

Historic Town-Plan Analysis
and Archaeological
Evaluation of
The Open Markets
Birmingham City Centre
2000

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit





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Historic Town-Plan Analysis and Archaeological Evaluation of the Open Markets Birmingham City Centre

2000

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Summary

This report describes the results of historic town-plan analysis and archaeological evaluation of the Open Markets and its surrounding area in Birmingham City Centre (centred on NGR SP 0729 8663). The work forms part of the second stage of assessment which has followed on from an earlier desk-based assessment produced by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1997 (OAU 1997).

The Open Markets site cannot be readily identified with one street block or with one specific area on the early maps. It lies immediately to the north of the important archaeological sites of the manorial moat, Parsonage Moat, Edgbaston Street and St. Martin's Church. Research and excavation have demonstrated that these sites date from the 12th century, whilst sites at Moor Street - to the east - date mainly from the 14th century.

Analysis of the historic maps suggests that the boundary of St. Martin's Church land has contracted from where 18th-century properties originally fronted onto the market place and Corn Cheaping, back to the grassed limit of the churchyard itself. The Open Markets site includes the five Corn Market, Shambles and Old Cross buildings. These were cleared, along with those around St. Martin's Church, in the early 19th century as part of a deliberate enhancement of the market facilities. More recent clearance, as part of the Bull Ring Centre construction in the 1960s, had a significant impact on the site.

Archaeological evaluation of the site, by trial-trenching, demonstrated that the only surviving feature of the site's medieval role was a well which had been cut into the sandstone ridge and which was located close to the present-day boundary of the churchyard. The size of the well suggests that it was meant for communal rather than private use. Its location, within the market place and close to the church, further supports this interpretation. The well was backfilled with soft material and was preserved in situ. The absence of any other archaeological deposits earlier than the 19th century meant that Birmingham City Council did not require any further archaeological investigation to follow on from the evaluation.

1.0 Introduction

This report describes the results of historic town-plan analysis and archaeological evaluation of the Open Markets and their surrounding area in Birmingham City Centre. The work was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit on behalf of Hammerson UK Properties plc and The Birmingham Alliance to provide archaeological information in advance of proposed development of the site.

The historic town-plan analysis forms part of the second stage of assessment which also includes field evaluation. It follows an earlier desk-based assessment produced by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1997 (OAU 1997).

The guidelines set down in the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Desk-based Assessments (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999) and in a guidance note produced by Birmingham City Council (Hodder 1998) were followed, along with the Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluation (Institute of Field Archaeologists 1999), a Brief prepared by Birmingham City Council (Hodder 2000) and a Specification prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (Mould 2000). This evaluation conformed to Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (Department of Environment 1990).

2.0 The Site and its Location (Figure 1; Plates 1 and 2)

The site is located within Birmingham City Centre (centred on NGR SP 0729 8663). It lies immediately to the north of St. Martin's Church and to the east of the Bull Ring Centre and Manzoni Gardens. It is bounded by St. Martin's Circus Queensway, Bull Ring, St. Martin's churchyard, the Bull Ring Centre and a concrete structure formerly occupied by 'Mark One' retailers. The site consists of a concrete and tarmaced area with metal stalls used for an open market. A two-storey row of small retail units are located at the northern end of the site, whilst a statue of Nelson is sited at the northeastern corner.

3.0 Geology and Topography

Central Birmingham is situated on a narrow Keuper Sandstone ridge less than 0.5 km wide, which extends from the Lickey Hills in the southwest to Sutton Coldfield in the northeast (OS Solid Geology sheet 168). To the southeast of the ridge is an area of red Mercia Mudstone. The edge of the Rea Valley slopes down from the Bull Ring to the river, a tributary of the Tame, which at the bottom of Digbeth flows across a fault where water draining from the sandstone accumulates and issues as springs in the valley (VCH Warwicks, vii, 4-5). The drift geology mainly consists of scattered patches of sand and gravel, while deposits of alluvium have built up on the Rea Valley floor (OS Drift Geology sheet 168).

4.0 Archaeological Background

Salvage recording of the wholesale markets' foundation piles on the site of the Birmingham Moat in the 1970s by Lorna Watts was an important archaeological intervention within the city centre. The results demonstrated the survival of substantial ashlar-masonry walls of a 13th-century hall within the manorial complex, and the potential of waterlogged deposits for environmental analysis. It was also accompanied by detailed documentary and cartographic research, which highlighted

the potential of a multi-disciplinary approach for the study of the town's past (Watts 1980).

This was not the first archaeological intervention within the City Centre. In the 1950s another salvage recording exercise was carried out during the widening of Deritend High Street near St. John's Chapel (Sherlock 1955). Sherlock observed what were probably the sandstone foundations of the medieval chapel, (which was rebuilt in brick in the 18th century), and found evidence suggesting pottery production in Deritend in the 13th and 14th centuries. Supporting evidence for medieval pottery production in Deritend was later discovered during archaeological excavation of the back-plot of the Old Crown public house (Litherland *et al.* 1994). Two further salvage recording exercises were carried out in the 1980s on the site of the Bull Ring Trading Estate by BUFAU and the City Museum. These indicated extensive post-medieval levelling had occurred towards the rear of the site, while 18th century features and two possible medieval features were found near the frontage.

An archaeological and historical assessment of almost one third of the medieval town (Litherland *et al.* 1995) shed further light on our understanding of Birmingham's development. Subsequent assessments have built upon this report and the results of all of these surveys are included in the Town-Plan Analysis section below (Mould and Litherland 1995a and 1995b, Mould 1997, Mould 1999).

Excavations elsewhere within the city centre, at Edgbaston Street, have identified the extensive remains of 13th to 14th-century tanning pits and settlement features (Mould forthcoming), whilst an evaluation at The Row Market recorded medieval remains between later cellars (Hovey 1999). On-going excavation at Moor Street has demonstrated an unbroken sequence of survival from the 12th century up to the present day. In addition, a watching brief on The Row has identified a surviving profile of the medieval manorial moat (Patrick *et al.* forthcoming).

The results of these more recent and on-going archaeological investigations at Edgbaston Street, the Row Market, Row Road and Moor Street are also incorporated here.

5.0 The Historical Background (Map 1)

Holt gives a comprehensive account of Birmingham's historical background in Litherland *et al.* (1995). However, a brief summary is included here to provide context and to help gain an understanding of the historical development of the Site.

Holt has argued that the loss of whatever documentation was produced by the medieval administration of Birmingham has been largely responsible for a long-standing popular misconception that the town was then of little importance. Earlier urban historians, and particularly Conrad Gill, the author of the first volume of the official History of Birmingham published in 1952, were obsessed with the formalities of borough status as conferred by charters of liberties; as Birmingham never received such a charter from its medieval lords, this school of historians could not accept it as a

proper town despite all the evidence that it was. Its 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 in the state records.

Edgbaston Street and the southern side of the triangular market place around St. Martin's Church were thought to date from the first phase of the medieval town (Map 1) – an argument subsequently confirmed by excavation to the south of Edgbaston Street in 1999 - and were the setting for the houses of prosperous merchants and craftsmen; immediately to the south were two moated sites, the manor house of the de Birmingham family and another moated site later occupied by the Rectory.

6.0 Historic Town-Plan Analysis

6.1 Introduction

This analysis is focused on the area defined by St. Martin's Circus Queensway, Bull Ring, St. Martin's churchyard, the Bull Ring Centre and a concrete structure formerly occupied by 'Mark One' retailers (Figure 1). This represents Zone B from the earlier report (OAU 1997) and is referred to here as 'The Site'. Ordnance Survey maps were consulted as part of that report, and information relating to the site's development in the 20th century is only briefly touched upon here.

The results of historic town-plan analysis for Zone A are given in a separate report (Burrows and Mould 2000).

6.2 Map Evidence (Appendix 1)

An extensive range of historical maps was examined, principally from the collections of the Archives and Local History Divisions of Birmingham Central Library. The Westley map and prospects of Birmingham of 1731 and 1732 are the earliest direct cartographic evidence available; there is also a prospect by Buck drawn in 1753. Other maps compiled later in the 18th and 19th centuries chronicle the expansion of the town as new suburbs and roads were built.

Detailed map study becomes possible with a series of large scale 1:528 plans produced by the borough surveyor Pigott Smith between 1850 and 1861. These maps depict individual properties and building plans in detail, and formed the basis of a series of rating maps compiled between 1869 and c.1890, although several sections of these later maps are not currently available. The Pigott Smith and 1889 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:500 map form the benchmark cartography for the present survey.

The Westley map of 1731 and the Bradford map of 1750 have been used as base plans for this analysis of the Site. Bradford has, in the past, been regarded as the more accurate of the two (Baker 1995). However, recent archaeological investigation at The Row has shown that Westley, not Bradford, is more accurate in his depiction of the location and morphology of the manorial moat (Patrick *et al.* forthcoming).

6.3 Historic Town-Plan Analysis for Birmingham

Baker has previously used the range of historic maps to follow the detailed physical development of Birmingham from the 1730s to the present day. He has also demonstrated how they can offer information on the circumstances in which those areas were developed and built up for the first time, in the period c.1160 to 1600 (Baker 1995 and 1999).

The plan of Birmingham revealed by the early cartography is that of a simple rural road pattern transformed by a succession of town-planning exercises, the earliest probably dating from around the time of the market charter of 1166, the first known initiative to develop trading functions on what would become the triangular Bull Ring market place. The pre-urban framework for the growth of the town was provided by the natural and agricultural topography: the river Rea, its floodplain and subsidiary channels. The growth of the town took place by the successive development of land parcels along the old roads, some of which were undoubtedly specially provided with facilities to attract traders and artisans, and the provision of new roads, with new plots laid out across the interstices of the old road network.

6.4 Plan Analysis of the Edgbaston Street Area

This area, immediately to the south of the Site, saw some of the earliest urban activity in Birmingham. Edgbaston Street forms the base of the triangle of the Bull Ring market place, and carried traffic to and from the axial route represented by High Town. It provided a link between Dudley Street – which ran directly to Parsonage Moat – Worcester Street, St. Martin's Church, the manorial moat and High Town. Excavation has shown that the south side of the street was occupied by a series of plots with very distinctive characteristics. The plots lay sandwiched between the Parsonage Moat at the west end, and the de Birmingham's manorial moated site at the east end. The moats were important foci for settlement and were originally linked by a watercourse which formed the back boundary to the series of plots running up the slope to Edgbaston Street.

To the east of the Site, Park Street and Moor Street represent secondary growth, following the development of housing on the main frontages of the market place and the axial street. The Priory precinct was located at the northern extent of Dale End, a street which represented a continuation of the main north-south axial route through Digbeth, the Bull Ring and High Street, and which fed north from the triangular market-place. The founding of a Priory at the northern limit of the medieval town was in keeping with contemporary urban development (Cullum 1993).

6.5 Historic Town-Plan Analysis of the Open Markets

The Site cannot be readily identified with one street block or with one specific area on Westley's map of 1731 (Map 1) and Bradford's map of 1750 (not illustrated). The southern boundary is represented by and includes buildings which line the perimeter of St. Martin's churchyard. The western boundary runs along and includes Mercer/Spicer Street. It continues north up to the junction with High Town, marked by the Old Cross building. Here, the northeastern corner of the Site is represented by

part of the High Town/Moor Street/Corn Cheaping street block. The eastern boundary follows Corn Cheaping down to St. Martin's churchyard. An overlay of the present-day street format with Westley suggests that the boundary of St. Martin's Church land has contracted from those properties which front onto the market place and Corn Cheaping back to a dotted line which represents the boundary of the churchyard. The site includes the five Corn Market, Shambles and Old Cross buildings.

Corn Cheaping forms part of the axial north-south route from Digbeth/Deritend through Birmingham via High Town, Broad Street and Dale End up to the medieval Priory precinct. Mercer Street provides a link along the western side of the churchyard between Edgbaston Street and High Town.

Westley and Bradford show that the Corn Cheaping, Mercer/Spicer Street and High Town frontages are built-up. A series of small alleys provides access to long, thin pieces of land which extend back from the street-facing structures. The spatial character of these property boundaries contrasts with those within the Moor Street/Park Street/Corn Cheaping street block. Those within the Site are more characteristic of ribbon-development along an axial route, whilst those within the Moor Street block are more characteristic of a planned intervention.

One of Hanson's maps, dated 1778 (not illustrated), shows no change apart from Corn Cheaping now being known as 'Bull Ring'. A second more detailed map by Hanson, also dated 1778, does not show the small building between Bell Street and the Shambles. Snape, in 1779, omits the same building, along with a second to the west of the Shambles and the Corn Market building. The last two are clearly shown on Hanson's later map of 1781 and their omission by Snape may be due to a lack of detail.

However, by the time of Kempson's map of 1808 (not illustrated), the market place has been cleared of all five structures and those around St. Martin's churchyard have also disappeared. By 1810 a statue of Nelson has been erected at the centre of an otherwise open market place. This more open townscape is also shown on an Inge Estate terrier dating to 1809, a survey of the Earl of Dartmouth's land, prepared by Pigott Smith in 1828 and on Beilby's map of 1828. Ackerman's Panoramic View of Birmingham, dated 1847 (Map 2), shows that the Bull Ring Market place remains open apart from Nelson's Statue.

This clearance of the Site should be seen within the context of a deliberate enhancement of the market facilities by the City's Commissioners. The success of the markets in Birmingham was balanced by the accompanying problems of street congestion from traffic bringing produce into the town and livestock being herded into the town for sale at High Street and Dale End and then being herded on to the individual slaughterhouses. The problem of livestock was solved around 1810 when the Commissioners bought the former medieval manorial moat which lay to the south of St. Martin's Church. This was opened for the sale of livestock in 1817 and was known as 'Smithfield Market'. A wholesale butcher's market, St. Martin's Market, was opened at the later date of 1851 at Jamaica Row (Skipp 1983).

The problem of the Bull Ring market place becoming overcrowded with stalls and extending far beyond its original boundaries was also addressed by the construction of a new market hall, St. John's Market, immediately to the west of the Site. This was opened in 1835 for meat, vegetable and other sellers. It was subsequently reorganised to accommodate the Fish Market which was brought down from Dale End. A separate Wholesale Fish Market was then opened to the south of St. John's Market by the City Corporation in 1869. The Smithfield Vegetable Market for wholesalers was opened in 1884, replacing the previous pitches on High Street, Spiceal Street and Worcester Street (Skipp 1983).

The first four editions of the Ordnance Survey map, dated 1888 (Map 3), 1905, 1919, and 1927 show only one change – the insertion of some urinals to the south of Nelson's Statue in the early 20th century. A northeast-southwest aligned tunnel leading to the newly created New Street Station forms the northern boundary of the Site. Property boundaries within the Site remain unchanged.

The 1952 (Map 4) Ordnance Survey edition shows a number of empty properties to the south of the Fish Market on Spiceal Street and to the south of the railway tunnel on High Street which reflects bomb damage from World War II.

The 1960s saw the construction of the new Bull Ring Centre and establishment of a new inner ring road – and this had a significant impact on the Site. The 1960 Ordnance Survey map shows that the northeastern corner of the Site had been completely cleared. By 1969 (Map 5), this corner had been terraced beneath the level of St. Martin's Circus Queensway. A series of small retail units was constructed on the northern boundary and the new site of Nelson's Statue is marked by a square plinth. The statue was sited on top of a new toilet block. This part of the Site is accessed by subways. To the south, the Lavatories have been cleared to create space for the new open market. This area is also terraced beneath the level of St. Martin's Circus Queensway.

7.0 Archaeological Evaluation

7.1 Objective

The objective of this archaeological evaluation was to determine the likely presence or absence of any archaeological deposits and features within the Open Markets. The evaluation also aimed to establish the extent, date and character of surviving archaeological deposits and to assess their quality and significance. In addition, the evaluation aimed to assess the extent to which any archaeological deposits had been damaged by 19th-century clearance and by more recent building and demolition work, to provide information regarding the depth of archaeological deposits and the implications of the proposed development.

7.2 Method

Four trial-trenches were excavated. The concrete and tarmac surfaces and modern overburden were mechanically removed with a 360° excavator, under archaeological

supervision, to the top of any significant archaeological features and deposits, or to the top of the natural subsoil.

All stratigraphic sequences were recorded, even where no archaeology was present, and contextual information was supplemented by scale drawings, plans, sections and photographs which, together with recovered artefacts, form the site archive. This is presently housed at Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit.

7.3 Results (Plates 3-5)

Measured plans and sections of Trenches 1-4 are stored within the site archive. They are not reproduced within this report due to the absence of surviving archaeological features. Photographs of a well in Trench 3 are included here.

Trench 1

(2m x 29m, aligned northeast-southwest, excavated to a depth of 0.85m)

The yellow-orange sand subsoil (1003) was recorded at a depth of between 0.30m and 0.40m at each end of the trench. The subsoil was exposed at a depth of 0.85m across the middle of the trench where it had been cut by modern concrete building supports and service trenches (F100-F109). These were overlaid by a 0.20-0.25m-thick levelling layer of crushed concrete and redeposited sand (1001). This was, in turn, overlaid by a 0.10m-thick tarmac ground surface (1000).

Artefacts: No artefacts were recovered from Trench 1.

Trench 2

(2m x 22m, aligned northwest-southeast, excavated to a depth of 0.85m)

The yellow-orange sand subsoil (2003) was exposed at a depth of 0.40m at the southeastern end of the trench. It was recorded at a depth of 0.85m at the northwest end where it had been cut by a modern concrete structure (F200) associated with the service trenches (F201-F209). The services ran across the line of the trench at approximately 3m intervals. A 0.20-0.25m-thick crushed concrete and redeposited sand levelling layer (2001) overlaid the service trenches and was itself sealed by a 0.08-0.10cm-thick tarmac ground surface (2000).

Artefacts: No artefacts were recovered from Trench 2.

Trench 3

 $(2m \times 27m, a ligned northwest-southeast, excavated to a depth of 0.98m)$

The yellow-orange sand subsoil (3007) was revealed at a depth of 0.98m at the southeastern end of the trench. It was overlaid by a 0.10m-thick compacted layer of mid-brown silty-clay-sand (3004).

This layer was cut at the southeastern end of the trench by a circular well, which was almost certainly medieval (F300; Plates 3-5). The well was 1.20m in diameter, had vertical sides and a flatish base and had been cut through the sandstone bedrock to a depth of 5.30m. The top of the well was built with two courses of large, dressed, red sandstone blocks. A series of notches in the well wall represented support holes for the original working platforms. The well had not been backfilled, but had instead been capped with a layer of red-bricks in the post-medieval period. The brick capping was sealed by a 0.50m-thick mid-grey-brown silty-sand-clay (3003).

A second well (F301), which also truncated layer 3004, was recorded approximately 1.80m to the northwest of F300. It was 1.05m in diameter and had been backfilled with a grey-brown silty-clay-sand matrix (3005) which contained brick, tile and demolition material. This well was not excavated.

The subsoil was recorded at a depth of 0.60m at the centre and at 0.40m at the northwestern end of the trench. It was overlaid by two levelling layers (3001 and 3002), which were 0.10m and 0.50m in depth respectively. These layers were cut by a series of service trenches which extended along the remainder of the trench. These layers were overlaid by a tarmac ground surface (3000).

Artefacts: No artefacts were recovered from Trench 3.

Trench 4.

(2m x 33m, aligned northwest-southwest, excavated to a depth of 1m)

The orange sand subsoil (4010) was exposed at a depth of between 0.35m and 0.40m along the length of the trench. It was overlaid at the southwestern end of the trench by two levelling layers (4008 and 4009). These were cut by a well (F405) which measured 1.05m in diameter. The well was excavated to a depth of 1m only – this did not represent the full depth of the feature, which had been heavily truncated by a modern service trench (F404). This was one of a series of modern service trenches and concrete building footings associated with a former toilet block (F401) which was recorded 10m from the northeastern end of the trench. The service trenches and concrete hardcore were overlaid by a 0.15m thick tarmac ground surface.

8.0 Discussion and Assessment of the Historical Development and Archaeological Remains of the Open Markets

The historic development of the Open Markets is at the centre of Birmingham's transformation from a rural road pattern to a planned town. Baker has suggested that the earliest planned exercises would have taken place on the main frontages of the market place, such as High Town. This was because the success and expansion of the market facilities was accompanied by a demand for increased space for house-plots and industrial activity (Holt 1995).

However, the Open Markets site cannot be readily identified with one street block or with one specific area on the early maps. It lies immediately to the north of the important archaeological sites of the manorial moat, Parsonage Moat, Edgbaston Street and St. Martin's Church. Research and excavation have demonstrated that these sites date from the 12th century, whilst sites at Moor Street - to the east - date mainly from the 14th century.

Analysis of the historic maps suggests that the boundary of St. Martin's Church has contracted back to the rear boundary of those properties which originally fronted onto the market place and Corn Cheaping in the 18th-century. The Open Markets site includes the five Corn Market, Shambles and Old Cross buildings. These were cleared, along with those around St. Martin's Church, in the early 19th century as part of a deliberate enhancement of the market facilities. More recent clearance, as part of the Bull Ring Centre construction in the 1960s, had a significant impact on the site.

Archaeological evaluation of the Open Markets site followed the town-plan analysis. This demonstrated that evidence relating to the site's central role in Birmingham's evolution, including the Old Cross, Shambles, Corn Market and structures surrounding St. Martin's Church, had been removed by groundworks associated with the 1960s creation of the Bull Ring Centre and inner ring road. The sole exception was a well which was almost certainly medieval in date. It was very similar in build to one excavated at the Moor Street site, immediately to the east (Mould in preparation). Both features had been cut into the sandstone ridge - this contrasts with the brick-lined 17th, 18th and 19th-century wells which have been excavated on a number of sites within the City Centre (Mould forthcoming). Pottery dating to the 13th-14th century was recovered from the primary fill of the Moor Street well. Whereas the Moor Street well had been backfilled with demolition debris, the Open Markets well had been capped in the post-medieval period with a layer of red bricks. The size and location of this well, close to the present-day boundary of the church, suggests that it was meant for communal rather than private use. Its location, within the market place, further supports this interpretation.

Following completion of the archaeological evaluation, the well was backfilled with soft material and was preserved *in situ*. Its location is marked on a site plan within the archive which is currently stored at the Field Archaeology Unit. The absence of any other archaeological deposits earlier than the 19th century meant that Birmingham City Council did not require any further archaeological investigation to follow on from the evaluation.

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Appendix 1: Catalogue of Map Sources Consulted

(arranged alphabetically)

Ackerman's Panoramic View of Birmingham, 1847.

Bickley and Hill, Conjectural Map of 1553.

Birmingham City Council map of Inner Ring Road, 1946.

Bradford map of 1751.

Hanson's map of 1778 and 1781.

Hutton's South View of Birmingham (1793).

Inge Estate Maps of 1760 (BRL: MS 258432) and 1809 (BRL: MS 177).

Insurance maps of 1889 (reprinted 1934 Chas E. Goad Ltd.).

Jobbin map of 1838.

Kempson maps of 1808 and 1810.

Ordnance Survey maps, 1890, 1912, 1918, 1946.

Pigott Smith maps of 1828, 1850-1861.

Plan of Birmingham, 1795.

Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge map of c.1840.

Snape map of 1779.

Tallis World Atlas of 1851.

Tithe map of the Parish of St. Martin, St. Thomas and All Saints in Birmingham, 1845-8.

Westley map of 1731.

Westley's east prospect of Birmingham of 1732.

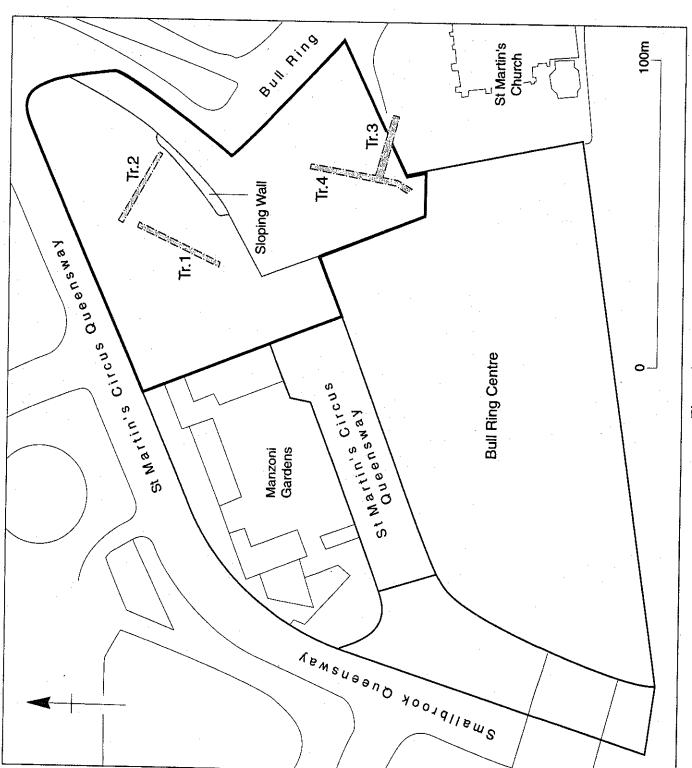
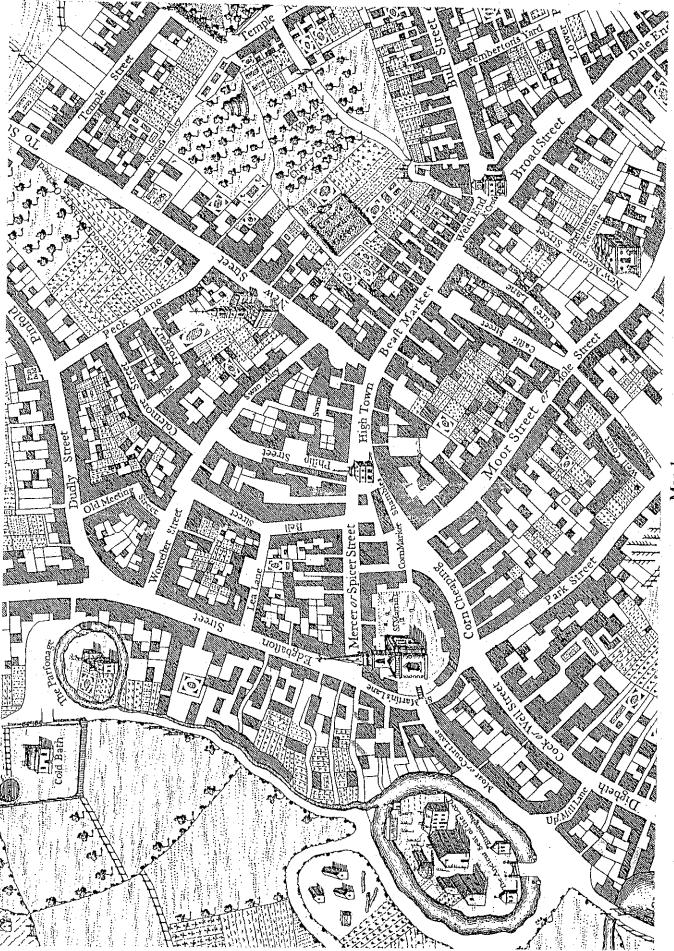
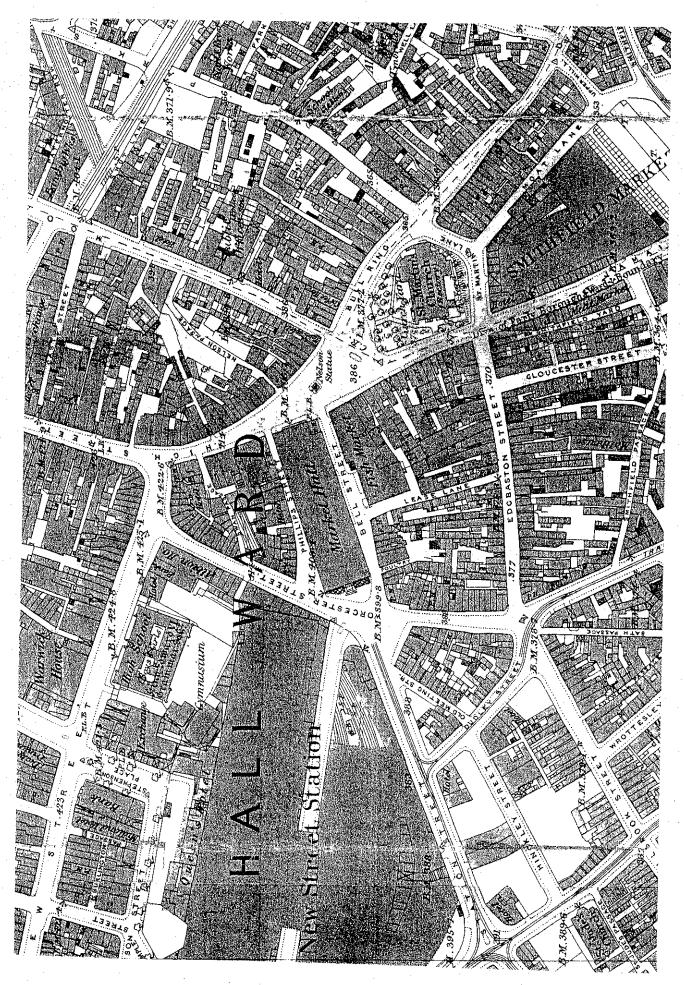


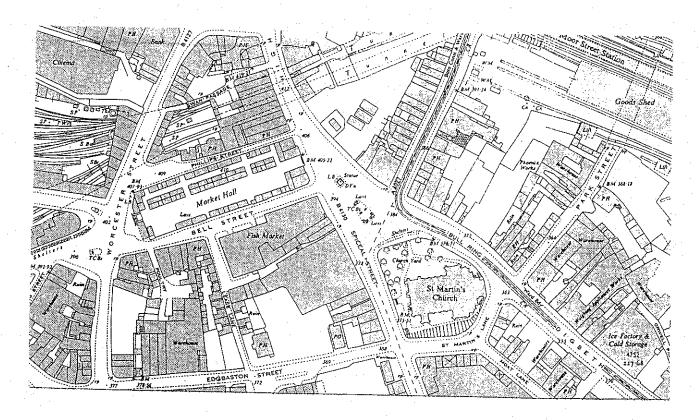
Figure 1



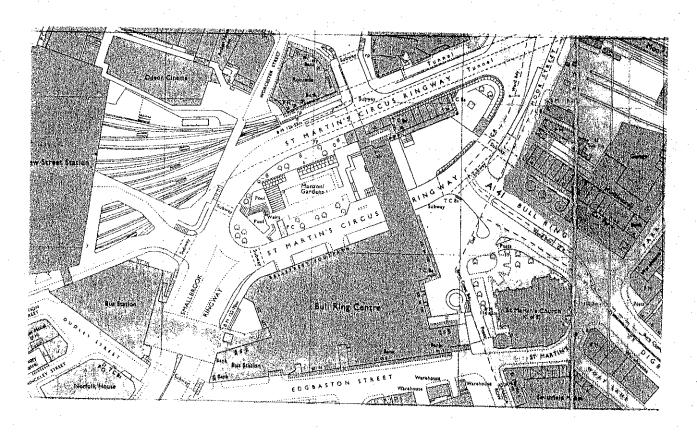
Map 1







Map 4



Map 5



Plate 1

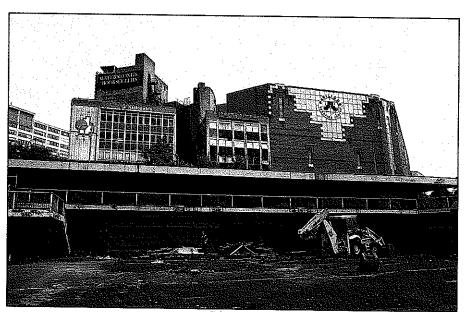


Plate 2

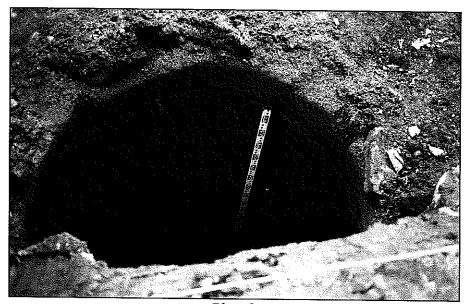


Plate 3

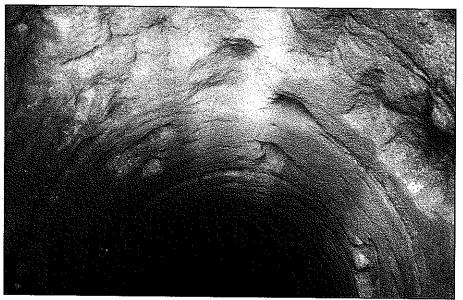
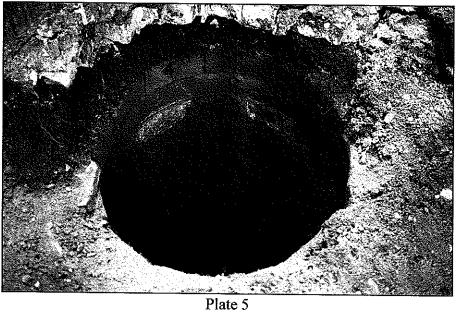


Plate 4



Founded in 1976 and drawing on the academic expertise and technical facilities of one of Britain's foremost universities, Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertakes archaeological work throughout Britain and abroad. The Unit offers a wide-ranging archaeological service including:

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