

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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THE CHURCHYARD OF ST. PHILIP'S CATHEDRAL, BIRMINGHAM

An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

by
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit

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1.0 SUMMARY

This report provides an archaeological assessment of the churchyard of St.Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham. It follows an application by Birmingham Cathedral to the National Heritage Memorial Fund, within its Urban Parks Programme, for funding for proposals to replant and enhance the graveyard. The sources consulted for this assessment included the material collated by the Landscape Practice Group (the contractors dealing with the proposals). This included material from the Lichfield Record Office. Other sources consulted were the Birmingham Sites and Monuments Record, as well as archive material, and secondary documentary and map sources held in the archives and local studies sections of Birmingham Central Library.

The research indicates that the churchyard was used as a burial ground for many years after the cathedral was built in the early 18th century and that the graveyard was closed when it became overfull in the mid-19th century. It is estimated that up to 80,000 people were buried in the cemetery. Between c.1840 and 1900 the original boundaries of the churchyard were marginally reduced by the widening of the surrounding streets.

The implications of the proposed landscaping are considered and proposals for an archaeological response are suggested.

2.0: INTRODUCTION

2.1: The Report

This report provides an archaeological desk-based assessment of approximately 1.5 hectares of land bounded by Colmore Row, Temple Row/Temple Row West and St.Philip's Place, in Birmingham city centre (Figs.1 and 2; centred on NGR.SP 0700 8720). It follows an application by Birmingham Cathedral to the National Heritage Memorial Fund, within its Urban Parks Programme, for funding for proposals to replant and enhance the graveyard (Figs.3 and 4). The work was commissioned by Birmingham Cathedral and undertaken by Birmingham University Field Archaeological Unit (BUFAU) in accordance with the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1991). The assessment follows the methodology set down in a brief prepared by Richard K Morriss, the Cathedral Archaeological Consultant, Birmingham Cathedral (1996B) and a specification prepared by BUFAU (1996). This report was also prepared in accordance with the 'Standard and Guidance for Desk-Based Assessments' (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994).

2.2: Aims

The aims of this assessment were:

- (1) To assess the survival and significance of any archaeological remains by means of a search of written records and plans, archaeological records and geotechnical records. This included an examination of the archive collated by the Landscape Practice Group, as well as other available information concerning burial exposure during excavation and landscaping within the churchyard.

(2) To propose further archaeological assessment, including, if appropriate, proposals for field evaluation to further determine the potential of the proposed development area.

(3) To propose a strategy to mitigate the impact of any development, if appropriate.

2.3: Sources

Several sources of archaeological information have proved useful in providing an assessment of the development of the churchyard and its setting. Historical sources consisted of local histories, antiquarian and estate maps, and early editions of Ordnance Survey maps. The archive material consulted included letters and plans relating to the development of the former burial ground. Photographs and illustrations of the churchyard were also examined.

Reference was made to the archaeological information held by the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for Birmingham, which contains an up-to-date record of all reported archaeological sites, and the recorded findspots of individual artefacts.

No published archaeological reports or geotechnical data could be found concerning the study area.

2.4: Topography and land use

St.Philip's churchyard is located on the highest ground within the centre of Birmingham. The grounds of the cathedral consist of lawned areas divided by paths leading from the cathedral to the surrounding streets.

The church stands on a sandstone ridge, the superficial geology of this area consisting of glacial sands and gravels.

3.0: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SETTING

This section touches briefly on the earlier history of the area surrounding St.Philips but is mainly concerned with a general discussion of its radical development after the construction of the church.

3.1: Pre-Cathedral

An 1890 map (not illustrated) by Hill and Binkley, based on mapping from the 18th century, and written surveys of the medieval and post-medieval landscape, gives some idea of the area prior to the construction of St.Philip's church. Although this information is not totally reliable, it does accord with later accounts that describe the area as virtually open land (Upton 1993; p.79) lying to the north-west of the Medieval town of Birmingham. On this map two field names are given in this area, one is 'Horse Close' and the other is 'Banner's Croft'. According to McKenna (1992; p.50) St.Philips was built on the former site.

3.2: Post-Cathedral

The construction of St.Philip's, which began in 1711 (Dent 1879; p.62), led to a radical change in the appearance of the surrounding area. Prior to this the main focus of the town was around St.Martins Church and the Bull Ring, but because of a lack of space in Birmingham's only Anglican church and cemetery a new church and burial ground was needed (Upton 1993; p.37). The site of the new church was on the highest

part of Birmingham in virtually unoccupied land. This appealed to the city's wealthier members and resulted in private development around St.Philip's. An area of open land called the New Hall Estate to the north of the churchyard remained undeveloped (see Westley's 1731 map; Fig.5) until the mid-18th century when it was divided into plots (see Hanson's 1778 map; Fig.5) which became the focus for industrial as well as domestic activity. Subsequent infilling of streets resulted in the centre of the town moving away from St.Martin's to the area around St.Philip's. By the mid-18th century, over-population combined with a poor water supply and inadequate sanitation resulted in disease and a high mortality rate, particularly amongst children (*ibid*; pps 37-9, 79, 135-37), which further increased the pressure on available burial space.

3.3: SMR Information

A Medieval rim sherd (Prn:20123), with an orange gritty fabric, was found in a pile of soil which had been raked together following the returfing of part of the churchyard in 1984.

4.0: THE CHURCHYARD: HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

Evidence for the early development of the St.Philip's cemetery comes mainly from map, pictorial and secondary documentary sources. The earliest known representation of the church and its grounds is Westley's map of 1731 (Fig.5). This stylistic representation of the churchyard shows a perimeter wall with an internal perimeter path flanked by a row of trees on either side. Paths are illustrated leading from St.Philip's to the surrounding streets. Westley's view of the north prospect of the church of 1732 (Fig.6) illustrates a very orderly and again probably stylised scene showing the churchyard and grand buildings on both Temple and Colmore Rows. There are a few tombs and gravestones illustrated on this drawing concentrated in the eastern part of the cemetery, and some are visible on the southern side which is mostly obscured by the church. A pictorial map (c.1730, not illustrated) depicts tombs on mainly the northern and eastern sides of the church with a few headstones to the south. This is contradictory to the normal preference of burying people in the southern part of a cemetery first (Mckenna 1992; p.1).

Comparisons between the number of gravestones on Westley's illustration and a depiction dating from the latter part of the 18th century (Fig.7) suggest that the amount of interments had greatly increased. Upton (1993; p.139) states that by the mid-19th century the accumulation of burials was reflected in the height of the churchyard above street level. This build up is clear from an illustration dating from about 1840 (Fig.9) which shows an even greater concentration of gravestones. This may suggest a higher percentage of poorer graves.

Overcrowding of cemeteries was causing problems for the public as the smell could be highly offensive (Mckenna 1992; p.11). The problem of overcrowding at St.Philip's and other cemeteries was relieved to some extent by the opening of new ones at Key Hill in 1835, and Warstone Lane in 1848. However, the problem was only really addressed by the opening of a corporation cemetery for all citizens at Witton in 1863 (Upton 1993; p.139). In the same year that Warstone Lane opened, the southern and eastern parts of St.Philip's churchyard were closed (Mckenna 1992; p.50). The remainder of the cemetery followed in 1856, with the exclusion of burials in walled and vaulted tombs (Letter, DRO25: Bundle 3). The closure of the southern and eastern parts of the churchyard first, suggests a greater concentration of burials in those areas. This was common as there was a preference for burial in the southern part of a cemetery away from the shadow of the church (Mckenna 1992; p.1). An 1850s

illustration (Fig.10) shows the southern part of the graveyard after closure. Most of the headstones have been laid flat and the area looks more like a garden. A photograph dated c.1885-90 (Fig.11) suggests a similar procedure after closure of the northern side.

A letter from the Reverend Canon Carnegie to the Lord Mayor in 1910 (DRO25: D60) authorises the corporation to take over the churchyard and lay out and plant it as a garden. An aerial photograph dated 1930 (Fig. 13) shows the churchyard as quite heavily planted with mature and young trees, and shrubs.

The cemetery boundaries and paths have also been subject to change. The boundary wall and double row of trees depicted on the earlier maps of the 18th century had been replaced on the southern side of the church by an iron perimeter fence according to an illustration dated c.1850 (Fig.10). Here the perimeter path formerly known as 'Bachelor's Walk', which was closed to the public in 1839 (Dent 1894; pps. 420-21), has been reduced in width by the widening of Temple Row. Letters suggest that this may have happened in c.1840. One of these refers to a wall protruding into Temple Row which should be removed and rebuilt on a different line. A plan is included with these documents illustrating the suggested new perimeter (photocopies of these documents are held in the archive collated by the Landscape Practice Group). The 1889 Ordnance Survey map (Fig.5) depicts the perimeter path as much narrower than an earlier survey of 1824/25 (Fig.5) this suggests that the majority of the churchyard boundaries were altered between these dates. Further reductions to the churchyard boundaries took place in 1900 (Letters DRO25: D15/D53) between the bank on Temple Row West and the corner of Colmore Row and Temple Row West, and between the Blue Coat School on St.Philip's Place and the corner of Colmore Row and St.Philip's Place.

The main paths within the churchyard illustrated on Westley's map of 1731 (Fig.5) have remained virtually unaltered, apart from the addition of extensive paved areas around the church itself, and the introduction of a walkway leading from the northern part of the church to Church Street to the north-west. These alterations occurred some time after the publication of the 1937 Ordnance Survey map (Fig.5).

A series of lesser paths are depicted in the churchyard on the Westley illustration of 1732 (Fig.6) and the Bradford map of 1751 (not illustrated). However, these paths do not appear on any subsequent maps and may have disappeared when the need for more burial space within the churchyard arose.

Minor paths are not illustrated again in the churchyard until the 1889 Ordnance Survey edition (Fig.5) which shows paths within the railed off areas which were accessible from the main thoroughfares across the churchyard. They are also shown to the south of the church on the c.1850 illustration (Fig.10). These paths are quite elaborate in plan and probably reflect the gradual conversion of the graveyard into a public garden. Later Ordnance Survey editions (1918 & 1937/5) illustrate additional inner walkways and a more elaborate plan than the 1889 edition. These paths were probably grassed over when the railings within the churchyard were removed and it became an open public space. Photographs and illustrations (not illustrated) suggest that this took place in c.1940-50.

Letters concerning alterations to the churchyard also give instructions on how any affected graves should be dealt with. A letter of 1839 (this document is held in the archive collated by the Landscape Practice Group) relating to the reduction of the churchyard boundary in 1840, which protruded into Temple Row, mentions the

reinterment of any bodies found within graves and vaults. Further letters of 1899 (DRO25: D15) referring to the proposed widening of the streets which took place in 1900, contain instructions on how to deal with any disturbed burials. One letter refers to the obligation of the corporation to keep a register of the re-situation and removal of tombstones and monuments, and another states that the corporation will ensure that 'all proper provisions will be made' with respect to vaults and walled graves situated on the corner of Colmore Row and Temple Row. In the Lord Mayor's letter of 1910 (DRO25: D60), where he suggests that the churchyard should become a garden, he refers to the transferring of headstones and monuments to consecrated ground. Another letter of the same year (*ibid*) refers to how the gravestones in a plot opposite the Rectory, formerly on St. Philip's Place, should be dealt with. An accompanying list of burials is given with a set of instructions consisting mainly of 'bury', and there are other instructions such as 'remove to the back of the cathedral', 'remain', 'level', and 'move to rails'.

Amongst the burials depicted on Westley's 1732 illustration (Fig.6) there are table top tombs representing interments of the wealthier members of the town. These tombs often lead down to a vault. Judging from a short article in the *Midland Antiquary* (Carter ed.1884; pps.37-8) it seems probable that there are several vaulted tombs in the former burial ground. Seven vaults are referred to in this brief description of a few churchyard epitaphs.

An idea of the nature of poorer burials in the churchyard is given by McKenna (1992; p.17) where he states that in a plot reserved for the poor who died in the Workhouse their coffins were buried only a foot below the surface and were frequently disturbed by the excavation for fresh graves. The sexton in Anglican churches had to use a boring rod to find space for further burials as no record of the location of burials was kept (Upton 1993; p.139).

5.0: ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

According to records there are approximately 80,000 people buried in the churchyard (Morriss 1996B). However, the specific location of particular burials cannot be verified from the available documentation, and it is unlikely that further research would be able to clarify this. There are areas which have been identified where a greater concentration of burials may be expected. The historical evidence suggests that the southern and eastern parts of the cemetery were more heavily used.

There are also areas around the boundaries of the graveyard which have been reduced and this will have resulted in the disturbance of human remains. However, it is likely that human remains may still be encountered during groundworks even within these areas. The implications of the variable distribution of burials throughout the graveyard is merely a question of the degree of difficulty, and thereby cost, of archaeological provision should any groundwork be carried out.

Any groundworks within the present churchyard or within the former, slightly larger perimeter of the 18th/19th century graveyard are going to have serious implications for the archaeology as outlined by Morriss (1996A). As is stated in his assessment of the implications of the proposed development, the potential disturbance to the archaeological resource can be divided into three main elements. The planned planting of young trees around the perimeter of the churchyard (Fig.3), the building of a new stone wall and entrance gates along its northern side, and the improvement of old paths and the creation of new ones. These proposed developments can be considered to be of varying significance in terms of their potential effect on the buried archaeological remains, either due to the amount of disturbance caused because of the nature/extent of

groundworks, or due to the location of groundworks and their proximity to areas of archaeological potential. For the purposes of this report this potential effect has been divided into four categories (Fig.4):

Category A) Proposals which are potentially very destructive to archaeological remains which may have been little disturbed by any development within the churchyards history. Generally 'any development' refers to the contraction of the churchyard boundary in the 19th century.

Category B) Proposals which have the potential to be very destructive to archaeological remains which have probably already suffered some degree of disturbance due to developments in the churchyards history.

Category C) Proposals which are potentially less destructive due to the nature of the proposed development or due to their being sited in an area where below ground deposits are likely to be of less significance.

Category D) Proposals which are unlikely to have an effect on archaeological remains associated with the churchyard.

Proposals which fall into Category A.

The proposed tree planting just inside the present churchyard boundary and Temple Row, as well as that along the front of St.Philip's place, lie within the earlier, as well as the current perimeters of the churchyard. This suggests that these areas may have been little disturbed in the past and therefore could have a higher archaeological potential.

The proposed planting of trees amongst existing ones just within the northern boundary of the north-western corner of the churchyard might be considered to have the same archaeological significance as the above.

It is worth adding that the proposed trees which are planned to run alongside St.Philip's Place intrude to a greater degree into the churchyard than any other proposed planting, and are in an area which map sources suggest has probably not been altered in plan since St.Philip's was first constructed.

Proposals which fall into Category B.

The proposed tree planting on Temple Row West lies on the line of the old boundary so disturbance to burials is highly likely. Interments in this area have probably already been disturbed to some extent by activities associated with the reduction of the boundary and widening of Temple Row West.

Proposals which fall into Category C.

The proposed new stone wall on the northern side of the churchyard, which would be erected along the line of the current boundary, lies inside the old perimeter which might normally suggest that disturbance to archaeology is likely. However, there may be fewer or no burials along the line of the proposed wall as the current boundary appears to be located approximately in the centre of, and on the same line, as an earlier cemetery path.

The areas of new and improved paving may only disturb the upper horizon of the churchyard, which as Morriss (1996A) suggests will probably consist of charnel rather than complete articulated burials. The proposed removal of paved areas will probably cause a minimum of disturbance unless there are complications associated with the depth of their foundations, or removal itself.

Proposals which fall into Category D

The proposed planting on the southern side of Temple Row is unlikely to effect burial remains as the trees would be situated outside the earlier churchyard boundary.

6.0: MITIGATION

Proposed Archaeological Strategy

For proposals which fall into Categories A and B some form of mitigation involving archaeological excavation may be necessary. Therefore it is suggested that a strategy of test-pitting to assess the survival and significance of any archaeological remains should be carried out. This should be particularly targetted to answer questions concerning the complications which might be involved if extensive excavations were to take place within the churchyard. A possible strategy for test-pitting might involve the hand-excavation of a group of trial areas in positions already selected for the planting of trees.

Prior to any below ground excavation it is possible that non-intrusive methods of prospection could be tried in order to establish the presence or absence of vaulted burials. While established forms of geophysical survey would not penetrate to a sufficient depth to differentiate between vaulted and ordinary burials, the option of using ground-probing radar may be considered. However, results from this type of survey have been variable and it is still in a process of development. In addition, it is quite a costly operation.

For proposals which fall into Categories C and D an archaeological watching brief during development would probably be appropriate. However, during the evaluation stage it may also be useful to assess the survival and the significance of the archaeological remains which might be encountered by the shallow excavations for the laying or refounding of paths within the churchyard.

In the case of development proposals which prove to be particularly problematic, archaeological investigation may help to determine an alternative less destructive landscaping strategy.

Proposals for planting mitigation

To alleviate the archaeological problems inherent in the excavation of substantial groundworks for the planting of young trees around the churchyard consideration could be given to their planned location. For example, the proposed row of trees on Temple Row West could be planted on the other side of the street further away from the graveyard. This would not be out of keeping with other aspects of the proposed development and would also be very similar in appearance to the avenue of trees along Colmore Row. Consideration could also be given to the possibility of placing the proposed trees in large containers. Destruction to the archaeological resource could also be avoided if new paths and paving were actually laid at ground level. In fact any part of the proposed development which could be realised above ground level would alleviate archaeological problems.

Related Archaeological Research

The study of excavated human remains from an 18th/19th century cemetery would be of interest as this is a period for which, from an archaeological point of view, very little is known. Although there are no records of the location of interments within the churchyard, there is still the potential to differentiate between the class and nature of burials, as well as disease and cause of death and relate this information to the existing documentation. Within the University of Birmingham, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit can draw upon the specialist expertise of staff involved in Forensic Archaeology and the archaeological study of human remains.

There is also the opportunity, albeit carefully controlled, for a public exhibition at the Church of St. Philip's. This could involve informative panels located around the churchyard dealing with subjects such as the development and architecture of the church, the history of the immediately surrounding area, and the archaeology of the cemetery and rituals associated with burial.

Brief Discussion of Archaeological and Ethical Problems

The excavation of cemetery sites is a complex procedure. Not only are there problems in the excavation of burials, there are other considerations such as health and safety, and ethical issues which need to be taken into account.

The degree of disturbance to buried archaeological remains caused by the planting of young trees, for which sizeable pits will need to be excavated, is likely to be considerable. Fully articulated burials are likely to be encountered towards the bottom of pits, some of which will probably be partially exposed. These would have to be fully excavated which could create a 'snowball' effect each time a different skeleton is revealed. Also, the excavation of any vaults which may be encountered would be a very complex issue as they may have to be emptied in accordance with current health and safety regulations (Morriss 1996A).

Appropriate health and safety precautions would be necessary should an archaeological unit or organisation be commissioned to carry out any such excavations. All works would need to be screened from the public at ground level. The site would also be visible from the offices etc. overlooking the cemetery and therefore additional screening precautions would be necessary.

The ethical implications outlined by Morriss (1996A), concerning the subsequent removal and reburial of any disturbed burials, and likely objections to the development by descendants of the deceased, are also of profound significance.

A technical paper published by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (Garratt-Frost, 1992) deals with the general law concerning the excavation of human remains and the disposal of tombstones and other memorials.

7.0: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Birmingham SMR and the local studies and archives sections at Birmingham Central Library is gratefully acknowledged.

8.0: REFERENCES AND SOURCES

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MAP SOURCES

c.1730 Pictorial Map of Birmingham

1731 Westley's Map of Birmingham

1751 Bradford's Map of Birmingham

1778 Hanson's Map of Birmingham

1824/25 Survey of Birmingham

1889 Ordnance Survey, First Edition

1890 Hill and Binkley's map of 'Medieval' Birmingham, based on earlier written surveys.

1902 Ordnance Survey map

1918 Ordnance Survey map

1937 Ordnance Survey map

Copies of the above maps are held in the Local Studies section at Birmingham Central Library.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The reference codes given below refer to archive material held in the Birmingham Central Library archives.

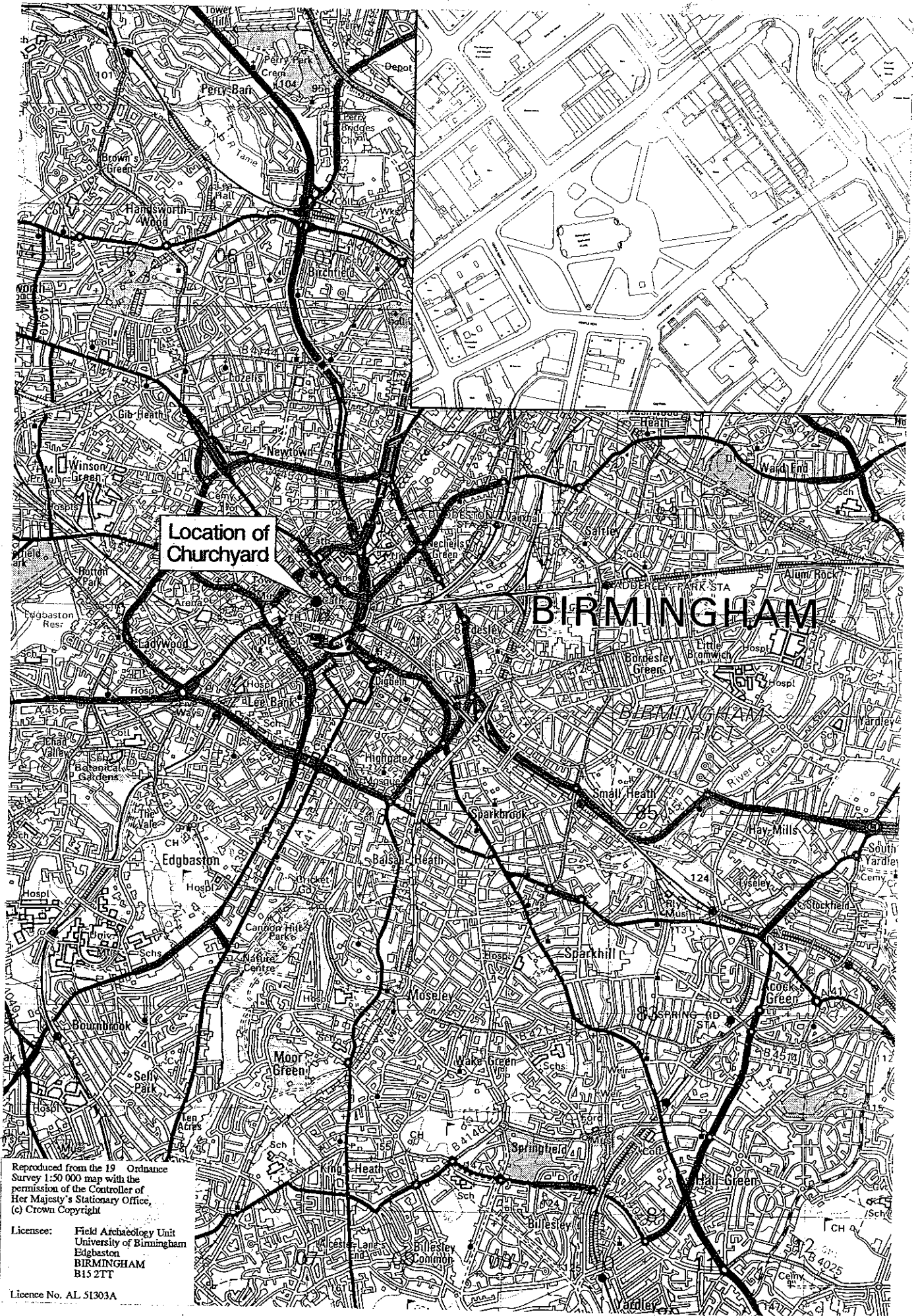
DRO25 Bundle 3 Miscellaneous documents concerning Birmingham Cathedral which include a letter ordering the discontinuation of burials in St.Philip's churchyard, 1956.

DR025 D15 Documents which include letters relating to St.Philip's churchyard and the widening of Colmore Row and Temple Row, 1895-1900.

DR025 D53 Documents concerning the widening of Colmore Row, dating from 1899-1901. A plan is also referred to which was not located during this assessment.

DR025 D60 Letters regarding the laying out of the churchyard as a garden and instructions on how to deal with gravestones.

Further primary material concerning the development of the churchyard has been collated and can be consulted in the archive.



Location of Churchyard

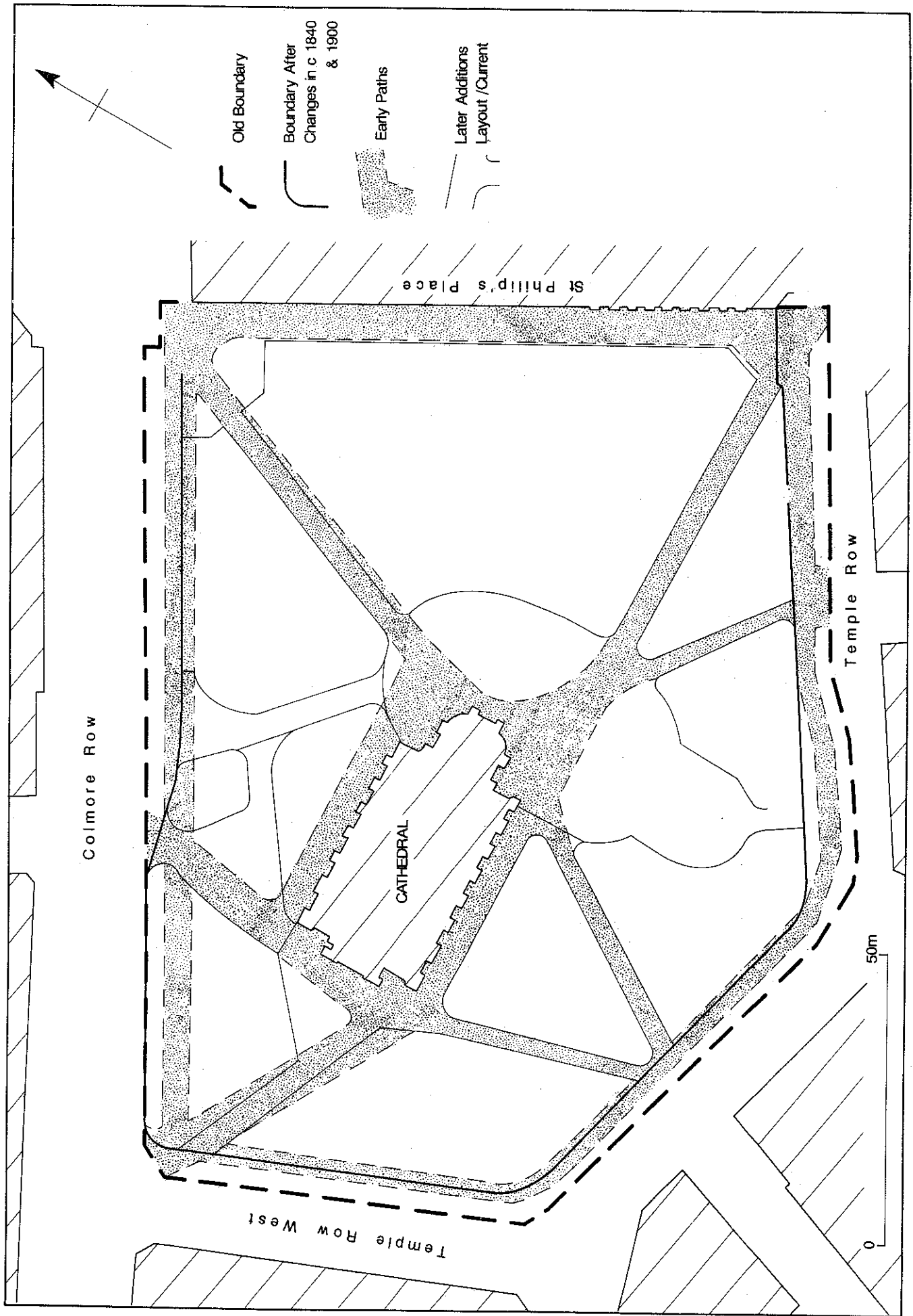
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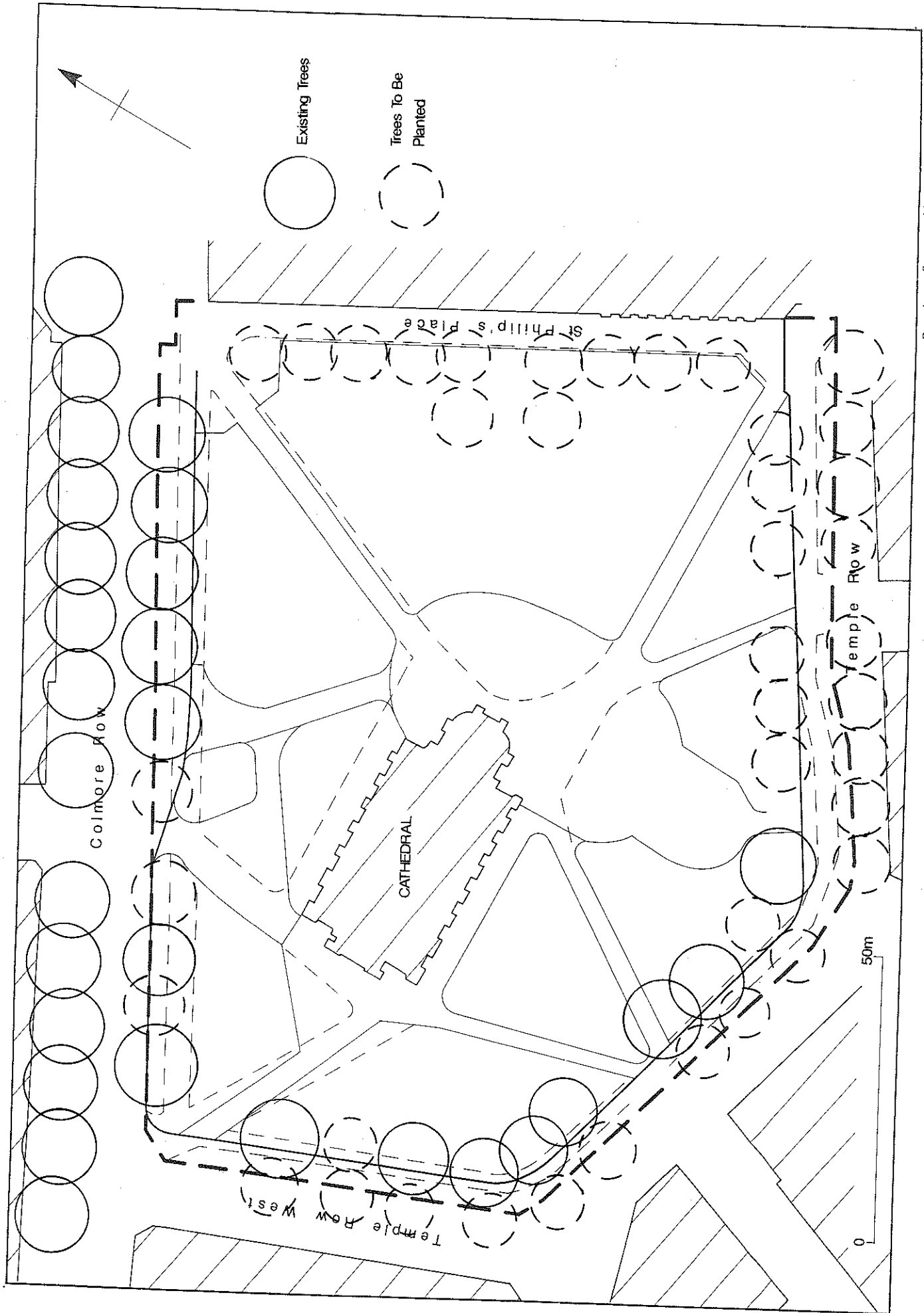
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Fig.1



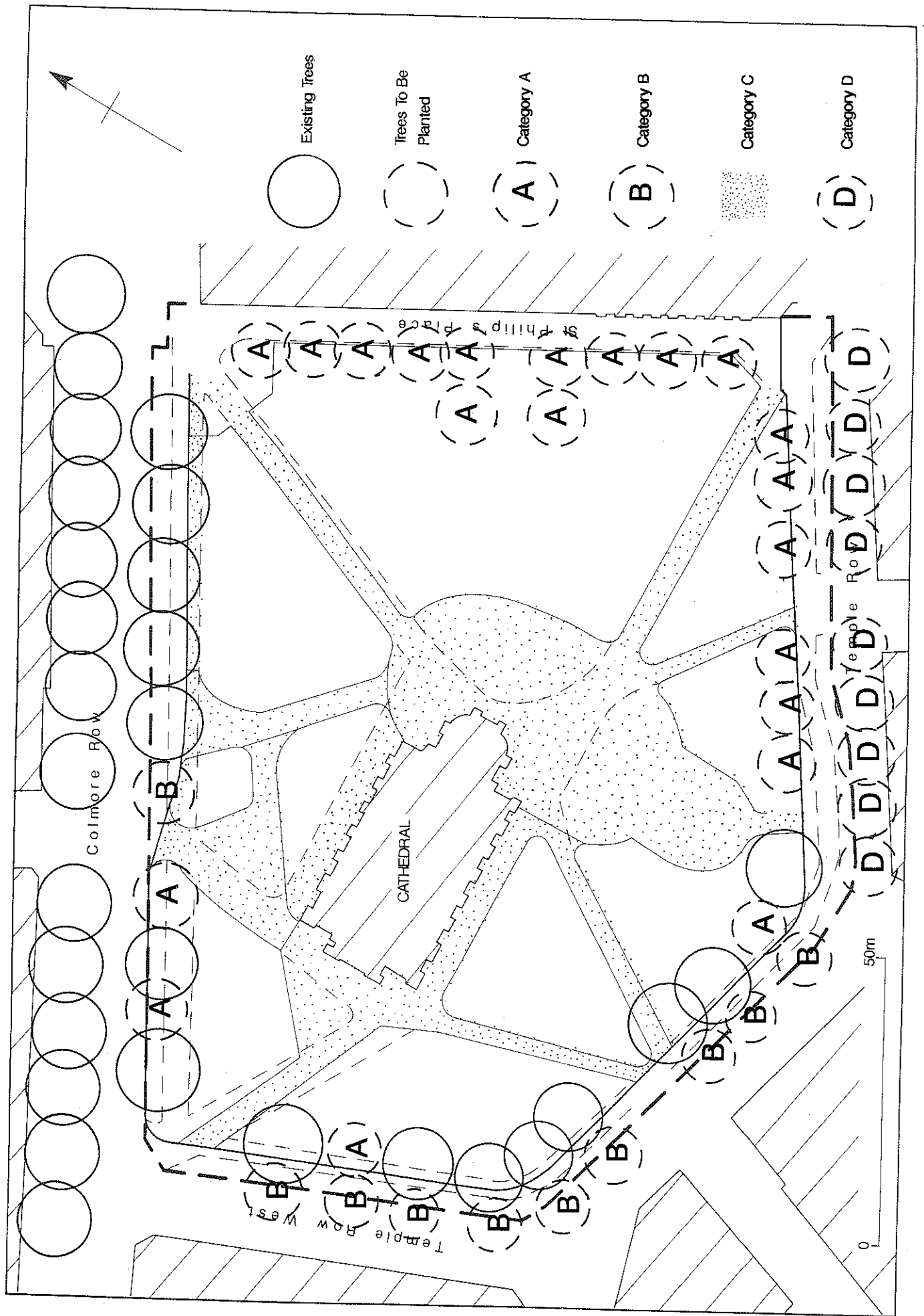
Based on a figure provided by Landscape Practise Group

Fig2



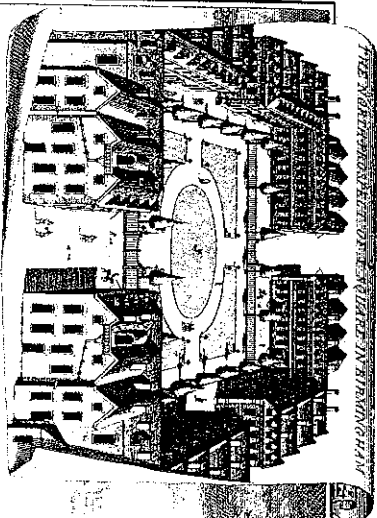
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Fig.3



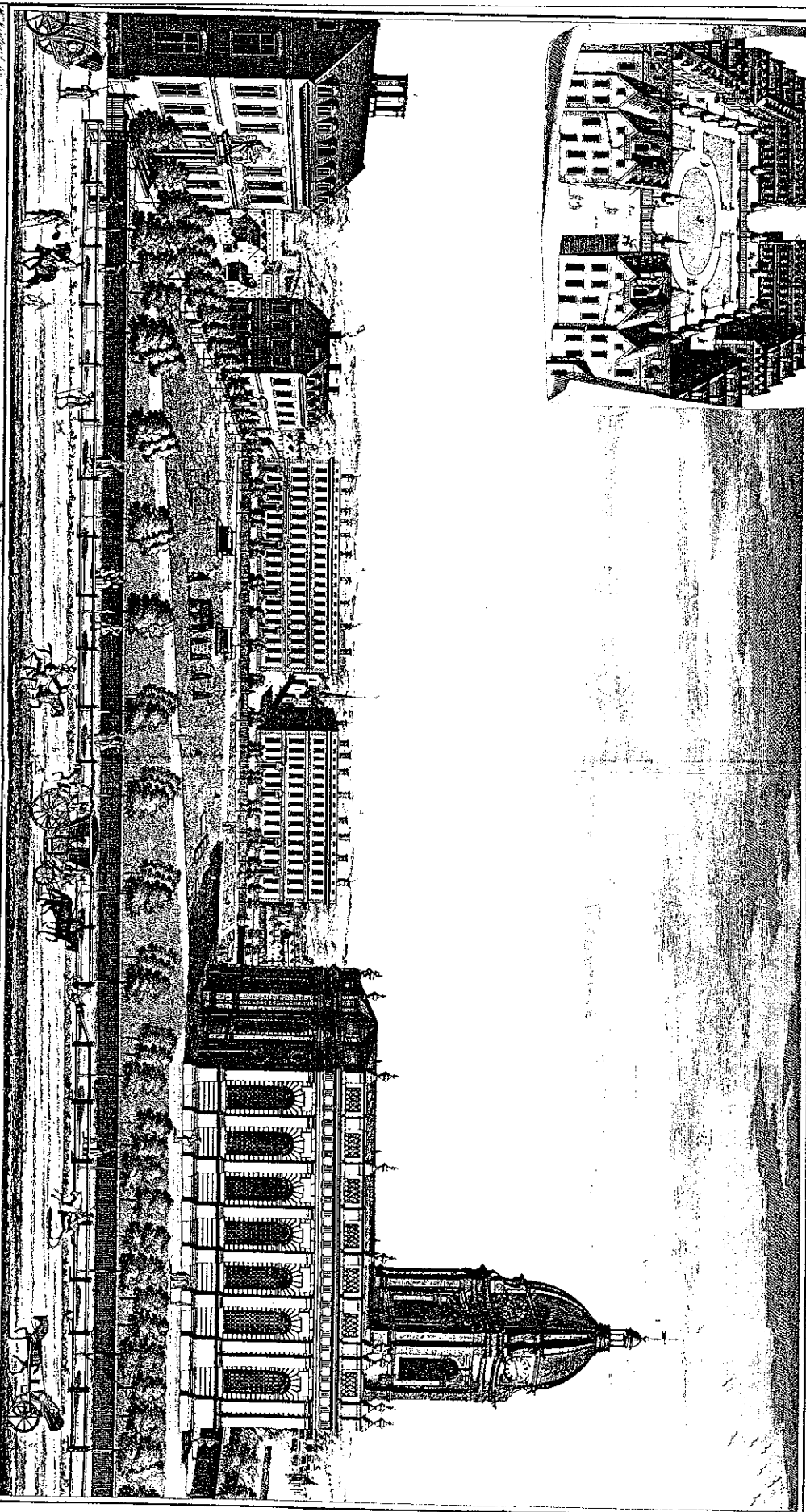
Based on a figure provided by Landscape Practise Group

Fig.4



THE NORTH PROSPECT OF BIRMINGHAM

THE NORTH PROSPECT OF ST PHILIP'S CHURCH & IN BIRMINGHAM



1. St Philips Church designed by
 the architect of our time
 2. A new Church School erected in 1860
 the old school and apartments of St Philips 1878

3. The Pitt Rivers Hotel, Fred Hoyle, Andrew, Fisher and
 the new Church School erected in 1860
 the old school and apartments of St Philips 1878

4. St Philips Church
 5. St Philips Church
 6. St Philips Church

Fig 6



Fig.8



Fig.9

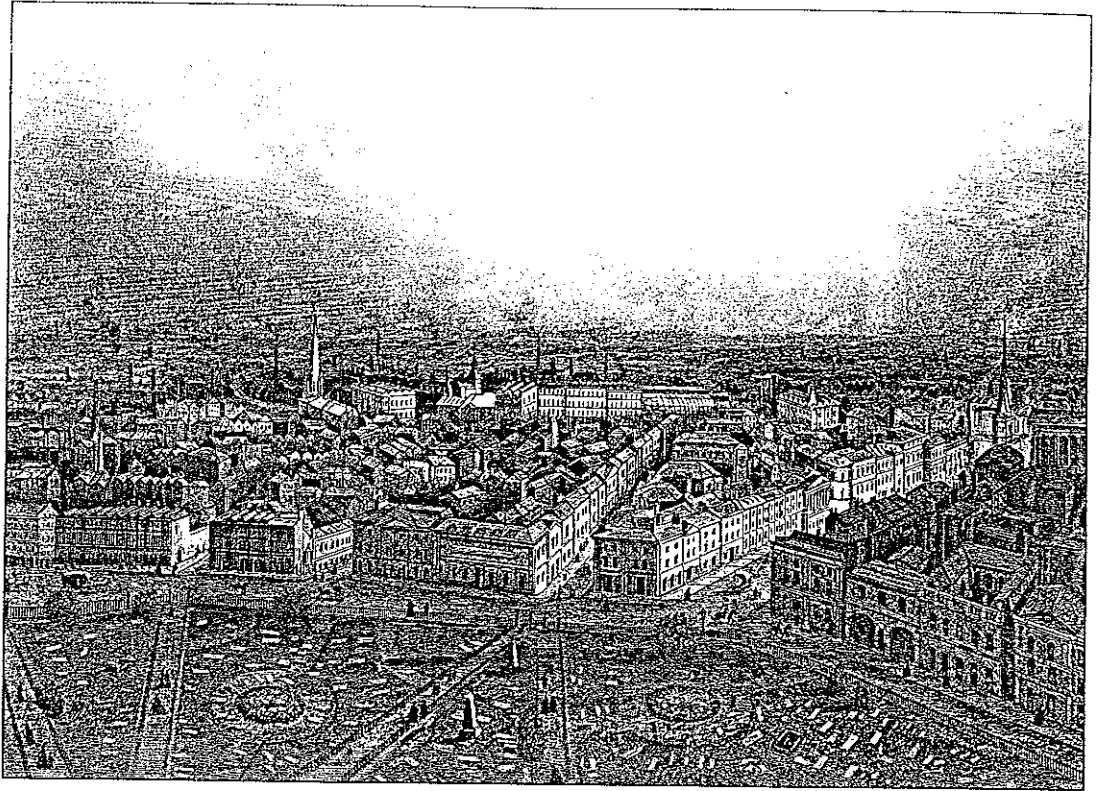


Fig.10

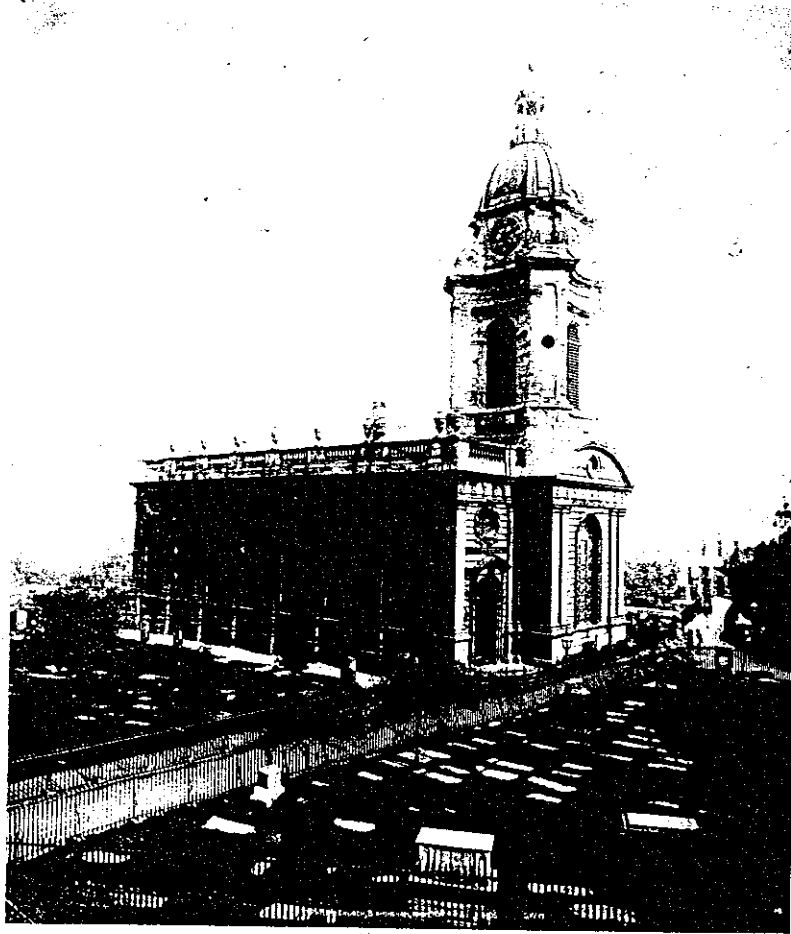
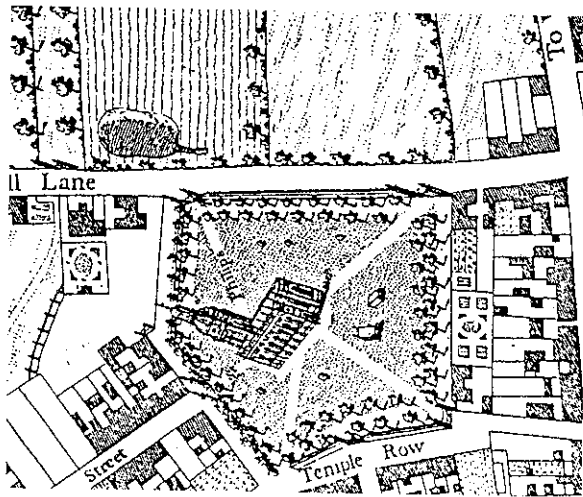
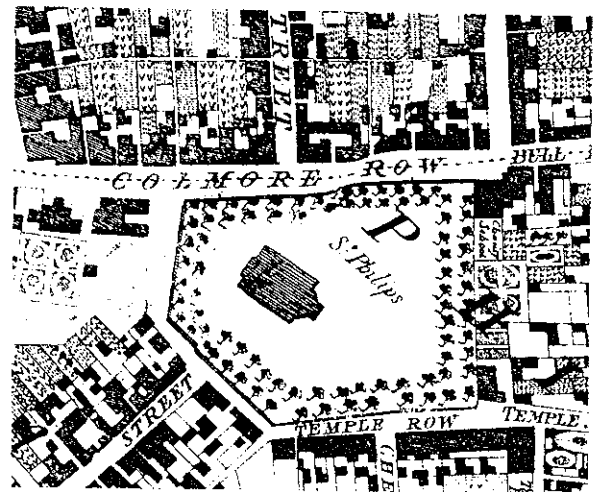


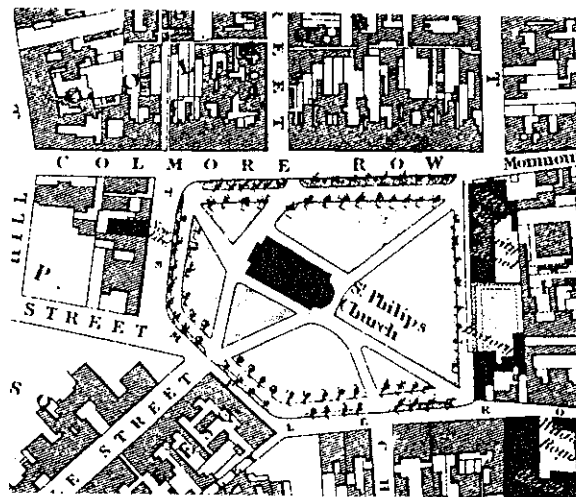
Fig.11



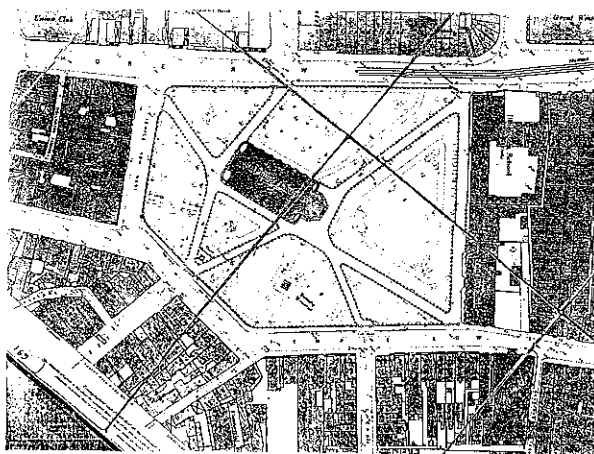
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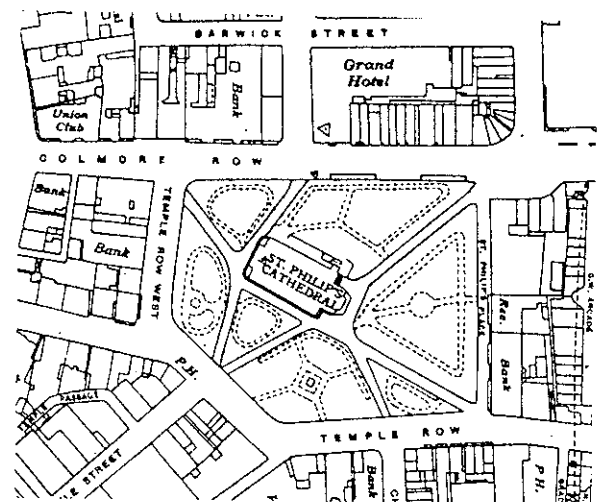
1778



1824/25



1889



1937

Fig.5

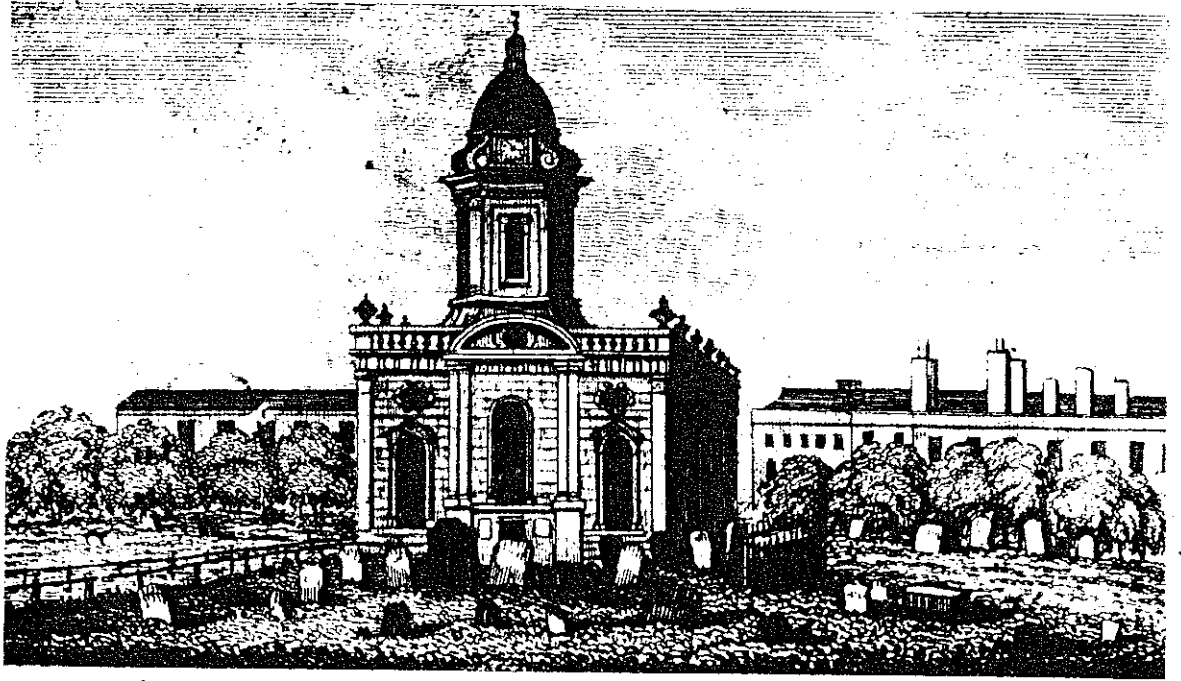


Fig.7

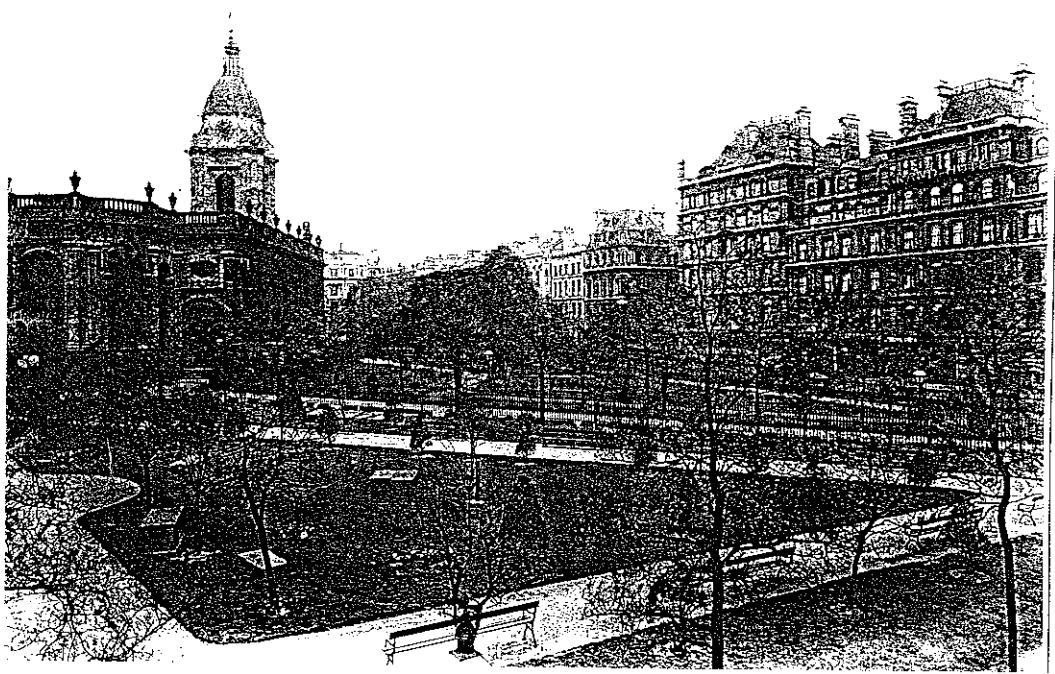


Fig.12

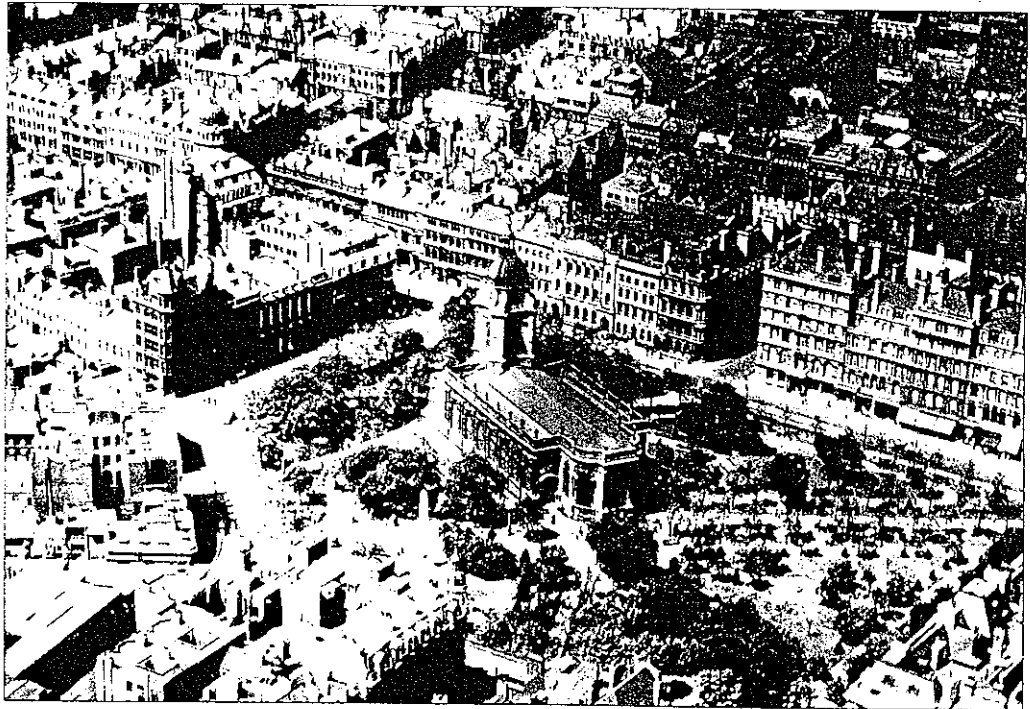


Fig.13