

# birmingham archaeology

Site Bounded by Digbeth, Allison  
Street, Well Lane and Park  
Street, Birmingham City Centre

An Historic Environment Study  
2005

P.N. 1274

January 2005

**Site Bounded by Digbeth, Allison Street, Well Lane and Park Street, Birmingham City Centre**

**An Historic Environment Study, 2005**

By Malcolm Hislop

for Birmingham City Council

For further information please contact:

Alex Jones (Director)

Birmingham Archaeology

The University of Birmingham

Edgbaston

Birmingham B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 414 5513

Fax: 0121 414 5516

E-Mail: [bham-arch@bham.ac.uk](mailto:bham-arch@bham.ac.uk)

Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

## Contents

Summary	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Site Location and Present Character	5
3. Aims and Objectives	5
4. Methodology	6
5. Topographical Analysis	6
6. Historical Development	7
7. Plot Histories	10
8. Analysis of Plot Pattern and Boundaries	15
9. Analysis of Street Layout	17
10. Building Assessments	18
11. Conclusions and Recommendations	22
12. Acknowledgements	23
13. Sources Consulted	24

## Figures

1. Plan of the study area
2. The study area in 1731
3. The study area in 1750
4. The study area in 1778
5. The study area in 1795
6. The study area in 1808
7. The study area in 1828
8. The study area c. 1860
9. The study area in 1889
10. The study area in 1905
11. The study area in 1912
12. The study area in 1918
13. The study area in 1937
14. Architect's drawing for 135-6 Digbeth
15. Dates of buildings within the study area
16. Dates of property boundaries within the study area

## Plates

1. Digbeth from the southeast
2. Allison Street from the south
3. Well Street from the east
4. Park Street from the southwest
5. Orwell Passage from the southeast
6. The Police Station from the west
7. The R. T. P. Crisp building from the southeast
8. Digbeth from the northwest
9. 89 Allison Street from the northeast
10. 93 Allison Street from the southeast
11. 123 Digbeth from the south
12. 124-134 Digbeth from the southeast
13. 124-134 Digbeth from the southwest
14. 135-136 Digbeth from the south
15. 137 Digbeth from the southwest

16. 138-139 Digbeth from the southwest
17. 140 Digbeth from the southwest
18. 140 Digbeth from the east
19. 140 Digbeth, staircase from the east
20. 140 Digbeth, northwest wall from the southeast
21. Digbeth (The Royal George) from the west
22. Park Street from the west

## SUMMARY

*An Historic Environment Study was carried out on an area of land in central Birmingham bounded by Digbeth, Allison Street, Well Lane and Park Street. The study area lies close to the centre of the medieval town of Birmingham, immediately east of the Parish Church. There is little doubt that the southwestern half of the study area has been settled since the Middle Ages, probably since the foundation of the town in 1166, and that the street and property pattern is to a large extent derived from that period.*

*Digbeth formed the principal route to and from the east in the medieval period, and was probably part of the 12th-century town layout, whereas Park Street is likely to have been a 13th-century creation. Orwell Passage, began life as a service road c.1900, but probably preserves part of the line of an early watercourse that was in use during the 12th century. This watercourse, part of which has been excavated on the edge of the study area, took the form of a ditch, some 7m wide and at least 2m deep. It served to confine the 12th-century town as well as to demarcate the rear extent of the properties facing Digbeth. Although changes have occurred over the centuries, including amalgamation of plots, and a considerable amount of rebuilding, the present delimitations of these Digbeth plots and buildings probably preserve the positions of several medieval property boundaries, and hence represent continuity from the foundation of the town in the 12th century to the present day.*

*Allison Street, which borders the area to the southeast, was formed at the end of the 18th century, probably as a response to the creation of the Digbeth Branch Canal in 1790, and the opening up of this area to development. Well Lane, which forms the northeastern side of the study area, was built c.1809 by the Inge estate. Buildings followed, including small industrial concerns at least two of which were exploiting the water supply by the mid-19th century.*

*The buildings that occupy the study area today range in date from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, though it is possible that some earlier fabric might survive in the party walls. Several are of good architectural quality, and although none is statutorily listed, or is likely to qualify or listing, there are four locally listed buildings along the Digbeth frontage (Nos 124-134, 135-6, 137, and 138-9), as well as one Grade A locally-listed building (Police Station, Digbeth/Allison Street), and one Grade II listed building (RTP Crisps, Allison Street/Well Street) immediately outside the study area.*

*The significance of the study area is that it represents the remarkable survival of part of the medieval town plan, whereas nearly all the other property boundaries of that date have been lost. It is even more consequential in that it preserves aspects of the plan of the town founded of 1166, and therefore, along with the Church of St Martin, embodies one of the last physical reminders of that early settlement. It is recommended that in any proposed redevelopment of the area, these medieval boundaries are preserved.*

# **SITE BOUNDED BY DIGBETH, ALLISON STREET, WELL LANE AND PARK STREET: AN HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT STUDY, 2005**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In January 2005 Birmingham Archaeology carried out an historic environment study of an area in Birmingham's Eastside bounded by Digbeth, Allison Street, Well Lane and Park Street (hereafter referred to as the study area). The work was commissioned by Birmingham City Council in advance of the proposed redevelopment of the area. The study adhered to a written scheme of investigation (Birmingham Archaeology 2005), which was itself based on a brief produced by Birmingham City Council (2004).

## **2 LOCATION AND PRESENT CHARACTER**

The study area is located in Digbeth, Birmingham, close to the city centre. It is bounded to the southwest by Digbeth (Plate 1), to the southeast by Allison Street (Plate 2), to the northeast by Well Lane (Plate 3) and the Bull Ring Car Park, and to the northwest by Park Street (Plate 4). Orwell Passage (Plate 5), a narrow lane metalled with stone sets, extends from Allison Street into the study area itself.

Opposite the study area, the southwest side of the thoroughfare of Digbeth was substantially rebuilt in the mid to late 20th century, whereas the opposite (northwest) side of Park Street is occupied by the new Bull Ring Shopping Centre, which was opened in 2004 (Plate 1). To the north and east of the study area, however, the wider district of Digbeth is, in common with the study area, largely late 19th and early 20th century in character, and the buildings are principally of an industrial, commercial, or public nature. Of particular note, and occupying prominent positions opposite the study area on the corners of Allison Street and Well Lane, respectively, are the imposing neo-Baroque Police Station of 1912 (Plate 6), a Grade A locally listed building, and the neo-Gothic RTP Crisp building a Grade II listed late 19th-century structure (Plate 7).

The buildings of the study area itself are concentrated along Digbeth (Plate 8), Park Street and Allison Street. A large area to the rear of these structures, and to the south of Well Lane, is now devoid of buildings and is used as a car park.

## **3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

To ascertain the extent of the remains of Birmingham's medieval town plan within the study area, and the significance of the remaining structures, above and below ground.

Specific objectives were:-

- a topographical analysis including evidence for former watercourses and wells.
- a brief history of the site
- an analysis of the historical development of each plot on the Digbeth frontage
- an analysis of plan unit boundaries
- an analysis of plot pattern and boundaries
- an analysis of the street layout
- a statement of significance for each building

## 4 METHODOLOGY

A search was made of Birmingham City Council Sites and Monuments Record, the main source of information on archaeological sites in the city. Local lists and other pertinent files held by Birmingham City Council were also perused, and a search of other published and unpublished documentary sources was undertaken at Birmingham City Library Local Studies and Archives sections, the libraries of the University of Birmingham, and in Birmingham Archaeology archives.

Documents consulted included corporation building plans, estate surveys, property deeds, rate books, trade directories, and historic mapping. Cartographic sources consulted included Westley (1731), Bradford (1751), Hanson (1778), Snape (1789), Pye (1795), Gooch Estate (1796), Inge Estate plan (1809) Kempson (1808), Piggot Smith (1828 and c.1850-60), Hunt (1834), SDUK (1840), Ackerman's Panoramic View (1847), St Martin's Parish tithe map (1848), OS 1:500 (1889), OS 1:2500 (1890, 1905, 1918, 1937).

Sources consulted in an assessment of the earlier development of the site included the Survey of Birmingham 1553 (Bickley and Hill 1880), archaeological reports and secondary appraisals of the archaeology. The plot plans were evaluated through comparison with other medieval town plans.

The documentary research was augmented by a walkover of the study area and an inspection of the existing buildings, both externally and internally where possible. A rapid record was made through written notes and photographs. The statements of significance are based on the statutory lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, the local list, and professional judgement.

## 5 TOPOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

Central Birmingham is built on a slender Keuper Sandstone ridge that extends from the Lickey Hills in the southwest to Sutton Coldfield in the northeast. A geological fault has resulted in the ridge falling away sharply on the east and southeast towards the valley of the River Rea. A result is that water percolates through the sandstone and accumulates on the line of the fault, where it gives rise to natural springs, which then spill into the river valley (VCH, 4-5). The study area is situated to the southeast of the ridge close to this fault line, and on the edge of the river valley where it starts to slope down towards the floodplain. This reliable supply of water, both from the springs and from easily bored wells, was one of the key advantages that the site offered to its early settlers and later inhabitants (Ibid. 5). The very names Well Street (as the upper end of Digbeth was formerly called) and Well Lane are indicative of the presence of either a well or a spring (Cameron 1977, 196).

There is certainly good reason to suppose that water made a substantial contribution to the character of the study area, from an early date. During the course of archaeological excavations on the southeast side of Park Street, a section of a 12th-century ditch, some 7m wide and at least 2m deep, was uncovered. It lay immediately to the southwest of the position now occupied by the southwest wall of the Bullring Car Park, and must have continued into the study area. This was almost certainly a continuation of another section of ditch excavated off Moor Street, which environmental sampling showed to have been a former watercourse, one of the many in the vicinity of the early settlement (Watts 1977, Fig. 24; Demidowicz 2002, Fig. 3; Buteux 2003, 46). Demidowicz believes that it would have crossed Digbeth to feed the water features associated with the manorial complex (2002, 3-5).

It seems probable too, that in the 16th-century, and perhaps earlier, the area to the south of the present Well Lane was the site of a pool. Bickley and Hill, quoting the Survey of Birmingham 1553, located it adjacent to the plot now occupied by Nos 135-6 Digbeth (Bickley and Hill 1890, 51-5; conjectural map of Birmingham). This theory may be supported by the knowledge that in 1809 the presence of a spring was recorded just to the south of Well Lane (BA Ms 177).

By the mid-19th century, Goffe and Company, mineral water manufacturers, had established themselves in this spot, just to the south of Well Lane (Litherland 1995, 19). To the east of their premises, on the corner of Well Lane and Allison Street, was the Digbeth Artesian Spring, which was built around the site of the spring existing in 1809 (Ibid.). In 1889 it was recorded that workmen excavating in the area had discovered a large cistern inscribed 1854 and fed by a 400ft deep artesian bore, connected by culverts to a series of wells, which were themselves linked to a 40ft long subterranean reservoir built of 'old' brickwork (Ibid.). Wells were common sights in the properties along the Digbeth (formerly Well Street) frontage (Ibid.).

## **6 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Background**

Birmingham is an Anglo-Saxon name meaning the homestead of the Beormingas (Beorma's people) (Cameron, 1977, 65), and at the time of the Domesday Book it was one of the least important settlements in the area, comprising nine peasant households representing a population of around 50. It is unlikely that much growth took place until 1166, when Peter, lord of Birmingham, obtained a royal charter to hold a market at his castle of Birmingham and to charge tolls. Holt has argued convincingly that the purchase of the charter was accompanied by the deliberate foundation of a town (Holt 1985, 4-5), an act that would have involved delineating the extent of the borough with a barrier such as a ditch, the better to control access to the market and the collection of tolls. The land within the borough would have been laid out in a series of burgage plots fronting the main streets, the possession of which would have bestowed privileges in respect of the market.

There is no doubt that Peter de Birmingham's venture was a success. By the mid-13th century the rural village had been transformed into a thriving centre of manufacture and commerce. The rebuilding of the Parish Church of St Martin, the foundation of the Priory or Hospital of St Thomas around 1250, and the attendance of two burgesses of the town at the Parliament of 1275, are all signs that Birmingham had become a prosperous and significant centre of population (Holt 1985, 4). By the second quarter of the 14th century, Birmingham had far outgrown its neighbouring villages to become one of the most significant towns of Warwickshire (VCH, 6), and on the evidence of the Lay Subsidy Roll of 1327, was the third largest town in the county after Coventry and Warwick (Holt 1985, 8-9).

The location and something of the layout of the early medieval town can be extrapolated from early maps, for example, Westley's (1731), and Bradford's (1750). Both depict the three most significant sites of the medieval town, the Parish Church of St Martin, which lies directly to the west of the study area, the manor house, which was sited within a large circular moat, due south of the study area, on the far side of Moat Lane, and the Parsonage, which was situated within a smaller, sub-rectangular moat, further to the west. To the northwest of St Martin's the shape of the triangular market place can be made out; it was here that three major routes converged, namely Edgbaston Street from the west, High Street from the north, and Digbeth from the east.

The market place lay at the heart of the settlement, and the extent of Peter de Birmingham's planned town has been conjectured, partly from documentary evidence including historic map analysis, and partly from archaeological excavation. Hodder (2004, Fig. 46) has proffered a tentative interpretation of the evidence in which he suggests that the southern limit of the town was formed by a watercourse extending from the manorial moat in the east to the parsonage moat in the west. From here, the boundary may have extended northwards roughly on the line of Worcester Street, and then turned towards the southeast running parallel with the marketplace and Digbeth before turning west to cross Digbeth to join the manorial moat. This northeastern boundary is thought to be the earthwork known as the Hersum ditch, which is mentioned in documents, ranging in date from the 14th to the 17th



century, as a boundary of a property located on the east side of Moor Street. The name is thought to denote lordly authority (Demidowicz 2002, 3) and has been loosely translated as lord's or lordship ditch (Hodder 2004, 84).

Park Street, which borders the study area to the northwest, is thought to be a later phase of planned development, possibly dating from the 13th or 14th centuries (Buteux 2003, 50). Excavations on the southeast side of the street, immediately to the north of the study area, in a location now occupied by the Bull Ring Car Park, revealed an archaeological sequence beginning in the 12th or 13th centuries (Ibid. 29). The excavations were carried within the burgage plots that fronted onto Park Street. At the southeast extremity of the excavated area, the edge of a ditch was discovered, which has been interpreted as the rear boundary ditch to the Park Street properties. It is believed that the ditch, discovered at the southwest end of the site and described above (Topographical Analysis), formed the northeastern boundary of the 12th-century town as well as that of the burgage plots facing the market place and upper Digbeth. The ditch appears to have been filled in early in the 14th century, presumably owing to a loss of significance as a town boundary when Park Street was built. Demidowicz identifies this ditch with the Hersum ditch, and suggests that it continued its course through the present study area (Demidowicz 2002, 3).

### **Development of the Study Area**

The study area is located within the early medieval core of the city, as described above. It lies to the east of the Parish Church of St Martin, and to the north of the site of the manor house, which was destroyed in the early 19th century. Given its proximity to the market place, and to a source of water, it may be presumed that the study area would have been a highly desirable location for settlers in the new town, and that it would have been occupied soon after the town was planted. Like other new towns of the Middle Ages, the early settlement would have been laid out in burgages, plots of land typically much longer than they were wide, in order to give as many properties as possible access to the street frontage. Generally, these were laid out in regular fashion, though deviations do occur in the face of natural or man-made obstacles (Platt 1976, 51).

The sizes of burgages when first laid out varied from town to town and from street to street, so that in analysing the character of the Birmingham plots there is no standard to make comparison with. At Stratford upon Avon, in Warwickshire, another late 12th-century foundation, the frontages measured 3½ perches (17.60m), whereas at Ludlow, in Shropshire, they varied, according to location, from 1 perch (5.03m) to 2 perches (10.06m). Despite this wide range in size, a common pattern of development is that over the years burgages tended to be subdivided to accommodate demand for a prime position on the street front, and to increase the rent returns (Grenville 1997, 162). The final result is a series of tightly-packed, narrow-fronted properties, very long in comparison to their width.

An initial perusal of the modern plan of the study area (Fig. 1) gives some reason to suppose that the present properties may have derived from medieval burgages. The areas occupied by the Royal George on the corner of Park Street, and the Digbeth Cold Storage building to the southeast of No. 136 are the results of comparatively recent plot amalgamations, but the plots accommodating Nos 136-140 are more telling. They vary in width from approximately 3½m (137) to 14½m (135-6), but all are much longer than they are wide. One curiosity that requires explanation is that the rear boundary of these Digbeth plots is not at all regular. It follows a diagonal pattern across the study area so that the properties become progressively shorter from northwest to southeast.

The line of this rear boundary might be explained by the presence of some existing feature that contained the medieval town. It certainly corresponds with the route that Demidowicz assigns to the Hersum ditch, which he identifies with the 12th-century earthwork discovered in the Park Street and Moor Street excavations (Demidowicz 2002, 3-5, 7-8, Fig 3). If this is right, then it would greatly strengthen the case for assigning the origins of the Digbeth properties to the initial layout of the town

in 1166.

What we know for certain about the study area is that the Digbeth frontage was already built up by 1688, when the White Hart Inn and the adjoining property are mentioned (BA 63/14). Westley's map of 1731 bears this out (Fig. 2). Digbeth, or Well Street or Cock Street as it was known in 1731, and Park Street, were both well developed by this date. The line of what was to become Allison Street appears as a lane extending between two properties, and is identifiable through being situated opposite Upper Mill Lane on the other side of Digbeth. Several long plots, containing large buildings separated by yards, extended back to a common rear boundary parallel with the line of Digbeth. However, neither Well Lane nor Orwell Passage was yet in existence. Bradford's map of 1750 (Fig. 3) shows a similar arrangement, one of the buildings being described as the White Hart (Inn).

Hanson's map of 1778 (Fig. 4) accurately reflects Bradford's, and it is not until 1795 (Pye's map, Fig. 5) that any major change appears in the cartographic record. On this map the George Inn is marked for the first time, but, more importantly, Allison Street had come into existence as part of a grid of streets laid down in this area. The rapid appearance of a street network during the last decade of the 18th century was probably precipitated by the construction of the Digbeth Branch Canal which opened up this side of the city for development. Pye depicts Allison Street as regularly laid out, and as meeting Digbeth at right angles. This must be an error because later maps, from the 1796 plan of the Gooch estate onwards, show that the northwest side of Allison Street narrowed towards the junction with Digbeth to form a funnel-shaped entrance.

On Piggot Smith's map of 1828, this funnelling entrance is mirrored by a lane or yard that runs parallel with this part of Allison Street, just within the study area, and which extends from Digbeth towards the centre of the block. There is a suggestion too on the Piggot Smith map that the plots fronting Digbeth were not quite so regular as they are depicted on earlier maps. In contrast to previous representations, they have taken on an oblique orientation. Well Lane, which was built for the Inge estate c. 1809 (BA Ms 177), is also shown on this map.

The irregularities in the layout of the study area are seen to greater effect on the rating map of c. 1860 (Fig. 8), the first large-scale map of the entire study area. The rating map depicts the marked diagonal orientation to the rear boundaries of the Digbeth properties that is apparent on the modern plan, and which has been associated above with the former existence of the 12th-century boundary ditch. The definition of this line becomes less assured as it moves southeastwards beyond No. 135, but it appears to curve round to meet Digbeth approximately at the position of No. 122, almost opposite Upper Mill Lane on the other side of Digbeth. When compared with the modern map of the area, this point seems to reflect the boundary between No. 123 Digbeth (Hennessey's Bar) and Digbeth Cold Storage. This position seems to correspond with the lane or yard shown on the Piggot Smith map, but by the time of the rate map of 1869-c.1896, although the position of this open space is quite clear, it had been encroached upon by buildings and was no longer generally accessible.

Much the same pattern appears on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition, the two maps highlighting a dichotomy in the character of the properties within the study area. To the south of the supposed line of the ditch, is the pattern of largely narrow fronted, and comparatively long plots that might be expected of a medieval town laid out in burgages. On the other hand, the area to north has a different, more spacious pattern of development, comprising a spread of freely ordered buildings and yards. This development is probably related to the creation of Allison Street and Well Lane, which formed the principal routes of access, and is therefore likely to have been laid out early in the 19th century.

The rate map also shows that by the mid-19th century many of the yards behind the Digbeth properties contained developments of courtyard housing. These are all recorded in the rate book for 1832, and at least some may be earlier. Such a pattern of development is recorded in a deed of 1735 for 138 Digbeth, where several dwellings are recorded in the yard to the rear of the property

(BA 63/18). The court housing shown on the rate map survived until the end of the 19th century, when Nos 120-134 were demolished in preparation for the construction of the Linde Refrigeration Company building that still occupies much of the site today. This development was accompanied by building of Orwell Passage, which is recorded on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map. This lane, then, is a recent creation, though for part of its distance it follows the line of the supposed course of the 12th century ditch uncovered in the Park Street excavation, and may therefore be looked upon as delineating an ancient boundary.

## 7 PLOT HISTORIES

### 123 Digbeth (Hennessey's Bar)

Partly on the site of the lane shown on Piggot Smith's map of 1828, latterly occupied by Nos 121-2 Digbeth, and perhaps the site of the 12th-century boundary ditch, and partly on the site of the Horse and Jockey Public House. The Horse and Jockey seems to have come into existence by 1853 when it was listed in the rate book. In 1860 the landlady was Mrs Mary Rogers (Post Office Directory). On the rate map it appears as the Horse and Jockey Inn. The 1890 OS map shows the building as a Public House but it was not listed in Kelly's Directory of the same year. In common with the other buildings at this end of the street, the Horse and Jockey appears to have been demolished by 1900. On 1 January 1933 plans were submitted for a new building on the site to act as Assembly Rooms for Midland Red Ltd (BA 57184). The new building appears on the 1937 Ordnance Survey map, at which date it was described as Midland Red Sports and Social Club (Kelly's Directory). It currently trades under the name of Hennessey's Bar.

### 124-134 (Digbeth Cold Storage) (Grade B locally listed)

Prior to 1900 the site of the Digbeth Cold Storage building was occupied by a whole series of long narrow fronted properties, which appear on the rating map of c.1850-60, numbered as 121-134. At least one of these sites, No. 134, can be traced in the trade directories back to the 18th century. On the Inge plan of 1809 (BL Ms 177) the Inge property (present Nos 135-7) is shown as adjoining the White Hart to the northwest, and Colmore, grocer, to the southeast. A Stephen Colmore, grocer and chandler, was listed at No. 131 Digbeth in 1770 (Sketchley's and Adam's Directory), and William Colmore, grocer, was listed at the same address in 1800. When the street was renumbered c. 1840, No. 131 appears to have become No. 134.

Other inhabitants of this block in 1770 included James Bedford, cutler at 121, William Beven, cabinet maker at 122, John Large, woolcomber, at 124, Thomas Bunn, dyer, at 125, Ann Knight, saddlers tool and pinking irons maker at 126, Walter Oakley, surgeon and man midwife, at 127, Daniel Dagley, butcher, at 129, and Samuel Iddens, poulterer, at 130. William Jones, tailor, had his premises 'in a yard between No. 127 and 128, Digbeth'.

The King's Head, at No. 127, first appears in the trade directories in 1841 (Pigot & Co.). As far as the other properties fronting Digbeth are concerned, although the names and occupations of the inhabitants at individual properties may have changed, other small business had replaced them to preserve the character of the area as one of residence, small-scale manufacture and commerce.

This pattern of use and social status appears to have continued to the end of the 19th century, but the rate map shows that by the later 19th century, there were, in addition, small developments of terraced court housing behind several of these Digbeth properties, namely 126, 129, 130 and 133/4, that is to say, courts 15, 16, 17 and 18 respectively. These too seem to have remained in existence until the end of the 19th century.

By 1899, the Linde Refrigeration Co. Ltd had obtained the site. Building plans were submitted on 13 September (BCL 15105) for a new ice factory and cold stores. The architects were Cossins, Peacock and Bewlay of 83 Colmore Row. The main plan shows that the bulk of the principal building was to be occupied by the ice store, which was surrounded by tanks. At the southeast end was the loading dock. The engine room and boiler house were at the rear. To the southeast, across a yard, were some subsidiary buildings including toilets.

The construction of the ice factory and cold stores was preceded by the sweeping away of all existing buildings and the amalgamation of the plots. The extent of the building is shown for the first time on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map, which shows the main existing building, as well some subsidiary structures on the other side of the yard to the southeast.

Following acquisition by the Lightfoot Refrigeration Company, building plans by Cossins Peacock and Bewlay were submitted in 1920 for replacement of the subsidiary buildings with a larger complex further to the southeast. The new arrangement, in which the area of the yard had been increased, appears on the 1937 map (Fig. 13).

### **135 – 136 and 137 Digbeth**

This plot, now housing two distinct buildings, has been identified with property recorded in 1553 when William Phillips held ‘one messuage in the street called Dygbathe, with a croft adjacent, and with two pools...and one parcel of land lying in Parkestret late in the holding of William Hethe.’ (Bickley and Hill 1890, 51-5). The Philips were a long-established Birmingham family, first mentioned in 1285 when Adam Phelyps served as a juror, and their substantial estate has been identified with that of their descendants, the Inge family who still held it in the late 19th century (Ibid. 50-52).

In 1688 the Digbeth messuage was in the possession of William Dirkins and John Sary or one of them, having previously been occupied by Mary Dirkins, widow (BA Ms 63/14).

The property in question is depicted on a plan of 1809, which also shows other Inge property in the locality (BA Ms 177). The current Digbeth plot formed part of a larger, L-shaped block of property, the northwestern wing of which had a Park Street frontage. The plan shows that the Digbeth frontage was divided into three properties, corresponding with the present numbers 135-7, though in years prior to c. 1830 they were numbered 132-4.

In 1770 (Sketchley’s and Adam’s Universal Directory) No. 132 was occupied by Thomas Collins, ‘garden, sheep and taylor’s shear maker’, and in 1788 by William Collins, who followed the same trade and was therefore likely to have been a son. No.134 was in the possession of Joseph Fearon, brazier, who was listed in 1788 as a tinplate worker (Pye’s Birmingham Directory).

Fearon was succeeded by one Paul Brunner, who in 1797 took possession of No. 134 on a 21-year lease from the Inge estate (BA Ms 177). He was described in 1800 as a wood and bone brush maker (Chapman’s Birmingham Directory) and remained there until c. 1810 when he moved to Milk Street ((Holden’s Triennial Directory). William Collins was succeeded in 1809 by Thomas Beale who took the southeastern part of the plot on a 99-year lease (BA Ms 177). The Brunner and Beale holdings are both shown on the plan of the Inge properties in this area (Ibid.).

In 1817 No. 132 was occupied by one Eli Scarrot, a milliner, and No. 133 by Joseph Whittle, a tailor. At the same date Thomas Beale is listed as a saddler of No.128 Digbeth.

By 1841 (Pigot and Co’s Directory of Birmingham), the three properties in this block appear to have been renumbered to reflect the current sequence. Isaac Greaves, boot maker, was at No. 135, and

Joseph Hill at No. 136.

In 1856 No. 135 was still in business as a shoe makers shop, now run by Edward Shingler. Charles Nutting, umbrella, parasol, walking stick fishing rod & tackle maker was at No. 136, and Thomas & John Yorke Madeley, curriers & leathersellers at No. 137. The Madeley's moved to No. 140 Digbeth c. 1861, and the Nutting family business moved to No. 137 sometime between 1871 and 1880, and remained in operation until 1900 (Kelly's Directory).

In 1913 Nos 135-6 were acquired by George Makepeace, second hand clothes dealer, of No.142 Digbeth. Building plans for a new building comprising a house and shop were submitted by the Ombersley architect, James Pratchett on the 28 July and approved on the 13 August (BA 24572). Makepeace was in residence by 1915 (Kelly's Directory). The house, which lay to the rear of the property, has since been demolished but the shop facing Digbeth remains.

### **Nos 138 and 139 (Birmingham Voluntary Service Council)**

This plot was until 1861, two separate properties, the northwestern one, which corresponds with No.139, being an inn of early origins, known as the White Hart, which existed as an inn until the two plots were amalgamated. In 1553 a Humphrey Jurdan held 'a tenement with appurtenances, also one croft lying in Dygbathe and in the High Street'. The tenement which Humphrey Jurdan held under the Gild was a house called 'Whyte Hart' (Bickley and Hill 1553, 21). There is a possibility, then, that this was on the site of the present No139.

Certainly the inn was in existence by 1688, when it was mentioned as the property of Joseph Carles in the tenure of Richard Halfpenny, in connection with disputes arising over a party wall with Samuel Carter's land, then in the tenure of Thomas Hulwood (BA 63/14). Samuel Carter's property is to be identified with the site of No. 138, and Joseph Carles property, the White Hart, with No. 139.

In an indenture drawn up on 14 March 1691 (BCL 63/16), obviously referring to No. 138, Thomas Hulwood, ironmonger, agreed to pay Samuel Carter £355 for two messuages, dwelling houses or tenements lately divided into two parts in Well Street (now renamed Digbeth). These messuages were located between the messuage or tenement late in the possession of Mary Dirkins, widow and now in the possession of William Dirkins and John Sary or one of them, and the messuage or tenement called the White Hart on the other side. The two messuages acquired by Hulwood, then, were apparently located on the site of No.138.

In 1735, the descendants of Thomas Hulwood sold his Digbeth property, adjoining the White Hart, to Nathaniel Hays. Stephen Colmore was the tenant at the time. The property seems to have included several dwellings situated behind the main house fronting Digbeth (BA Ms 63/18). By the terms of his will dated 29 June 1745, Nathaniel Hays left two houses, both fronting Well Street (Digbeth) to his nephew Samuel Twigg (BA 63/20).

1767 William Colmore is listed as a publican of the White Hart (Sketchley's Birmingham Directory), but by 1770 William Steen of 137 Digbeth, which seems to have been the address of the White Hart prior to c. 1840, is listed as publican and maltster (Sketchley's and Adam's Universal Directory). In 1788 William Steen, publican and maltster was described as of the White Hart Inn (Pye's Birmingham Directory).

In 1791 the site of No. 138 was leased to William Steen for 99 years, dating from the previous 25th March. It was described as 'All that messuage and dwelling house situate and being in a certain street in Birmingham adjoining on the north side to a messuage of William Steen (i.e. The White Hart Inn), and on the south side to another messuage of William Inge (i.e. Nos 135-7). The lease was conditional upon William Steen rebuilding the Digbeth frontage and the brewhouse within two years (BA Ms1406/3/1).

By the terms of William Steen's will of 24 December 1794, his Digbeth 'leasehold, messuage or dwelling house wherein he dwelt' which was described as 'adjoining the White Hart' was bequeathed to his daughters Mary and Elizabeth (Ibid.). The leasehold of the late William Steen's 'newly erected dwelling house...adjoining the White Hart Inn' was sold by auction on 24 April 1797 (Aris's Birmingham Gazette Vol. LVI No. 2889, Monday 27 March 1797). In the 1809-11 edition of Holden's Triennial Directory, Thomas Marston is recorded as being at the White Hart, and a few years later Elizabeth Marston was cited as the occupant (Wrightson's Triennial Directory 1816-17).

Both Elizabeth Steen and her sister Mary Salt died in 1821. Elizabeth left her moiety in the Digbeth property to her brothers Samuel Steen and John Simcox, whereas Mary bequeathed her moiety to her daughter Mary Ann Salt. The property had previously been tenanted by James Stowe, but at the time of the will was held by a person called Bentley (BA Ms1406/3/1). In 1823 the moieties held by Samuel Steen and John Simcox on the one hand and by Mary Ann Ainsworth (nee Salt) and her husband on the other hand, were both sold to William Ward, a jeweller. The property was inherited by his son James on 3 April 1826.

On 21 April 1834 James Ward sold the lease to Thomas Bull, innkeeper, proprietor of the White Hart Inn (BA Ms1406/3/2). From this date the two properties that made up this plot appear to have been united under one ownership. This was made explicit in a document of 1838 in which it is described as a freehold messuage, tenement or dwelling house 'heretofore used as two houses but since laid together and occupied as one lease and called or known by the name of White Hart Inn...' (BA Ms 1406/3/4).

In 1838 the White Hart was occupied by Thomas Bull's widow, Bull himself having died in 1835, though not before substantial building works to the value of £521 4s. 9½d. had been carried out at the inn, between 1834 and 1835 (BA Ms 1406/3/3). In 1841, Benjamin Bull, presumably a relative of Thomas, was at the White Hart (Pigot & Co's Directory).

By 1860, No. 138 was occupied by Richard Winwood, fruiterer, and No. 139, now known as the White Hart Commercial Hotel, was held by Thomas Brooks (Post Office Directory of Birmingham). This is the last time the White Hart is mentioned in the trade directories. In the same year No.138 was leased to William Steen by the trustees and executors of Thomas Bull for 30 years (BA Ms 1406/3/10), and in 1861 he obtained a 99 year lease (BA Ms 1406/3/11).

Over the next few years various individuals and businesses occupied the premises or parts of them, and when William Steen died in 1878, the former White Hart Inn then being in the occupation of James Seeley and others, was left to Edmund Francis English and Thomas Simcox. In 1908 the freehold was sold to Misses L A & A J Steen (BA Ms 1406/3/23), and in 1912 both moieties came under the control of Sarah Ann Steen (BA Ms 1406/3/24).

The property was leased to the Soho Trust in 1927, who must have raised the present building. Building plans were submitted for the rebuilding of the premises in 1936 for W and T Avery Ltd, the weighing scale manufacturers, who were installed by 1938 (Kelly's Directory). W. & T. Avery became the owners in 1946, when it was described as two retail shops numbers 138 and 139.

### **No. 140 (Mokham's Of Digbeth)**

Prior to c. 1830, this plot was numbered 138. In 1770, Thomas Lutwyche, grocer and tobacconist is listed at No. 138 (Sketchley's and Adam's Universal Directory). He was still there in 1780 (Pearson's and Rollason's Directory of Birmingham), but in 1788 there was no entry in the trade directories for 138, and the site appears to have been vacant in 1828 when Piggot Smith's map was published, being used by the cartographer to write in the name of the adjacent White Hart Inn.

In 1841 No. 140 was occupied by Thomas Pountney, grocer, in 1850 by Harris & Pierce, wholesale druggists, and in 1860 by Thomas Averill, tallow chandler and tea dealer. The buildings were certainly in existence in their current form by the time of the rating map (c. 1850-60).

On the Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1889, No.140 Digbeth is described as a 'warehouse', and appears to have been largely unchanged, though a projecting porch or bay window had been added to the street frontage. At this time the proprietors were John Yorke Madeley & Son, leather merchants. (Kelly's Directory) who had moved to this address from 137 Digbeth, c.1862. Its successor company, John Yorke Madeley & Sons, leather merchants, was still being in possession in 1901 (Kelly's Directory).

During the occupation of the Madeleys, in 1879, a new workshop was built at the back of No. 140 (BA 1786). The architect's drawings, which could not be fully examined owing to their fragility, suggest that this was the red brick building that currently occupies the north end of the plot.

### **141 (The Royal George)**

The George Inn at Digbeth had been established by 1767 when William Dunn was the proprietor (Sketchley's Birmingham Directory). He was still the landlord in 1774 (Swinney's Birmingham Directory), but by 1788 responsibility appears to have devolved upon Anne Dunn (Pye's Birmingham Directory). In 1800 the George Inn appears to have been under the management of Dunn and Twemlow, whereas a William Dunn of Digbeth was listed as a coach proprietor. (Chapman's Birmingham Directory).

If this William Dunn is the same man, then it gives a clue to the sort of establishment that the George Inn was, namely a coaching inn, forming a staging post on a significant transport route. The map evidence goes some way to supporting this. Bradford (1750), Hanson (1778) and Piggot Smith (1828) may all be said to represent a building with a large courtyard that might have been designed to accommodate coaches.

If this was its *raison d'être*, then the coming of the railways, the first of which reached Birmingham in 1838, would have had a major impact on its viability. By 1856 it was being advertised as the George Commercial Inn (Post Office Directory), perhaps in a desperate attempt to attract the business trade, but it seems to have gone out of business by 1858, a casualty of changing times.

The George Commercial Inn was replaced by the London Museum Tavern and Music Hall, erected in 1863 at a cost of £7000 (Litherland 1995, 18). By 1890 it was the Canterbury Tavern & Music Hall (Kelly's Directory), and by 1896 it had become the Royal George. Alterations to the Royal George were carried out by the well-known Birmingham pub architects James and Lister Lea, who submitted their plans for approval in 8 June 1896 (BA 11912). During the demolition of the Royal George in the late 1940s timber framing is said to have been discovered in the party wall with No.142 (Litherland 1995, 18). If so, then this is likely to push the dates of one or both of these buildings back into the 17th century at the latest.

The George Inn occupied the corner of the current site, but the plot now adhering to the Royal George was shared with two other properties, Nos 141 and 142 Digbeth. A sketch from 1947 shows that these two properties were, like No. 137, narrow-fronted with 19th-century facades (Ibid.). On the rating map, these two properties have been foreshortened by the presence of the Corporation Stables at the rear of the plot, but there is little doubt that they were formerly much longer. From the 18th century onwards various small tradespeople were recorded as having occupied these properties.

The present building of 1962-4 was designed by Kelly and Surman.

**123 Digbeth (Hennessey's Bar)**

The plot occupied by Hennessey's Bar seems to be an early 20th-century amalgam of Nos 120-122 Digbeth, and some other properties to the rear, although widening of Allison Street and Digbeth has reduced the area on the southeast and southwest sides. The west side of the property is at the junction between what was in 1850-60 Nos 122 and 123. To judge from the rating map this boundary seems to be connected with the communal rear property boundary that is believed to have been formed by the 12th-century ditch, and is therefore likely to be medieval, though the present boundary seems to have deviated from its original course towards the east.

**124-134 Digbeth**

The plot occupied by the Digbeth Cold Storage buildings results from an amalgamation of Nos 121-134 as they appeared on the rating map. The redevelopment of the site in 1900 was accompanied by the widening of Digbeth so that the present southwest front no longer reflects the earlier arrangement. The rear boundaries of these plots, however, were formed by the curving line of the supposed course of the 12th-century ditch. The curving northwestern part of Orwell Passage is built just within the line so that its northeast side represents the former property boundary. The southeast boundary of the site is common with Hennessey's Bar, and is therefore likely to be partially on the conjectured line of the 12th-century ditch. The southeast wall of the main building seems to be on the line of the property division between Nos 127 and 128, and although we cannot be certain of the date at which the boundaries of 121-134 were established, most of these plots have the appearance of burgages and it is not unreasonable to assume that they date from the medieval period. However, the main building has a basement, so any remains of the boundaries of Nos 128-34 are unlikely to survive below ground.

**135-136 Digbeth**

135-6 and 137 Digbeth formerly made up a single plot, which existed in the 16th-century and which is thought to have been in existence by the 13th century. In 1809, it extended as far as Well Lane, or Well Street, as it was known then, but by the time of the rating map it had been redeveloped, and the northeastern end alienated. The present northeastern boundary, which has a more acute northwest-southeast orientation than Digbeth, probably follows the continuation of the 12th-century ditch uncovered in the Park Street excavation. The southeastern and southwestern boundaries are also likely to have medieval origins, whereas the northwestern boundary with 137 may be later. It is true, however, that the greater plot was divided into at least two lease holdings by the 18th century, and that one of these was roughly co-terminus with the existing position of No. 137. The existing buildings occupy less than half of the plot, being concentrated at the southwestern end. Much of the northwestern boundary with No. 137 and the entire rear northeastern boundary is now open, but structural remains of these should survive below ground.

**137 Digbeth**

No. 137 Digbeth formerly made up part of the same plot as Nos 135-6, so the front and rear (northeastern) boundaries are likely to be of early medieval origin. This is probably true of its northwestern boundary too (see 138-9 below). By the late 18th century, the larger plot had been divided into at least two lease holdings, one of which seems to have been roughly co-terminus with the existing position of No. 137. Here too the former rear (northeastern) boundary as well as much of the southeastern boundary with Nos 135-6, are open, though structural remains should survive below ground.



## **138-9 Digbeth**

The existing boundaries of this plot, which is now entirely occupied by buildings, were all in place by the mid-19th century (rating map). One immediately striking aspect of the 138-9 plot is its irregularity. Although its southeastern side is largely perpendicular to Digbeth, the northwestern side deviates slightly towards the west. In addition, both sides show a sharp southward deflection at the northeast end of the plot, and the northeast end has a more acute northwest-southeast orientation than Digbeth itself.

One of these anomalies, namely, the angled northeastern end of the plot, is readily explicable. This probably marks the line of a continuation of the 12th-century watercourse excavated in Park Street and Moor Street, which has been interpreted as the northeast boundary of the town founded in 1166, which would also have formed the boundary of any burgages on this side of the settlement. A step in this boundary is probably related to the fact that between 1688 and 1861 the plot was made up of two properties. The slightly greater length of No. 139 may represent encroachment on the ditch after it had been backfilled.

Regarding the deviation from the perpendicular of the northwest side, and the deflection of the northeast end, these probably represent the vestiges of a reversed-S pattern. The former White Hart, which occupied the northwest side of the plot, is shown on the rating map of 1850-60 to have had just such a plan. Plots displaying this characteristic at Stratford upon Avon, in Warwickshire, another 12th-century foundation, are believed to result from the ridge and furrow field patterns existing prior to the establishment of the town. So it is possible that here at Nos 138-9 we may have a boundary that had its origins in a pre-12th-century landscape.

It is probable, then, that the northwest side of the present plot has its origins in the early medieval period. The position of the southeast side of the plot formerly occupied by the White Hart (No. 139) runs through the present building and has probably been lost. The angularity of other boundaries of the plot, which contrast with the gentle curve of the northwest side, may perhaps be explained by minor adjustments to the boundary as rebuilding was carried out.

## **140 Digbeth**

The plan of the present plot replicates that shown on the rating map, except in one instance. On the rating map both sides of the plot are deflected at its northeast end like that of the adjacent Nos 138-9. By the time of the 1889 1:500 Ordnance Survey map, the deflection on the western side was no longer apparent. This aspect of the plan reflects that of 138-9 Digbeth, and is probably to be ascribed to a similar origin. Therefore all the boundaries of this plot are likely to have been in existence in the 12th century. The plot is almost entirely covered in buildings, the only remaining space being a narrow alley that extends for almost the full length, giving access to the former workshops behind the house and shop facing Digbeth.

## **The Royal George and Former Music Hall**

The site currently occupied by the Royal George and the former London Museum Music Hall, incorporates not only the site of the George Inn, but also the sites of Nos 141 and 142 Digbeth. The Digbeth (southwest) frontage and the west corner of the plot were moved back in the 1960s when the Royal George was rebuilt and road improvements were carried out, though a large part of the Park Street frontage may represent continuity from the 13th century. The rear boundary was presumably marked originally by the 12th-century ditch excavated in the Park Street excavation, which lay immediately to the northeast of the site. A remnant of the southeastern boundary prior to amalgamation with Nos 141-2 is represented by the southeast wall of the former music hall. In view of the character of the 138-9 and 140, discussed above, it is interesting to note that this is also a

curving line, a phenomenon particularly noticeable on the rating map and the Ordnance Survey 1:500 map of 1889. The southeastern boundary of the present plot with No. 140 has already been identified as dating predominantly from the 12th-century (140 above).

## 9 ANALYSIS OF STREET LAYOUT

### **Digbeth** (Plates 1 and 8)

Digbeth is the earliest of the streets around and in the study area, and would have formed a principal thoroughfare of the 12th-century town, as the main route from the east that terminated in the Market place to the north of St Martin's Church. In 1900, in concert with the redevelopment of No 120-134 Digbeth, the road was widened and the fronts of the new buildings set back from the position of their predecessors. In the 1960s road widening involved the cutting back of the corner with Park Street.

### **Park Street** (Plate 4)

Park Street is thought to be an early extension to the 12th-century foundation, probably being laid out in the 13th century, and cutting through the northeastern boundary of the town (Buteux 2003, 30-2). In the 1960s improvements to the road system resulted in the rounding off of the corner with Digbeth, resulting in some loss of the corner plot.

### **Allison Street** (Plate 2)

Allison Street first appears on Pye's map of 1795, as part of a grid of streets imposed on the land to the east of Park Street and to the north of Digbeth. It is probable that the impetus for this development was the establishment of the Digbeth Branch Canal in 1790.

Whereas Pye's map shows a right-angled junction with Allison Street, much as it is today, the Gooch map of 1796 and Kempson's map of 1808 (Fig. 6) appear to record its early character more accurately. Both maps show a deviation of the northwest side of the street resulting in a narrowing of its entrance from Digbeth. This anomaly can be seen more clearly on Piggot Smith's map of 1828 (Fig. 7) which depicts a pronounced, funnel-shaped, entrance to Allison Street from Digbeth. This anomaly appears on all the subsequent maps until the Ordnance Survey 1905 edition, by which time the south corner of the study area had been cleared and the road straightened out.

### **Well Lane** (Plate 3)

Well Lane appears to have been created in 1809. It is not shown on Kempson's map of 1808, whereas it does appear, as Well Street, on the Inge plan of 1809, which is accompanied by the following statement: 'The land forming part of Well Street from A to B was purchased from Mr John Lowe for the purpose of giving the Park Street and Digbeth property a communication with Allison Street' (BA Ms 177).

### **Orwell Passage** (Plate 5)

Orwell Passage came into existence as part of the Linde Refrigeration Company development of 1900. It appears on the 1905 Ordnance Survey map. It was clearly designed to service the new ice factory and cold store, giving access to the main yard and to the engine room and boiler house to the rear. It extended for almost the entire length of the building, terminating in front of the short wing at its north corner. It also provided a (gated) link with Well Lane and the mineral water concerns on its southwest sides. The curving, northwestern end of the lane lies on the supposed course of the 12th-century boundary ditch, but the southwestern end which joins Allison Street seems to extend through the site of a former yard that opened onto Allison Street.

**89 Allison Street** (Charming Chairs/Abbey Marble Ltd) (Plate 9)

*Description*

No. 89 Allison Street is a late 19th-century/early 20th-century brick-built structure, rendered towards Allison Street. The building comprises a two-storey element to the left with two vehicular entrances, and three segmental-arched windows with small-pane cast iron frames at first floor level. Stepped down to the right is a single-storey block with two vehicular entrances. Both elements have a plain parapet.

*Statement of Significance*

A poorly preserved example of the many late 19th-century small industrial/commercial premises that survive in the west Midlands conurbation. The only points of architectural interest are the cast-iron framed windows.

**93 Allison Street (Roger Etchells & Co.)** (Plate 10)

*Description*

No. 93 Allison Street is an early 20th century workshop/ office, refurbished in the early 21st century. Built in red brick laid in Flemish bond with flared headers and a slate roof, this two-storey structure is sited on the corner of Allison Street and Orwell Passage. The Allison Street front has a carriage entrance to the left with three windows at first-floor level beneath a pedimented gable. To the right is a doorway with single window over. The Orwell Passage front has a central doorway flanked by two pairs of windows, and a three-bay upper storey, the principal feature of which is a large segmental-arched window. All ground floor openings also have segmental arches, and all other first-floor windows have flat recessed lintels. The recent refurbishment of the building has involved the replacement of all original fenestration, though the openings have been retained.

*Statement of Significance*

Although this is not an unattractive building, it is comparatively late in date and not of particular interest. It is not locally listed, and does not merit being added to the list.

**Building to the rear of 93 Allison Street** (not illustrated)

*Description*

Early 20th-century red brick building facing towards Orwell Passage. Here, there are two gables, and beneath the right hand one an inserted vehicular entrance, the full width of the bay. The building is no longer roofed but retains a number of steel roof trusses. It is currently used as a car park.

*Statement of Significance*

This building has no special significance.

### **123 Digbeth (Hennessey's Bar) (Plate 11)**

#### *Description*

The former Midland Red Sports and Social Club of 1933 is a long narrow building, which makes the most of a restricted plot, but is now to a great extent obscured by later 20th-century additions along the southeast front and at the southern corner. It is a red-brick structure with a plain parapet obscuring the roof. There are two fronts, one looking southeast towards Allison Street, and the other formed by the polygonal end, which faces south towards the corner of Digbeth and Allison Street. The three-storey structure has a three-bay south end and an eight-bay Allison Street front. The windows all appear to be late-20th-century replacements, and are surmounted at parapet level by recessed panels. Two of the panels have triangular heads to suggest pediments, and probably mark the positions of the original entrances, one in each of the two fronts. Undistinguished later 20th-century two-storey extensions, along the whole of the Allison Street elevation, and a single-storey extension of similar date at the south end.

#### *Statement of Significance*

This building is not locally listed and has only minimal architectural or historic interest. Further, the recent additions have destroyed the character of the original structure. Its loss would not necessarily have a detrimental effect on the character of the conservation area.

### **124-134 Digbeth (Digbeth Cold Store) (Plates 12 and 13)**

#### *Description*

The site is now occupied by the former ice factory and cold stores of 1900, which were housed within a red-brick structure with slate roof and minimal detailing. It is a double-pile, three-storey building aligned with the street and facing into a yard towards the southeast. The double-gabled east front has a four-bay open arcade of iron columns at ground level carrying an I-beam. Above, are blind recessed panels under semi-circular arches. The ten-bay street front has blind ground floor windows with segmental heads and stepped sills recessed beneath semi-circular arches. Small-pane iron-framed segmental-headed windows to first floor recessed beneath the semi-circular arches that house the second floor lunettes.

To the right (southeast) is the entrance to the works yard, on the other side of which is an arrangement of smaller buildings, which were erected c. 1920, which faces towards Digbeth (Plate 13). Towards the street is a single-storey, three-bay structure with central doorway, now boarded up, set within a semi-circular-arched recess. To each side of the door is a segmental-arched window with apron recess. Immediately left of the left-hand window is an inserted cast-iron letterbox embossed with the legend 'The Lightfoot Refrigeration/ Co Ltd/ Letters'. A plain parapet steps up in the centre and has a segmental apex to suggest an open-base pediment. Set-back from this elevation and rising up behind it is one end of a semi-circular gabled building.

Access was from the loading bay, which led into an entrance lobby containing two lifts and a staircase between them. The whole of the interior was insulated, a cavity being created between the brick outer walls and an inner lining of wooden boards, which was filled with cork. The whole of the main building was treated thus. Thick metal doors sealed the entrances. The building is currently disused and has suffered substantially from structural deterioration. Water was evidently getting into the building from a ground or underground source; the sound of running water could be heard, though not located, and a pool had been formed in the base of one of the lift shafts. The basement, however, from what could be seen of it, remained dry.

### *Statement of Significance*

Digbeth Cold Store is Grade B locally listed. This assessment is reasonable, and there are a number of points of interest that justify this grading. Firstly, the architectural impact is substantial; the building has a certain amount of aesthetic appeal and owing to its sheer bulk dominates this part of Digbeth. Secondly, there is a structural and technological interest, which includes the insulation technique and the use of steel framing (to support the central valley). Thirdly, it is interesting as a relatively unaltered (not counting dilapidations) example of a building with a very specific function. The loss of this building would make a substantial difference to the historic character of the locality.

### **Nos 135-6 Digbeth (Plate 14)**

#### *Description*

Of the building erected for George Makepeace in 1913, only the southwestern end towards Digbeth survives, the rear wing having been demolished. The Digbeth front is an elaborate red brick façade ornamented with terracotta dressings. It is a three-storey, two-bay building articulated vertically by terracotta tourelles. Now two shop fronts at ground level, but above this the glazed first floor front is recessed beneath a semi-circular arch which originally incorporated the ground storey. Canted bay windows with leaded roofs at second floor level. The parapet is embossed with the legend 'G. Makepeace'. A cellar has recently been treated for water penetration, attributed to the poorly maintained state of the adjoining Digbeth Cold Storage building. The principal internal feature is situated at the rear of the building. It is an elaborate open-well, neo-Jacobean staircase with square moulded balusters, square moulded newels with low pyramidal caps and moulded handrail. This staircase extends through the full height of the building, and gives access at first-floor level to a large chamber, generously lit by the glazed frontage. On one side of this window is an alcove with semi-circular arch on foliated impost.

#### *Statement of Significance*

This is a Grade A locally listed building, the high rating reflecting the important contribution it makes to the character of the conservation area. It is a comparatively tall structure, and the most ornate of the buildings fronting this block. Whereas the former Digbeth Cold Stores building impresses by its size, Nos 135-6 are significant for their eye-catching design. It is interesting too as an example of an early 20th-century emporium

Obviously designed to be noticed and to impress, both in respect of the exterior as well as the interior with its elaborate staircase and spacious and well-lit upper rooms. Certainly, this is one of the most important buildings in the row, and its loss would have a detrimental effect on the conservation area.

### **No. 137 (Reader's World) (Plate 15)**

#### *Description*

No. 137 is a mid to late 19th-century building with bold classical detailing. It would not be incompatible with a date of around 1875 when William Nutting moved here from No. 135, perhaps to purpose built premises. It is constructed of red brick and has a slate roof. Three storeys high, it is of a single bay's width and has recessed ends. It has a large shop front at ground level, a first floor pedimented cross window containing a small-pane casement with raised, moulded and eared stone surround, and second floor glazing bar sash window with apron sill. Inside, visible at both ground and first-floor level, though the two parts are no longer in communication, is an original staircase with stick balusters and open string with shaped tread ends. A small brick-lined cellar is apparently contemporary with the building. Unlike its neighbour in Nos 135-6, there is no indication of damp.

### *Statement of Significance*

This building is Grade B locally listed, and this is probably a good measure of its significance. Certainly, it wouldn't qualify for statutory listing, being too late in date, and not of sufficiently high quality. Nevertheless, it is an attractive building that makes a significant contribution to the streetscape, and is important to the character of the conservation area. Its historic interest lies in the continuity it represents, between the 18th century or before, when this plot existed as one of the tenements that made up the Inge holding, and the present day.

### **138-9 Digbeth (Birmingham Voluntary Service Council) (Plate 16)**

#### *Description*

The former Avery building of 1936 is a red brick structure with reconstituted-stone front at ground level and reconstituted-stone dressings. This four-storey building has large display windows at ground level. Four bays of steel-framed windows with stone sills and hood bands. Set back to the right is a narrow section containing a full-height stair window with scalloped canopy over. The cellar is contemporary with the superstructure and not of special interest. Generally, the interior has been modernised and retains few significant features. The walls of the cellar are largely obscured, but the elements that are visible point to it being contemporary with the 1930s building.

#### *Statement of Significance*

No. 138-9 is a Grade B locally listed building. The recent extension and re-ordering of the interior means that the interest of the property lies almost entirely in the Digbeth elevation. This is a good, but fairly plain example of its kind. Owing to its late date, even in its original state, it is highly unlikely to have been of sufficiently high quality to qualify for statutory listing; the alterations to the interior make this certain. However, it does form an important component of the historic character of the Digbeth frontage, and makes a significant contribution to the conservation area. The historical interest lies in the continuity it represents between the land tenure of the 17th century and probably earlier, and the present.

### **140 Digbeth (Plates 17-20)**

#### *Description*

No. 140 is a mid-19th century, three-storey, three-bay building with late 20th century restaurant front at ground level. It is constructed in red brick, the front elevation painted. Segmental-arched windows, boarded up at the time of the study. To the right is a door giving access to the side passage. The passage leads first to a former workshop attached to the rear of the shop and house. It is a lower two-storey wing, with some iron-framed windows. At the rear (northeastern) extremity of the plot is a taller, two-storey red-brick structure, apparently the workshop erected in 1879. It is a plain building with segmental-arched first-floor windows to the northeast and roofline sloping towards the southwest (Plate 18). Inside the main building there are two main features of interest. Firstly, there is an original; staircase with stick balusters, moulded handrail and turned newels. Secondly, at second-floor level, the brickwork of the northwest wall has been exposed to reveal two distinct phases (Plate). The earlier of these phases may be 18th century in date. It terminates in a former roofline, denoting an earlier, two-storey building. Neither the cellar, nor the interiors of the former workshops could be inspected at the time of his study.

#### *Statement of Significance*

No. 140 is neither statutorily listed nor locally listed. It is certainly unlikely to qualify for either

on architectural grounds. It is a plain building, though probably one of the earliest to survive along this part of Digbeth, and by means of its general proportions makes a contribution to the historic streetscape. Its main interest, perhaps, is historical, the long narrow plot that it occupies, probably having its origins in the medieval period.

### **141 Digbeth (The Royal George and Former Music Hall) (Plates 21-22)**

#### *Description*

Kelly and Surman's Royal George, which occupies the corner plot between Park Street and Digbeth, and which dates from 1962-4, is built of buff-coloured brick with marble-faced ground storey. It is a four-storey structure with a plain coped parapet to a flat roof. It has a two-bay Park Street front, and an eight-bay Digbeth front, in addition to an entrance front towards the corner. The latter contains three late 20th-century entrances set within a square recess in the marble. It probably represents a late 20th-century modification. Above, is the pub name 'The Royal George', and a giant sailing ship motif fixed onto the brickwork.

The former London Museum Music Hall, which is attached to the northeast end of the Royal George, is a brick-built structure, roughcast towards Park Street. It has a slate roof with raised verge towards the northeast and hipped towards the southwest. At street level are seven inserted doorways, probably dating from the its time as a cinema, and above, six bays of blocked semi-circular arched windows with painted stone sills, set within large rectangular recesses. Moulded, slightly oversailing cornice.

#### *Statement of Significance*

The Royal George is an undistinguished building, whose functional tedium is relieved only by the marble facing at ground level and by the unusual ship motif over the entrance. Its late date and lack of architectural interest mean that it warrants neither statutory nor local listing. The principal merit of the current building lies in the historical continuity that it represents, in that it serves as a reminder of the 18th-century George Inn that stood on this spot, and of the later 19th-century Royal George that benefited from the work of James and Lister Lea. In this respect there is group value with the former music hall immediately to the north. However, this historical link is not important enough to endow the current structure with any greater significance. This prominent corner site provides an important visual focus, and deserves better than the current architecturally disadvantaged building.

The former music hall is neither statutorily listed, nor is it on the local list. Although it has an unprepossessing exterior, this is largely a result of the later roughcast cladding, which it would be possible to remove, and given its historic interest in providing a link with the former George Inn, and as an example of a comparatively rare building type, local listing would seem to be appropriate.

## **11 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is little doubt that the study area lies within, and near the centre of, the town established by Peter de Birmingham in 1166, and that the rear boundaries of the Digbeth properties were delineated by a continuation of the ditch discovered in the Moor Street and Park Street excavations, a feature that probably marked the northern extent of the borough. It is certainly true that in the medieval period, burgages in this spot would have been prime sites, close to the commercial heart of the town and much sought after by the merchant and artisan class. The presence of a reliable water supply is further reason to suppose that the study area was occupied from an early date. The pattern of historic property boundaries is compatible with having been laid out in the Middle Ages, and the vestiges of distinctive reversed-S shaped plots may be a direct link to the medieval landscape that predated the establishment of the town.

The documentary evidence tends to support the view that the study area has been developed from an early date. The identification of Nos. 135-7 with the Philips property recorded in 1553 has the potential to push the date of settlement back into the 13th century, from whence it is but a short step to the foundation of the town in 1166. In addition, the mention of a house called White Hart in the same survey suggests that the plot occupied by No. 138 is of ancient origin too. Certainly the site was occupied by an inn of the same name without interruption from 1688 until it closed for business in 1860. The map evidence shows that the rest of the Digbeth frontage had been settled by the early 18th century at the latest. Continuity of tenure from this date can be suggested for at least one other plot, namely, that on which the Royal George now stands. The George Inn was in existence from at least the mid-18th century, and it may be significant that its name, like that of the White Hart, is one that has its origins in the Middle Ages.

The evidence, then, strongly suggests that within the study area the Digbeth properties are likely to have had their origins in the medieval period, probably as burgages laid out when Peter de Birmingham planted his town in 1166. The northeastern corner of the site, now largely cleared of buildings, has had a quite different pattern of development, largely connected with the presence of water on the site. It may have been the site of a pool in the 16th century, it was certainly the site of a spring in the early 19th century, and it is known that the water supply was being exploited from here by mid-19th century.

The buildings that occupy the study area today range in date from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, though it is possible that some earlier fabric might survive in the party walls. Several are of good architectural quality, and although none is statutorily listed, or is likely to qualify or listing, there are four locally listed buildings along the Digbeth frontage (Nos 124-134, 135-6, 137, and 138-9), as well as one Grade A locally-listed building (Police Station, Digbeth/Allison Street), and one Grade II listed building (RTP Crisps, Allison Street/Well Street) directly opposite the study area. The Digbeth buildings are a coherent part of the larger architectural grouping of Digbeth and Deritend High Street, a largely later 19th and early 20th century collection of buildings that line the northeast side of this ancient thoroughfare, and which form one of the most significant groups of historic buildings in Birmingham.

Regarding future development of the site, the most important element of the historic environment is the ancient plot layout (Fig. 16). The surviving boundaries include the nearly the entire perimeters of Nos 135-7, 138-9 and 140 as well as the northwest and southeast walls of the former London Museum Music Hall, the southeast side of the Digbeth Cold Store main building, part of the boundary between the Digbeth Cold Store and 123 Digbeth, and the northeast side of Orwell Passage. In addition, elements of the former northeastern extension of Nos 135-7 are likely to survive below ground level. This group of property boundaries amounts to a remarkable survival in a city where traces of the medieval layout have all but been destroyed. There is an added significance in that rather than being part of the later medieval development of the town, this area is right in the heart of the settlement founded in 1166, and forms an unbroken link between the modern city and its 12th-century origins.

The principal recommendations, then, in respect of any proposed redevelopment of the study area is that the medieval property boundaries are retained, and that full consideration is made of the historic buildings, and the contribution they make to townscape, not least the Digbeth conservation area, and the prospect of St Martin's Church and the Bullring from the east.

## **12 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The project was commissioned by Birmingham City Council. Thanks are due to for their co-operation and assistance throughout the project. The assessment was undertaken by Malcolm Hislop and the illustrations prepared by Nigel Dodds.



## 13 SOURCES CONSULTED

### Abbreviations

BA – Birmingham Archives  
BLS – Birmingham Local Studies

### 13.1 Primary Sources

#### *Building Plans*

BA 1786, New workshop at the back of No. 140 Digbeth by Osborn and Ready.

BA 15105, 'The Linde Refrigeration Co. Ltd, New Ice Factory and Cold Stores, Digbeth, Birmingham' by Cossins, Peacock and Bewlay, architects, 83 Colmore Row, Birmingham.

BA 15115, Smoke House to the rear of No. 139 Digbeth.

BA 24572, 'New Premises for No. 135–136 Digbeth, Birmingham, for George Makepeace' by James Pratchett, Architect, Ombersley.

#### *Building Plans Listed but not Found*

BA 1754, New Shop Front 11 June 1878

BA 6142, Alterations to London Museum Concert Hall, 9 July 1888

BA 6247, Alterations to Public House Digbeth/Allison Street, 3 September 1888

BA 11912, Alterations to Royal George, J. & L/ Lea, 8 June 1896

#### *Deeds*

BA Ms 63/14-27 Deeds relating to 138 Digbeth

BA Ms 1406/1-3, Deeds relating to 138 and 139 Digbeth

#### *Estate Records*

BLS L60.4 669754 Estates in the Parish of Birmingham belonging to Sir Thomas Gooch (1796).

BA Ms 177, A Terrier to the Estates of W.P Inge Esq. Situate in the Town and Parish of Birmingham in the County of Warwick.

#### *Rate Books*

Digbeth District 1832

St Martin's District 1853

#### *Trade Directories*

Chapman's Birmingham Directory 1800, 1801

Commercial Directory of Birmingham, 1816-17

Holden's Triennial Directory 1809-11

Kelly's Directory 1880, 1890, 1900, 1901, 1903, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1937, 1938

Pearson's and Rollason's Directory of Birmingham 1780

Pigot and Co's Directory of Birmingham 1841

Post Office Directory of Birmingham 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871

Pye's Birmingham Directory 1788

Sketchley's Birmingham Directory 1767

Sketchley's and Adam's Universal Directory 1770

Swinney's Birmingham Directory 1774

White's History Gazetteer and Directory of Warwickshire 1850

Wrightson's Triennial Directory 1825

### **13.2 Secondary Sources**

Baker, N J, 1995, 'A Town-Plan Analysis of the Digbeth ERA and Cheapside IA, in Litherland, 1995.

Bickley, W B, and Hill, J, 1890, A Survey of the Borough and Manor of Birmingham made in 1553.

Buteux, S, 2004, Beneath the Bull Ring: The Archaeology of Life and Death in Early Birmingham.

Buteux, S, in preparation, Report on the archaeological excavations

Cameron, K. 1977, English Place-Names, 3rd edn.

Demidowicz, G, 2002, 'The Hersum Ditch, Birmingham and Coventry: A local Topographical Term? Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society, 106, 143–50.

Department of the Environment (DoE), 1990, Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning

Gillespie, R W, 1887, 'On Some Memorials of Old Birmingham', Birmingham and Midland Institute 14, 1-9.

Grenville, J. 1997, Medieval Housing.

Hindle, P. 2002, Medieval Town Plans.

Hodder, M, 2004, Birmingham: The Hidden History.

- Holt, R. 1985, *The Early History of the Town of Birmingham 1166 to 1600*, Dugdale Occasional Papers No. 30.
- Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), 1999, *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*, rev. edn.
- Kinvig, R H, Smith, J G and Wise, M J (edd), 1950, *Birmingham and its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey*, British Association for the Advancement of Science.
- Litherland, S, 1995, *An Archaeological Assessment of the Digbeth Economic Regeneration Area and Cheapside Industrial Area, Birmingham (BUFAU Report No 337)*
- Mould, C, 1999, *An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment of Part of the Digbeth Millennium Quarter, Birmingham City Centre (BUFAU Report No. 575)*
- Pantin, W.A. 1961, 'Medieval Inns' in E.M.Jope (ed), *Studies in Building History*, 166-91.
- Platt, C. 1976, *The English Medieval Town*.
- Slater, T, 1980, 'Ideal and Reality in English Episcopal Medieval Town Planning', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, N.S. 12 (1987), 191-203
- Toulmin Smith, J. 1864, *Memorials of Old Birmingham: Men and Names: Founders, Freeholders and Indwellers*.
- Toulmin Smith, L (ed), 1870, *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1533 to 1543*.
- Upton, C, 1993, *A History of Birmingham*.
- VCH, 1964. *The Victoria History of the County of Warwick Vol.7: The City of Birmingham*.
- Watts, L, 1977, *Birmingham Moat: Its History, Topography and Destruction* (University of Birmingham MA thesis)
- Watts, L, 1980, 'Birmingham Moat: its History, Topography and Destruction', *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 89, 1-77.

### **13.3 Cartographic Sources**

- 1731 Westley
- 1750 Bradford
- 1778 Hanson
- 1781 Hanson
- 1789 Snape
- 1795 Pye
- 1796 Gooch Estate

1809 Inge Estate

1810 Kempson

1828 Piggot Smith

1834 Hunt

1840 Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge

1847 Ackerman's Panoramic View

1848 St Martin's Parish Tithe Map

1848-62 Board of Health maps

1869-c. 1896 Rate maps

1889 Ordnance Survey 1:500

1890 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1905 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1918 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1937 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

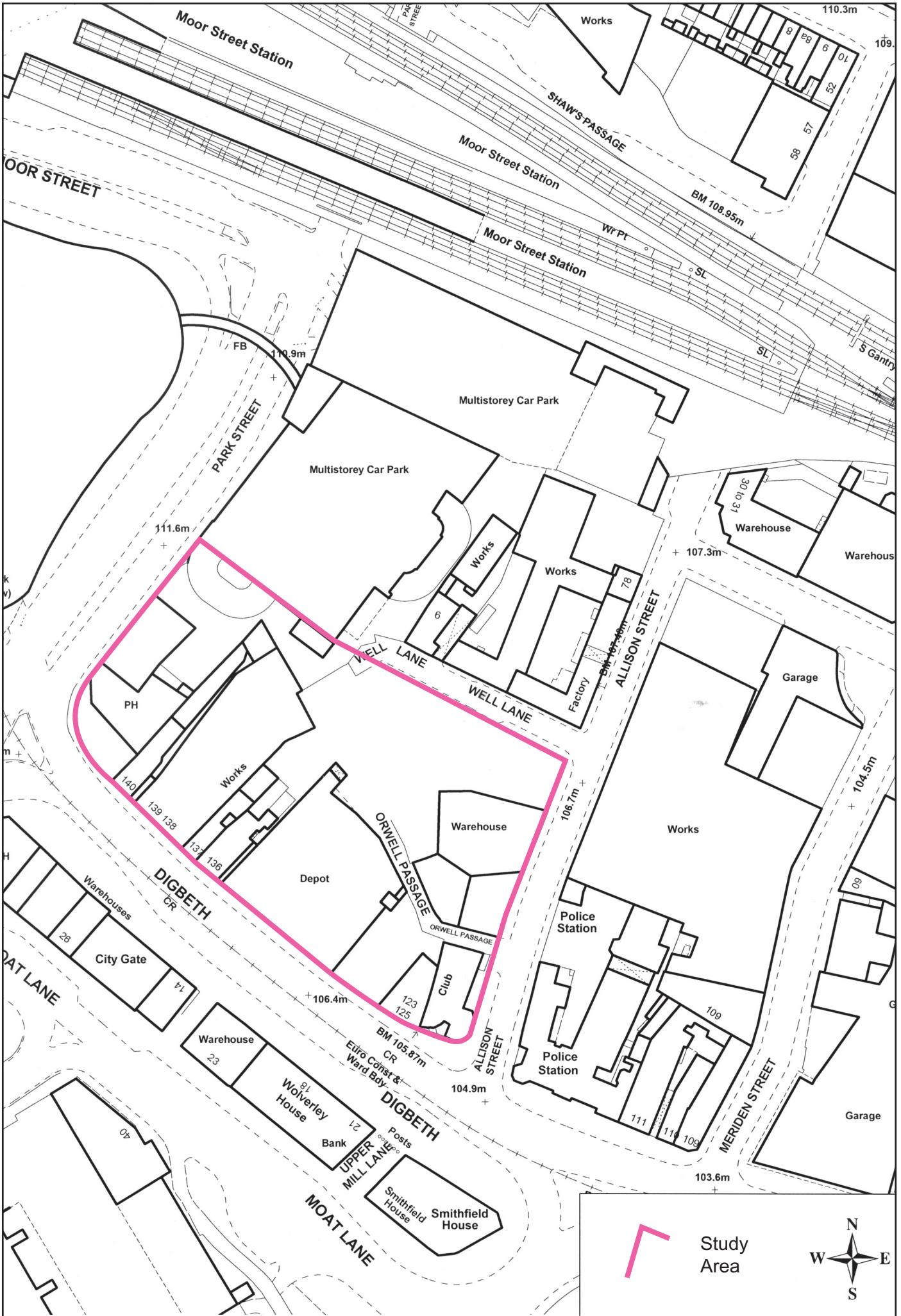


Fig.1

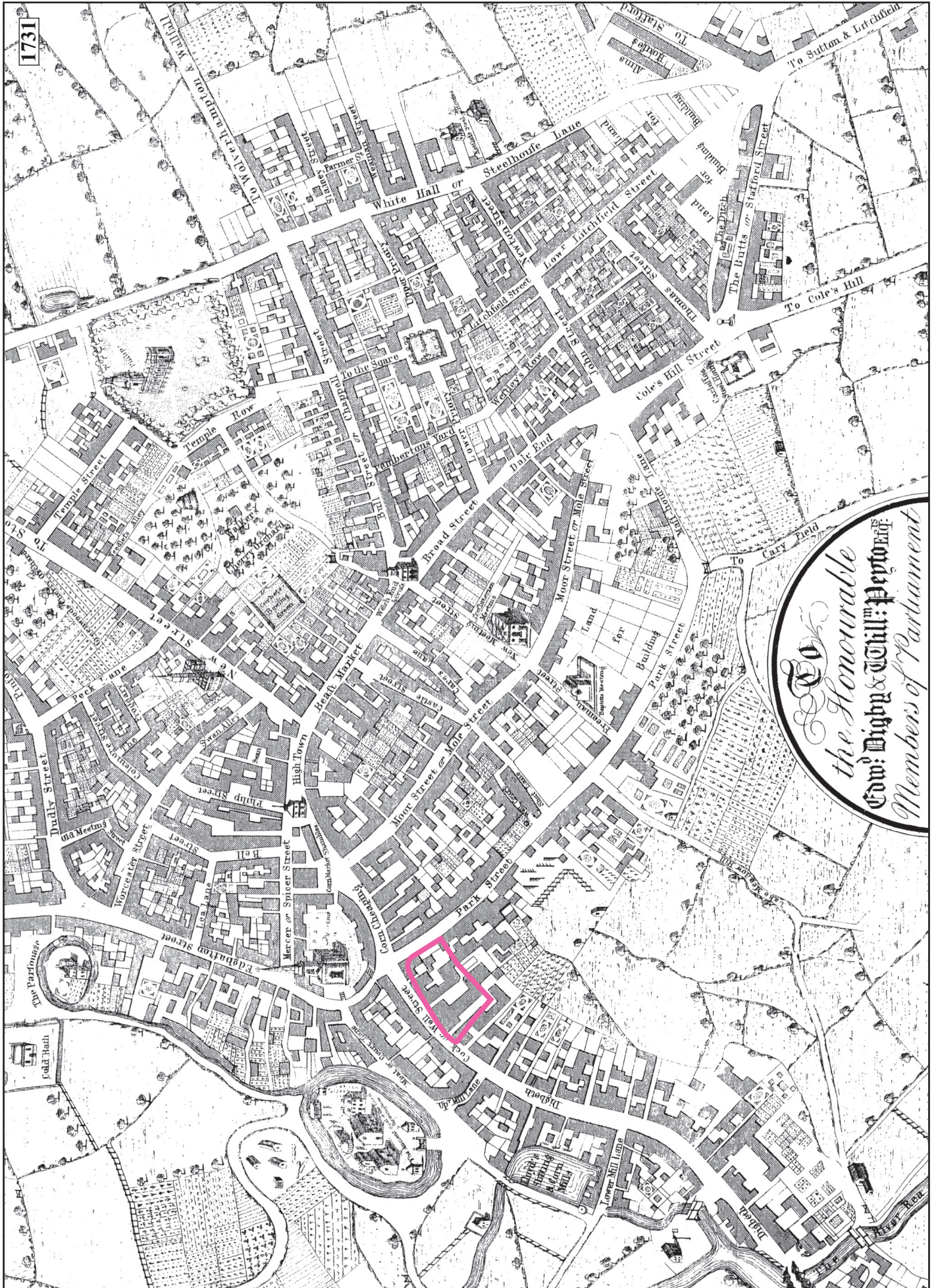


Fig.2

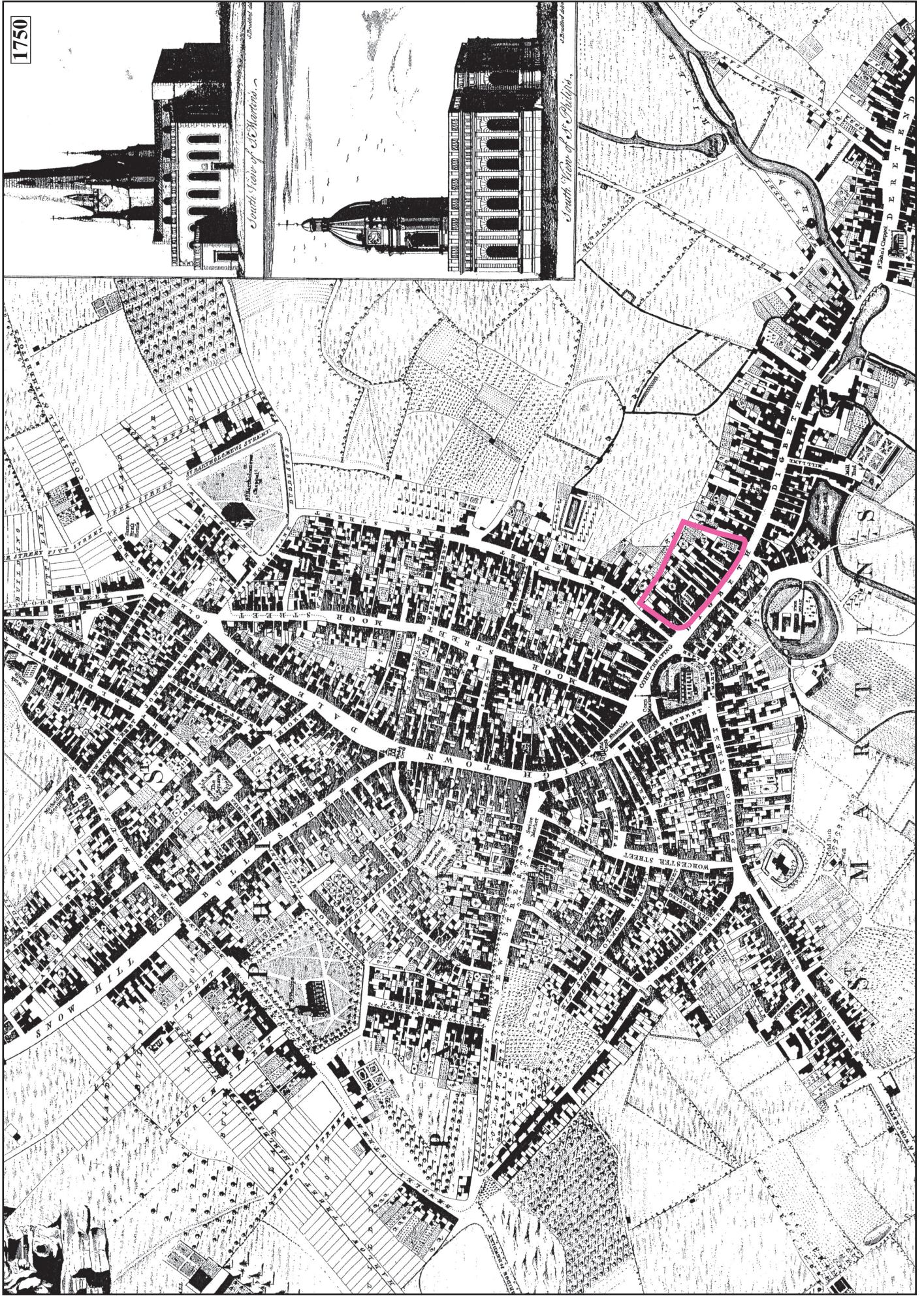


Fig.3

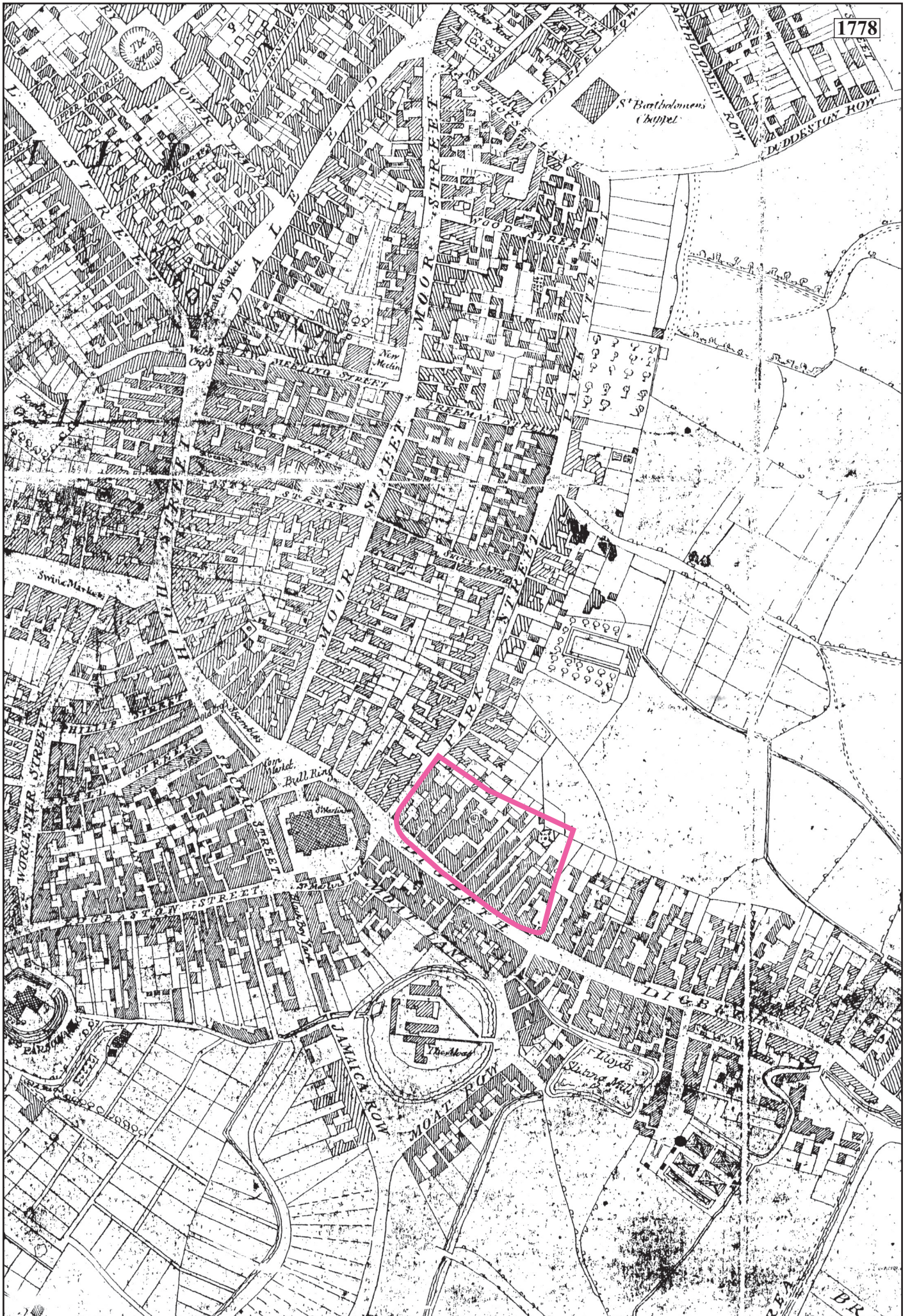


Fig.4



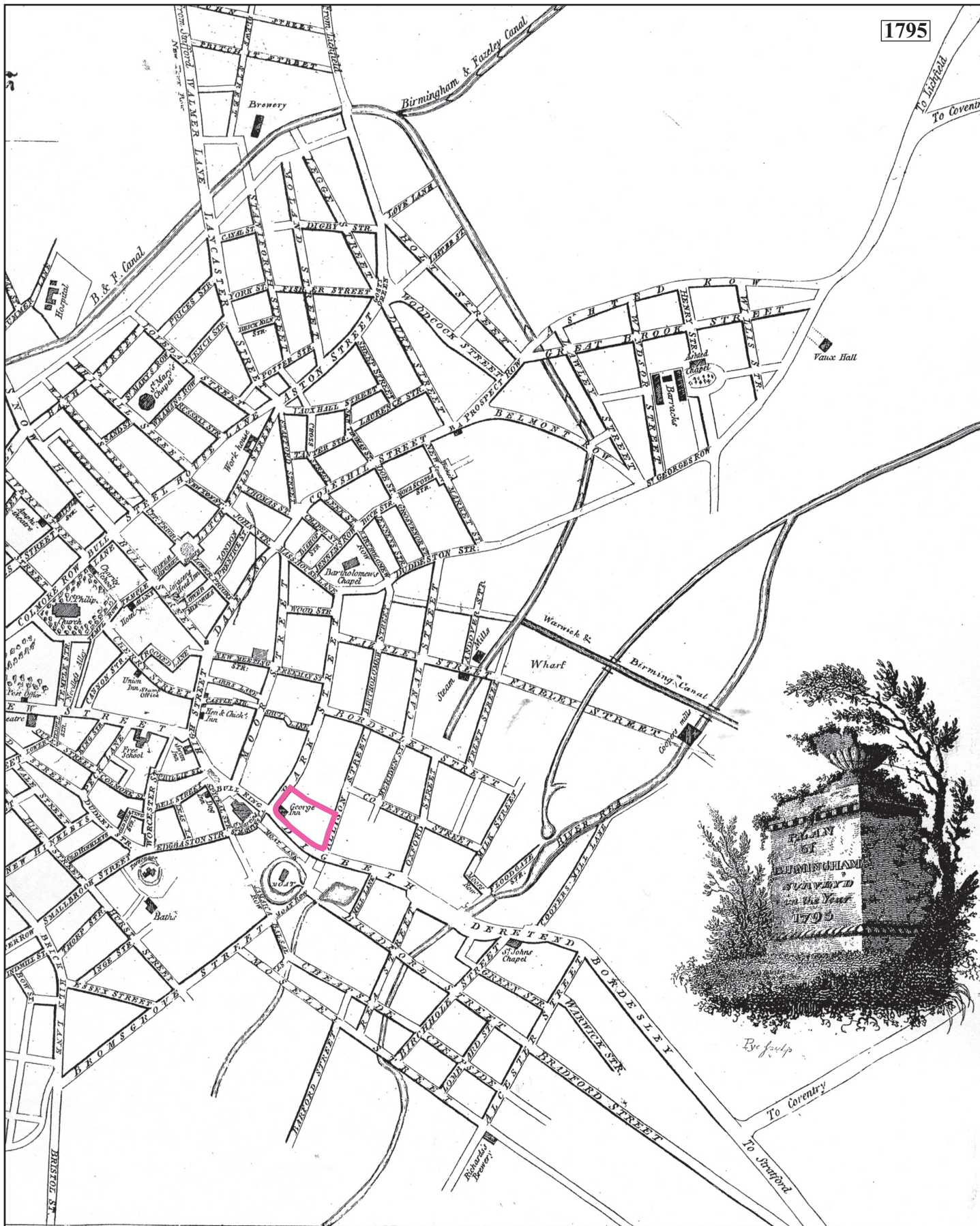


Fig.5

# TOWN OF BIRMINGHAM

1808

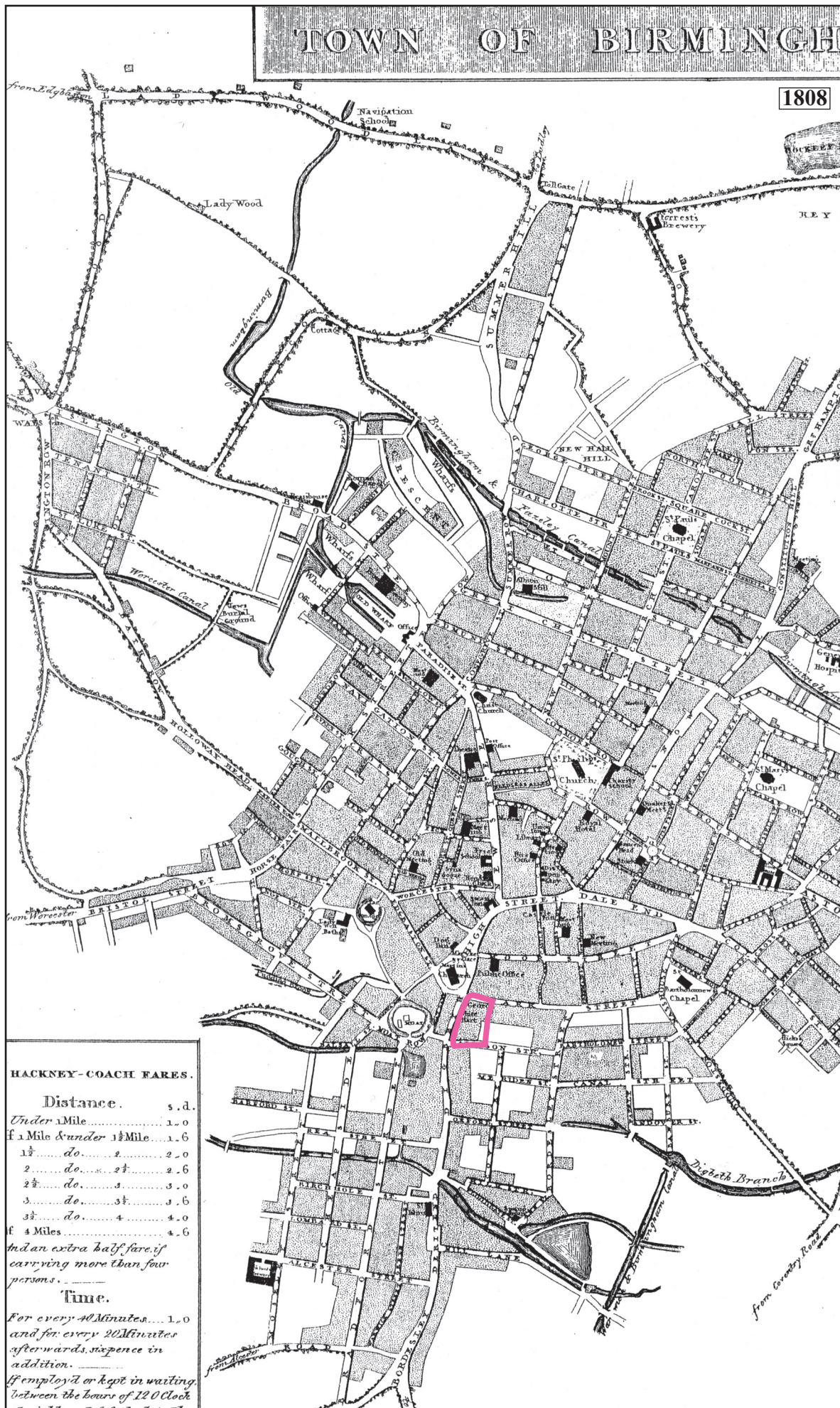


Fig.6

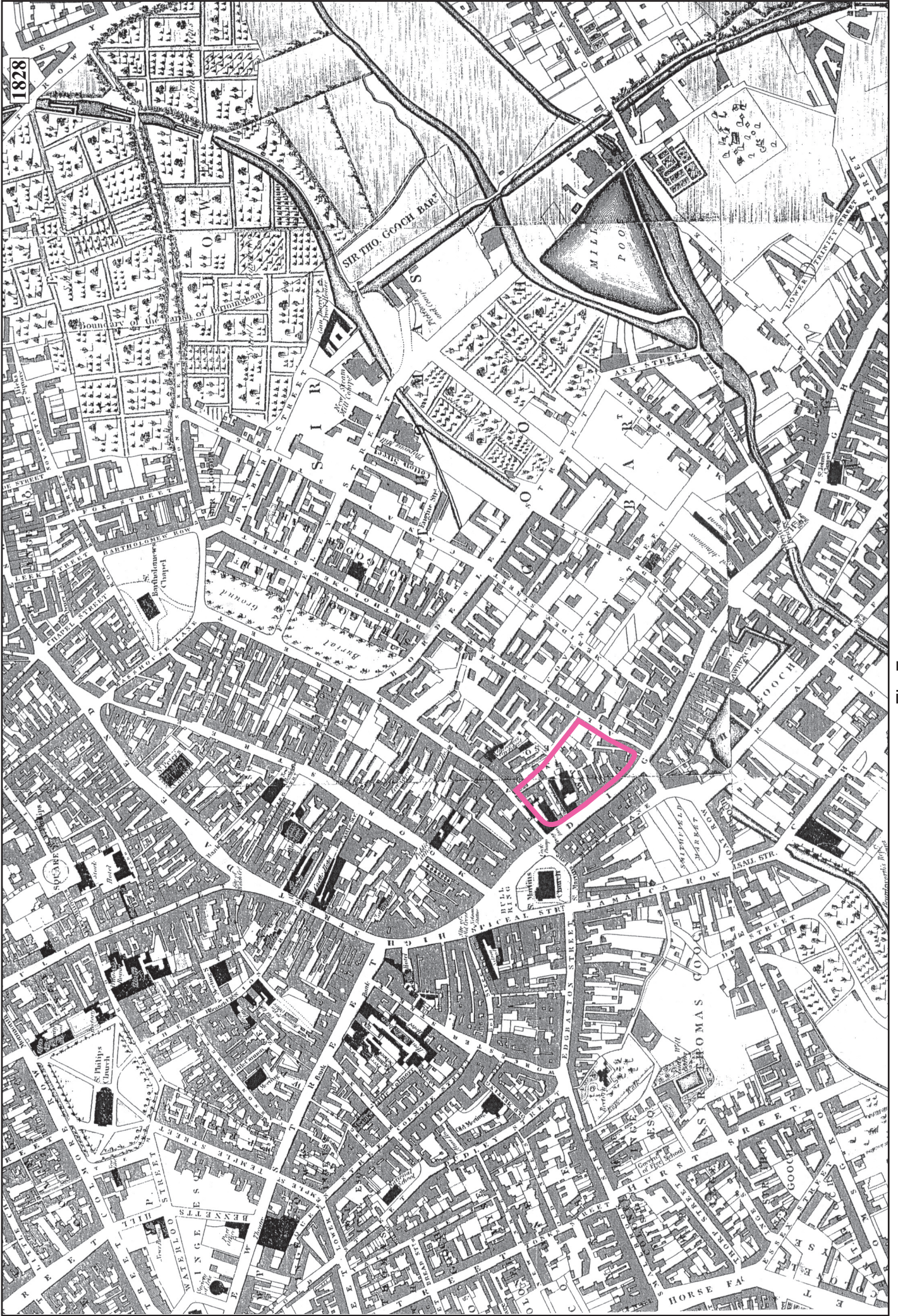


Fig. 7

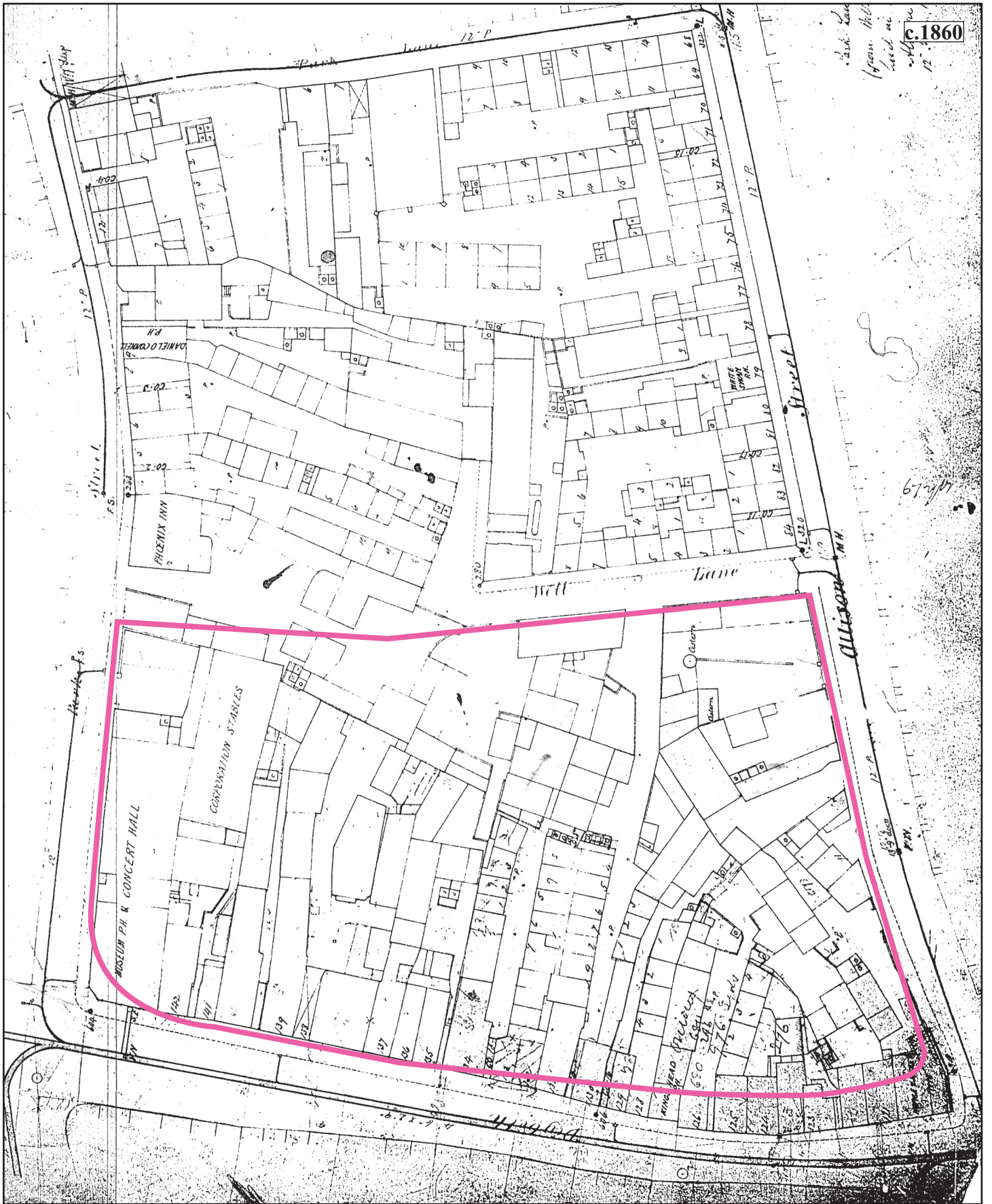


Fig.8



Fig.9

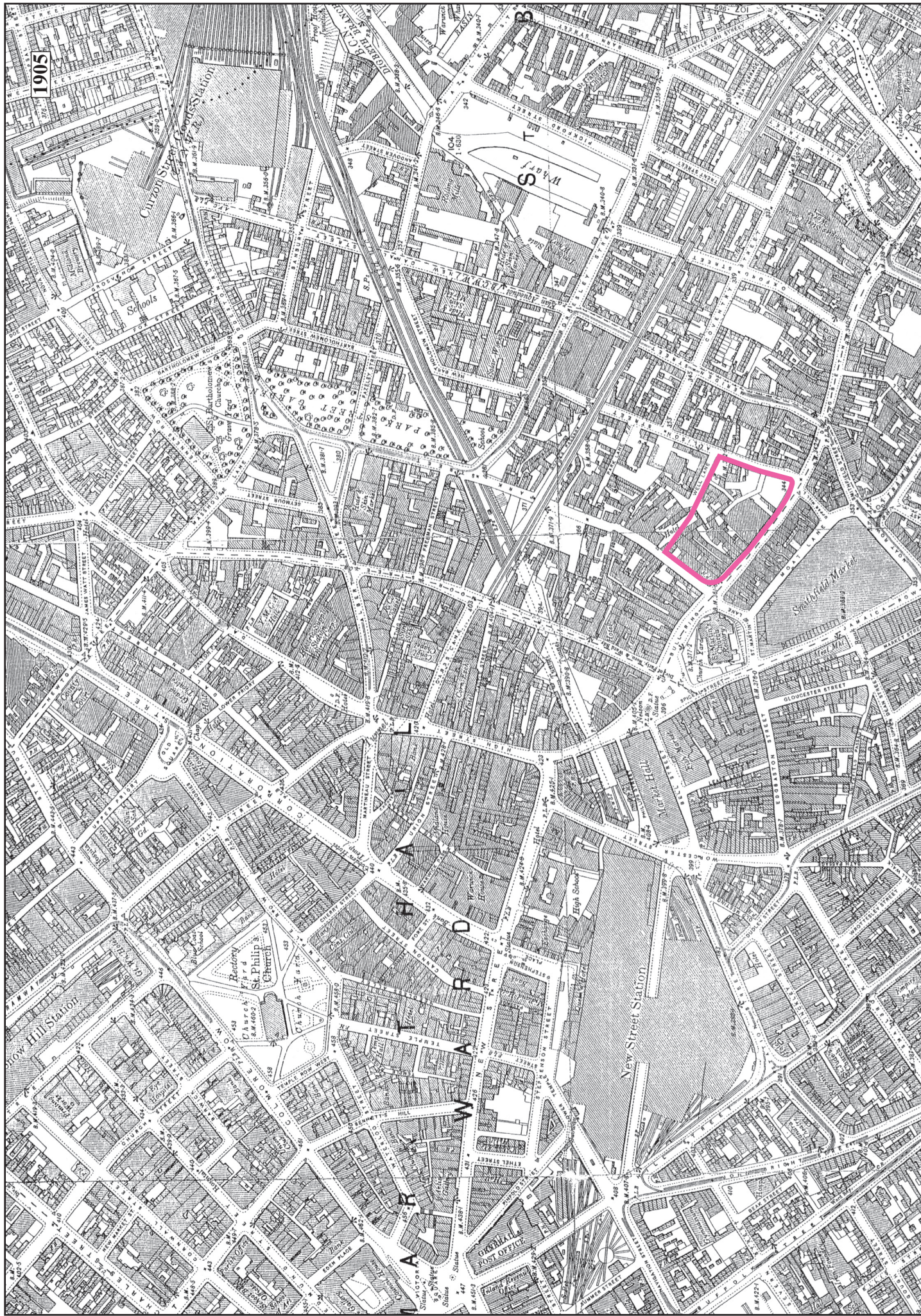


Fig.10

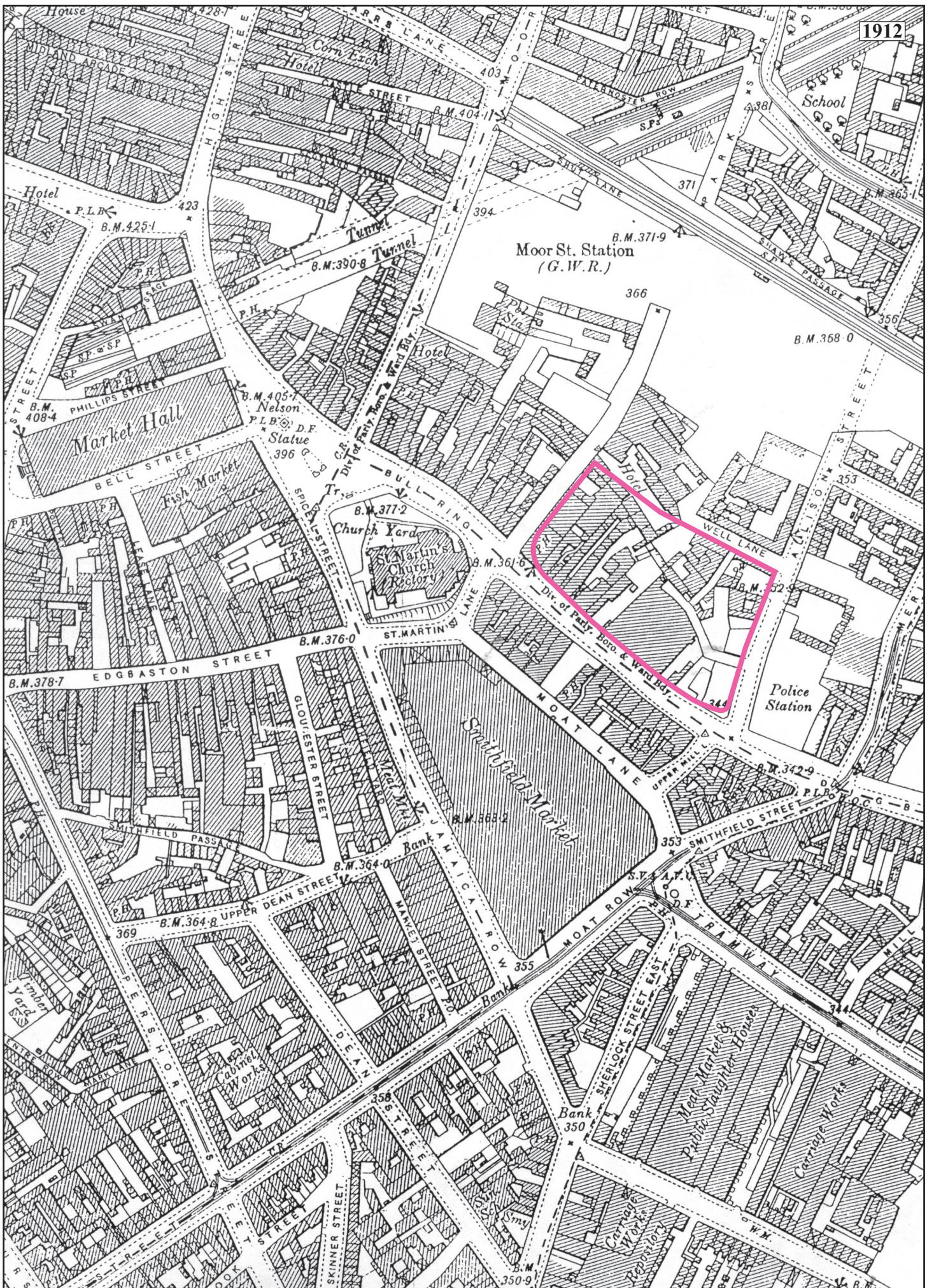
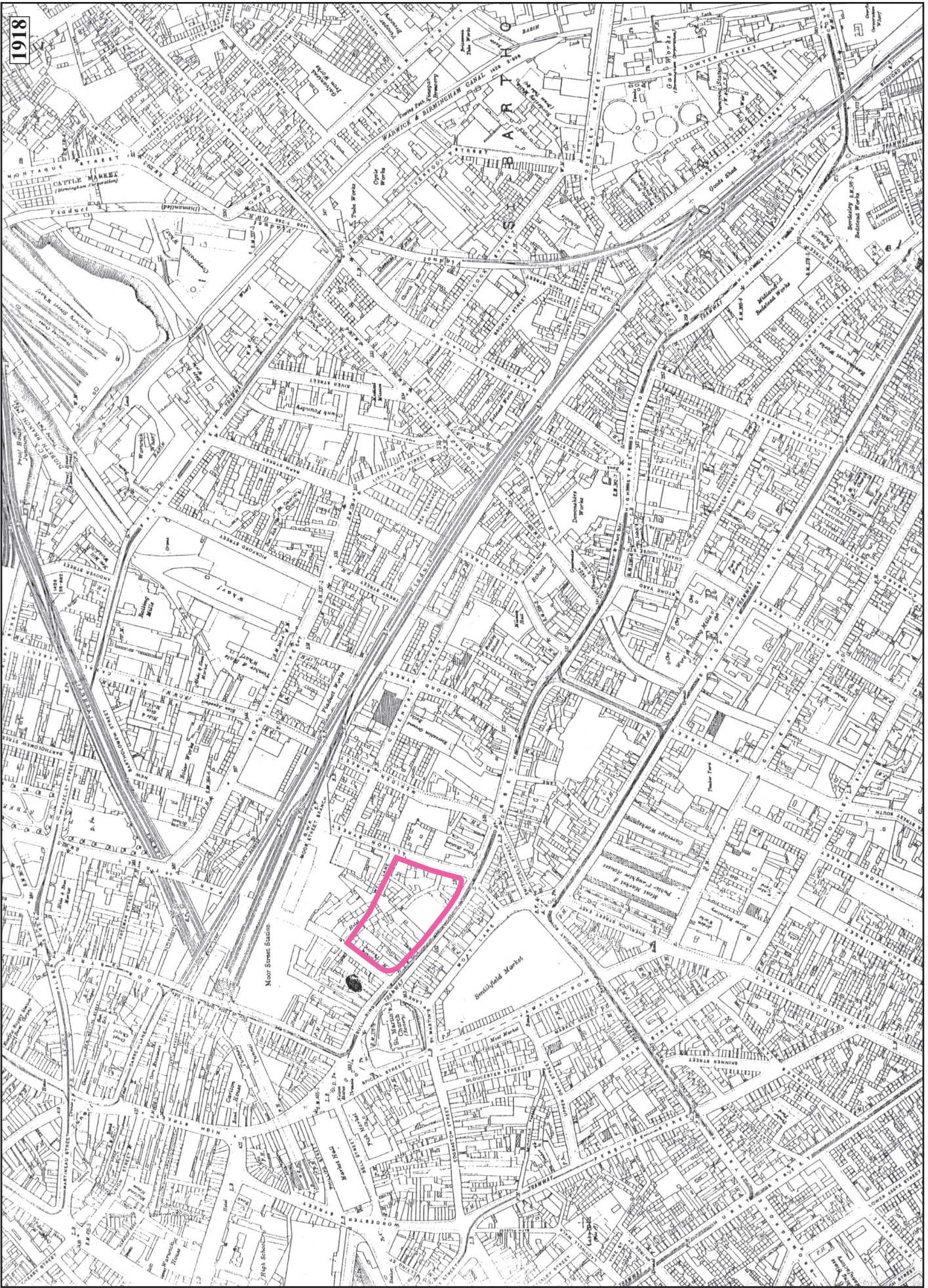


Fig.11



1918

Fig.12



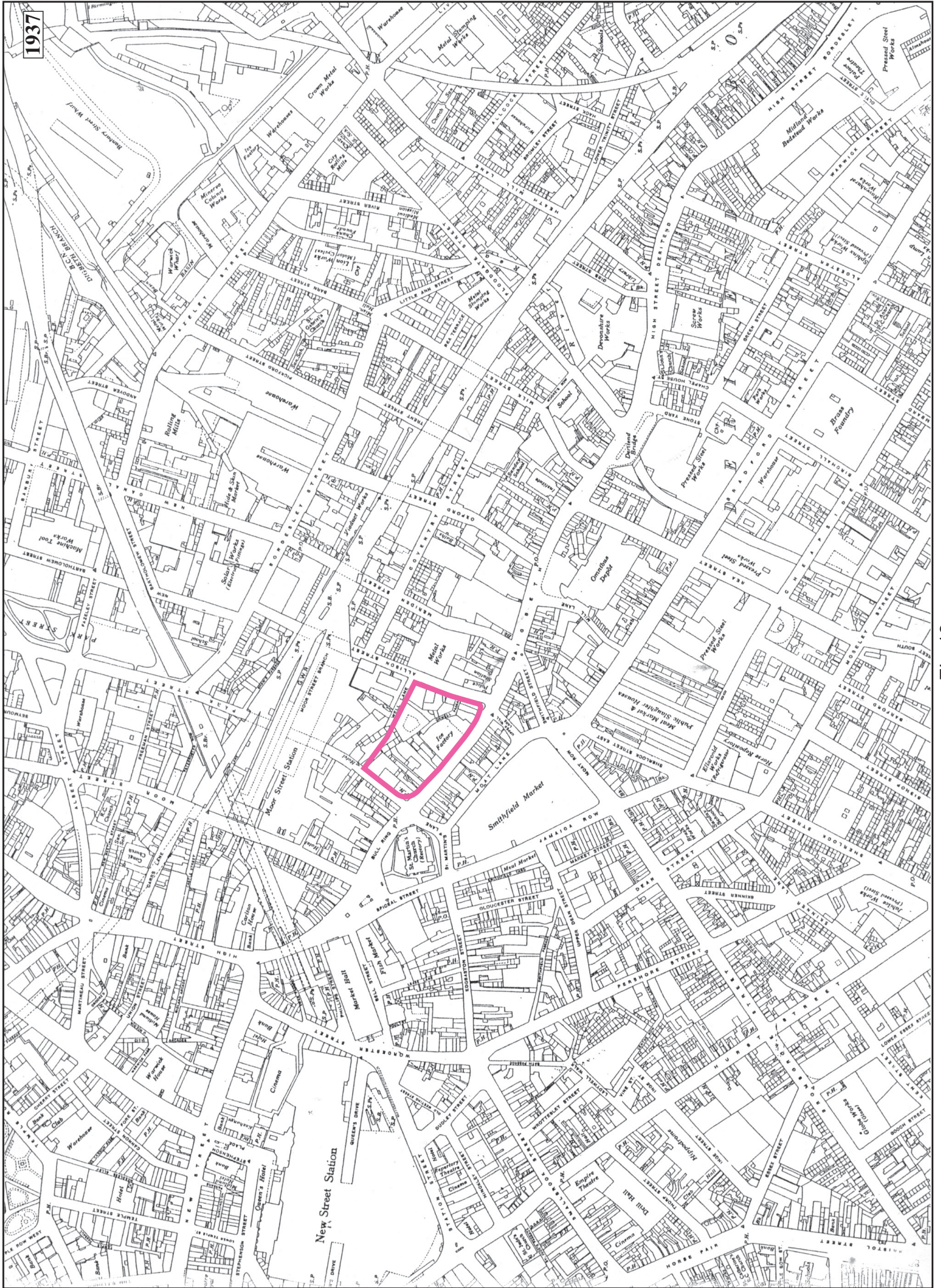


Fig. 13

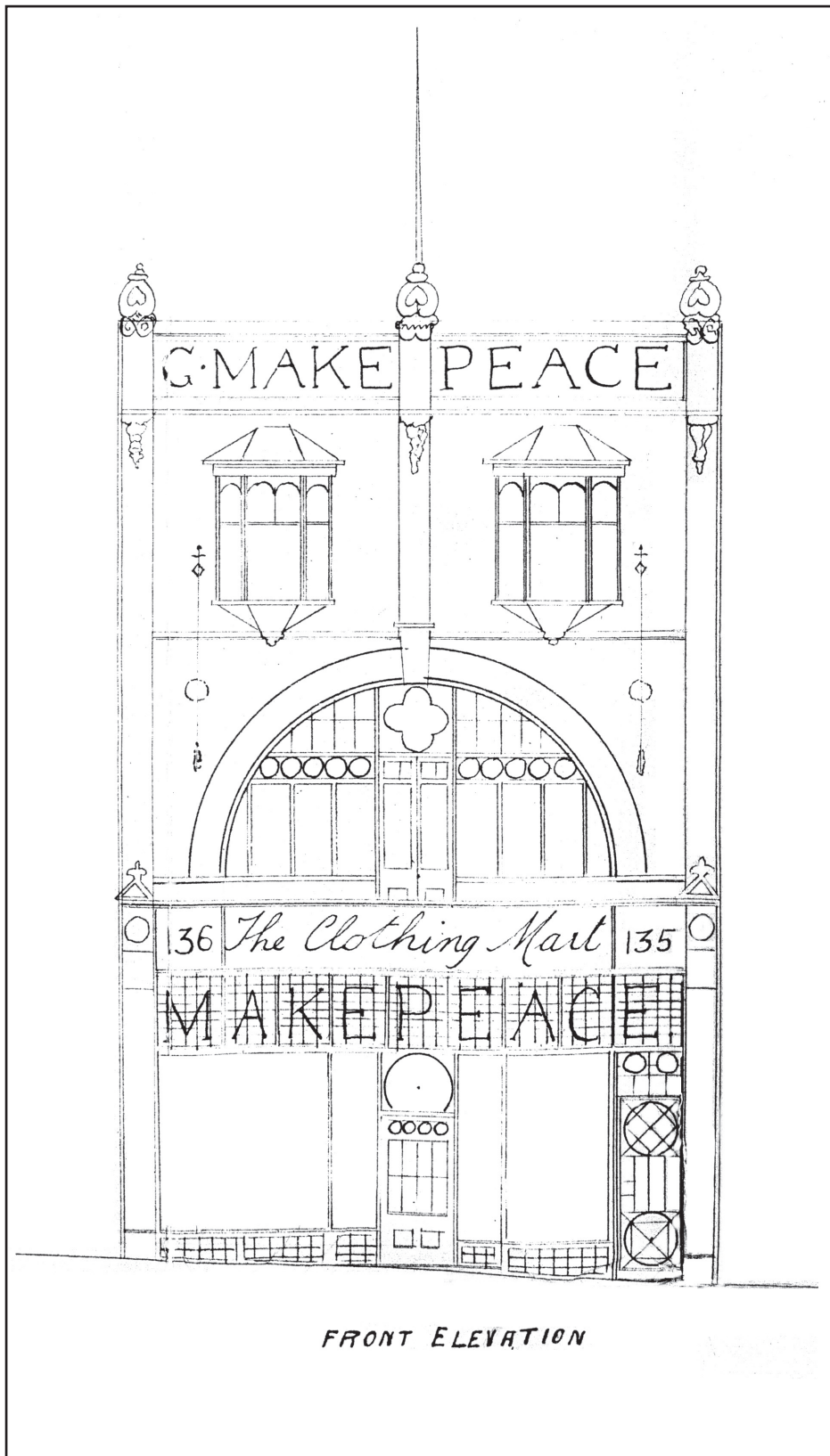


Fig.14

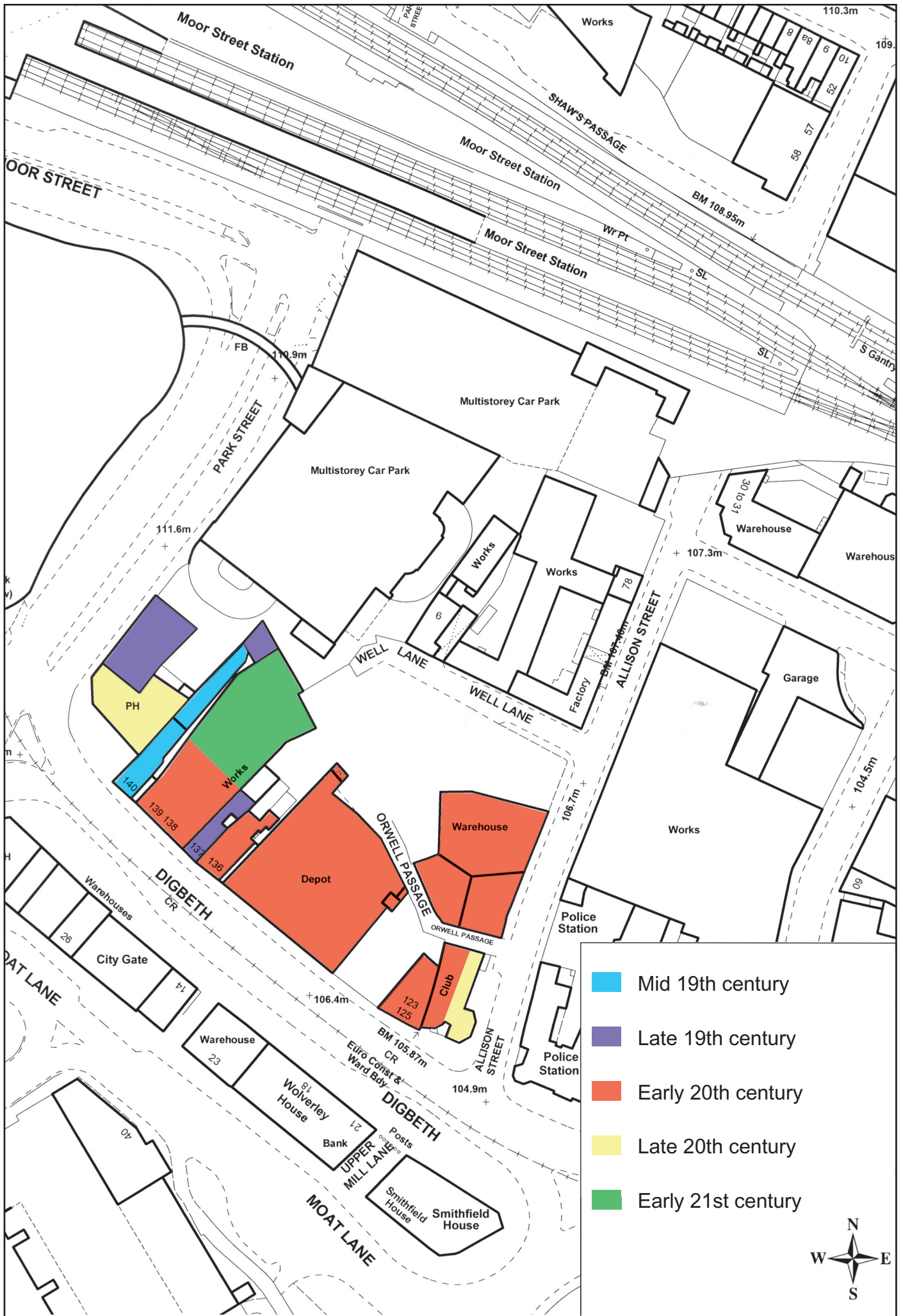


Fig.15

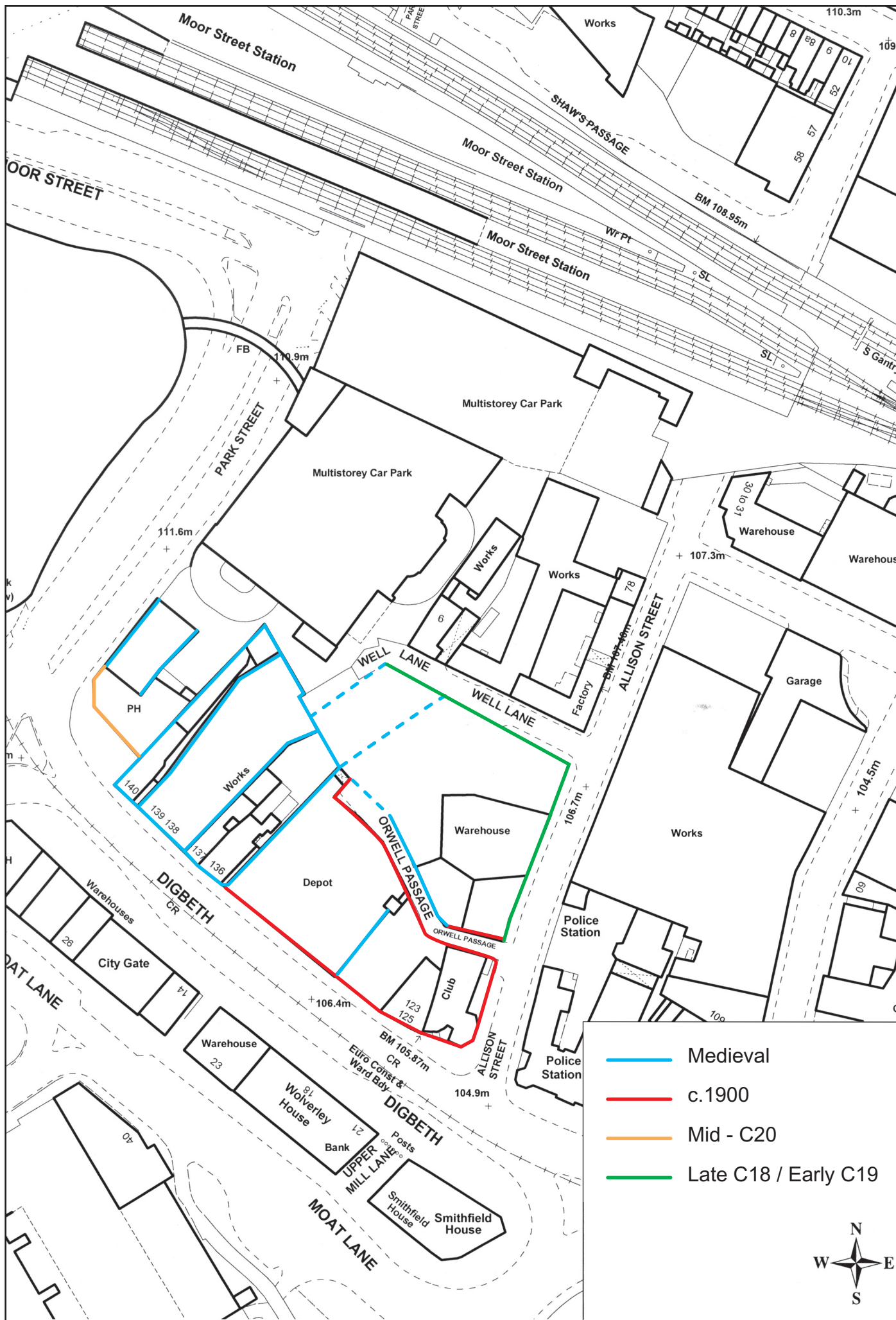


Fig.16



Plate 1. Digbeth from the southeast



Plate 2. Allison Street from the south



Plate 3. Well Street from the east



Plate 4. Park Street from the southwest



Plate 5. Orwell Passage from the southwest



Plate 6. The Police station from the west



Plate 7. The R.T.P. Crisp building from the southeast

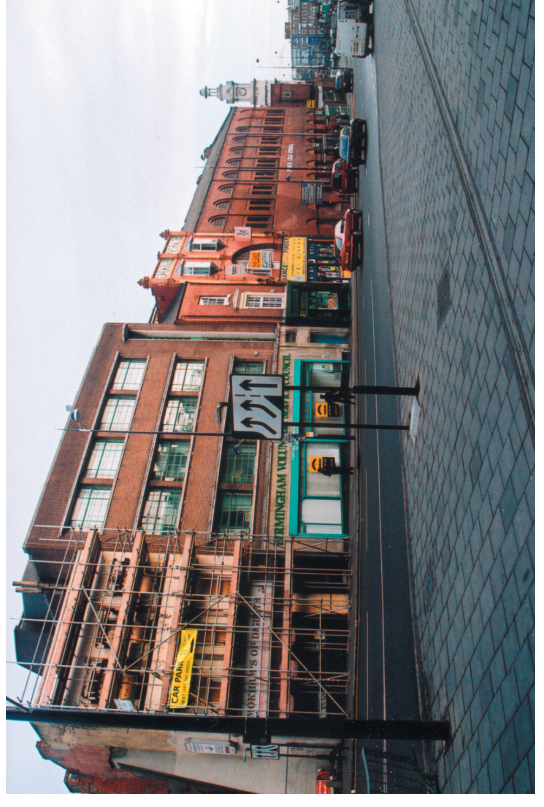


Plate 8. Digbeth from the northwest



Plate 9. 89 Allison Street from the northwest



Plate 10. 93 Allison Street from the southeast



Plate 11. 123 Digbeth from the south



Plate 12. 123-134 Digbeth from the southeast



Plate 13. 124-136 Digbeth from the southwest



Plate 14. 135-136 Digbeth from the south



Plate 15. 137 Digbeth from southwest



Plate 16. 138-139 Digbeth from the southwest





Plate 17. 140 digbeth from the southwest



Plate 18. 140 digbeth from the east



Plate 19. 140 digbeth, staircase from the east



Plate 20. 140 digbeth, northwest wall from the southeast



Plate 21. 142 Digbeth (The Royal George) from the west



Plate 22. Park Street from the west