

**27-28 Park Street, Digbeth,
Birmingham**

**An Archaeological Desk-Based
Assessment
2004**

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27-28 Park Street, Birmingham

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2004

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27-28 Park Street, Digbeth, Birmingham An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Summary

In February 2004, Birmingham Archaeology carried out a desk-based assessment on 27-28 Park Street, Digbeth, Birmingham (SP 075865) for QDP Limited. The work was associated with a planning application to demolish the existing buildings on the site and to replace them with a new one. The assessment showed that the study area lay within the area of the medieval town and that there is a possibility that it retains below-ground archaeology of the medieval period. The existing building fronting the site was probably built in 1878 for Thomas and Alice Butler, last makers. From the end of the 19th century a Thomas Butler carried on a business from this address as a cutter and paper knife maker. The firm continued to operate from the premises into the 1970s. The building itself is a three-storey brick structure, which has undergone considerable alteration, including refenestration. The only original internal features to survive were two large segmental-arched fireplaces. There was no visible evidence for industrial activity. It is recommended that the survival of the below-ground archaeology is further assessed by archaeological evaluation.

1.0 Introduction

In February 2004, Birmingham Archaeology carried out an archaeological desk-based assessment at 27-28 Park Street, Digbeth, Birmingham. The work was commissioned by QDP Limited and was prompted by a planning application to demolish all existing structures on the site and to replace them with a new building. The study was necessary because there was a likelihood that the site would contain archaeological remains that could be affected by the proposed redevelopment. This is in accordance with Policy 8.36 of Birmingham City Council's Unitary Development Plan and Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, 'Archaeology and Planning'. The work was carried out according to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology (Hislop 2004), which was itself based on a brief issued by Birmingham City Council (Hodder 2004).

2.0 Site Location (Figs 1 & 2)

27-28 Park Street is situated on the east side of Park Street, between the junctions with Bordesley Street and Shaw's Passage (NGR SP075865).

3.0 Objectives

The principal objective was to define the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains in the proposed development area, so that appropriate mitigation strategies can be devised. Specifically, the following items were to be assessed:-

- The significance of the existing buildings on the site.

- The likely extent of 19th century and later deposits and therefore the depth and potential survival of earlier deposits.
- The likely survival and significance of archaeological remains of industrial or domestic activity.
- The likely use of the site before the 16th century.
- The potential of the site to contribute to an understanding of the historic development of this part of Birmingham.

4.0 Methods

The desk-based assessment comprised a site inspection, including an assessment of the surviving buildings, as well as search of all readily available, published and unpublished documentary sources including illustrations, maps and archaeological and geotechnical records, and a comparison with nearby sites. The Birmingham City Council Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted.

5.0 Present Character and Building Description

To the south of the study area, the south side of Shaw's Passage is defined by a railway viaduct, which crosses Park Street. To the north of the study area, there is a railway cutting running beneath the junction of Park Street and Bordesley Street. Further along Park Street to the north are Park Street Gardens (east), and the Grade II listed Fox and Grapes Public House (west) on the corner of Freeman Street. On the west side of Park Street, opposite the study area, is a patch of land defined by the two railway lines. Fronting it is a mid-20th century brick and concrete building (Taboo Cinema Club) and a currently unoccupied industrial unit of corrugated iron (Plate 1). Immediately north of the study area is a late 20th-century brick industrial building (Plate 2), and immediately south, between 27-28 Park Street and Shaw's Passage, is an open area currently used as a car park (Plate 3).

The plot that makes up the study area itself is comparatively long (*c.* 20m) and narrow (7.30m) with a pronounced southeastward deflection towards the east end. It is bounded by high brick walls to the north, south and east. The street (west) front is currently occupied by a house to the south and an access passage to the north (Plate 4). The house dates from the mid to late 19th century but has been substantially altered. It is constructed of 9" x 4" x 3" red bricks laid in Flemish stretcher bond, and is now painted to the front. It has a slate roof. Three storeys with eaves cornice. One bay, all windows replaced in the late 20th century. 20th-century roller shutter to ground-floor window. First-floor window has a painted stone sill and square head below the original segmental arch. Second-floor window with painted stone sill and chamfered stone lintel. There are two rooms on each floor, one at the front and one at the back. The interior has been almost entirely renewed, the only original features being two segmental arched brick fireplaces (Plate 5). To the rear, the house is rendered and there is a single-storey lean-to projection with slate roof, possibly an extension (Plate 6).

The access passage to the side of the house leads to a rear yard (Plate 7) presently containing a 20th century brick garage building (Plate 8). The wall defining the yard on the north side is constructed of 8½" x 4¼" x 2¼-2½" bricks, and probably dates from the early 19th century. There are a number of blocked doorways in it (Plate 9), suggesting that there was, at one time, communication between this plot and the property to the north.

6.0 Previous Archaeological Work

In 1995, the study area was included in a more general desk-based assessment of part of the Digbeth Millennium Quarter (Mould 1999, 22-26). The Park Street properties between Bordesley Street and Shaw's Passage, of which Nos. 27-28 is one, were believed to be the descendants of the medieval burgages that existed along this thoroughfare. It was found that there was a noticeable continuity of property boundaries and that the properties along the Park Street frontage had been terraced out above the slope of the street. Consequently, it was concluded that there was a high potential for the survival of archaeological deposits.

This, however, was not borne out by an archaeological evaluation of a plot of land at the corner of Bordesley Street and Park Street, undertaken in 2000 (Tavener 2000). Two trenches were excavated, Trench 1 close to the Park Street frontage and Trench 2 along the Bordesley Street frontage. Trench 1 revealed the weathered natural sandstone at a depth of 2.8m below the existing ground surface, sloping steeply from north to south. All archaeological deposits appeared to have been removed before the mid-19th century and the natural was directly overlain by approximately 2m of 19th-century landfill, which was in turn sealed by approximately 1m of more recent landfill. In Trench 2, the top of a buried soil surface was uncovered approximately 2.4m below the existing ground surface. This soil contained dating evidence from *c.* AD 1700 as well as a medieval jug handle. A sherd of medieval pottery was also recovered from a small late 17th/early 18th-century pit, which cut the buried soil. The soil surface was sealed by approximately 1.5m of 19th-century landfill, which was itself overlain by approximately 1m of more recent landfill. It was concluded that the construction of 18th and 19th-century buildings on the site had probably resulted in the localised destruction of earlier archaeological deposits and that these were more likely to survive behind the street frontages.

Contrasting with the results of this evaluation is the comparatively rich archaeological sequence uncovered by an excavation carried out in 2001 towards the south end, and on the east side of Park Street. This excavation revealed a succession of occupation periods dating from the 12th century to the present day (Burrows and Martin 2001). Three broad phases were identified, Phase 1, dating from the 12th to 15th century, Phase 2 from the early 16th century to the end of the 18th century, and Phase 3 from the 19th and 20th centuries. A number of large boundary ditches were assigned to Phase 1 as well as a sequence of layers with associated pits, postholes, a possible kiln, and two grave cuts containing articulated skeletons. During Phase 2 a cultivation soil lay across the site, and pits associated with industrial activity were dug, some of which may have been related to the tanning industry. In addition, the remains of a number of small buildings and

sandstone walls were recorded. Phase 3 was a period of intense building activity associated with the rapid development of the modern city.

7.0 Historical Development

The Study Area lies on the eastern edge of the area occupied by the medieval town of Birmingham. It has been surmised that Park Street was part a deliberately planned medieval extension of the town (Baker 1995, 12-13); if this is the case, then the evidence from the 2001 excavation suggests that it occurred as early as the 12th century. The early post-medieval plan is reconstructed in Bickley's and Hill's conjectural map of Birmingham in 1553 (Bickley and Hill 1890, Fig. 3) which shows the east side of Park Street as being lined with a series of long narrow burgage-plots, which were defined to the east by a substantial ditch. This ditch lay beyond the study area to the east, and was probably co-terminus with the eastern side of Park Street Gardens, which lies to the north (Watt 2001, 10).

On Westley's map of 1731 (Fig. 4), a lane known as Lake Meadow Hill followed the approximate northwest-southeast line of Bordesley Street, turning towards the north at its western end where it met Park Street, a divergence that is more marked on later maps. The east side of Park Street to the south of the junction with Lake Meadow Hill was built up as far as and beyond the study area. Some of the property boundaries to the rear were laid out at right angles to Park Street, and some aligned with the divergent end of Lake Meadow Hill (Bordesley Street). The west side of Park Street was less intensively developed, with only two isolated blocks of buildings between Freeman Street to the north of Bordesley Street and Shut Lane to the south of the study area.

Samuel Bradford's map of 1750 (Fig. 5) shows that development had proceeded apace since 1731. Now, the west side of Park Street was completely built up between Freeman Street and Shut Lane. Almost opposite Shut Lane, a lane had appeared roughly in the position of the current Shaw's Passage to the south of the study area, which was part of a large block of buildings along the Park Street frontage. All the properties on the east side of Park Street were now shown as being laid out at right angles to the street. Much the same arrangement prevailed in 1778 (Thomas Hanson's map) (Fig. 6).

Piggot Smith's map of 1828 shows a considerable change (Fig. 7). The block of buildings that had occupied the site of the study area had been demolished, and in its place was a wide vacant plot of land. This plot was aligned with the divergent end of Bordesley Street, suggesting, perhaps, that the alignment of the property boundaries on the Hanson map of 1778 were inaccurately depicted. The SDUK map of 1840 (Fig. 8) suggests that no change had occurred within the study area, and Ackerman's View of 1847 (Fig. 9) shows that the vacant plot still existed amidst an area of court housing.

The still unoccupied site is shown in more detail on Piggot Smith's map of c.1855 (Fig. 10). The building immediately to the north of the plot was No.29 Park Street, the Duke of Cumberland Public House, which was in existence by 1845 (Post Office Directory) when the landlord was George Watts. By 1889 (Ordnance Survey, Fig 11) Nos 27-28 had been

built including the single-storey section to the rear. There was a partially covered entrance passage to the north and another building, perhaps a workshop, at the east end of the rear yard, on the site of the current garage. This property is to be identified with the No. 28 of the trade directories, the first mention of which was in 1879 when Mrs Alice Butler was listed under last and boot tree makers (Post Office Directory). A year later Thomas Butler of No.28 was recorded as a boot machinist (Kelly's Directory).

It seems probable that No.28 (now 27-28) was built in 1878. Prior to that, Thomas Butler, last maker, was recorded as the occupant of No. 16 Park Street (Post Office Directory 1871), a property that was situated to the south of Shaw's Passage (Kelly's Directory 1883). Butler was last mentioned as the addressee in 1878 (Kelly's Directory), when Walter Shaw, ironmonger, was at No.17. By 1879 Butler was no longer associated with the address, and Shaw occupied both 16 and 17 (Kelly's Directory). In 1881 Thomas Butler was described as a machine maker (Hulley's Directory), but in 1882 he was again a last maker (Kelly's Directory). After 1882 he disappears from the records and Mrs Alice Butler, last maker, reappears.

By 1905 (Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Fig. 12) an extension had been built to the rear of No.28 (now 27-28) Park Street, leaving only a small area of the yard open. A building, perhaps a row of terraced houses, had been erected against the south side of the property, and another along the north side of Shaw's Passage, with a gap between the two. In 1908 No. 28 Park Street was occupied by Thomas Butler, last maker, leather and paper knife maker, and No.30 by Frederick Baker, tinsplate worker (Kelly's Directory). The businesses of both Thomas Butler and Frederick Baker are recorded as occupying their respective properties through to 1973-4 (Kelly's Directory), and possibly beyond.

There had been no change to the study area By 1918 (Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Fig. 13). In 1924 (Kelly's Directory) Thomas Butler was described as a paper box machine maker, and No. 28 Park Street was also the premises of 'Rogers' (The) Patent Safety Razor Co. Ltd. In 1928 Thomas Butler was known as a cutter & maker and a cutter & knife maker. By 1937 (Ordnance Survey 1:2500, Fig. 14) both buildings to the south of 27-28 had been demolished. Between 1951 and 1956, Ilett, Birch and Son Limited, general engineers, were listed at 27-28 Park Street, though 28 was still home to Thomas Butler, 'Makers of leather and paper knives and saddlers' tools'. By 1969 the firm of Thomas Butler were makers of 'rotary swaged products'.

8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Below-Ground Archaeology

The fact that Park Street lay within the area of the medieval town raises the possibility that features and contexts of medieval date survive within the study area. Although evaluation of the nearby site at the junction of Park Street and Bordesley Street suggested that early stratigraphy had not survived, this is off-set by the recovery of medieval archaeology from the Park Street excavation further to the south. Without further

evaluation we cannot be certain as to the survival of archaeological deposits at 27-28 Park Street.

The early maps show that the street frontage of the study area was occupied during the 18th century by a building of unknown date, but that after demolition (sometime before 1828) the plot remained empty until the erection of the present structure, probably in 1878. The construction of 27-28 Park Street only encroached on part of the street frontage, as it was provided with an access passage to the rear yard. There is a possibility, then, that pre 19th-century archaeology survives within the passageway. Only a small area of the rear yard has not been built on but it is possible that islands of archaeology remain relatively undisturbed. The excavation of evaluation trenches in the passageway and in front of the garage would provide sufficient information to assess the archaeological potential of the site.

8.2 Above-Ground Archaeology

The existing building is of late 19th-century date, of no particular architectural merit, retains no evidence for an industrial function, and has been considerably altered. It not recommended that any further recording work be carried out.

9.0 Acknowledgements

The documentary research for this project was undertaken by Malcolm Hislop and Sally Radford. Malcolm Hislop wrote this report and Nigel Dodds prepared the illustrations. Thanks are owed to the staff of Birmingham City Library Local Studies for their assistance.

10.0 Sources

10.1 Primary Sources

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10.3 Cartographic Sources

1731 W. Westley

1750 Samuel Bradford

1778 Thomas Hanson

1825 J. Piggot Smith

1847 Ackerman's Panoramic View

1855 J. Piggot Smith

1889 Ordnance Survey 1:500

1890 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1891 Blickley's and Hill's Conjectural Map of Birmingham in 1553

1905 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1918 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1937 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

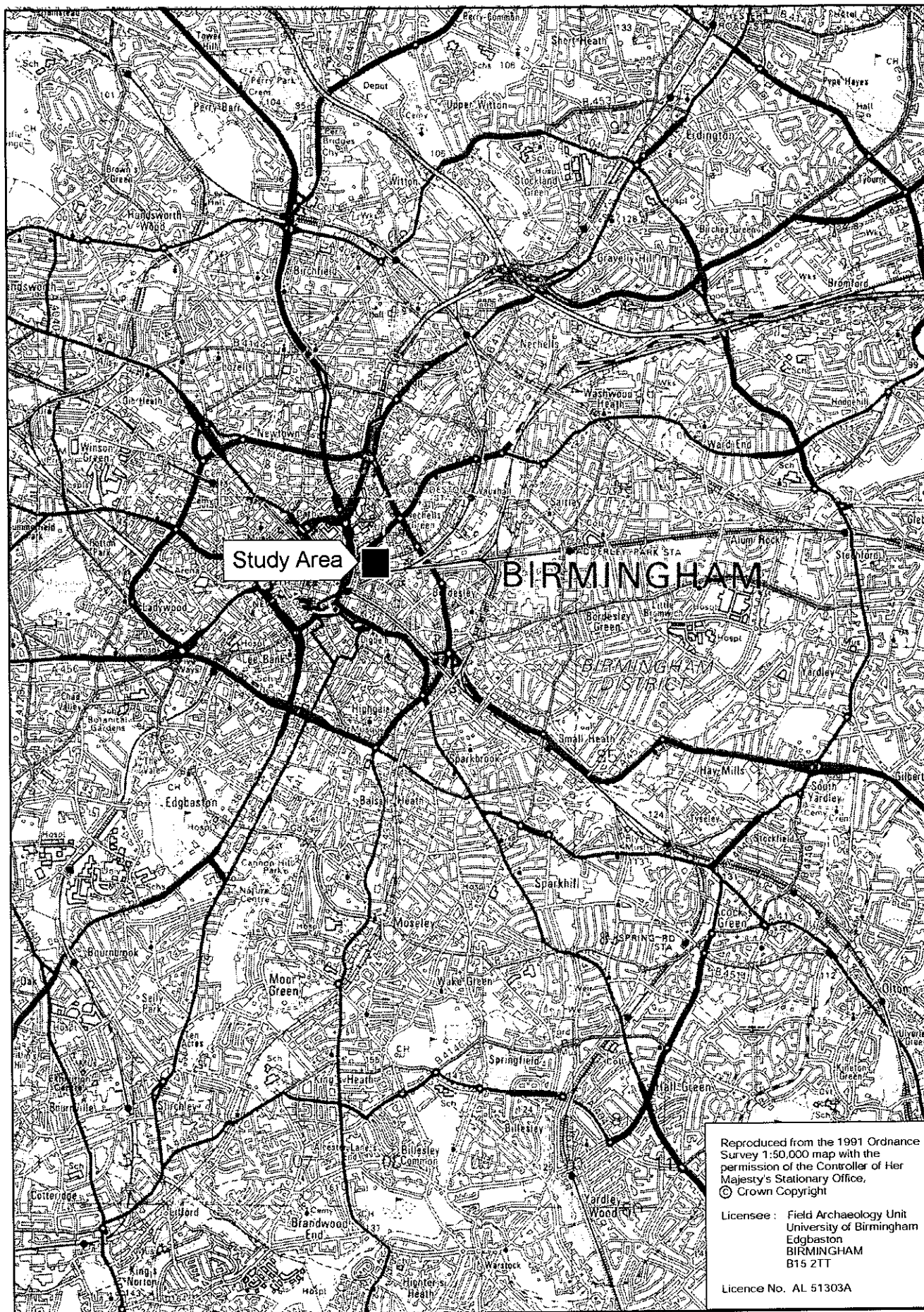


Fig.1

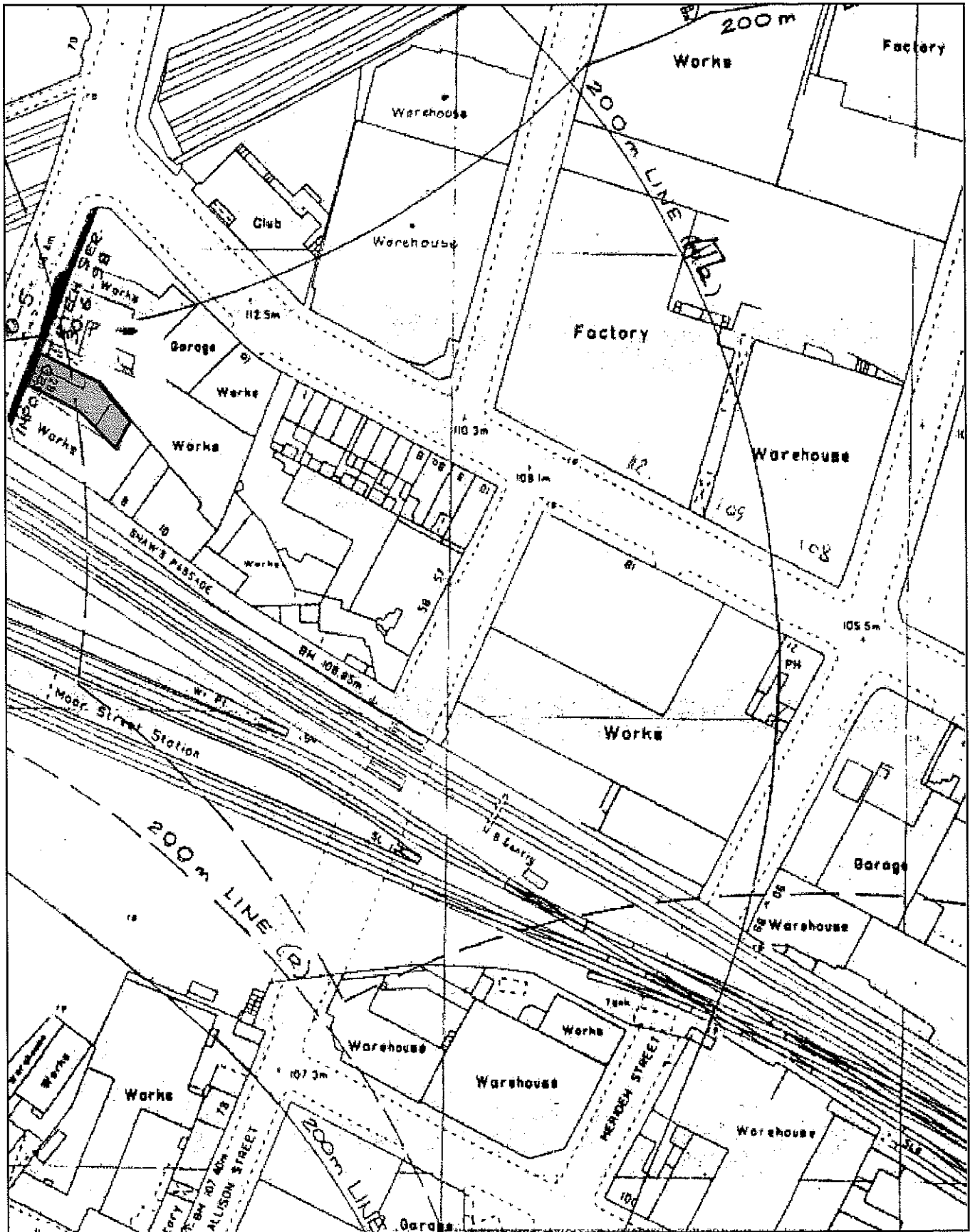


Fig.2

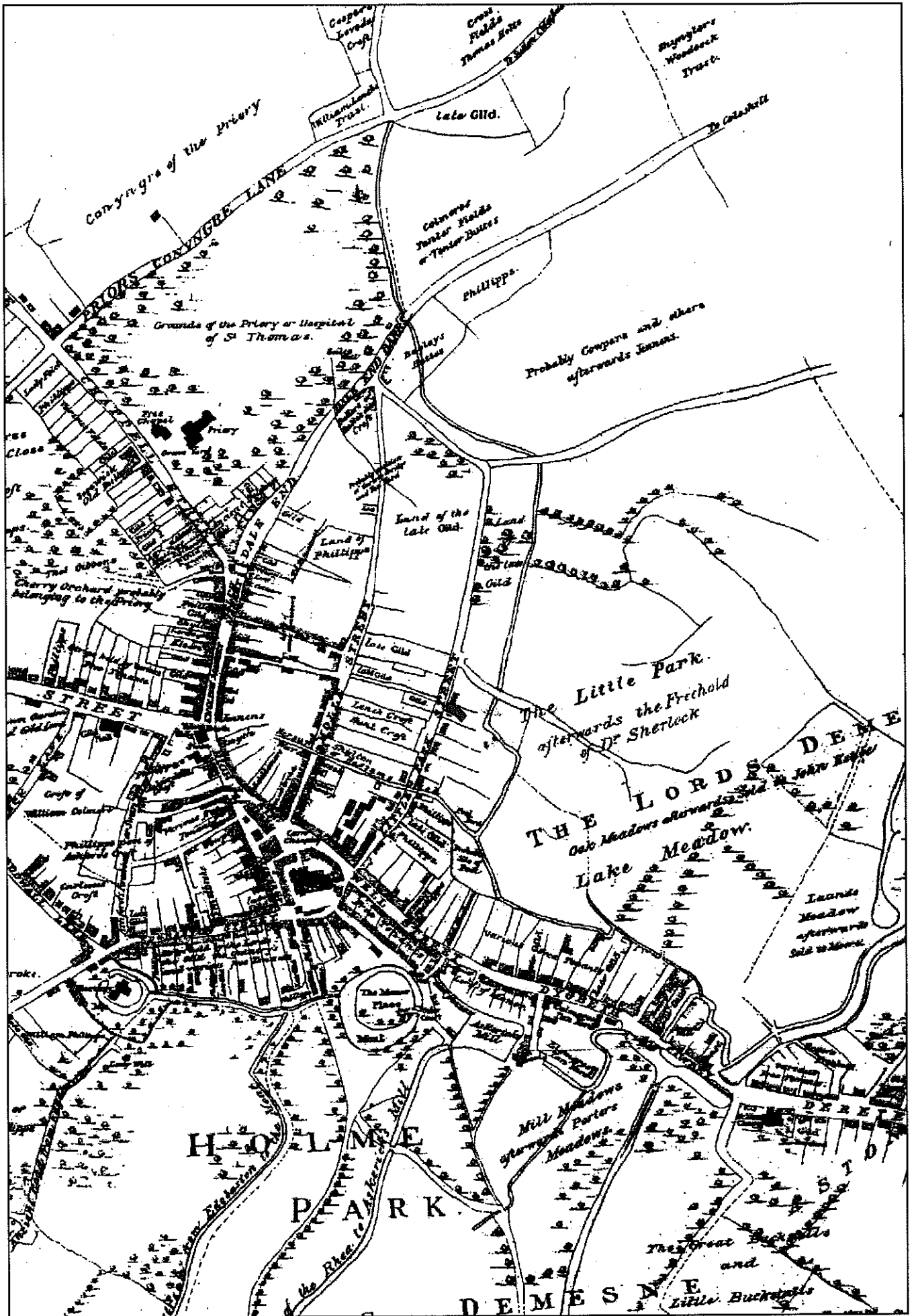


Fig.3 (1553)

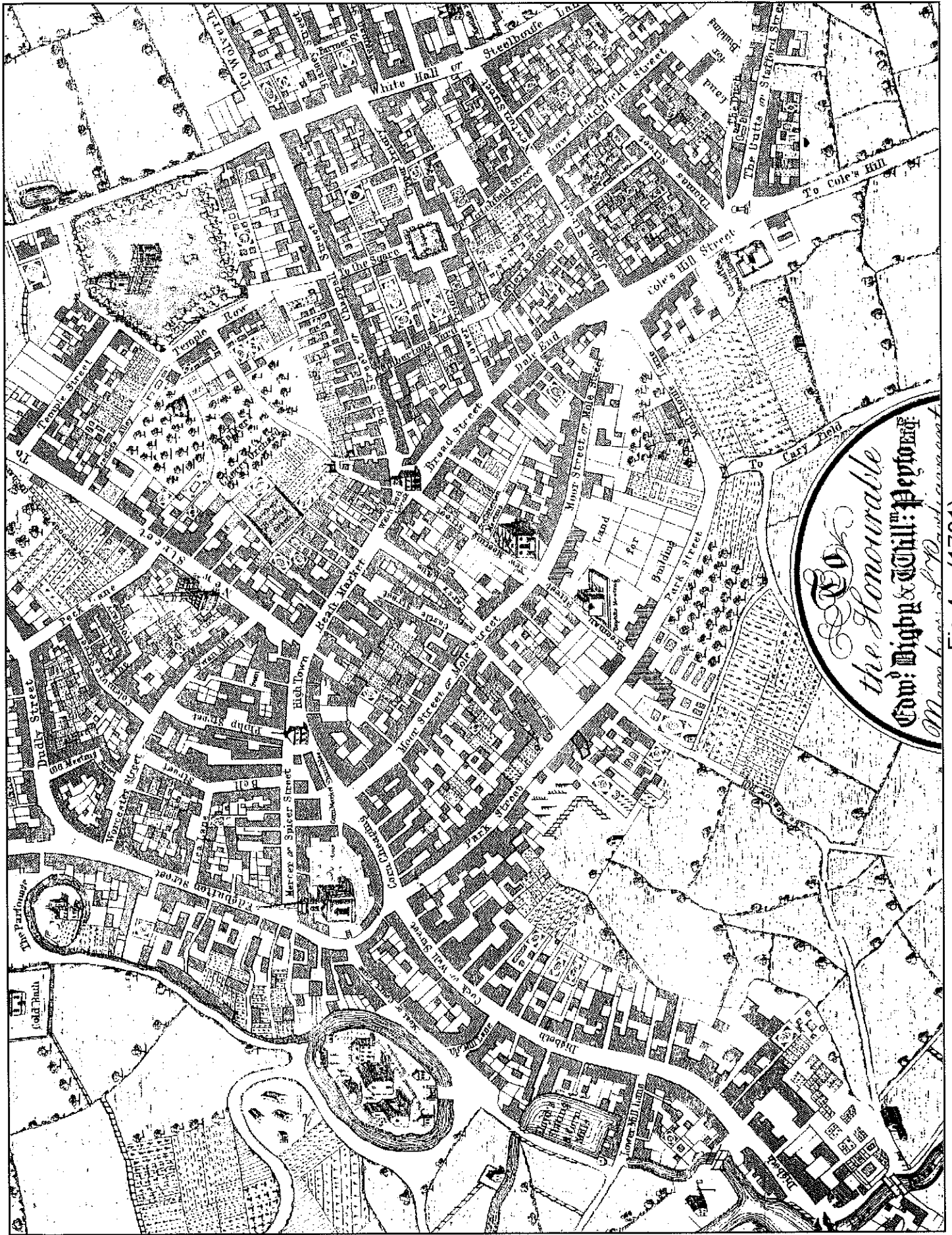


Fig.4 (1731)

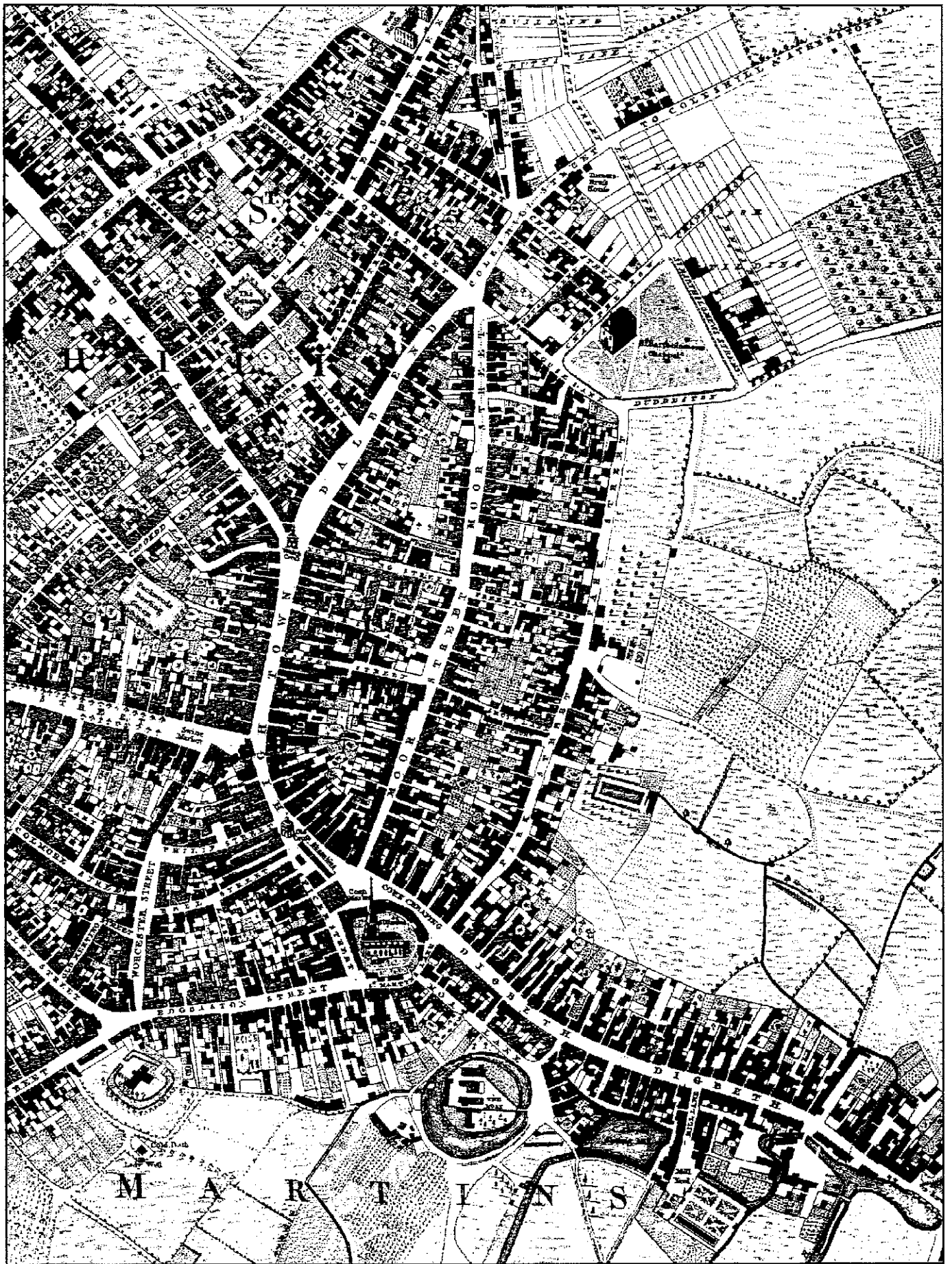


Fig.5 (1750)



Fig.6 (1778)



Fig.7 (1828)



Fig.8 (1840)

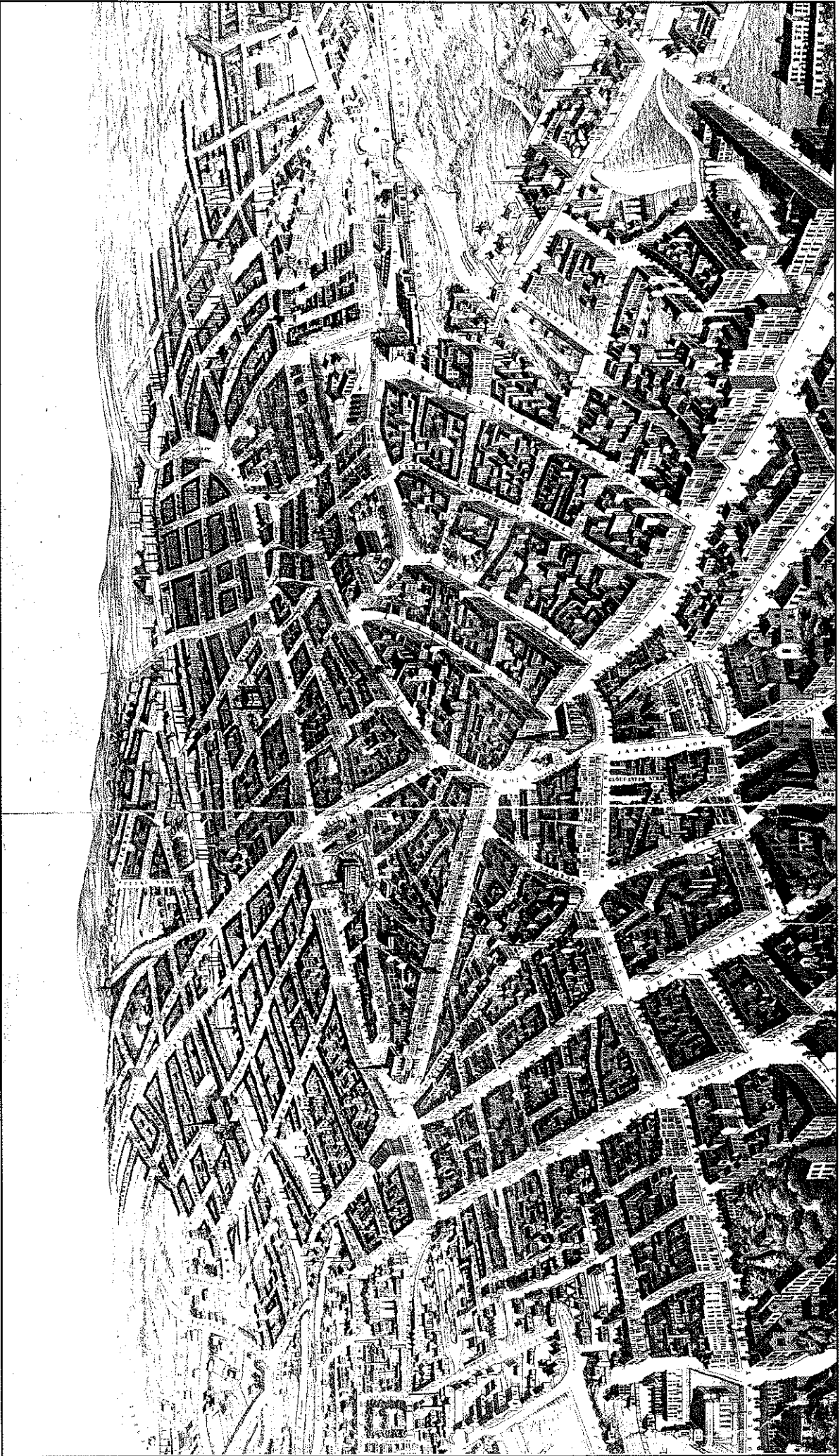


Fig.9 (1847)

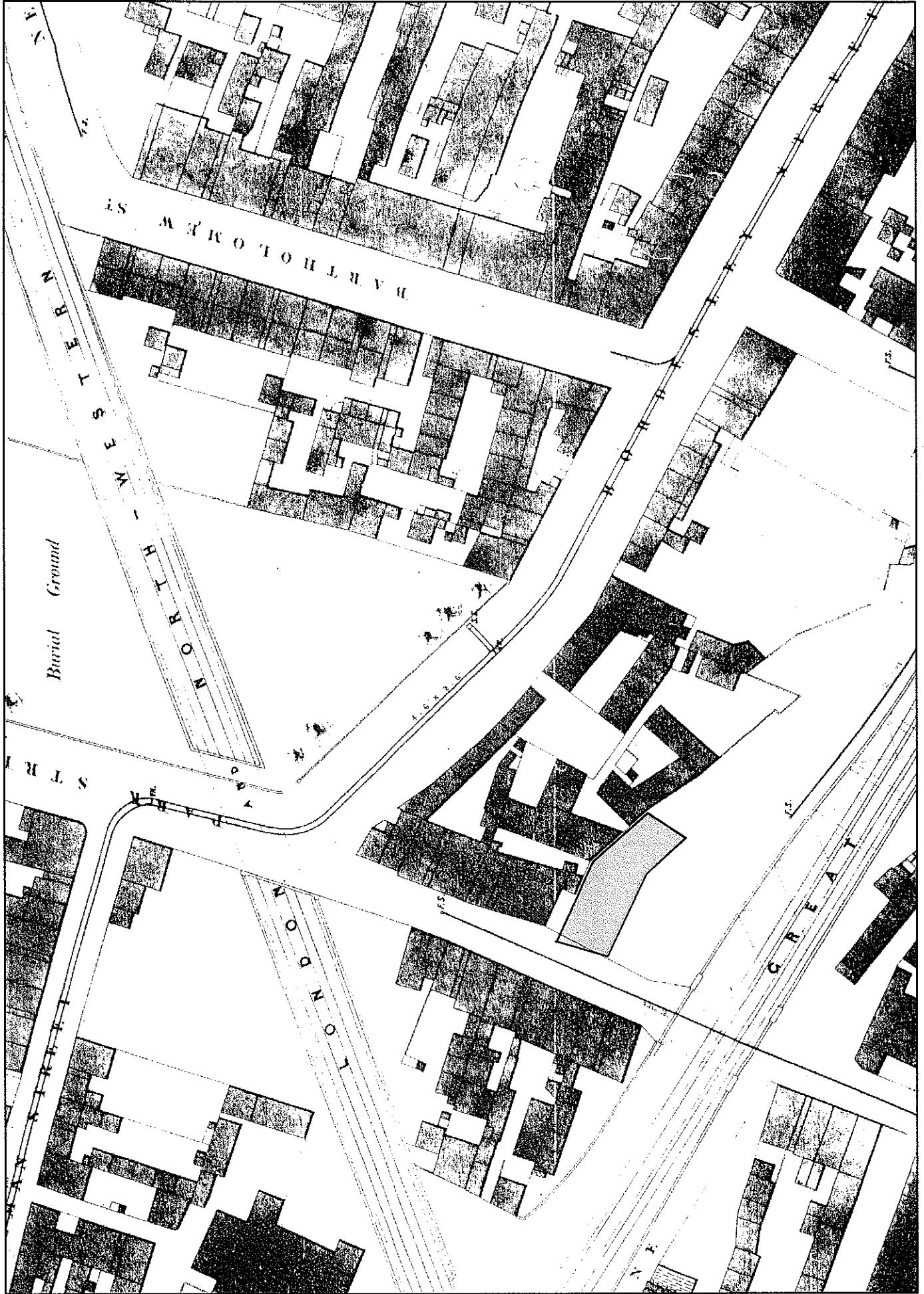


Fig.10 (1855)

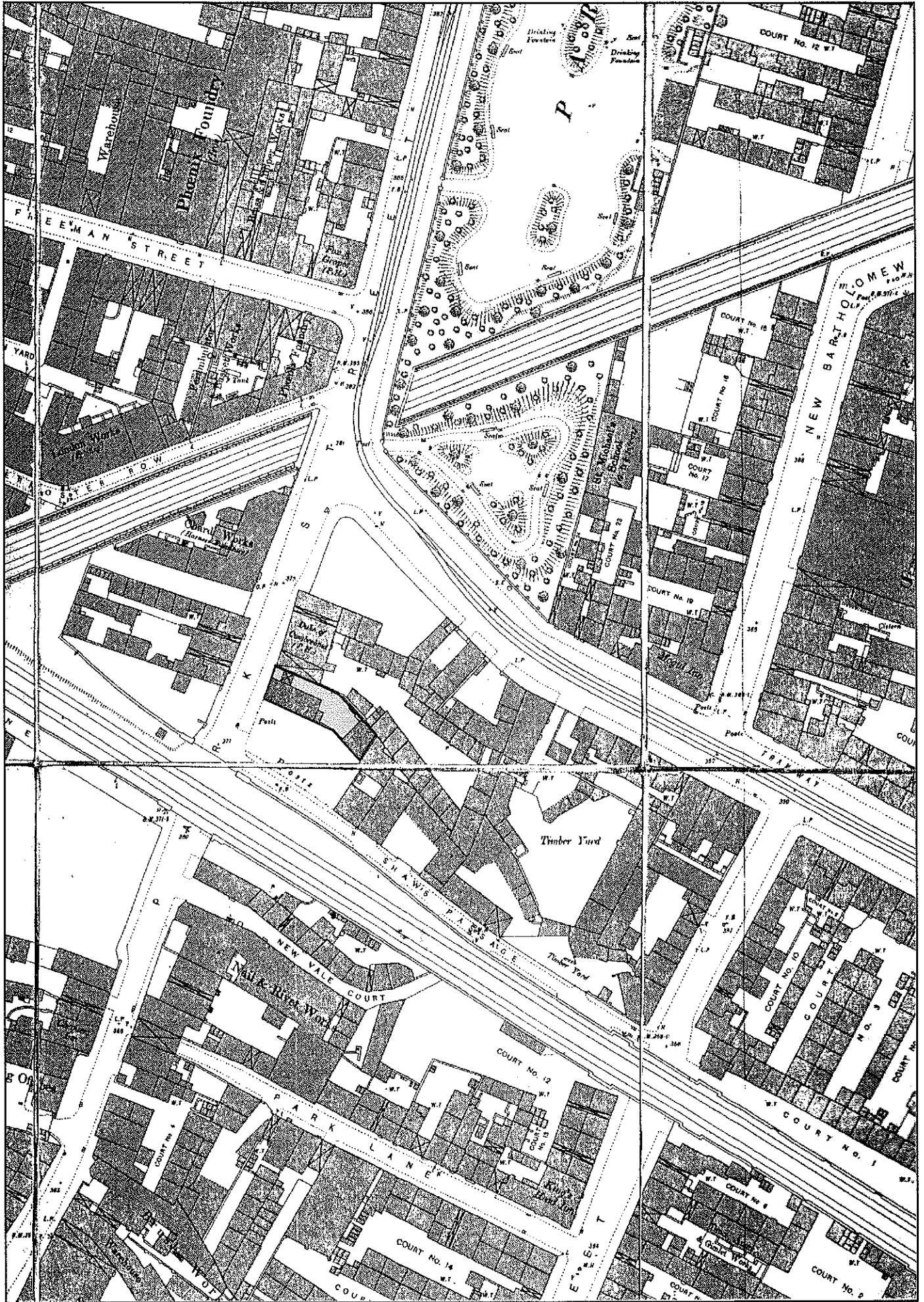


Fig.11 (1889)

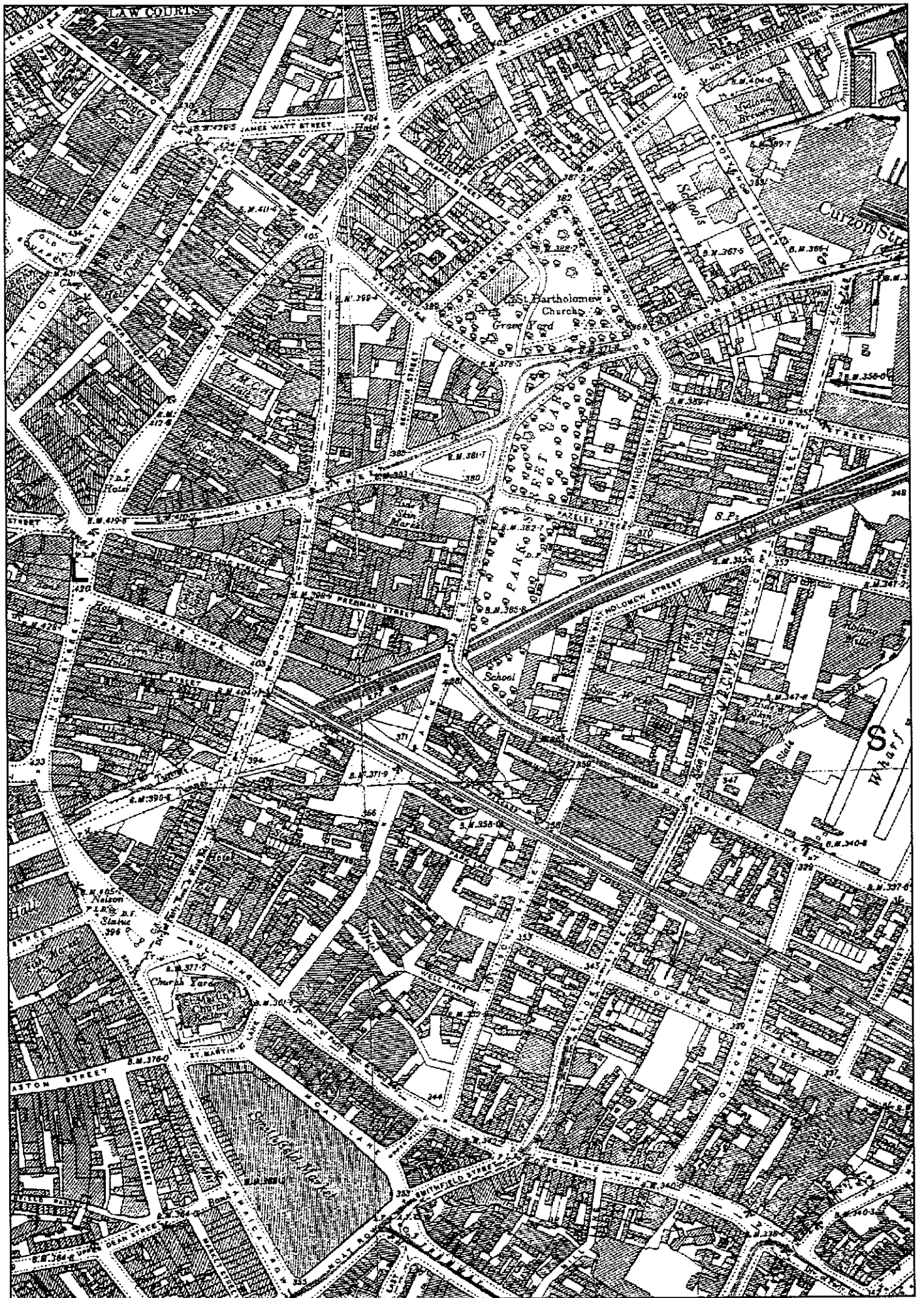


Fig.12 (1905)

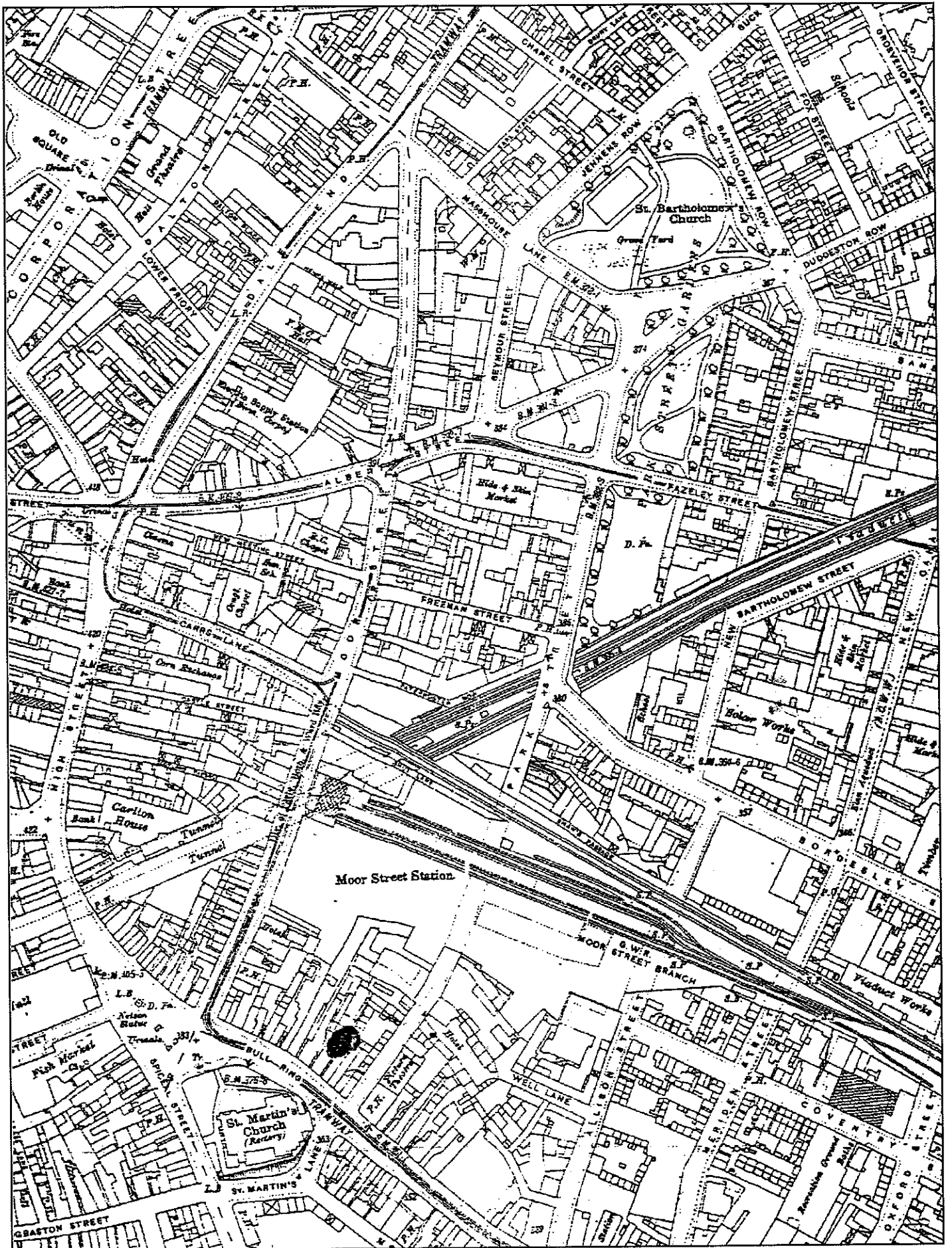


Fig.13 (1918)

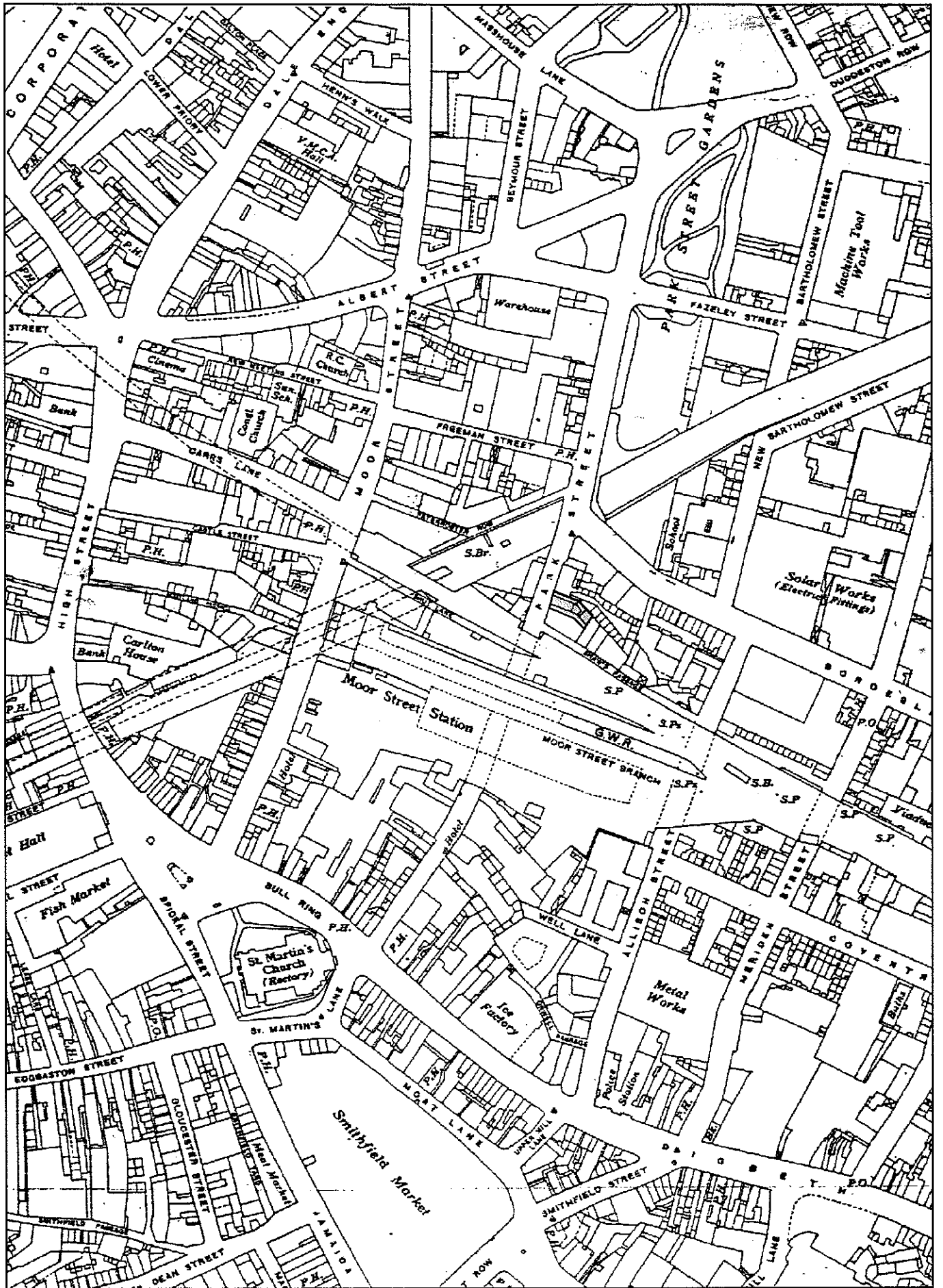


Fig.14 (1937)



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4

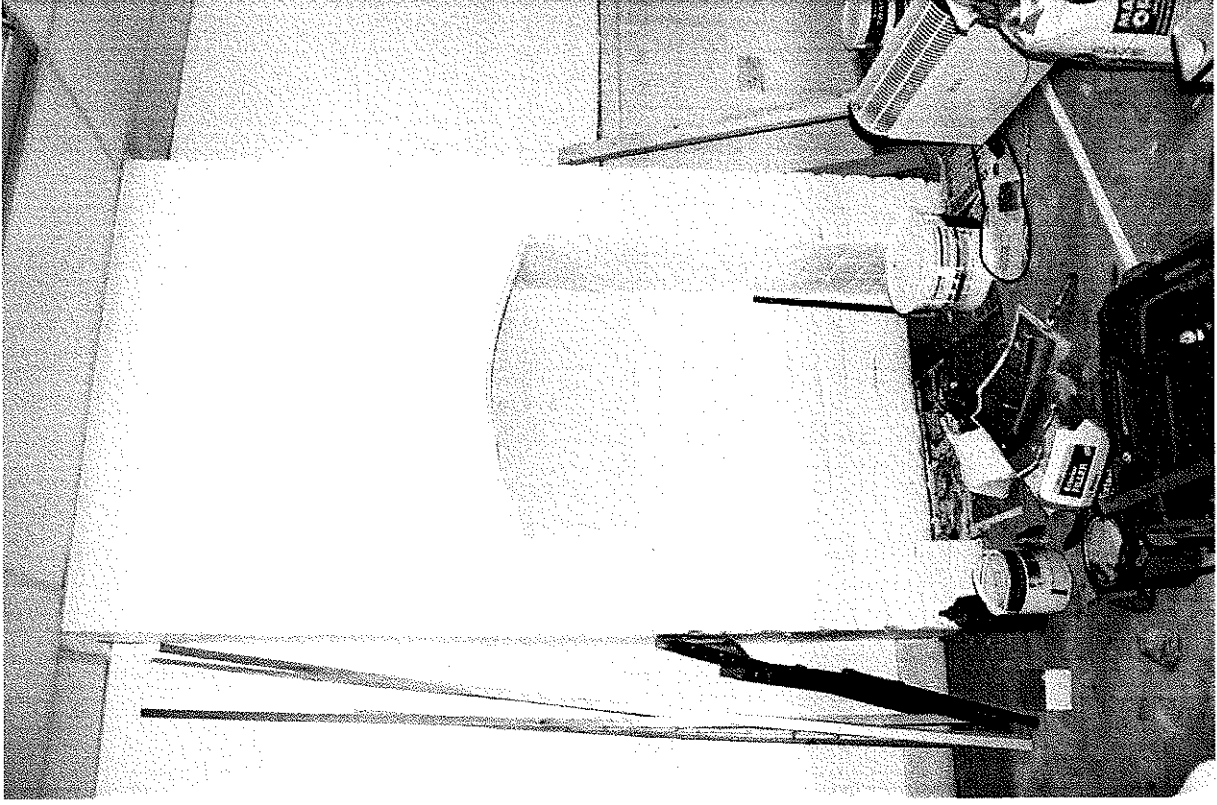


Plate 5

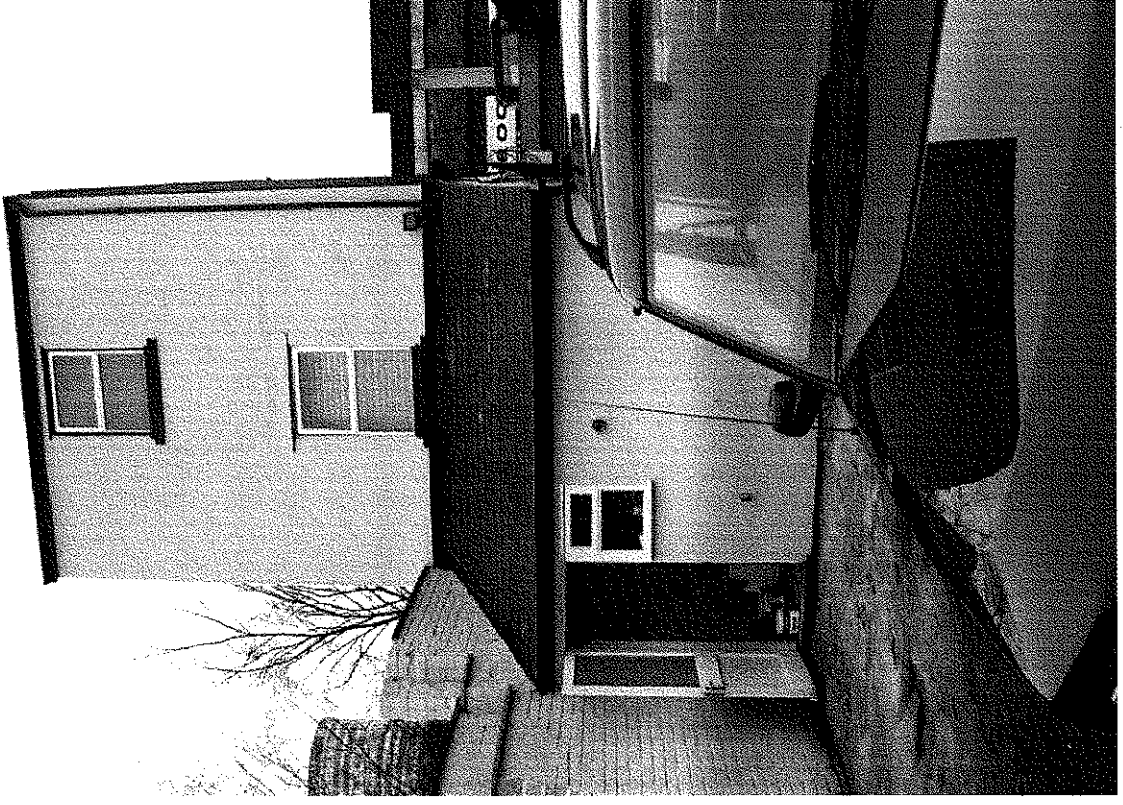


Plate 6

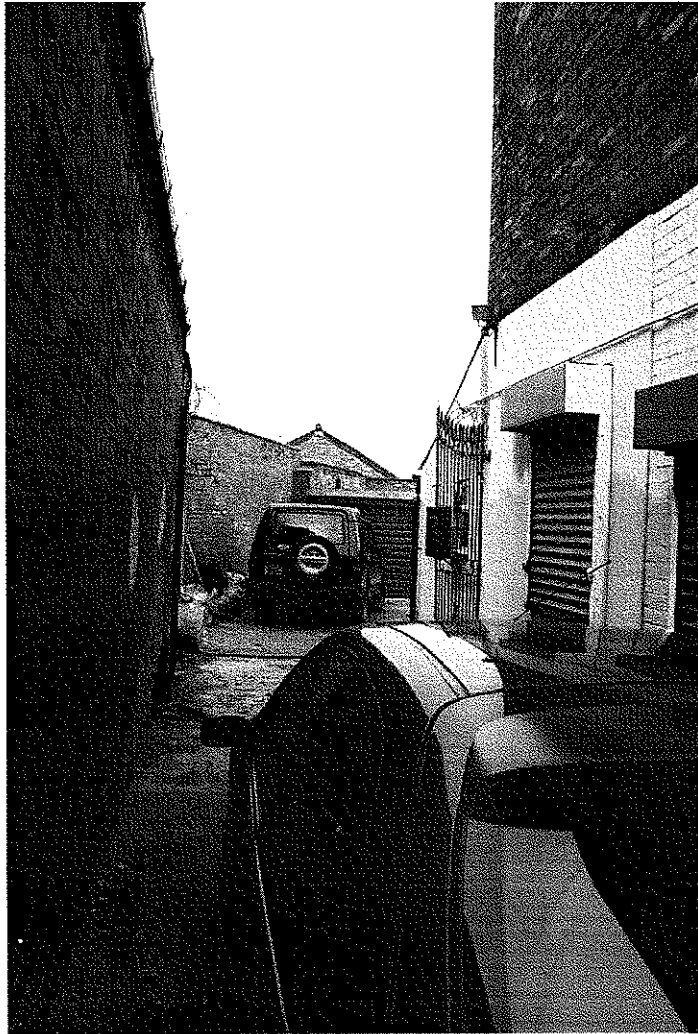


Plate 7

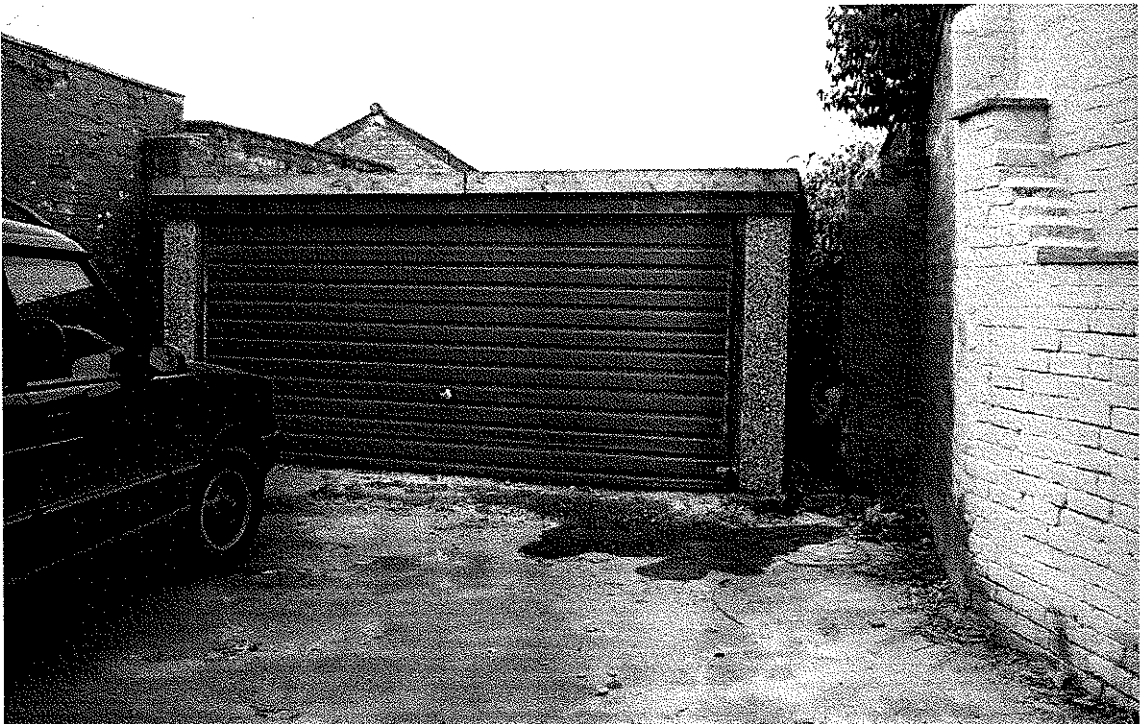


Plate 8



Plate 9