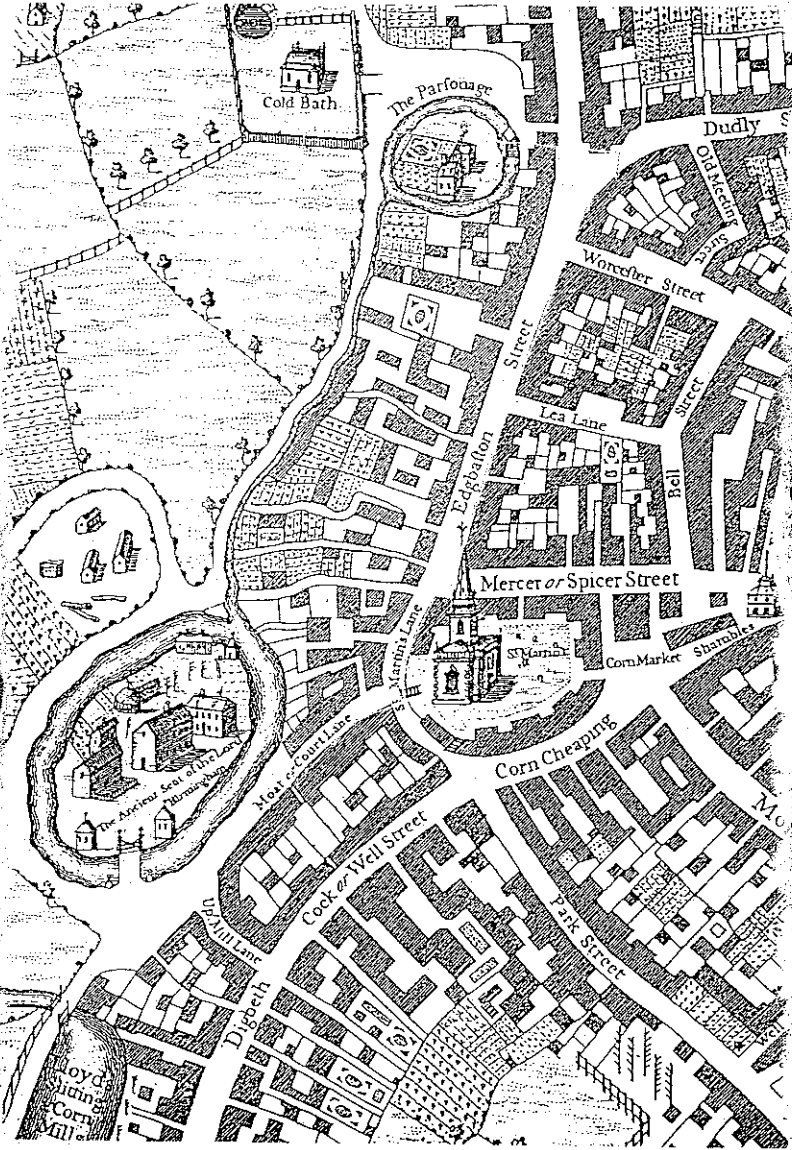


No.354

Edgbaston Street, Pershore Street,
Upper Dean Street and Moat Lane
Birmingham City Centre



A Preliminary Archaeological Assessment

BUFAU

**A Preliminary Archaeological Assessment of the area of
Edgbaston Street, Pershore Street, Upper Dean Street
and Moat Lane
Birmingham City Centre**

by

Catharine Mould and Steve Litherland

1.0 Summary

There is a growing body of evidence that Birmingham may be regarded as an important example of a medieval town which was based upon trade and industry and which has enjoyed sustained growth up to and including this century. In fact, this very success has, to a large extent, been responsible for the destruction of a great many historic buildings. However, the below-ground archaeology of the town centre may be considered to have a great deal of potential for further understanding of the chronology and form of Birmingham's growth. Situated within the proposed development area are several important archaeological sites. These include the moated manor house, the smaller Parsonage moat, and associated watercourses, together with Edgbaston Street, which was one of the earliest streets to be laid-out in the town. This preliminary archaeological assessment indicates that a number of specific zones within the overall development area require a thorough and phased archaeological response.

2.0 Introduction

The proposed development in the area defined by Edgbaston Street, Pershore Street, Upper Dean Street and Moat Lane may result in the disturbance of buried archaeological remains in one of the most important, and earliest developed, parts of Birmingham. An assessment of both the above and below-ground archaeological implications of development was therefore required in accordance with PPG16 and policy 8.36 of the City Council Unitary Development Plan, in order to evaluate the impact of development upon the

archaeological resource and to permit the formulation of appropriate mitigation strategies.

The following report outlines the results of a first stage of archaeological assessment based upon a search of documentary and cartographic sources, published and unpublished written records and on-site inspection of the development area. Sources of information are referenced in Appendix 1. The report was produced by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Chapman Taylor Partners (architects for SPP.LET), following a brief prepared by Dr. Michael Hodder, Planning Archaeologist for Birmingham City Council. The brief for this work is reproduced as Appendix 2.

A general introduction will first place the development area in context, and will be followed by a consideration of the area's present character, its historical and archaeological profile, the below-ground information, an assessment of the archaeological implications of development, and recommendations for an archaeological response, together with an outline costing of these works. Illustrative figures and photographs are included to depict aspects of the area's archaeological and historical character.

3.0 Site Location (Figure 1; NGR SP 0725 8645; centre)

The proposed development site is located immediately south of St. Martin's Church and the present Bull Ring Markets, and encompasses an area bounded by Edgbaston Street, Pershore Street, Upper Dean Street and Moat Lane.

4.0 Geology and Topography (Figure 1)

The development area lies immediately east of the conjectured Birmingham fault (Figure 1). Geotechnical investigations conducted in the 1970s indicated that the geological profile comprised mainly silty-sandy clay or clayey sand-silt, underlain by sand and gravel. Groundwater and soft spots were encountered in eleven of the twenty-three geotechnical boreholes. Three of these were located within the proposed development area (Coulson Report 300067).

5.0 The Development Site in a Historical Context

The loss of much of the documentation produced by the medieval administration of Birmingham has been largely responsible for a longstanding popular misconception that the town was of little

importance. Earlier urban historians, obsessed with legalistic formalities of borough status, as conferred by charters of liberties, could not accept it was a proper medieval town despite a great deal of corroborating evidence that it was. Birmingham's market was legalised in 1166 by a charter from the crown, and subsequent events in the town are known from a small number of references and state records, occasional notices of criminal and civil cases, property tax assessments from 1327, 1332 and 1524 and a limited, but useful, number of local property deeds. Taken together these provide informative economic and topographical references concerning the importance of the medieval town. It would appear that Birmingham's significance as a medieval town lay not in the presence of a castle (like Tamworth); and not as an administrative or religious centre (like Coventry, Shrewsbury or Stafford); but lay instead in its development as a trading and industrial centre for its evolving hinterland.

Despite all the indications of being an important medieval town, the precise chronology and form of Birmingham's early development remains unclear. At present various models may be proposed which draw upon the patchy evidence for the development of the town and which compare and contrast this with other contemporary parallels throughout the region.

The key question is how do the important historical elements of St. Martin's Church, the moated manor house, Parsonage Moat and the triangular market place around the Bull Ring fit into the overall framework for the development of the early town. Precise dates for the origins of these important features are crucial, but cannot yet be accurately defined.

At the time of the Domesday Book, Birmingham was only one of several small settlements within the present-day city. Birmingham was situated on the edge of the former forest of Arden, a wooded area of Warwickshire, much of which was not colonised until the 11th century and after. No mention is made of a church in Domesday and, instead, a model based upon the development of a small manor possibly centred on a moated homestead may be proposed as the most likely form of pioneer settlement of Birmingham around the later 11th and early 12th centuries. Between the 11th and 14th centuries the population of north Warwickshire probably at least doubled, and perhaps almost trebled - this led inevitably to the growth of a network of market centres, particularly in the century after 1150.

Moated sites are a distinctive feature in the settlement pattern of this part of the forest of Arden; the majority of these probably date from between the 13th and 14th centuries. However, the circular shape of the Birmingham Moat and the sub-circular shape of the Parsonage

Moat may indicate, although this is far from certain, that these moats do indeed date from the early phase of moat building in the region, which has been estimated to be around 1150.

The pre-urban framework for the growth of the town was provided, first, by the natural and agricultural topography: the river Rea, its floodplain and subsidiary channels and the high ground on which the manor house and church were sited. Subsequent growth was characterised by the successive development of land parcels along the major old roads, and new roads, laid out across the interstices of the existing network. Both Holt and Baker (Holt 1995, Baker 1995) conclude that much of the central area of Birmingham, including the Moor Street, Park Street and Bull Ring area, was probably laid out sometime before c.1400.

The grant of the market charter in 1166 points to a conscious effort on behalf of the seigneurial lord to promote the status of his lordship. It is likely that St. Martin's Church was in existence by 1154, probably under the sponsorship of the lord of the manor. The location of the triangular market place - currently associated with the Bull Ring - to the north of both the manor house and church was probably part of this deliberate enhancement of Birmingham's trading facilities. The likelihood is that Edgbaston Street was also laid out around this time, forming the southwestern point of this triangle, the other points being defined by the important routes to the southeast, down what was later to become the industrial area of Digbeth, and to the north to Lichfield, Stafford, Walsall and Wolverhampton. However, it should be stressed that there is little hard evidence to prove this hypothesis. Alternatively, it is possible that the moated sites were part of a later (possibly 13th century) addition to the town, situated on its southern periphery. Only archaeology may provide the evidence to resolve this vitally important, but outstanding question concerning Birmingham's early development.

6.0 A Detailed Assessment of the Edgbaston Street, Pershore Street, Upper Dean Street and Moat Lane area

The evidence will be discussed and evaluated under the following sub-headings: Present Character; Historical and Archaeological Profile; Below-Ground Information; Archaeological Potential; and Recommendations for an Archaeological Response.

Present Character includes a description of the built environment together with field observation on land use where applicable. The **Historical and Archaeological Profile** outlines historical development and provides details of previous archaeological work.

Below-Ground Information covers information from a site inspection and anticipated building and service disruption. The section on **Archaeological Potential** summarises the potential of the development area for further archaeological field evaluation in the light of evidence gleaned by archaeological assessment to date, and is designed to give an indication of the potential importance of surviving archaeological deposits. This section should be read in conjunction with the following **Recommendations for an Archaeological Response** to the proposed development.

6.1 Present Character

Little above-ground evidence survives concerning the long history of the proposed development area prior to the 1960s. The area, which is defined by Edgbaston Street, Pershore Street, Upper Dean Street and Moat Lane, currently comprises a tarmaced market area, a concrete and steel-framed structure which forms the 'Rag' or St. Martin's Market (which has extensive below-ground storage and unloading facilities), an eight-storey office block of the S & U, two warehouses, one of which is disused, and a recently constructed restaurant. A vacant area of waste ground to the rear of the Edgbaston street frontage is used as a carpark, and is cut into two sections by Smithfield Passage.

6.2 Historical and Archaeological Profile (Figures 2 and 3)

This profile is based on a study of the available documentary and cartographic sources, and also incorporates archaeological data recovered during excavation in the 1970s (Watts 1980).

Dr. Nigel Baker (Baker 1995) has produced a preliminary town plan analysis of the development of Birmingham, based upon inspection of the Bradford map of 1750/1 (Figure 2) and the subsequent editions of the Ordnance Survey (Figure 3). His analysis has suggested that the principal features of the Birmingham town plan, which includes streets, street frontage lines, sites of public buildings and property boundaries surveyed in the early 18th century, have probably not moved significantly since the area was first laid out for settlement in the medieval period. While our knowledge of the early development of the town prior to the 12th century is far from complete, Dr. Baker suggests that town-planning exercises probably develop after the granting of a market charter in 1166, which was a conscious initiative to develop trading functions in the town. However, archaeological evidence is probably the only source for quantifying more precisely the

early development of the town, given the limitations of the documentary record.

Edgbaston Street, which forms the base of the triangle of the Bull Ring market place, would have carried mainly local traffic from the southwest to and from the main axial route represented by High Town and Digbeth, and may have seen some of the earliest urban activity in the centre of Birmingham. Figure 2 shows how the limits of Edgbaston Street are defined by Parsonage Moat to the west and Birmingham moat to the east. The origins of the two moats and their original relationship to each other is not clear, but they are likely to have been important foci of the rural development and it has been suggested that they originally represented the manorial site and its 'home farm' (Baker 1995). The natural springs or wells of this district may have been exploited at an early date, for example the Lady Well is known from medieval documentation. Westley's 1731 Plan of Birmingham shows that the two moats were originally linked by a watercourse (gone by 1750, but restored on Figure 2), probably fed by springwater, via the Parsonage moat and joined by a second watercourse a few metres west of the manorial site. The channel linking the two moats formed the back boundary to a series of plots running up the slope to Edgbaston Street. The provision of watered plots is a recurrent feature of nascent urban settlements and, in particular, early markets. Livestock could be contained, grazed and watered close to the market and in large early medieval centres such as Winchester, for example, there would be a strong demand for such land from the town butchers. In time, a watercourse in this location would also attract other associated industrial uses, such as tanning. There is no doubt that in some circumstances watercourses were deliberately diverted to service a series of new plots hoping to attract new tenants. It is not known whether or not this was the case in Edgbaston Street, but it is perhaps more likely that the watercourse was an earlier feature, part of the evolving pattern of floodplain watercourses for milling, drainage, water meadows and (possibly) supplying the moats. Nevertheless, the Edgbaston Street plot series represents what was in 12th century terms a prime site for development and the generation of new rents for the de Birmingham family, with a principal trading and market frontage and access to supplies of fresh water at the rear.

It is probable that Moat Lane also dates from the medieval period and would have provided access from the market place to the de Birmingham's moated site behind the street frontages. It may also have acted as a service lane for the two blocks of properties on the south side of the upper part of Digbeth. The provision of back service lanes to series of plots is one of the most basic and widely-found of medieval town-planning practices at every level of urban hierarchy, in

all urbanising periods. The lane may therefore have been diverted, inserted or improved as part of another early (?12th century) seigneurial improvement scheme for the properties around the main market place. By the time the first maps become available the lane was itself occupied by housing.

The history and development of the site of the former Birmingham Moat and later Smithfield Market has been extensively studied by Lorna Watts (Watts 1980), following excavations on the site in the early 1970s. Both her report in the *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeology Society* and her unpublished MA Dissertation, held at the University of Birmingham, contain a mass of relevant and detailed information concerning her excavations and the groundworks carried out for that development. While it is highly probable that the Birmingham Moat is situated just to the south of the proposed development area, it is recommended that this information is analysed in detail as part of any further work.

The 18th/19th Century Development (Figure 3)

From the 18th century the quality of the documentary and cartographic record is immeasurably enhanced. There is a mass of detailed topographic evidence concerning the proposed development area. A summary of this data is given below.

As late as 1731 the limits of the town here were probably much the same as in medieval times. The Birmingham and Parsonage Moats still formed the southern boundary of the town, together with a watercourse connecting the two moats, which formed the rear boundary of plots laid out off Edgbaston Street. Hutton, writing in the 18th century, observed the form of the watercourse, which:

'near the place where the small riverlet discharges itself into the moat, another of the same size was carried over it, and proceeded from the town as this advanced towards it, producing a curiosity seldom met with; one river running south and the other north, for half a mile, yet only one a path road of three feet asunder.'

(Hutton 1783,332)

While it is impossible to infer exactly what was happening to the watercourses here, the 'path road' referred to by Hutton may be the Smithfield Passage, which seems to have developed along the back-plots of the properties fronting Edgbaston Street and is visible on 18th century maps.

Development up to the 18th century was hindered not so much by the physical bulk of the moats, but rather by the restrictive policy of the landowners involved. The only development to the southwest of the Birmingham Moat was a group of what appear to be farm buildings in 1731. However, in 1766 one of the major landowners, Sir Thomas Gooch, was granted an Act of Parliament in which he was given permission to cut streets from his estate and lease parcels of land. From the time Gooch decided to develop the area it seems to have experienced rapid growth and by 1778 the Birmingham Moat had been surrounded by a triangle of houses, Jamaica Row had been built to the southwest, and Moat Row to the southeast. In the 17th and 18th century small-scale artisan occupations characterised the area, and by the 18th century the former manor house and structures within the moat itself were given over to the manufacture of wire.

A sale document dated to 1815 includes a detailed inventory and valuation of the property within the moat prior to the demolition of the moat and island in 1815/17. Following this destruction Moat Lane and Moat Row encroached upon the circuit of the ditch, and the remainder of the island was contained within the market buildings of the later 19th century.

The period following Gooch's newly granted property freedom also witnessed the destruction of Parsonage Moat. A turnpike road, connecting Worcester Street to the north with Bromsgrove Street to the south, was driven into the area in the late 1820s/early 1830s. A contemporary map shows how the new street, Pershore Street, cut through the southeast corner of 'Reverend Curtis' St. Martin's Parsonage'. Property deeds of the 1830s and 1840s, commissioned by Gooch, depict the subsequent build-up of structures along the newly created street frontage.

By the 18th century several large Queen Ann and Georgian houses lined Edgbaston Street. An advertisement from 1765 describes one such house:

'Handsome large commodious house, consisting of a large warehouse with a counting house behind it, two good parlours, a hall, two staircases, a china pantry, three large chambers, each having light and dark closet, many of each of them large enough to hold a bed, a spacious dining room, wainscoted, six good upper chambers with closets, a kitchen, pantry, four large cellars in one of which is a pump, a brewhouse with a pump, and an oven to bake bread, a good stable with a loft over it, a coach house and a large garden, with a canal, and other conveniences thereto belonging...'

However, the status of Edgbaston Street seems to have declined rapidly in the 19th century, possibly as a result of the growth of the Smithfield Market. Massive growth of the urban population in the 19th century, associated with social changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution also contributed towards a general decline in the 19th century inner city. The urban poor were forced to live in insanitary and often old properties commonly situated in courts built behind more substantial properties lining the street frontages. This situation only began to be seriously addressed during Joseph Chamberlain's leadership of the City Council which corresponded with broader changes in the economic shape of Birmingham, particularly brought about by enhanced rail links. These firmly established the status of the 19th century wholesale markets situated over the former Birmingham Moat, which continued to grow both in size and importance throughout the 19th century. Later, in the 20th century, the markets suffered some temporary set-backs associated with changes in the economic infrastructure of the country as a whole, and in addition from bomb damage during the war. This was such that by the late 1950s, as the economy began to expand again, the area as a whole was ripe for extensive redevelopment. The wholesale markets, with one of the first grants of European Economic Community Regional Aid, were one of the last parts of the general market complex to be redeveloped in the 1970s, and it was during this work that excavations on the Birmingham Moat took place.

6.3 Below Ground Information

Geotechnical information is available for the site, and a combination of site inspection and historical information provide further indications of below ground conditions.

The impact of the construction of foundations for the 1970s market on the medieval deposits known to survive here was mapped by Watts in the 1970s, and it is clear that 'islands' of archaeology survive between the concrete piles. Archaeology surviving under the present market includes the remains of fine ashlar-walls, tentatively dated to around the 13th century by Dr. L.A.S. Butler (Watts 1980, 40). Watts also noted that the 19th century construction of the market had scoured away important occupation deposits from the moat platform itself.

Given the history of development of the street block and information provided by early nineteenth century planning applications, damage to archaeological deposits by cellarage may be anticipated, particularly along the street frontages. Previous urban excavations in the West Midlands - including evaluations in Digbeth and Deritend - have demonstrated that archaeological deposits can survive as 'islands' between areas of later disturbance. Without specific below-ground information from archaeological evaluation trenches, definition of areas of archaeological survival may best be characterised in terms of zones of survival, of which five have been identified (see Figure 1). These are discussed from west to east across the proposed development area.

Zone 1

The first zone may be identified with the former site of the Parsonage Moat, which documentary research has established to lie in the vicinity of the junction of Pershore Street with Edgbaston Street. It has been proposed that the road layout (and possibly service locations) be altered in this area. It is possible that archaeological deposits which relate to this important moated site do survive, although it is likely that these will have suffered an unspecified amount of disturbance by services beneath the road and under its associated footpaths.

Zone 2

The second zone of archaeological survival is identified with the street block defined by Edgbaston Street, Gloucester Street, Pershore Street and Upper Dean Street. It has been proposed that retail properties are constructed either side of the S & U office block on Edgbaston Street and that a brand new multi-storey carpark is constructed behind. This initial archaeological assessment has identified significant archaeological potential in this area, both in terms of the

potential importance of archaeological deposits and in terms of the potential survival of these deposits. In particular, deposits around the former watercourse which ran between the Parsonage and Birmingham Moats have high potential value, not only for the light they can shed on the chronology of early development here, but also for the preservation of important artefacts and ecofacts within a waterlogged, organic environment.

Zone 3

The third zone is one of known destruction underneath the footprint of the Rag or St. Martin's Market. No further archaeological response is recommended for this area.

Zone 4

The fourth zone comprises an area currently defined by the open air market. An archaeological response for this zone would be determined by the level of any proposed below-ground interventions here, but as far as is known, no substantial proposals have been identified and as such, no archaeological response may be required.

Zone 5

The fifth zone is identified with the former site of the Birmingham Moat. Excavation in the 1970s established that archaeological deposits and medieval structures which relate to this important moated site do survive within Zone 5 (Watts 1980). It has been proposed that a road, The Row, which would connect Moat Lane with Upper Dean Street, be inserted into this zone of the development area. The proposed road follows the course of an existing access 'track' to the markets and an archaeological response would be determined by the level of any proposed below-ground interventions here. It is possible that the proposed route of The Row is located sufficiently far north to avoid disturbance of deposits associated with the moat; but this is far from clear and below-ground investigation would be required to further evaluate the location of Birmingham Moat and its associated watercourses.

6.4 Archaeological Potential

Evidence for some of the earliest stages of Birmingham's growth is likely to be found within the proposed development area. Any surviving archaeological deposits have the potential to shed light on the early historical development of this area from the Middle Ages up to the present day. The importance of these archaeological deposits is enhanced by the inadequacy of surviving medieval historical records, and the consequent lack of understanding of the many facets of that process of early growth within the town, as discussed above.

Archaeological deposits are known to survive within Zone 5 of the proposed development area, and survival in Zones 1 and 2 is potentially good. Indeed, if archaeological deposits were found to survive in these areas it is possible that a sequence of intensifying development commencing well before c.1200 could be revealed and information gained regarding economic activities crucial to the development of this part of Birmingham, beginning in the medieval period and continuing through the important transitional phases of the early post-medieval and later periods, which laid the foundations for the industrial strength of the town which became the "workshop of the world".

7.0 Recommendations for an Archaeological Response

The archaeological response to the proposed development requires careful programming, and a phased programme is suggested. Following on from this assessment, further examination of documentary and cartographic sources is recommended. This work should be undertaken as a prelude to below-ground evaluation, which would comprise the excavation of archaeological evaluation trenches, whose aim will be to confirm the nature, extent and significance of archaeological remains affected by the proposed development. A main aim of archaeological trial trenching would be to test the potential of archaeological deposits and environmental data, and especially to test any waterlogged deposits preserved, particularly from the areas of the two moats. It would be sensible to combine this phase of archaeological enquiry with any proposed geotechnical survey. Following on from, and dependent upon, the results of the archaeological evaluation, design options including either preservation *in situ* or 'by record' (i.e. excavation) may be considered.

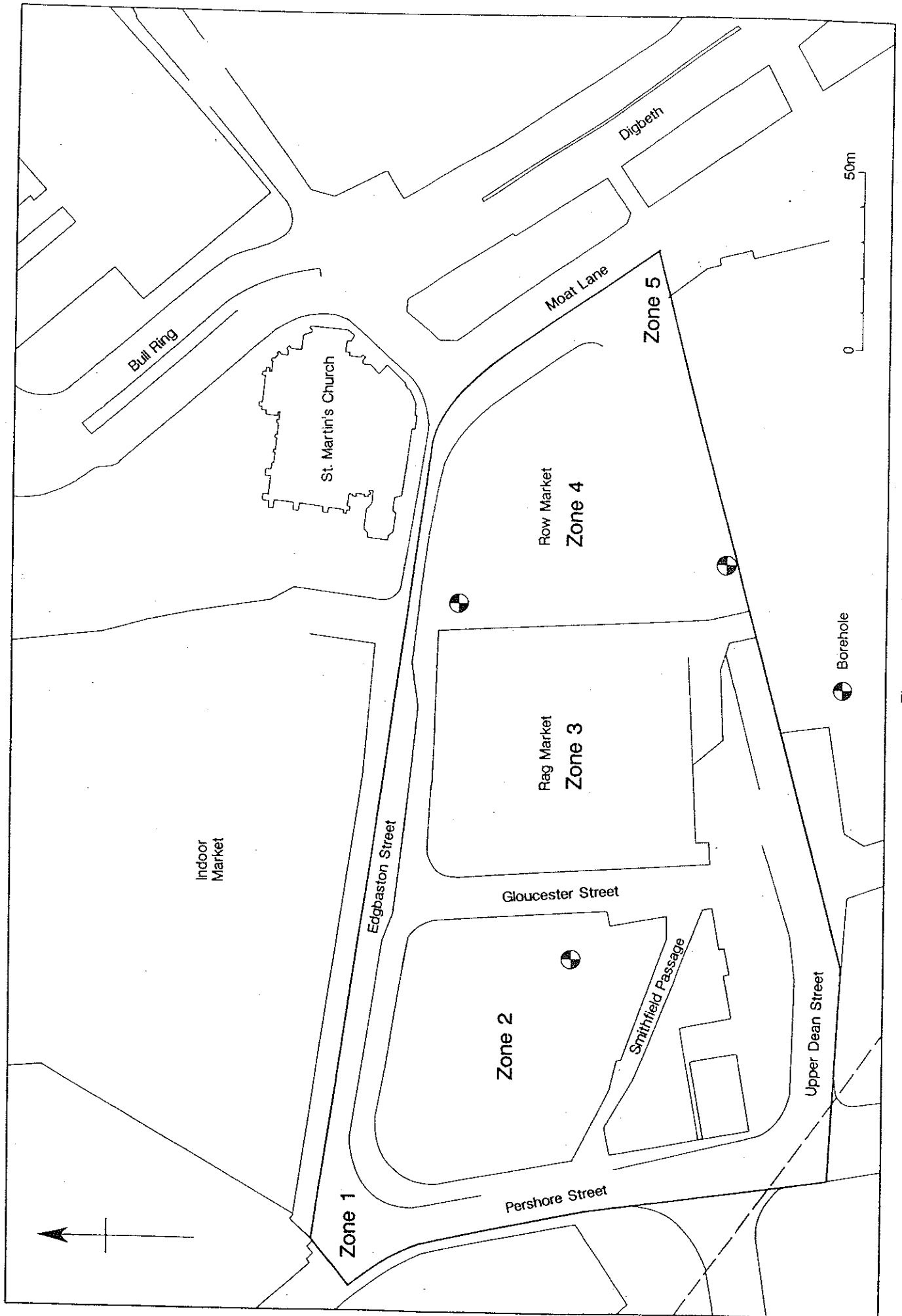
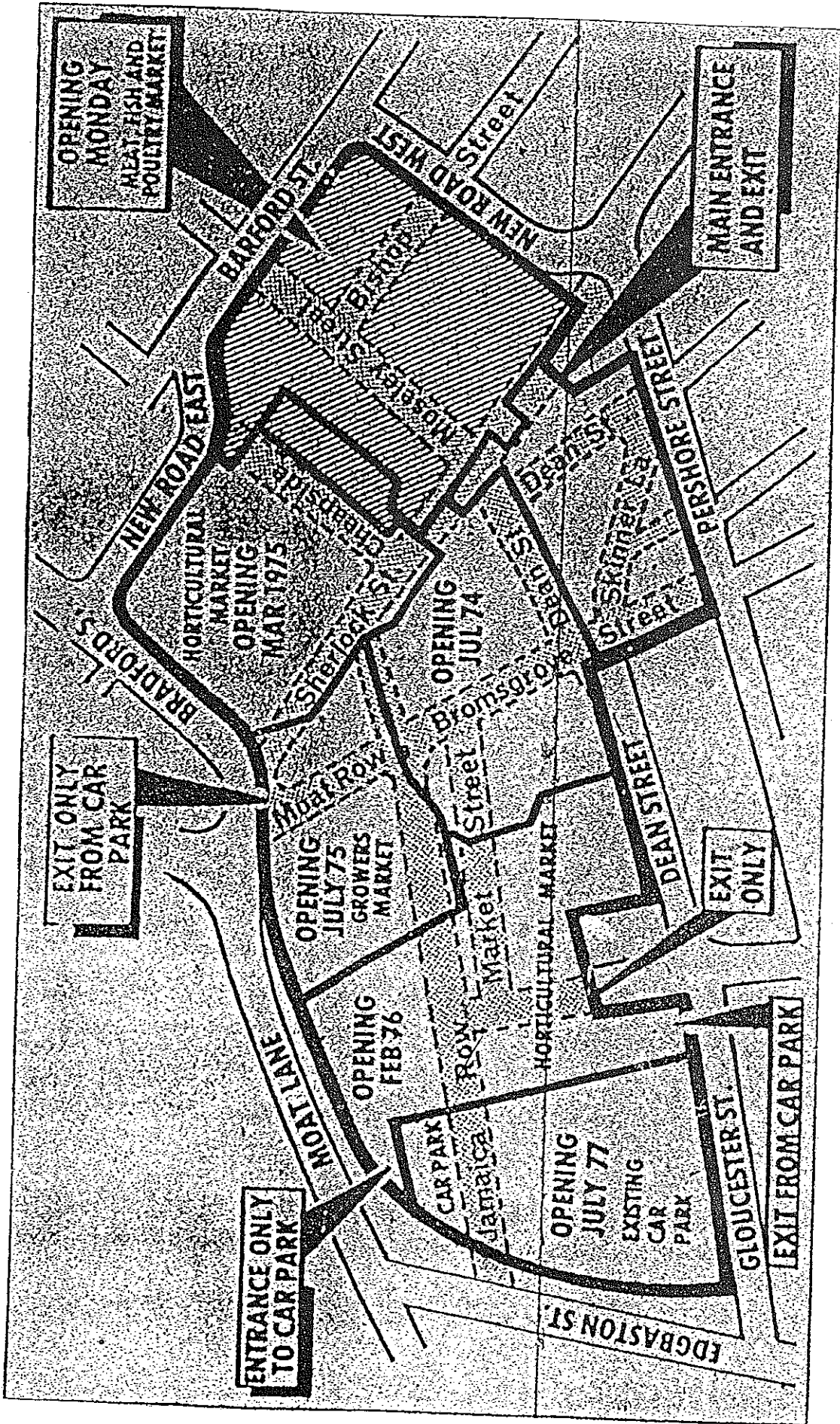
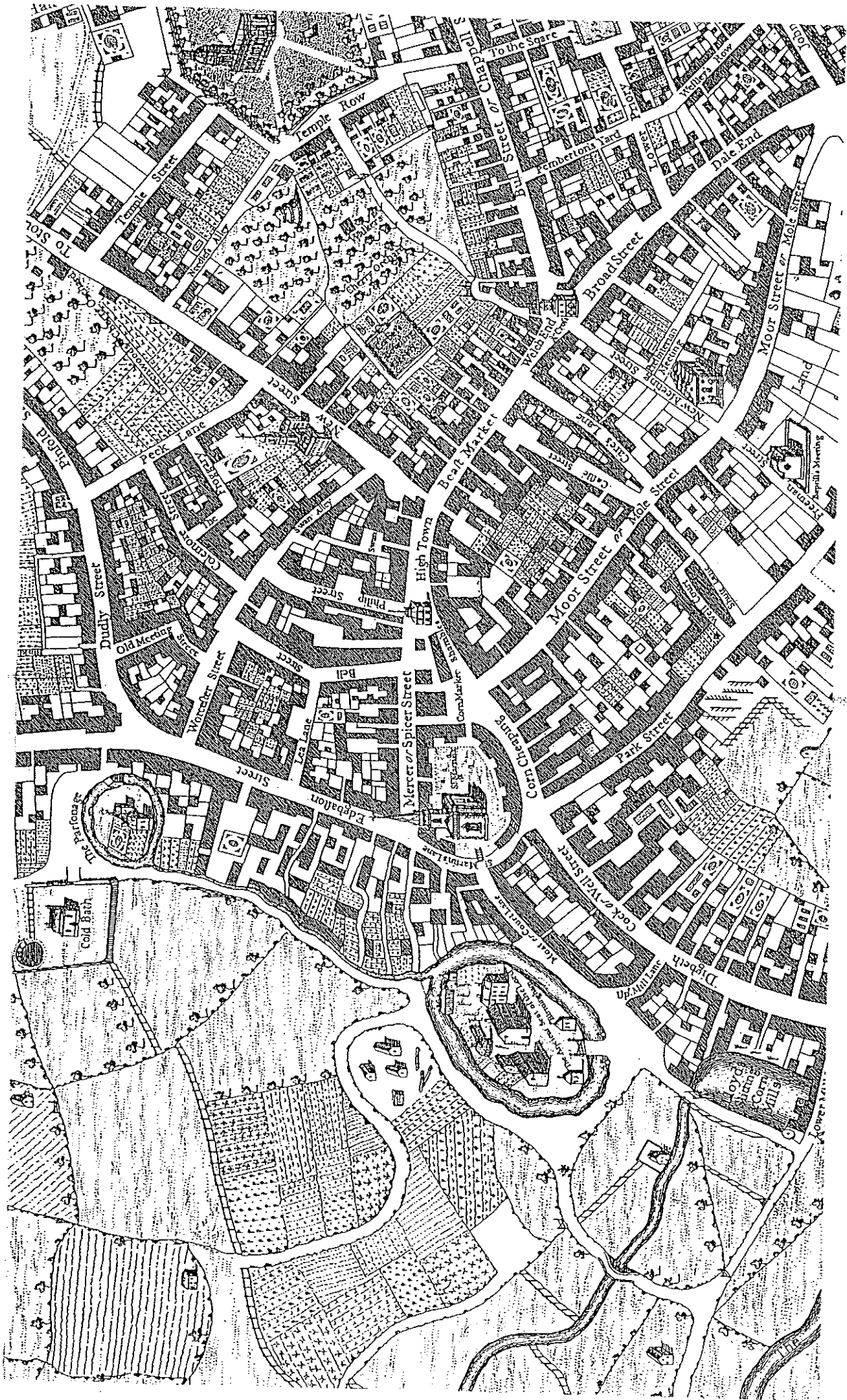


Fig. 1.

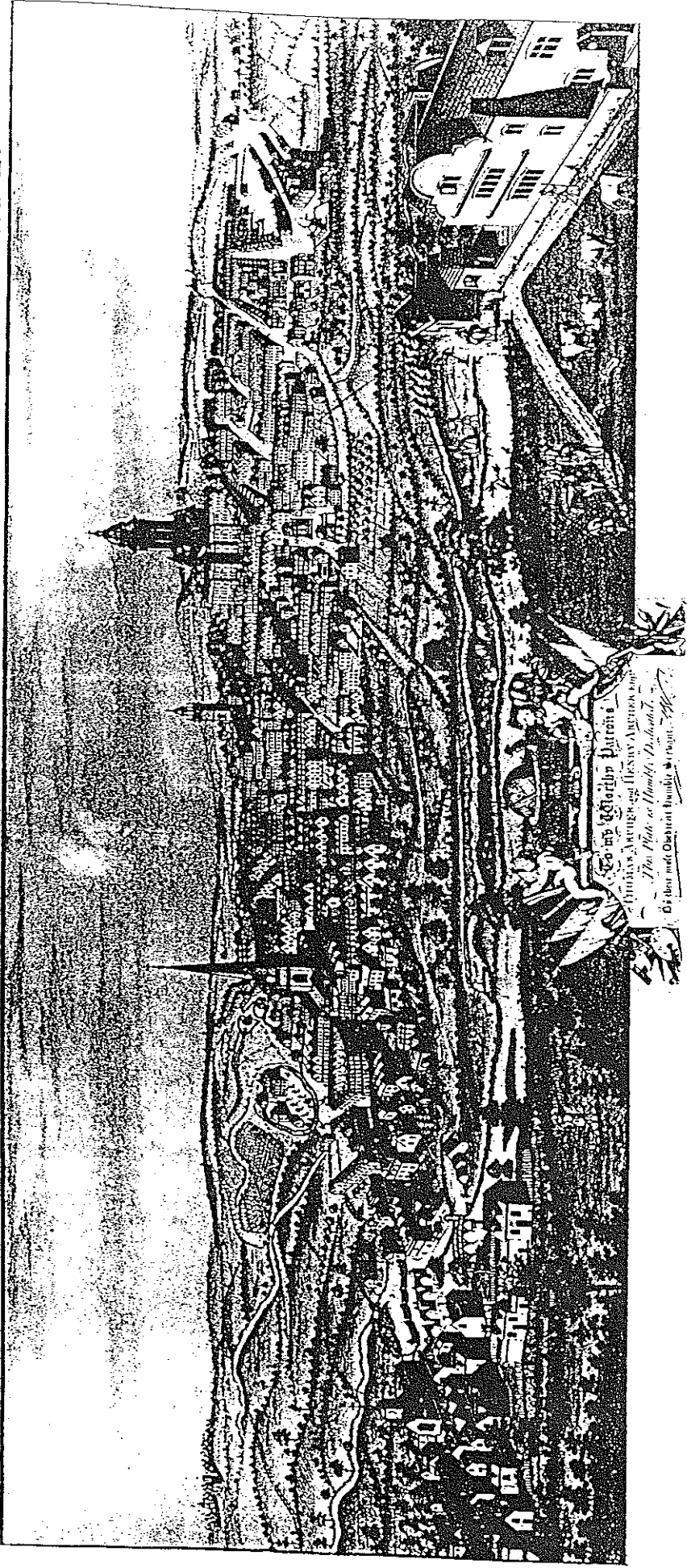


Map compiled by T. MacNeece in 1974 showing the extent of the Wholesale Market Complex



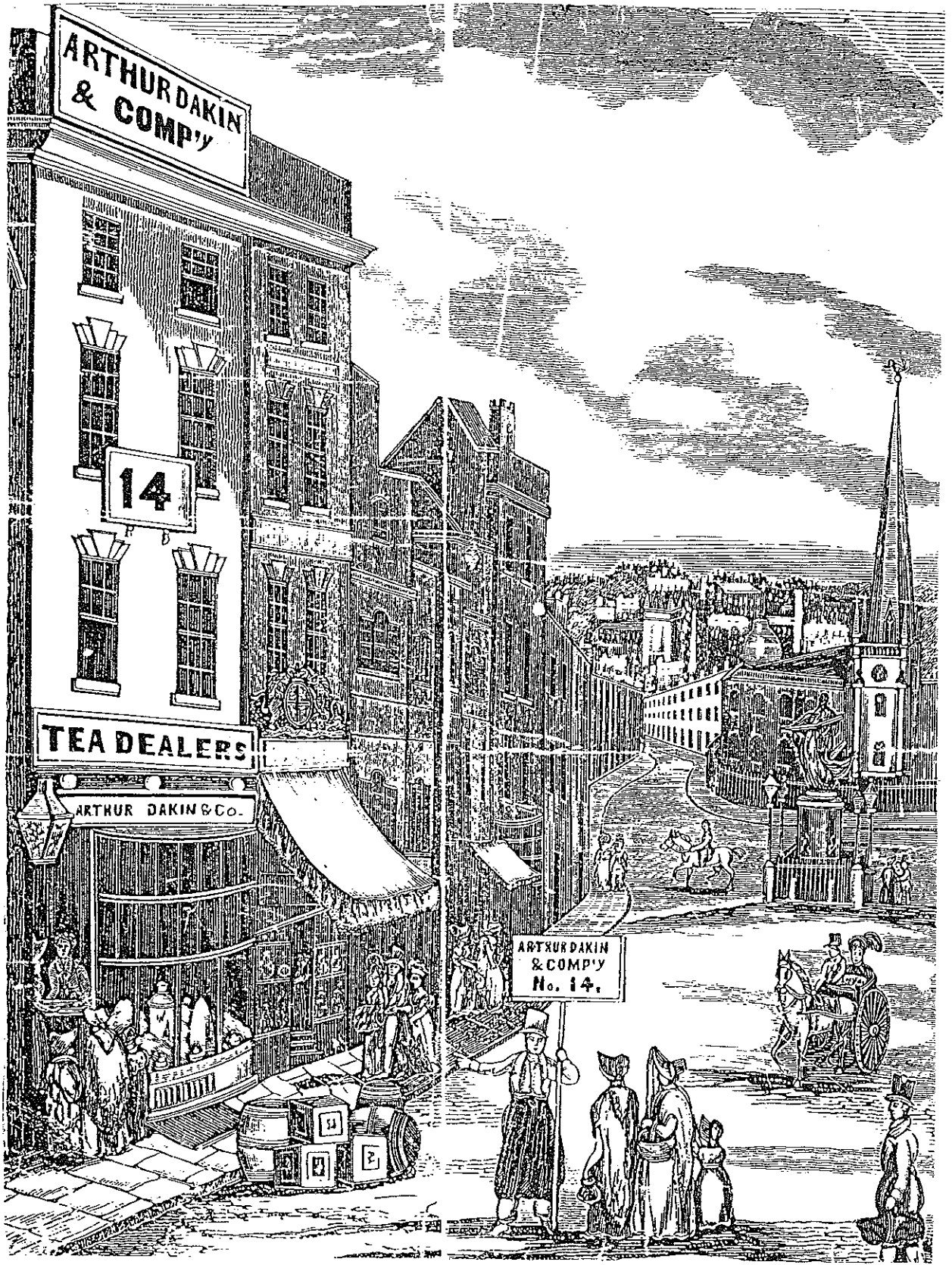
Westley, 1731

The EAST PROSPECT of BIRMINGHAM.

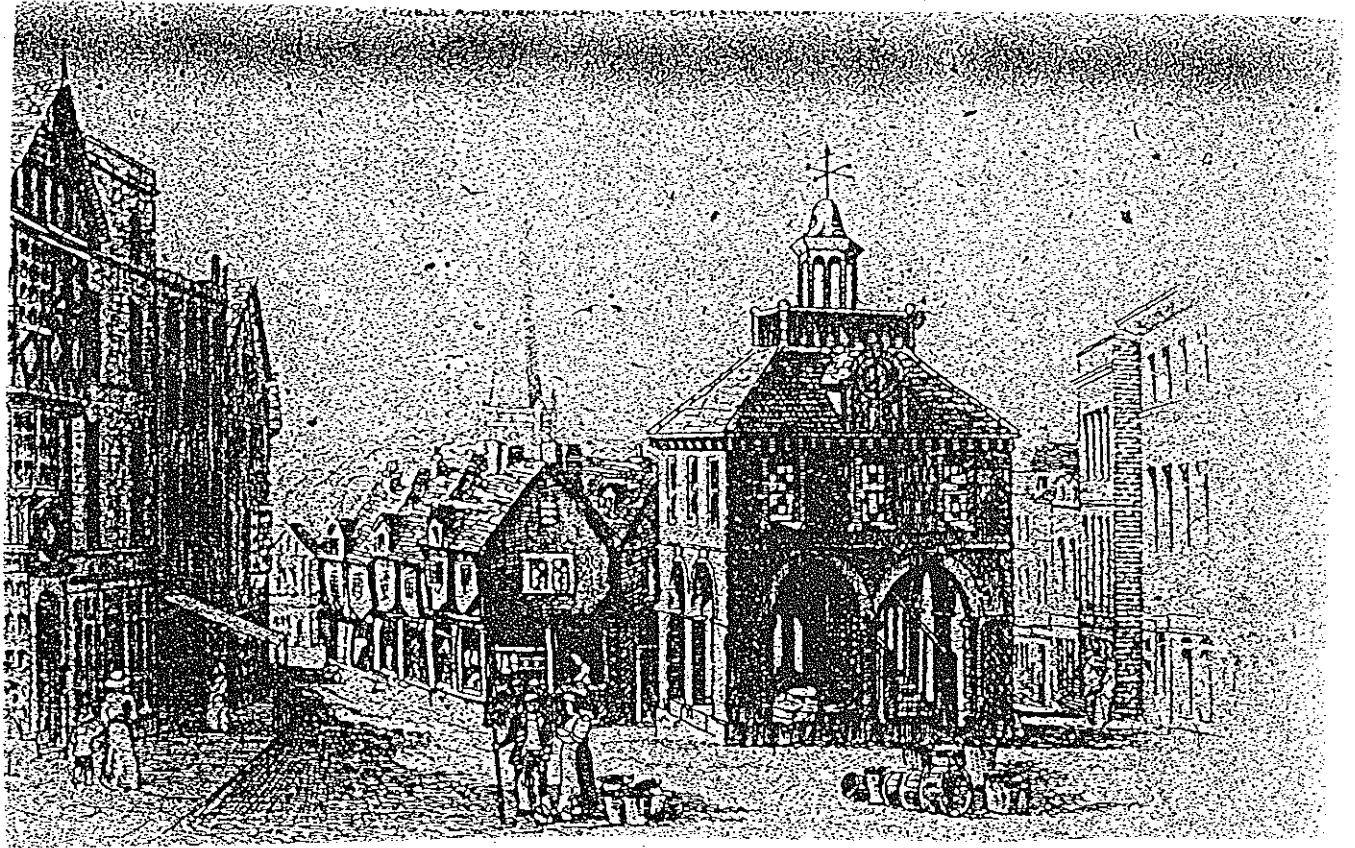


THEATRO REGIO BIRMINGHAM
The Theatre Royal in Birmingham
By the most Excellent Hand of J. Kneller

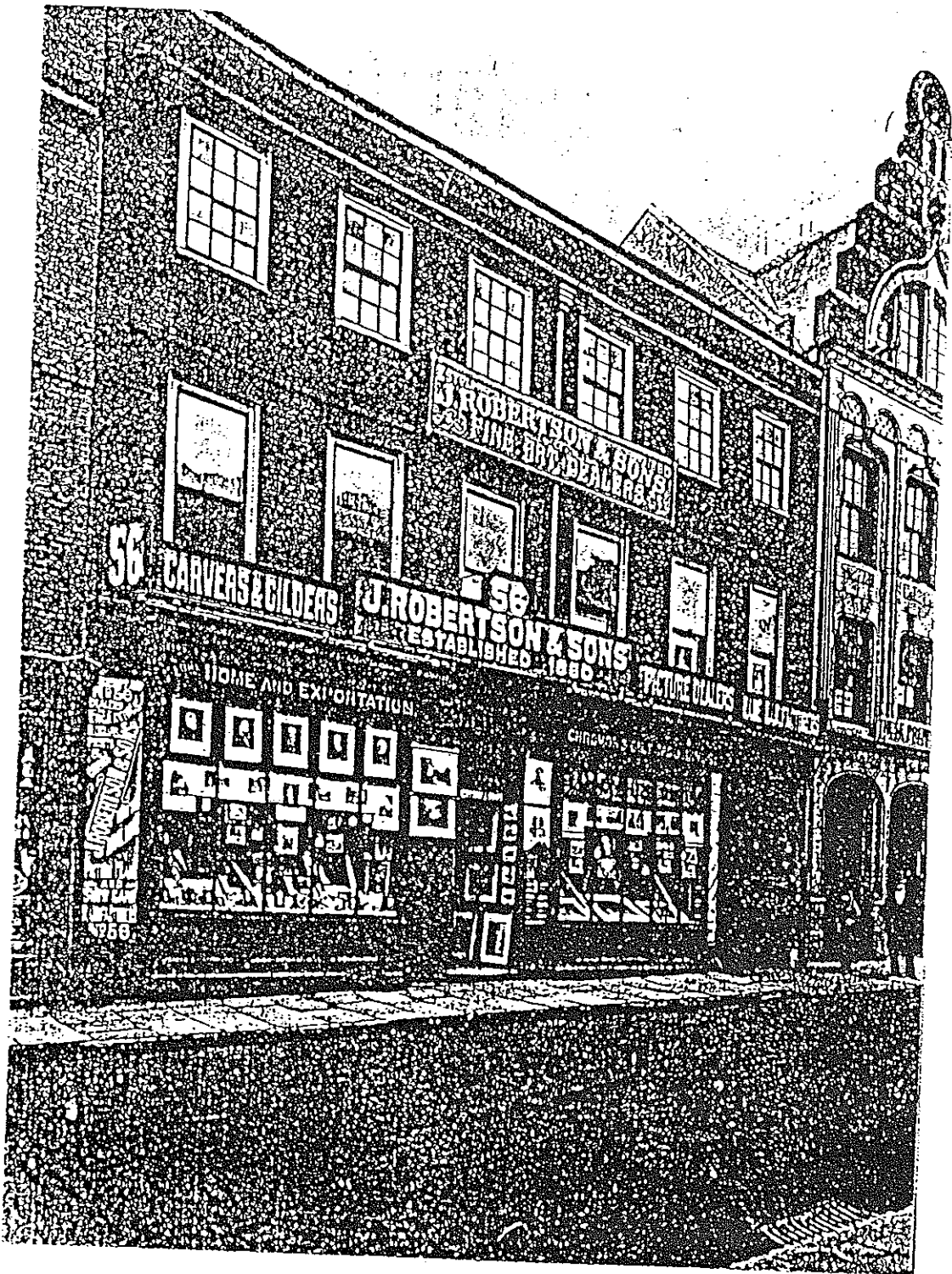
WESTLEY'S EAST PROSPECT, 1732



The Bull Ring in the 1820s, with St Martin's church and Digbeth behind.



The Bull Ring



56, Edgbaston Street, 1931



JOHN BOWEN
Appraiser & General Broker



*Paintings, Effects,
 Valued to the
 greatest advantage*



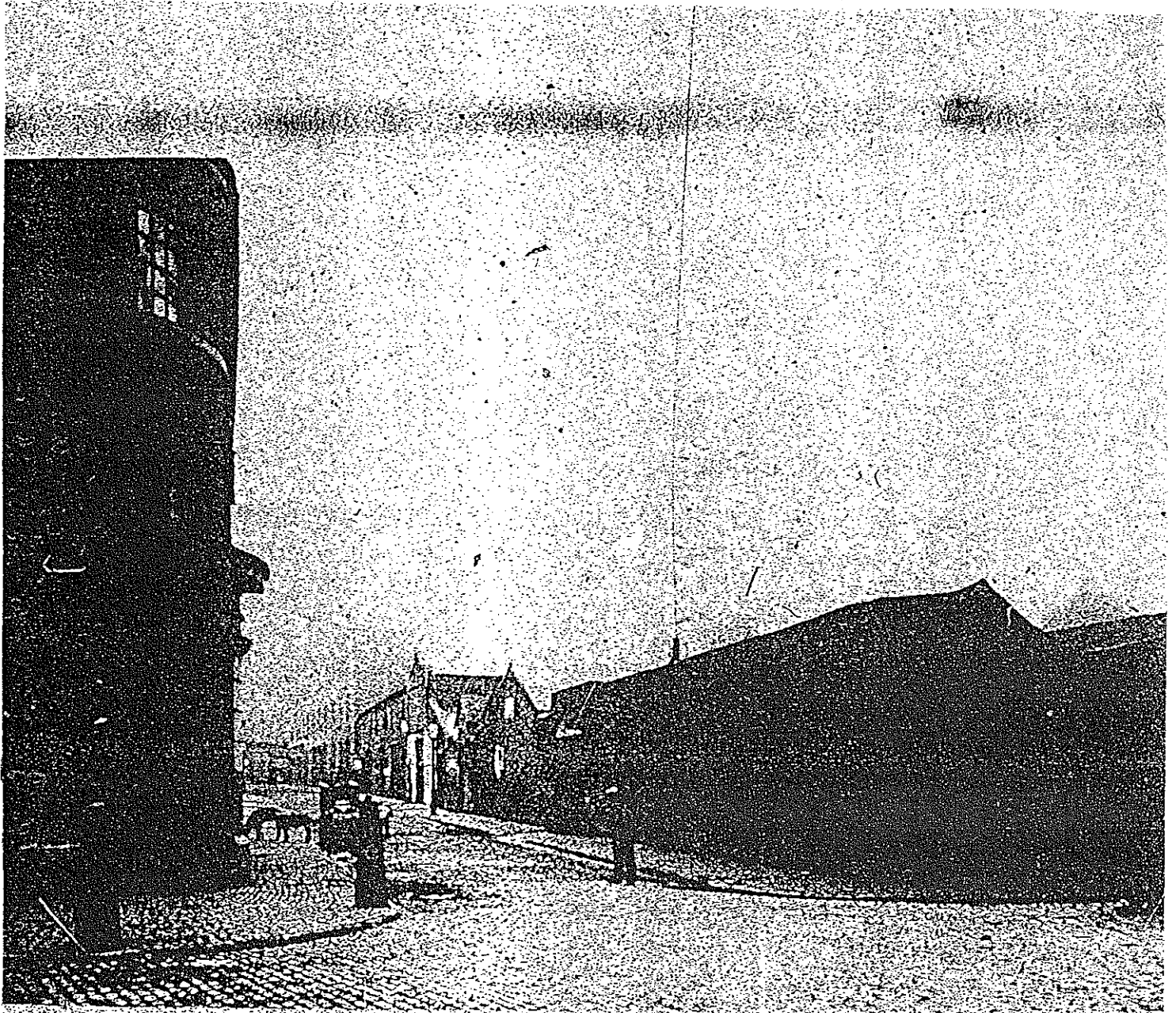
*All kinds of
 Household Furniture
 sold at low prices*



108 Edgbaston Street
BIRMINGHAM

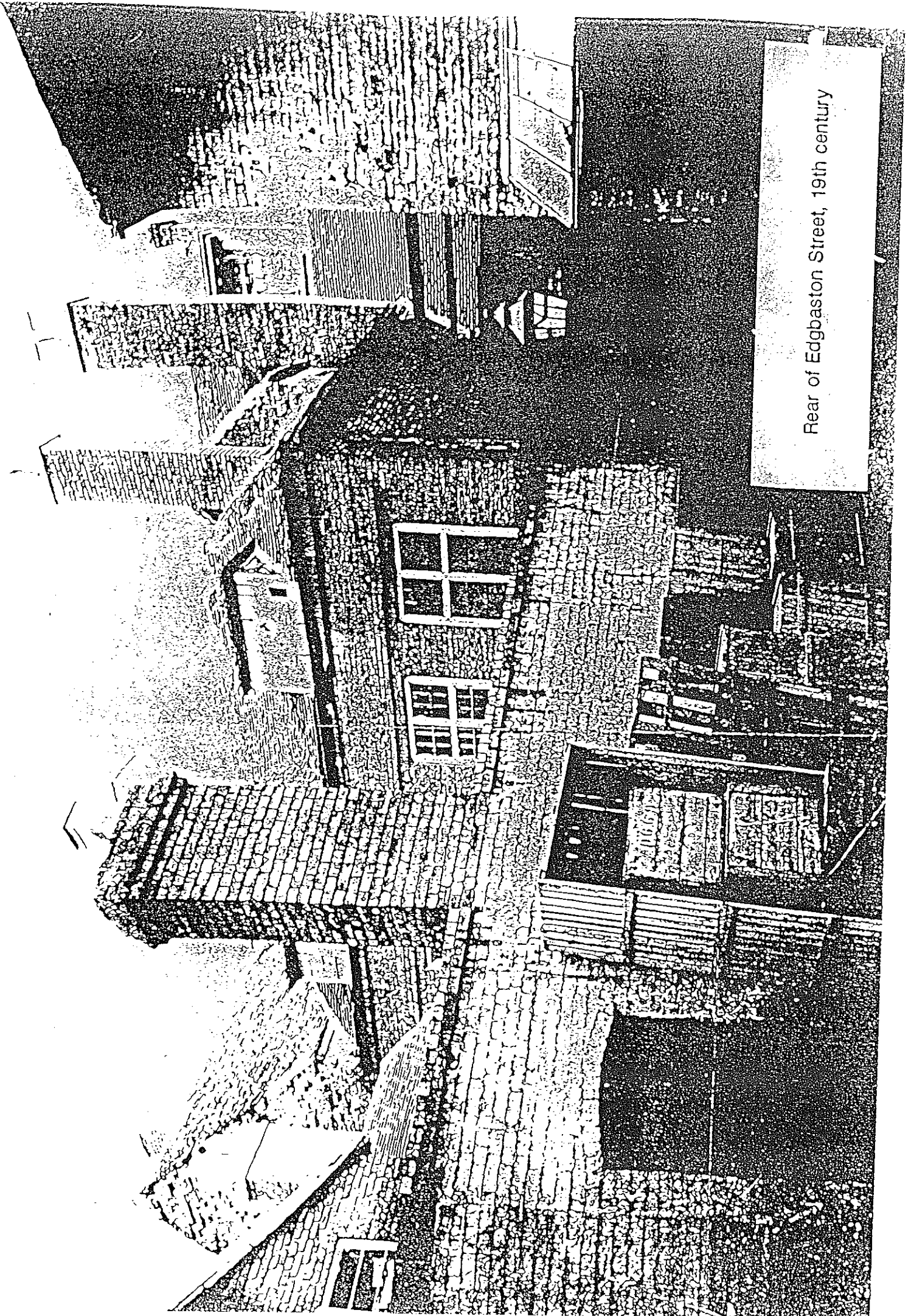


Importer of Goose Feathers

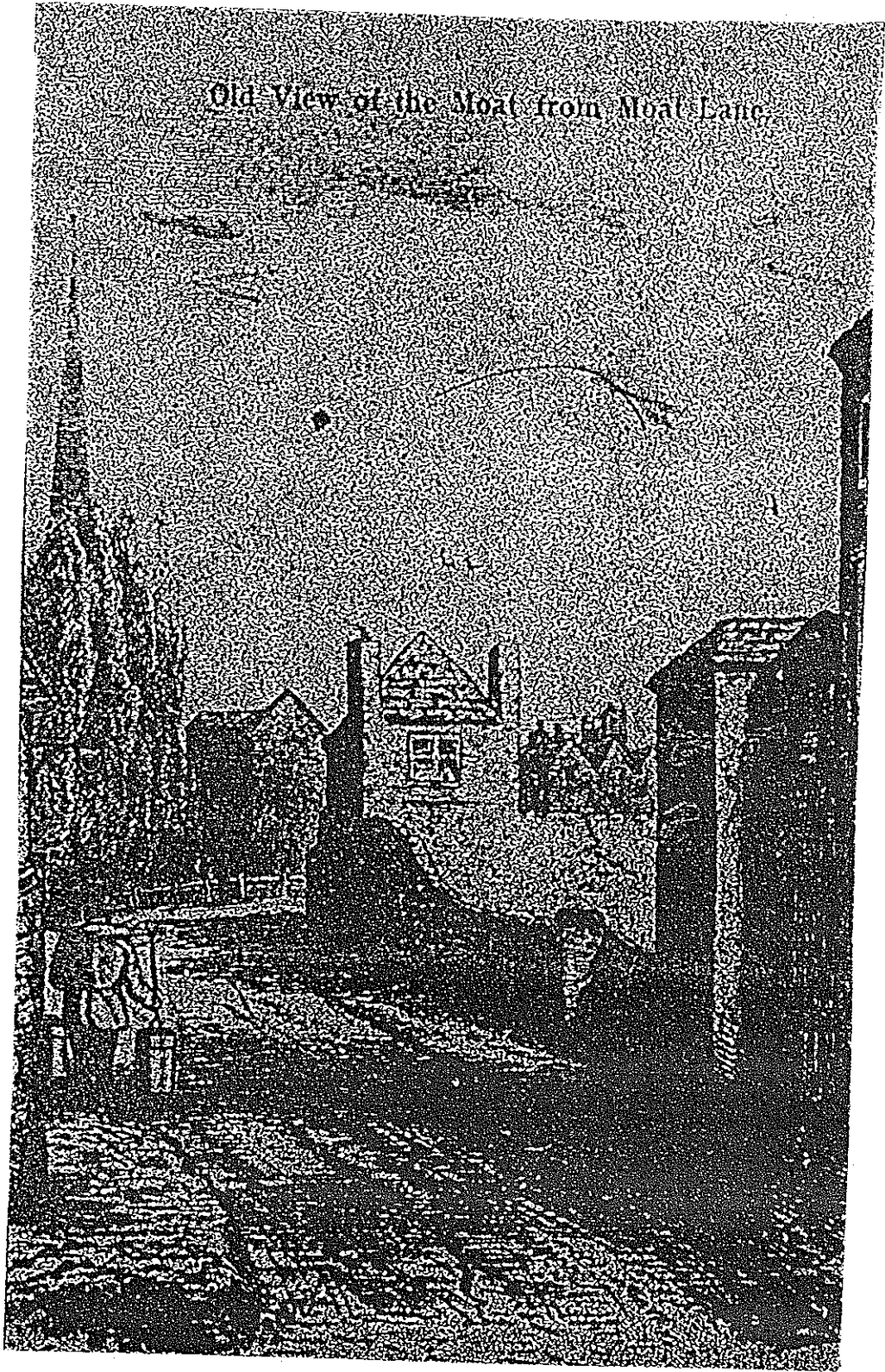


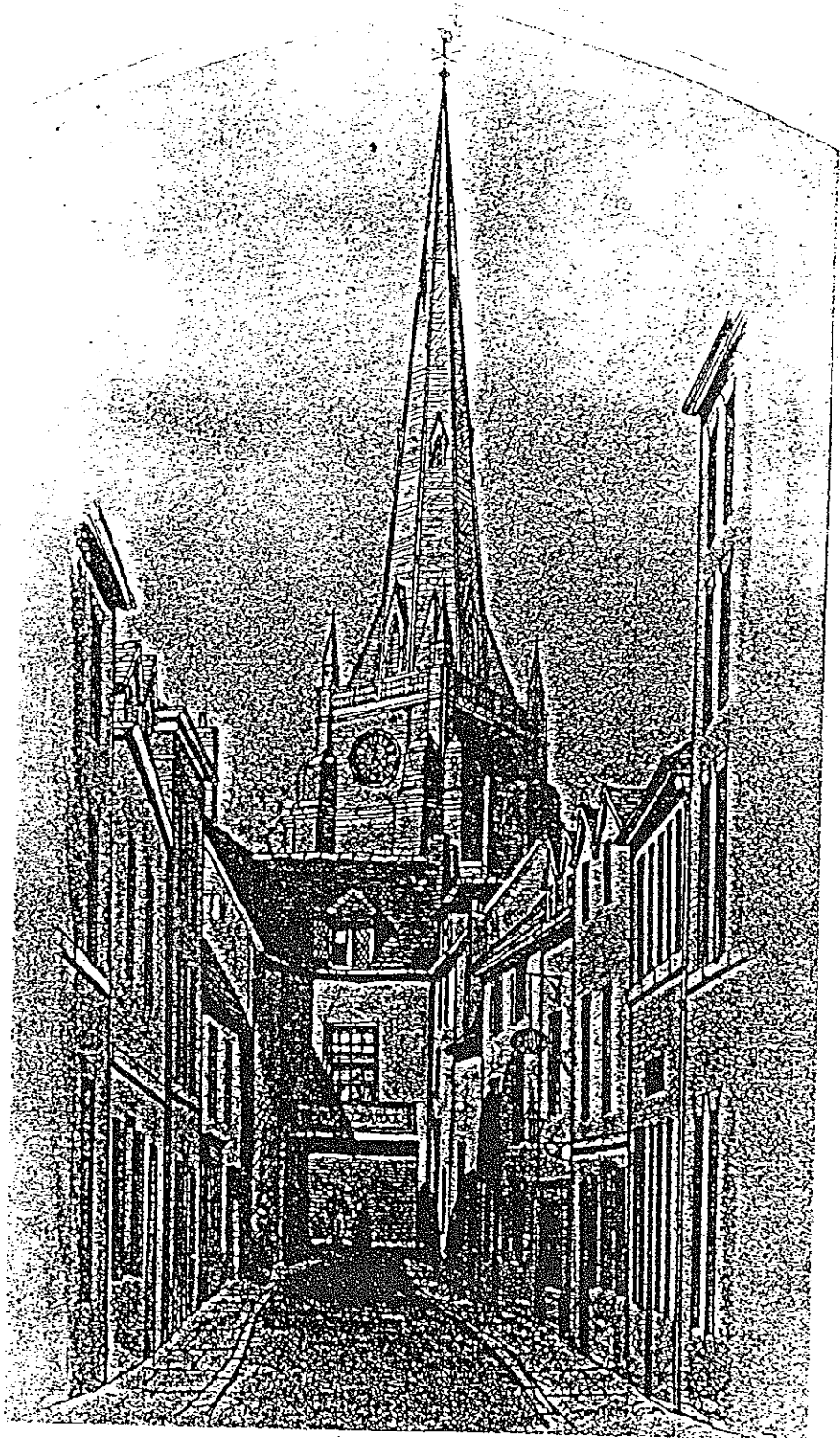
Gloucester St looking towards Edgbastan St
from Upper Dean St

Rear of Edgbaston Street, 19th century



Old View of the Moat from Moat Lane





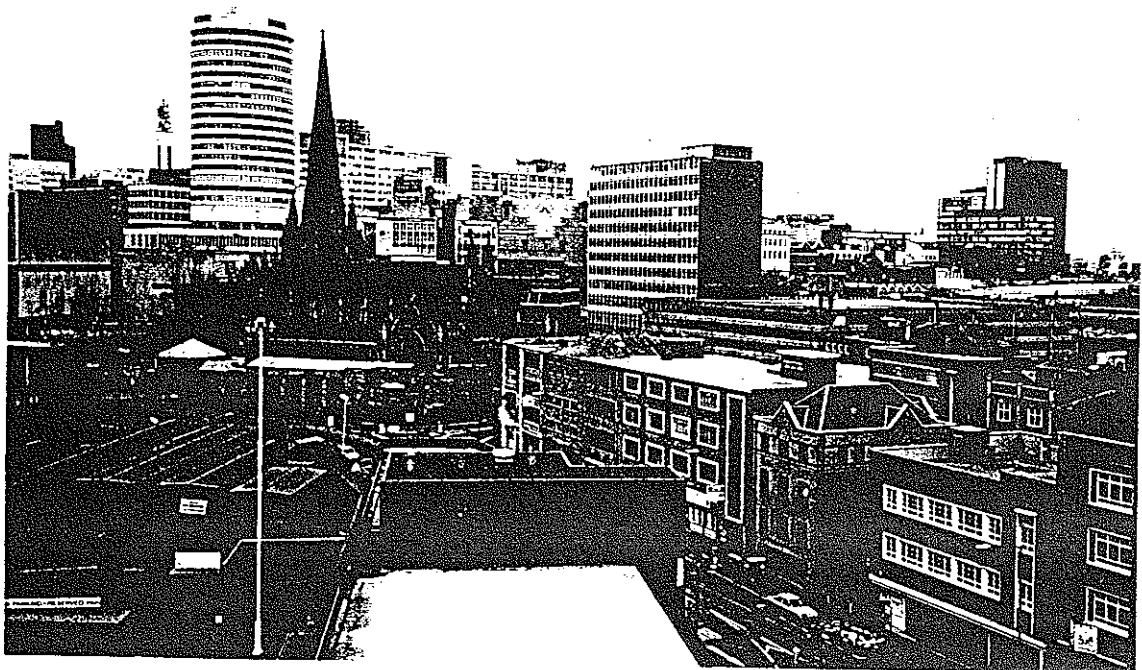
Moat Lane, 1853



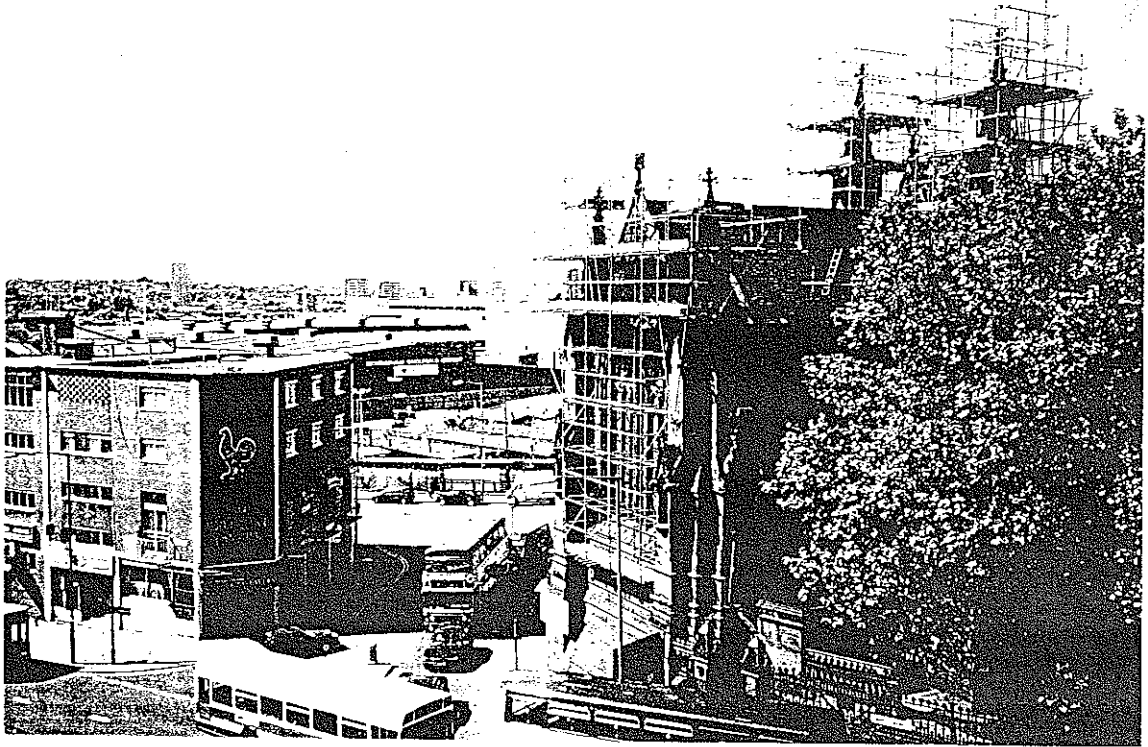
St. Martin's Lane, 1840



Court No. 7, Pershore Street, mid 1920s



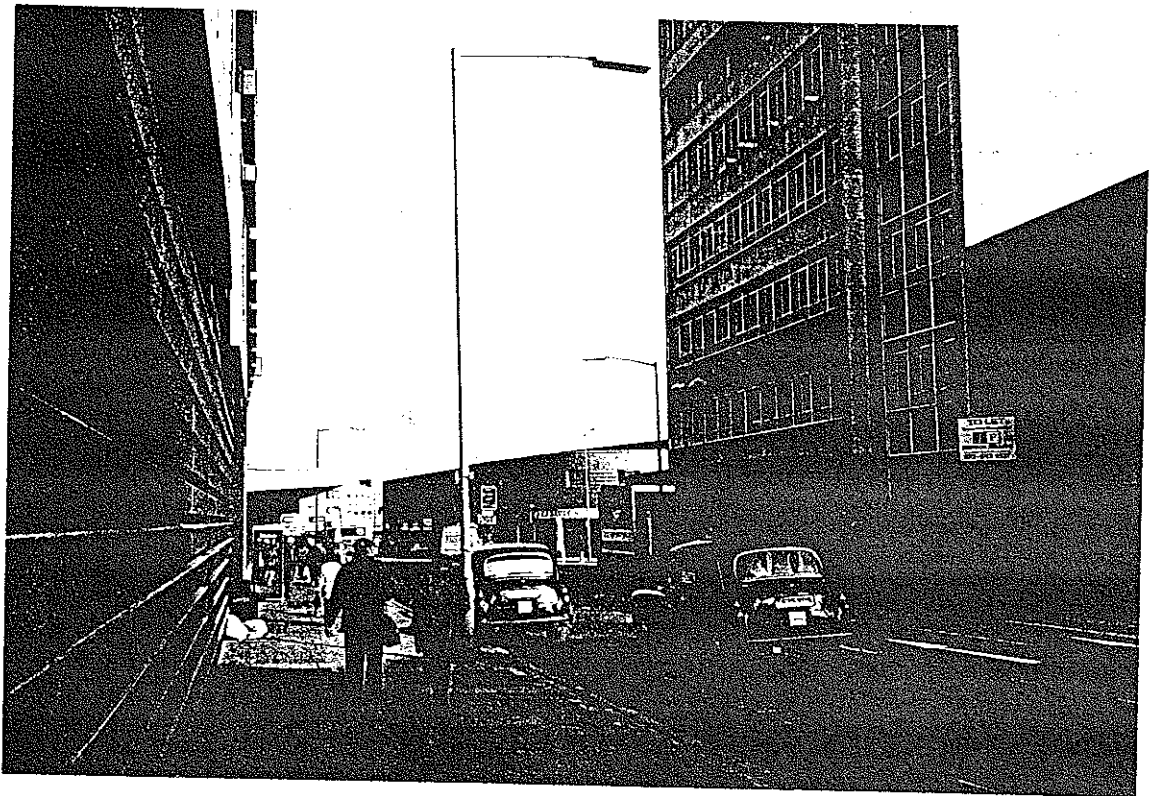
Looking towards Edgbaston Street and the Rag Market



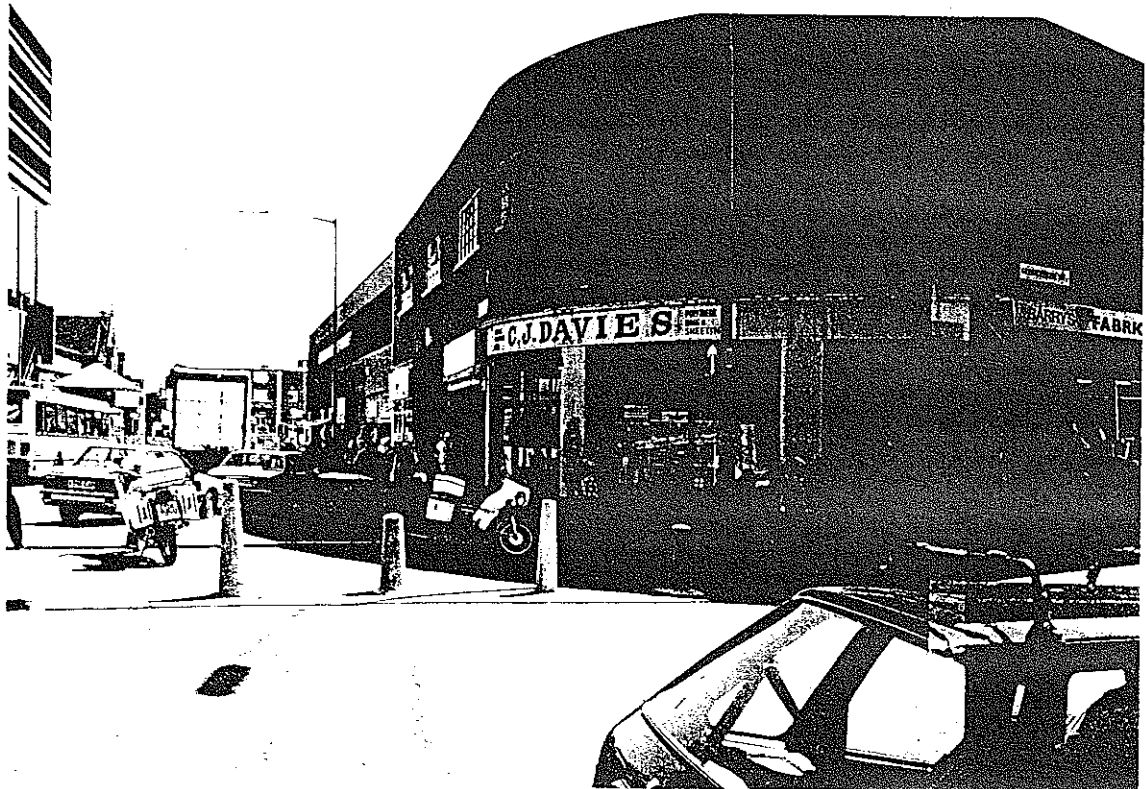
Looking towards Edgbaston Street and the Rag Market



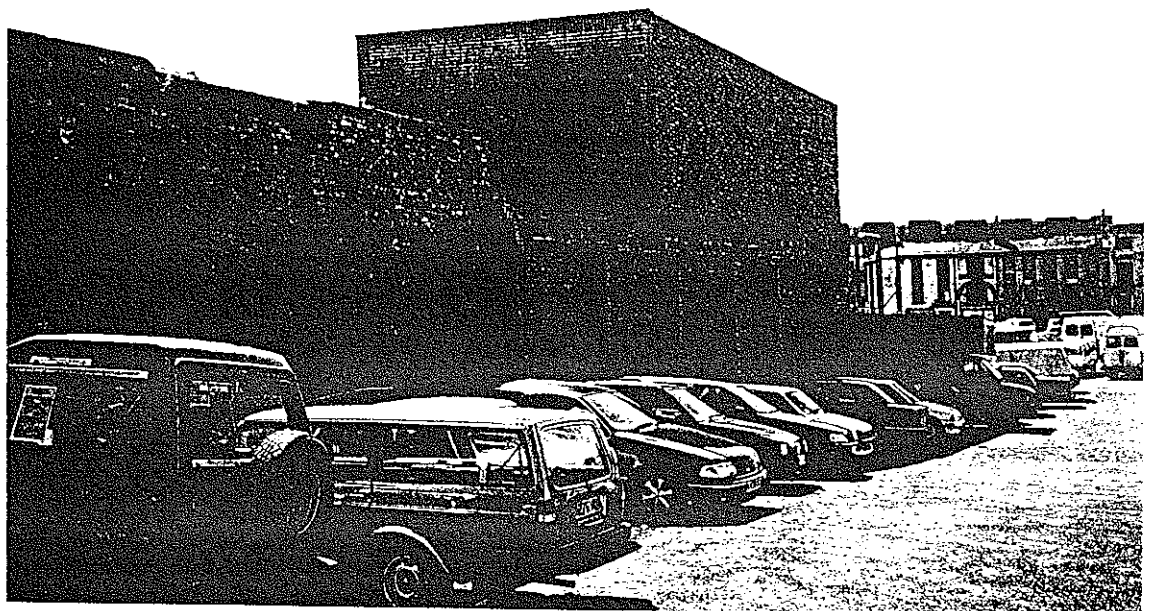
Edgbaston Street



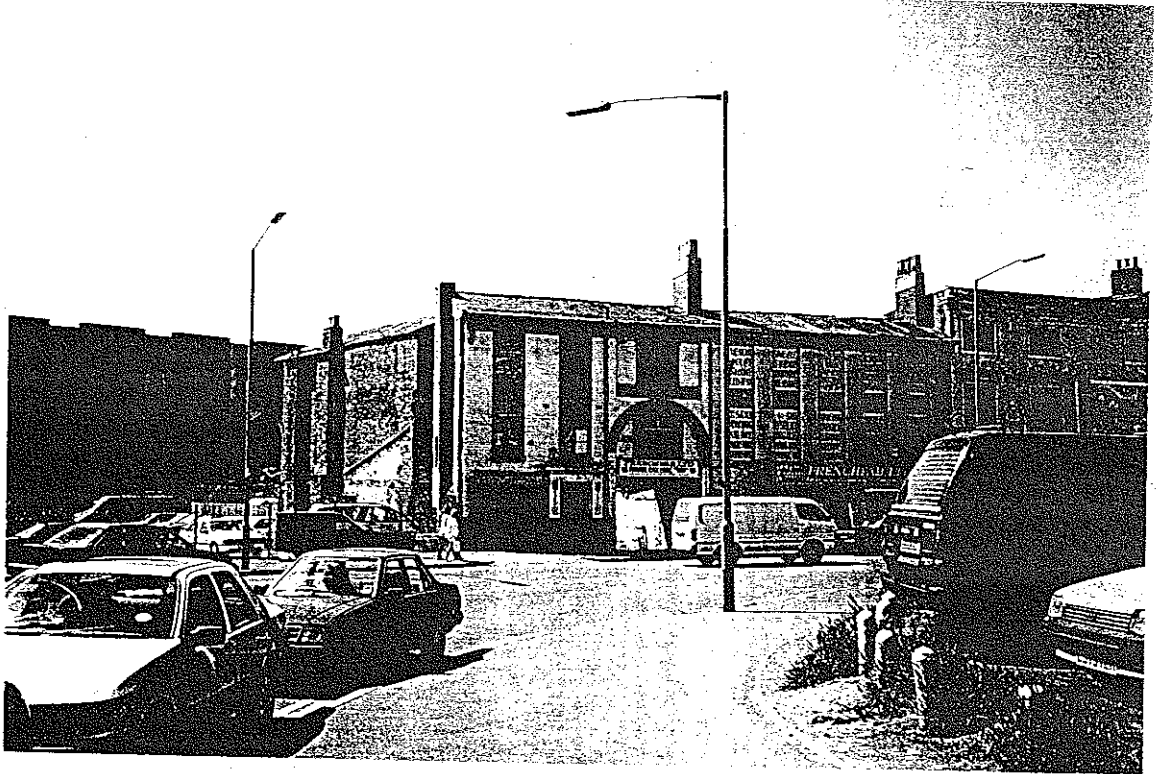
Edgbaston Street



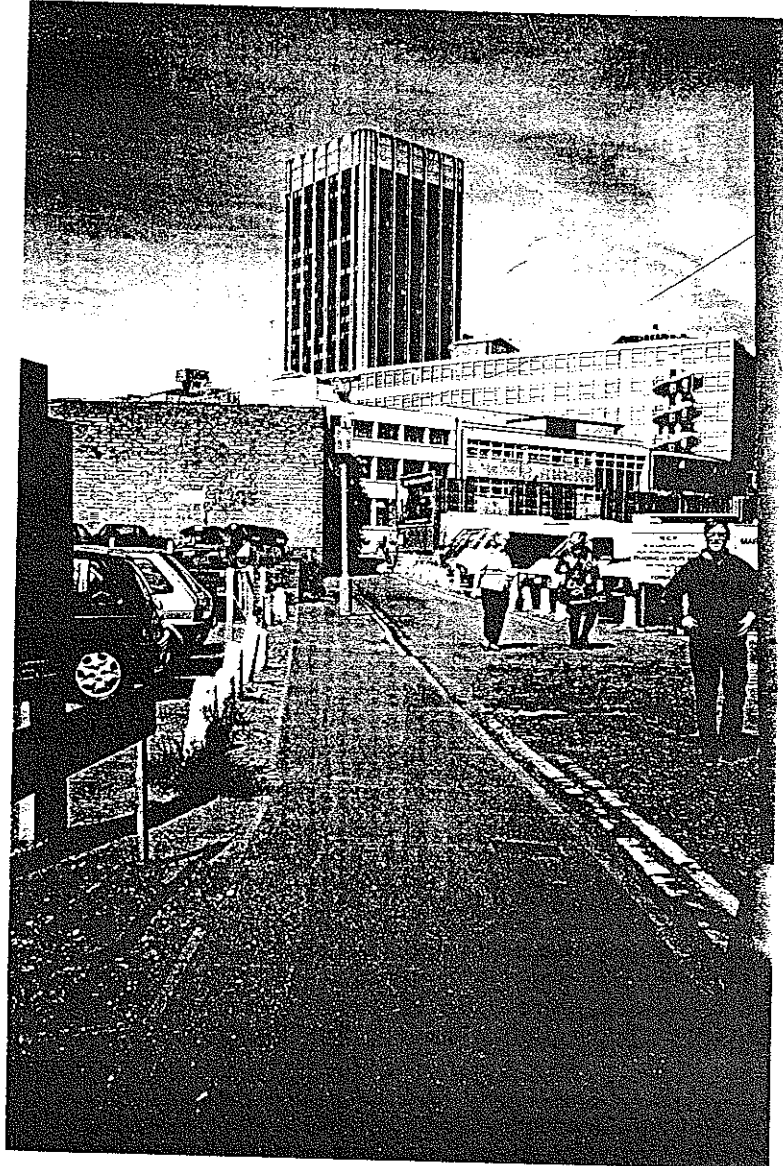
Edgbaston Street and Gloucester Street



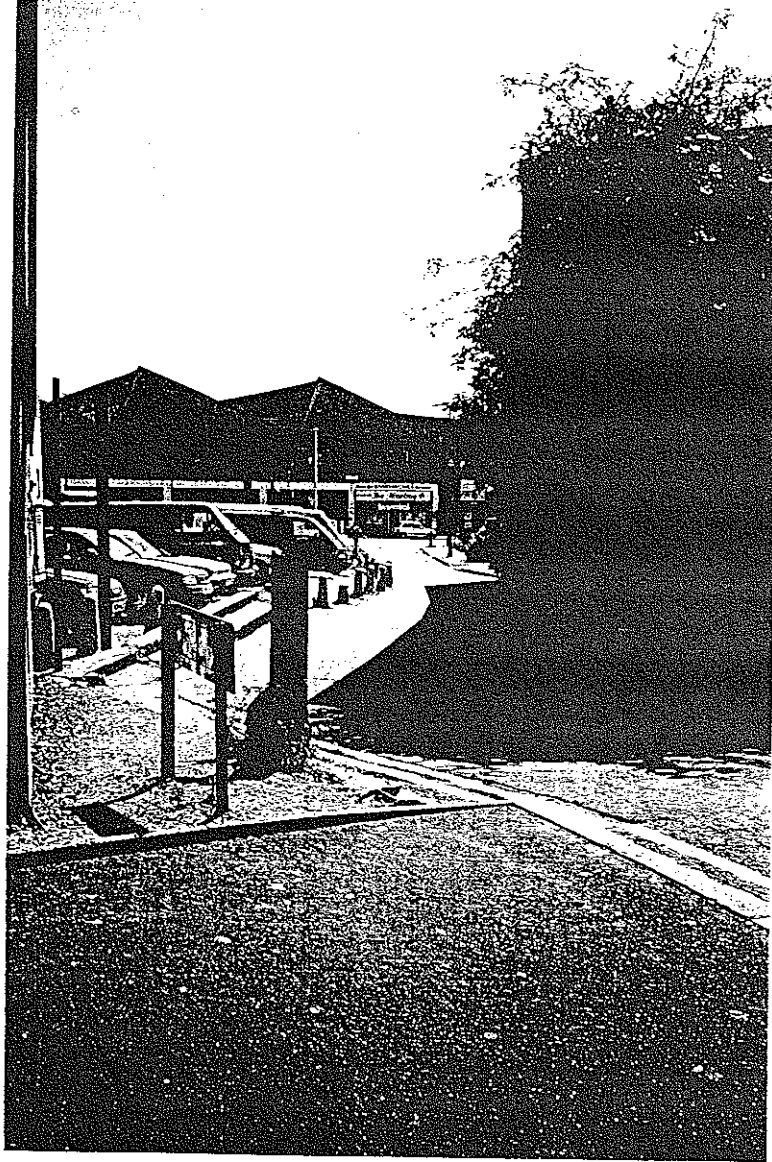
?Surviving 18th century wall, Edgbaston Street/Gloucester Street



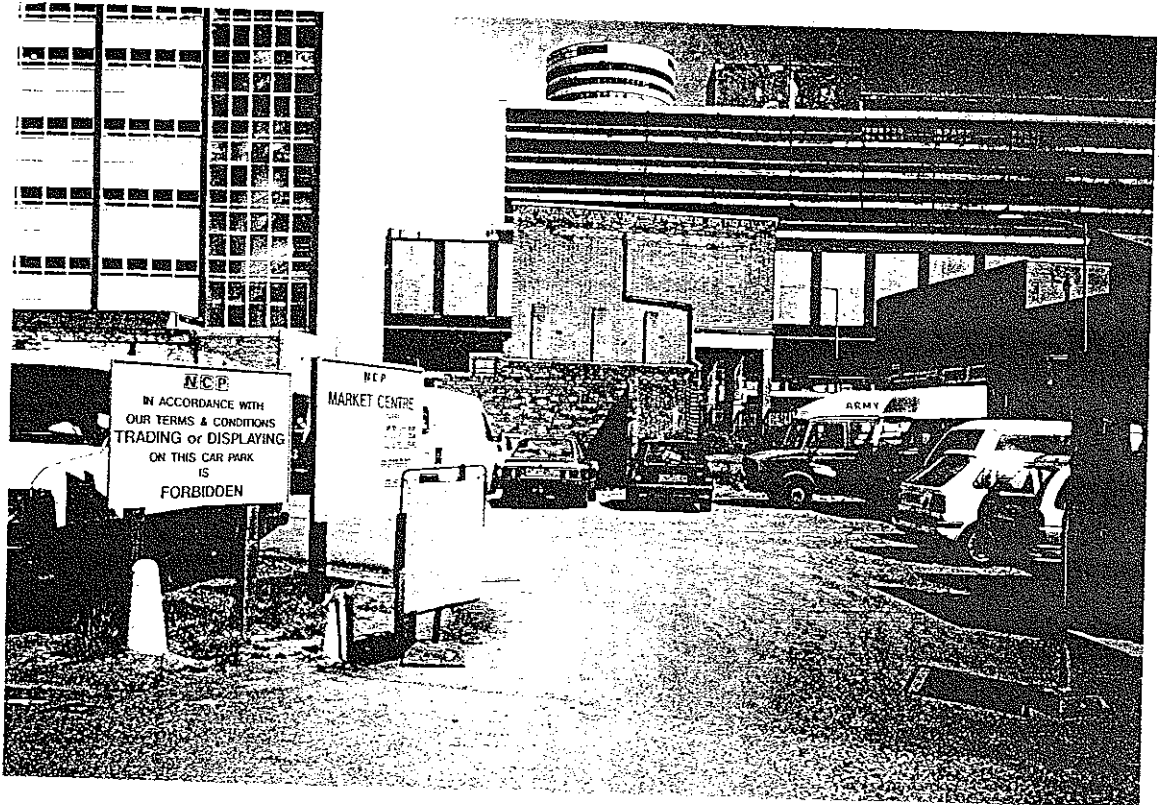
Upper Dean Street



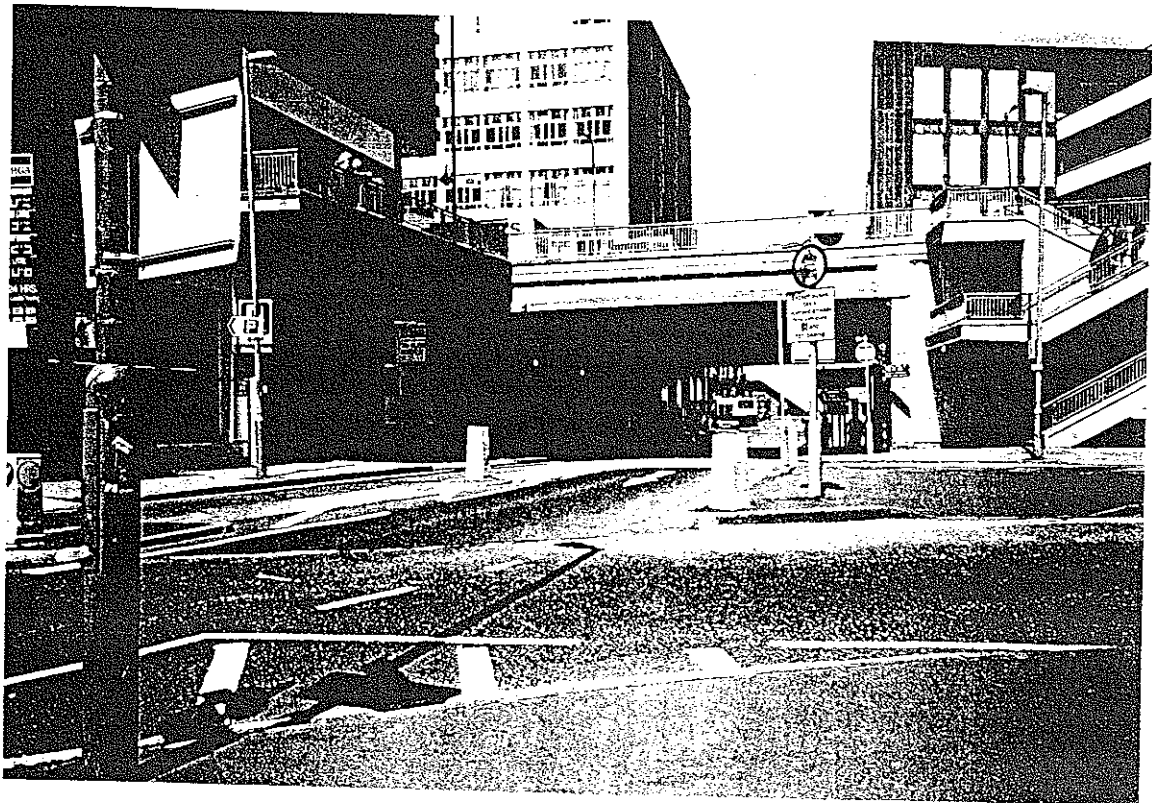
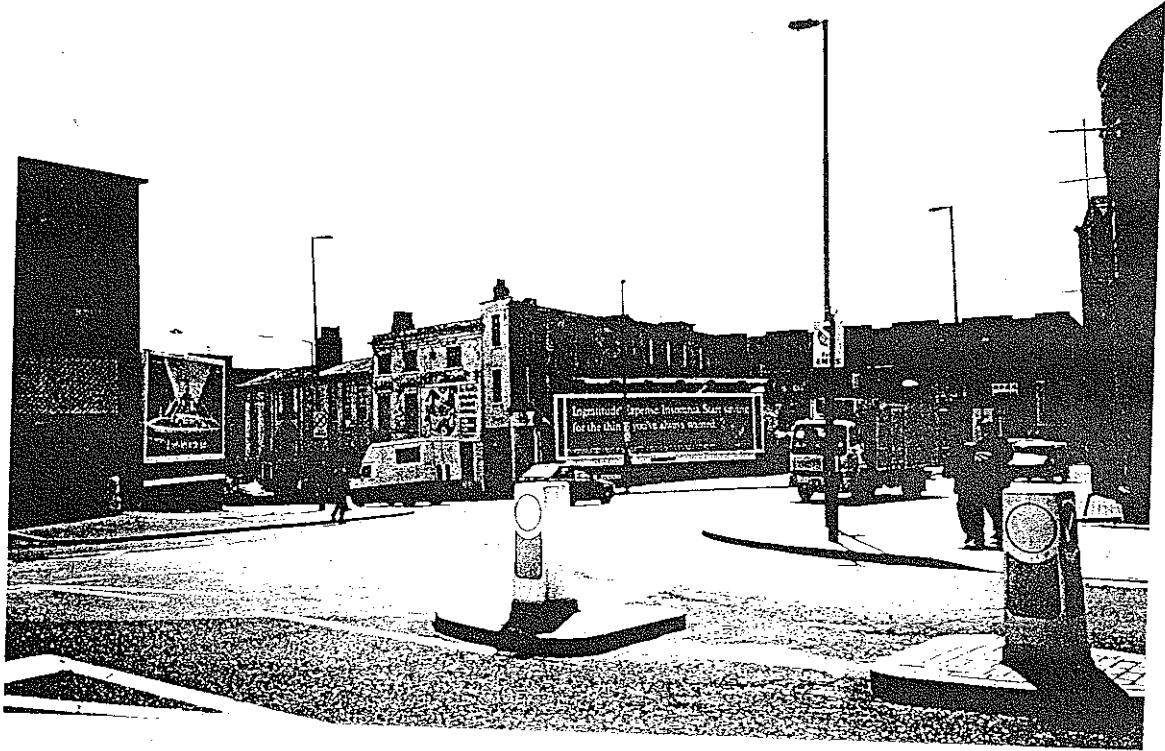
Smithfield Passage



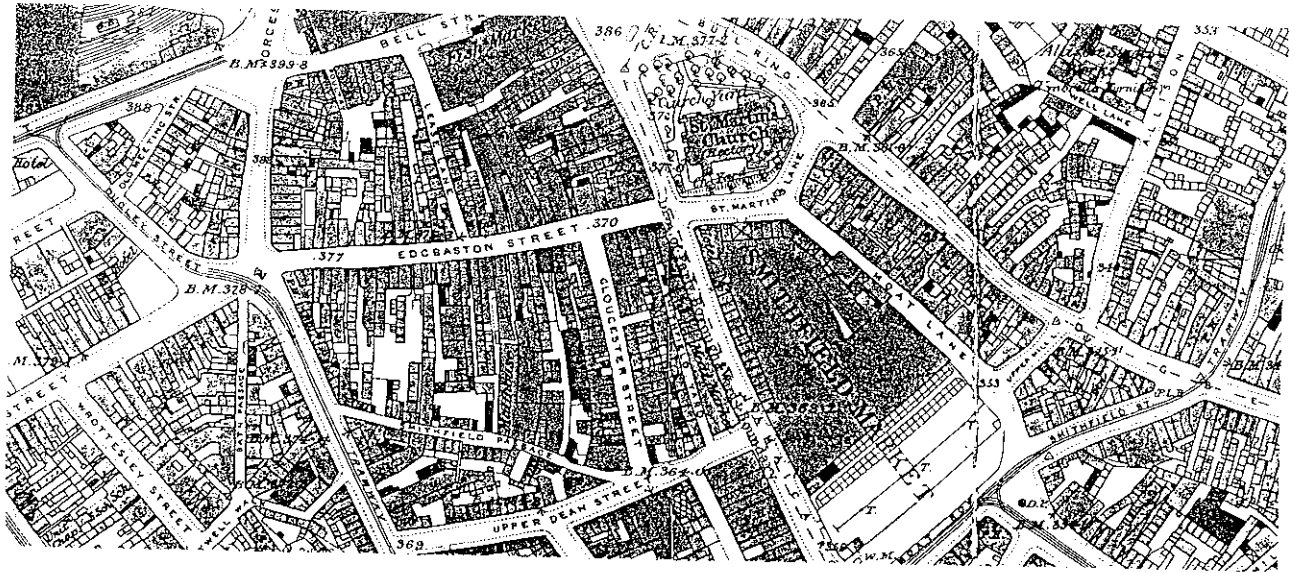
Smithfield Passage



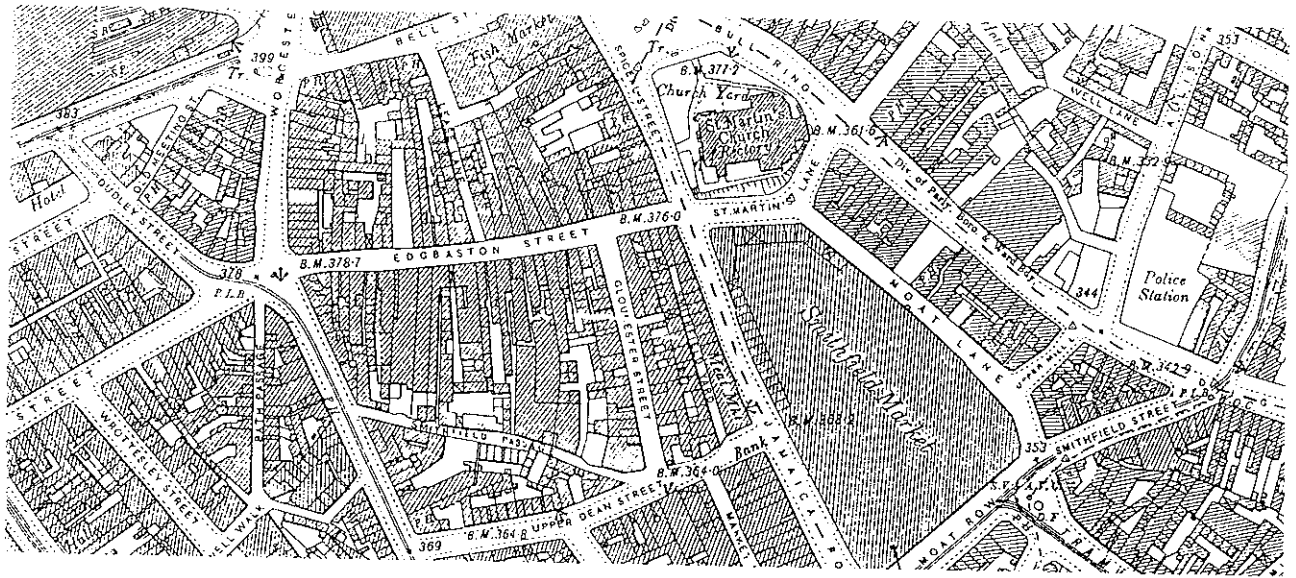
Carpark to rear of Edgbaston Street



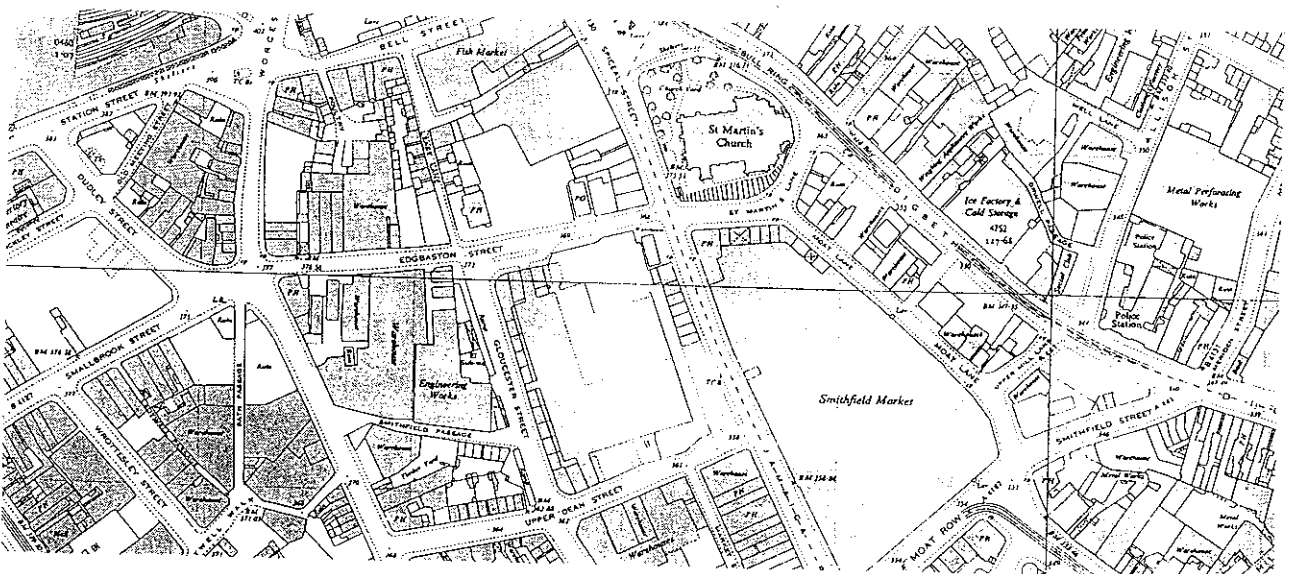
Possible location of Parsonage Moat, Pershore Street



1888



1912



1952



Fig. 3



Ackerman's Panoramic View of Birmingham, 1847