

Bentley Road South,
Darlaston:

An Archaeological Desk-
based Assessment
2005

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**Bentley Road South, Darlaston:
An Archaeological Desk-based Assessment 2005**

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SUMMARY

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out in December 2005 along the route of a proposed road scheme in Darlaston, near Walsall, West Midlands (centred on NGR SO 980987). The proposed road scheme involves work around Bentley Road South.

A previous desk-based assessment, conducted for the Darlaston Strategic Development Area, concluded that the area as a whole was probably not initially developed prior to the closing stages of the eighteenth century, though the area spans much of the core industrial area which established Darlaston's importance and reputation as a regional and national centre for mining and the manufacture of metals and metal goods from the mid-nineteenth century (Conway 2002).

The assessment concluded that below-ground archaeological remains associated with a malthouse depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map (BCSMR 11032) might survive within the study area. The assessment further concluded that early-20th-century walls fronting Bentley Road South to the south of the canal have earlier 19th-century walls incorporated into them relating to earlier industrial works and might merit further archaeological recording if they are to be demolished during redevelopment.

The history and development of Darlaston, and the Black Country in general, is greatly influenced by the natural mineral resources of the area and the construction of man-made infrastructure that helped utilise these resources. Due to the degraded character of the site, the development will have a moderately positive effect on the visual environment and be of itself part of an ongoing history involving new and improved infrastructure that has been occurring for over 200 years.

BENTLEY ROAD SOUTH, DARLASTON: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT, 2005

1 INTRODUCTION

In December 2005 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an archaeological desk-based assessment in respect of a new road scheme in Darlaston, near Walsall, West Midlands (hereafter referred to as the study area). The work was commissioned by JMP Consulting in advance of a proposed new road scheme.

This report outlines the results of the assessment, which was prepared in accordance with the Institute of Field Archaeologists Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment (IFA 2001). Two previous desk-based assessments were undertaken, one centred on Bentley Mill Way and the east-west link of the proposed new road (Ramsey 2005), and one which was concerned with a wider area (Conway 2002).

2 LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

The proposed route follows Bentley Road South from the roundabout with Bentley Road North to the north, where it joins with the proposed new east-west link (Ramsey 2005), to the junction of Heath Road to the south at Darlaston Green. The site is roughly centred on NGR SO 980987 (Figs 1 and 2).

The drift geology of the area as a whole is mainly characterised by boulder clays. Alluvial deposits are found around the river and stream corridors. The underlying solid geology is mainly composed of coal measures. Darlaston is situated on the South Staffordshire coalfield and the seam of 'thick coal' or 'ten yard coal' outcrops in the vicinity (Conway 2002, 2).

The present character of the route can be divided into two areas. The land either side of Bentley Road South to the north of the canal is dominated by scrap yards and late-20th century factories and warehousing. To the south, the area possesses mostly early-20th century industrial buildings, with some 19th-century walls incorporated into the new builds.

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The principle objective of the project is to define the likely extent, survival and significance of above and below-ground archaeological remains within the study area. It will also determine the need for any further archaeological work in advance of or during the development.

This information will be used to inform a mitigation strategy for future archaeological work on the site (see Section 7 below).

4 METHODOLOGY

A search of all relevant and readily available published and non-published documentary sources, including historic maps and photographs, was carried out in the Walsall Local History Centre and the Library of the University of Birmingham. The

Black Country Sites and Monuments Record, the main source of archaeological information for archaeological sites in Walsall, was also consulted.

In addition, a walkover of the study area was undertaken in order to assess the topography and any above-ground archaeology, including standing buildings.

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

5.1 Anglo-Saxon

The settlement of Darlaston may have had its root in the Anglo-Saxon period, as the place-name 'Darlaston' is Anglo-Saxon in origin (DCHP 1984, 3). The earliest known archaeological deposits in the Darlaston area date to the medieval period.

5.2 Medieval

Darlaston is not mentioned in the Domesday Book, this may be because no settlement existed at this date or could merely be one of the many omissions from the survey. By the thirteenth century Darlaston had become established as a settlement, which was probably focused, as today, on the area around Church Street and King Street, to the south-west of the proposed route. Closer to the south-west is Darlaston Green. This was not a 'village green' in the proper sense but more probably an extensive area of waste or heathland on the edge of the town (Timmins 1993, 13, 56). Also highlighted by the Darlaston Strategic Development Area assessment was an area known as 'The Flatts', which was part of the town's medieval open field system. The pattern of strip-cultivation indicative of open field survived in this area into the mid-nineteenth century (Conway 2002).

5.3 Post-medieval

The area remained largely undeveloped into the middle of the nineteenth century despite the fact that the Darlaston Area was rich in mineral resources such as coal, ironstone and fireclays (VCH 1968, 285). Yates map of the county of Staffordshire 1775 (not illustrated) shows some settlement at Darlaston Green (BCSMR 13130, not illustrated). Much of the common land of Darlaston and Tittensor was enclosed under an act passed in 1828 (Whites History Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire 1834). The industrial development of Darlaston, like much of the Staffordshire Black Country, was hampered by its relative isolation. The absence of navigable rivers meant bulky raw materials, such as coal, could not be easily transported from the area (Conway 2002, 4). The development of Darlaston relied heavily on the deliberate construction of infrastructure such as the canals and the railways.

The arrival of new transport links stimulated the industrial development of the area and facilitated the exploitation of the mineral resources present within the area. Darlaston was connected to the extensive Birmingham Canal Navigations in 1799 and the Grand Junction Railway was cut through the area in 1837 (ibid.).

The arrival of the canal to the area did not lead initially to much industrial development. The Tithe Map of Darlaston parish c.1840 (Fig. 4) shows that several basins were cut from the canal into what were undeveloped areas during this period, including two to the east of Bentley Road South (BCSMR 13170 and 13171), and the basin that would later become an early interchange basin (BCSMR 11028). These basins were presumably constructed to serve factories or mines, which were planned

but not yet established. It was only after the railway arrived and was linked to the canal in the 1840s that large-scale industrial development seems to have taken place (Conway 2002).

Within the Midlands two public railways met in Birmingham, the Grand Junction and the London and Birmingham. They formed a junction in 1838, which cemented the link with the North West and created the embryonic national network. Birmingham became an early focus point for new railways. By 1842 four lines converged on the town, but none served the Black Country industry (Foxton 1998, vii). Darlaston was exceptional as it was served by the Grand Junction Railway.

The canal network and the railway network were linked in 1845 when an early interchange basin, known as Darlaston Green Goods Station, was constructed at Bughole Bridge (BCSMR 11028). Darlaston became an important centre of coal and ironstone mining in the early to mid-nineteenth century (DCHP 1984, 8). Mining in Darlaston was mainly carried out by cutting numerous small-scale workings using the rib and pillar system (*ibid.* 10). Large collieries, such as the James Bridge Colliery to the east, were exceptional in the area.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century mining began to be complemented by the production of iron and steel in particular. Many furnaces and sheet mills, which took advantage of the coal and ore resources of the area, grew up around the established mines and the railway and canal. A further development away from primary manufacture toward the production of finished metal articles occurred in the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Conway 2002). The mainstay of Darlaston's manufacturing trades was nuts and bolts and the town became a national centre for their manufacture. Many firms thrived and grew to be major manufacturers.

In summary, the earliest tangible industrial development in the area followed the construction of the canal in 1799 and the construction of the Grand Junction railway in 1837. Early industry was focused on the primary extraction of coal, ironstone and to a lesser extent, limestone.

6 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY AREA

The Walsall Canal (BCSMR 5870, Fig. 3) runs through the area and forms part of the Birmingham Canal Navigations (BCN). The southern end of the Walsall canal from its junction with the Wednesbury Old Canal to Broadwater Fire Engine was constructed by the Birmingham and Fazeley canal promoters in 1786. The canal was cut through the area in 1799 and is the main line of the Walsall Canal. Bentley Road South transects the canal at Bentley Bridge. The Grand Junction Railway was cut through in 1837.

The Tithe Map of Darlaston depicts the railway and the canals cutting through still relatively undeveloped countryside, though the basins that would later serve the Crescent Iron Works and Darlaston Green Furnaces (to the west and east of Bentley Road South) are visible. This map also depicts a few small buildings along either side of Bentley Road South, in particular within a trapezoidal block of land immediately to the east of Bentley Road South and to the south of the canal. These buildings are still visible on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map, one of which is labelled a public house.

The competition for the transporting of goods between the canals and railways meant that connections between the two were essential for the railways to gain a substantial share of the heavy iron trade (Foxton 1998). Darlaston Basin Interchange (BCSMR 11028) was an early interchange basin whose sidings were connected with the Grand Junction Railway, and was adapted from an earlier basin (Conway 2002). The basin was on the Walsall Level of the BCN at Bughole Bridge (to the west of Bentley Road South) and originally served the Birmingham Coal Company. It is recorded as dealing with iron ore in 1855 and could be expected to be handling mainly the products and raw materials of the local iron works by that time. The opening of the Stour Valley line to goods in 1852, enabling interchanges to be built on the Wolverhampton and Birmingham Levels of the BCN, left Darlaston with little more than the Walsall Level for a catchment area (Foxton 1998, 9)

The interchange basin is clearly depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 5). By this time there were many iron works in the area including the Crescent Iron Works (BCSMR 11031), the Albert Works (BCSMR 11029) and the Darlaston Steel and Iron Works. Immediately to the west of Bentley Road South was the London and North Western Works (BCSMR 11030). Jesse Tildesley is listed in Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1896, as present at the Crescent Iron Works, as a manufacturer of iron or steel bridges, viaducts, girders, roofs and buildings, boilers, gas holders, tanks and pans, boats and wagons, doors and rooms, riveted tubes, pipes, aqueducts and all kinds of engineering and structural iron or steel work. In the same directory, Garrington and Sons are listed at the Albert Works as gun lock makers, gun stampers, hame and chain makers, stampers and washer manufacturers, and their advert lists a multitude of other manufactured metal items. The London and North Western Works was owned by Staffordshire Bolt, Nut and Fencing Company Ltd, and specialised in the nut and bolt trade for which Darlaston became nationally renowned. The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map depicts a canal basin (BCSMR 13172) between the London and North Western Works and Bentley Road South, which was not present on the earlier Tithe Map.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map also depicts a Malthouse (BCSMR 11032) on the east side of Bentley Road South, immediately north of the canal as an L-shaped building with the main range along the roadside. This map also shows the parcel of land immediately to the south of the canal, also to the east of the road as having a basin cut through the east and south of it. The buildings identified on the Tithe Map are still present, and one is labelled Public House. To the east of this, another building is depicted adjacent to the canal, which is still standing today (Plate 1). The land at the southern end of the road was much more built up by this time, mainly with small terraced houses.

The buildings depicted on the Tithe Map, situated to the west of Bentley Road South between the railway and the canal are not standing at the time of the Ordnance Survey First Edition. A new terrace of houses, however, was present at this time slightly further to the north. The land to the north of the railway was still undeveloped at this time, though the road cuts through fields annotated as having mine shafts present.

The Second Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1903 (Fig. 6) depicts little change along most of the length of the road. The Imperial Works (nut and bolt) was now in existence, adjacent to the canal, in the location of the disused sheet mills. Buildings associated with these works still stand today (Plate 2). Three beer retailers are listed in Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire 1904 present on Bentley Road, and it is

possible that John Simmonds, of the Boat Commercial Inn, owned the public house depicted on the maps, immediately to the south of the canal. The present Boat Public House is a 1930s building in the same area (Plate 3). The buildings of the London and North Western Works had undergone substantial additions and alterations, and new building were present at the southern end of Bentley Road, at the junction with Lower Green. Several small houses were present on the eastern side of Bentley Road.

The Third Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1918 (Fig. 7) again shows little major changes along Bentley Road, though the area of land at the southern end of Bentley Road had further building additions present. Darlaston Green itself had become more populated. By the time of the Fourth Edition Ordnance Survey in 1938 (not illustrated), there were more houses on the west of Bentley Road South, though the land to the north of the railway was still undeveloped, and described on this plan as allotment gardens.

The area continued to undergo change and development, with new works buildings being depicted on subsequent Ordnance Survey editions (not illustrated). The Malthouse building (SMR 11032) was still standing in 1963. This development did not spread north of the railway, and the present roundabout at the proposed junction of Bentley Road and the new east-west link was constructed after 1980.

The walkover survey identified that Bentley Bridge, over the canal, dates to the early 20th century, and is constructed from red and blue bricks in English bond with a rounded arch and plain parapet (Plate 4). A modern metal footbridge has been constructed adjacent to this bridge. To the south of the canal, the walkover survey further identified that the walls adjacent to the road associated with the Imperial Works are mostly early-20th century, with 19th-century walls with blind arches/blocked windows with semi-circular heads, incorporated into them. The lettering on the walls, which includes the name Charles Richards with the words 'and sons' blocked out, is in white ceramic tile (Plate 2). To the west of Bentley Road South, another early-20th century wall follows the line of the road, again with blocked up windows (Plate 5). The current state of these buildings is abandoned and derelict.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed route along Bentley Road South passes through a wonderful example of what was a late 19th-century industrial landscape, though much of the area now is derelict. The canal corridor is the dominant historical feature within the Study Area, and is a prime example of what has been characterised as an 'industrial canal'. However, survival of the associated infrastructure, such as bridges and aqueducts is variable (Conway 2002).

Most of the archaeological sites of early industrial activity in the area as a whole, such as former tramways, railways or canal basins and mines and factories are of local importance, but several of these may have been damaged by subsequent industrial activity.

Below-ground Archaeology

One site is close enough to the road to be potentially effected by the proposed new road scheme, which is the malthouse to the east of Bentley Road South (BCSMR

11032). Though the building is no longer standing, archaeological remains, including sunken tiled floors, may well survive.

Above-ground Archaeology

Although the present standing walls either side of Bentley Road South are of mainly 20th century construction and are part of derelict and abandoned buildings, they do include in places earlier builds, and are representative of an important period of development in Darlaston's history. As such, they might merit further archaeological recording if they are to be demolished in advance of redevelopment.

Any decision concerning further archaeological work lies with Mike Shaw, the Black Country Planning Archaeologist.

8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was commissioned by JMP Consulting. Thanks are due to the staff at Walsall Local History Centre. Thanks also go to Mike Shaw, the Black Country Archaeologist, who monitored the project. The assessment was undertaken by Eleanor Ramsey who produced the written report. Dr Malcolm Hislop conducted the walkover survey. The report was illustrated by Nigel Dodds, and edited by Dr Malcolm Hislop, who also monitored the project for Birmingham Archaeology.

9 SOURCES

9.1 Primary Sources

1896 Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire

1904 Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire

9.2 Secondary Sources

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Timmins, M. 1993 *Street Names of Darlaston and Bentley*

VCH 1968 *Victoria History of the County of Stafford*

9.3 Cartographic Sources

c.1840 Darlaston Tithe Map

1886 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Staffordshire Sheet LXIII.9

1887 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Staffordshire Sheet LXIII.10

1903 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Staffordshire Sheet LXIII.9

1903 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Staffordshire Sheet LXIII.10

1917 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Staffordshire Sheet LXIII.10

1918 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Staffordshire Sheet LXIII.9

1938 Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Staffordshire Sheet LXIII.9

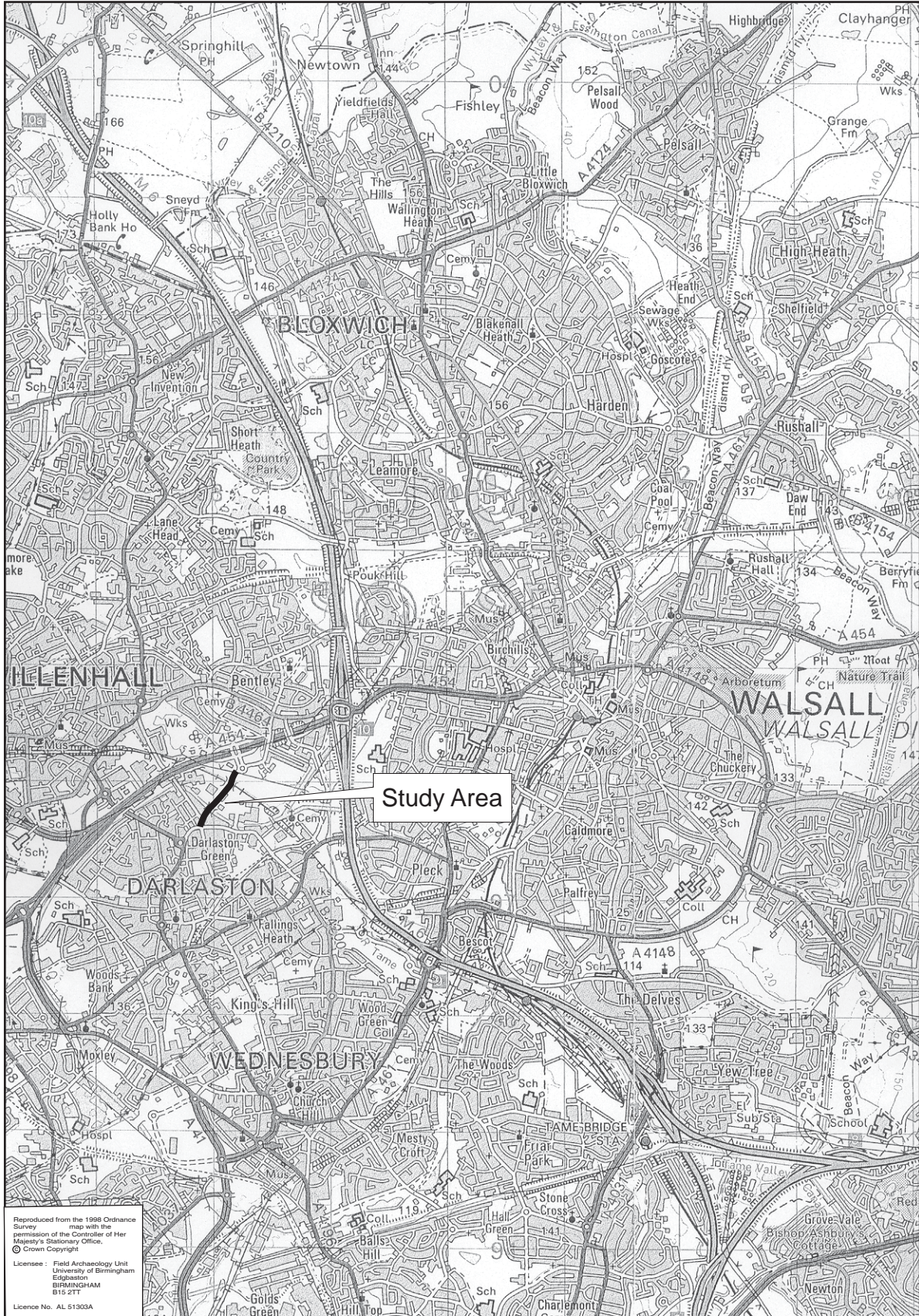


Fig.1

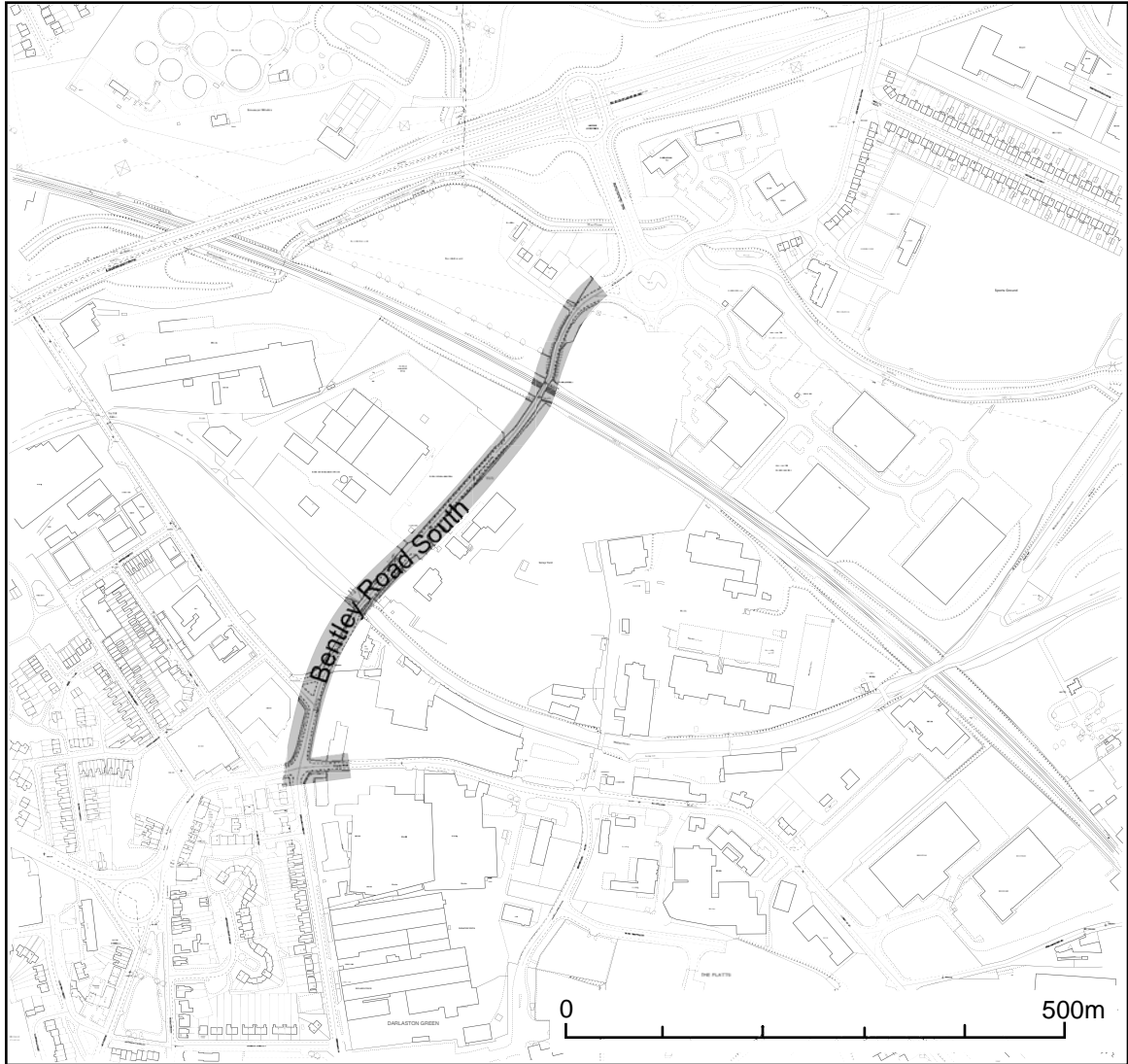


Fig.2

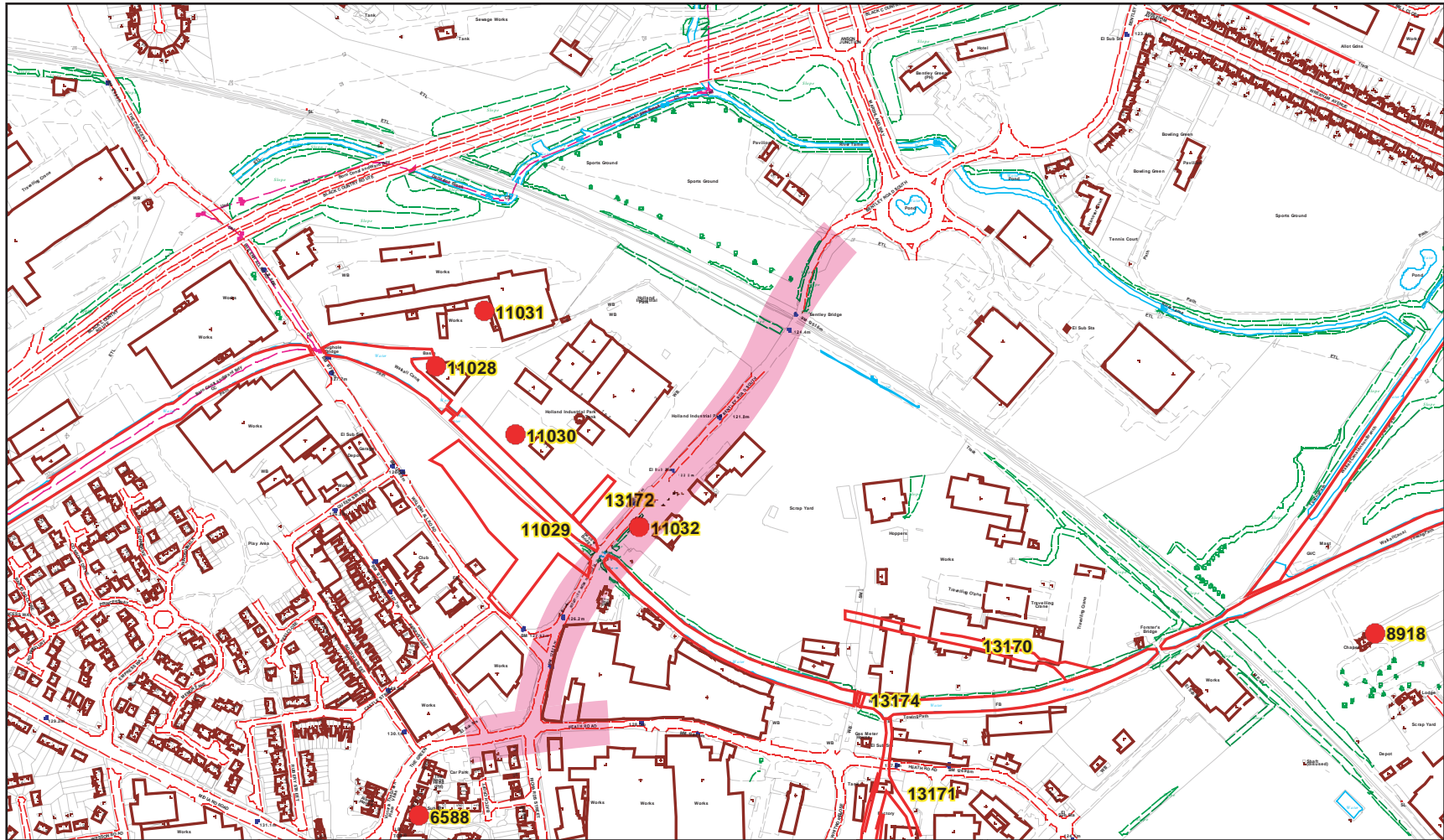


Fig.3

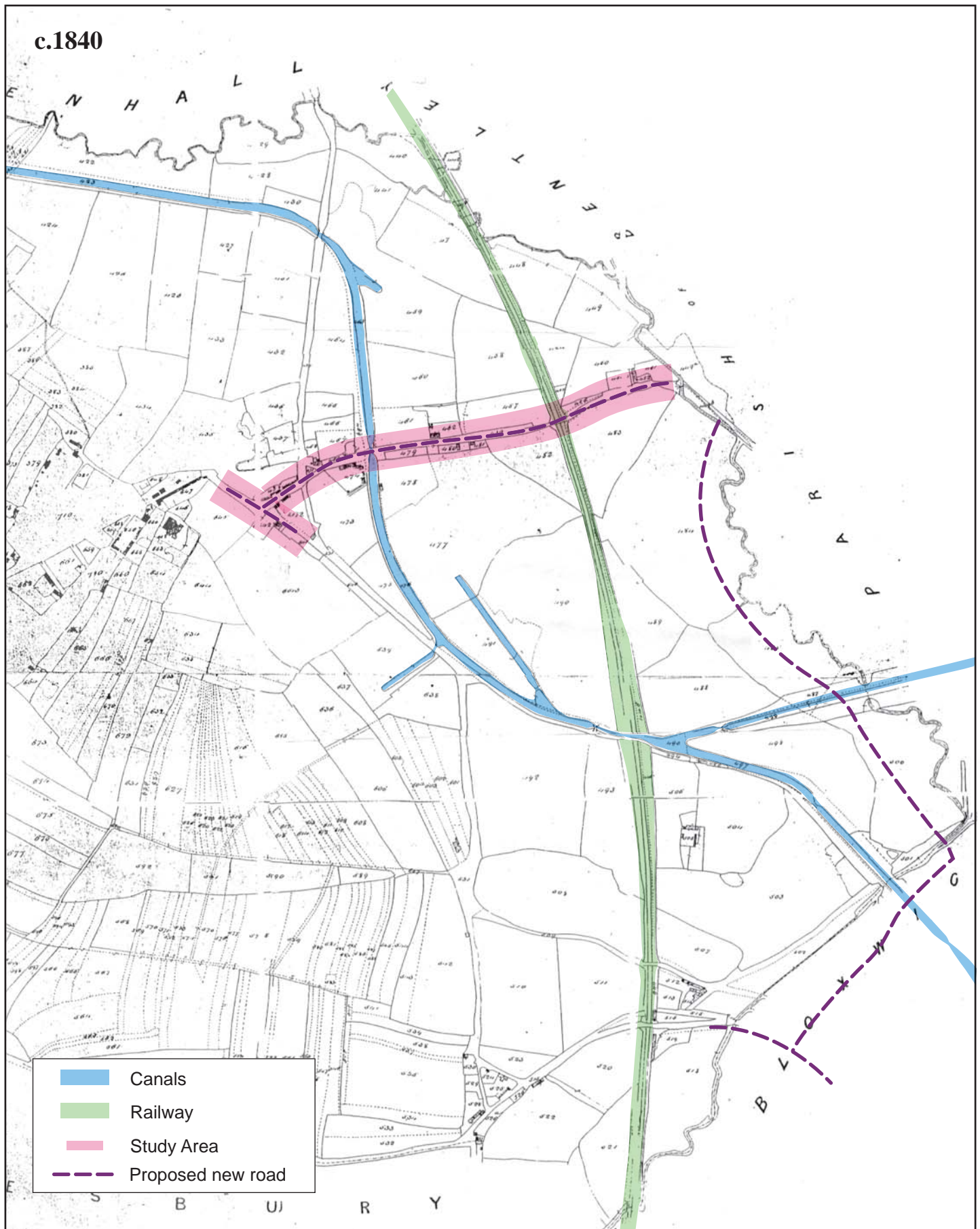


Fig.4

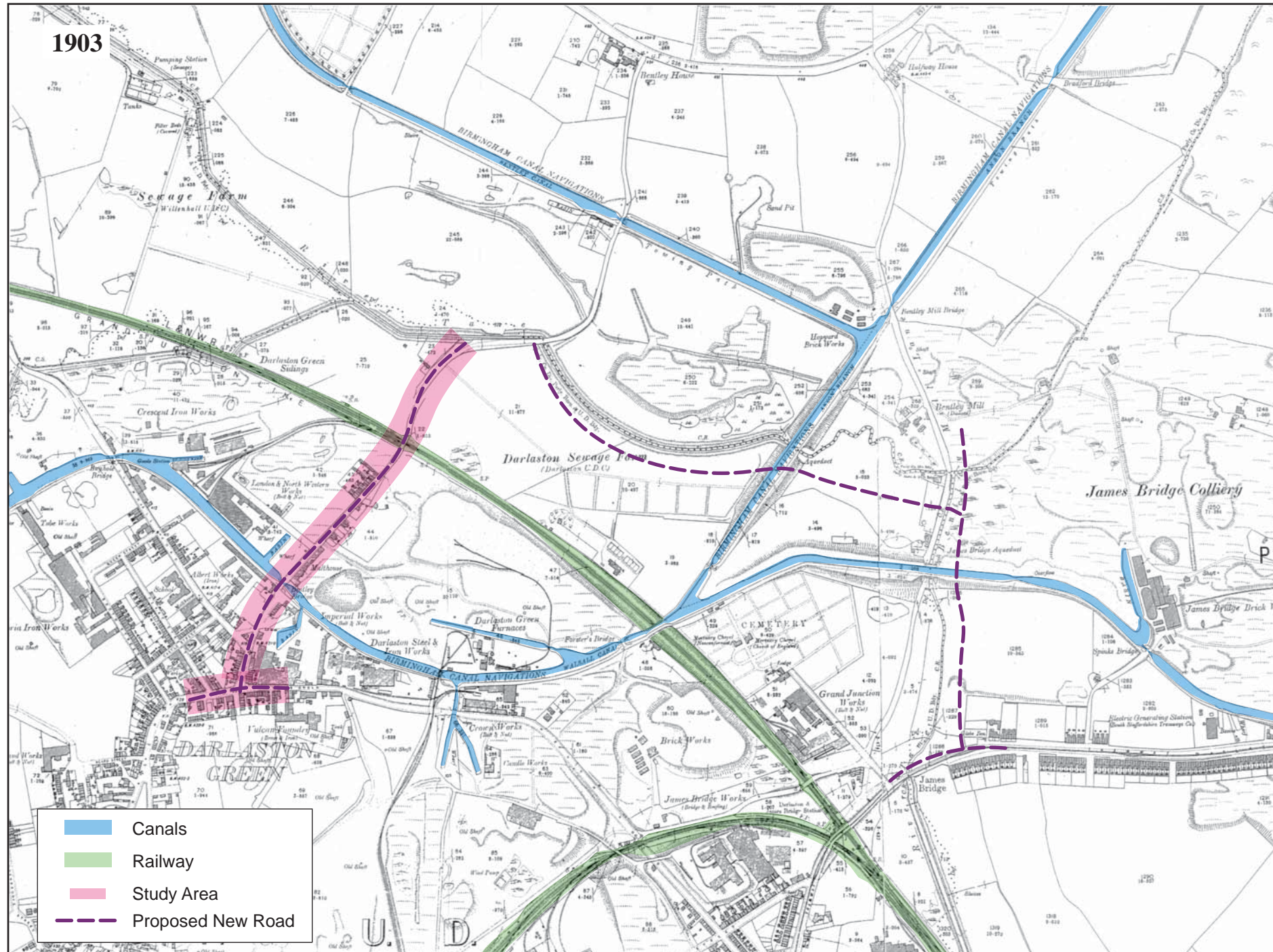


Fig.6

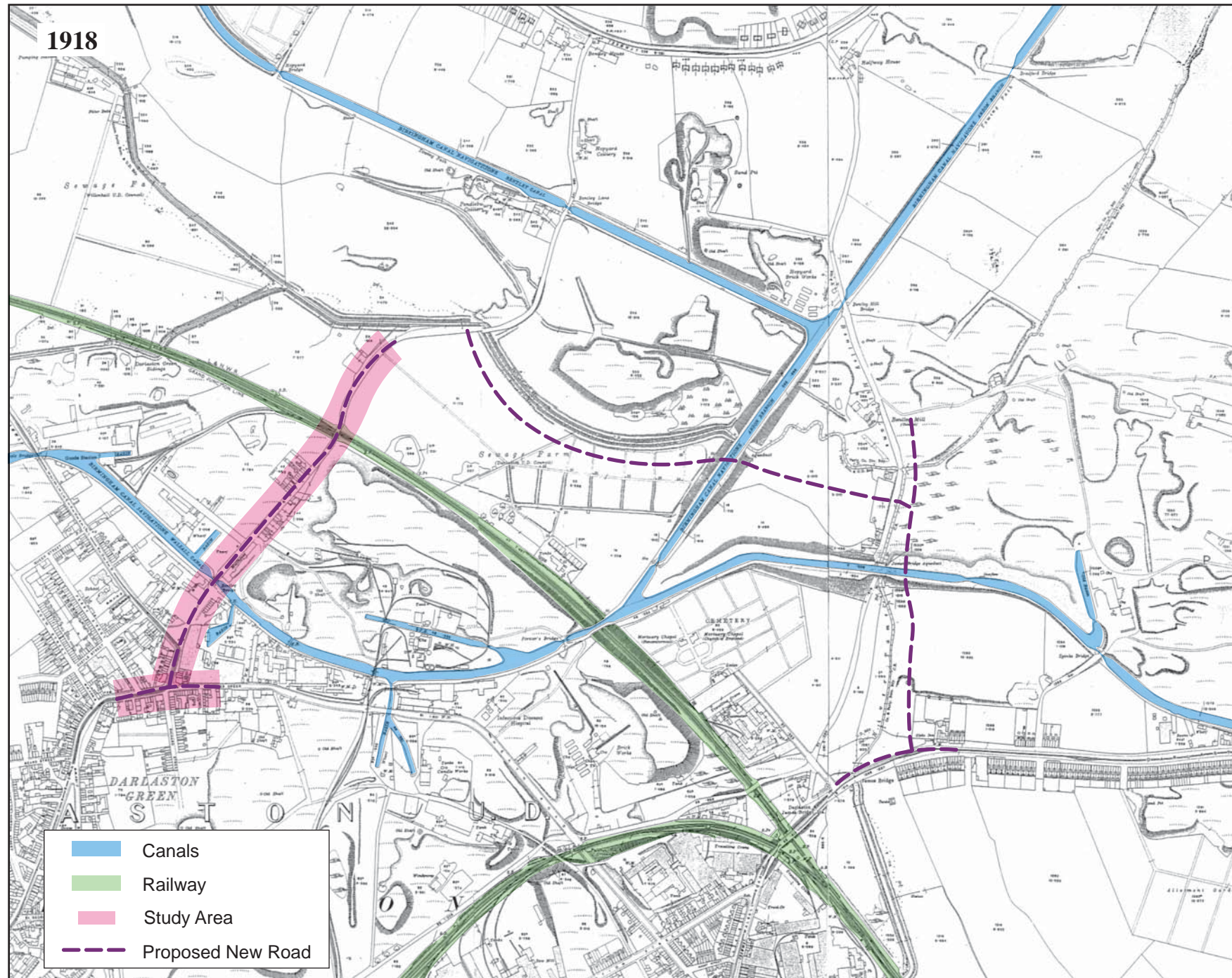


Fig.7



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5