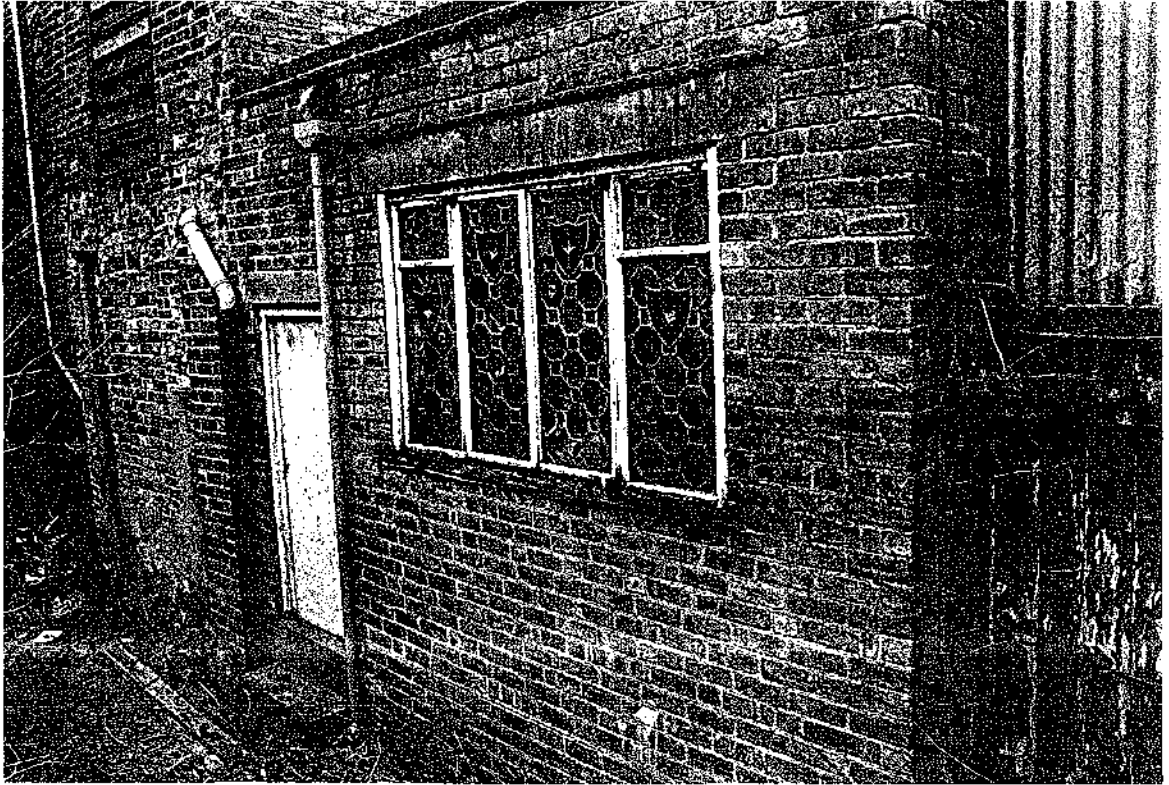


Plate 9

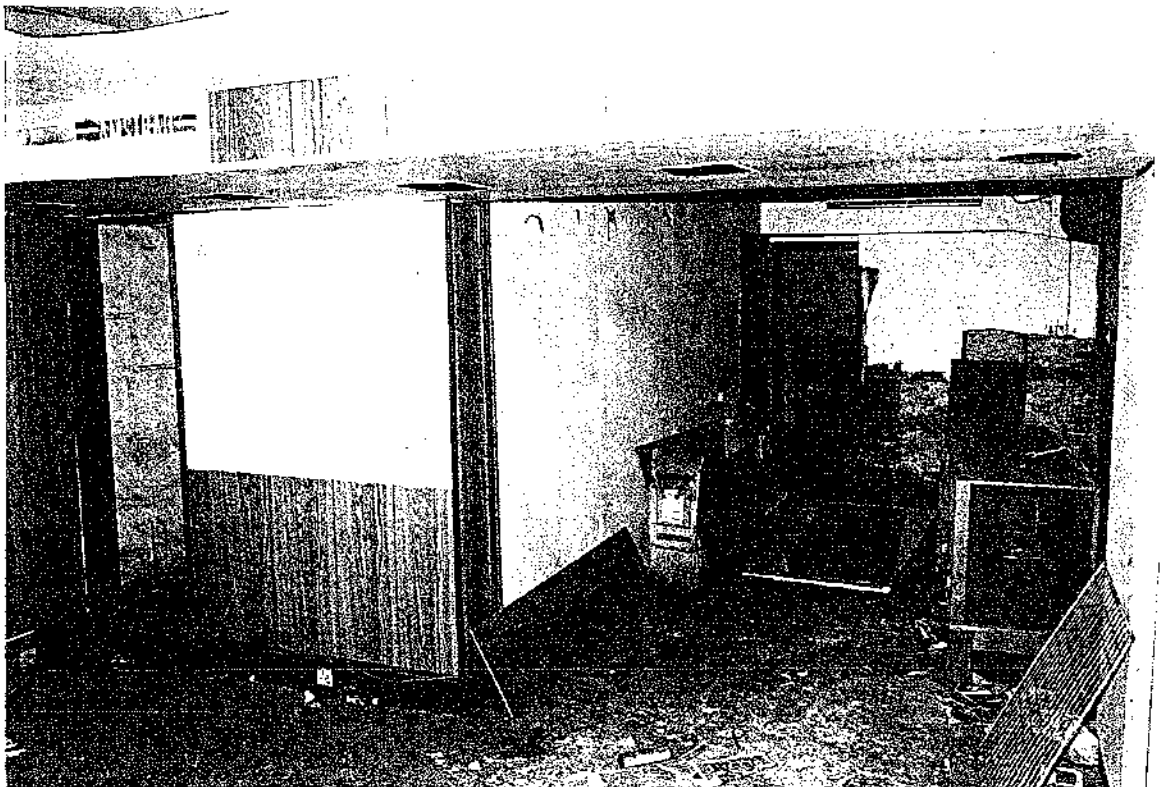


Plate 10

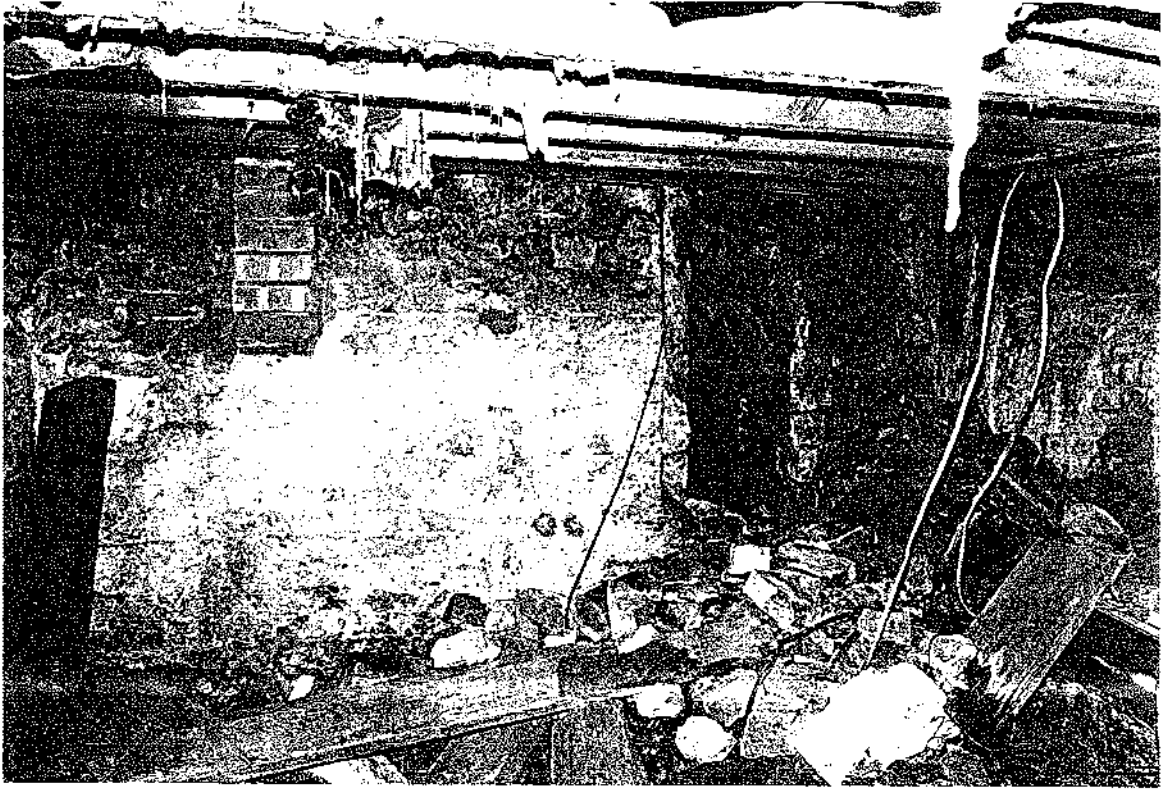


Plate 11

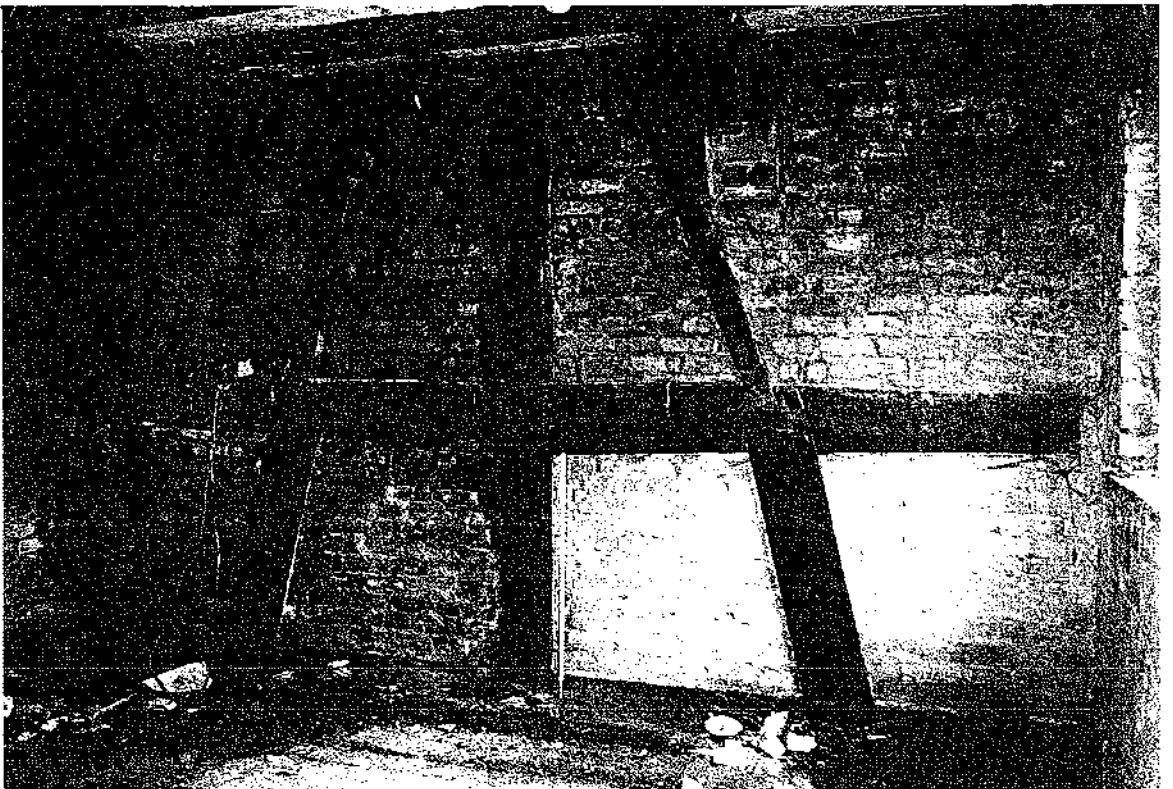


Plate 12

Plate 13

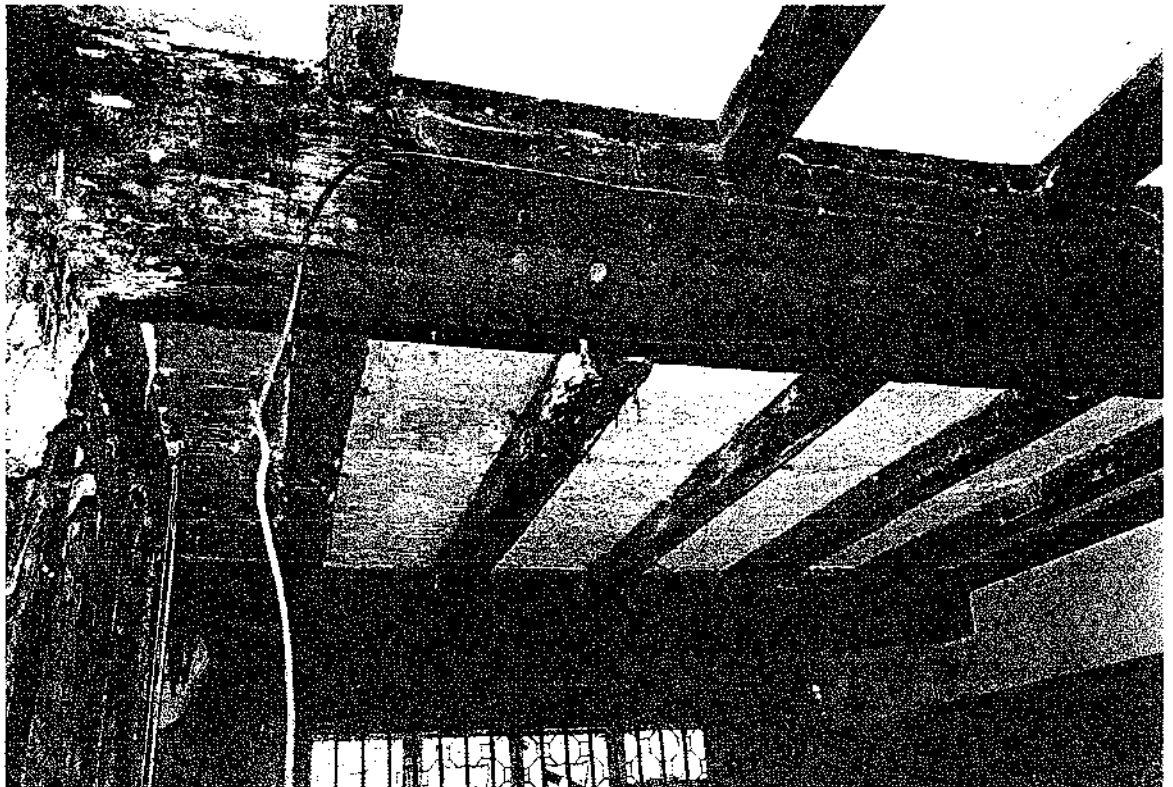


Plate 14

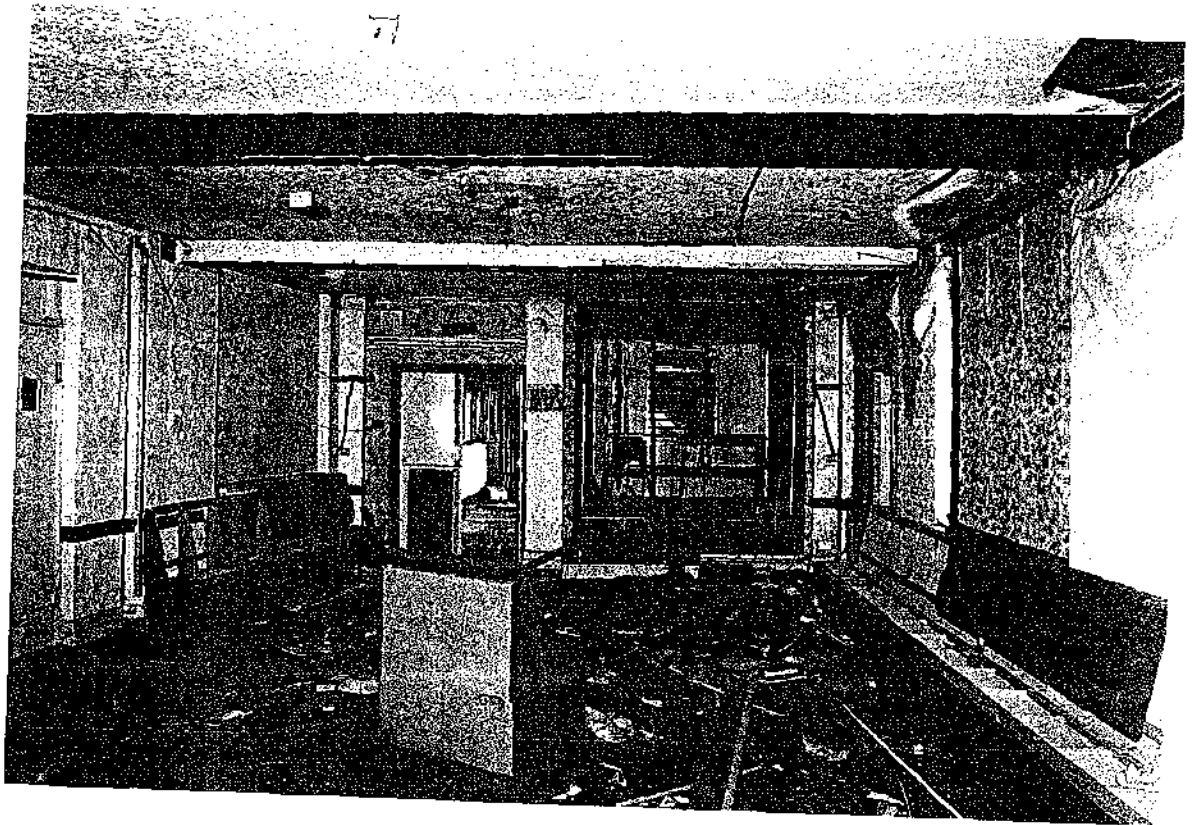


Plate 15

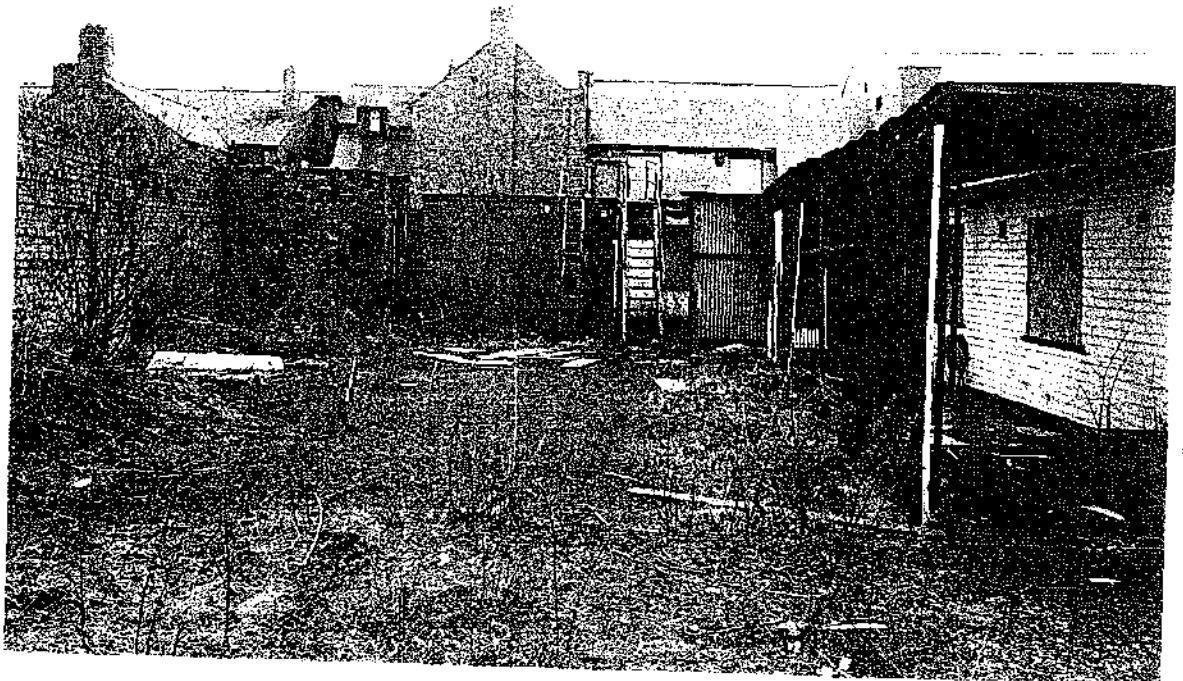


Plate 16