



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF BIRMINGHAM

**The New IT Centre,  
Inner Courtyard,  
University of  
Wolverhampton.**

**An Archaeological  
Desk-Based Assessment  
2002**

*Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit*



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Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit  
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**The New IT Centre, Inner Courtyard, University of Wolverhampton:  
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment  
2002**

by  
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## **2.0 LOCATION**

The Main Campus of the University of Wolverhampton lies in the centre of the city and is defined by Wulfruna Street, St. Peter's Square, Ring Road St. Peter's and Stafford Street (Figures 1 and 2). The proposed development site, hereafter referred to as the Study Area, lies within the Inner Courtyard to the rear of the University's MA block (Figure 2). The University's Main Campus, and the Study Area, lies to the north of St. Peter's Church, around which the medieval town was centred.

## **3.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY**

Wolverhampton city centre lies on a promontory, reaching up to 150-159m AOD, that is part of a chain of high ground which stretches between Cannock, Staffordshire, to the Clent Hills, Worcestershire (White 1997, 2). St. Peter's Church stands on the highest point of the promontory and the surrounding land slopes away very steeply to its west and northwest and more gently on the northeast, east and south sides. The Study Area lies 100m north of St. Peter's Church on ground which slopes gently away from the church. The underlying geology of Wolverhampton city centre is composed of glacial sands, sands and gravels and pebble beds intermixed with sandy clays and outcrops of sandstone (White 1997, 2).

## **4.0 AIMS**

The main aim of this assessment was to clarify the nature and quality of the archaeological resource contained within the Study Area. A specific priority was to establish whether the nineteenth century overspill burial ground of St. Peter's Church had ever extended into the Study Area and, therefore, estimate the likelihood of human burials existing within the area. The findings of the assessment will enable an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy to be drawn up and implemented prior to the commencement of development works.

## **5.0 METHODOLOGY**

The following sources were consulted during the course of this assessment:

- The Black Country Sites and Monuments Record (BCSMR)
- Historic mapping and early Ordnance Survey maps of the area held by Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies
- Primary historic sources, including trade directories and censuses, held by Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies
- Secondary archaeological and historical sources held by Wolverhampton Archives and Local Studies and the University of Birmingham libraries

A walkover survey of the Study Area was carried out in October 2002 to assess the archaeological potential of the area.

## 6.0 PRESENT CHARACTER

The Study Area is presently subject to mixed land-use. The majority of the Study Area is presently open ground within the University's Inner Courtyard; part of this area is landscaped grassland crossed by paved pathways and the remainder is tarmac surfaced service roads and loading bays (Figure 2, Plate 1). Around one fifth of the Study Area is occupied by an existing building, a single-storeyed wing of the University's MA Block (Figure 2, Plate 2). This wing has a basement and a sunken stairway providing access to it is visible at the northeastern corner of the Study Area (Figure 2).

## 7.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

There is little evidence, other than a few chance finds of doubtful provenance, for settlement activity within the Wolverhampton area prior to the late Saxon period (White and Wade 1997, 2). It has been argued that the promontory on which Wolverhampton stands was the site of an Iron Age hillfort. A circuit of earthwork defences encircling the highest point of the promontory has been inferred from street names, boundaries and plot patterns visible on historic maps of the town (e.g. Hooke and Slater 1986, Baker 1980). Slater argues that this circuit represents the remains of defences belonging to an Iron Age hill-fort. The Study Area lies within the proposed earthwork circuit (Figure 3)

Evidence from charters shows that a settlement and Minster church, St Peter's, existed at Wolverhampton by the later tenth century (Hooke and Slater 1986, 10 & 14). The location, nature and extent of the late Saxon settlement at Wolverhampton is unclear as little archaeological evidence from this period has yet been found in the city. The proposed earthwork circuit around the hilltop, discussed above, has also been attributed an Anglo-Saxon origin (Baker 1980, Mike Shaw *pers. comm.*). Research into Anglo-Saxon charters has demonstrated that some of the main streets of medieval and later Wolverhampton, including Stafford Street, were established by this period and that they were part of a wider network of cross-country routes in this part of the midlands (Hooke and Slater 1986, 35-7). The Study Area lies near the probable focal point of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, the Minster church, immediately to the rear of one of the major routes into the settlement, Stafford Street, and within the proposed earthwork circuit. The Study Area, therefore, probably saw activity or settlement in the later Saxon period.

Wolverhampton was divided into two estates in the medieval period: a religious manor, the Deanery, and a royal manor, Stowheath. The Deanery manor was established to serve St. Peter's Church and was centred on the Deanery Hall. By the thirteenth century borough status had been granted to the Deanery manor and this gradually seems to have also come to apply to the Stowheath manor (White and Wade 1997, 3). The Study Area lay within the Deanery Manor and lies a short distance to the northeast of the site of the former Deanery Hall. Wolverhampton had become a prosperous market town by the later medieval period, due to its important role in the wool trade (Upton 1998, 17). The built-up area of the later medieval town extended from the central area around St. Peter's Church and the market place, along all the major routes into the town, including Stafford Street. A model of the probable

sequence of development of Wolverhampton has been proposed, using historic maps of the town. It is argued that the earliest settlement was focused on the high ground around St. Peter's Church, at the point where the routes into the town converged, with settlement subsequently spreading outwards along these routes as the town prospered (Baker 1980, figure 2). The Study Area lies very close to the core of the medieval settlement of Wolverhampton.

The industrial development of Wolverhampton began fairly early, and by the mid-seventeenth century many of the trades that later became important features of industry in the town in the nineteenth century, such as buckle and lock manufacture, were being carried out (White and Wade 1997, 4). By the close of the seventeenth century, Wolverhampton was also starting to play an important role in the distribution of raw materials, such as iron, required by industry (White and Wade 1997, 4). Analysis of plot boundaries visible on early maps of Wolverhampton shows that the town had grown outside the extent of the medieval settlement only on its southeastern side by the mid-eighteenth century.

Wolverhampton became increasingly industrialised from the later eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. Large industries, such as iron production, became established on the outskirts of the town. Many smaller-scale industrial processes, such as lock making and japanning, became established within the town itself. Growing industrialisation in the nineteenth century led to the infilling of open areas in the town with small works and shoppings to accommodate these trades and with back-to-back housing to house workers and families. This increasingly dense building and occupation led to the degeneration of many areas of the town into slums by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The twentieth century saw continued expansion of the built-up area covered by Wolverhampton and large-scale redevelopments of the town centre itself. One element of the re-development was the clearance of slum areas within the town, including part of the Study Area. Large-scale shopping developments constructed in Wolverhampton in the 1950s and 1960s changed the face of the town centre completely. Wolverhampton retained an industrial character up to the recessions of the late 1970s and 1980s. Most industrial activity, however, is now focused on the many industrial estates on the outskirts of the town, rather than in the town centre proper. The University of Wolverhampton was created in the 1990s from the former buildings of the Wolverhampton and Staffordshire Technical College (BCSMR No. 13216). The establishment of the university and the construction of many buildings as part of its expansion since the late 1990s has led to the development of an inner-city campus in Wolverhampton.

## 8.0 RESULTS

### 8.1 Archaeology

A search of the Black Country Sites and Monuments Record (BCSMR) found ten records within a 100m radius of the Study Area (Figure 3, extent of BCSMR No. 13165 not shown).

| BCSMR No. | Site   | Date               | Description  |
|-----------|--|--------------------|--|
| 6713      | HILLFORT                                       | Iron Age           | Line of an earthwork inferred from boundaries on 1750 map.   |
| 1307      | ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT                         | Early Medieval     | Extent of settlement possibly defined by line of earthwork inferred from 1750 map.   |
| 13165     | MEDIEVAL TOWN                                  | Medieval           | Borough status granted in mid-13 <sup>th</sup> century. Extent of town late medieval town inferred from burgage plots visible on 1750 map.             |
| 2555      | THE DEANERY                                    | Medieval to Modern | Mid-17 <sup>th</sup> century hall probably built on the site of a 14 <sup>th</sup> century manse, set in large grounds. Demolished in 1926.            |
| 9956      | STAFFORD STREET (WEST SIDE) EAST OF DEANERY    | Medieval to Modern | Urban plan component. Area was probably occupied from the medieval period onwards.   |
| 9957      | STAFFORD STREET (WEST SIDE) NORTH OF HORSEFAIR | Medieval to Modern | Urban plan component. Area was probably occupied from the medieval period onwards.   |
| 8270      | THE OLD POUND                                  | Post-Medieval      | 18 <sup>th</sup> century pound situated on the edge of the Deanery grounds.  |
| 8831      | ST. PETER'S NEW CEMETERY                       | Post-Medieval      | Overspill burial ground for St. Peter's established in early 19 <sup>th</sup> century. Possibly disused by late 19 <sup>th</sup> . Excavated in 2001/2 |
| 8832      | BURIAL VAULTS                                  | Post-Medieval      | Vaults from St. Peter's New Cemetery discovered during building works in 1996.   |
| 13216     | UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON (MAIN BUILDING)    | Modern             | Formerly the Wolverhampton and Staffordshire Technical College, opened in 1932. Many original features survive.  |

### 8.2 Development of the Study Area

The records of the 1666 Hearth Tax are one of the earliest documentary records that refers to streets and individual properties in Wolverhampton (Transcribed in SHC 1924, 47 - 56). Analysis of these records has shown that, judging by the numbers of hearths per property, the four streets leading off High Green contained the largest and most impressive houses (Figure 4). The records of the Hearth Tax and additional documentary research has shown that these streets were occupied by the clergy, gentry and professionals. It is not clear what the character of the Study Area was at this date as the Stafford Street was one of several streets not listed in these Hearth Tax returns. The fact that Stafford Street was not listed does not indicate that it was not occupied at this date, since other streets which were known to be occupied by this

date, like Bilston Street, were similarly absent from the returns. Stafford Street's absence from the Hearth Tax returns may merely indicate that an incomplete copy of the returns was transcribed. The Deanery Hall was listed as having fifteen hearths at this date and was occupied by Lady Throckmorton in 1666.

The first clear picture of the Study Area comes from Taylor's plan of Wolverhampton of 1750 (Figure 4). At this date the Study Area was of mixed land usage, most of it lay in the backplot area of the western side of Stafford Street, a small part of it was in the Deanery grounds and the remainder was situated in gardens north of the Deanery. The southwestern part of the Study Area lay within the Deanery lands and was in the northeastern corner of its grounds. It was occupied by what is depicted as a small rectangular garden plantation. The gardens to the north of the Deanery grounds were depicted as formal gardens with lawns, formal tree and hedge plantings and walkways. The northwest part of the Study Area lay within the southeast corner of these gardens. The boundary between the Deanery grounds and the formal gardens continued on the same, approximately east-west, line as the street known as Horsefair. It is argued that this boundary line runs along the course of the northern part of a circuit of earthwork defences, of either prehistoric or Anglo-Saxon date, which is thought to have existed on the hilltop on which Wolverhampton stands (see Section 8.1 above, BCSMR Nos. 6713 and 1307). The eastern, and largest, part of the Study Area lay within the backplot area of the western side of Stafford Street at this date. The backplots of this part of Stafford Street were occupied by small rectilinear buildings and some garden areas. These rectilinear buildings may have been small workshops, outbuildings or, perhaps, small houses. The backplot buildings within the eastern part of the Study Area had begun to develop the appearance of a court by this date. Buildings had become concentrated in the backplot and were accessed from Stafford Street via a wide alley immediately to the east of the Study Area.

The Tithe Map of Wolverhampton of 1842 shows the buildings within the town in a very schematic way (Figure 5). Churches and public buildings were the only buildings depicted in detail by this map and development along street frontages was depicted using shaded areas. The Tithe Map illustrates that the Study Area was still split between three distinct areas of land-use: the Deanery grounds, a garden and the backplots of Stafford Street – at this date. The map also shows the extent of the new burial ground of St. Peter's Church. The burial ground is visible on maps of the town from the 1820s onwards but had reached its greatest extent by the time the Tithe Map was drawn up. It is clear from this map that the Study Area lies well outside the maximum known extent of the burial ground.

The Board of Health plans of the whole of Wolverhampton, drawn up in the 1850s, show the buildings of the town at a very detailed scale (not illustrated). The Study Area was shown as still divided between the three areas of differing land-use. Little change had occurred in the Deanery grounds or the formal gardens to their north by this date. The backplots in the eastern part of the Study Area were becoming much more densely occupied by this date with small housing, arranged in courts, and some linear, industrial buildings or shoppings.

Steen and Blacket's Plan of the Town and Borough of Wolverhampton (1871) shows development had become very dense within some parts of the Study Area by this date (Figure 6). The parts of the Study Area that lay within the Deanery Grounds and the



formal garden remained undeveloped at this date. Development in the backplots of Stafford Street within the Study Area had reached its densest by this date. The backplots had become cramped courts of back-to-back housing intermixed with some shoppings.

Documentary evidence of the nature of the Study Area becomes accessible from trade directories from the 1870s onwards. The listing of Wolverhampton Streets contained in Whites Birmingham Directory for 1873 provides useful information on the trades carried out by the occupants of this part, Numbers 9-16, of Stafford Street. The trades listed in this year included a butcher, grocer, victualler, clothes dealer, pawnbroker and several shopkeepers. None of these trades people were listed as occupying a property within a court. It is, therefore, probable that their premises were on the street frontage itself. The courts to the rear of Nos. 10-18, within the Study Area, were not mentioned in this directory. This may reflect the fact that at this date the courts were mainly occupied by private residents living in the cramped back-to-back houses, as such residents are not usually listed by trade directories.

By the 1880s little change had occurred in the Study Area. The first edition Ordnance Survey map of this area (1889) shows that the former formal gardens belonged to the Deanery by this date (Figure 7). They were accessed by a pathway leading from the rear of the Deanery and were no longer formally planted, containing glass-houses and outbuildings instead, by this date. None of the garden structures lay within the Study Area. The Deanery building had become a Conservative Club by this date. The backplots of Stafford Street within the Study Area had become slightly less densely occupied with buildings. This part of the Study Area was still occupied by fairly dense housing arranged in courts. Large shoppings, however, had been constructed at the northern edge of the Study Area. Some of these structures belonged to the Stafford Street Works, a tin and iron works. The majority of this factory lay outside of the Study Area.

Trade directories of the 1880s show that there had been little change in the trades carried out by the occupants of this part of the Stafford Street frontage. The Post Office Directory of Wolverhampton for 1883-4 shows that a number of shopkeepers and clothes dealers still operated out of the buildings on the frontage. The Old Mug House, an inn that was shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map, had become established at No. 16 by this date. The pawnbrokers at No. 17, listed in 1873, were still trading at this location in 1884. This firm had also occupied No. 18 and were operating a japanning works from this location. It is probable that the shoppings, which lie within the Study Area, shown on the first edition map to the south of the Stafford Street Works belonged to this firm (Figure 7). The position of the courts is noted by the Post Office Directory. There is no listing of the courts' occupants in this year, suggesting that they were still occupied by private residents.

By the time of the third edition Ordnance Survey coverage of the area in 1919, the Study Area was almost free of buildings (Figure 8). The Study Area was still split between three different areas of land use. The area formerly occupied by the formal gardens had become St. Peters School by this date. The Study Area overlaid an open area at the southeastern corner of its grounds. The Deanery still stood at this date and its grounds remained apparently unaltered at this date. The backplots of Stafford Street within the Study Area had, by 1919, been largely cleared of the courts of back-

to-back housing visible on earlier maps. A few structures of industrial character existed in the northern part of the Study Area. The factory formerly shown as the Stafford Street Works was disused by this date.

Spennell's Wolverhampton Directory for 1921-2 shows that Stafford Street as a whole was of quite a mixed character, with some heavy industry interspersed between mostly small commercial premises. The section of Stafford Street whose backplots lay in the Study Area was still occupied in 1922 by a mix of trades including, fruiterers, fishmongers, furnishers and clothes dealers. The pawn-brokers at No. 17 had, by this date, ceased to operate a japanning works.

Later maps of the Study Area show that the division of this area into three differing areas of land-use persisted well into the later twentieth century. The Ordnance Survey map of the area of 1938 shows that the Deanery had been demolished and its grounds had been utilised as the site of the Wolverhampton and Staffordshire Technical College (Figure 9). The Study Area overlies an undeveloped strip of land to the rear of the college building at this date. Considerable expansion had taken place at St. Peter's School between 1919 and 1938 and a large part of the area that was formerly occupied by the formal gardens was covered by buildings by this date. The school buildings had begun to partially encroach into the Study Area by 1938. The backplots of Stafford Street within the Study Area were occupied by two ranges of linear industrial-looking buildings at this date. These structures seem to form the western and southern sides of a complex of industrial buildings arranged around a courtyard leading off Stafford Street. The function of these buildings is unclear as trade directories that list premises by street are not readily accessible for Wolverhampton from the 1930s onwards.

The 1957 Ordnance Survey coverage of the area shows that, although there had been considerable expansion at the Technical College, the part of the Study Area that lay within its grounds remained undeveloped (Figure 10). No further development had occurred at St. Peter's School. The part of the Study Area that lay to the rear of the Stafford Street frontage had ceased to be occupied by backplots. This part of the Study Area was occupied in 1957 by a large L-shaped building with platforms and the large area between this structure and Stafford Street was open ground. It is likely that this structure was a loading bay, a large open space being required for loading traffic, which may have been related to the coach builders and engineering works shown to the north of the Study Area. The Study Area was occupied by part of an extension to a Technical College building, now the University's MA Block, in the 1960s. This structure is the same as that which currently occupies the Study Area (described above, Section 6.0).

## 9.0 DISCUSSION

The Study Area contains three areas of varying developmental histories which were separated by important long-lived boundaries. The eastern part of the Study Area overlies an area historically occupied by the rear of the backplots of the west side of Stafford Street. This area was part of the medieval town of Wolverhampton. The patterns visible within this area on early historic mapping of the town show that these plots probably originated as burgage plots some time in the medieval period. The

laying out of these plots may date back to the earlier thirteenth century when Wolverhampton was conferred borough status. This part of the Study Area has seen considerable development from the medieval period to the present day. The eastern part of the Study Area was separated from the remainder of the Study Area by the north-south boundary which historically formed the back-line of the backplots of Stafford Street.

The western part of the Study Area was historically bisected by the east-west boundary which divided the grounds of the Deanery from the lands to the north. The land on both sides of this boundary, in the northwestern and southwestern parts of the Study Area, seems to have remained largely undeveloped to the present day. This boundary is thought to follow the course of the northern line of the earthwork defences that have been argued to surround the hilltop on which Wolverhampton stands. The eastward course of the defences is unclear, but is thought to continue from this point up to Stafford Street, and would, therefore, pass through the eastern part of the Study Area. This defensive circuit is thought to have been built, either as the defences of an Iron Age hillfort, or as earthen defences surrounding an important Anglo-Saxon settlement, or *burh*. The southwestern part of the Study Area lies in the occupied area inside of these defences. There is a lack of consensus on the origin and nature of these defences, their date and existence remains a topic of considerable debate among researchers of Wolverhampton's earliest history.

This assessment has shown that the Study Area lies outside of the maximum mapped extent of St. Peter's New Burial ground. It is, therefore, unlikely that any articulated human remains relating to this burial ground will be encountered within the Study Area.

The Study Area has a high archaeological potential. The eastern part of the Study Area is known to have been the site of occupation from, at least, the medieval period onwards. The western parts of the Study Area are separated by a boundary which is thought to follow the course of a substantial defensive earthwork of possible Iron Age or Anglo-Saxon date. The southwestern part of the Study Area lies within the area defined by this earthwork and may, therefore, have been occupied in the Iron Age or the Anglo-Saxon period. It is likely that archaeological deposits relating to these periods of usage survive within the Study Area.

The eastern part of the Study Area only has been subject to dense nineteenth century development. Foundations of the nineteenth century buildings within this area will have caused some truncation to the upper levels of any archaeological deposits within this area. Deposits may not have been substantially compromised as these buildings were of a kind unlikely to have been routinely cellared. The presence of a basement in the building, which currently stands in part of the Study Area, will have caused total removal of archaeological deposits in this location (shown on Figure 2).

The likelihood of archaeological deposits surviving across the majority of the Study Area is high. Deposits will probably survive as 'islands' of archaeology between nineteenth and twentieth century development in the eastern part of the Study Area. Archaeological deposits are likely to be more intact in the western part of the Study Area as the scale of post-medieval development in this area has been low.

## **10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Study Area has the potential to add important detail to Wolverhampton's medieval history and to elucidate contentious issues in the earliest origins of the settlement at Wolverhampton. The Study Area has a high potential for the preservation of buried archaeological deposits. A programme of archaeological evaluation should be pursued in conjunction with a careful consideration of the depths of ground disturbance to be involved in any subsequent groundworks within the Study Area. The results of a programme of evaluation will enable the quality and extent of the archaeological resource within the Study Area to be clarified and will allow an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy to be drawn up prior to construction works commencing on the site. The decision on the requirement for, and the nature and scope of, further archaeological work on the Study Area rests with Mike Shaw, Black Country Archaeologist.

## **11.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This report was written by Melissa Conway and the illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds. The report was edited by Gary Coates, who also managed the project. Thanks are due to The University of Wolverhampton for commissioning this project and to Anthony Turner of their Property Services Department for his assistance during this project. Thanks are also due to Mike Shaw, Black Country Planning Archaeologist, for assistance and helpful feedback during this project. The help of the staff of the Wolverhampton Local Studies Centre is also gratefully acknowledged.

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## Figures

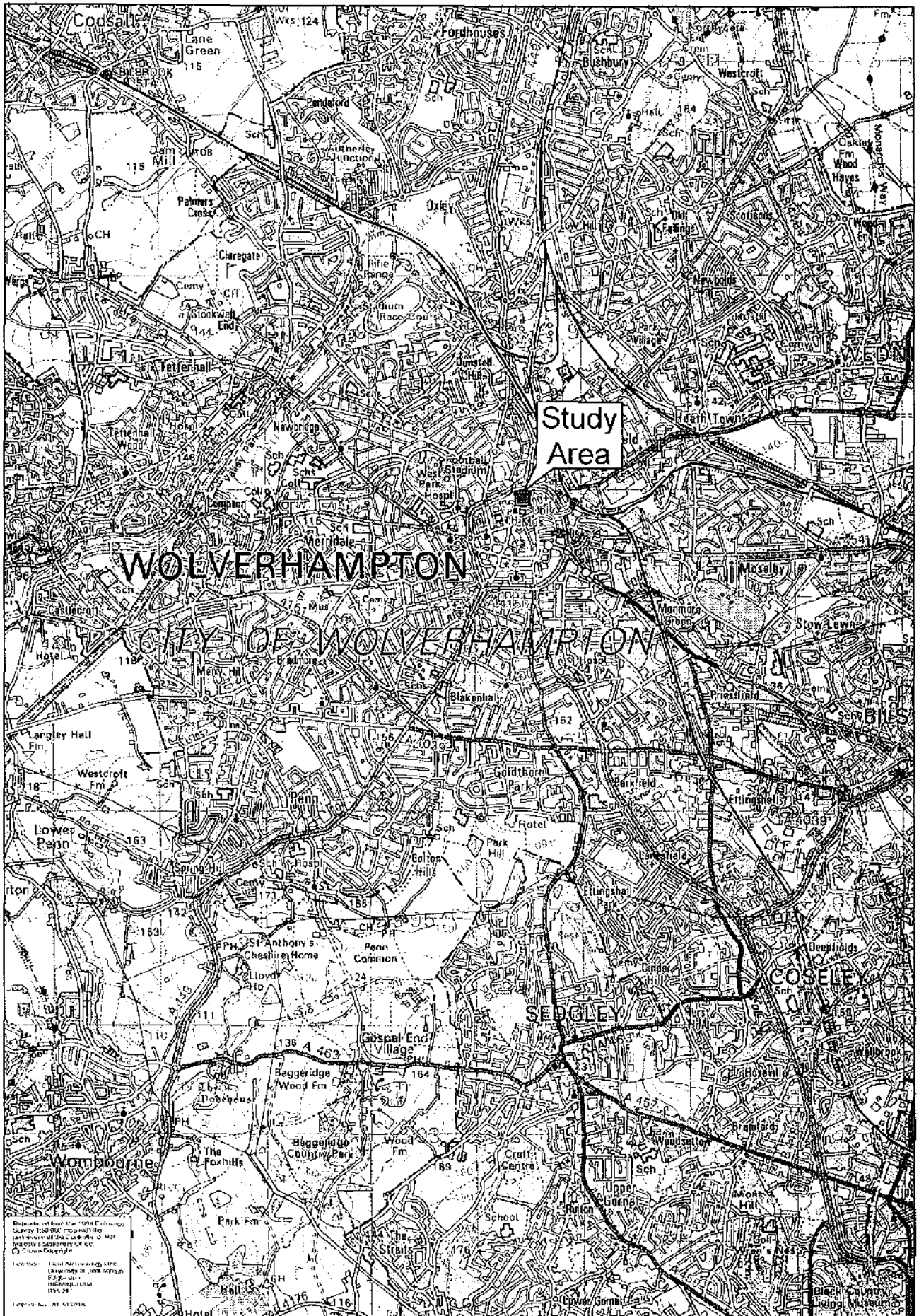


Figure 1



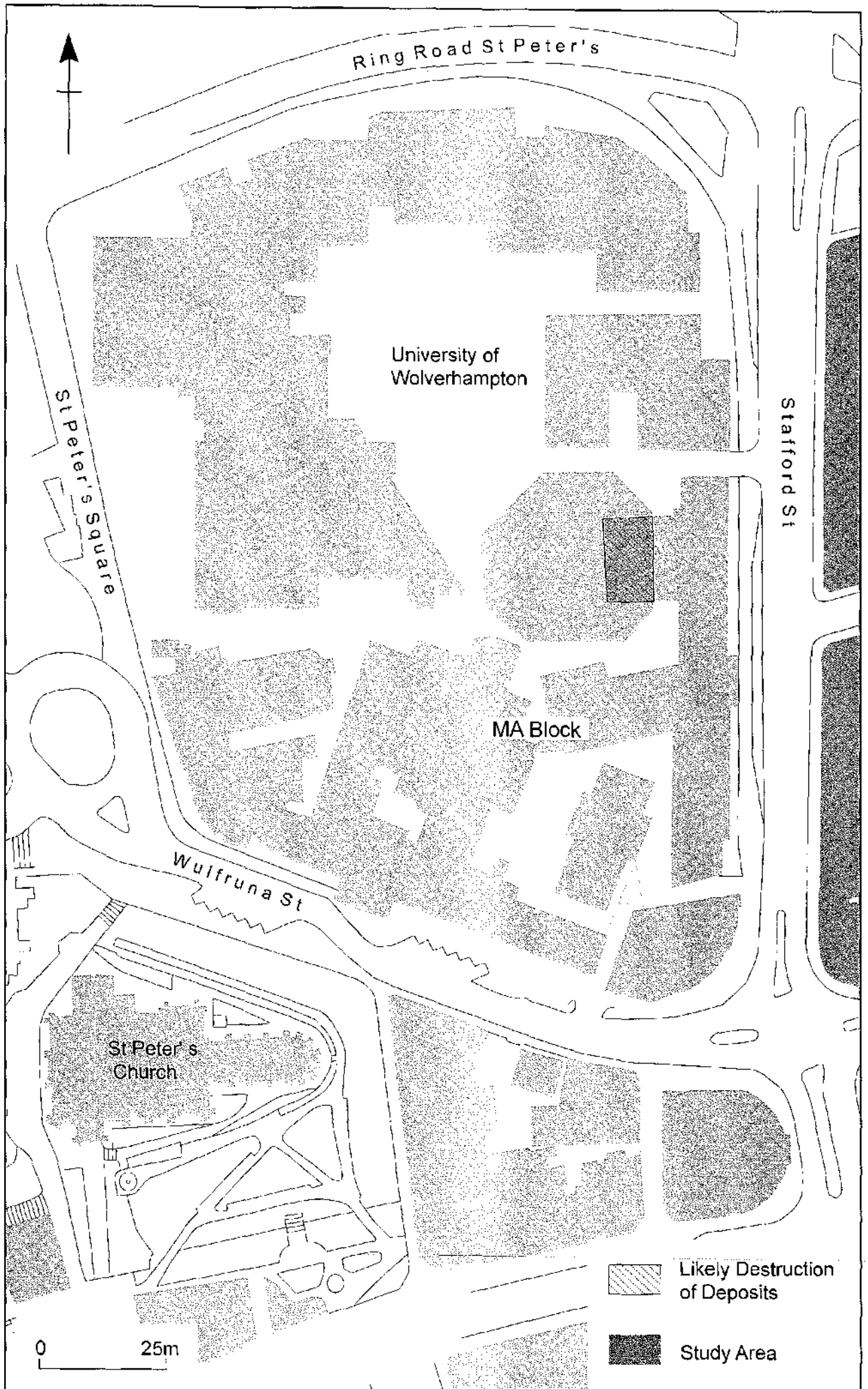


Figure 2

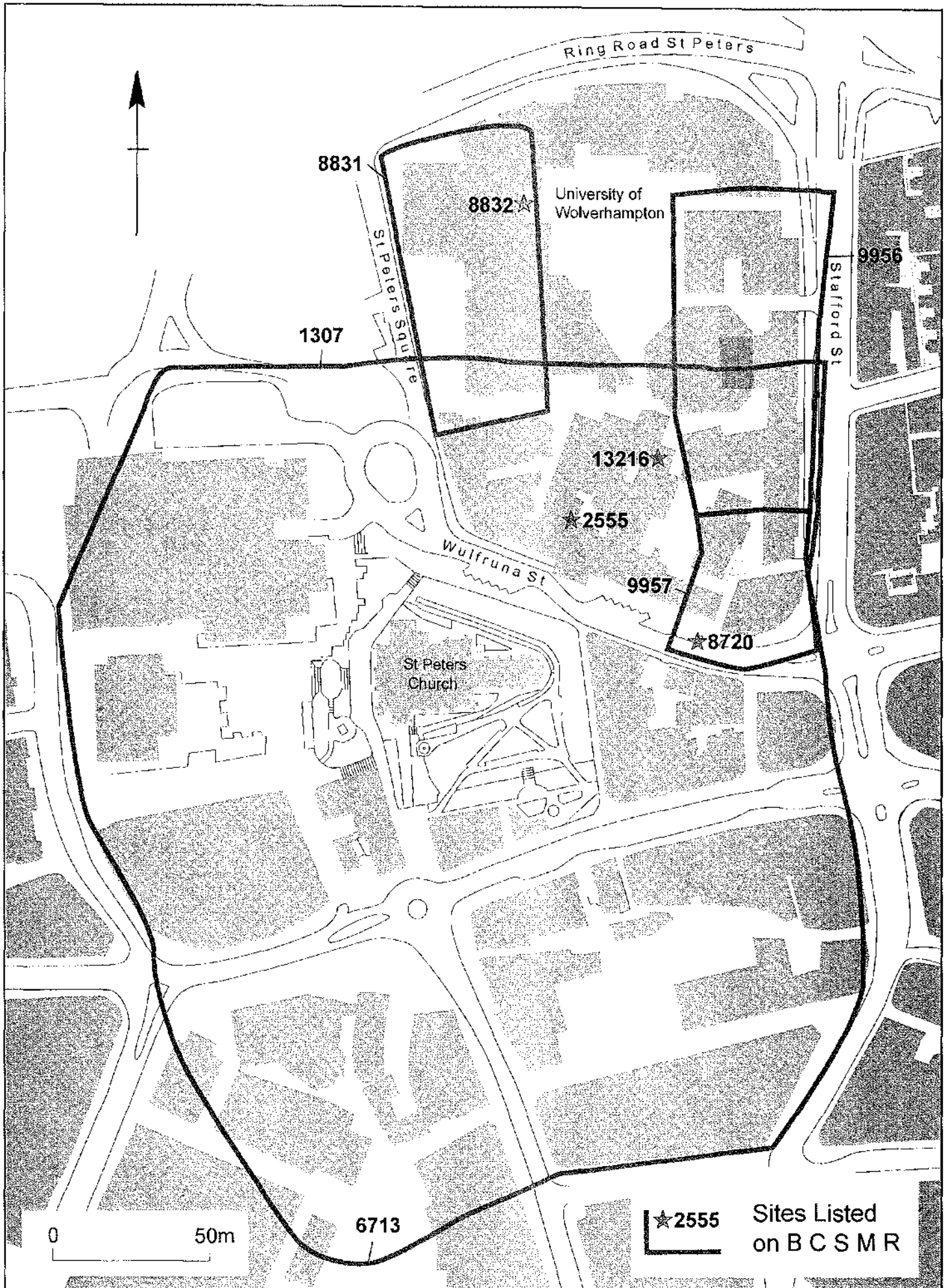


Figure 3

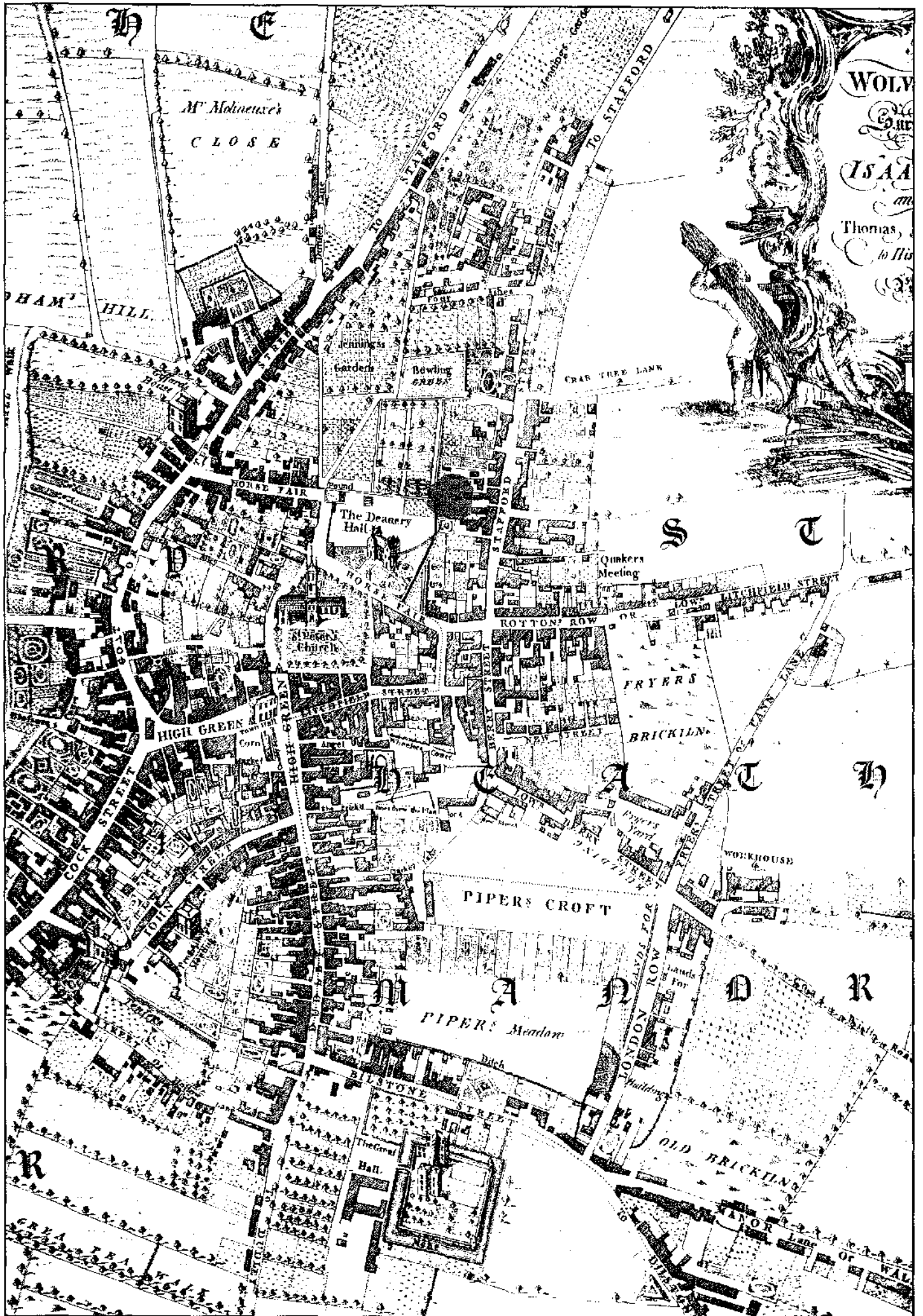


Figure 4 (1750)

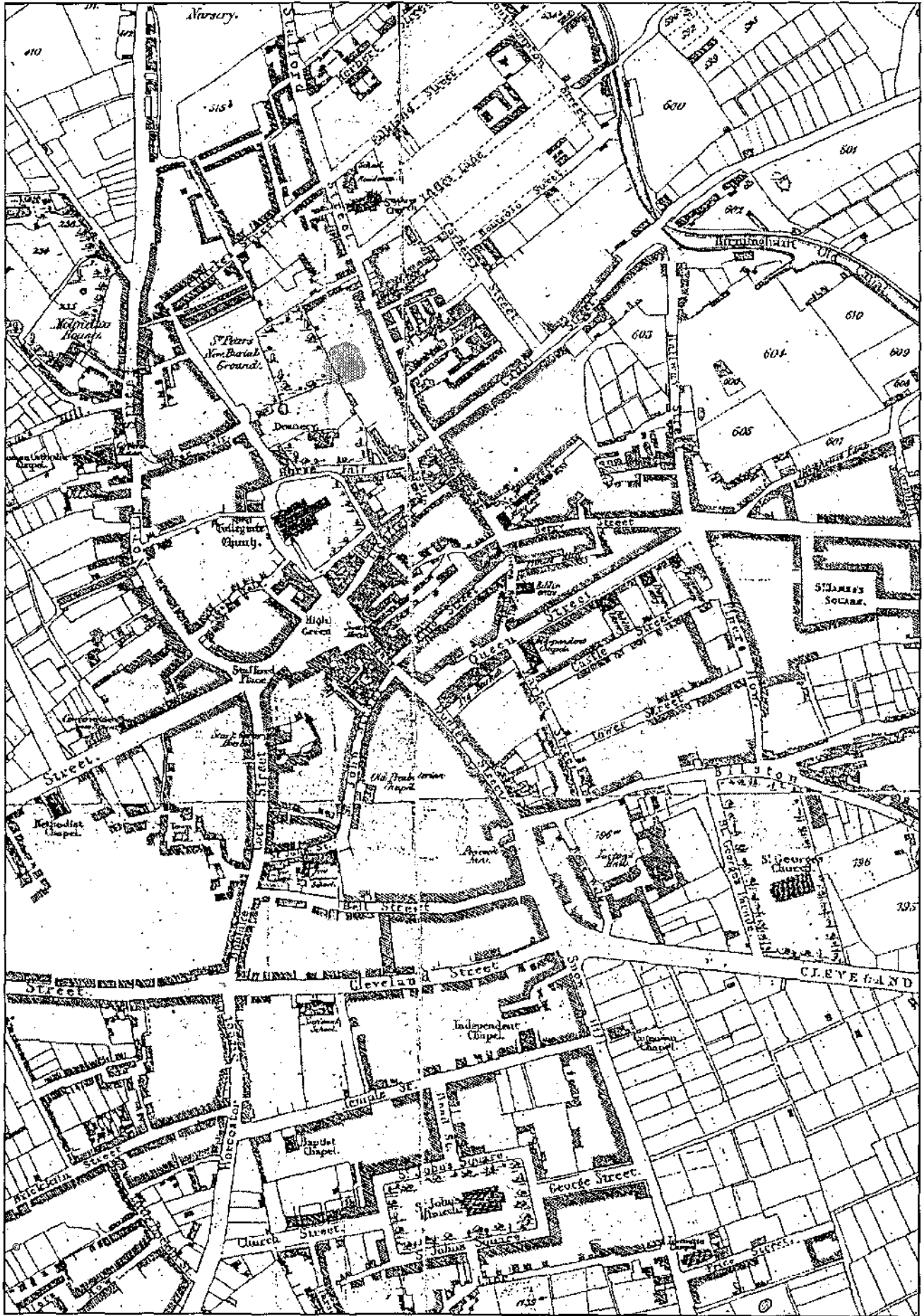


Figure 5 (1842)

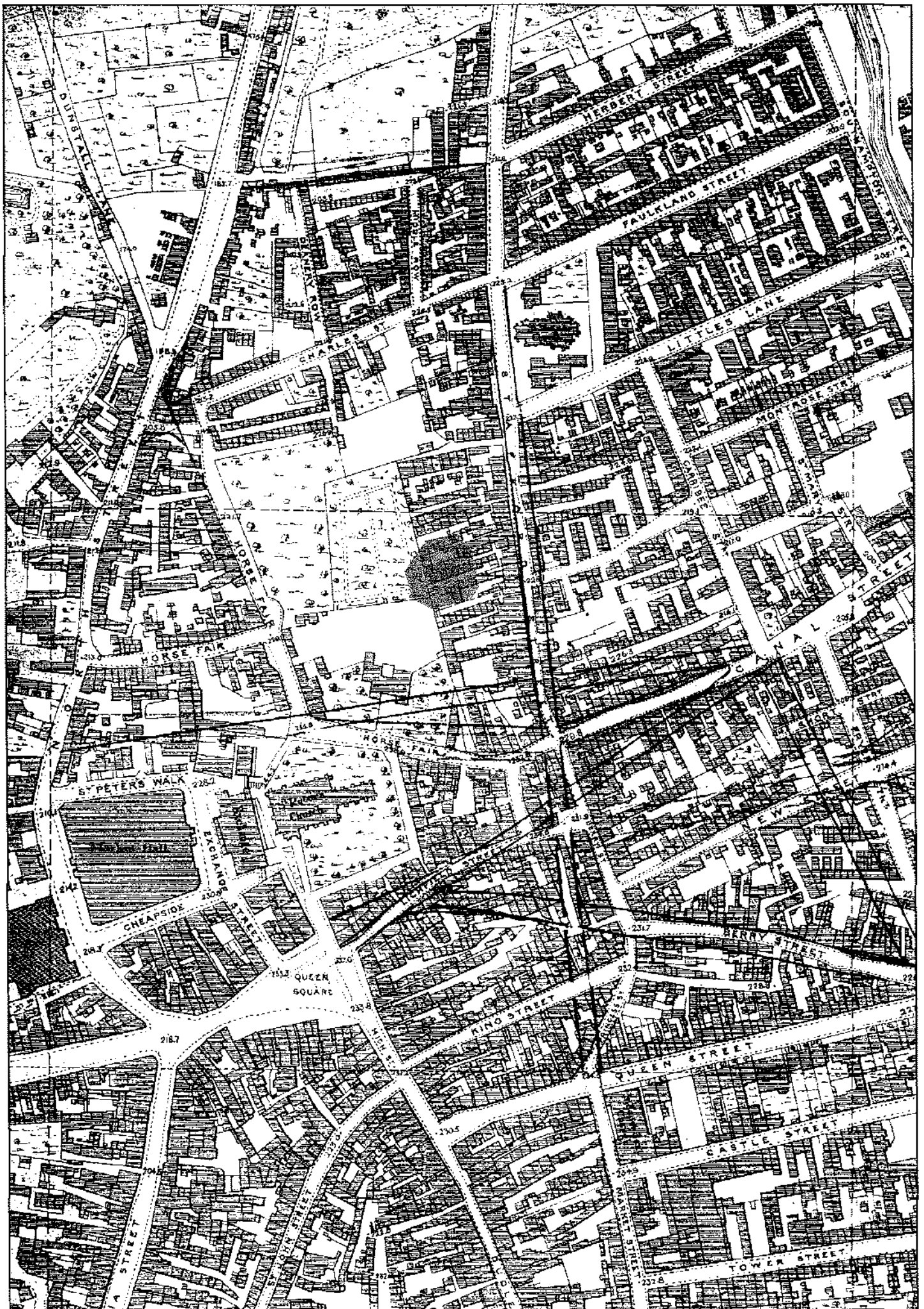


Figure 6 (1871)

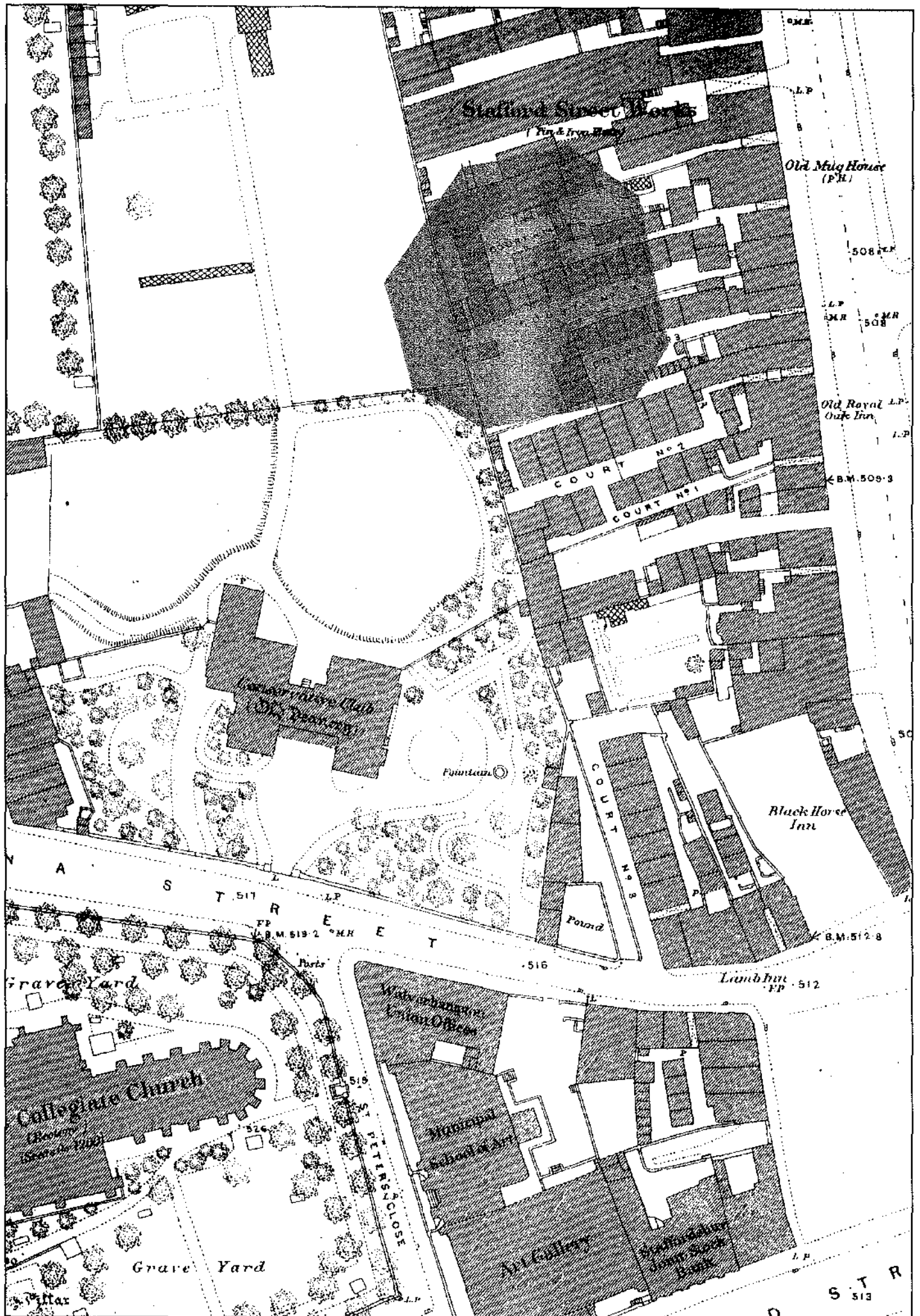


Figure 7 (1889)



Figure 8 (1919)



Figure 9 (1938)





Figure 10 (1957)

## Plates

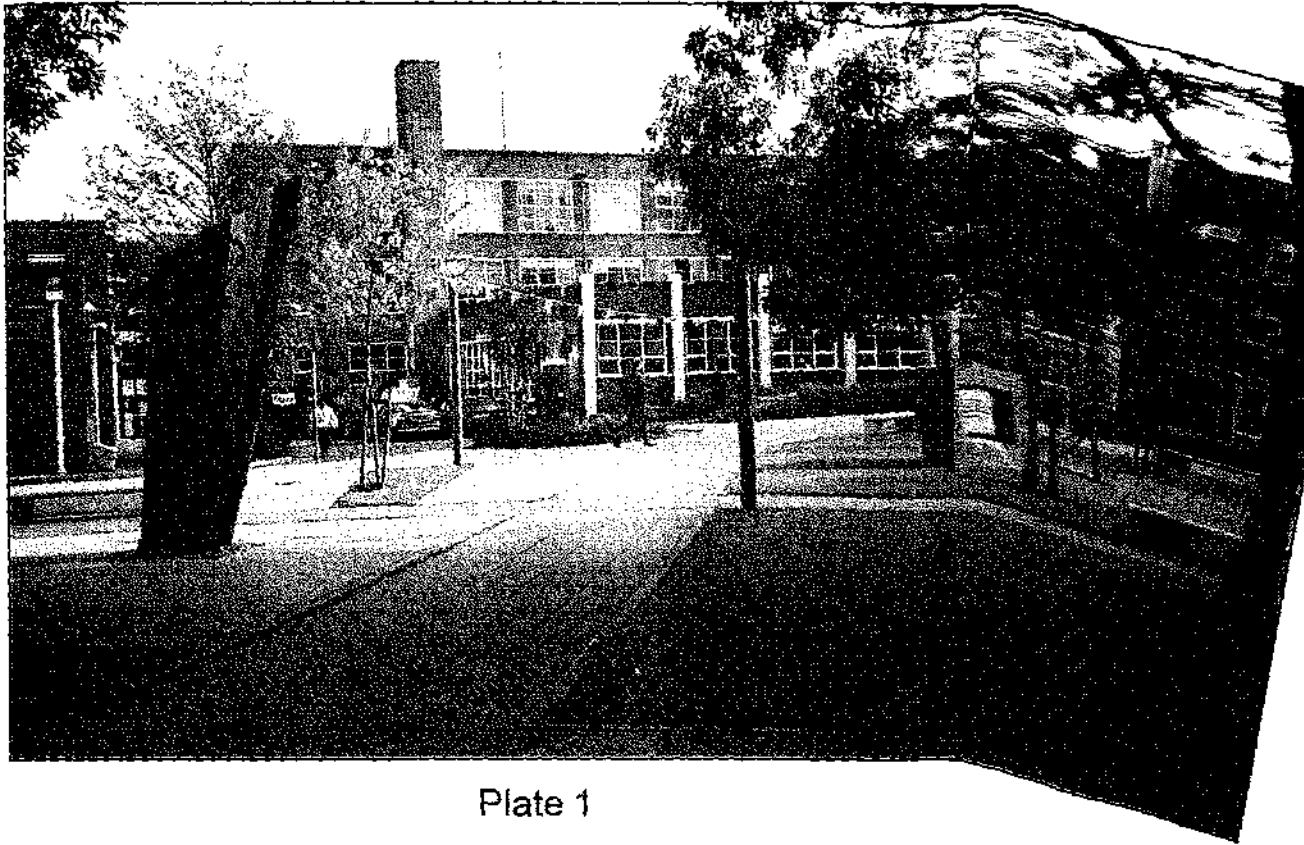


Plate 1

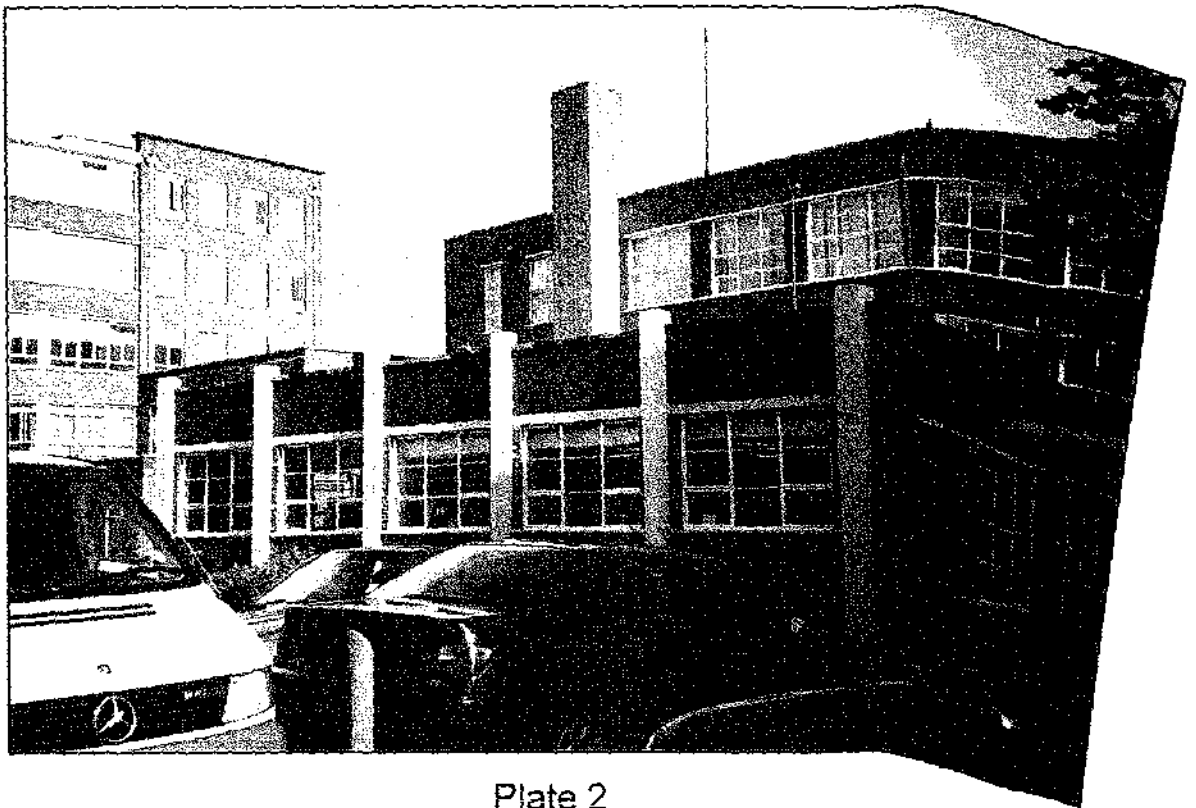


Plate 2