

birmingham archaeology



**THE UNIVERSITY
OF BIRMINGHAM**

**John Bright Street,
Birmingham**

**An Historic Buildings
Assessment
2004**



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John Bright Street, Birmingham

An Historic Buildings Assessment 2004

By
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for

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93-99 John Bright Street, Birmingham: An Historic Buildings Assessment

Summary

In March 2004 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an historic buildings assessment of properties at John Bright Street and Lower Severn Street, Birmingham (NGR 4068 2866). The work was commissioned by Crosby Homes and was occasioned by proposals to convert and partially demolish existing buildings on the site. The assessment revealed that Nos 93-97 John Bright Street and 11-13 Severn Street were raised in 1901 as shops and business premises to the designs of the Gilbert Smith and Type of Newhall Street, Birmingham. Another building, No. 15 Lower Severn Street, was designed in 1911 as a warehouse by the well-known Birmingham architects James and Lister Lee. The exterior elevations of these properties have a high degree of architectural merit, though there have been a number of alterations including the remodelling of large parts of the ground storey, and partial refenestration. Latterly, these structures have formed a single property and have functioned as a nightclub, the interior being completely remodelled so that no original features survive. No. 99 John Bright Street was raised in 1891 as a sports hall and offices for the Birmingham Athletic Institute. It too has been subject to alteration including the remodelling of the ground storey.

1.0 Introduction

In March 2004 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an historic buildings assessment of properties at John Bright Street, Birmingham. The work was commissioned by Crosby Homes and was occasioned by proposals to convert and partially demolish existing buildings on the site. The purpose of the assessment was to inform the planning process and the final design for the scheme. The project was carried out according to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology.

2.0 Site Location (Figs 1 & 2)

The site is located between John Bright Street, Lower Severn Street and Suffolk Street Queensway, Birmingham at NGR SP 4068 2866.

3.0 Objectives

The principal objective was to obtain an analytical record of the buildings, in order to distinguish between original and later features, and so inform planning decisions on the final form of the design.

4.0 Methods

A rapid building record was made comprising a written description supplemented by structural analysis and a 35mm photographic survey. Historical research was undertaken at Birmingham City Library Local Studies and Archives, and included a map regression exercise, consultation of trade directories and a search of building control plans.

5.0 Historical Notes

Princes Street (later Lower Severn Street) was in existence by 1778 (Thomas Hanson's map, Fig. 3). The name had changed to Cross Street by 1795 (Snape's map, not illustrated), and by 1828 was known as Severn Street (Fig. 4). John Bright Street had not been built by the time of the Board of Health maps of c. 1855 (not illustrated), but by 1889 it had come into existence, cutting diagonally across the block defined by Navigation Street (northwest), Hill Street (northeast), Smallbrook Street (southeast) and Suffolk Street (southwest) (Ordnance Survey, Fig. 5). At this time none of the current buildings, either on John Bright Street or Lower Severn Street, had been raised.

By 1905, when the second edition of the Ordnance Survey appeared, the street scene had been transformed. On John Bright Street, Nos 93-97 had been erected, all aligned with Lower Severn Street, and so too had No.99, which comprised a narrow building at the front on the same alignment as Nos 93-97, and a much larger hall to the rear labelled 'Gymnasium' on the map (Fig. 6).

The earliest of the buildings was No.99 John Bright Street, for which building plans were submitted on 7 April 1891 for a hall and offices for the Birmingham Athletic Institute (BBP 7944). Unfortunately the drawings have not survived. On 6 May 1901 the Birmingham architects Smith and Type of Newhall Street submitted plans on behalf of Jeffrey Buildings Limited for three shops in John Bright Street and business premises in Severn Street (BBP 16224). These buildings are to be identified with 93-97 John Bright Street and 11-13 Lower Severn Street. Each shop had its entrance to the left and shop window to the right curving round into the recessed portico.

In 1904 (Kelly's Directory) No 93 John Bright Street on the corner with Severn Street, was occupied by Oliver and Stevens, house furnishers, who also held Nos 7 and 9 Severn Street (now 11-13 Lower Severn Street). No. 95 John Bright Street was the premises of the Main Wheeleries Ltd, cycle agents, while No. 97 does not appear to have been occupied. No. 99 was home to various concerns including Birmingham Athletic Club, Birmingham Athletic Institute and the Birmingham Chess Club.

Of the Lower Severn Street buildings only No.11 appears on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map, but both 13 and 15 are recorded on the 1918 map (Fig. 7). No.15 dates from 1911 (BBP 21997) and was designed as a warehouse by the Birmingham partnership James and Lister Lee of Cannon Street, who are better known for their work as public house architects. The work was commissioned by Alfred Brown & Co. hardware merchant.

By 1914 (Kelly's Directory) Nos 7-9 Severn Street (now 11-13 Lower Severn Street) were no longer in the possession of Oliver and Stevens but had been divided up into numerous occupancies including Miss Amy M. Matthews, teacher of physical culture; Fox and Charles, shroud manufacturers, the Publishing Committee of the Churches of Christ Publishers; J. Meredith Jones and Sons Ltd, leather manufacturers; Sol Jacobs, tailor; Le Brasseur Surgical Manufacturing Co. Ltd; and W. Meadowcroft & Son Ltd,

mineral water machinery manufacturers. Beyond lay Alfred Brown & Co., hardware merchants in the new purpose built warehouse that is now No.15 Lower Severn Street.

6.0 Descriptive Notes

93-97 John Bright Street (Geoffrey Buildings) (Plate 1)

Dated 1901 with later alterations. Red brick (Flemish stretcher bond) with orange terracotta dressings and steeply pitched plain tile roof. The design incorporates elements of Vernacular Revival. The three-storey building with attic occupies a corner plot between John Bright Street and Lower Severn Street. The ground storey is largely a creation of the late 20th-century with large windows, doorways to both elevations and a continuous fascia.

At the angle is an elaborate centrepiece with canted bay windows and flanking semi-elliptical pilasters rising to a projecting eaves band. Above is the attic gablet with scrolled and coped parapet capped by a miniature semi-elliptical pediment (Plate 2). The cornerpiece is now partly obscured by a late 20th sign pertaining to a later manifestation of the building as the 'Orleans' nightclub. Behind this sign is a terracotta panel bearing the embossed legend "Geoffrey/Buildings". Below the attic window is a shield with the date "1901". Mullioned and transomed windows to first and second floors, the latter incorporating semi-circular arches. Ogee tracery to attic window. The lower lights have all been replaced but the upper leaded lights survive.

Three-bay elevation to John Bright Street articulated by pilasters of rectangular (first floor) and semi-elliptical (second floor) section in a darker brick. A curiosity is that there is no division between the centre and right-hand end bay at second floor level. First floor windows of one (left and centre) or two (right) lights with semi-circular arches and sunken spandrels. Second floor windows of two (left and centre) or three (right) lights with semi-circular arches, sloping sills, impost band (missing between centre and right hand bays) and original plate glass sashes. Flat-roofed attic dormers, which the architect's plans show to have been part of the original design.

Three-bay elevation to Lower Severn Street of one (left and centre) or two (right) lights. Towards the left-hand end of the building is a blocked ground-floor window with semi-circular gauged brick arch, apparently the only original opening to survive at this level (Plate 3), though the late 20th doorway to the right is in the position of an original entrance, shown on the architect's plans. First-floor squared-headed windows with high segmental transoms, moulded surrounds, flanking pilasters and continuous hood mould. The left and centre windows (Plate 4) retain their original upper leaded lights, but all other glazing at this level appears to be later. The second floor windows are of the same character as those on the John Bright Street elevation and retain their original plate glass sashes (Plate 5).

11-13 Lower Severn Street (Plate 6)

1901 onwards, with later alterations. Red brick with terracotta dressings and steeply pitched plain tile roof continuous with that of 93-97 John Bright Street. Two storeys and attic. Ground floor altered in late 20th century and now plastered over and containing two doors pertaining to the nightclub phase. The first floor is in two parts and slightly oversails the ground floor, the divisions between the windows being continued downwards as wall shafts to terminate in corbels. Left-hand side of elevation has four windows (left hand one narrow) with ovolo-moulded wooden frames, probably original, and continuous hood mould. Right-hand side of elevation has three windows (left-hand one narrow) at a slightly lower level, above which the wall is tile hung (Plate 7). Original flat-roofed attic dormers depicted in the architect's plans.

15 Lower Severn Street (Plate 8)

1911 with later alterations. Red brick (English bond), slate roof with raised coped verges and brick end stacks. Three storeys and attic with bracketed eaves cornice. Five window bays articulated by pilasters. Ground storey has a blocked six-bay arcade of segmental arches with raised keys and voussoirs joined by a continuous hood mould (Plate 9). The architect's plans show that there was a carriage entrance with double doors to the left and a pedestrian entrance also with double doors to the right. The other four openings were windows. All these openings are now boarded up but retain at least parts of the original frames, visible above the boarding. Bold sill cornice to first-floor windows (Plate 10), the windows themselves are fixed lights with mullions and transoms, segmental arches with raised keys and voussoirs and straight hood moulds (Plate 11). The frames are original though most of the glazing has been replaced. Two-light second floor windows with square heads, also with fixed lights, the frames probably 20th century.

99 John Bright Street (Birmingham School of Speech and Drama) (Plate 12)

Late 19th century with later alterations. Red brick (English bond), slate roof. Three storeys and attic. Entrance remodelled, probably in the 1920s, with recessed double doors and curved side windows. Later facing to front elevation at this level. Group of three closely-set windows at first and second floor levels treated as a single feature with flat-arched lower windows divided by embossed panels and second floor sill string from the segmental-arched upper windows, which have dog-tooth ornament around the arches. Metal window frames, probably 1920s. Flat roofed attic dormer, probably original.

7.0 Acknowledgements

The site inspection and architectural assessment was carried out by Malcolm Hislop, the documentary research by Sally Radford. Malcolm Hislop compiled this report. Thanks are owed to the staff of Birmingham City Library Local Studies for their assistance.

8.0 Sources

Textual Sources

Birmingham Building Plan No. 16224, Birmingham City Archives, Three shops in John Bright Street and Business Premises, Severn Street (1901).

Birmingham Building Plan No. 21997 Warehouse, John Bright Street (1911).

Kelly's Directory 1904

Kelly's Directory 1914

Cartographic Sources

1781 Thomas Hanson

1795 John Snape

1828 J. Piggot Smith

1855 J. Piggot Smith

1887 Ordnance Survey 1:500

1905 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1918 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

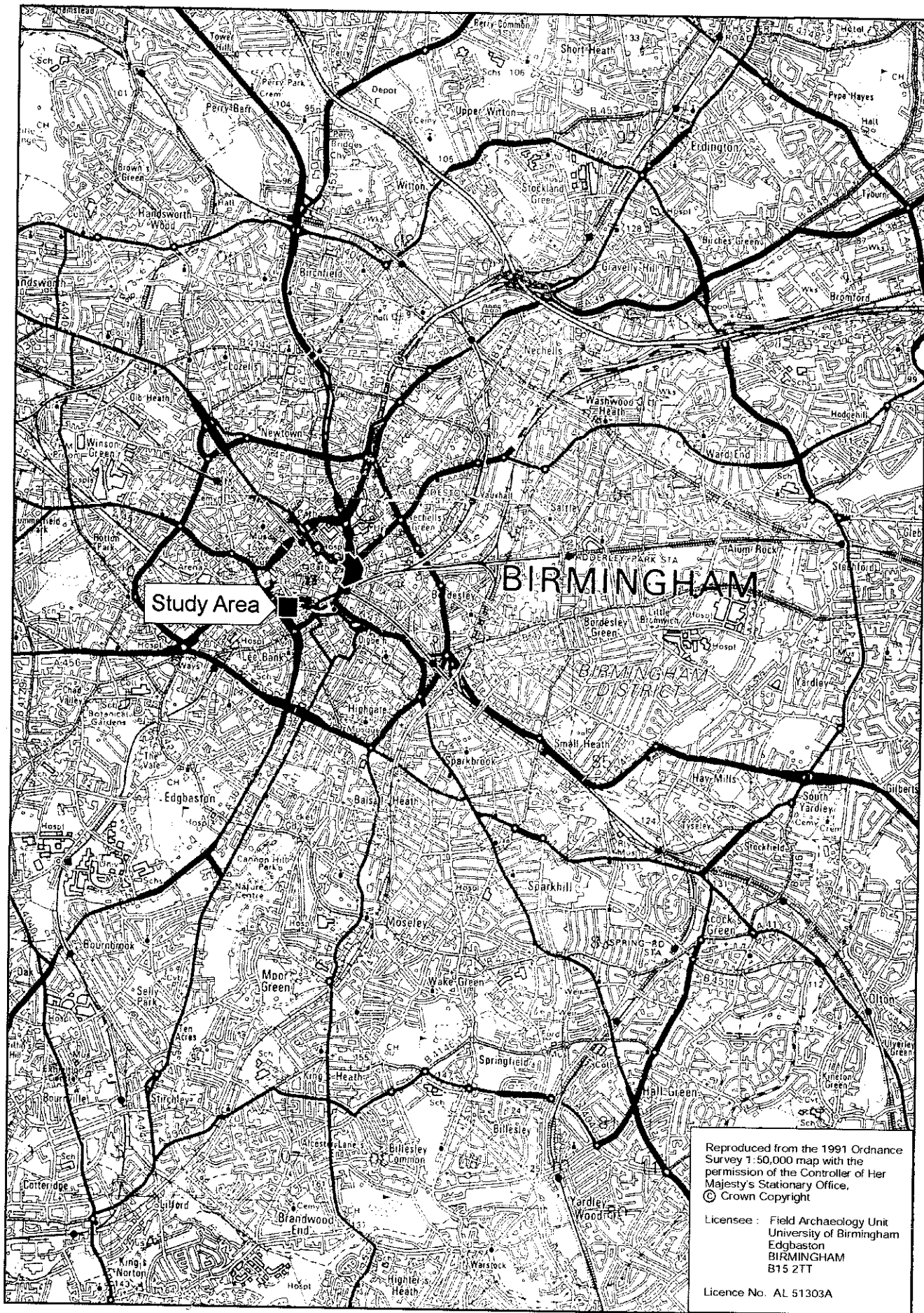


Fig.1

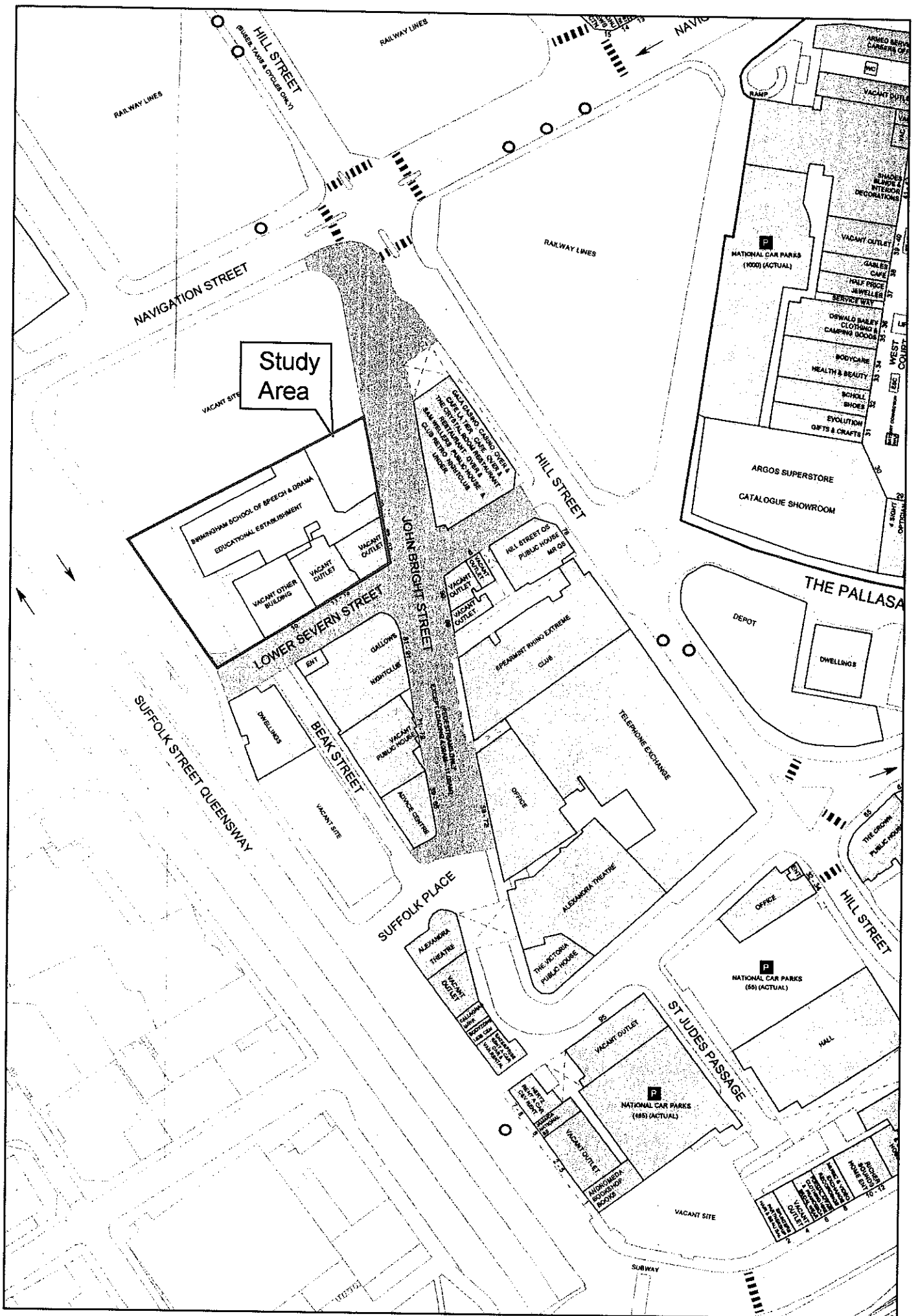


Fig.2

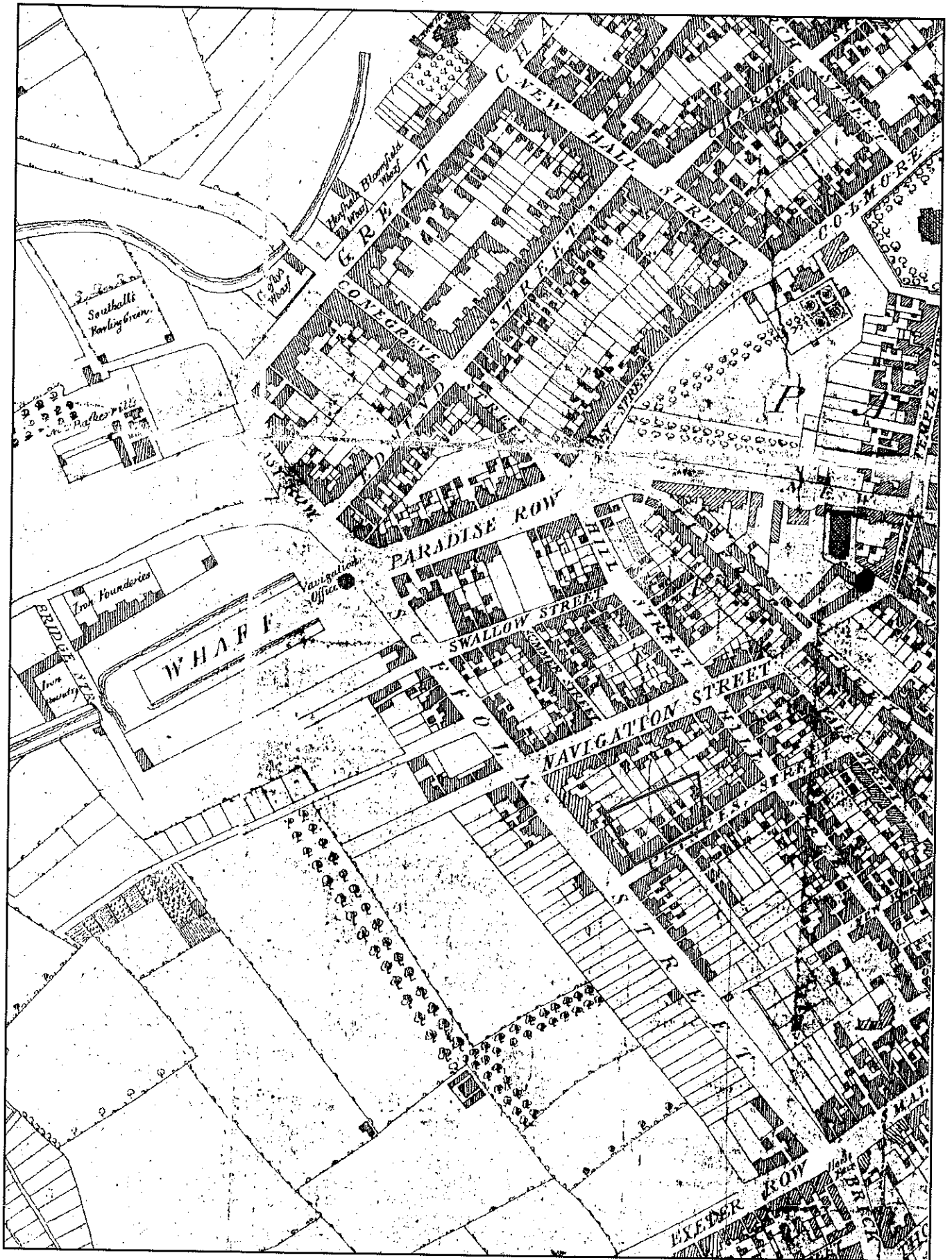


Fig.3 (1778)

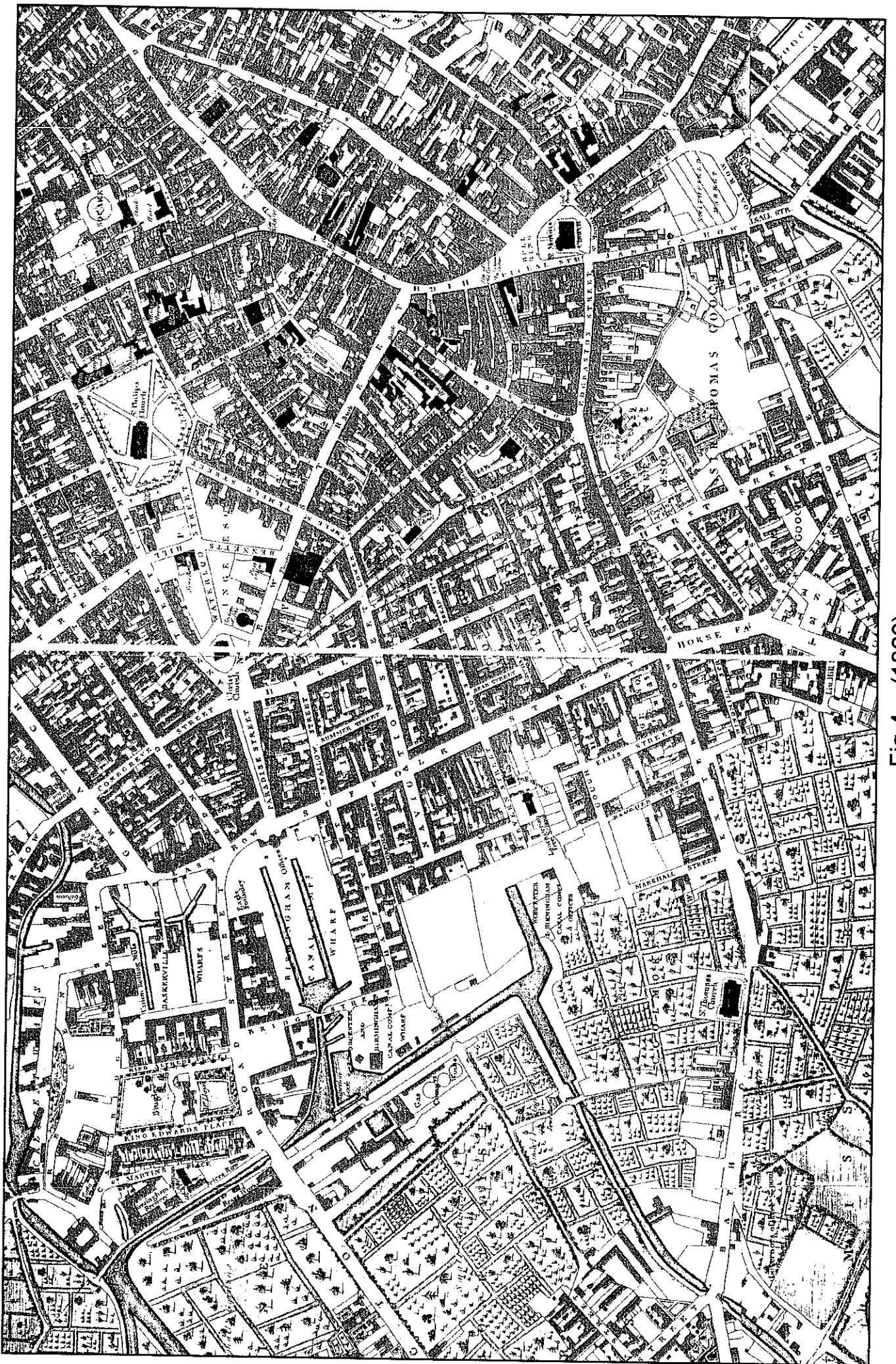


Fig.4 (1828)

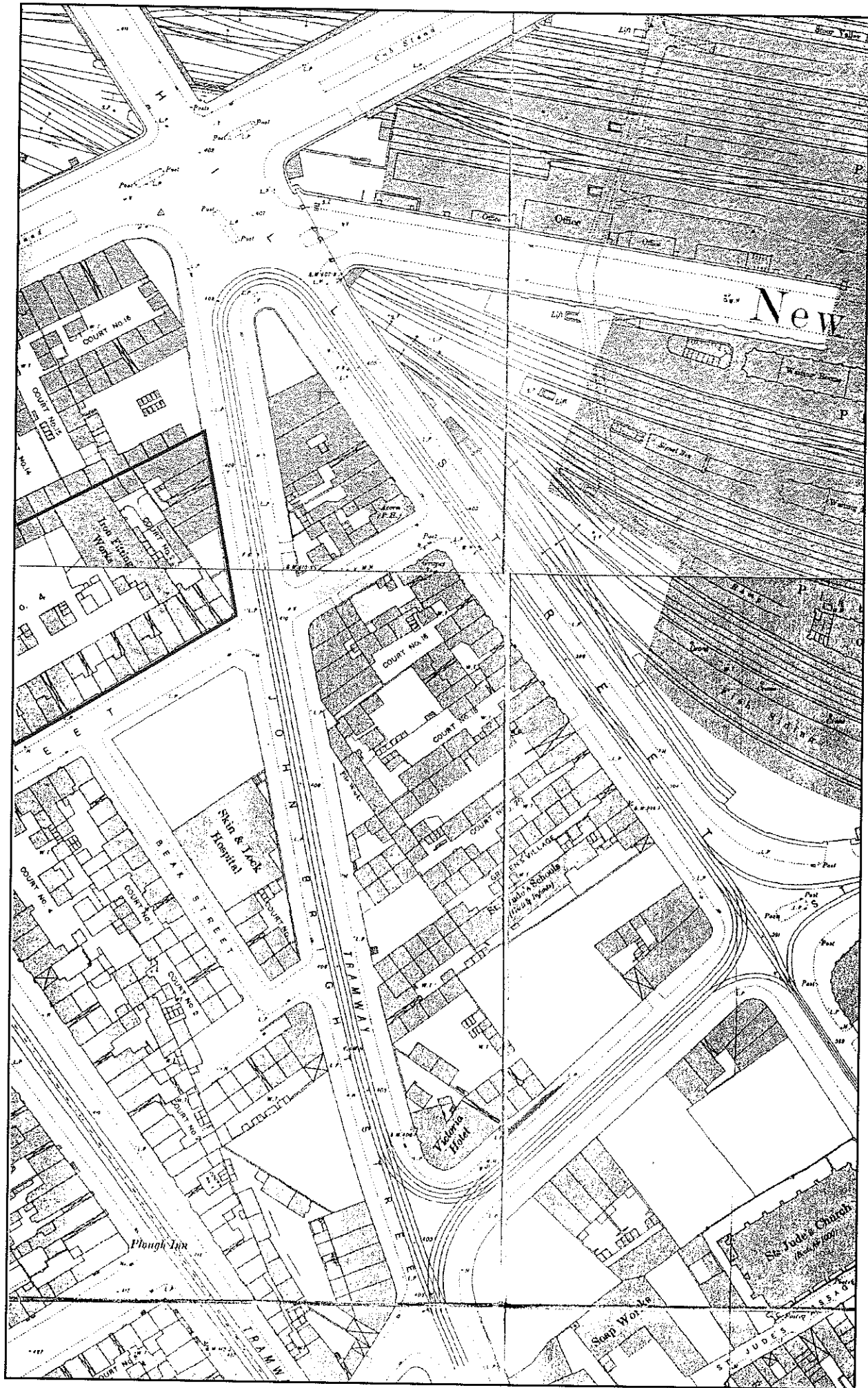


Fig.5 (1889)

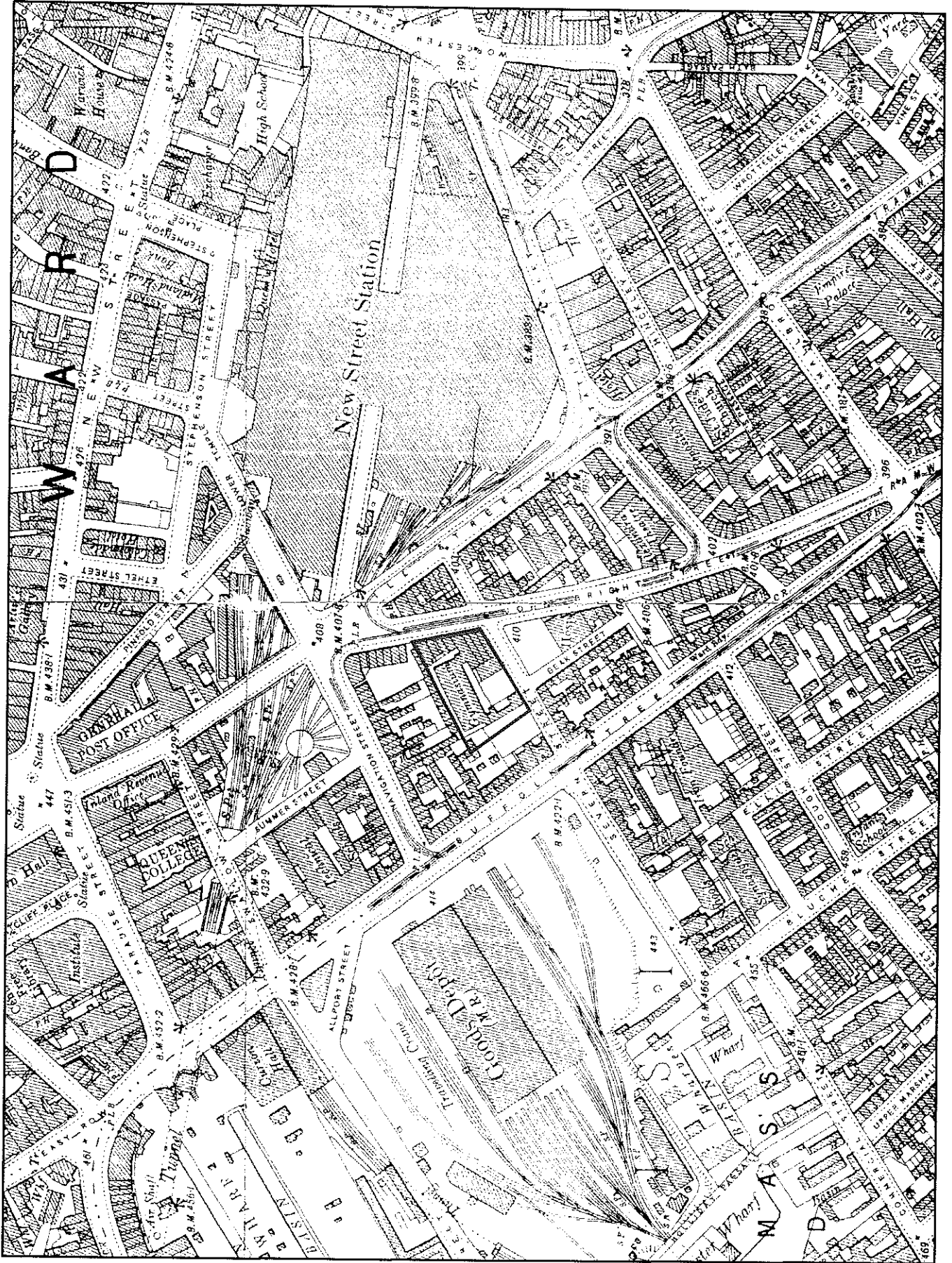


Fig.6 (1905)

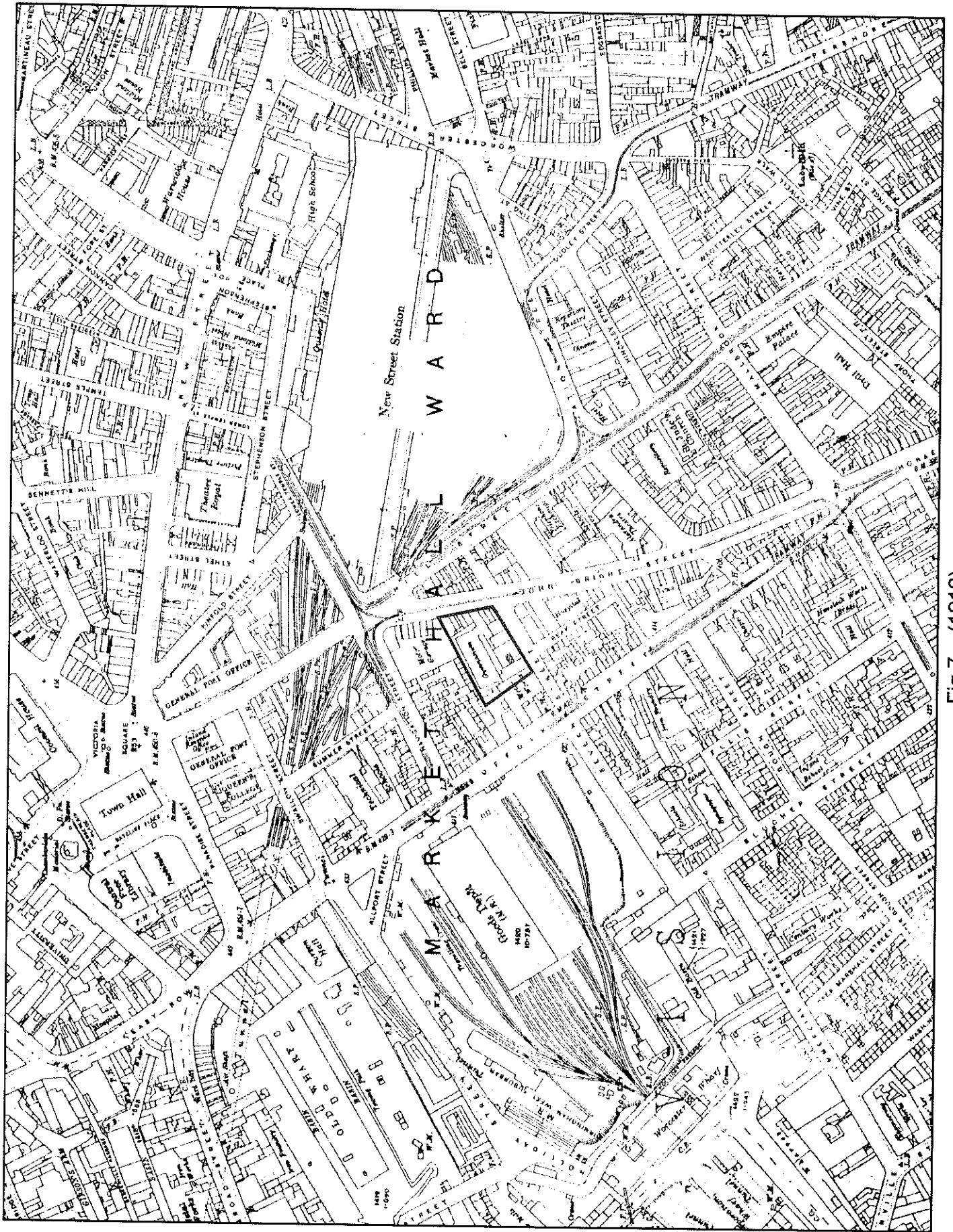


Fig.7 (1918)



Plate 1



Plate 2

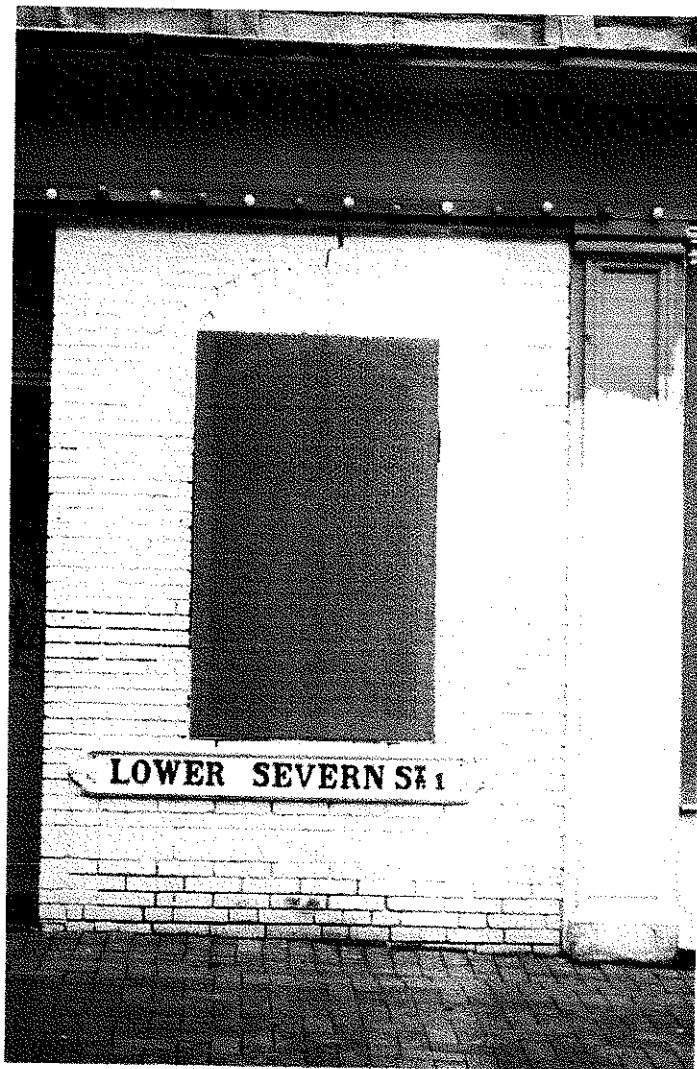


Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5

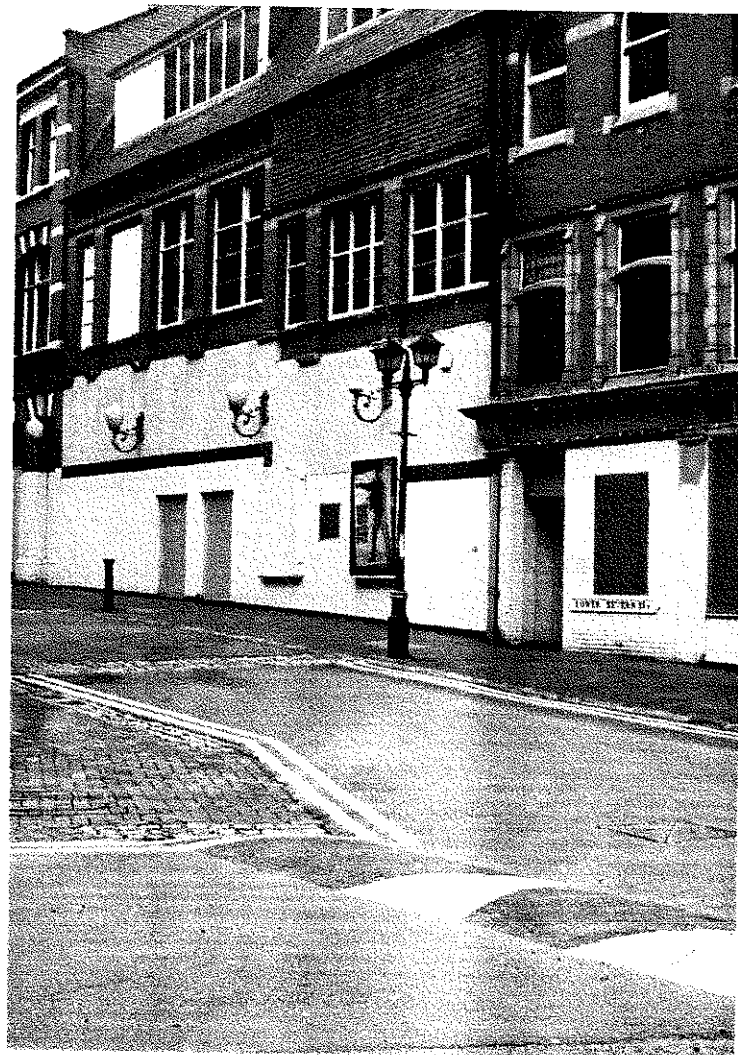


Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12