

Market Way, Bilston:

**An Archaeological
Desk-Based Assessment
2002**

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**Market Way, Bilston:
Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment**

by
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Contents

	Page
1.0 Summary	1
2.0 Introduction	1
3.0 Site location and topography	2
4.0 Objectives	2
5.0 Method	2
6.0 Present character	3
7.0 Archaeological and historical background	4
<i>Prehistoric to Roman</i>	4
<i>Saxon</i>	4
<i>Medieval</i>	5
<i>Post-Medieval</i>	6
8.0 Mapping and documentary evidence	6
9.0 Discussion	9
10.0 Conclusions	10
11.0 Acknowledgements	11
12.0 References	11

Figures

1	Site location
2	Development area
3	Map of 1799
4	Cholera map of 1832
5	First Edition Ordnance Survey 1 in to one mile, 1836
6	Map of 1839
7	Map of 1887
8	Map of 1903
9	Map of 1938

List of plates

Plate 1	The market area	1
Plate 2	Church Street, Bilston	2
Plate 3	The Arcade	3
Plate 4	The Market Tavern	4
Plate 5	The old market hall	6
Plate 6	Church Street, c1910	8
Plate 7	Interior of the old market	9

Appendix 1 *Brief for Archaeological work at Market Way, Bilston*

Market Way, Bilston, Wolverhampton An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2002

1.0: Summary

A desk-based archaeological assessment was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in March 2002 on behalf of Wolverhampton City Council. The work was undertaken in advance of the construction of a new market office, crèche and colonnade at Market Way (centred on NGR. SO 9499 9652), in the historic centre of Bilston. The assessment examined the available cartographic and documentary evidence in order to identify the likely location, nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains which may have survived within the development area.

The desktop assessment demonstrated that the site is located outside the earliest settlement dating to the Anglo-Saxon period. The focus of the early settlement appears to have moved during the medieval period and the site was considered to have significant archaeological potential relating to Bilston's medieval heritage due to the proximity of the main medieval thoroughfare. The site was clearly occupied from the early post medieval period, throughout the industrial revolution to the present day. From the map evidence it would seem that the land use as the site of a market during the 19th century would have provided favourable conditions for the survival of archaeological deposits.

2.0: Introduction

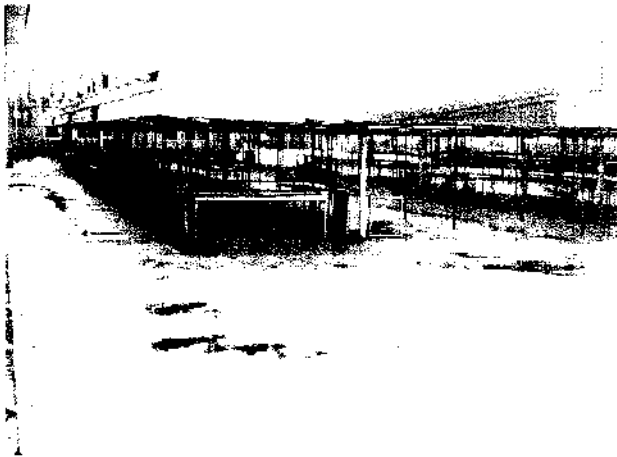


Plate 1: The market area

An archaeological desk-based assessment was undertaken in March 2002 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of Wolverhampton City Council. The assessment was undertaken in accordance with a brief for archaeological work prepared by the Black Country Archaeologist (Shaw 2002) and was carried out in advance of the construction of a new market office, crèche and colonnade at Market Way within the historic centre of Bilston (Figs. 1 and 2).

An examination of the cartographic and documentary sources provided information regarding the likely location, extent and significance of any archaeological deposits within and around the proposed development site. The assessment adheres to the guidelines set down in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999).

3.0: Site location and topography

Present day Bilston is centred on the Church of St. Leonard's (NGR SO 9499 9652) at approximately 142m OD and forms part of the City of Wolverhampton. Bilston lies on a knoll of boulder clay which overlies the Staffordshire middle coal measure. To the south of the proposed development site the Bilston Brook runs from high ground in the Parish of Coseley eastwards to the River Tame.



Plate 2: Church Street, Bilston

The development area centred on NGR SO 9490 9630 (Fig. 2) forms the focus of this study which is located at Market Way, a recent route leading off Church street within the historic centre of Bilston.

4.0: Objectives

The objectives of this assessment were to determine the likely location, nature, extent and survival of archaeological remains within the area of the proposed development. The assessment also considered the impact of any changes in land-usage, recent developments and any build-up or reduction in the ground-level.

5.0: Method

Documentary research was undertaken of primary and secondary records and maps held by Wolverhampton Archives. These sources included historical maps, early Ordnance Survey maps and trade directories. Those local histories formerly held by Bilston Library, but now located within the Local Studies section at Wolverhampton Archives, were also

consulted, along with local histories held by the University of Birmingham library. The Black Country Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted. In order to ascertain and assess the present nature of the site and the likely effects on the study area by more recent development a site visit was conducted and a photographic record was made.

6.0: Present character

The study area lies within a pedestrianised precinct which extends from Church Street to the Black Country Route, and its immediate environs (from the junction of Church Street and Walsall Street in the northeast to the junction of Church Street and Broad Street in the southwest).



Plate 3: The Arcade

Within this area many of the buildings which front the southern side of Church Street date to the construction of the modern shopping centre during redevelopment in the late 1960 and early 1970s. Market Way itself was established as a result of this redevelopment and forms an arcade running between the modern shopping centre at its northern end, and dividing the indoor and outdoor markets at its southern end. The development area borders the Black Country Route at its southern extent and is currently an open area consisting of a car park for market traders in the southeastern part of the area and block paving across the eastern side of the area.



Plate 4: The Market Tavern

On the northern side of Church Street a number of substantially older buildings survive in the vicinity of Market Way, the most notable being the Market Tavern, which appears on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 and a directory of 1851.

Land immediately to the east of the development area is currently occupied by the market hall, and land to the west is an open market area and traders car park.

7.0: Archaeological and historical background

Prehistoric and Roman

There is currently no evidence of prehistoric activity in Bilston. A possible hoard of Roman coins, recorded as being 'in a beautiful state of preservation' have been found in Bilston although, the exact location of their discovery is unknown. The coins all dated to the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Commodus (Lawley 1893, 10).

Hooke and Slater (1986) have identified the former Stone Street (which ran parallel to Bridge Street) as an ancient route, although when this route was established is not entirely clear. It has been suggested that it may be Roman in origin (Cockin 2000;) although the evidence for this is scant. The Roman fort of Penkridge lies to the northwest of Bilston and the fort of Metchley, Birmingham to the southeast. The line of a road connecting the two has yet to be established.

Saxon

The earliest occupation of the area dates to the Anglo-Saxon period. The name Bilston, its spelling and derivation have been subject to a number of theories through time. Early theories suggested the name related to the Old English word for sword (Ekwall 1960).

More recent research has suggested the name is derived from a tribe of Angles the Bilsactan or Bilsonii (Cockin 2000) who settled within the area in the late 6th century (the village or enclosure of the dwellers at Bil. with Bil being elliptical for a longer name). The name Bilston may however refer to 'farmstead of the dwellers at the sharp ridge' (Mills 1993).

The first sources of documentary evidence in which Bilston is mentioned come from two Anglo-Saxon charters. The first charter is dated to AD 985, and relates to a grant of land in Wolverhampton and Trescott from King Æthelred to the Lady Wulfrun or Wulfruna (Hooke and Slater 1986). The second charter is dated AD 994, refers to the Lady Wulfruna and her grant of Bilston along with other lands, to the monastery at Hampton which subsequently became known as Wulfrun's Hampton or Wolverhampton (Rees 1988). The charter describes Bilston as an old vill and gives details of its boundaries.

Medieval

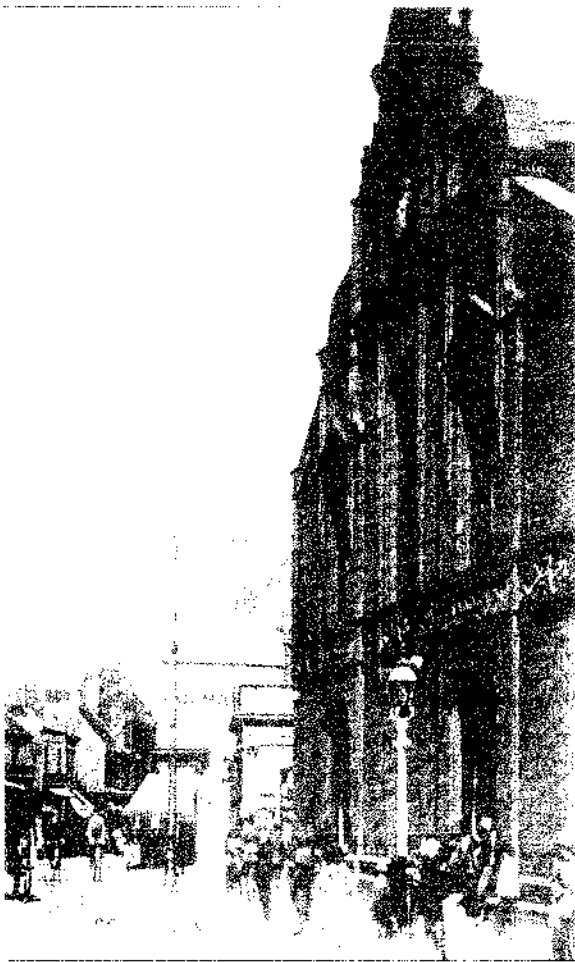
In the Domesday survey of 1086 Bilston is recorded as being part of the King's land.

"In Billestone there are 2 hides. There is land for 4 ploughs. There are 8 villeins and 3 bordars with 3 ploughs. There is 1 acre of meadow. Wood(land) half league in length and half (league) in breadth. It was worth 20s. Now 30s" (VCH Vol. IV).

From this it is inferred that Bilston had a population of between 50 and 100 people during the 11th century (Brereton 1996). Bilston remained Crown property until 1265 when the manor of Bilston was granted to Walter de Bilston. The de Bilstons continued to be lords of Bilston manor until c 1458 when the manor was passed by marriage to the Mollesleys. During the reign of Edward III all Bilston men were certified to be free from toll charges since the village had formerly been a demesne of the crown, which may have encouraged the growth of an unofficial market in the medieval period.

Cartographic sources suggest that the medieval settlement at Bilston was planned around High Street/Church Street, possibly with burgage plots fronting onto the street. Recent archaeological work in Bilston has so far failed to locate any substantial evidence for medieval settlement. Excavations to the rear of 21 to 27 High Street (BCSMR 9466) and along the south side of the High Street frontage (BCSMR 5705) concluded that medieval remains were probably scoured out by later cellars and Victorian buildings (Jones 1993, Dingwall 1997 and Mould 1998).

Although coal began to be mined in the 14th century onwards agriculture remained the dominant economic activity until the 1780s.



Post-medieval

Plate 5: The Old Market Hall

The first outbreak occurred in 1832 and killed one in twenty of the population (Fig. 4). A second outbreak in 1849 resulted in over 700 deaths. As a result of the Cholera outbreaks in 1850 the Bilston Improvement Act was passed which established a board of commissioners and a local board of health in order to improve conditions and to maintain and regulate the market (Collins 1991).

8.0: Mapping and documentary evidence

1799 An undated copy of a hand drawn map originally dating to 1799 (Fig. 3) shows the major streets of the town, with some land divisions, but very little detail of the town centre. Broad areas are demarcated as containing buildings and gardens, but only a few buildings are represented and those very simply. The area of the proposed development site is located within the northern part of a rectangular plot of land recorded as being 4 acres, 2 rods and 10 perches in size. The area of land

is designated on the map as containing buildings and gardens but no further detail is provided.

- 1832** The cholera map of 1832 (Fig. 4) shows more detail of the town centre, with the street plan and built up areas represented, but the buildings are stylised and poorly defined and individual property divisions are not marked. The market place is clearly labelled on this map, and remained in the same use until the later 20th century. Vine Street, or at least its predecessor, is clearly visible running along the northern side of the market place. Buildings are also depicted running along the northern side of Vine Street with the frontages overlooking the market. The area of the market forms a rectangular plot of land lying between Church Street on the west and later Market Street to the east. The area occupied by the market adjoining Church Street is distinctly narrower and appears to respect a series of buildings which run along the eastern side of the street and their associated back plots. No structures are represented within the area of the market place itself. The market place is shown divided into two parts, eastern and western, a separation which has survived almost unaltered up to the present day.
- 1836** First edition Ordnance Survey plan one inch to one mile (Fig. 5).
- 1839** The Timmis map of 1839 (Fig. 6) is the earliest map to show property divisions within the town centre, and the detail on this map suggests it is fairly accurate. The proposed development site is again identified as the market place. Its location, extent and morphology appear to remain unchanged. A series of four elongated rectilinear structures, running northwest-southeast are now recorded on the western market plot. The eastern plot has not yet been built-over. Along the eastern front of Vine Street, a number of buildings (also shown on the First Edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map, Fig. 7) can be seen, including buildings later identified as the Vine Inn and Shakespeare Inn public houses. To the south and southwest of the site, the area of the market place is still depicted as lying within open fields. No tithe apportionment number is given for the field directly adjacent to the market.
- 1887** The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1887 (Fig. 7) shows considerable development within Bilston. Many of the structures recorded on the 1839 map can still be identified and are recorded in greater detail. Of particular note are the two public houses, the Vine Inn and Shakespeare Inn, which lie along the area of Vine Street, opposite the southern section of the market place. Both these structures can be clearly identified on the 1839 map despite its limited detail. To the south and southwest of the proposed development site considerable development has taken place, including the construction of Bilston Foundry immediately adjacent to the southern end of the market place. Further to the west, and fronting onto Market Street was mapped a terrace of six houses, with a central accessway running from the street front to a yard area at the rear. The market place itself had changed little apart from the construction of a series of elongated subsidiary structures on the

northern plot, and a building in the southwestern corner of the southern plot, which is attached to the terraced houses fronting on to Market Street.

- 1903** By the time of the 1903 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 8) Bilston Market Hall (Plate 5), opened in 1892, is clearly identified as a large elongated building running northwest-southeast from its frontage on Church Street to its southern limit, on the northern boundary of the southern market plot. The southern plot of land is still called the market place and remains free of any further development.

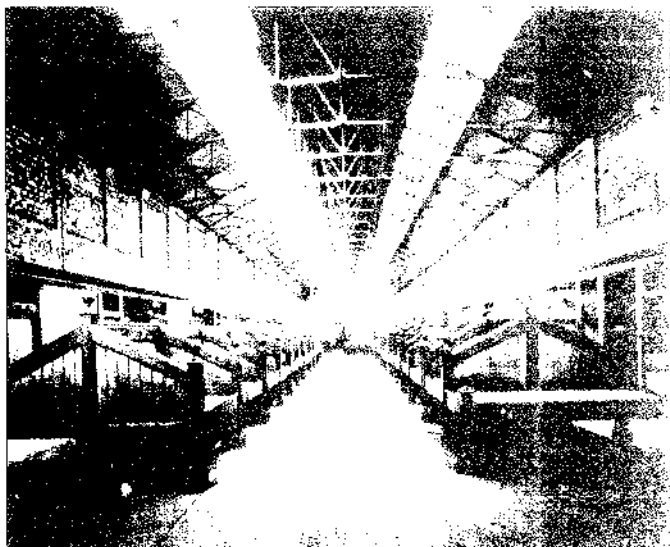


Plate 6: Church Street, c 1910

- 1938** The Ordnance Survey map of 1938 (Fig. 9) shows little change in the layout of structures bordering the development area since 1903. The northern plot of land containing the market hall remains largely unchanged, apart from the addition of smaller subsidiary structures within the yard area. In the southern market plot, the building in the southwestern corner first identified on the 1887 map (Fig. 7) and on the 1903 map (Fig. 8) as a Fire Station, appears to have been enlarged. A number of structures are now adjoin the northern, western and eastern sides of the southern market plot, with six rectilinear structures now depicted in the central area.

There is no discernible change in the layout of the proposed development site and its surrounding area from 1938 up until the time of its redevelopment toward the

end of the 1960s and early 1970s. This resulted in the demolition of many old buildings (including the Market Hall) and the construction of a new shopping centre and indoor and outdoor market.



Trade directories from the mid-19th century show that the proposed development area, including the area of Vine Street and Church Street, was composed of a mix of both residential homes, commercial premises and small workshops for professionals, tradesmen and artisans. These included publicans, joiners, builders, milliners, dress makers, attorneys and booksellers, ironmongers, confectioners and chemists.

Plate 7: Interior of the Old Market

9.0: Discussion

Documentary evidence for occupation in Bilston prior to the Saxon period is scant. While there has been no direct archaeological evidence of early settlement it seems possible that this was a nuclear settlement. Whether or not the early Anglian settlers established a ford across the Bilston Brook is not known. By 1597 a bridge over Bilston Brook was in use and it is likely that Bridge Street itself owes its origins to the initial construction of a bridge at this point (VCH XIV).

Up until pre-conquest/ early medieval Bilston probably changed little from its dominantly nuclear form. Some elements of Church Street and High Street suggest a degree of planing to the town during the medieval period. The town utilised the higher ground to the west of the Bilston Brook with the focus of the settlement drawn towards the church of St. Leonard's and the junction of later Lichfield Street and Church Street. The triangular parcel of land formed between Lichfield Street and Church Street, and the Church of St. Leonard's may have been the location of the earliest (and probably unofficial) market.

The grant of a Charter of Freedom from Tolls in 1328 does not necessarily mean that a market was in operation. Two medieval crosses however, thought to be market crosses are associated with Bilston but neither survive in their original location. The older of the two crosses called Nether cross is said to have stood on a site which by 1690 was occupied by a house (cross house) located near to the Church of St. Leonard's (established in the late 11th century or early 12th century, and rebuilt in 1726) and the

junction of the main streets by the church. The Overas cross or Upper cross which appears to have been a cross house, remained until c 1825 and was probably located close to Toll Gate House at the Swan Bank end of High Street (Fig. 4). The market as it survives today was probably established on its present site as a result of the Market Act passed in 1824, which empowered the village/town commissioners to form a large market place in which markets could be held every Monday and Saturday, and once the profits from this market were sufficient to erect a town hall (White 1851).

As Bilston expanded into the medieval period the township appears to have expanded on the northeast-southwest alignment along Church Street and High Street. The post-medieval period saw rapid development to the south of Bridge Street with Oxford Street becoming the main bridging point across Bilston Brook in 1809. It is likely that the construction of Oxford Street may well have resulted in the destruction of some of Bilston's earliest historic remains. The construction of a new road from Lichfield Street to Wolverhampton also saw the re-establishment of the former northwest-southeast London to Chester routeway. This routeway, the 'New Road' becomes a focus for development in the early 1900s.

10.0: Conclusions

The development site lies within the historic core of Bilston, designated an Area of Archaeological Importance. It seems likely that the development at Market Way lies outside the area which might reasonably be expected to contain archaeological evidence of Bilston's earliest Anglo-Saxon origins. The medieval township however was essentially a linear settlement running along the length of Church Street and High Street. The close proximity of the proposed development to the historic centre of medieval Bilston suggests that this area was occupied during the medieval period. It is likely that any features may relate to structures formerly fronting onto High Street/Church Street.

Remains associated with cottage industries may also survive within the proposed development area, as well as evidence of early mining activity. Remains relating to the early industrial history of Bilston are of particular importance, and it is likely that post-medieval remains relating to this activity will be encountered. Of a number of post-medieval sites recorded within the area by the SMR a glassworks (BCSMR 9464) is of particular note. While its actual location is uncertain this site is of particular importance to the understanding of glass manufacture within the region.

11.0: Acknowledgements

This report was written by Andrew Rudge, and the figures prepared by Edward Newton. The project was monitored by Mike Shaw on behalf of Wolverhampton City Council and by Richard Cutler for BUFAU who also edited this report. The project was commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council. Thanks are also due to the staff of Wolverhampton Archives, and to Melissa Conway and local historian Mrs Megan Shaw.

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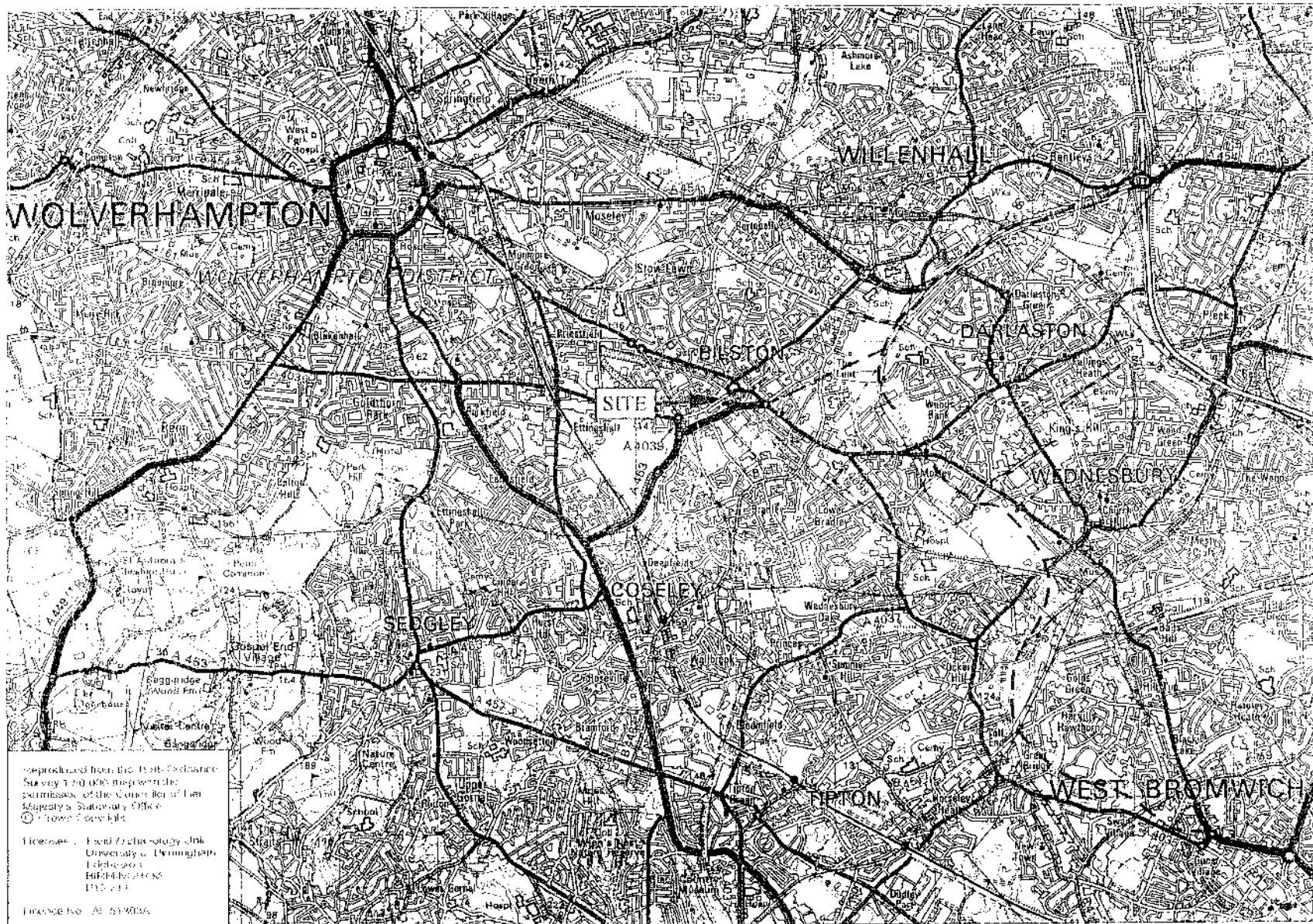


Fig. 1

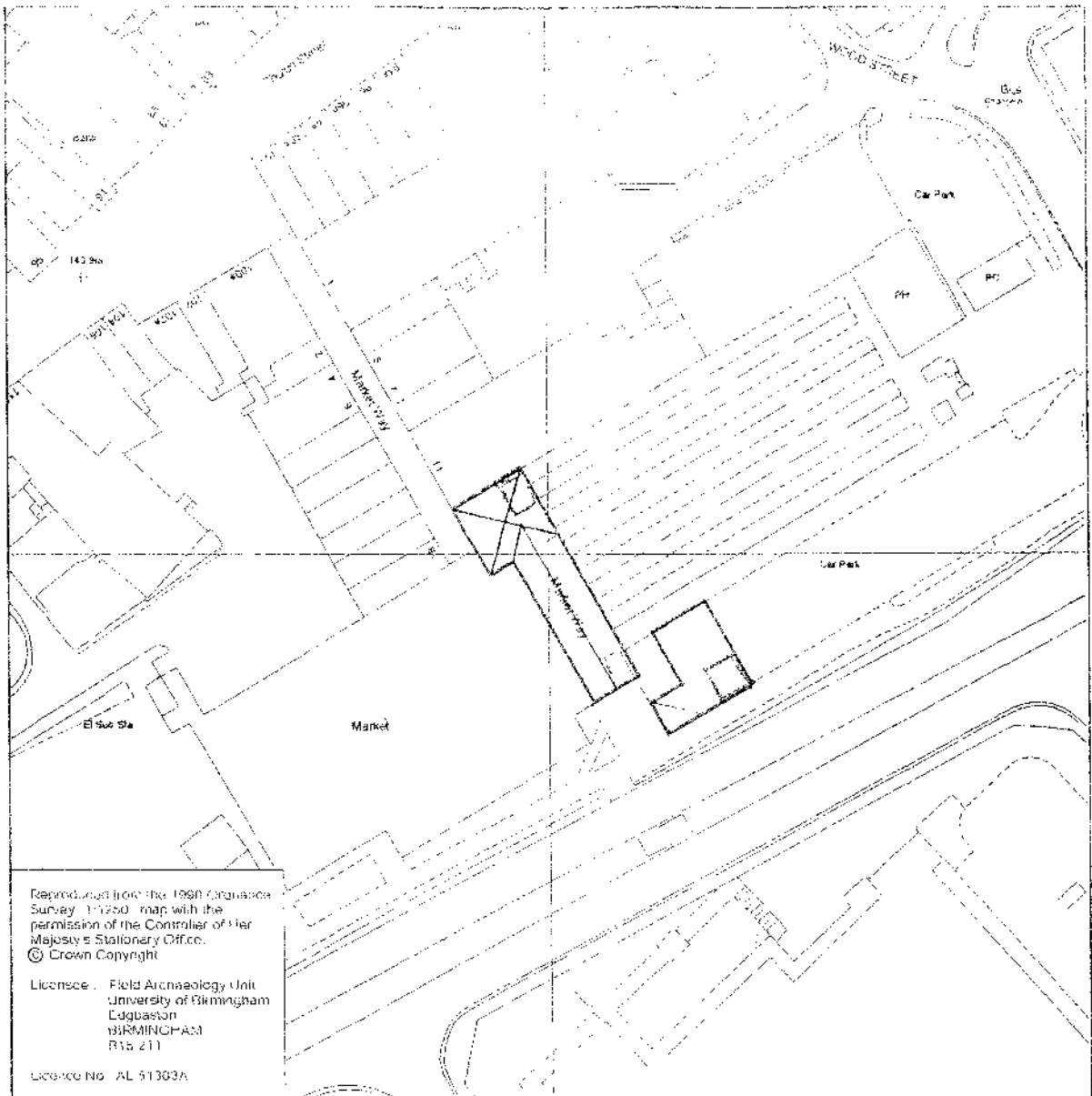


Fig. 2 Development area

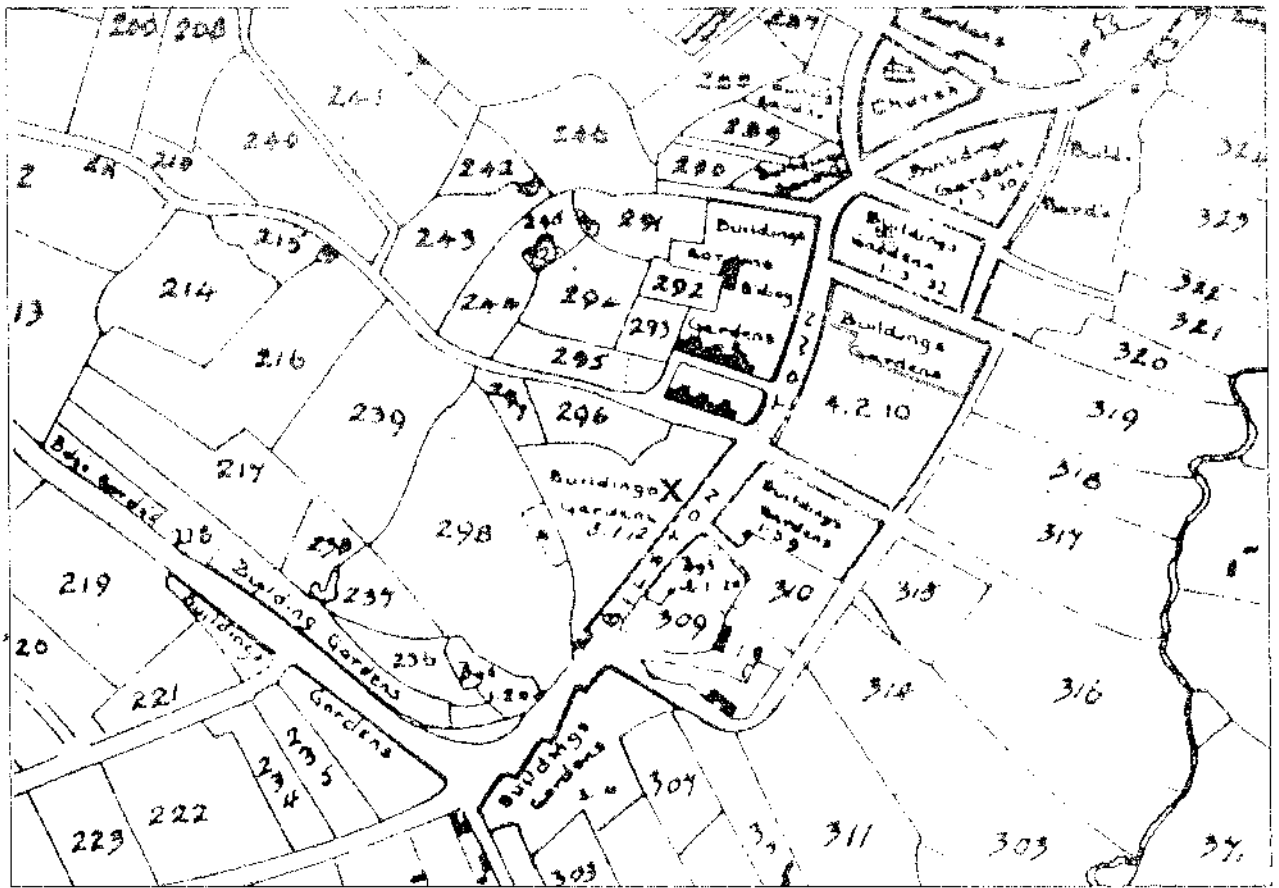


Fig. 3 1799

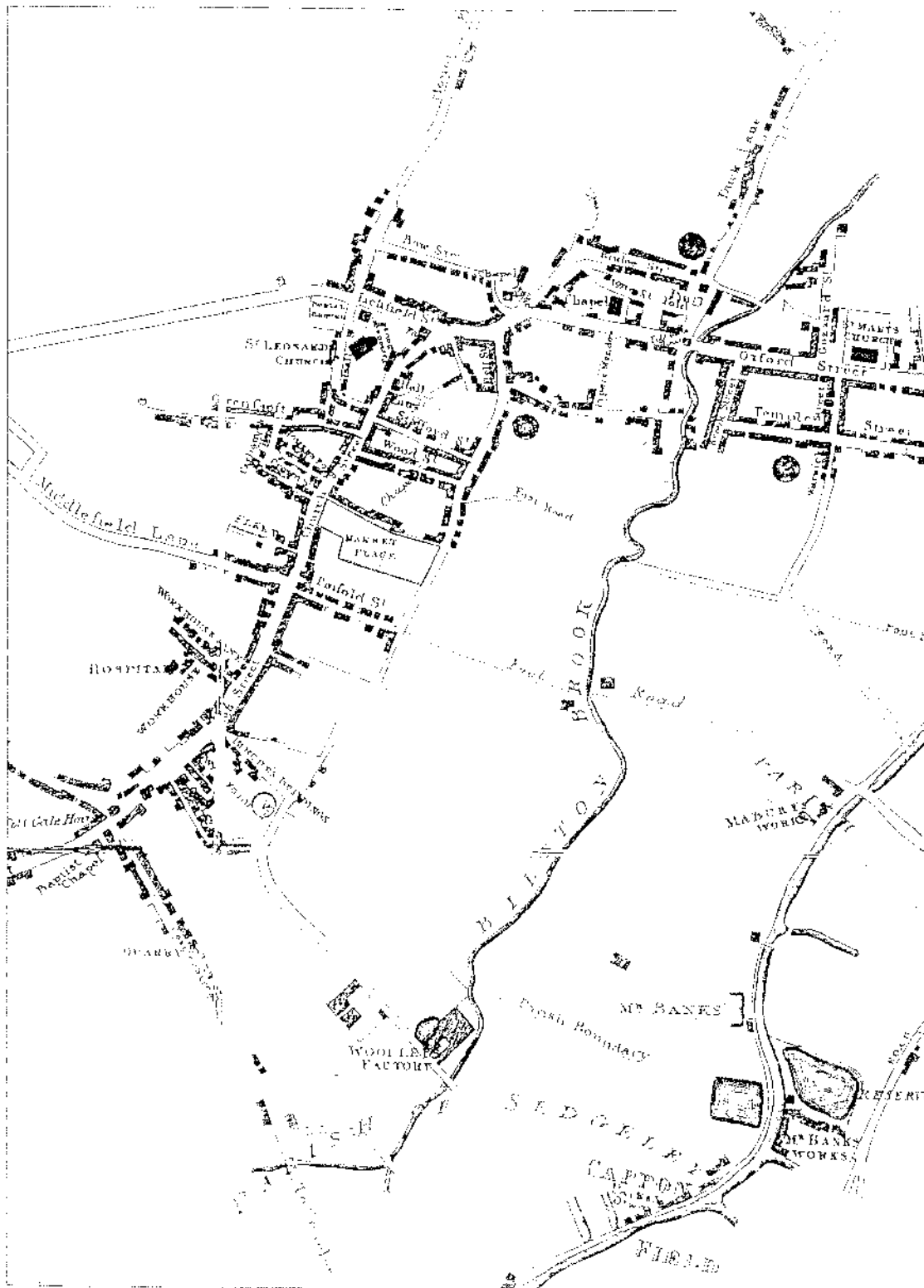


Fig. 4 Cholera map of 1832

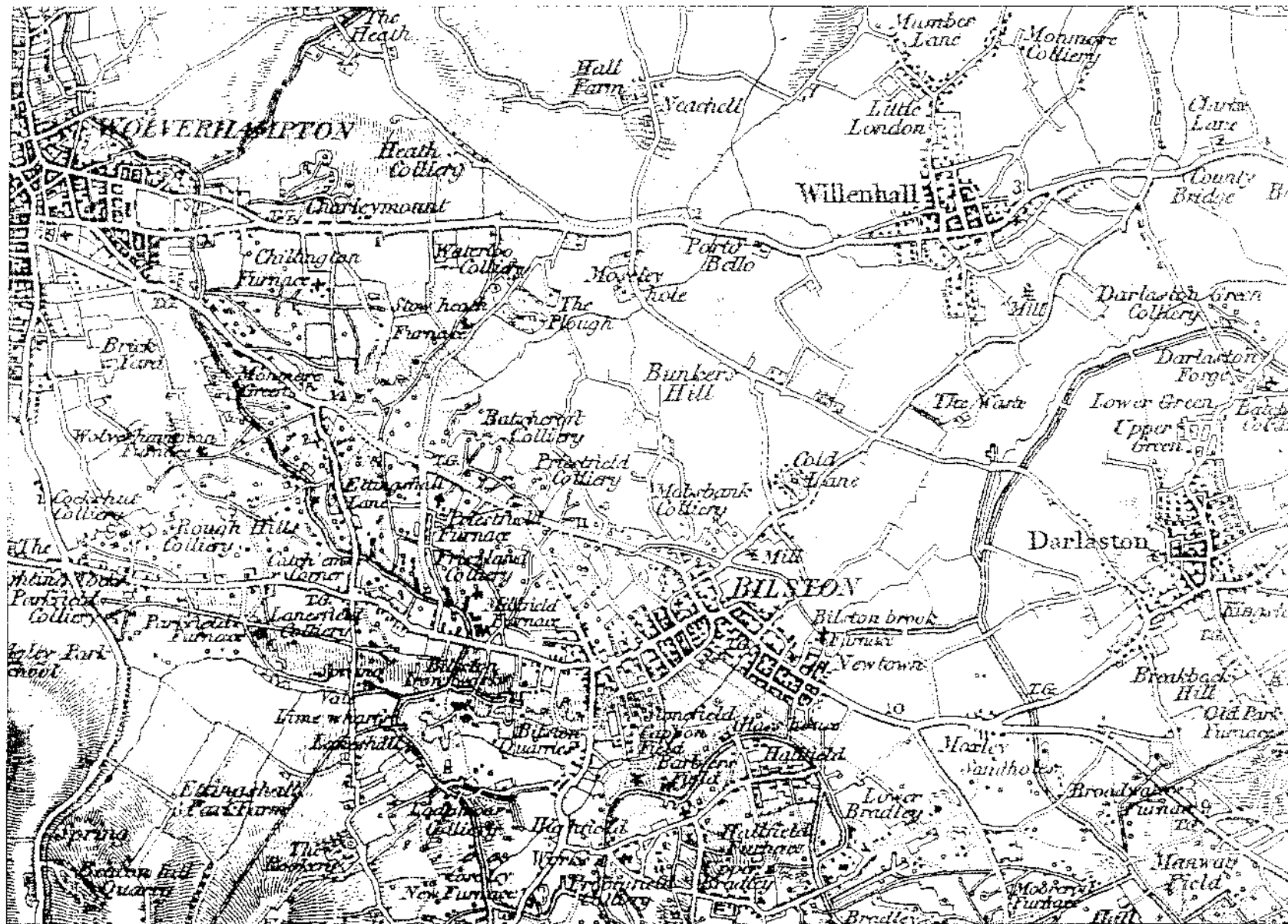


Fig. 5 1836



Fig. 6 1839

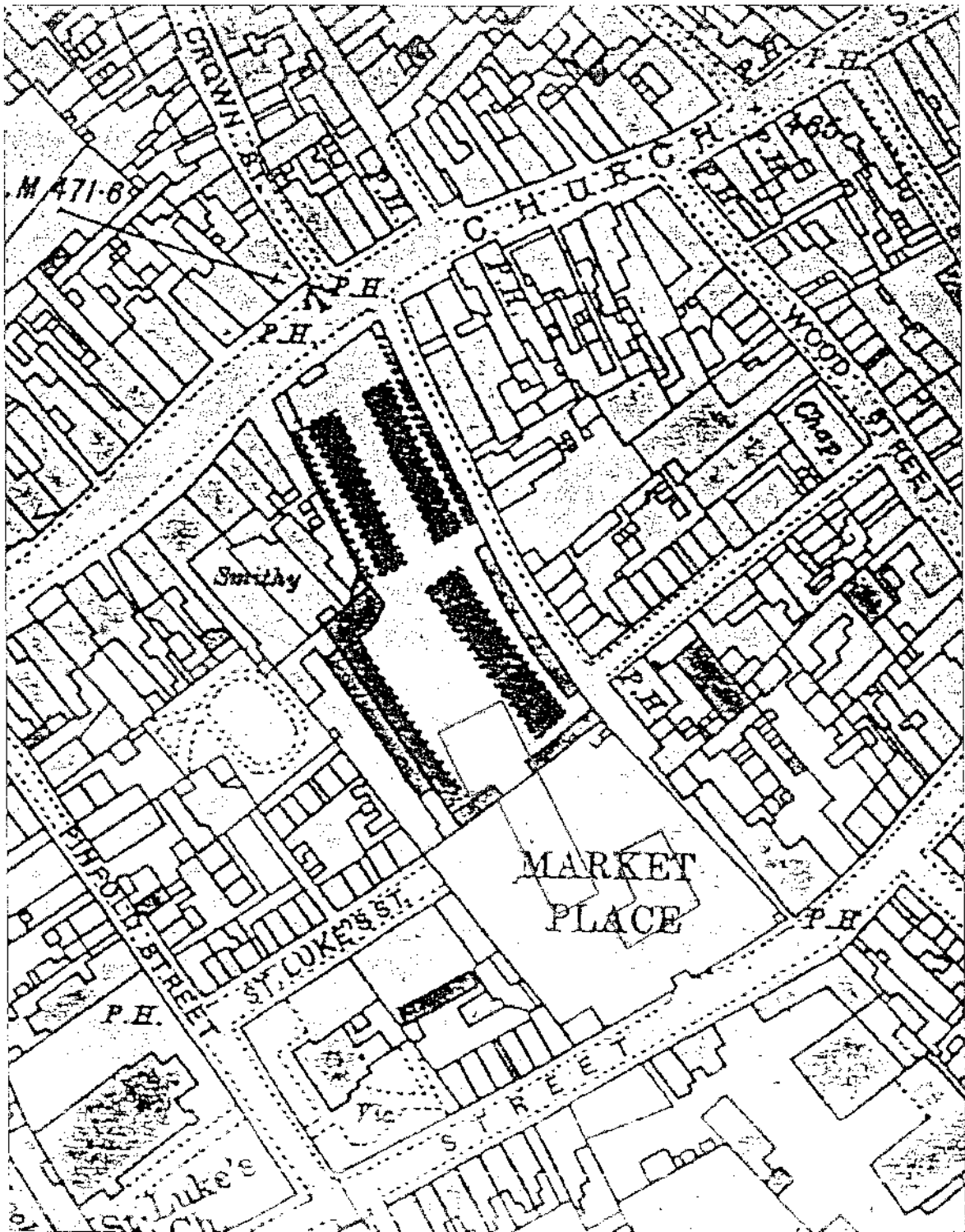


Fig 7 1887



Fig 3 1903

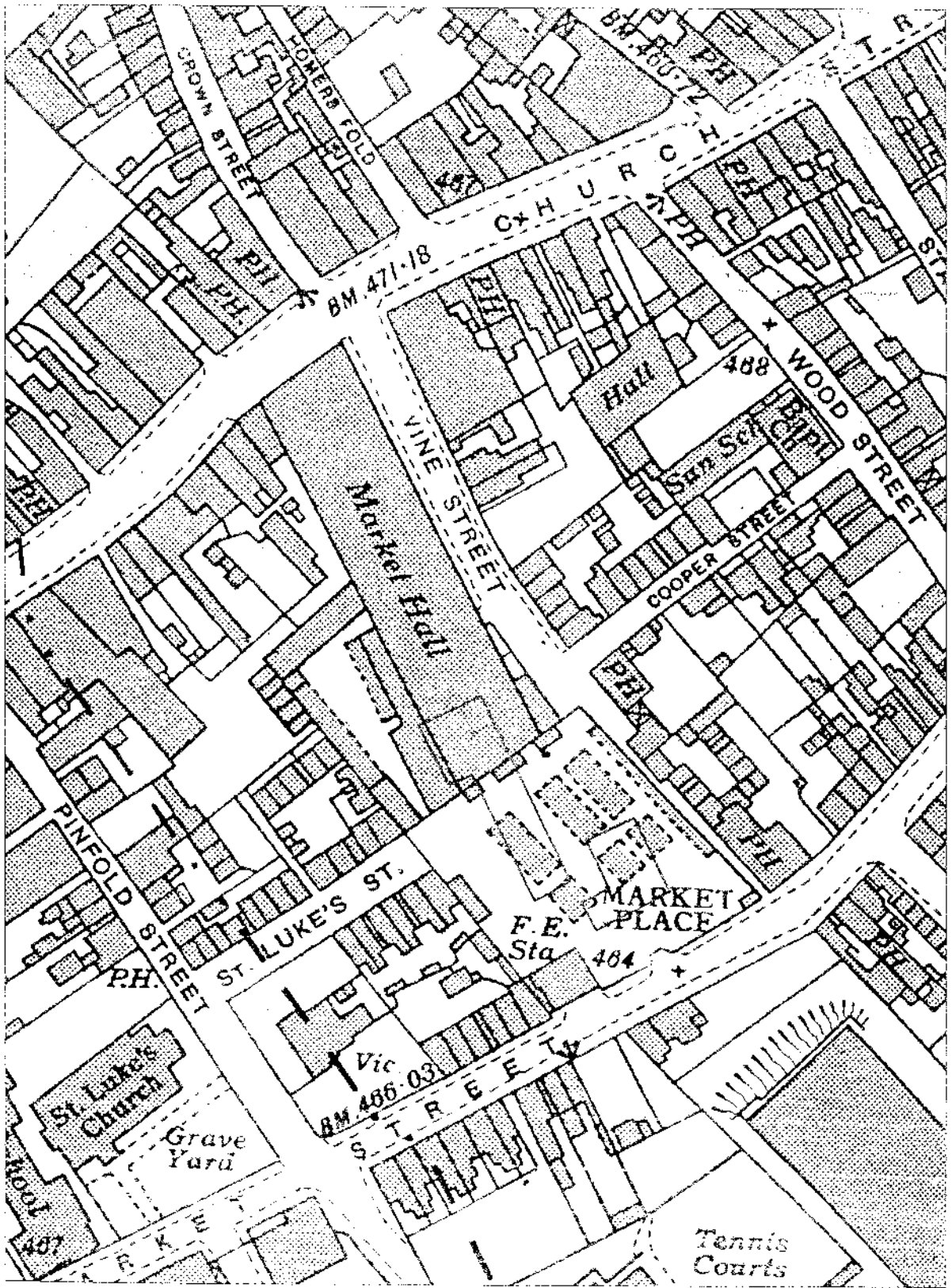


Fig. 9 1938