

**The Typhoo Wharf,
Bordesley Street, Digbeth,
Birmingham:
An Archaeological Desk-
Based Assessment**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit
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The Typhoo Wharf, Bordesley Street, Digbeth, Birmingham
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

by
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1.0 Summary

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out in June 2002 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of J.G.Developments Limited, in advance of proposed redevelopment of the Typhoo Wharf, Bordesley Street, Digbeth, Birmingham. The Study Area was agricultural land until the construction of the Digbeth Branch Canal (SMR No. 20336-BI1987) in 1790, which terminated here where there were several wharves. Thereafter the site rapidly underwent development, and by second quarter of the nineteenth century had acquired a disparate collection of domestic and industrial buildings. The Typhoo Company relocated to Digbeth in 1924, and built a new bonded warehouse on the; large-scale additions were made in the 1930s. It is recommended that consideration be given to at least partial retention of the Typhoo complex, because it is a building of architectural merit, and of both local and national historic interest, and because its frontages makes an important contribution to character of this particular quarter of the city. It is also recommended that trial trenching be carried out to evaluate the survival of archaeological deposits.

2.0 Introduction

An archaeological desk-based assessment was carried out in June 2002 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) on behalf of J.G.Developments Limited, in advance of proposed redevelopment of the Typhoo Wharf. The site contains a Grade C locally listed historic building, and there are likely to be below ground archaeological remains. These are likely to be affected by the development proposal which includes building over most of the site, whilst retaining elements of the buildings. In accordance with Policy 8.36 of Birmingham City Council's Unitary Development Plan, and government advice (DoE 1990), the desk-based assessment is required in order to evaluate the archaeological implications of the proposals prior to their consideration by the Planning Department. The work was undertaken in accordance with a brief prepared by Birmingham City Council (2002), and adheres to the professional guidelines of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999).

3.0 Location of Study Area

The location of the site is in north Digbeth (Figure 1), within the block bordered by Fazeley Street, Bordesley Street, New Canal Street and Pickford Street, at NGR SP 0783 8679. The development site comprises part of the former Typhoo premises (latterly S.Rose Company Limited Warehouse), fronting onto Bordesley Street as well as an adjacent plot of land, currently used as a car park, occupying the south-west corner of the block (Figure 2). Although this assessment was commissioned to research only the proposed area of development (hitherto known as the Development Site), the work has, in fact, involved a study of the entire street block (hitherto known as the Study Area).

4.0 Objectives

- To define the likely extent, survival and significance of archaeological remains, including historic buildings, in the area of proposed development.
- To determine the need for further archaeological assessment by field evaluation in advance of consideration of development proposals.
- To determine the need for preservation of archaeological remains including historic buildings, and/or further archaeological work in advance of or during development.

5.0 Method

An inspection of the Study Area was carried out in order to assess current conditions and to evaluate the buildings in respect of their historic/architectural interest. Documentary research of primary and secondary sources, including maps, was undertaken at Birmingham Central Library Local Studies and Archives, and at Birmingham University. Birmingham City Sites and Monuments Record, the primary source of known archaeological information for the city, was consulted.

6.0 Geology and Topography

Birmingham is built on a narrow Keuper sandstone ridge which, on the east side of the city, falls away sharply towards the valley of the River Rea, one of the tributaries of the Tame. The Study Area is located towards the bottom of the slope at the point where the land levels out into the River valley floor. The drift geology mainly consists of scattered patches of sand and gravel, with deposits of alluvium on the bed of the River Rea itself (OS Drift Geology Sheet 168).

7.0 Previous Archaeological Work

In general, archaeological activity in the Digbeth and Deritend area has tended to be confined to the areas of medieval or early post medieval settlement (e.g. Sherlock 1955; Litherland 1995; Litherland and Moscrop 1995; Burrows *et al* 2000; Mould 2000; Watt 2001; Williams 2001; Watt 2002), and has limited relevance to the present focus of attention, which lay beyond the periphery of these localities. The exception is the desk-based assessment carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in 1999 in which the present Study Area was included. This study concluded that 'any surviving archaeological deposits and features could significantly enhance our understanding of the evolution of the Study Area from being open, cultivated land in the medieval period to the centre of industrial production in the post-medieval period' (Mould 1999, 56-8).

8.0 Historical Development

Pre-Eighteenth Century

The Study Area is situated to the north of Digbeth, an important medieval thoroughfare that linked Birmingham with Coventry and London, and to the east of Park Street, apparently the north-eastern extent of the medieval settlement of Birmingham. Burgage plots dating from the Middle Ages line both Digbeth and Park Street. Those on the north side of Digbeth were contained by a water course known as the Hersums or Hessums Ditch, that flowed into the River Rea, and which was fed by a second watercourse that ran to the east of Park Street and bounded the burgage plots there (Baker 1999).

The Study Area, then, lies outside the area of medieval settlement, but we can conjecture something of its character by reference to a survey of the lordship of Birmingham made in 1553 (Bickley and Hill 1890). The land beyond the Hersums was demesne land occupied partly by a series of meadows, including Lake Meadow, Oak Meadow and Launds Meadow, and partly by 'The Little Park'. It is possible that the Study Area lies within what was the Little Park itself. (Figure 3).

The Eighteenth Century

The manorial demesne lands survived largely intact well into the eighteenth century when they were held by Dr Sherlock Bishop of London (1678-1761). The earliest cartographic evidence for the area, Westley's map of Birmingham (Figure 4), dates from 1731. This shows that at that time the Study Area was taken up by a number of fields on the north side of a lane known as Lake Meadow Hill (now Bordesley Street). Lake Meadow Hill led to a footbridge over the River Rea and to Digbeth High Street; there seems to have been another thoroughfare to the north, roughly on the line of Fazeley Street. It is difficult to relate these agricultural divisions to the later street layout, because a comparison of the maps suggests that the field boundaries were not respected to any great extent. In 1751 (Samuel Bradford's map) and 1778 (Thomas Hanson's map), the area retained much the same character as in 1731, though limited encroachment of the urban landscape beyond its medieval boundaries, and into the rural hinterland, was beginning to occur (Baker 1999, 14). It was not, however, until the construction of the Digbeth Branch Canal in 1790 (Stephens, 1964, p.34) that any major change occurred.

Indeed, development of the plot 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, 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 piece of legislation allowed Sherlock's successor, Sir Thomas Gooch, to grant long term leases and, because many of his plots were intermingled with other properties, so making it difficult to lay out street systems, to consolidate his holding by exchanging plots of land (Stephens 1964, 8). The Digbeth Branch Canal was built on land leased from the Gooch Estate.

The Digbeth Branch Canal is an example of a contour canal, an early type, built on flat ground, which often followed the line (and consequently the meanderings) of a river valley. The choice of site was therefore dependent on topography, and it is for this reason that the low-lying land of the Rea valley attracted the enterprise. The canal 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 (Figure 5). It appears as a single branch terminating within an otherwise nearly empty plot of land that was bordered by Fazeley Street to the north, Bordesley Street to the south, Trent Street (now Pickford Street) to the east, and Canal Street (now New Canal Street) to the west. The only building recorded by Snape is a rectangular structure on Fazeley Street on the west side of the canal. This, together with another building on the opposite (north) side of Fazeley Street is labelled 'Steam Mills'.

The building of the Digbeth Branch Canal proved the catalyst for a vastly accelerated expansion of the town into the fields east of Park Street and to the north of Digbeth. Indeed, Snape's map suggests that the canal and the surrounding street grid were planned as a single scheme, probably to attract further development. The Steam Mills are the earliest manifestation of this 'magnet' effect, for their locations must have been entirely determined by the presence of the canal, and the logistical advantage it provided. Coal for powering the machinery could be unloaded onto private wharves, and the produce of the factories distributed to other parts of the country.

The Nineteenth Century

On Kempson's map of 1808 (Figure 6), the canal is shown as having two branches, a long one to the east and a short one to the west. No buildings are shown, but by 1828 (Piggot Smith's map) considerable development had taken place within the Study Area, which divided it into a number of well-defined plots (Figure 7). The canal now had two long branches, the main one to the east, and a narrower one to the west, both traversing almost the entire length of the block.

The steam mill that appeared on Snape's map of 1789 is annotated 'Phipson's Mill'. In 1798 a certain Thomas Phipson was described as a 'Refiner and Roller of Metal', and as having premises on New Street (*The New Birmingham Directory*, 35), but by 1800 when Thomas Phipson and son were described as 'Rollers and Millers', the New Street business appears to have been moved to Fazeley Street (*Chapman's Birmingham Directory*, 65). The mill itself, does not seem to have been devoted to metal working from the outset. This is suggested by the location of the Phipsons' business in 1800 which is given as 'Old-cotton-mill', on Fazeley Street.

In 1808 'Phipson's Mill' occupied a triangular plot of land between the western branch of the canal and the significantly named Cotton Street, which lay at right angles to, and was entered from, Fazeley Street. There were ranges of buildings on both sides of Cotton Street, and at the south end it communicated with Engine Street, which ran parallel with Fazeley Street but was entered from Canal Street (now New Canal Street). On the south side of Engine Street there was a single long range, but the north side was only sparsely occupied with buildings. The north-west quadrant of the

plot, defined by Cotton Street and Engine Street, was taken up with a number of well spaced buildings. A second built up area lay within the south-west corner of the site, which again comprised a number of well spaced buildings. There was nothing between the two branches of the canal, and between the eastern branch and the road to the east (now Pickford Street) were gardens.

By 1838 (Jobbins' map) the gardens to the east of the canal had been replaced by coal wharves, but otherwise the layout remained much the same as in 1808. Ackerman's Panoramic View of Birmingham of 1847 (Figure 8) shows the buildings occupying the position of 'Phipson's Mill' of Snape's map to be supplied with several tall chimneys, and a number of small, shed-like buildings on the coal wharves. Buildings are depicted on the western side of the site and show a certain amount of correlation with the dispositions of those shown on the maps, but are otherwise unreliable as to the character of these structures.

Circa 1855 a map by Piggot Smith was published for the Board of Health (Figure 9); this shows that a third branch of the canal had been constructed between the other two. A building had been erected on the corner of Bordesley Street and Pickford Street. On the west side of Cotton Street was a row of terraced houses, some of which were back to back, and a row of back to back terraced houses on the south side of Engine Street. In both cases the houses to the rear were served by a lane or 'court'. The Rate Book (The Grand Levy Book) for 1840 lists all the properties of Cotton Street and most of the properties of Engine Street as 'House and Premises'. The court houses had the lowest rates at 3s. 6d, the highest rates were 6s. On Engine Street one John Turvey had a 'House Stable and Premises' rated at 18s. 6d. It is probable that this property was located on the south side of the street where there were some larger premises. As might be expected, the 1861 census shows that these terraced houses on Engine Street and Cotton Street were occupied by people with a variety of working class occupations. Several of these were connected with metalworking: screw maker, brass founder (several), wire drawer, German silver polisher (several). A number worked in wood: cooper (several), carpenter, wood turner. In addition there was, a bellows maker, a family of brush makers, a tailor, several labourers, a horse slaughterer and a pearl button maker.

By 1888 (Ordnance Survey, Figure 10) the triangular plot of land occupied by 'Phipson's Mill' in 1789, was largely covered by a single block of buildings described as 'Fazeley Street Rolling Mill'. The buildings on the west side of Cotton Street had disappeared, and there had been some modifications to the buildings in the north-west corner of the site. These included additions to the Canal Street frontage (renamed 'New Canal Street' since Piggot Smith's survey of 1855), and the appearance of a large rectangular building on the north side of Engine Street, labelled 'Hide Skin & c. Market'. Another, larger building on the south side of the street, and partially bordered by the canal, is similarly described. The buildings recorded by Piggot Smith in the south-east corner of the site appear to have been largely retained, though additions had been made, and those between the central and western arms of the canal were annotated 'Star Works Enamelled Slate'. To the north of the Star Works was a 'Timber and Slate Yard' and associated buildings. The area between the central and eastern branches of the canal is labelled 'Bordesley Street Wharf'.

The Twentieth Century

Further changes had occurred by 1905 (Ordnance Survey, Figure 11). The disparate collection of buildings that made up the Star Works had been replaced by a single large block, which, with the yard to the north, was now described, as 'Timber and Slate Wharf'. There had been a certain amount of demolition further west including some of the structures recorded by Piggot Smith, though the street frontage seems to have largely survived. The north-west sector had also undergone alterations, principally the loss of most of the buildings of the New Canal Street frontage. Cotton Street was no longer defined as a street and seems to have become more of a yard. The only further main development to have occurred by 1918 (Ordnance Survey, Figure 12) was the construction of a large building or canopy over the eastern branch of the canal.

In 1924 John Sumner, the most successful of the many Birmingham based tea merchants, relocated his Typhoo Company to Digbeth (Upton 1993, 90) and built new premises on Bordesley Street, specifically, it seems, in order to have direct access to the canal system and to facilitate the transport of tea from Ceylon. Three thousand chests of Ceylon tea were to be unloaded at the Typhoo Wharf every week (Upton 1993, 169). The plans for the new building were drawn up by Bateman and Bateman, Architects, whose Birmingham Office was situated on Bennets Hill, submitted to the City Council on 14 January 1924 (Building Plan No.36679, Figures 13 & 14), and approved on 11 February. However, the front elevation of the structure (Plate 1) that was actually built bears no resemblance to the drawings (Figure 14), and a change of plan must have taken place soon after the approval of the application. Subsequent alterations to submitted plans were made by the Birmingham architect and surveyor, Harry W. Weedon (Building Plan No. 47934), so it is possible that the present design is the result of a change of architect. The Typhoo building is shown on the 1937 Ordnance Survey map as a long rectangular structure on a north/south alignment labelled as 'Warehouse' (Figure 15). It was built over the central branch of the canal, and was attached to the Timber and Slate Wharf building that was erected between 1888 and 1904 by further structures to the rear.

Also, by 1937 the gaps in the north-west quarter had largely been infilled, including the erection of two large buildings immediately west of the Rolling Mills, partially on the site of Cotton Street. The south-west quadrant had also been developed, Engine Street had been built on, and the Hide and Skin Market building to the south of it had grown in size, apparently incorporating some of its neighbouring structures. A number of separate units in the extreme south-west corner of this quarter had been replaced by a single large structure. In addition, the north-east corner of the block was now occupied by a single large building, and another, only slightly smaller lay to the south of it. To the south of the Rolling Mills, between the central and western branches of the canal and straddling the latter, another large building had appeared.

On 10 April 1941 the Typhoo building was hit by incendiary bombs, which are said to have destroyed the whole complex (Upton 1993, 90). This cannot be entirely true, because the façade of 1929 survives largely intact and there is a near contemporary

elevation to the rear. Indeed, photographs taken on 18 and 19 April show that it was the buildings on the site of the eastern branch of the canal that were destroyed whereas, the main building though very badly damaged at second floor level, remained standing.¹

In 1952 (Ordnance Survey, Figure 16) the premises are described as the 'Tea Packing Works and Warehouse', and an elongated extension had been built at its north-east corner on the bank of the central branch of the canal.² The warehouse over the eastern branch of the canal had been reduced in size, owing, no doubt to the damage sustained during the Second World War, and now comprised an L-shaped block south and east of the waterway. The former Timber and Slate Wharf building of c.1900 appears as a blank, suggesting that this too may have been a casualty of bombing. The building at the north-east corner of the block was now described as a 'Weighing Machine Factory', and the structure to the south of it as a 'Cardboard Box Factory'.

Only one major change appears to have occurred between 1952 and 1963 (Ordnance Survey, Figure 17), which is that the Tea Packing Works and Warehouse building had expanded massively towards the east as far as Pickford Street. Most of this complex survives, though by 1978 (Ordnance Survey, Figure 18), the northern extension built between 1937 and 1952 had gone. Other changes that had occurred to the block by 1978 included the clearance of all structures from the south-west quadrant, the demolition of the Rolling Mills and the construction of factory units either side of a new road, Benacre Drive, that roughly follows the course of Cotton Street.

9.0 Building Assessment

The former Typhoo premises comprise a bonded warehouse, where the tea was held until duty had been paid on it. The earliest part of the building can be dated to 1929 by embossed figures on two rainwater heads; there are large extensions to the east and west. The main building is aligned north/south and faces south onto Bordesley Street (Plate 1). It has modernist leanings but is essentially classical in inspiration, and is built of blue brick (English bond) and concrete with reconstituted stone dressings. There are three storeys, the second floor being of reduced proportions, with floor and parapet bands, a wall head moulded cornice supported on paired brackets across the centre, and a stepped parapet.

The window bays are in the rhythm of 1:3:1:8:1:3:1 so that the façade is divided into a centre block with flanking wings, articulated by single bay projections. The window bays of the central block are articulated with column-like triangular projections suggesting a giant order, and between the first and second floor windows, are alternate vertical strips of raised and sunken brickwork that form a decorative band (Plate 2). The single-bay projections house, at ground level, from left to right, window, door, window, door. All these openings have reconstituted stone surrounds incorporating shallow obelisks over, suggesting pediments (Plate 3), and, on the first floor band above, the Typhoo symbol of three Ts (for Typhoo Tipps Tea) within a crescent (Plate

¹ Warwickshire Photographic Society, Birmingham Local Studies, WK/D1 661 & WK/D1 662.

² A wing in this position is described as the canteen in the architect's drawings of 1924, but it had not been built by 1937.

4). Also, between first and second floors, each single bay projection has a reconstituted stone panel (Plate 5).

To the rear is a composed but less regular elevation (Plate 6) that is more modernist in style than the Bordesley Street elevation. A roughly central 4-storey, 2-bay block, articulated vertically with plain pilaster buttresses, and horizontally by window head bands and plain parapet. To the left is a slightly lower 3-storey wing with similar detailing. Also a slightly lower wing to the right with a central stone or concrete capped projecting tower which forms one of the main features of this front. This elevation includes extensions to the building of 1929, though these were in existence by 1937, and can only be a few years later in date.

The interior inspection showed that the building is steel framed, and that there is a marked change in floor level from the low south end towards Bordesley Street, to a higher northern end. The higher level coincides with the position of the canal, and may be a consequence of its existence.

10.0 Conclusions and Provisional Recommendations

Below-ground archaeology

It is likely that construction of the canal branches in the late 18th and early 19th centuries will have obliterated the pre-industrial archaeological deposits in those areas. It is also probable that the depth of foundation required by the existing multi-storey buildings fronting Bordesley Street (the former Typhoo premises) would have caused extensive disturbance. Also there may have been some ground contamination in the area of the enamelled slate works. The south-west corner of the site (the current car park), has been subjected to various phases of nineteenth and twentieth century development, and some ground contamination may have occurred in the vicinity of the former skin and hide market.

In mitigation of these factors it should be considered that upcast from the canal excavations may have been used to build up the land surface prior to building being carried out. If so, then this might have offered protection to the early layers. However, the historical evidence, which shows a dearth of settlement in this locality, does not offer much hope of recovering significant remains from the pre-industrial era. The main interest of the site, however, is its eighteenth century phase, and the transition between the agricultural economy of the Middle Ages and the industrial one of the nineteenth century. Further archaeological work may certainly help to recover evidence to further our understanding of this phenomenon. In particular, the site of the current car park, which contained the western branch of the canal, and its associated wharves, offers considerable potential for investigating the sequential development of the site. For this reason it is recommended that trial trenching be carried out on the site of the current car park in order to evaluate the survival of the archaeology.

Above-ground archaeology

It appears from the map evidence and from a visual inspection of the Study Area, that no buildings earlier than *circa* 1900 survive. However, the Development Site

contains, in the Typhoo premises of 1929, a building of architectural distinction and of both local and (owing to the Typhoo associations) national historic interest. It is also important from an industrial archaeological point of view as being a very late example of the association of an industrial complex with the canal network. The attached buildings to the west (with the exception of the 1950s block on the site of the old timber wharf building) are close in date to the 1920s structure, and should also be considered an architecturally and archaeologically important part of the complex.

In line with government advice (DoE 1994) there must be a strong presumption in favour of retaining this building within any future development. In the event of alteration to the fabric, then it is important that an archaeological record is made according to RCHME guidelines (RCHME 1999). It is suggested that such a record should consist, at the very least, of a photographic survey, a written description, and the production of a phased plan (based on existing drawings if available).

11.0 Acknowledgements

This report was written by Malcolm Hislop and edited by Steve Litherland, who also managed the project. Nigel Dodd prepared the figures. Thanks are due to Dr Mike Hodder, and to the staff of Birmingham Central Library Local Study and Archive departments for their assistance.

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- 1918 Ordnance Survey 1:2500
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1978 Ordnance Survey 1:1250

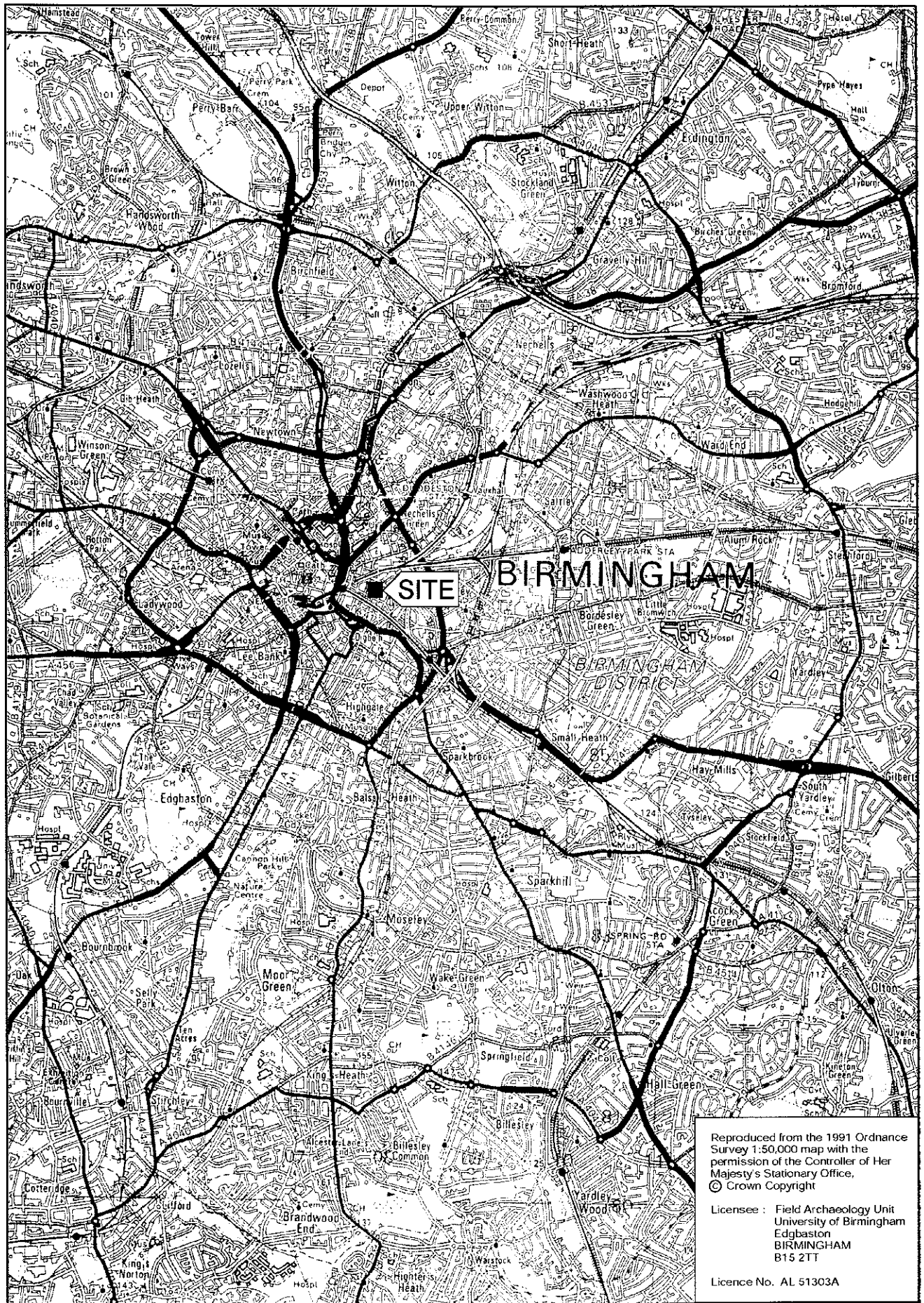


Fig.1

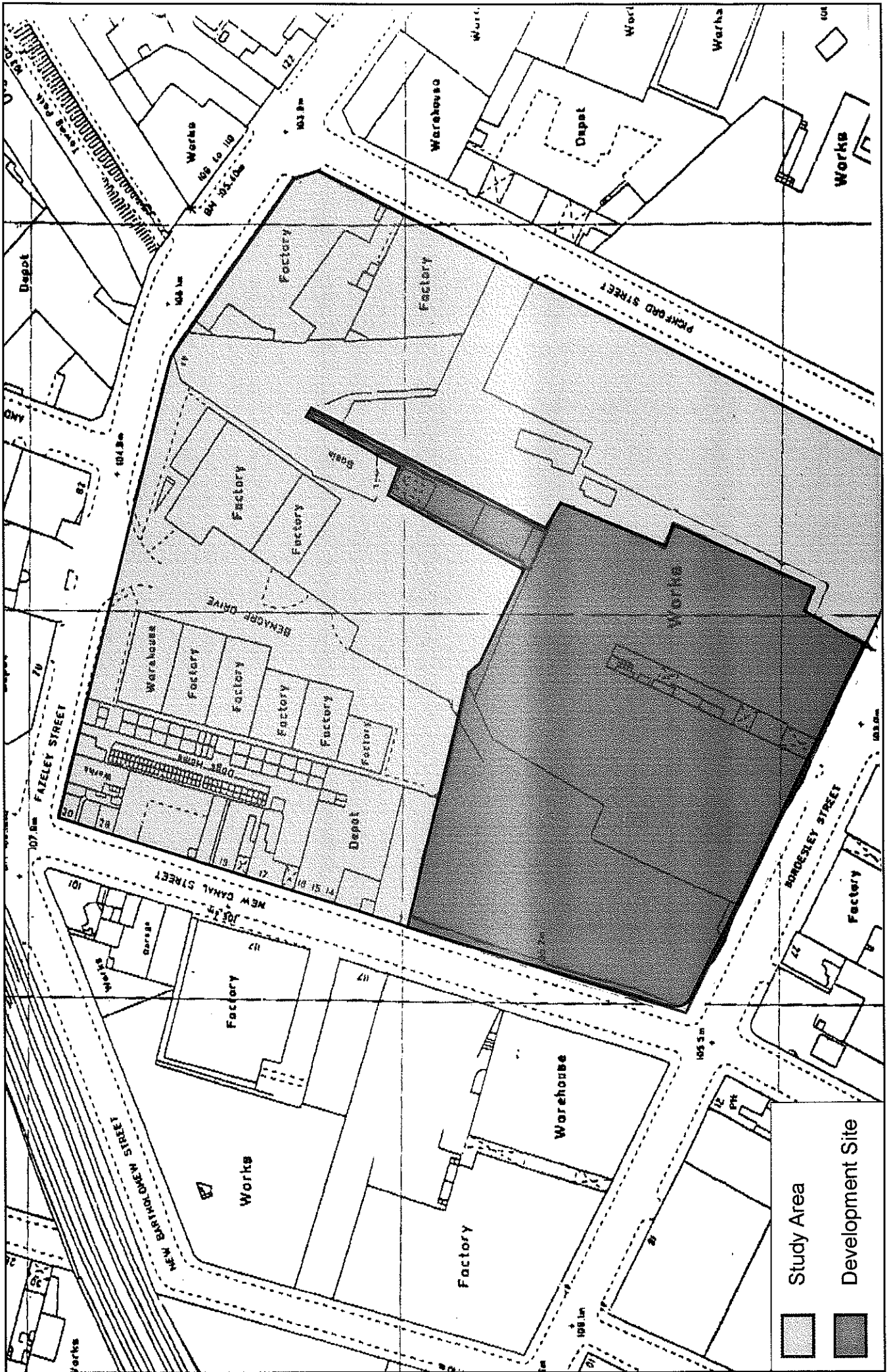


Fig.2

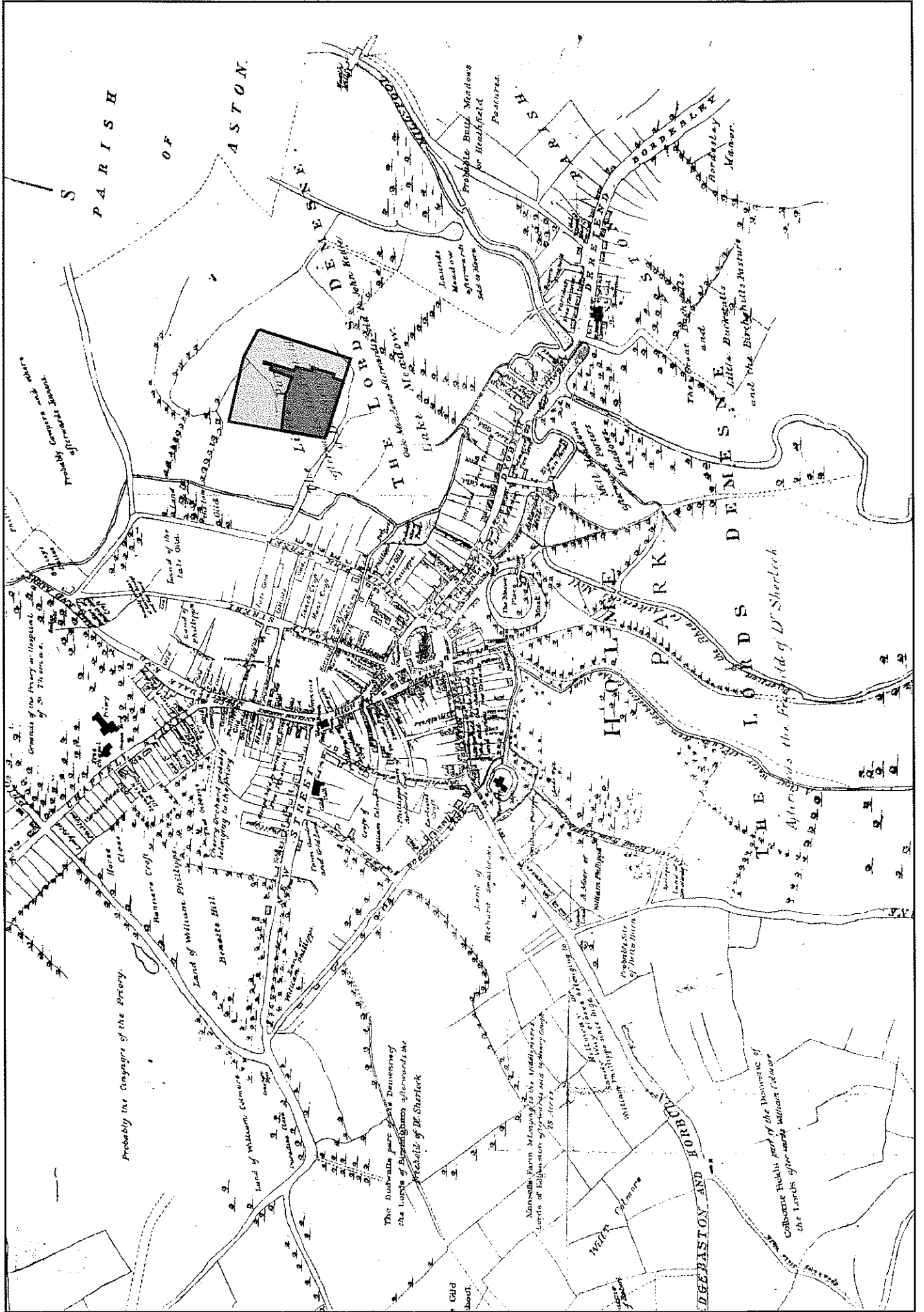
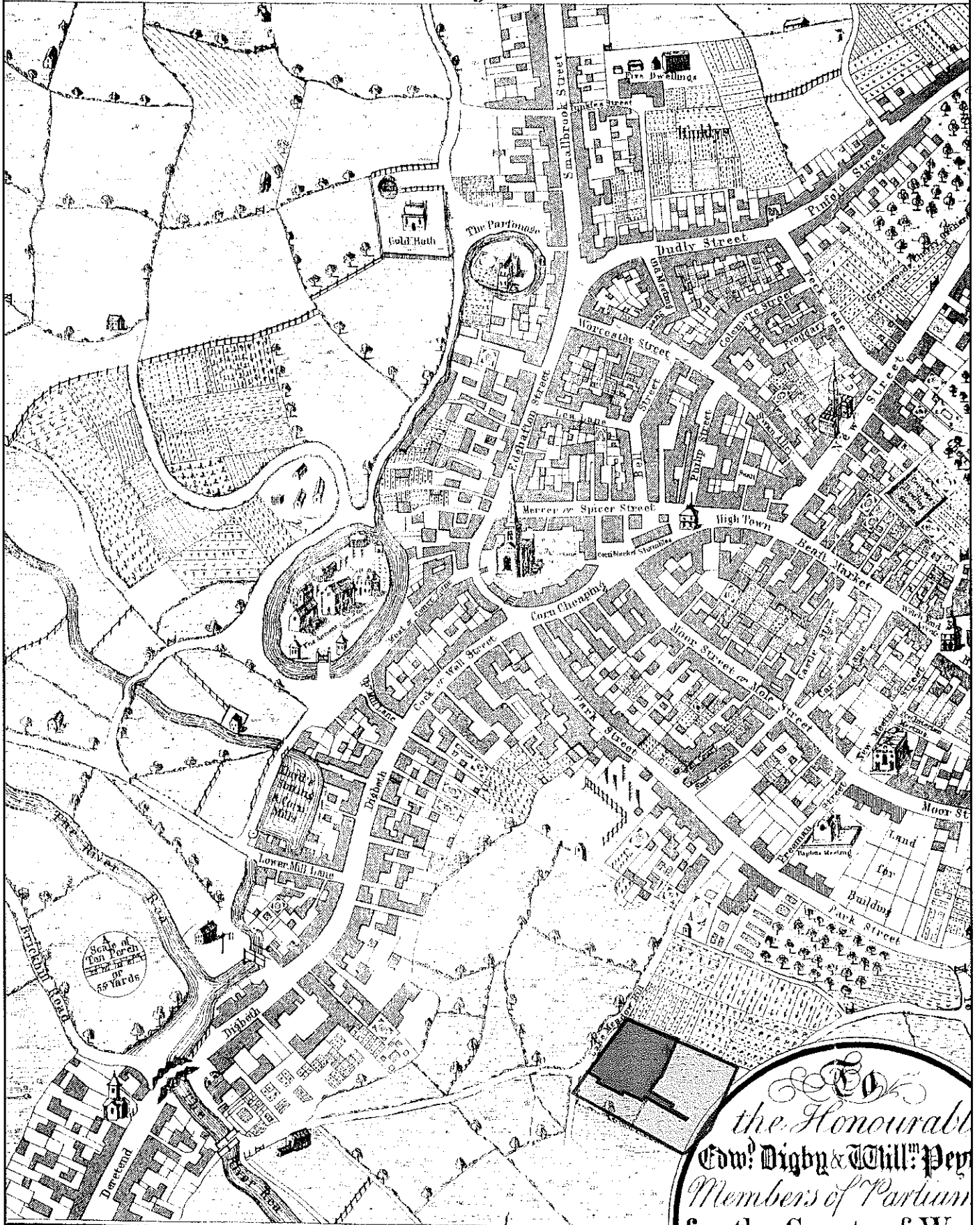


Fig.3 (1883)

The PLAN of BIRMINGHAM



To
 the Honourable
 Edw: Digby & Will: Pitt
 Members of Parliament
 for the County of War

this Plate is humbly
 by their most obed: humble Serv

In the Year 1700 Birmingham Contained 30 Streets no
 Courts and 2504 Houses 15032 Inhabitants one
 Church dedicated to St Martin & a Chappel to St John & a School
 founded by Edward 6th also 2 Dissenting Meeting Houses



Copied from the Original Engraving and Published by Thomas Underwood.

Fig.4 (1731)

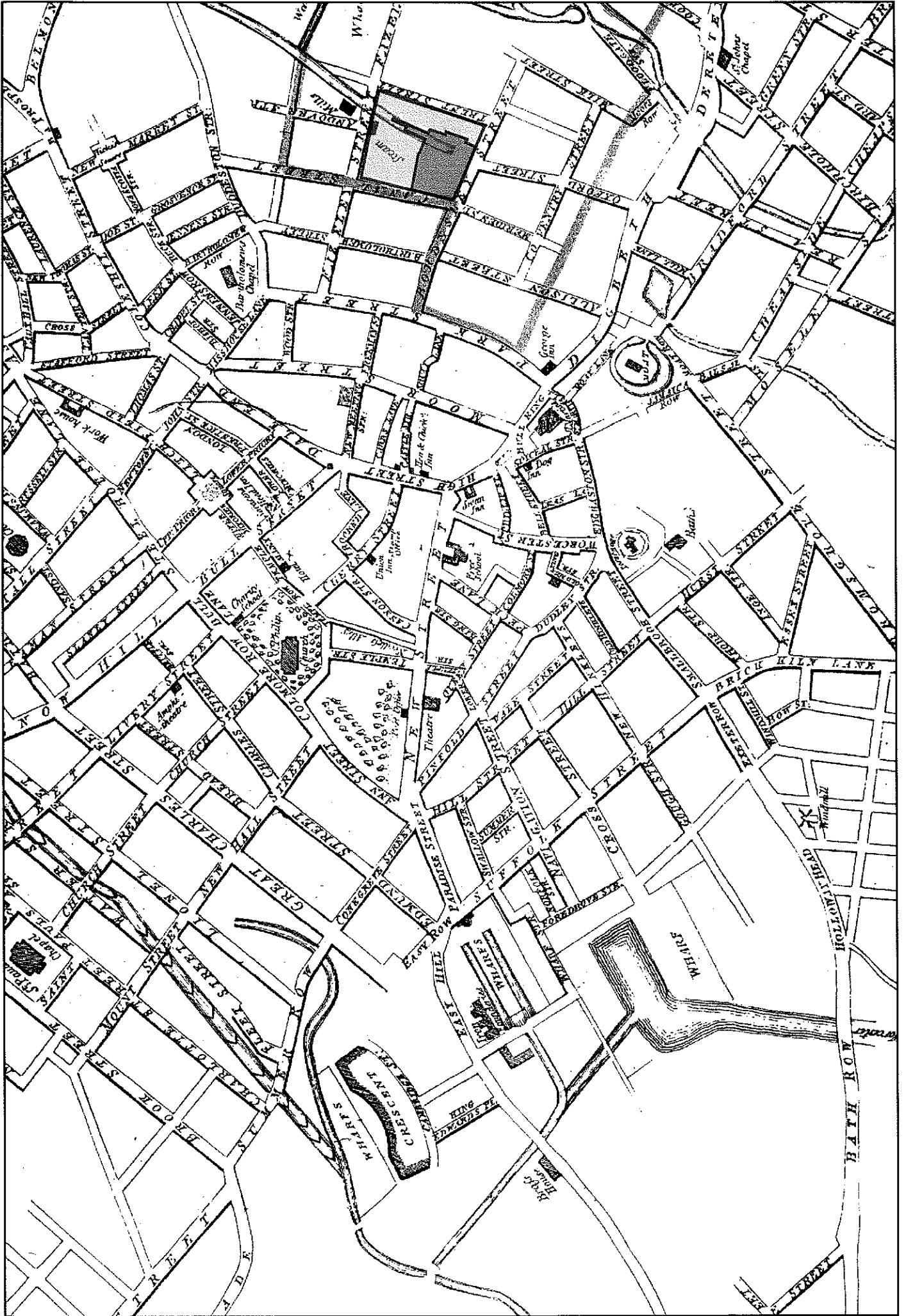


Fig.5 (1789)

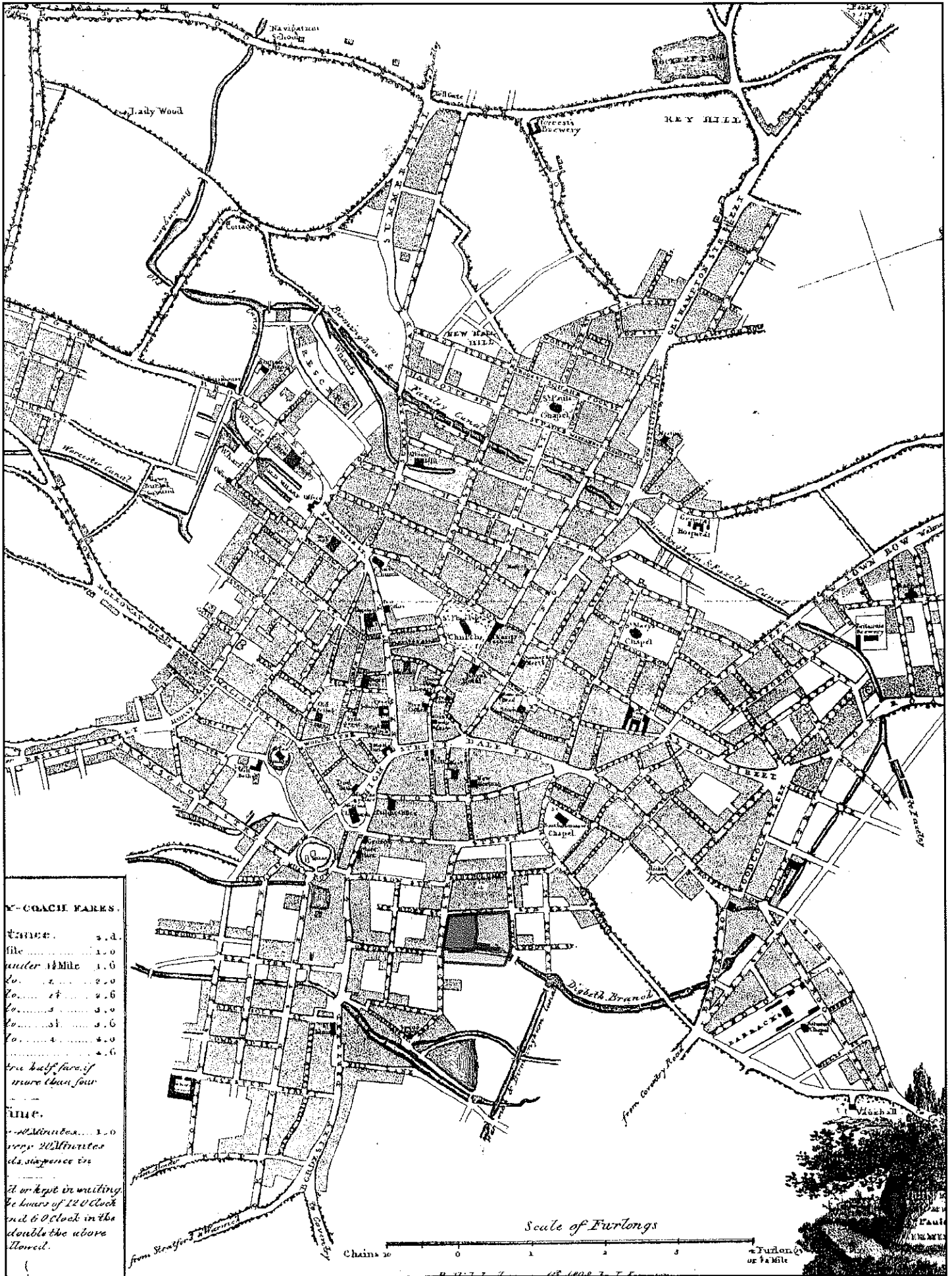


Fig.6 (1808)

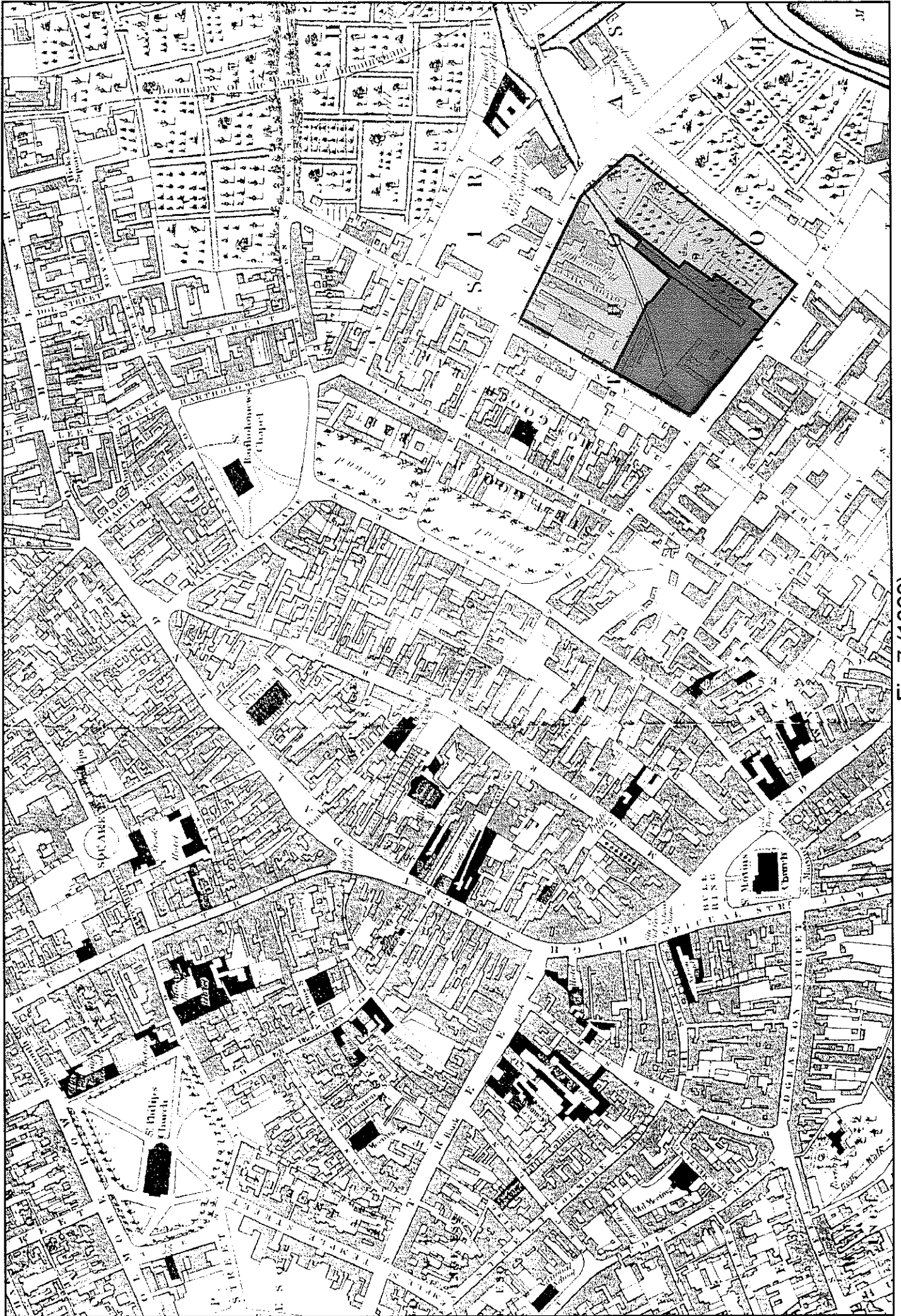


Fig.7 (1828)

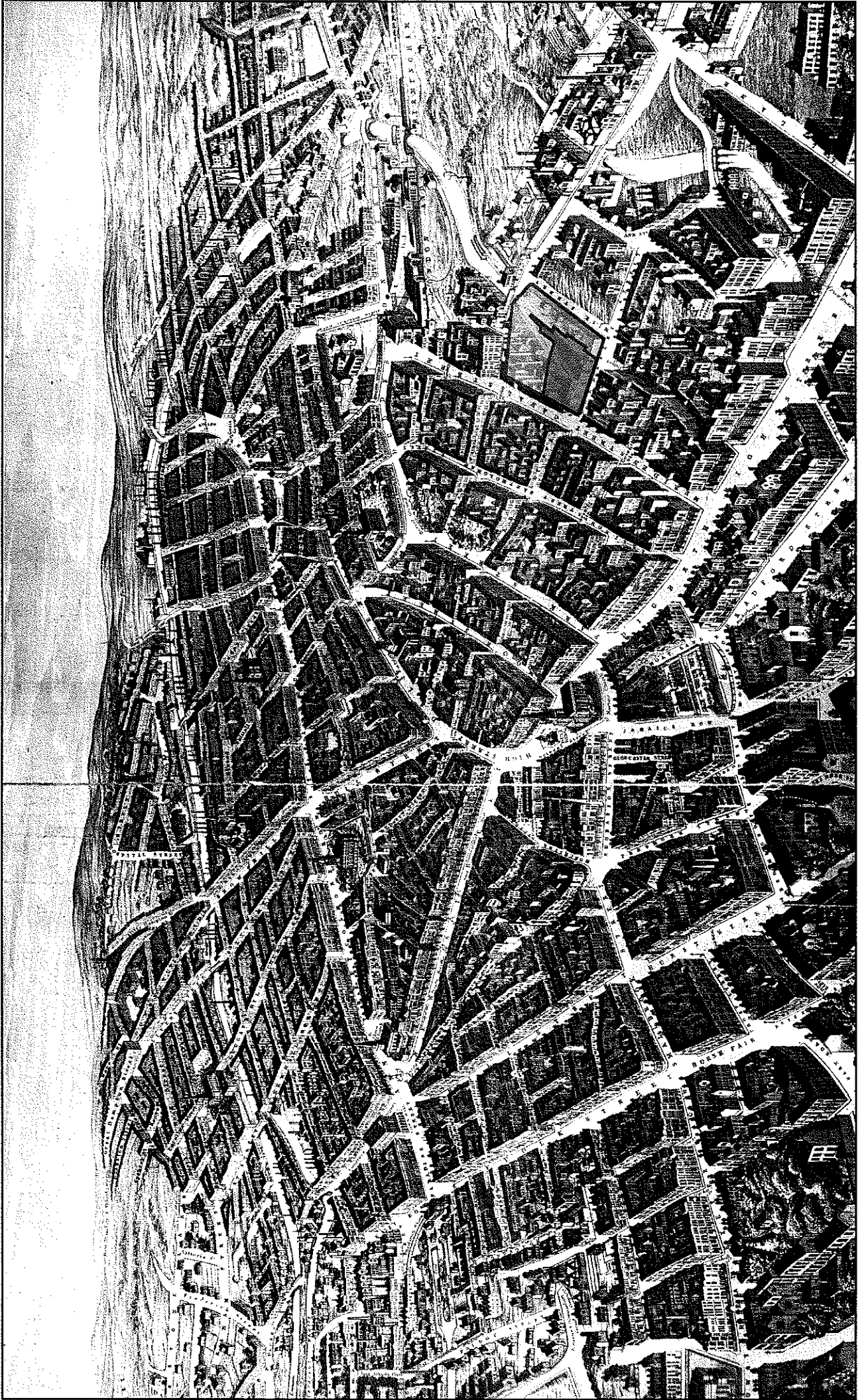


Fig.8 (1847)

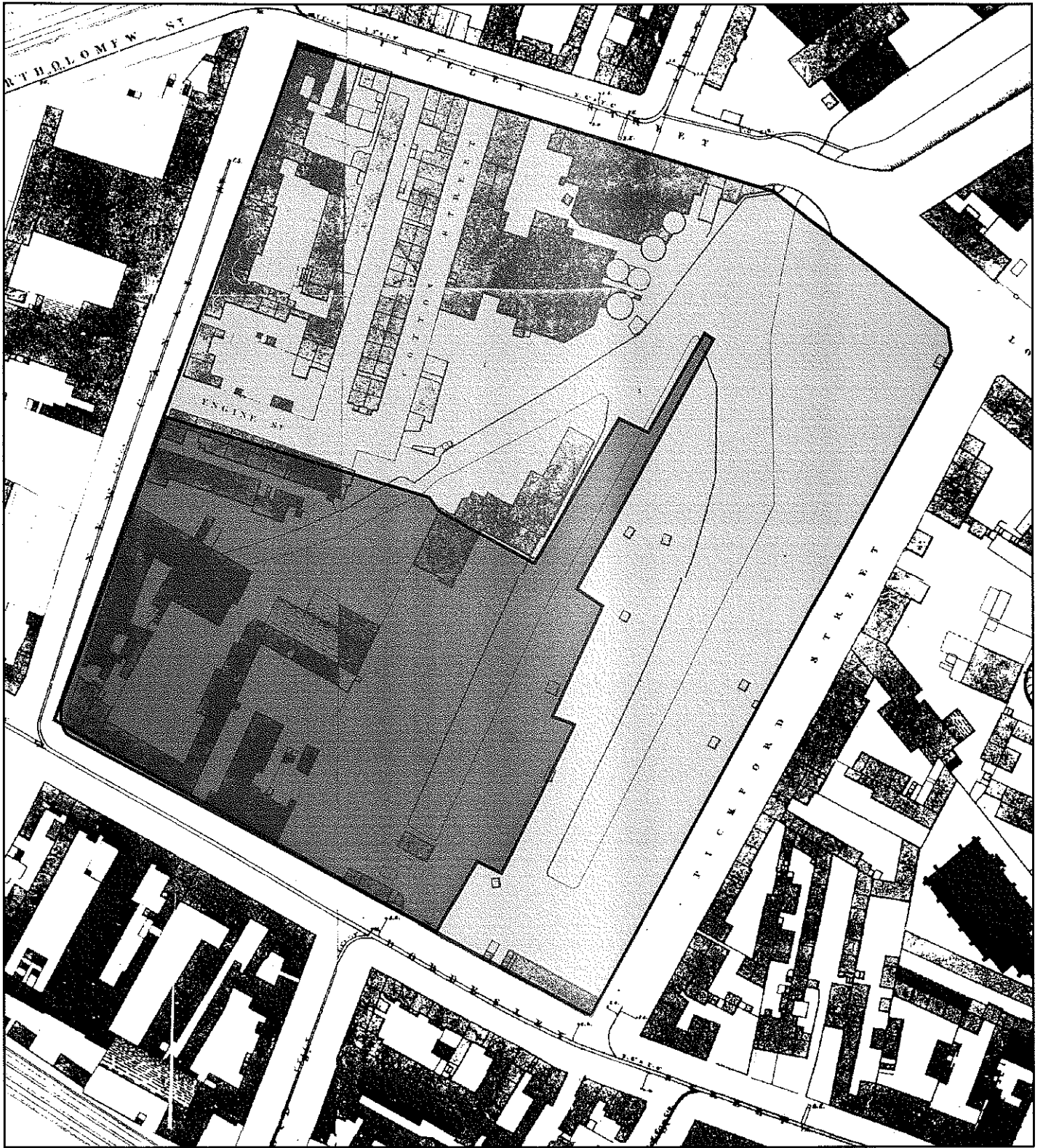


Fig.9 (circa 1855)

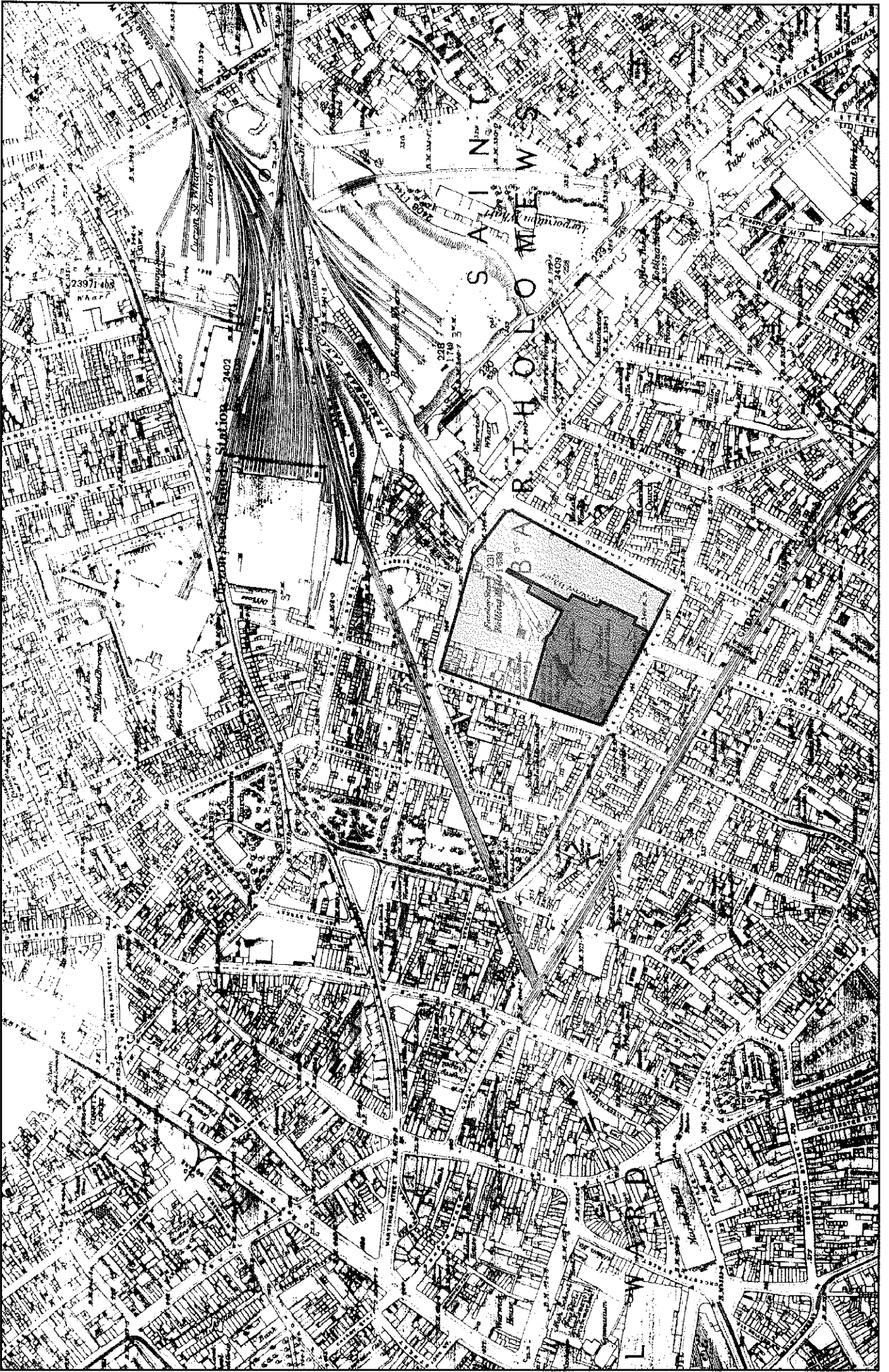


Fig. 10 (1888)

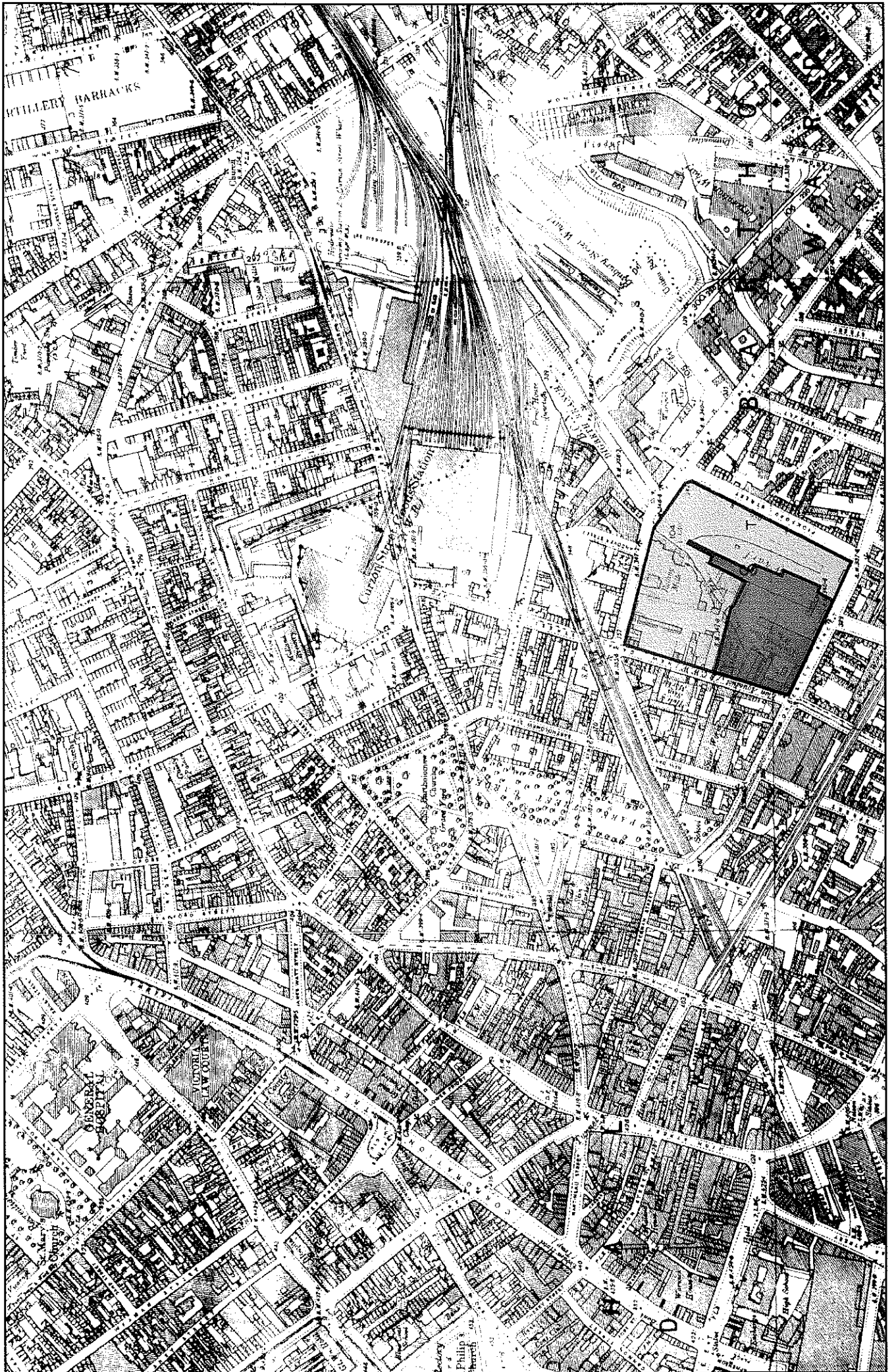


Fig.11 (1905)

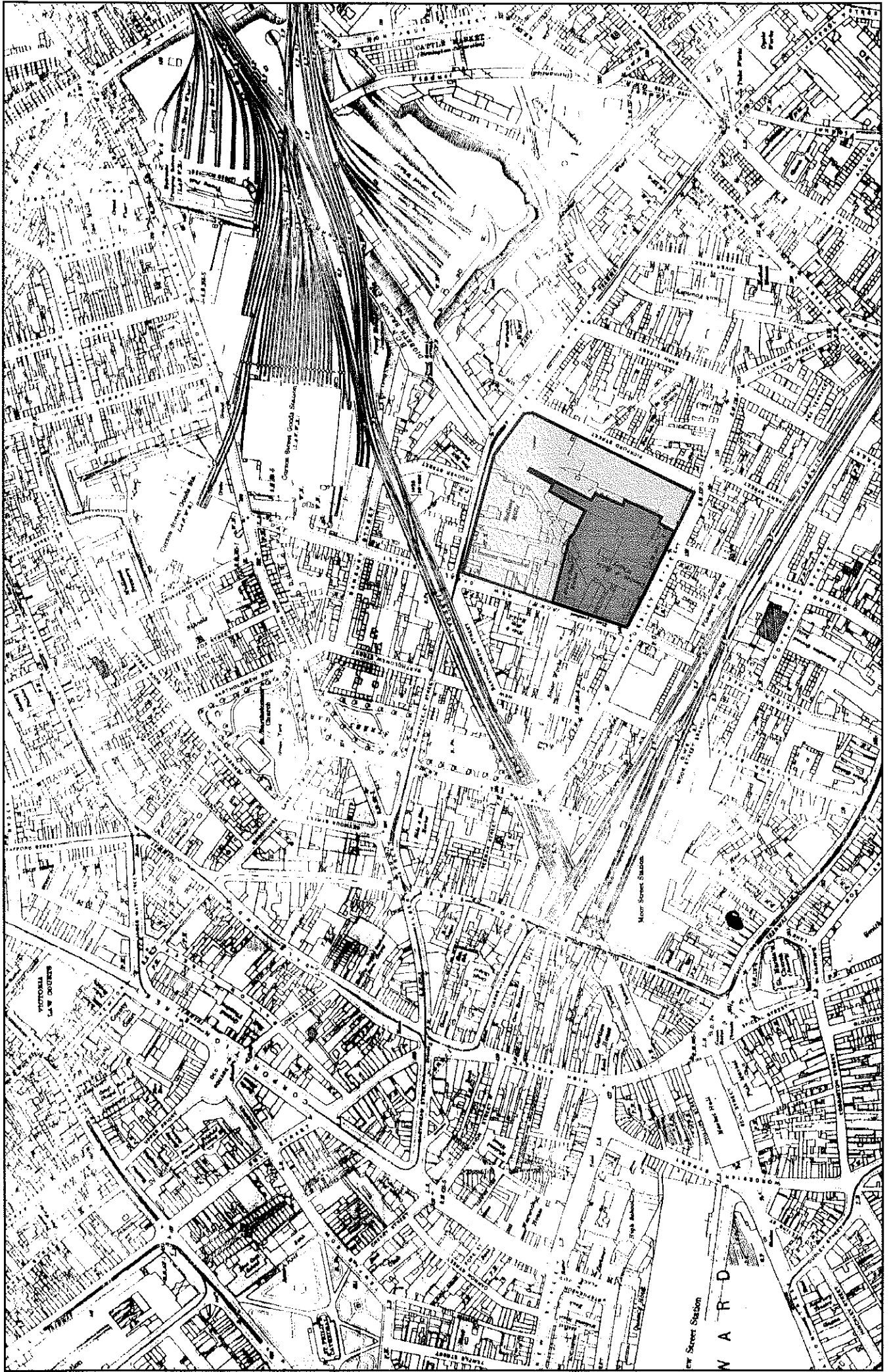


Fig.12 (1918)

SED BONDED WAREHOUSE

LEY ST. BIRMINGHAM

Scale: Eight feet to one inch

GROUND-FLOOR-PLAN

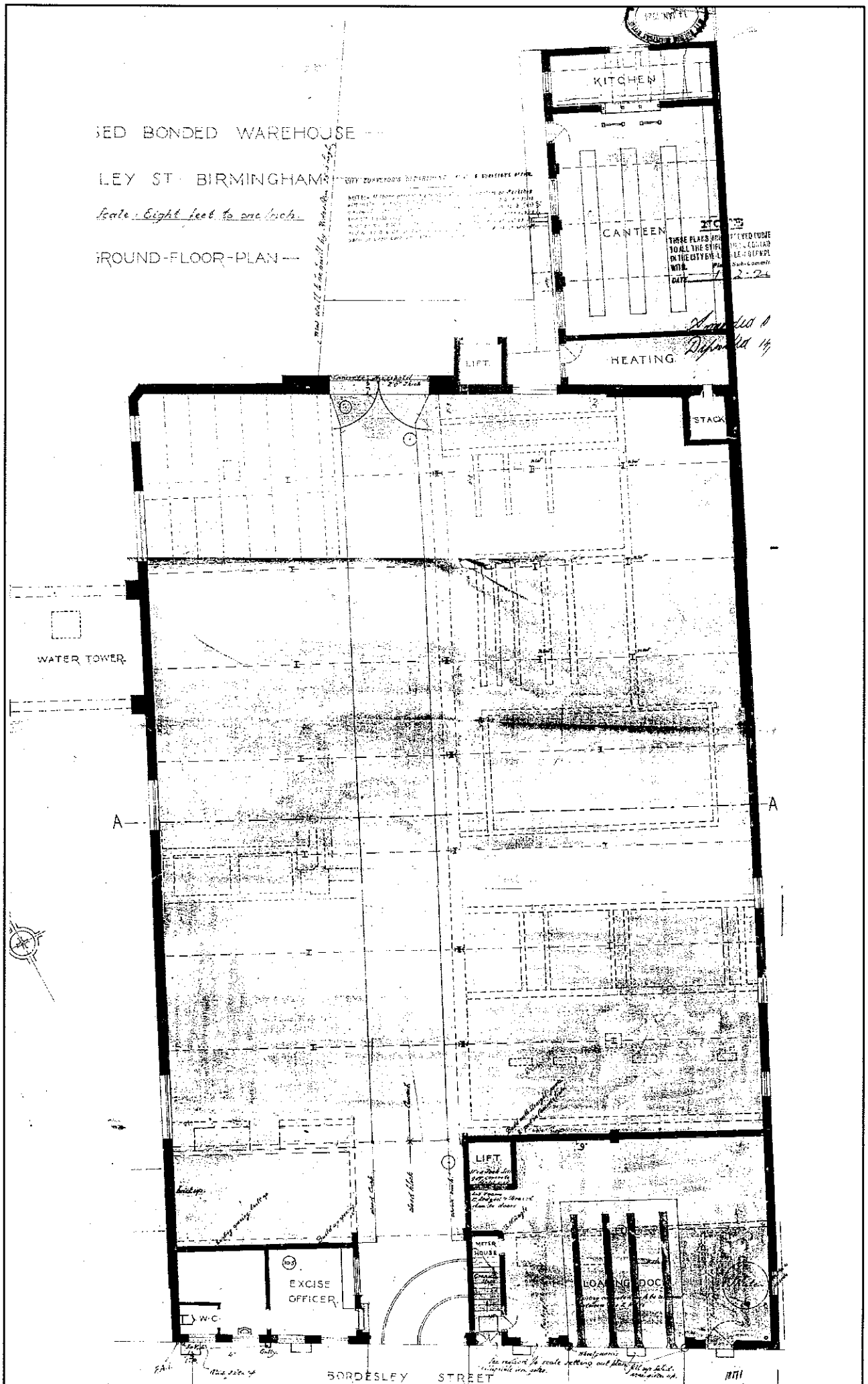


Fig.13

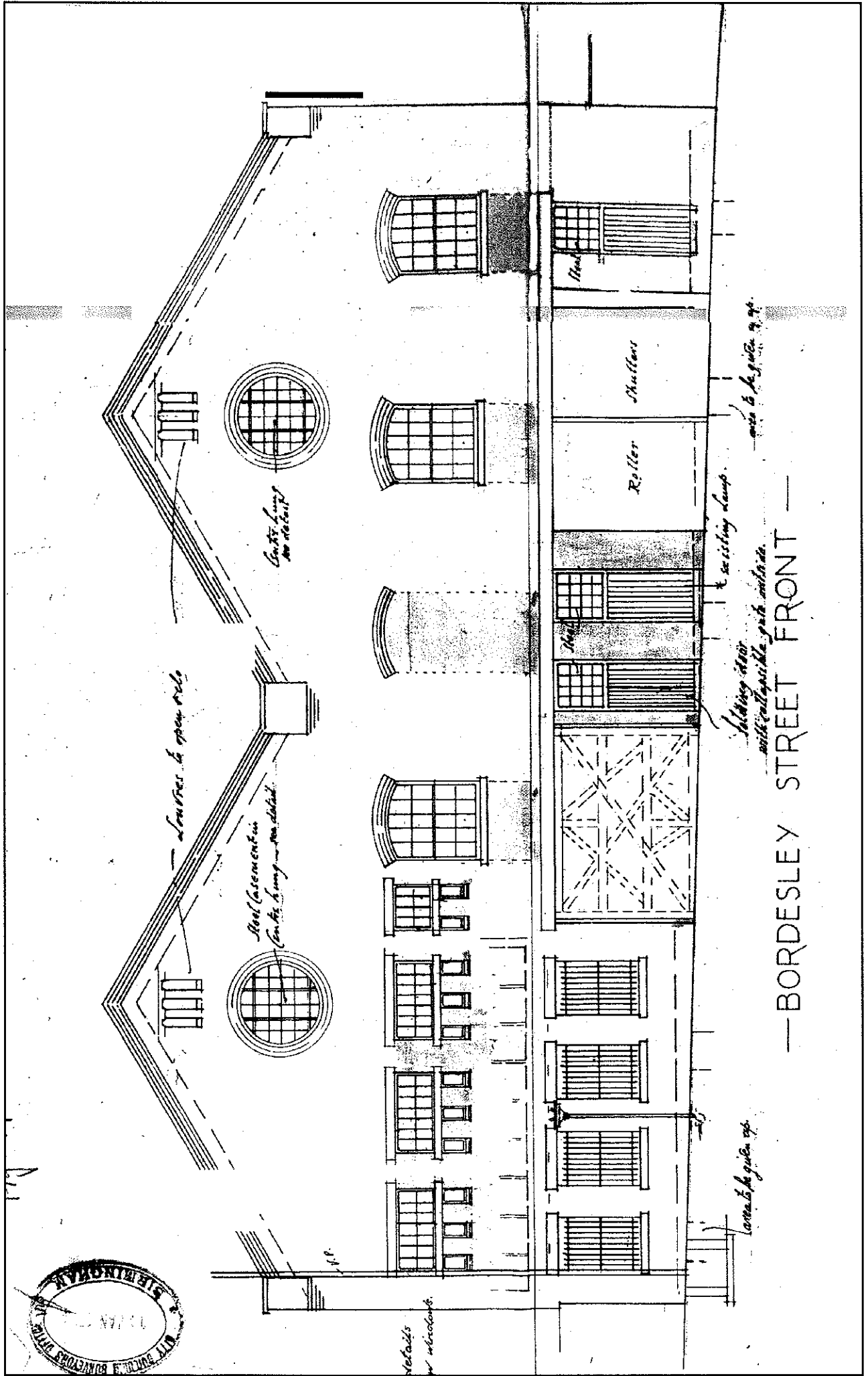


Fig. 14

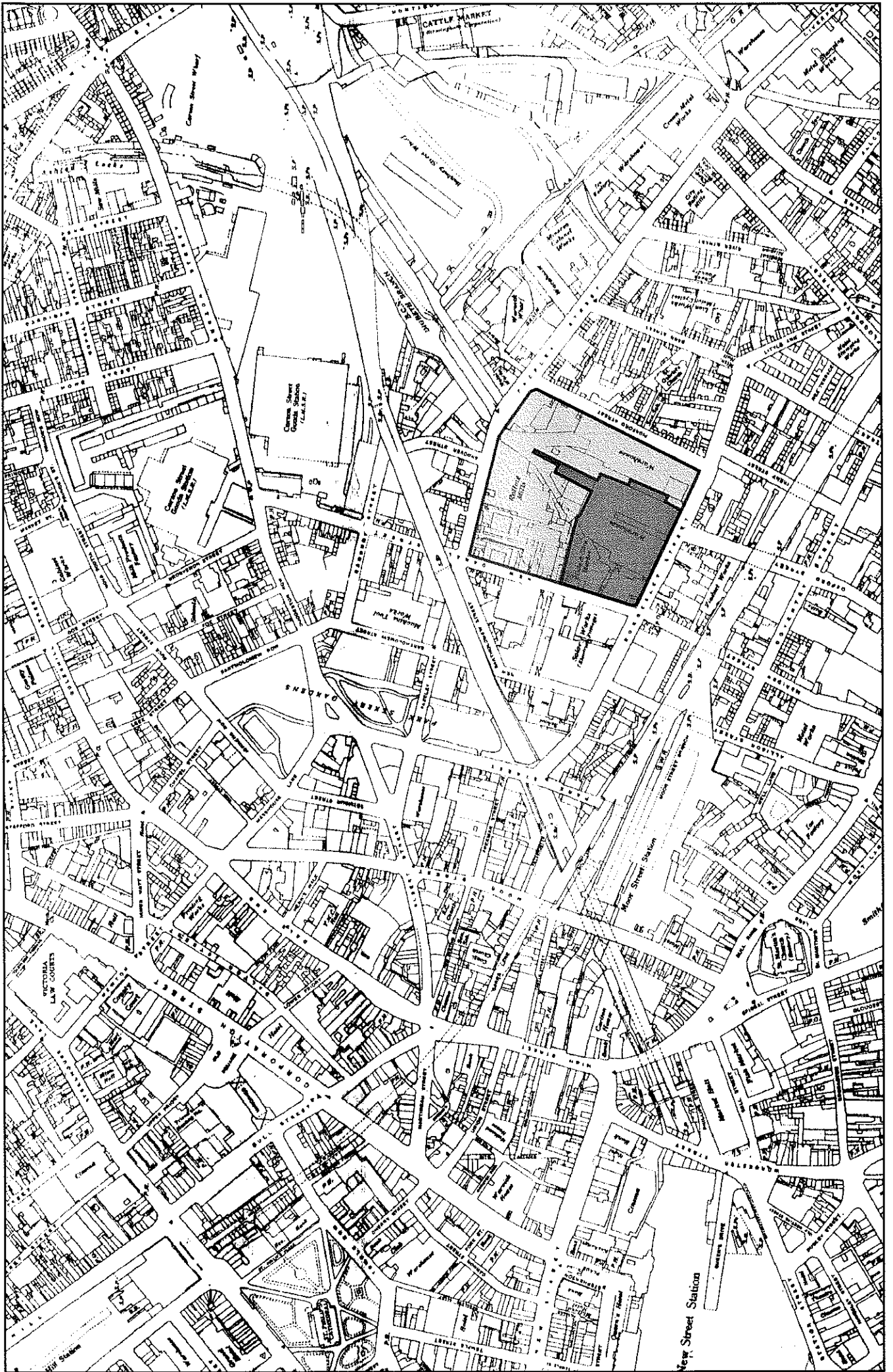


Fig.15 (1937)

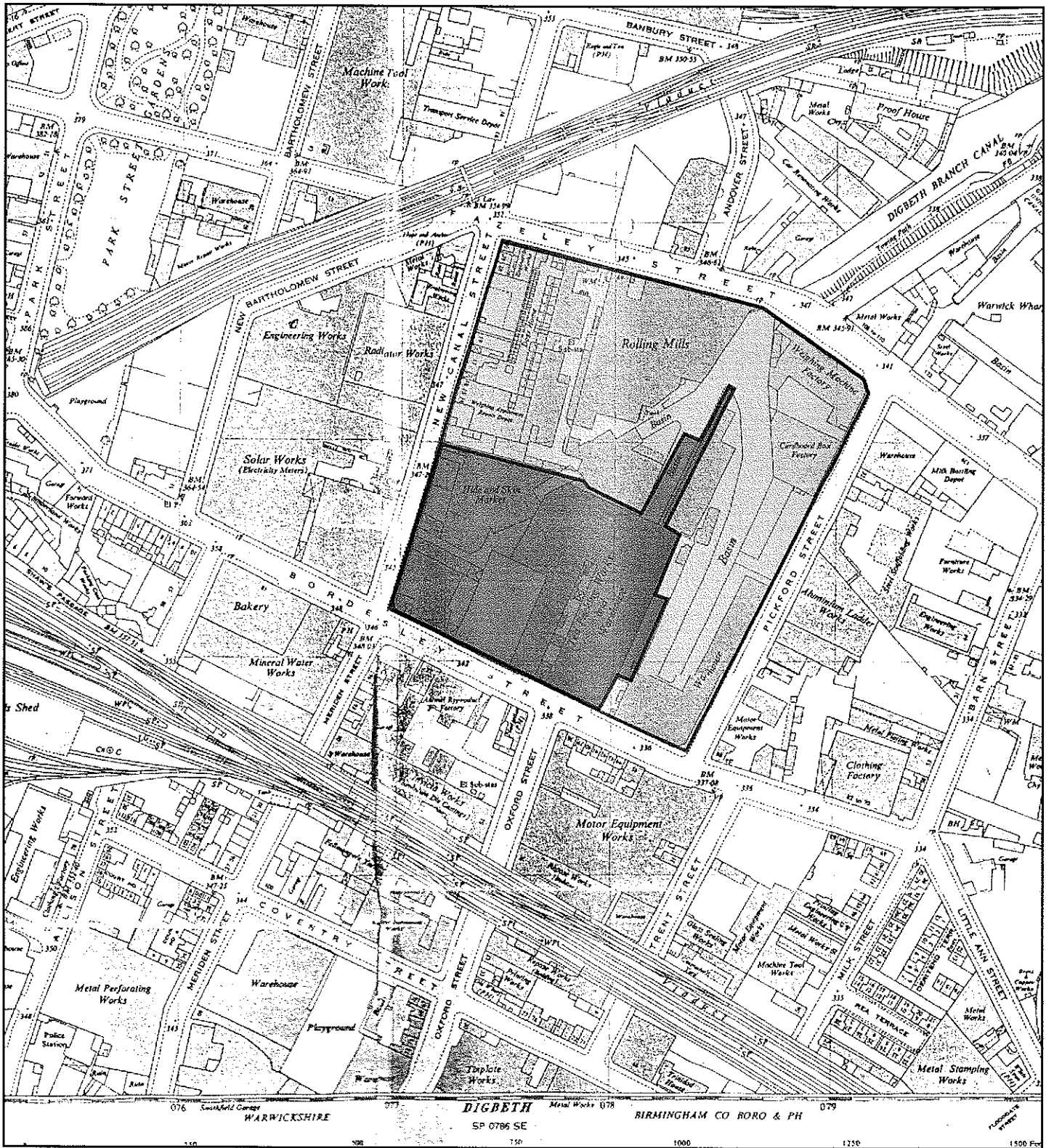


Fig.16 (1952)

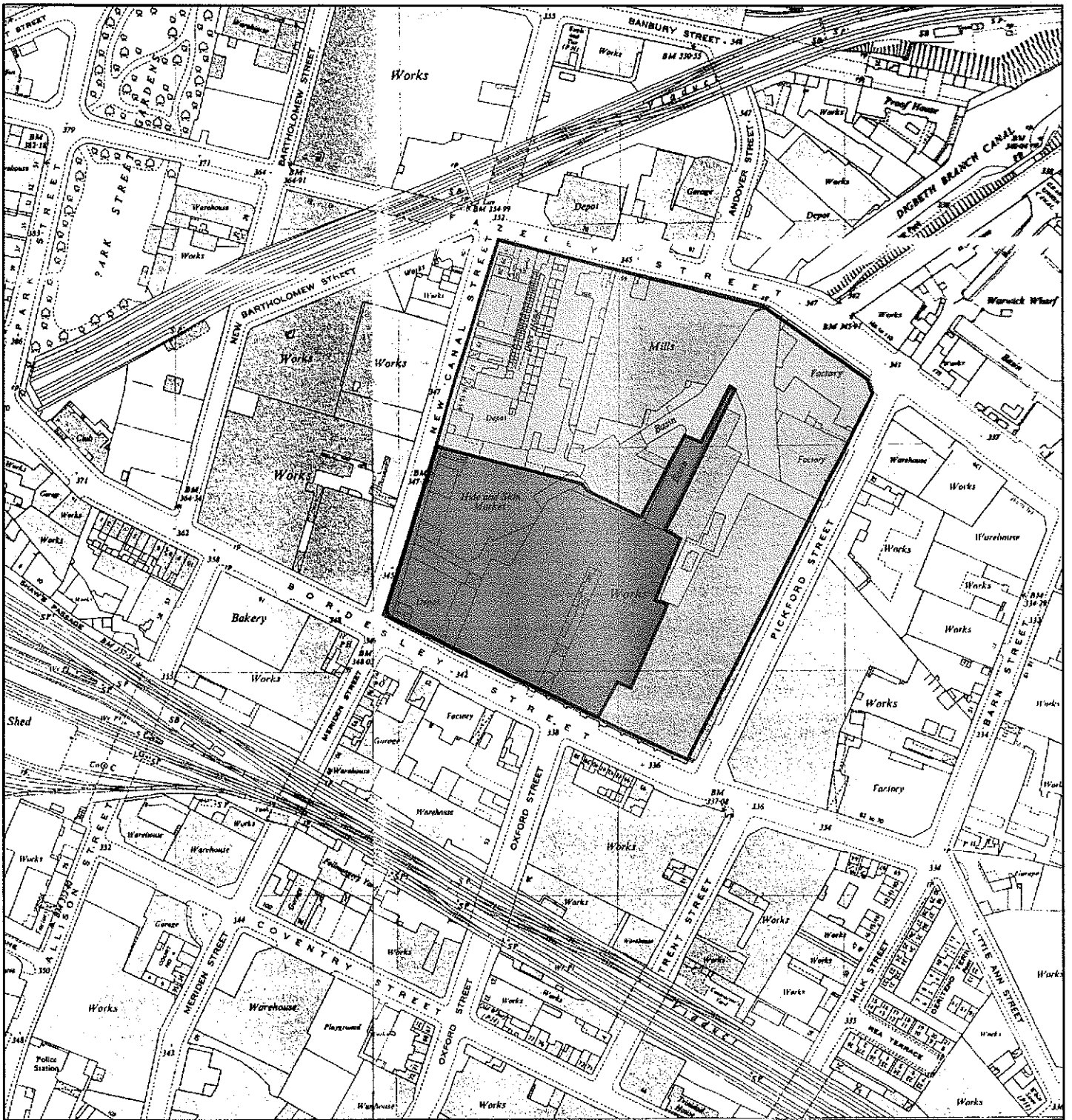


Fig.17 (1963)

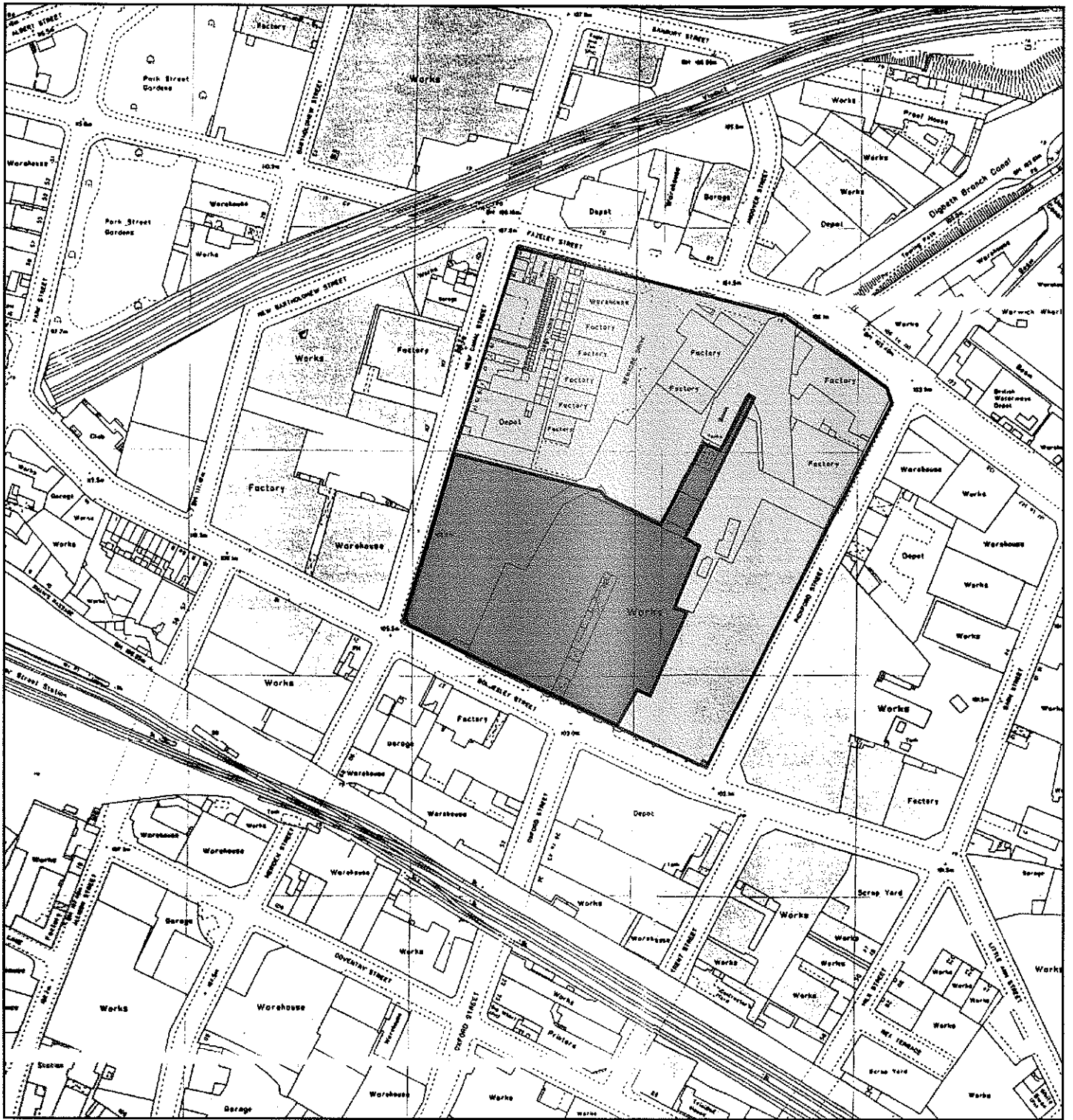


Fig.18 (1978)



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3

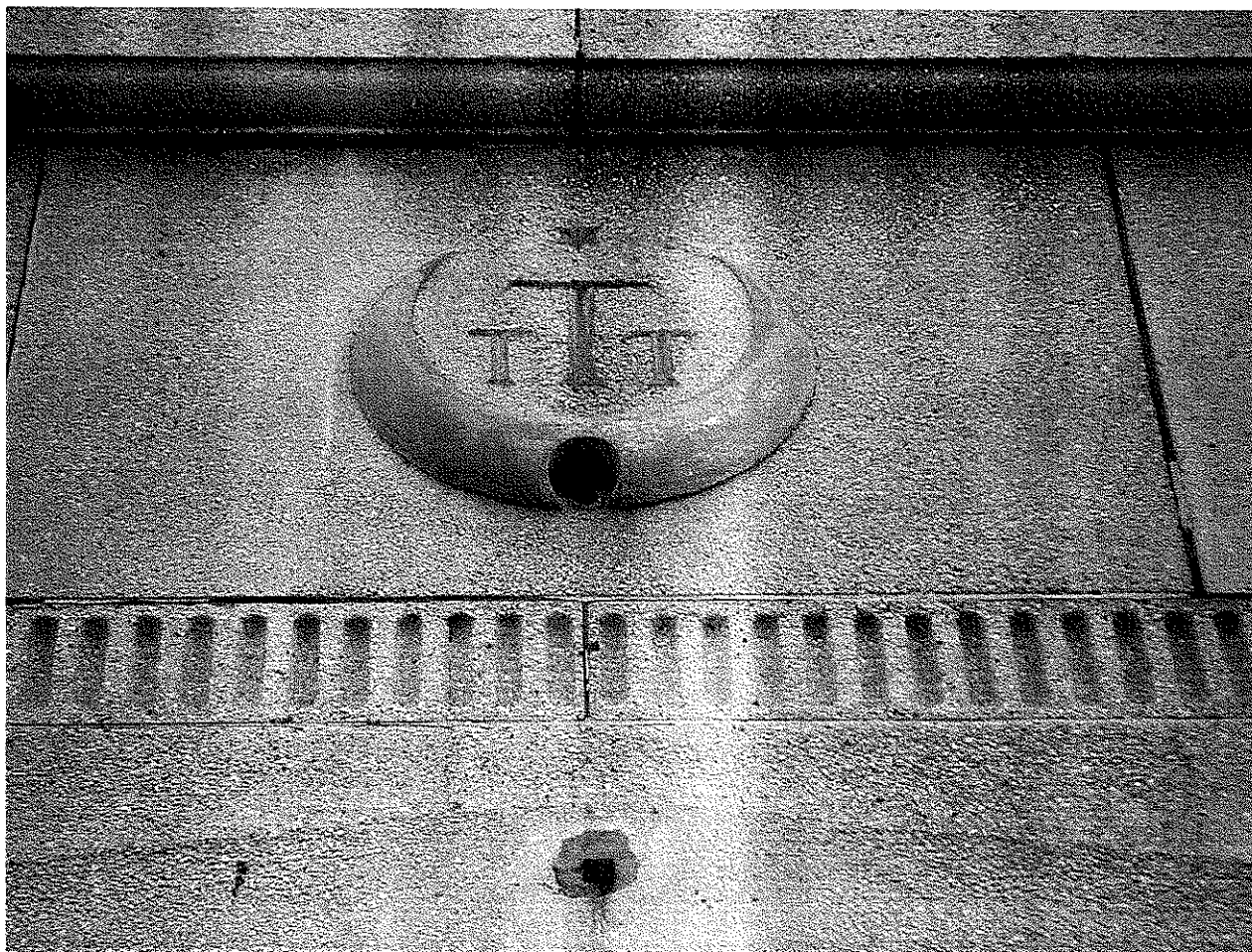


Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6