

**The Proposed City Park Site,
Birmingham City Centre, 2003**

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A Desk-Based Assessment 2003

By
Malcolm Hislop

For further information please contact:
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
Web Address: <http://www.barch.bham.ac.uk/bufau>

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The Proposed City Park Site, Birmingham City Centre: An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment 2003

SUMMARY

In September 2003 Birmingham Archaeology carried out a desk-based assessment of a site in Birmingham City Centre lying to the north of Albert Street and Curzon Street and between Bartholomew Row to the west and the Digbeth Branch canal to the east (centred on NGR. SP 078872). The work was undertaken on behalf of GVA Grimley and is the latest in a series of archaeological assessments occasioned by plans to regenerate the eastern part of the city. The current site has been proposed for the creation of a City Park to the northeast of the proposed new Library of Birmingham. The site is currently occupied by a number of industrial and commercial properties as well as an extensive open area, including car parks in front of Millennium Point. The study area remained rural in character until the mid-18th century. Housing development began to take place at the western end of the study area from around 1750, and the Digbeth Branch Canal was constructed at the eastern extremity of the study area in 1790. The main period of development, however, was the second quarter of the 19th century when the London and Birmingham Railway built a goods and stable yard within the study area, and streets were laid down on a gridiron pattern to accommodate intensive schemes of mainly working class housing. This largely 19th-century character survived until the mid-20th century, when the eastern half of the study area was redeveloped for industrial units. At the end of the 20th century the former London and Birmingham Railway goods and stable yard was demolished for the construction of Millennium Point and the associated landscaping.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of an archaeological desk-based assessment carried out by Birmingham Archaeology on behalf of GVA Grimley. It represents the latest phase of archaeological assessment occasioned by plans to regenerate the eastern part of the city ('Eastside'). This report is the third and final archaeological assessment of areas affected by proposals for a new Library of Birmingham, and City Park. The other related archaeological assessments comprise a report concerning the Masshouse redevelopment (also including areas outside the present scheme, Watt 2001), and a report concerning the site of the proposed new library itself (Watt 2002). The current assessment is concerned with a strip of land to the north of Albert Street and Curzon Street, extending northward up to a line roughly parallel with the southern frontage of Millennium Point, which it is proposed to develop as a City Park (Figs. 1-2). A summary of the archaeological assessment of the entire Library of Birmingham and proposed City Park scheme will be contained in the Environmental Statement, which will include proposals for archaeological field evaluation and mitigation, in advance of construction. Where relevant, information from the surrounding area, such as listed buildings, is also included. Details of the broader archaeological background may be found in Watt 2001, and will not be repeated here.

The area of the proposed City Park (hereafter described as the study area) adjoins the Digbeth Branch Canal, part of Warwick Bar conservation area, and the development would have an impact on its setting as well as on those of a number of historic buildings. It would also involve demolition of existing properties and could have

implications for below-ground archaeological remains. In accordance with Policy 8.36 of the City Council's Unitary Development Plan and government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Archaeology and Planning) an assessment of the archaeological implications is required in advance of consideration of the proposals.

The assessment considered all appropriate sources recommended by the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessments* (Institute of Archaeologists 1994) and by the City Council's *Guidance on Sources*.

2.0 LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA (Figs 1-2)

The study area comprises a strip of land centred on NGR SP 078872 and defined by the frontage of Millennium Point to the north, by Curzon Street and Albert Street to the south, and by the Digbeth Branch Canal to the east. The west end of the Study Area falls within the car park immediately west of Bartholomew Row.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the assessment (Birmingham Archaeology 2003) were:

- To define the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains within the study area and its immediate surroundings, including historic buildings.
- To assess the potential of the study area for contributing to our understanding of the historical development of this part of Birmingham.

4.0 METHOD

The desk-based assessment comprised a site inspection (including external inspection of existing buildings) and an examination of published and unpublished written records, illustrations, maps, and archaeological and geological records held at Birmingham City and University of Birmingham Libraries. The Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted.

5.0 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Central Birmingham is built on part of a narrow Keuper sandstone ridge that stretches from the Lickey Hills in the southwest to Sutton Coldfield in the northeast. To the east and southeast of the city, owing to a fault in the sandstone, the ridge falls away sharply towards Digbeth and the valley of the River Rea, one of the tributaries of the Tame. The study area occupies a position towards the bottom of the ridge where it begins to level out into the floodplain of the River Rea (Plate 1).

6.0 STUDY AREA AND BUILDINGS INSPECTION

Little of historic interest survives within the study area above ground level. Almost the only remnant of the pre-1890 streetscape to have survived comprises a row of buildings along the north side of Albert Street (Nos 105-115, Plate 2) between Bartholomew Row and Fox Street. To the east of Grosvenor Street is a large flat car park, belonging to Millennium Point. Between Millennium Point and the Digbeth

Branch Canal is an area of later 20th-century industrial and commercial premises. There are no buildings of special architectural or historic interest within the study area but there is small number of listed and locally listed buildings on its periphery, and one on the periphery of the proposed Library of Birmingham site which could not be assessed as part of the desk-based assessment on that site (Watt 2002, 3), and so is dealt with here. A building on the western edge of the study area (7-12 Bartholomew Row, Plate 3) was included in the Masshouse assessment (Hislop 2001) and the description from that report is reproduced here.

105-115 Albert Street (Plate 2)

This row of buildings has been much altered during the 20th century through the application of render, insertion of shop fronts and the replacement of windows (though not the window openings), but is evidently earlier. It comprises two three-storey, three-bay corner buildings, flanking a lower three-storey range. No. 105, on the corner of Bartholomew Row, is probably to be identified with the Golden Horse Public House, and No. 115, on the corner of Fox Street, with the Thatched House Public House. Both buildings were in existence by 1845 and the bracketed window sills suggest a mid-19th century date, though the rendering makes it impossible to tell whether these features are original. There were buildings on this plot from the late 18th century, so it is possible that the block retains earlier fabric than is immediately apparent.

7-12 Bartholomew Row (Christopher Wray Lighting) Grade II listed (Plate 3)

This property appears to comprise a pair of houses with workshops attached to the rear. The street frontage is mid-19th-century in character, and in a similar style throughout. However it seems to be of more than one structural phase, and probably masks an accretive development, so it is possible that the building incorporates earlier remains. The houses are built of red brick with plaster dressings, and have separate slate roofs behind plain parapets. They are of three storeys, the proportions being reduced at second floor level. The house to the left is of three bays, that to the right of five bays. Each has a central doorway with semi-circular head, though the right hand one is slightly more elaborate having a pilastered architrave and projecting keystone. Most of the windows have moulded architraves, hood moulds and cornices, and although survival is patchy at ground floor level, the fenestration of the upper storeys is retained and forms an interesting ensemble. The first floor windows are linked horizontally by a sill string continuous across the two houses, beneath which the openings are emphasised by pairs of corbels. Above, the cornices of the first floor windows merge into the aprons of the second floor openings.

The Woodman, Albert Street (Grade II listed) Plate 4

A Queen Anne style Public House of 1896-7 by the Birmingham architects, James and Lister Lea, the two-storey Woodman is built of red brick under a slate roof and is situated on a prominent corner site with elevations facing both Albert Street and New Canal Street. The two elevations form a continuous frontage of semi-circular arched windows and doorways, the latter emphasized by flanking wall shafts and first-floor pedimented projections. Four-paneled doors with overlights, and large fixed-light windows with wooden panels below. Paired first-floor windows with square heads

under common three-centred arches containing tympana with scrolled panels (Girouard 1984, 237).

LMS Railway Goods Office, New Canal Street (Grade I listed) Plate 5

Curzon Street Station was built in 1838 as the Birmingham terminus of the London and Birmingham Railway and, like Euston, the company's London terminus, was designed by the architect Philip Hardwick. This building flanked the formal entrance to the station and accommodated the company's Birmingham offices. It is a neo-classical structure executed in ashlar (rusticated at ground level), and faces west, fronting New Canal Street. A giant Ionic portico, tetrastyle prostyle, dominates this three-storey (reduced proportions to second floor) structure. The columns stand on a stone platform plinth broken by a flight of steps to the central doorway. The windows are glazing bar sashes with balustraded aprons, raised surround and console bracketed hoods at first floor level, and bracketed sills and raised surrounds at second floor level.

The Eagle and Tun, New Canal Street (Grade B locally listed) Plate 6

The Eagle and Tun is a late 19th-century Public House with classical detailing designed by James and Lister Lea of Birmingham. It is built of red brick with terracotta dressings and has a slate roof with crested ridge tiles. This two-storey building of L-shaped plan occupies a street corner position with frontages to both New Canal Street and Banbury Street. Apart from the main entrance at the corner there were two doors towards Banbury Street and one towards New Canal Street. The ground storey is arranged as a continuous series of segmental-arched doorways and windows with raised fluted keys and hood moulds articulated by canted pilasters. Fascia immediately above the keystones area surmounted by a moulded string. Paired first floor windows with segmental arches and Gibbs surrounds. Fluted frieze to moulded eaves cornice.

Moby Dick's, Penn Street (Grade II listed) Not illustrated

Formerly the Eagle and Ball, a Public House of *c* 1840-50 built of red brick with stucco trim and hipped slate roof. This three-storey building occupies a corner position with elevations to Penn Street and Gopsal Street. Three bays to each elevation in a continuous Public House front articulated by panelled pilasters, and lower two-bay wing to Gopsal Street. Corner doorway and two others. Panelled risers to windows with late 19th century leaded glazing. Upper windows are glazing bar sashes with architrave surrounds. First floor windows have bracketed sills and cornices, the centre ones on each front pedimented.

Ashted Canal Locks, Digbeth Branch Canal (Grade B locally listed) Plate 7

The Ashted Locks abut the eastern boundary of the proposed City Park. They date from the construction of the canal *c* 1790, but have been subjected to later alteration. Brick and sandstone dressings with later use of concrete. The west bank of the canal is currently overgrown, but it is possible that there are structural elements hidden beneath the undergrowth. The canal lies within the Warwick Bar Conservation Area.

A length of this canal adjoining the eastern study area boundary has recently been restored.

7.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

7.1 Previous archaeological work

In 1997 Gifford and Partners carried out a programme of archaeological evaluation and building recording on the former Curzon Street Station goods yard prior to redevelopment of the site with the construction of Millennium Point. Two former stable blocks dating from the 1870s and 1897 respectively were recorded, as well as a two-storey structure built in 1845 and identified as an accommodation office for Gloucester Goods Warehouse, though later used as a stable. Three evaluation trenches were excavated, two of which confirmed the respective positions of two demolished 19th-century buildings. A sealed cultivation soil in Trenches 2 and 3 was related to the use of the site as a garden in the 18th century (Gifford and Partners 1997a and 1997b).

A watching brief maintained at the site by Gifford and Partners the following year during construction groundworks recorded sub-surface deposits including silts containing 19th ceramic fragments and sandy silts containing charcoal fragments and 16th and 17th ceramic fragments. These deposits represented the earliest phase of activity, pre-dating the construction of goods yard. The watching brief also recorded the survival of brick foundations and remains of two railway turntables dating from the 19th century all of which were depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1890 (not illustrated). In addition, some other structures and concrete pads were discovered which were believed to date from after 1952 (Gifford and Partners 1998a and 1998b).

These are the only two pieces of fieldwork to have been undertaken within the study area itself, but projects have been carried in adjacent areas, most notably in the Masshouse area. The Masshouse desk-based assessment (Watt 2001) concluded that it had the potential to provide an insight into the growth of 18th-century Birmingham as it began to expand eastward. The 18th-century development of the area was largely domestic in character, consisting of tightly packed court housing much of which probably doubled as premises for domestic industry.

In 2001 BUFAU maintained a watching brief on the site of Masshouse Circus to the northwest of the present study area during groundworks for a new highway which the desk-based assessment had indicated would cut the east side of the former burial ground of the (now demolished) 18th-century St Bartholomew's chapel (Duncan and Neilson 2001). Although some human bone, coffin furniture and a few broken gravestones were recovered, no intact burials or grave cuts were identified and it was concluded that clearance and leveling of the site after World War II had been carried out effectively.

A second watching brief was carried out by BUFAU in 2002 at two other locations within Masshouse Circus (Krakowicz and Rudge forthcoming). The foundations of brick buildings fronting onto the western side of Chapel Street and dating from the 18th and 19th centuries were recorded in one of these locations. At the other location

four graves containing human remains were discovered, apparently from the St Bartholomew's Chapel burial ground.

In 2002 a desk-based assessment of the proposed new Library of Birmingham was undertaken (Watt 2002). The proposed library is to be located immediately to the east of the Masshouse study area and immediately southeast of the area assessed in this report. Like the Masshouse area, the proposed Library of Birmingham site had formed part of the manorial demesne and was not developed until the late 18th/19th century when it too became built up with domestic structures within which small industries were carried on.

7.2 Historical development of the study area

16th to 18th century

The Study Area lies to the north-east of the area occupied by the medieval town of Birmingham and seems to have been undeveloped at this time. The situation is reconstructed in Bickley's and Hill's conjectural map of Birmingham in 1553 (Bickley and Hill 1890) which shows the study area as lying north of the demesne lands and comprising open land and fields with a roughly east-west aligned road or track following the approximate alignment of the later Curzon Street (Fig. 3).

Westley's map (not illustrated) confirms that the study area was still countryside in 1731 and occupied by fields, but by 1750 when Samuel Bradford's map appeared, the Chapel of St Bartholomew was in existence (Fig. 4). The grounds of the chapel formed a triangular shape defined by 'Chappel Row' to the northwest, St Bartholomew's Street (now Bartholomew Row) to the northeast and Masshouse Lane and Duddeston Street to the south, and the land is now occupied by a car park. To the east of St Bartholomew's Street another street, Jenning Street (now Fox Street), had been laid out and several buildings had been erected within the resultant street block. To the east of Jenning Street a block of land had been laid out in strips perhaps for building plots and beyond it was an orchard.

By 1778 (Hanson's map, not illustrated) Grosvenor Street had been constructed parallel to Jenning Street apparently on the line of the plot laid out by 1750. The east side of Bartholomew Row and the north side of Duddeston Row (formerly Duddeston Street) as far as Grosvenor Street were completely built up. A lesser amount of development had taken place on Jenning Street and Grosvenor Street where the buildings were interspersed with gardens. There were still orchards to the east of Grosvenor Street but a new road (New Market Street), parallel to Grosvenor Street, had been driven through to Duddeston Row.

The entries in the Birmingham Directory of 1781 suggest that the two street blocks at the western end of the study area were occupied mainly by tradesmen and manufacturers. The biggest group of these was related to the metal industries that were the staple of the Birmingham economy. In Bartholomew Row, for instance, were a 'dye-sinker', a banker and sword cutler, a plater and a brassfounder, whereas in Jennings Row were a dye-sinker, bridle bit maker and watch chain maker. Otherwise there was no particular emphasis. The only other occupant listed in Jennings Row was a glass pincher, and the only two entries for Grosvenor Street were a chafing dish

maker and a spectacle maker. In Bartholomew Row there was also a coach painter, a gilder, silverer and bluer, a refiner, a victualler and a merchant and factor. The fact that there was also a gentleman listed may suggest that St Bartholomew's Chapel conferred a certain amount of prestige on its immediate neighbourhood.

The former manorial demesne to the south of the study area remained rural well into the later 18th century, when it was held by Dr Sherlock, Bishop of London (1678-1761), and it was not until the construction of the Digbeth Branch Canal around 1790 (Stephens 1964, 34) that any major change occurred. Earlier development had been hindered by the refusal of the proprietor, Dr Sherlock, to grant building leases on the grounds that 'his land was valuable, and if built upon, his successor, at the extirpation of the term would have the rubbish to carry off'. Sherlock, by the terms of his will, even went so far as to debar his successors from granting such leases (Stephens 1964, 8). It was not until 1766 that this impediment was removed by the passing of a private Act of Parliament. This allowed Sherlock's successor, Sir Thomas Gooch, to grant long term leases and consolidate his holdings by exchanging plots of land.

The Digbeth Branch Canal was built on land leased from the Gooch Estate. It was first depicted on 'A Plan of the intended Navigation Canal from the Town of Birmingham into the River Severn near the City of Worcester' drawn up by John Snape in 1789 (not illustrated). The Warwick and Birmingham Canal followed in 1793, and the building of both canals was to prove a catalyst for accelerated expansion of the town east of Park Street and north of Digbeth.

19th century

Even so, the effect was far from immediate. John Kempson's map of 1810 (not illustrated), which shows the entire length of the study area as far as the Digbeth Branch Canal, demonstrates that the only built up areas remained within the Bartholomew Row, Jenning Street/Jennings Row (now renamed Fox Street) and Grosvenor Street block. However, plots had been laid out along New Market Street which show that the city was continuing to expand gradually eastwards. By 1825 a grid of streets had been laid across the whole study area though there was, as yet, little sign of building within the street blocks which retained a pastoral aspect. On the other hand, Fox Street (formerly Jenning Street) was now completely built up (Fig. 5).

It was only in the late 1830s with the coming of the railways that the study area was to take on the unmistakable urban character that defined it until the mid-20th century. The railways exploited the as yet relatively undeveloped River Rea valley as a natural transport corridor into Birmingham. The London and Birmingham Railway, which opened in 1839 built its Birmingham terminus at Curzon Street with a goods and stable yard within the study area. Ackerman's Panoramic View demonstrates that by 1847 a major transformation of the area had taken place (Fig. 6). The station and its associated buildings and yards straddled Curzon Street (formerly Duddeston Street), to occupy most of the area to the south of the study area as well as a large block to the east of Grosvenor Street including New Market Street which was absorbed into the yard. The Bartholomew Row/Fox Street/ Grosvenor Street block was to a great extent occupied by terrace housing including court housing. Further to the west, headstones within the grounds of St Bartholomew's Chapel indicate that interments were carried out here. To the east of the station yard, the street blocks laid out by 1825 were

occupied by court housing. The east end of the study area, however, remained undeveloped and maintained a single house surrounded by open ground.

Ackerman's View is largely confirmed by Piggot Smith's maps of 1850-55 (not illustrated), which show in detail the terraced and back to back housing grouped round courts. The Post Office Directory of 1845 shows that a number of Public Houses were in existence within the study area by this time. At the corner of Duddeston Row and Bartholomew Row was the Golden Lion, at the corner of Duddeston Row and Fox Street, the Thatched House, a little way up on the east side of Fox Street, the Old Ship, and on the west side of Cardigan Street, the Grand Junction. Both the Old Ship and Grand Junction have now been demolished, though the Golden Horse and the Thatched House survive in much altered states (105-115 Albert Street, see above).

As in 1781 the study area was occupied in 1845 by a population of tradesmen and manufacturers, and the impression is still one of small home-based businesses, though the large rise in the population meant that there was a greater variety of trades than previously. A number of the occupants were engaged in the metal industries, including two brass founders, a tin plater, and a German silver spoon maker, but the proportion was not so high as it had been in 1781. If any one group of trades can be said to have predominated it was the clothing manufacturers including tailors, boot and shoe makers, button makers, milliners, dressmakers, a stay maker, and a cloth cap maker. There were numerous shopkeepers and beer retailers, with a concentration in Duddeston Row. Gun manufacturers are also represented in the lists, and in No. 2 Court, Bartholomew Row were two separate spectacle frame manufacturers. Finally, listed under 'Railway Terminus' on Duddeston Row (now Curzon Street) are several carriers including Pickford and Co., the Birmingham Company with premises on the Digbeth Branch Canal, and J. Shipton and Co., a Wolverhampton firm based in Albion Street on the Birmingham Canal (Hislop and Cherrington 2003, 2).

The area appears much the same on the Ordnance Survey map of 1889, though certain changes had been made at the western end of the study area (Fig. 7). Clearances had been made on the west side of Grosvenor Street for the construction of two schools, and at 9 and 10 Bartholomew Row, immediately north of the study area, a glass gilding works owned by Jenkinson and Co. had been built. These premises are to be identified with the present 7-12 Bartholomew Row occupied by Christopher Wray Lighting.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 General

The assessment has established that the study area was largely rural land until the mid-18th century and that there is no evidence of the presence of earlier archaeology, although it cannot be conclusively ruled out. The 18th century development was limited to St Bartholomew's Chapel and the two street blocks at the west end of the site, and to the Digbeth Branch Canal at the east end. These areas may be able to contribute towards an understanding of the 18th century development of Birmingham.

8.2 Above-ground archaeology

All the listed or locally listed buildings identified by this project lie outside the study area, and the creation of the City Park is unlikely to have an adverse effect on their settings, given that most of the 18th and 19th century buildings within the study area itself have been demolished. The main exception to the widespread clearance of the area during the 20th century is the row of buildings on the north side of Albert Street between Bartholomew Row and Fox Street. The two corner buildings are probably to be identified with the Golden Horse and Thatched House Public Houses that were in existence in 1845, and it is probable too that the intervening properties are at least as old. There is also a possibility that this row of buildings contains earlier, perhaps late 18th-century material, dating from the first development of the site. Further investigation may elucidate this possibility.

8.3 Below-ground archaeology

At the western extremity of the site, beneath the present car park, it is possible that graves containing human remains may be discovered. In the two street blocks immediately east of the former chapel grounds foundations of 18th and 19th-century properties are to be expected. In front of Millennium Point, the remains of the Curzon Street Station Goods yard buildings, which formerly existed below the ground surface, have almost certainly been destroyed during construction of Millennium Point. Between Millennium Point and Penn Street the documentary evidence suggests that the only below ground archaeology comprises the foundations of 19th-century buildings, disturbed by 20th century foundations.

9.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The project was researched by Dr Malcolm Hislop and managed by Alex Jones, who also edited this report. Nigel Dodds prepared the illustrations. Thanks are owed to Dr Mike Hodder, Birmingham City Archaeologist, and to the staff of Birmingham City Library for their assistance.

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1905 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1918 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

1937 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

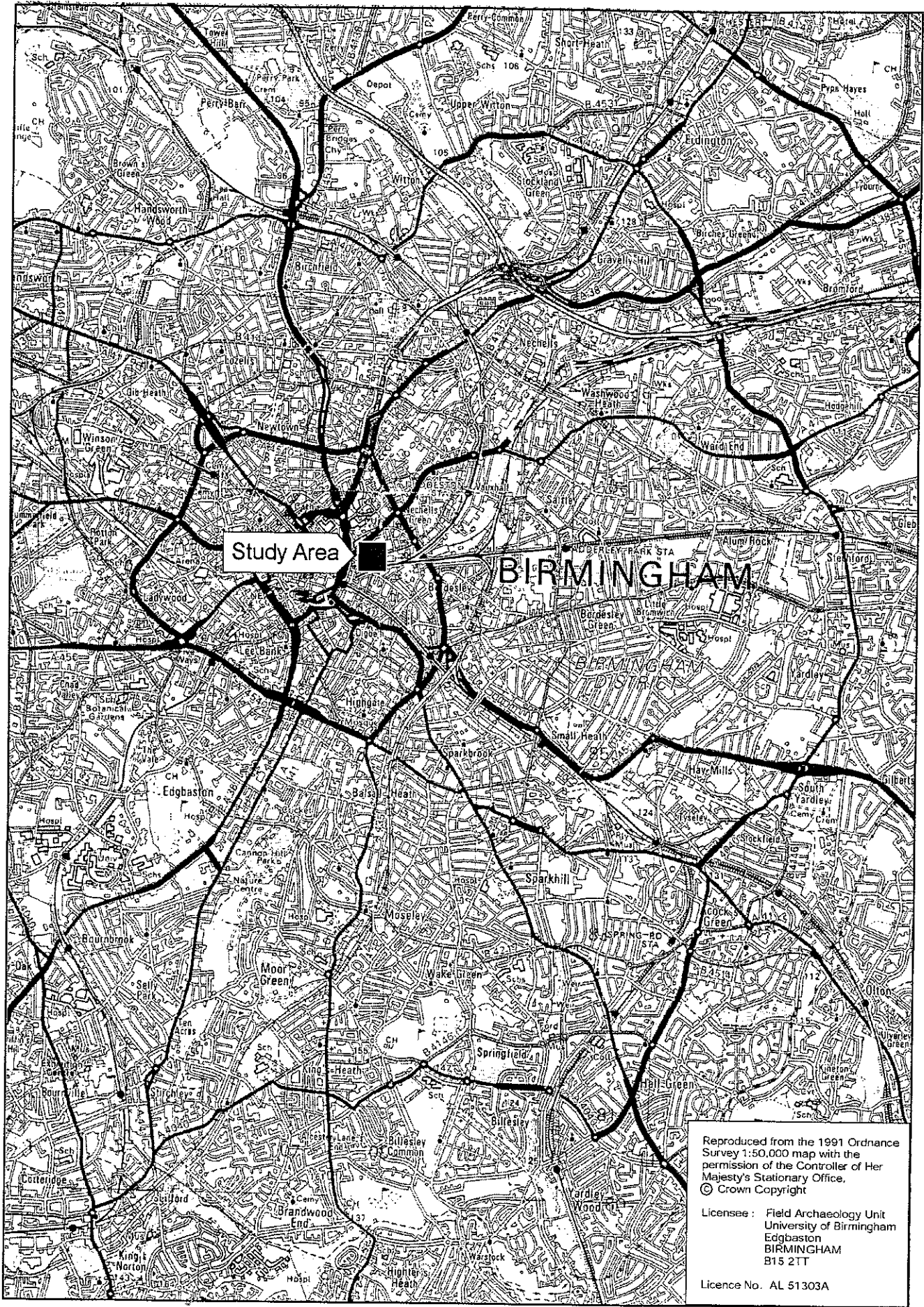


Fig.1

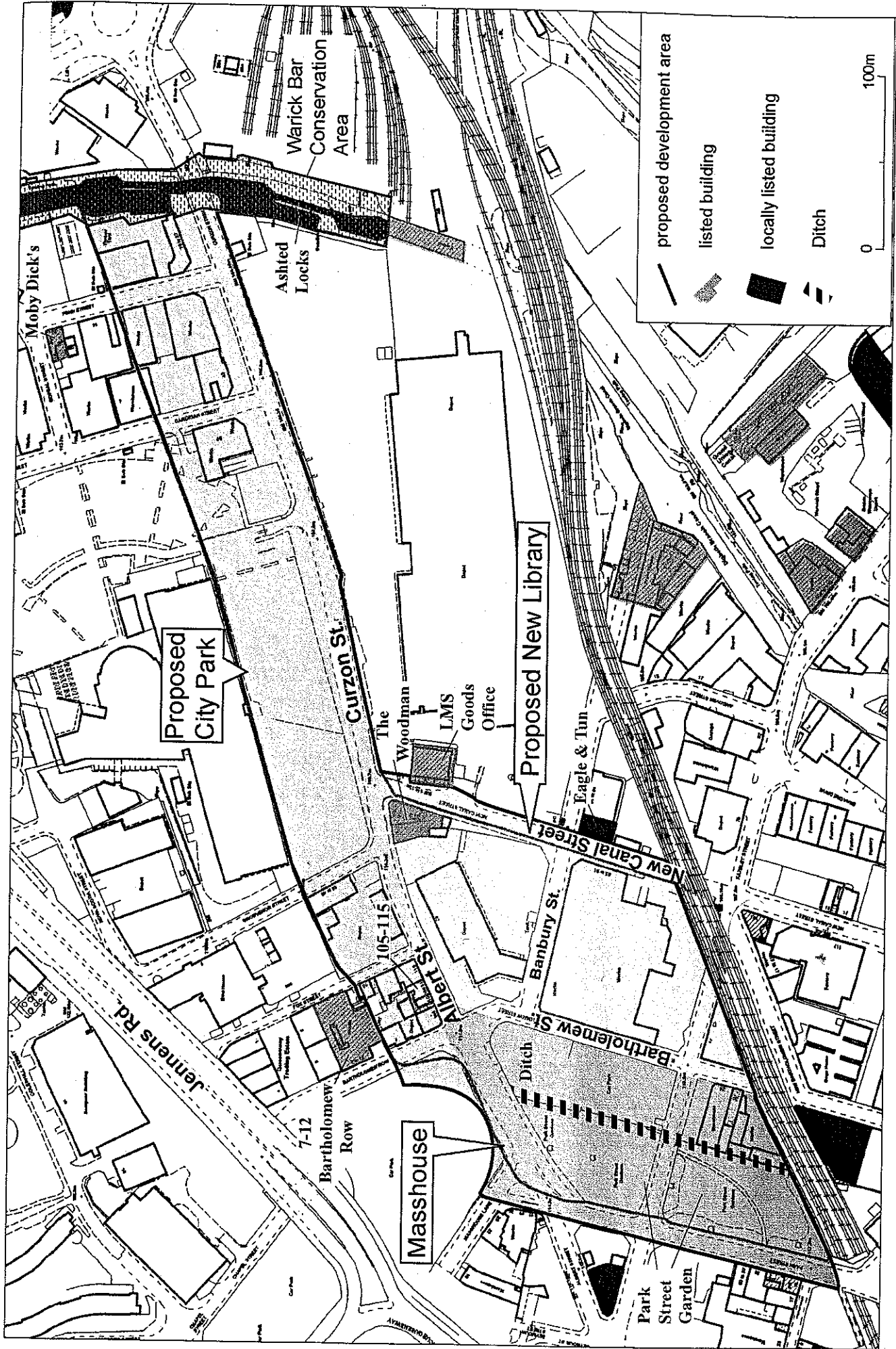
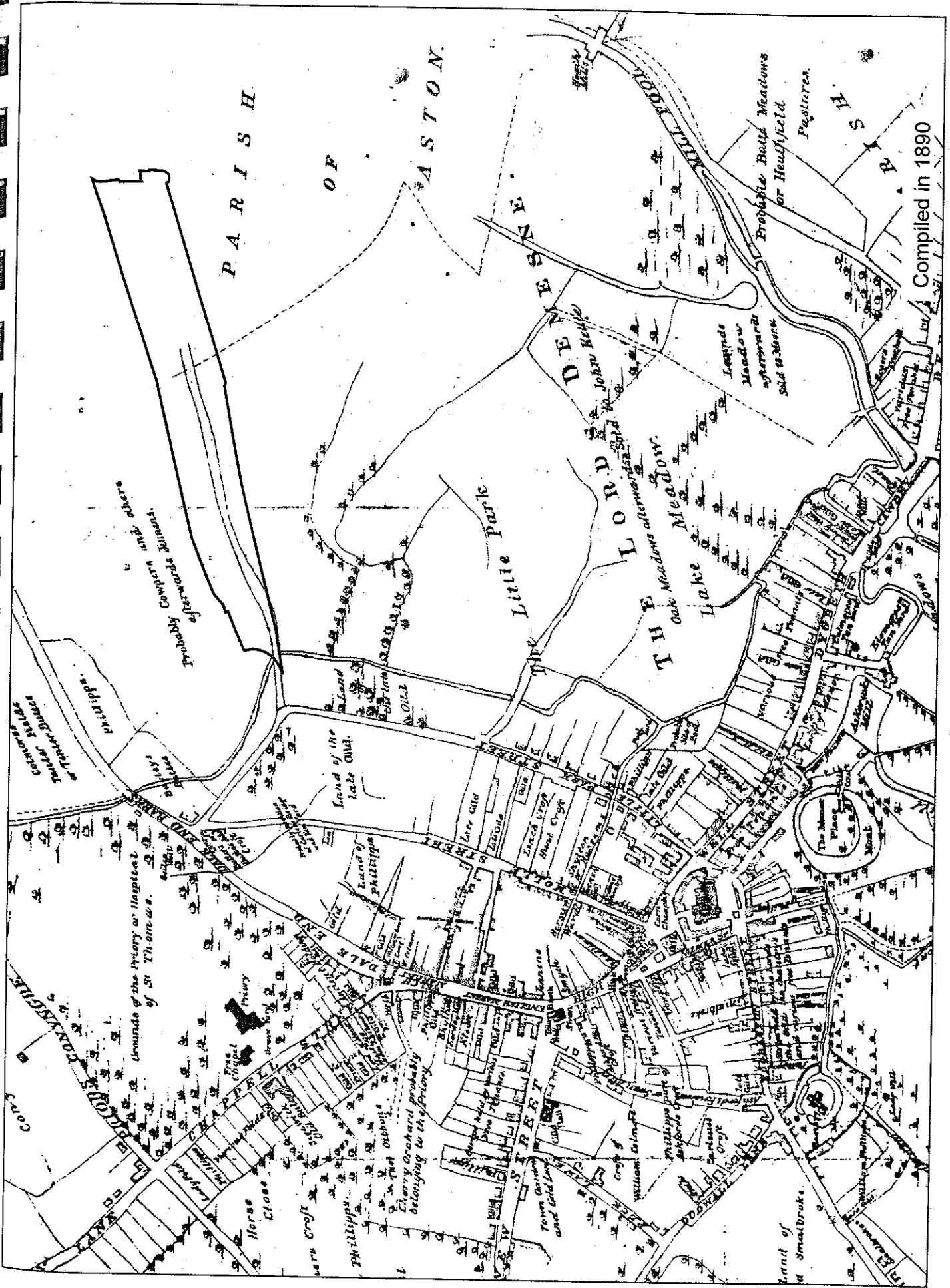


Fig.2



Compiled in 1890

Fig.3 (1553)

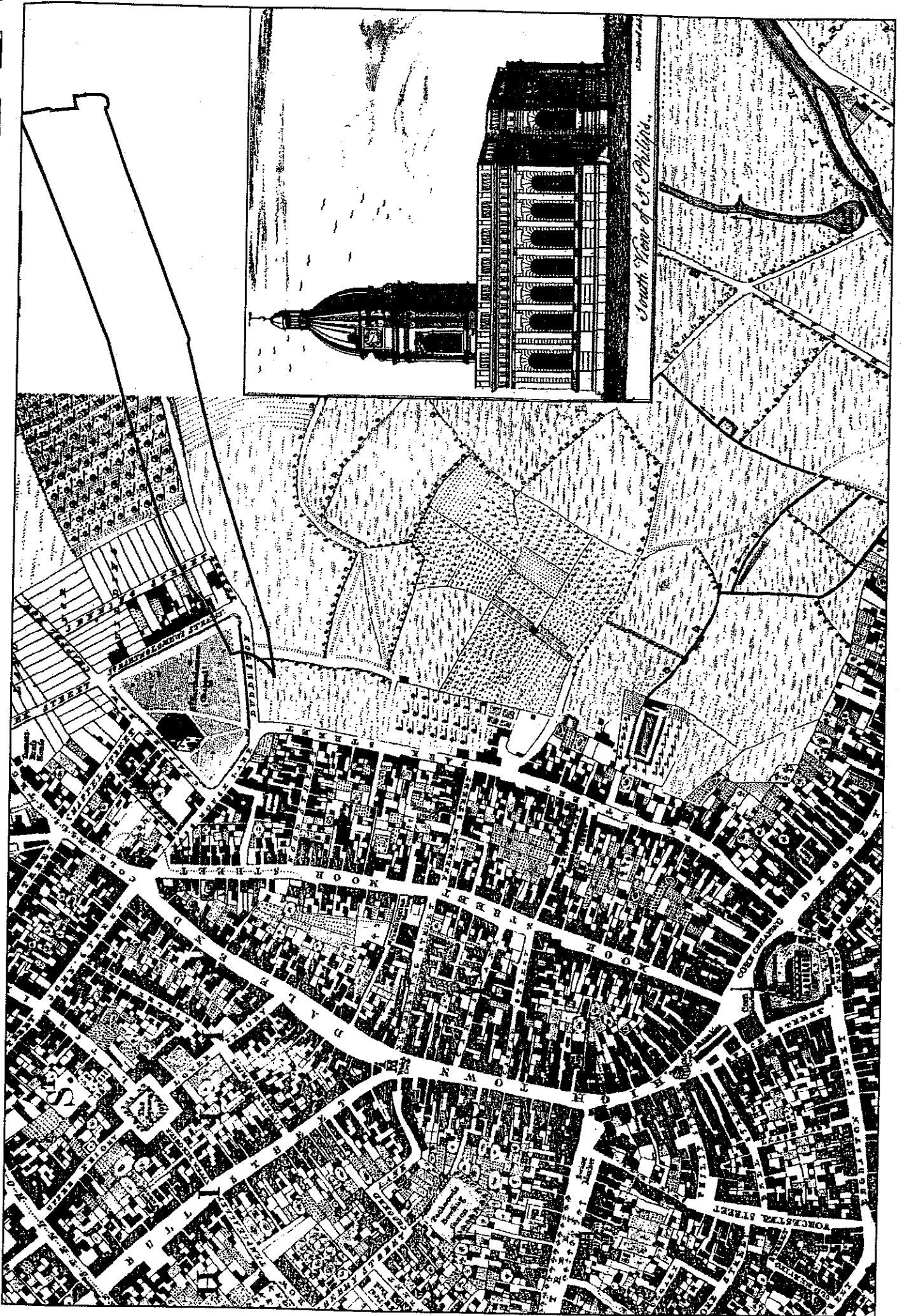


Fig.4 (1750)

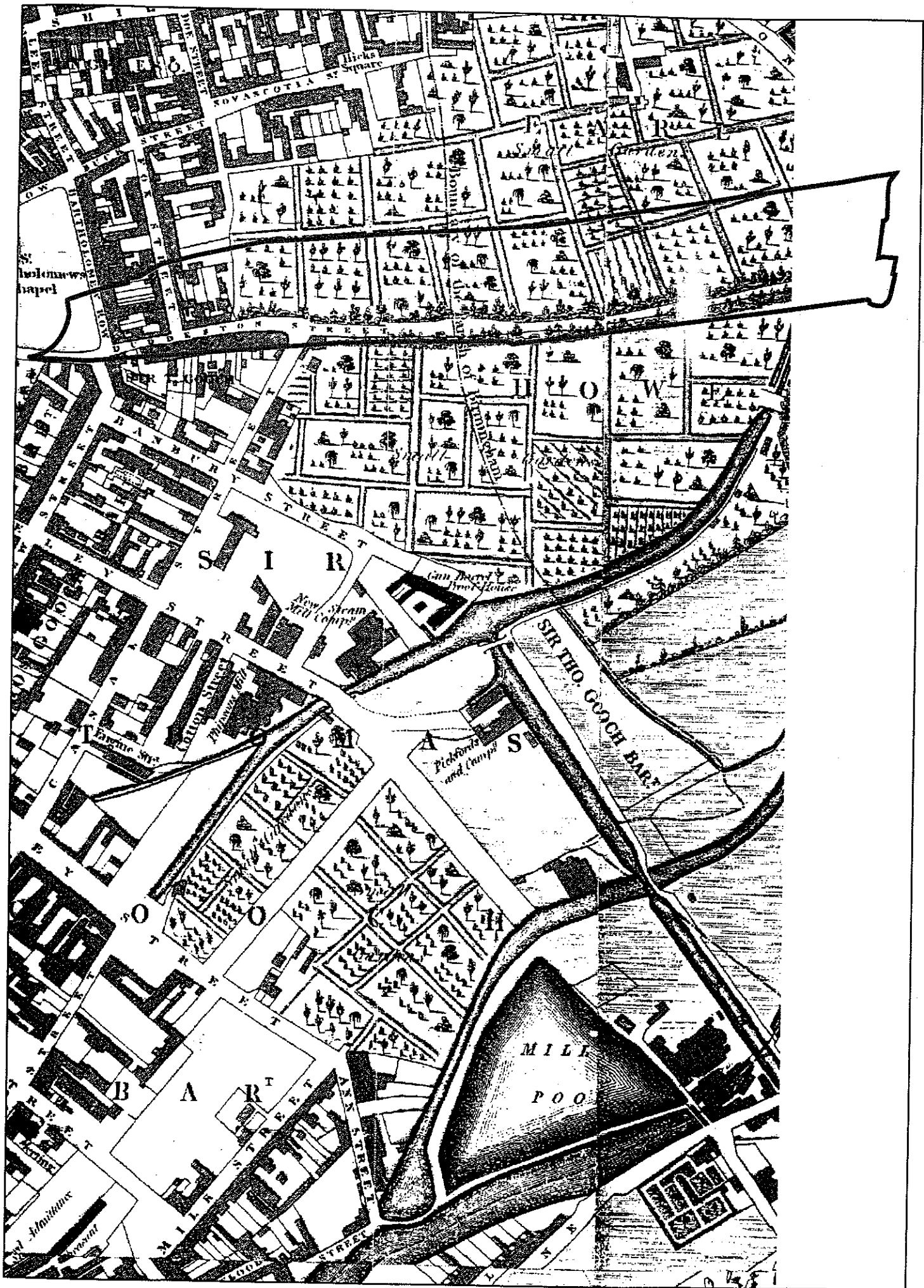


Fig.5 (1828)

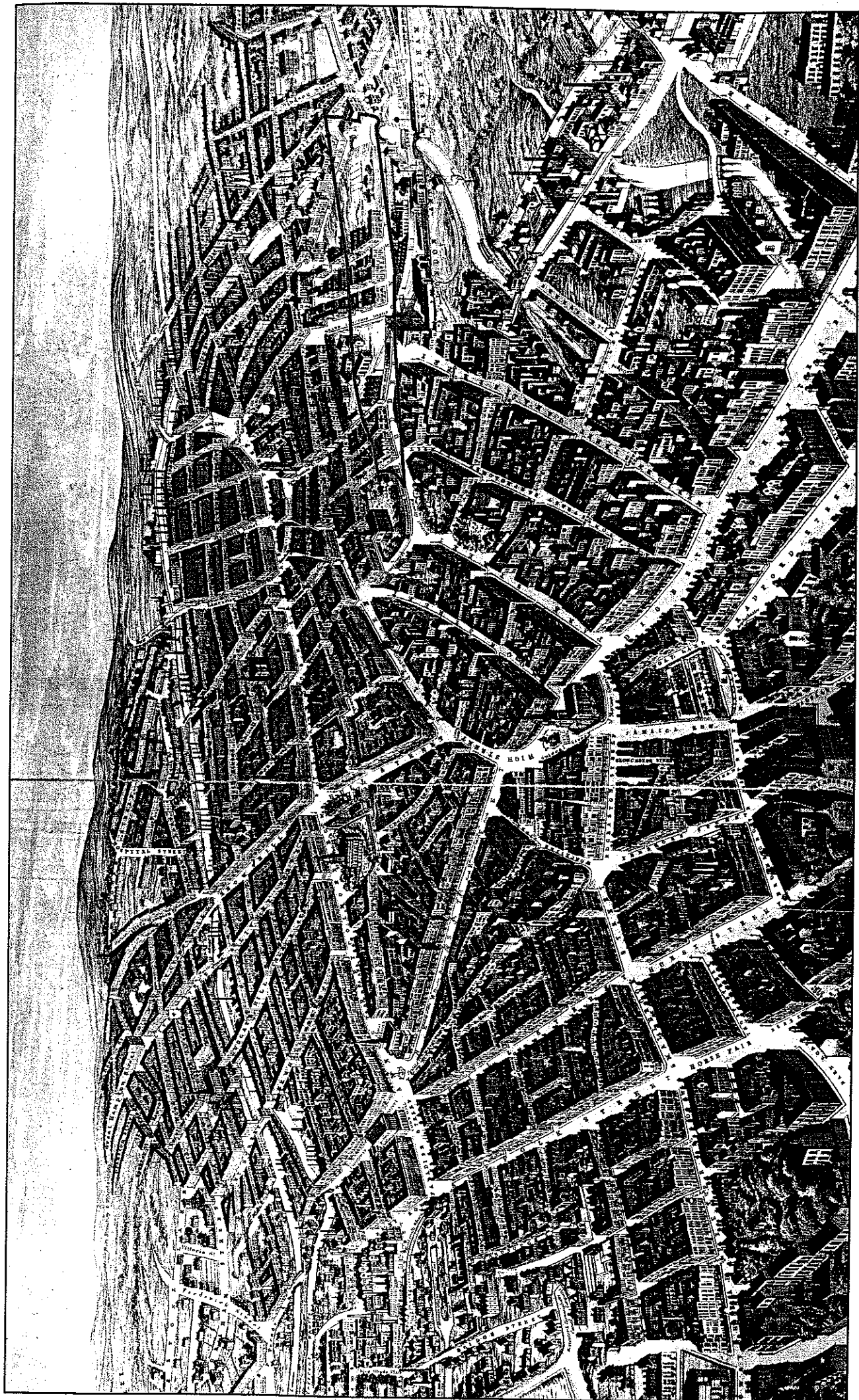


Fig.6 (1847)

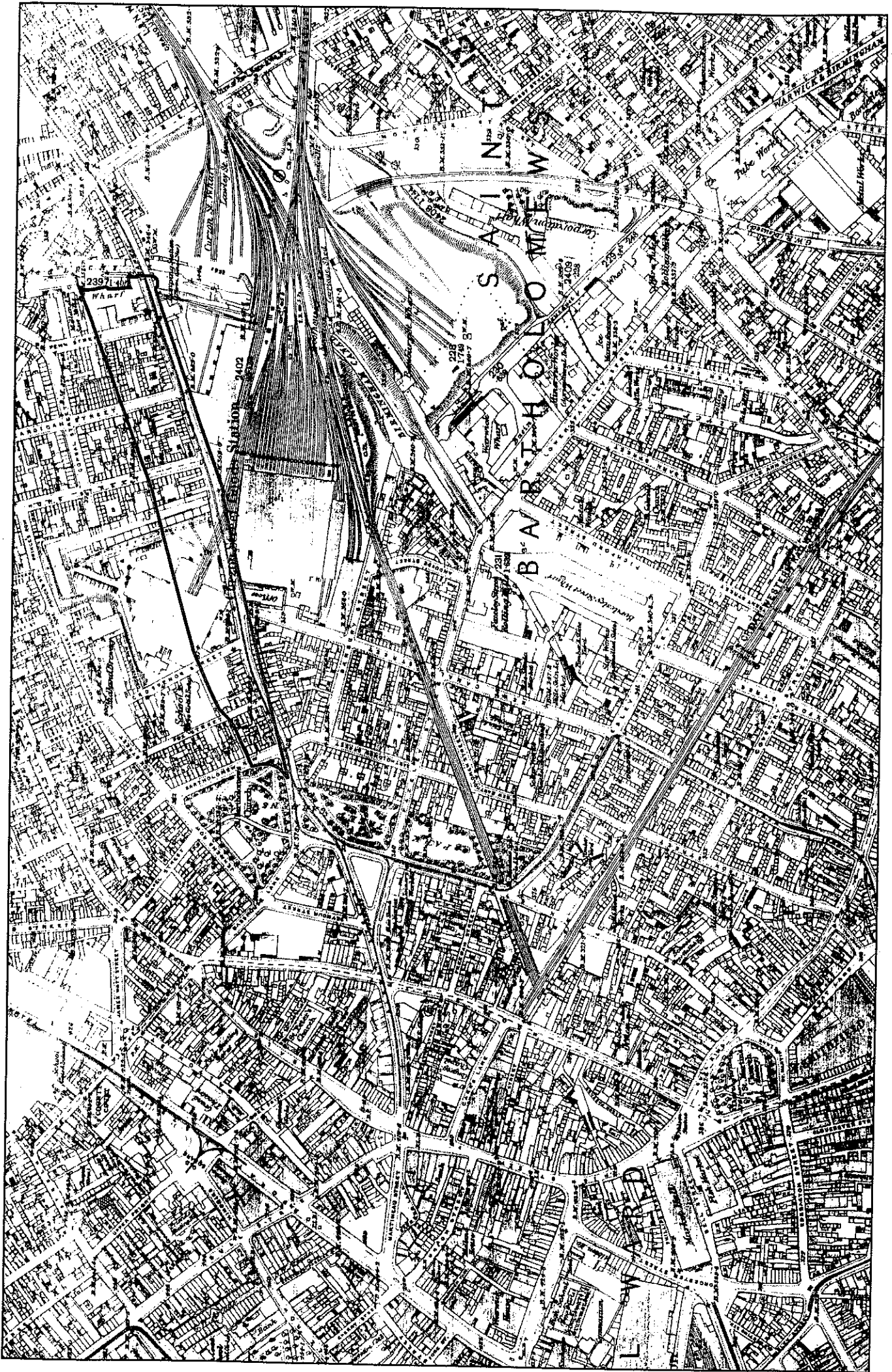


Fig.7 (1888)

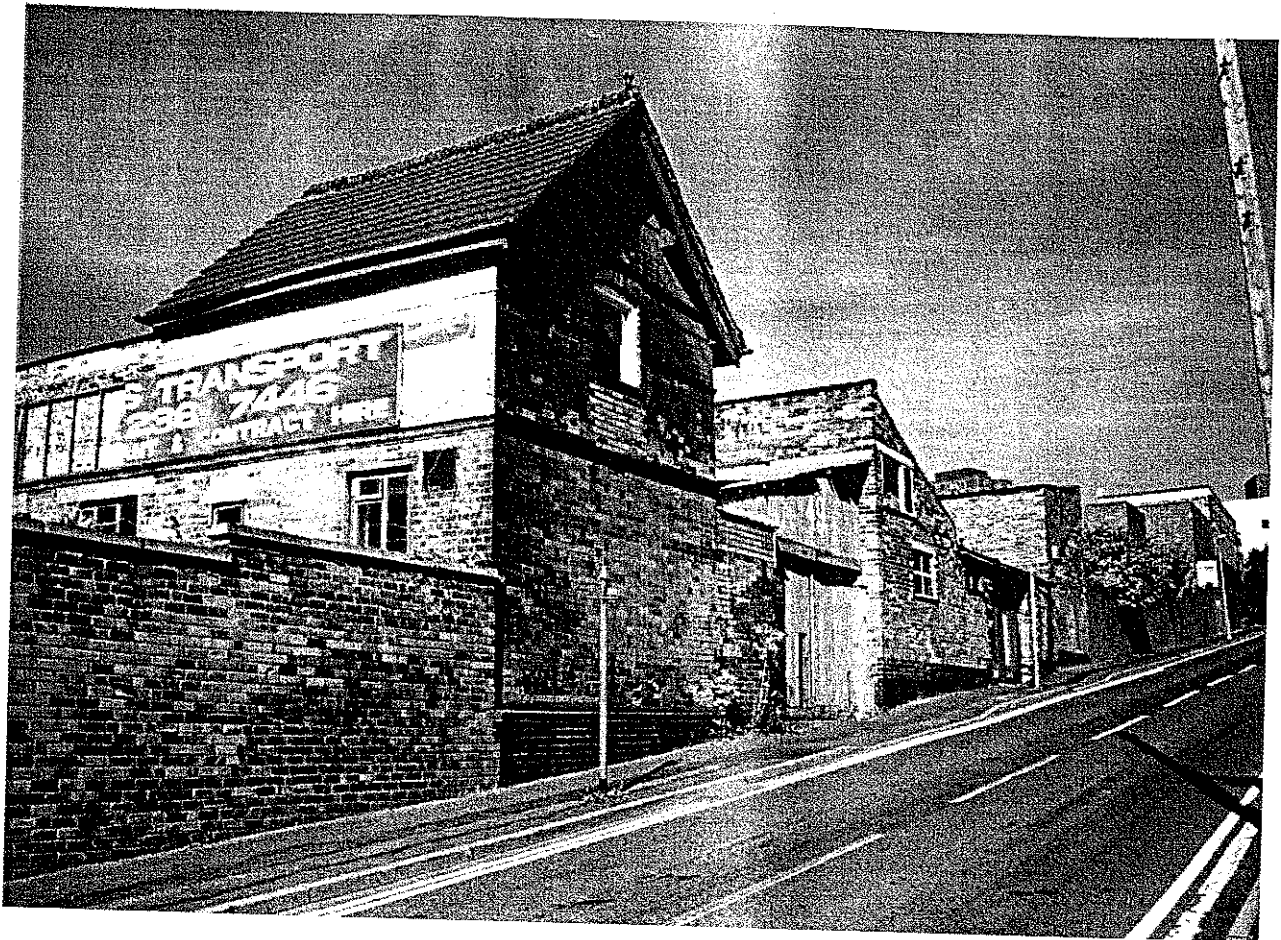


Plate 1



Plate 2

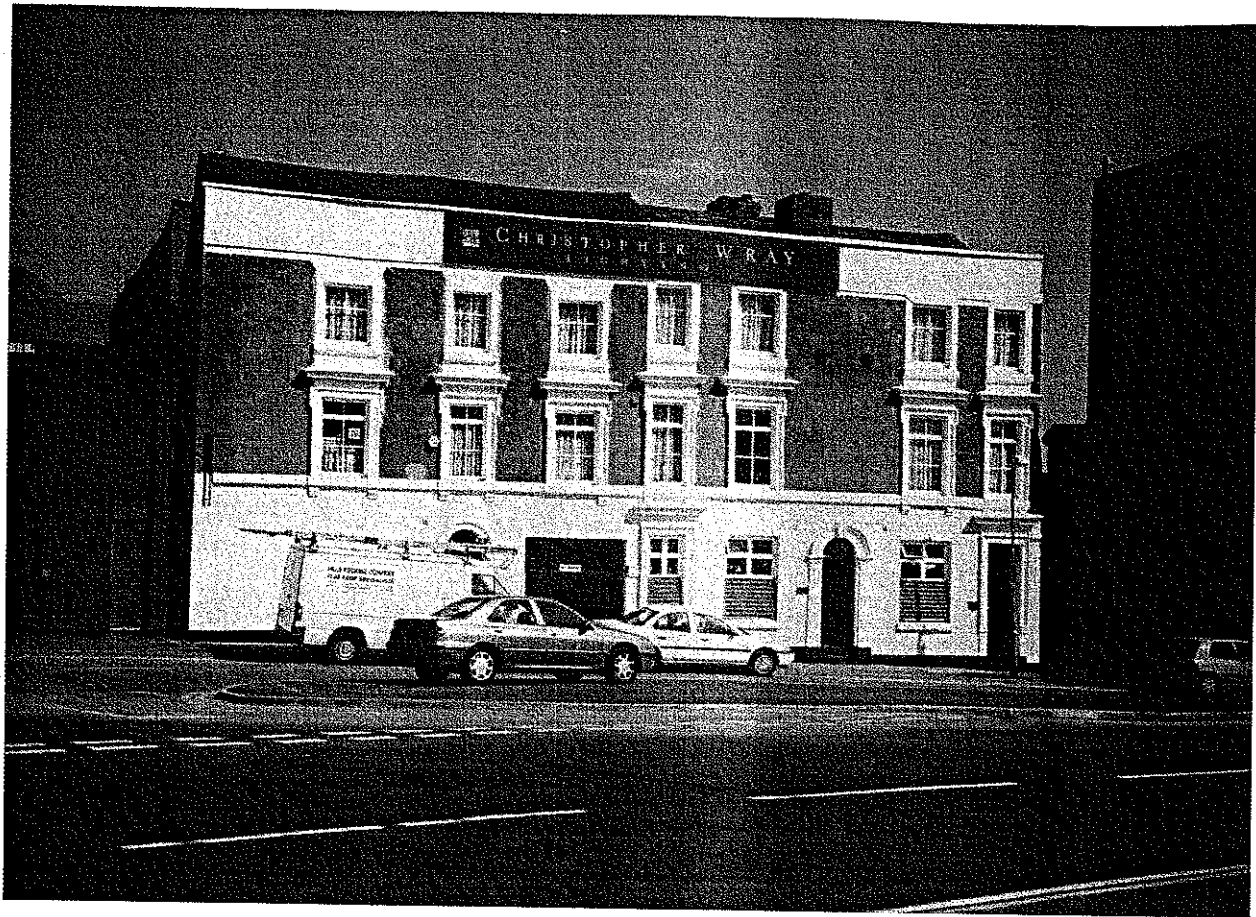


Plate 3



Plate 4

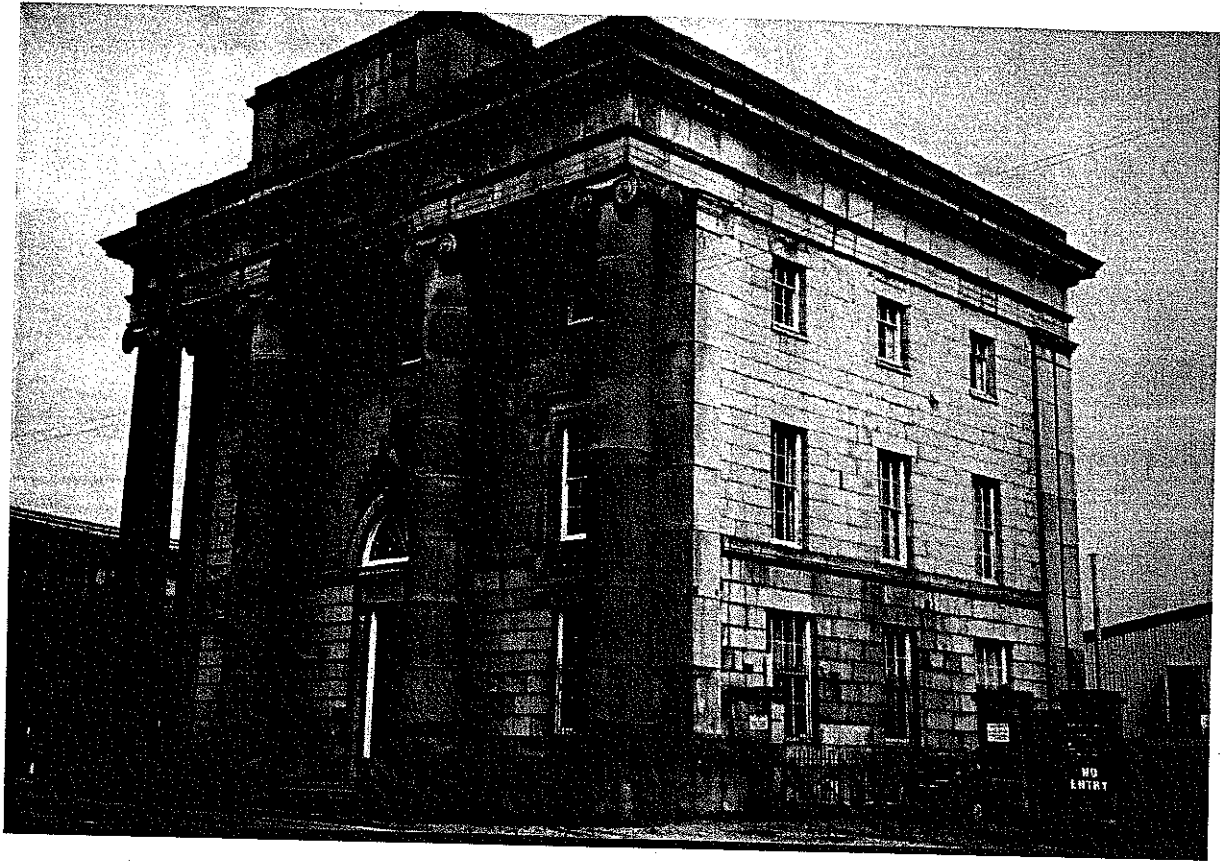


Plate 5



Plate 6

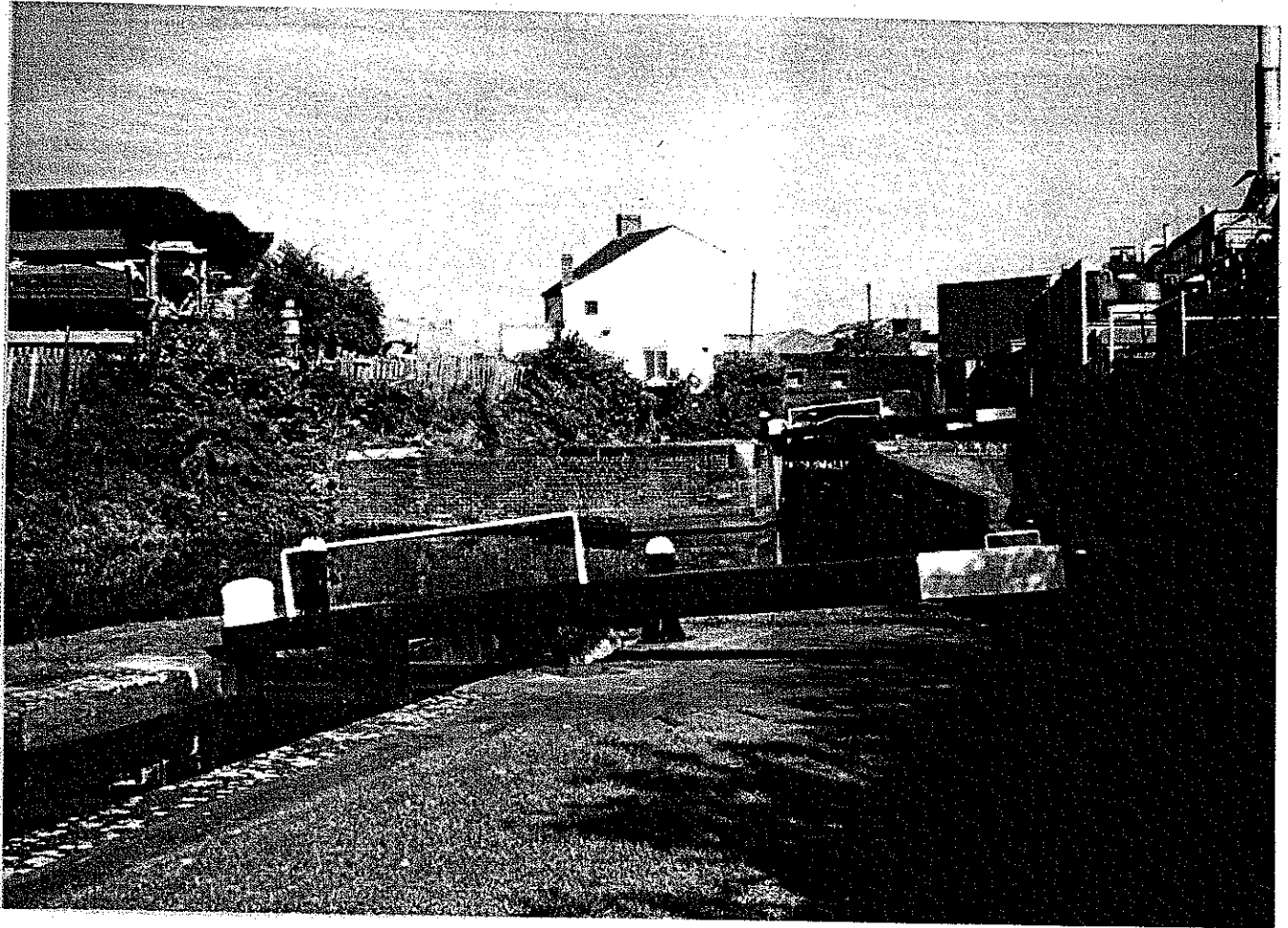


Plate 7