

Edgbaston Reservoir and  
Icknield Port Loop,  
Birmingham

**An Archaeological Desk-Based  
Assessment, 2004**

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# **Archaeological Desk-based Assessment for the area surrounding Edgbaston Reservoir and Icknield Port Loop: An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment, 2004**

## ***Summary***

*An archaeological desk-based assessment of the area surrounding Edgbaston Reservoir and Icknield Port Loop (centred on NGR SP045769) was carried out for British Waterways in advance of the consideration of any proposed redevelopment of the area. The Icknield Port Loop was part of the original Birmingham Canal, which ran between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Constructed in 1766, it was only decades later, in 1820, that Thomas Telford was asked to improve the Birmingham Canal Navigations. In 1825 construction began on a new stretch of canal between Birmingham and Wolverhampton and in 1826 Telford created the Edgbaston Reservoir to supply water to the new canal. Icknield Port Loop, like many of the loops formed by Telford's new canal, was kept in use, and during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century industry began to establish itself there. Many of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and later industrial buildings survive, as do structures associated with the canal and reservoir. The study area contains eight Grade II listed buildings, a further seven locally listed buildings, as well as eleven other buildings of architectural, historical or archaeological interest. Of these eleven unlisted sites it was recommended that one be locally listed, and that in the event of alteration or demolition archaeological building recording be carried out at various levels of detail, according to the RCHME guidelines, two buildings to be recorded at Level 1, four at Level 2 and five at Level 3.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

This archaeological desk-based assessment was prepared by Birmingham Archaeology in October and November 2004 in advance of the consideration of any proposed redevelopment of the study area. The report was commissioned by British Waterways. The area covered by this desk-based assessment includes the Edgbaston Reservoir and the Icknield Port Loop as far as the New Main Line Canal. The aim of this report is to provide a summary of any above and below-ground archaeology which may be affected by development within the proposed area. It will provide clear recommendations as to the level of archaeological investigation and recording that should be carried out prior to the development of the site.

The desk-based assessment was carried out according to a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology, which was itself based on a brief issued by Birmingham City Council, and adhered to IFA guidelines (IFA 1999).

## **2.0 Site Location and Present Character (Fig. 1)**

The study area includes the Edgbaston Reservoir, Icknield Port Loop and adjoining land as far as the New Main Line Canal, and the railway (centred on NGR SP045769). The land within and around the Icknield Port Loop is currently occupied by a number of industrial units and their yards (Plate 1). The study area also includes residential areas

particularly surrounding the reservoir itself. The reservoir is used as a venue by the Midland Sailing Club and other water-sport organisations. The paths around the reservoir are popular with local people who walk and cycle there.

### **3.0 Objectives**

To define the likely extent, survival and significance of above and below-ground archaeological remains in the study area.

### **4.0 Methods**

- An inspection of the study area included an assessment of all standing structures. Written notes and photographs were used to make a preliminary record of any buildings potentially of special architectural, archaeological or historic significance.
- A search of published and unpublished written records, illustrations, maps and geotechnical records was undertaken at Birmingham City Library Local Studies and Archives, and at the libraries of the University of Birmingham
- A search of archaeological records was made through the Birmingham SMR.

### **5.0 Archaeological and Historical Development**

#### **Pre 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

Prior to the construction of the first Birmingham to Wolverhampton Canal in 1766 the study area comprised a rural landscape with no large areas of settlement within or in close proximity to the study area. The study area is within an area called Rotton Park. A park by this name is known from documentary evidence to have existed since 1307 (Chinn 1999: 124), and the Edgbaston Reservoir was until recently called the Rotton Park Reservoir. Rotton Park is so called after the Rothon family, who are known to have lived in the Birmingham area since 1225 when William de Rotham owned land in Kings Norton (*ibid.*). The Park is likely to have been used by the Lord of the Manor and his guests, for riding and hunting. Rotton Park existed until 1852 when it was sold to Joseph Gillot, soon after this date areas of housing began to be constructed in former parkland. The park covered a large area of land, and its boundaries are likely to have been in the area of Dudley Road to the north and Icknield Port Road to the east; to the west the boundary went from Colenso Road to the bottom of Shenstone Road and the reservoir formed part of the southern boundary (Chinn 1999: 125).

A search of the SMR also showed little evidence of early occupation within the study area. There are two entries for sites predating the construction of the canal, one being an arrowhead (SMR 03005) found on the northern boundary of the proposed area for development, and the second an undated coin (SMR 03278) found in a drained area of the reservoir.

## 18<sup>th</sup> Century

The Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal, which linked Birmingham city centre with the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, near Wolverhampton, was the first canal in the Birmingham area. It was also the main canal of the district, and linked Birmingham with the coal works of the Black Country (Kinvig 1950: 183). Surveyed by James Brindley, the course of the old Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal was largely dictated by the contours of the landscape. Work on the canal was begun in 1766 and on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1769, the first boatload of coal arrived at the Birmingham wharves. The price of coal in Birmingham fell immediately by half (*ibid.*). Soon, an extensive complex of canals was established, connecting Birmingham with other important industrial centres.

The canal appears on the Plan of the Parish of Birmingham published by John Snape in 1779 (Fig. 2). It is shown surrounded by open fields, with no sign of settlement within the study area.

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century

By 1820 the canal network was struggling to cope with the ever-growing numbers of boats that used it. Thomas Telford was asked to propose ways of improving the Birmingham canals and his modifications to the Birmingham Canal Navigations took until 1827 to complete. Telford's route for the new line of the Birmingham and Wolverhampton canal was straight, and significantly shortened the distance between the two towns (Hadfield 1969: 66). His design utilised cuttings and embankments in order to traverse the minor undulations of hills and valleys. Locks were installed only at permanent rise and fall points in ground levels. The new straight canal cut the old meandering canal in several places, leaving stretches of the old canal, known as loops, all along its length. The loops were kept in a navigable state and were used as canal arms. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when industry in Birmingham spread outwards from the city centre, these loops attracted industries owing to their excellent transport links.

In order to supply the new stretch of canal with water, Telford created the Edgbaston Reservoir in 1826, possibly by enlarging the pre-existing fishing pool known as Roach Pool. The water from the reservoir was fed to the new line of the Birmingham and Wolverhampton canal via the Icknield Port Loop (part of the old line of canal).

It was in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the urbanisation of areas to the south and east of the study area began. The first building within the study area, the Grade II listed Reservoir Lodge, dates from this period. This building is thought to have been built by Thomas Telford and appears on Hunt's 1834 Map of Birmingham (Fig. 3).

The area to the north of the reservoir was slower to develop but by the time of Till's Map of 1884 some construction of housing had begun on Summerfield Crescent (Fig. 4). Urbanisation appears to have spread from south to north, the first built-up areas within the study area being in the Icknield Square area, Freeth Street and the area of Icknield Port Loop to the west of Icknield Port Road.

It was during the 19<sup>th</sup> century too, that there was a rapid increase in the number of industrial sites around the Icknield Port Loop, mainly small metalworking industries (Skipp 1980: 53). By 1887 around 20 separate companies had established themselves around the Icknield Port Loop (Fig. 5). At this time Rotton Park Street was under construction. This road came off Icknield Port Road, and ran down the centre of the 'island' created by the two canals. The construction of this road encouraged further industries to establish themselves in the area during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The growth of industry and the development of housing in the area of the reservoir continued. By 1904, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the OS Map was published (Fig. 6), the area to the south, and substantial parts to the north of the now complete Rotton Park Street had been occupied. The area to the north of the reservoir, which had previously been open fields, was now filled with rows of terraced housing. New roads had been created including City Road and Selwyn Road.

Few of the industrial buildings dating from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century replaced earlier 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings. It was only later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings were demolished to be replaced by modern factory buildings. In the area of Wiggin Street particularly, no trace survives above ground of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial buildings. In the area around Icknield Square and Freeth Street, 19<sup>th</sup>-century housing was demolished to provide space for a new road layout and open grassed area.

## **6.0 Specific Sites and Monuments**

The following section includes accounts of individual sites within the study area. Information compiled in this section was gained through site visits, (including wherever possible the inspection of the interior of individual buildings) information held in the SMR, the study of maps and written records.

### **1. Roving Bridge, Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal (SMR 03555) (Plate 2)**

Cast iron bridge dating from c.1828, of a style associated with the Horsley Ironworks but of lighter construction than usual. The bridge has pierced and patterned balustrades and stone and dressed brick abutments.

*Grade II listed*

### **2. Roving Bridge, Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal (SMR 03898) (Plate 3)**

Cast iron bridge dated 1854. A more decorative than usual version of the Horsley ironworks type cast-iron roving bridge. Ribbed, pierced, cross pattern to balustrade with crossed braced open-work panels and pierced quatrefoil band beneath handrail.

*Grade II listed*



**3. Roving Bridge, Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal (SMR 03899) (Plate 4)**

Cast iron Bridge made by Thompson, Astbury & Co of Smethwick, dating to c.1830. Bridge has cross pattern pierced Balustrades, supported by stone dressed brick abutments.  
*Grade II listed*

**4. Dam, Edgbaston Reservoir (SMR 04383) (Not illustrated)**

1200 by 47 foot dam built by Thomas Telford in 1826. Faced with brick on the reservoir side in 1832.

*Grade B locally listed*

**5. Cast iron Crab Winches, Edgbaston Reservoir (SMR 04715 & 04716) (Plate 5)**

Two cast-iron, double purchase crab winches situated on the top of Edgbaston Reservoir dam. Used for lowering sluice paddle in an emergency, to cut off supply of water to the weir.

*Grade C locally listed*

**6. Overflow Weir, Edgbaston Reservoir (SMR 04726) (Plate 6)**

20<sup>th</sup>-century brick overflow weir from Edgbaston Reservoir into Icknield Port Loop. Shallow segmented stone arch carries road along dam over weir.

*Grade C locally listed*

**7. Valve House, Edgbaston Reservoir (SMR 04717) (Plate 7)**

Circular brick valve house. 9ft in diameter with cast iron domed roof. Cast iron arched door frame. Internally there is one room with a valve in the floor for controlling the water flow from the reservoir to the weir.

*Grade C locally listed*

An identical valve house lies to the north of this one, but does not appear on the SMR.

**8. Icknield Glass Works, Freeth Street (SMR 20504) (Plate 8)**

The Icknield Glassworks which was originally called the Osler's Glassworks, is known from trade directories to have been in existence by 1857. In the 1858 Dix General and Commercial Directory the company was listed as table glass, lustre and chandelier manufacturers, and also had premises on Broad Street. The latest reference for the Freeth Street premises being used as a glassworks is in 1923. The Icknield Glassworks appears on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1887. Comparing this edition with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> edition OS maps, the size and arrangement of buildings at this site appear to be largely unaltered.

The buildings indicated on the 1887 map largely survive. They are constructed of brick and covered with corrugated asbestos roofs. The main block comprises three parallel ranges aligned northeast-southwest fronting Freeth Street. It is a two-storey, ten-bay structure with segmental-arched window openings, and although the windows of the Freeth Street façade have been replaced by later metal-framed windows, several openings in the southwest elevation retain their original small-pane cast iron frames. There are inserted doorways at each end of the street front but an original segmental-arched entrance survives in the southwest end elevation at the junction between the front and middle ranges. To the rear is a larger single-storey building on a similar alignment.

An inspection carried out as part of the present assessment suggested that although the glassworks buildings appeared to have survived, there was nothing very revealing about those parts of the interior that were accessible, though an earlier internal inspection by Birmingham City Council identified modern furnaces (pers. comm. M. Hodder). The large single-storey building to the rear probably housed the furnace, the position of which may be represented on the 1887 map by a circular feature. The two-storey buildings at the front probably accommodated the finishing shops and offices. The site is currently occupied and has been divided into four separate industrial units.

## **9. William Morris Rolling Mill, Freeth Street (Plate 9)**

Trade directories list a rolling mill at this Freeth Street site since 1878. Even at this early date the mill was known as the William Morris Rolling Mill. The Freeth Street frontage appears to date from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. An inspection of the interior of the building revealed that although the front of the site is occupied by a comparatively recent office block, a number of older rolling mill buildings survive to the rear. These industrial buildings date from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century through to the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. The principal block comprised a double-pile construction aligned northwest-southeast, the panelled side walls being articulated by pilasters carrying I-beams. Steel spinal framework carrying the central valley and steel roof trusses. This roof structure dates from the later 20<sup>th</sup> century following a fire at the factory. Extension to the rear, taking the structure as far as the canal, part of which retains its timber roof trusses. To the southwest of this building, another structure is roofed with wooden Belfast Trusses. Another building incorporates the lower part of a large, square, brick chimney (plate 10). A chimney in the same position is marked on the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition OS map (1914). Within the same area of the building is a small overhead crane, probably operated by remote control.

No.300 Icknield Port Road is a single-storey factory building, accessed via the back of the rolling mill. This building, which dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century, and the building alongside it, no.298, are likely to have been part of the *Weldless Steel Tube Company* factory complex which occupied this corner site from 1878 until the construction of a large cinema in the 1930s (now Bill Landon & Sons, q.v. 17). The works occupied a large site on the corner of Freeth Street and Icknield Port Road and were further extended in 1900 to occupy the corner of Rotton Park Street (this part of the tube works survives, q.v. 25).

**10. Canal Company Engineer's Office, Icknield Port Road (SMR 04729) (Not illustrated)**

19<sup>th</sup>-century canal company engineer's office, much altered by large extension.  
*Grade C locally listed*

**11. Canal Office Building, Icknield Port Road (SMR 04720) (Plate 11)**

Two-storey canal office building dating from c.1845. The building has Gothic lancet window openings and a hipped wide-eaved roof. None of the original window frames survive. The building forms part of a complex of 19<sup>th</sup>-century listed buildings between the end of the canal loop and the Edgbaston Reservoir.  
*Grade II listed and Grade A locally listed*

**12. Canal Stables, Icknield Port Road (SMR 04722) (Plate 12)**

Canal stables for two horses and adjoining groom's room c.1860. The small red and blue brick building with slate roof survives little changed from its original form. It retains its original cast-iron windows. Groom's room has small corner fireplace with cast iron grate.  
*Grade II listed and Grade B locally listed*

**13. Crane, Icknield Port Road (SMR 04724) (Not illustrated)**

Gear-drum hand-operated cast iron crane. 15ft tubular jib on circular plinth, used for unloading canal boats.  
*Grade C locally listed*

**14. Narrowboat maintenance building, Icknield Port Road (SMR 04721) (Plate 13)**

Long, narrow, single-storey building, red brick with slate roof. Double doors face onto the Icknield Port Loop and allow a narrowboat to enter the building. From the other end of the building there is access to the interior from the wharf. The building has a stone floor surrounding the water. Here boats would have been repaired and maintained.  
*Grade II listed and Grade A locally listed*

**15. Weir, Icknield Port Road (SMR 04723) (Plate 14)**

The supply of water from the two sluices of Edgbaston Reservoir is discharged into the Birmingham and Wolverhampton canal over this brick weir.

**16. Workshops, Icknield Port Road (SMR 04725) (Plate 15)**

Single-storey workshops with original cast-iron arched windows. Originally built as an L-shaped block enclosing a yard, one wing survives.

*Grade II listed and Grade B locally listed*

**17. Bill Landon & Sons, Icknield Port Road (Plate 16)**

Large red brick cinema with column detail to its façade. The cinema's construction is likely to date from the 1930s. The façade is plain in comparison to other examples of 1930s cinema architecture and it has been significantly altered to accommodate its new use as a bathroom showroom. It is currently occupied by Bill Landon and Sons. Alongside the cinema on Icknield Port Road are further single-storey buildings of a similar date, which are likely to have been garages.

**18. Hermetic Rubber Co, Icknield Port Road (Plate 17)**

This site on the corner of Osler Street and Icknield Port Road has been occupied by industrial premises since the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. Presently used by the Hermetic Rubber Company, the site was originally the Icknield Port Rolling and Wire Mills. Trade directories dating from 1863 list Vivian Henry Hussey & Co as the manufacturers. Amongst the goods they produced were brass and copper tubes, German silver and brass and copper wire.

The front of the site is today occupied by a large 1930s' brick-built office building with hipped plain tile roofs. The two-storey main block with central doorway is flanked by single-storey set-back wings, the whole given a 2:3:2 window bay rhythm. Flanking gateways give access to the works, which is largely accommodated in the original later 19<sup>th</sup>-century red-brick industrial buildings. These are aligned northwest-southeast and comprise a double-pile structure with prominent coped gables. Panelled southwest elevation towards Osler Street.

**19. Former Litherland and Co. Premises, Icknield Port Road (Plate 18)**

A building had appeared on this site by 1904, though the Ordnance Survey map gives no indication as to its function. However, its elongated rectangular plan contrasts markedly with the nearby terraced housing that dominates the area, and it is probable that it was a small industrial structure.

The present building, which fronts Icknield Port Road, is an unprepossessing red-brick structure of *c.* 1900. Towards the road it has a domestic aspect displaying a half gable with two sash-windowed storeys and a gable-end chimneystack. Towards the rear, however, part of the building is provided with an unusually wide chimneystack, which may denote some kind of crucible-based manufacturing process.

The building was unoccupied at the time of the assessment, and access to the interior could not be obtained, in order to confirm its former function, and to assess it fully.

## **20. Biddle and Webb Auctioneers, Icknield Square (Figs 8 – 9, Plates 19 & 20)**

The buildings currently occupied by Biddle and Webb auctioneers were originally the premises of the C. Joyner & Co Gas Fitting Works where chandeliers and gas fittings were produced. The works were first listed in trade directories in the year 1880 and appear on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS Map (1887) which depicts a double courtyard complex situated between Icknield Square and Telford's canal (Fig. 8). Access to the two works' yards was via a pair of covered carriage entrances towards Icknield Square. To the northwest of the buildings was a wharf with access to Telford's new line. It is possible that this wharf was associated with the works, though it seems to have had a separate entrance from Icknield Square.

There was a good deal of expansion at the Icknield Square site between 1887 and 1904, by which time additions had been made to the southeast of the original factory, a site previously taken up by terraced housing. These included an extension to the range fronting Icknield Square and the construction of a large block adjacent to the canal. The wharf shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition map had disappeared and was now covered by large factory-type buildings (Fig. 9).

Although much of the area to the northwest of the Gas Fitting Works is now occupied by modern industrial units, a good deal of the works themselves appear to survive. The Icknield Square front comprises a long, brick-built, three-storey structure. The building is evidently of several phases but presents a coherent (though slightly rambling) frontage through uniformity of materials and the liberal provision of segmental-arched windows. Some of these windows have been replaced, though for the most part the old openings survive and many retain their original small-pane cast-iron frames. To the rear of this building and running at right angles from it are three narrow buildings stretching towards the canal. These structures, which are mostly three-storied, are characterised by their many windows, providing much light to the floors within. Some windows are now blocked, however those that survive retain their original cast-iron window frames. A modern, concrete staircase has been inserted inside the north end of the front building, scarring on the walls within the courtyards of the works, suggests that the building originally had external wooden staircases, providing access to the upper storeys. This may have been to both maximise the internal area of the building and to hinder the spread of fire through the works.

## **21. Covered Wharf, Icknield Square (Plates 21 & 22)**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> (1887) and 2<sup>nd</sup> (1904) edition OS Maps this area is marked as wharf, at this time the wharf is open. By the time the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition map was published in 1918 the wharf was covered.

A Belfast roof is supported by metal columns, the structure retains hoists and winches used for moving goods to, from and around the wharf. It is unclear however if this equipment is original or a later insertion.

## **22. Reservoir Lodge, Reservoir Road (SMR 20229) (Plate 23)**

Canal reservoir lodge c.1830 with 1880 extension. Probably built by Thomas Telford. Red brick with hipped slate roof with deep eaves and octagonal brick stack at apex. The original part of the lodge has canted front with tall sash windows. Set back on left is the later two-storey range also with sash-windows.

*Grade II listed.*

## **23. Bellis & Morcom Ltd, Rotton Park Street (Figs 8 – 9, Plates 24 & 25)**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Bellis & Morcom established an engineering works at this site on Rotton Park Street. The earliest parts of the works occupied the east end of the street previously occupied by boat builders and a rope walk, and stretched along the canal side (Fig. 8). The works expanded quickly and by 1904 occupied half of Rotton Park Street (Fig. 9). At the northeast end of the site, which bordered Telford's new line canal, there were two large blocks aligned northwest-southeast and a number of smaller subsidiary links. This part of the complex extended between Rotton Park Street and the old line canal, and at the southeast end was a small yard with access to a bridge over the old line to a wharf on the opposite side (q.v. 21). To the southwest of these buildings were two other large rectangular blocks aligned northeast-southwest. The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition OS Map (1918) shows the extent of the Bellis & Morcom engineering works at its peak. Almost the entire site was covered in buildings (Fig. 10).

The complex is now much reduced from its 1918 extent, though the Rotton Park Street front remains largely intact. The surviving buildings are built of red brick, and the two-storey main front is perforated with pairs of semi-circular arched windows with cast-iron frames within recessed panels. Internally the buildings contain large, open spaces. The earliest buildings, which occupy the northeast end of the site, retain their original Belfast trusses, and many other early features survive, including tramways, parquet flooring and cast-iron window frames. The machine shop, stores, blacksmith's shop and drawing office are among the buildings, which remain within this once considerable complex of industrial buildings.

Steam engines were amongst the products of the Bellis & Morcom engineering works and the company developed and patented a method of providing a constant supply of oil to the bearings of its engines. Bellis and Morcom engines were regarded as being of very high quality, and many examples are preserved in museums across the UK.

## **24. Birmingham Corporation Refuse Collection and Destruction Plant, Rotton Park Street (Plates 26 & 27)**

Built alongside the tube works, on the site of the Corporation Wharf. The earliest building on the site is dated 1903 and fronts onto Rotton Park Street (plate 26). This red-brick building has three storeys, 8:2:8 bays of small square windows, and a gabled centrepiece with decorative chimney stacks. It is thought that it served as the stables of the Corporation.

The second building of interest on the site dates from the 1920s or 1930s (plate 27). It was used as garages and the central cell of the building was the substation for the plant. The building is whitewashed and has large garage doorways on the east side. The windows, which form a continuous band around the building, are positioned immediately below the roofline.

## **25. Tube works, Rotton Park Street (Plate 28)**

Part of the premises of the *Weldless Steel Tube Co Ltd*, this area of the tube works is known from trade directories to have been established by 1900. The main building fronting onto Icknield Port Road and Rotton Park Street is red brick with terracotta dressings. This tube works is an extension of the demolished tube works on Freeth Street (of which a chimney may survive). It first appears on the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition OS Map and is built upon part of a site previously used as a wharf by the Birmingham Corporation. A much-reduced Corporation wharf was still in operation alongside the tube works in 1918.

## **7.0 Significance**

### **7.1 Below -Ground Archaeology**

The study area appears to have been devoid of structures until the construction of the Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal in 1766. Prior to this, the area was open park land from which only two stray archaeological finds have been recovered. There is no further evidence to suggest that any significant below-ground archaeology predating the canal exists.

The earliest building known to have been constructed within the study area, Reservoir Lodge, still exists, and is Grade II listed. However, other buildings built later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been demolished. The possibility should be considered that remains of these buildings survive within or below later developments. Areas where 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings have been replaced by 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings include Wiggin Street, Freeth Street and Icknield Square. The area to the south of Freeth Street (now open grassland and modern development) was an area of 19<sup>th</sup> century housing, the earliest housing within the study area, and made up of courtyard and terraced housing. Amongst this housing, and fronting onto monument road, were the Corporation Baths and General Dispensary, which had been established by 1887. These buildings are likely to have been demolished at the same time as the surrounding area of housing.

### **7.2 Above-Ground Archaeology**

The Edgbaston Reservoir, Icknield Port Loop and new line of the Birmingham and Wolverhampton Canal are important elements of Birmingham's industrial past. These features supported and encouraged the growth of industry, which developed within the area from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The buildings and structures that survive there today are important to an understanding of Birmingham's industrial development in

general and to history and current character of Edgbaston in particular. Of special interest is the group value of a collection of industrial premises built up over a period of approximately 100 years, and its relationship with the canal network. None of the industrial buildings can be fully understood without reference to it, for it was the canal and the transport links it provided that attracted companies to establish themselves either directly on its banks or in its vicinity.

Of the surviving buildings of interest within the study area, eight are Grade II listed and a further seven are listed locally as grades B and C. Virtually all of these are connected with the canals or reservoir. Several other buildings within the study, however, are also worthy of note. Of special architectural interest is the 1920s/1930s garage and electricity sub-station building within the Birmingham Refuse and Recycling Plant premises. A number of others, including Bellis and Morcom on Rotton Park Street, Biddle and Webb in Icknield Square, the former Icknield Glassworks on Freeth Street, and the former tube works at the corner of Icknield Port Road and Rotton Park Street, whilst less architecturally significant, nevertheless play important roles in defining the character of the area. Their imposing street fronts, with their regular fenestration patterns based on classical proportions, make enormous contributions to the historical streetscape.

From the perspective of the industrial archaeology, the Bellis and Morcom site is probably the most significant. Bellis and Morcom steam engines were and are still recognised for their high quality. Many examples of engines produced at this works in Rotton Park Street can be found in museums or are still at work in factories across the world. Large parts of the factory survive, including the earliest elements, dating from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Amongst the industrial sites within the study area, it is the Bellis and Morcom factory that has the greatest potential for adding to our knowledge of how a heavy engineering works of this period functioned.

The other major site within the study area is the former gas fitting works in Icknield Square, now occupied by Biddle and Webb, which, like the Bellis and Morcom premises, retain a substantial proportion of the buildings depicted on the historic maps from 1887 onwards. Although the original buildings were much added to after the works first appeared in the cartographic record, they seem to have been retained rather than replaced, with the result that the existing structures reflect the full manufacturing history of the company on this site. The works has a historical interest in reflecting the widespread use of gas for domestic lighting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Another important survivor is the former Icknield glassworks, on Freeth Street, the buildings of which are largely intact, and which have the potential to reveal a good deal of information about the arrangement of a medium-sized glassworks of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, and to contrast it with what we know of contemporary establishments, like, for example, the recently investigated Royal Brierley Crystal Works of c. 1870 at Brierley Hill (Hislop 2002).

The buildings of the former William Morris Rolling Mills and the former Icknield Port Rolling Mills (now The Hermetic Rubber Company), both of which appear on the 1887



map, also survive. The former suffered considerably from a fire, which necessitated the reconstruction of a large part of the roof, but the premises retain some features of interest including an industrial chimneystack. The manufactory of the former Icknield Port Rolling Mills is on a less restricted site but displays much the same layout, with 20<sup>th</sup>-century office building at the front and the main 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrial buildings to the rear comprising a double-pile structure, gable ends toward the road. Both these sites are interesting in being examples of what were then medium-sized steel processing works which never increased much in size, and which continued to use the same premises.

The function of the former Litherland works has not yet been identified, but it seems probable that some kind of metal-working was being carried out. The significance of this site lies in its small scale and the juxtaposition of house and workshop. It seems to have been only one step removed from the domestic industries with which Birmingham and other industrial cities abounded in the early years of their development. Architecturally it is unimportant, but it as a reflection of social history it has a greater significance.

## **8.0 Recommendations**

### **8.1 Below Ground Archaeology**

No recommendations for further archaeological work.

### **8.2 Above Ground Archaeology**

It is recommended that in taking planning decisions, account should be taken of the beneficial contribution that many of these buildings make to the historic environment. Several are already on the statutory list, and several others on the local list. All these are buildings directly related to the reservoir and canals, and include the earliest structures.

The industrial buildings are generally later, but most are related to the canals and give this distinct historic landscape a coherence that should not be ignored. The greatest contributions to the defining character of the area are made by the Biddle and Webb premises, the Icknield glassworks, Bellis and Morcom and the former tube works on the corner of Icknield Port Road and Rotton Park Street. It is recommended that these buildings be preserved if the essential qualities of the district are to be retained.

Taken individually, one building stands out, namely, the garages and sub-station at the Birmingham Refuse Collection and Recycling Plant, which is recommended for inclusion on the local list. It is a building of some architectural merit with sufficient aesthetic and social historical interest to merit every effort being made to preserve it.

Whilst this and the other sites are important markers within the historic landscape, and are worth preserving, it is not considered that any would meet the criteria for statutory listing. Should the future of the study area involve alterations or demolition it is recommended that the following buildings be preserved by record at levels equivalent to the RCHME standards indicated:-

### RCHME Level 1

Bill Landon & Sons, Icknield Port Road  
Birmingham Corporation Wharf stable building, Rotton Park Street

### RCHME Level 2

William Morris Rolling Mill, Freeth Street  
Hermetic Rubber Co., Icknield Port Road  
Litherland & Co., Icknield Port Road  
Covered wharf, Icknield Square

### RCHME Level 3

Icknield Glassworks, Freeth Street  
Biddle and Webb, Icknield Square  
Bellis and Morcom, Rotton Park Street  
Tube Works, Rotton Park Street  
Birmingham Corporation Wharf garage and sub-station building and canal retaining wall

## **9.0 Acknowledgements**

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## **10.0 Sources**

### **10.1 Trade Directories**

1858	W.H. Dix & Co. General and Commercial directory of the borough of Birmingham Part 1
1876-77	Hulley's Birmingham Directory Part 2
1878	Kelly's Directory
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1888	Kelly's Directory
1900	Kelly's Directory

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Kinzig R.H (ed). 1950. *Birmingham and its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey*. Birmingham: The Local Executive Committee

Skipp V. 1980. *A History of Greater Birmingham-down to 1830*. Birmingham: Published by the author

## 10.3 Cartographic Sources

1779. Plan of the Parish of Birmingham. John Snape

1834. Map of Birmingham. Hunt

1855. Map of the Borough of Birmingham. James Guest

1855. Survey to the Corporation. Pigott Smith

1884. Map of Birmingham. William Till

1887. First Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch

1904. Second Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch

1918. Kelly's Directory map of Birmingham

1918. Third Edition Ordnance Survey 25 inch

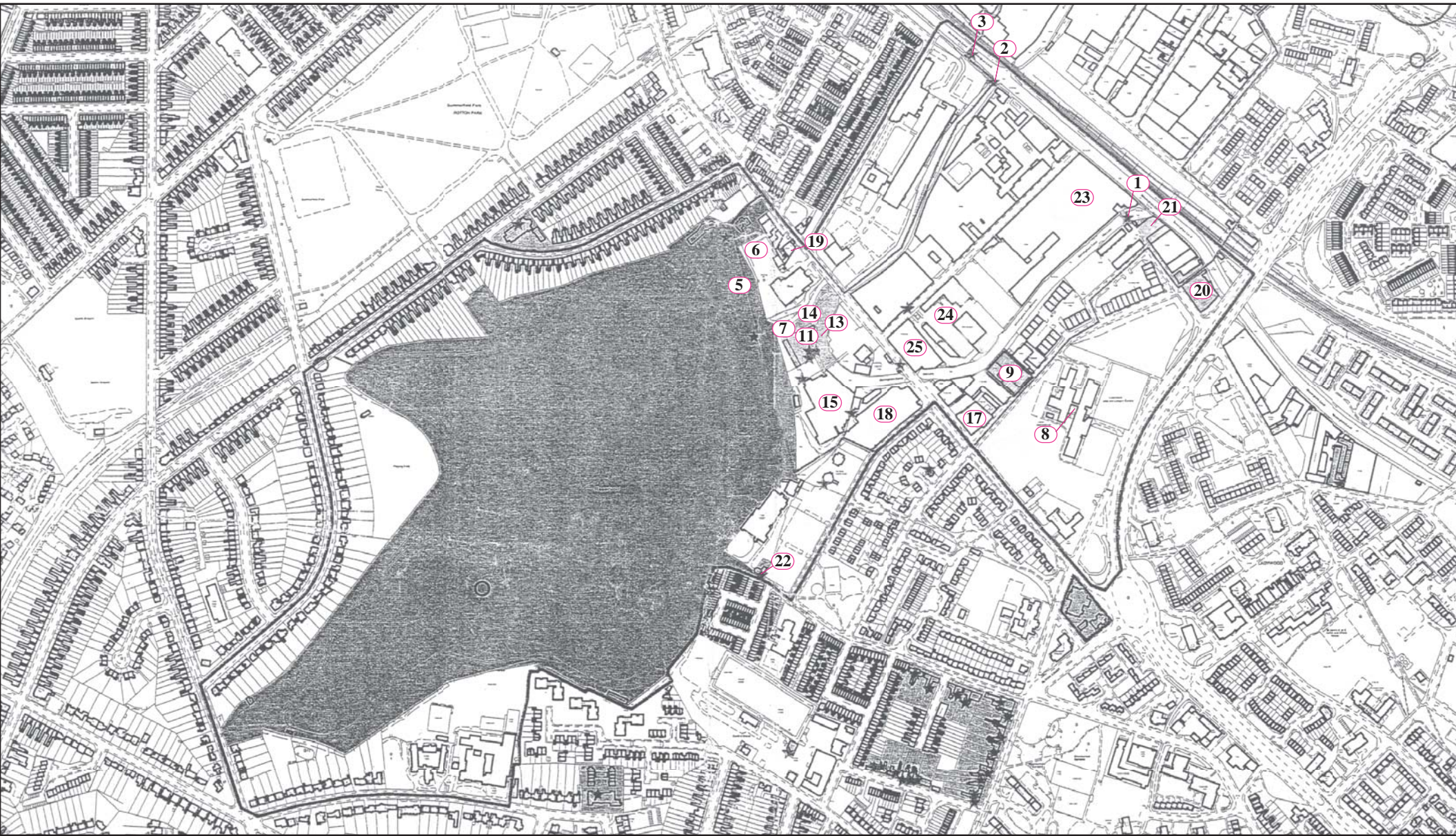


Fig.1

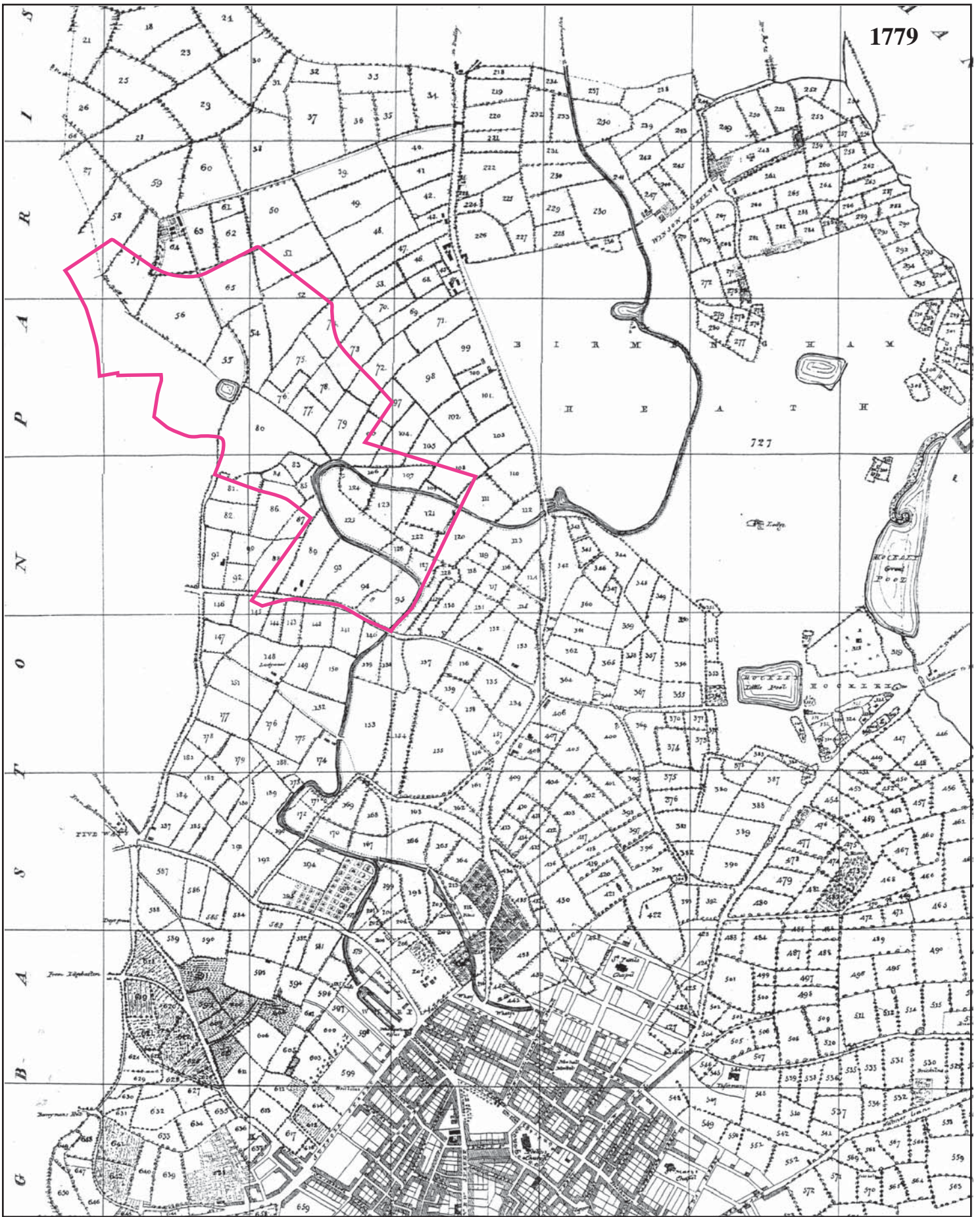


Fig.2

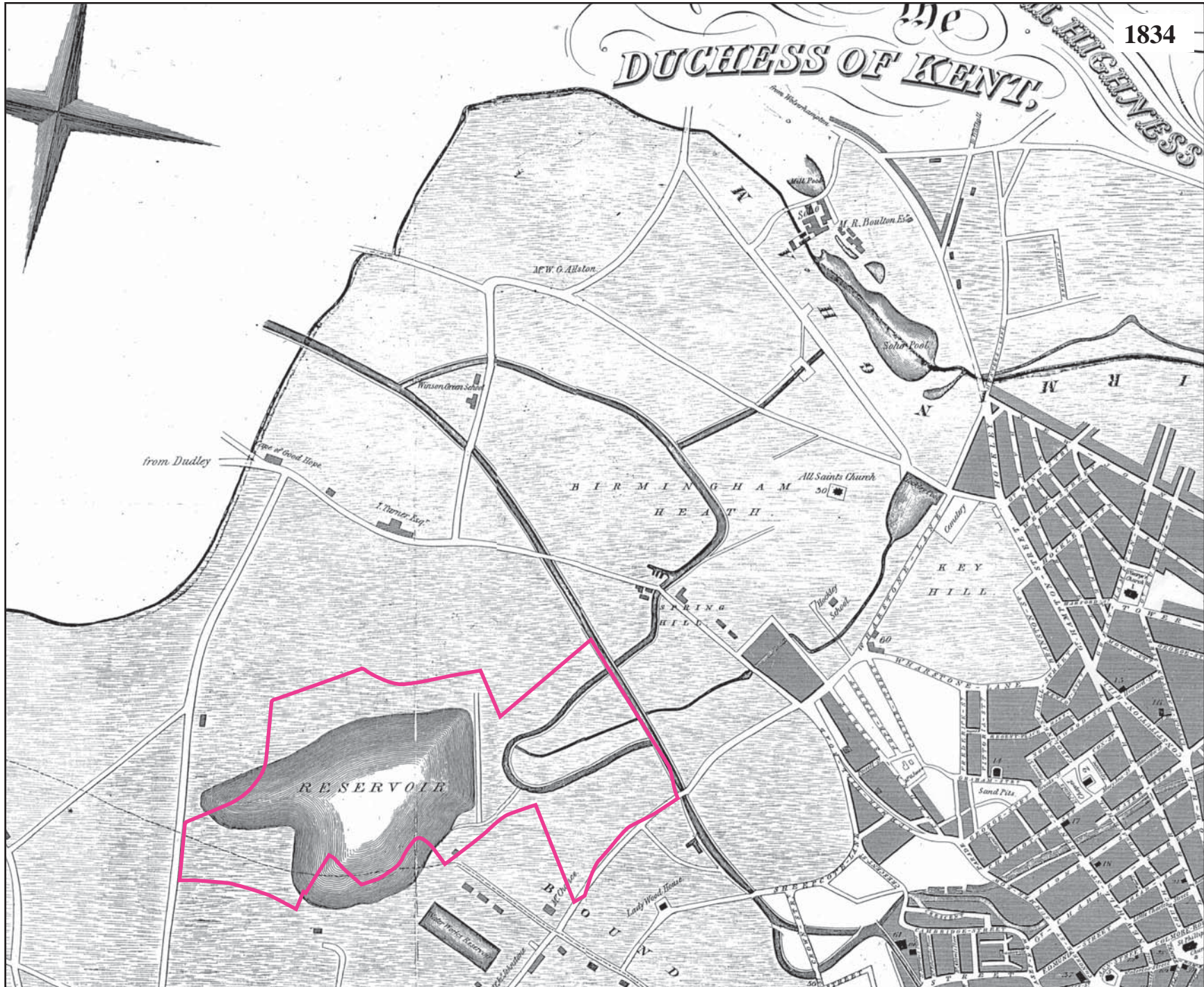


Fig.3

1884

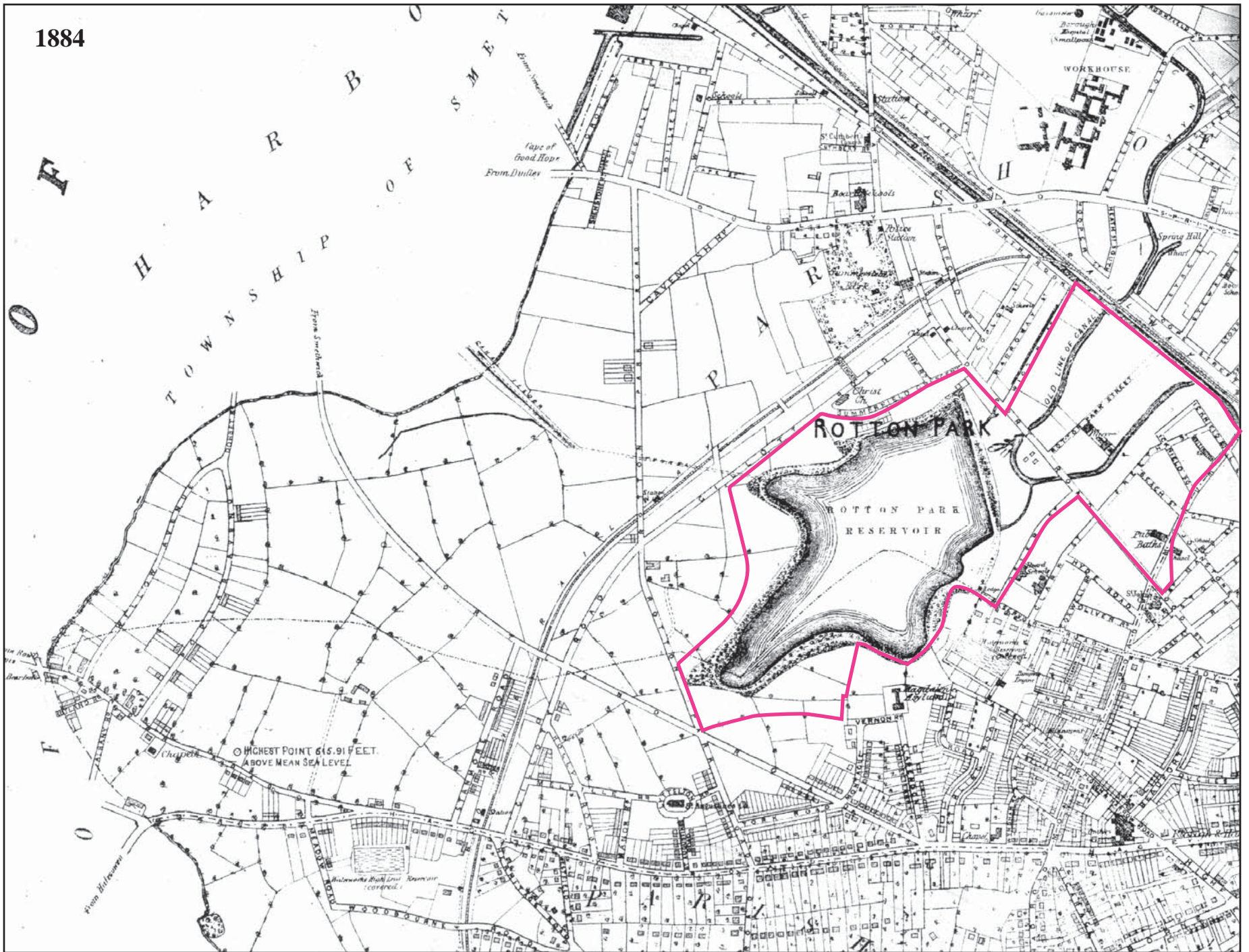


Fig.4





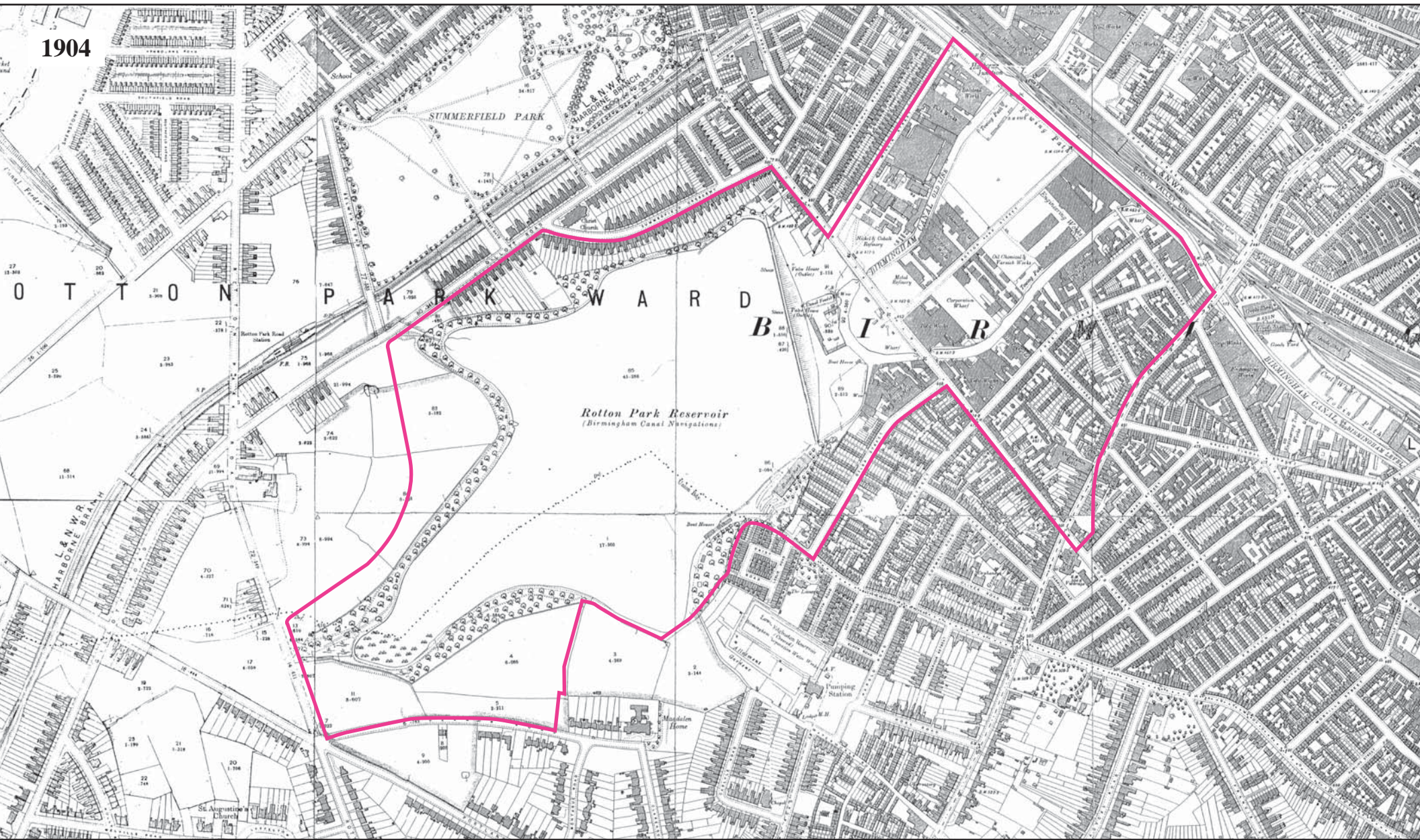


Fig.6

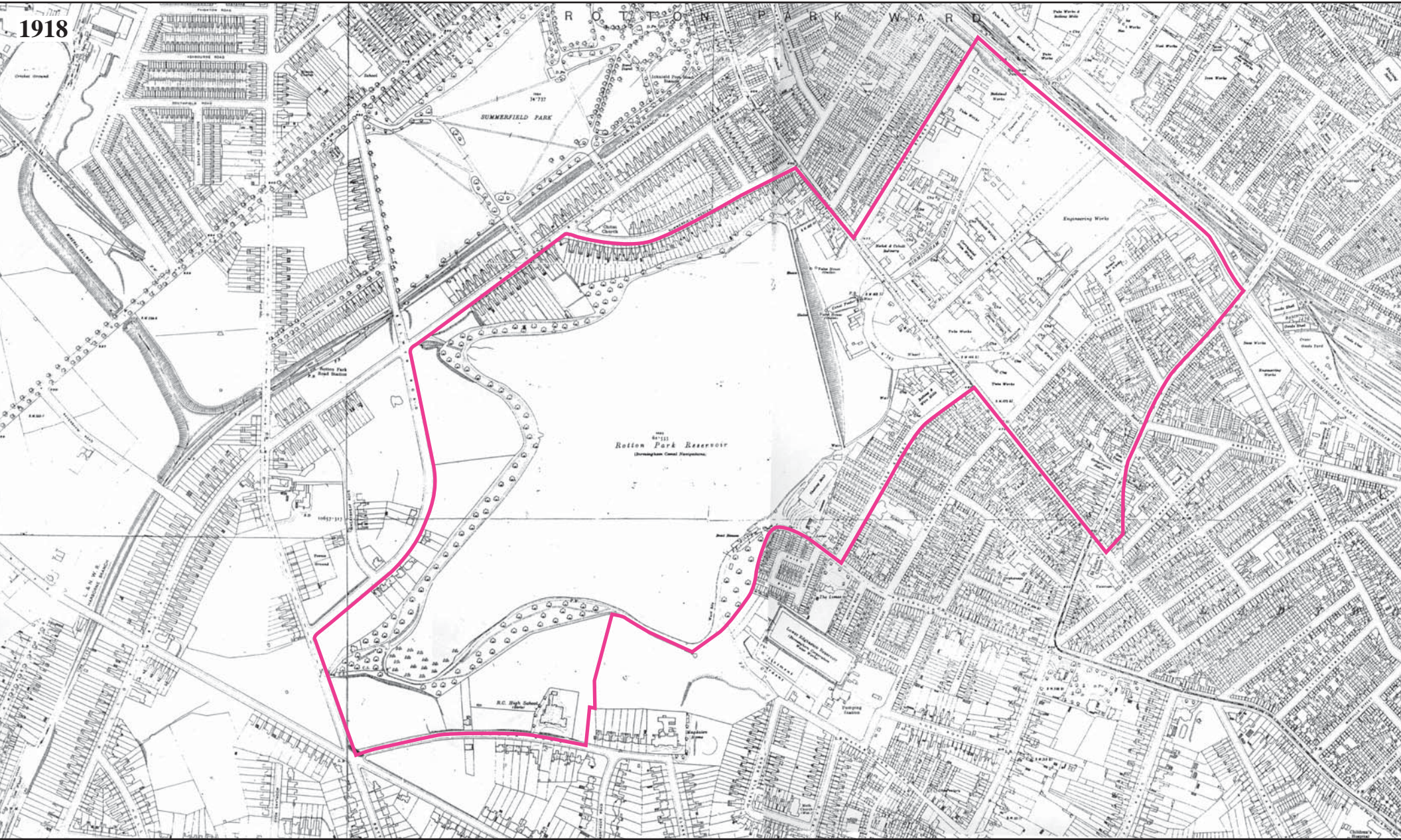


Fig.7

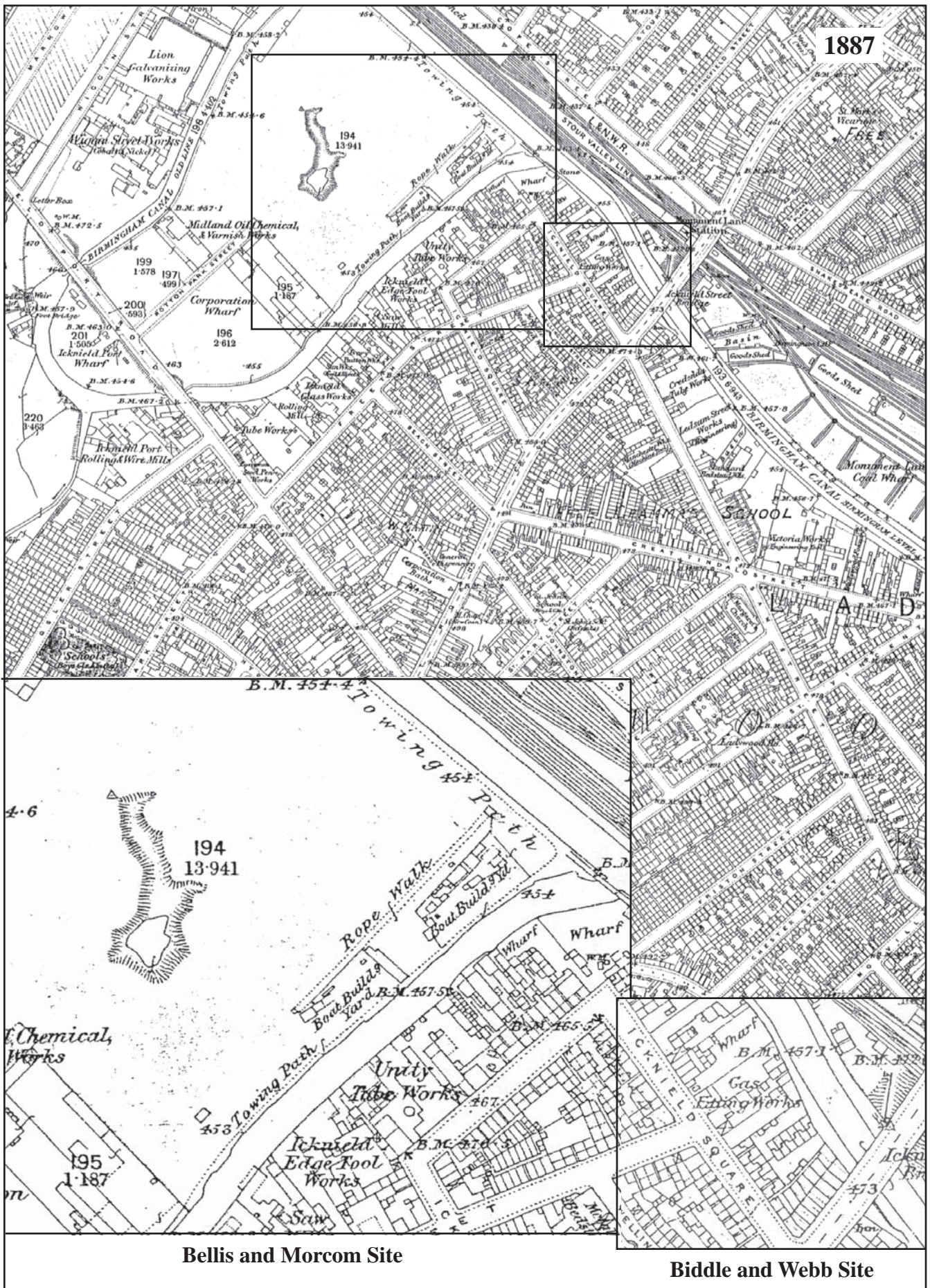
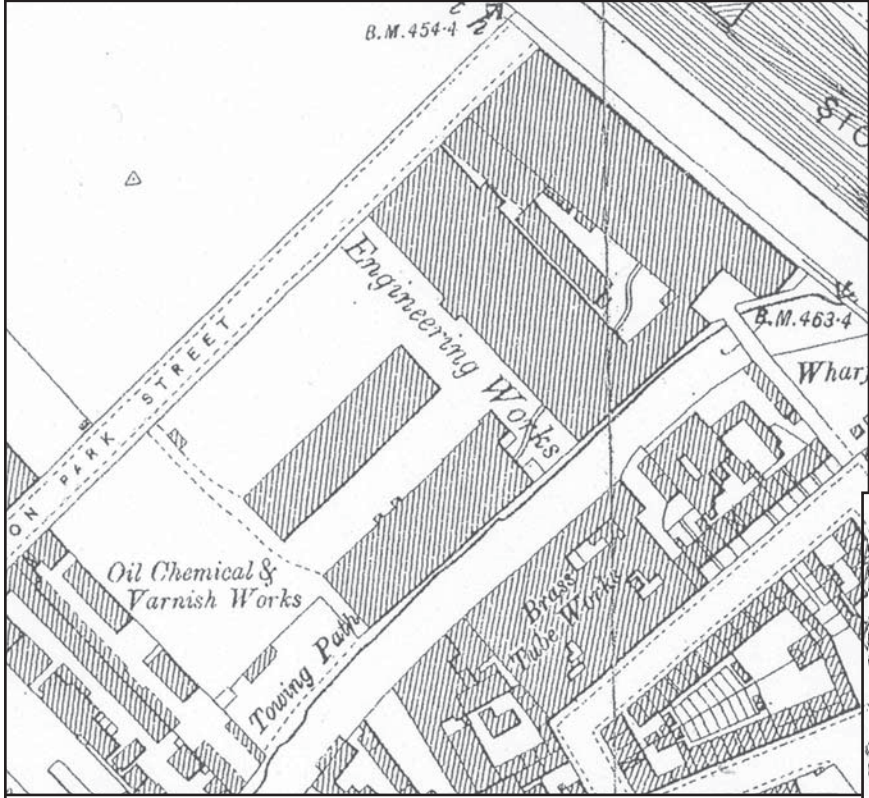
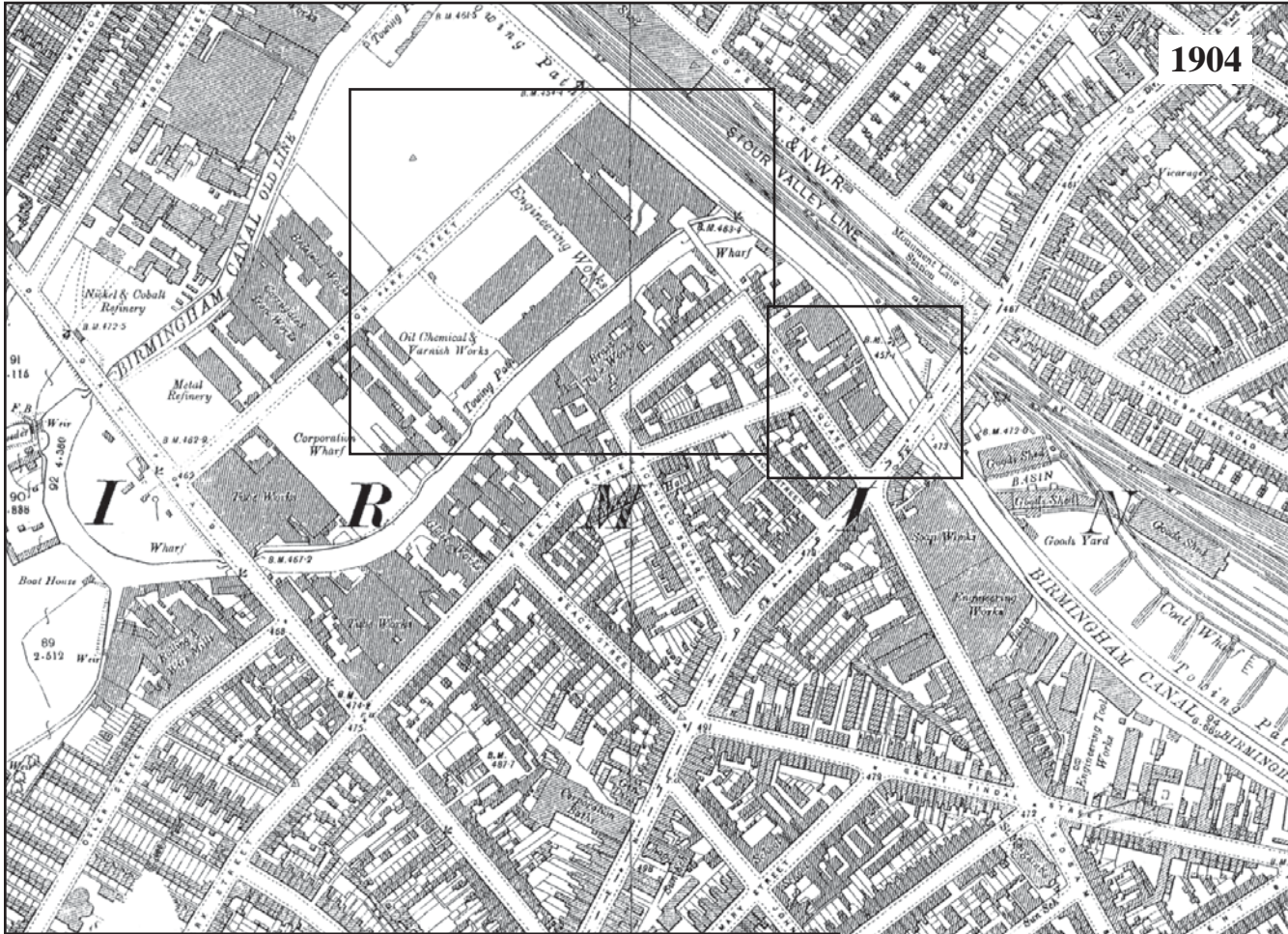


Fig.8

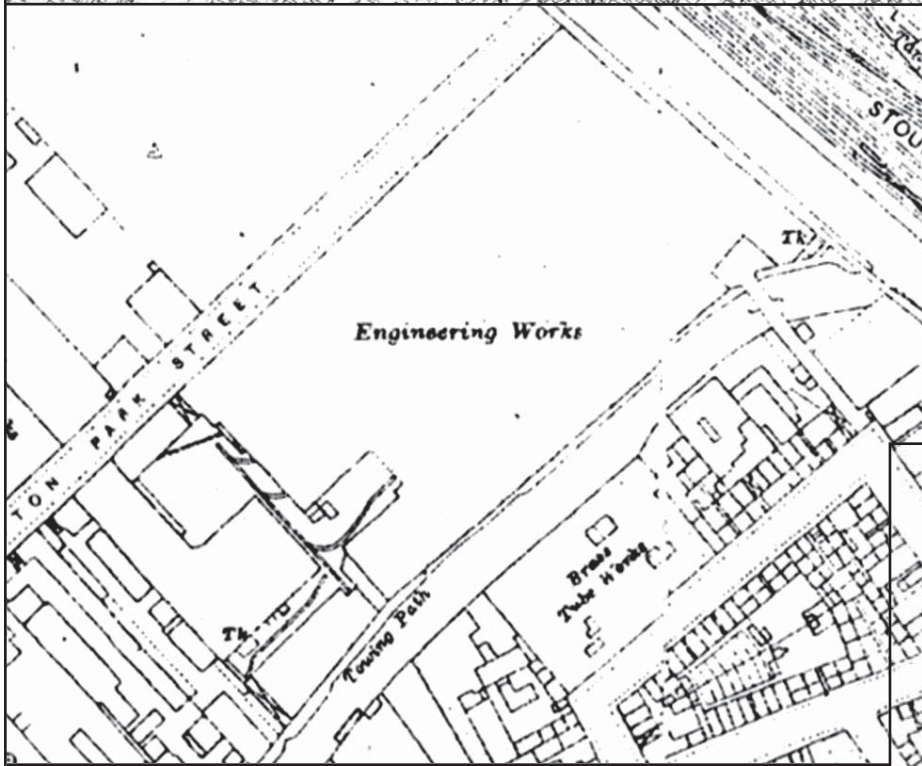
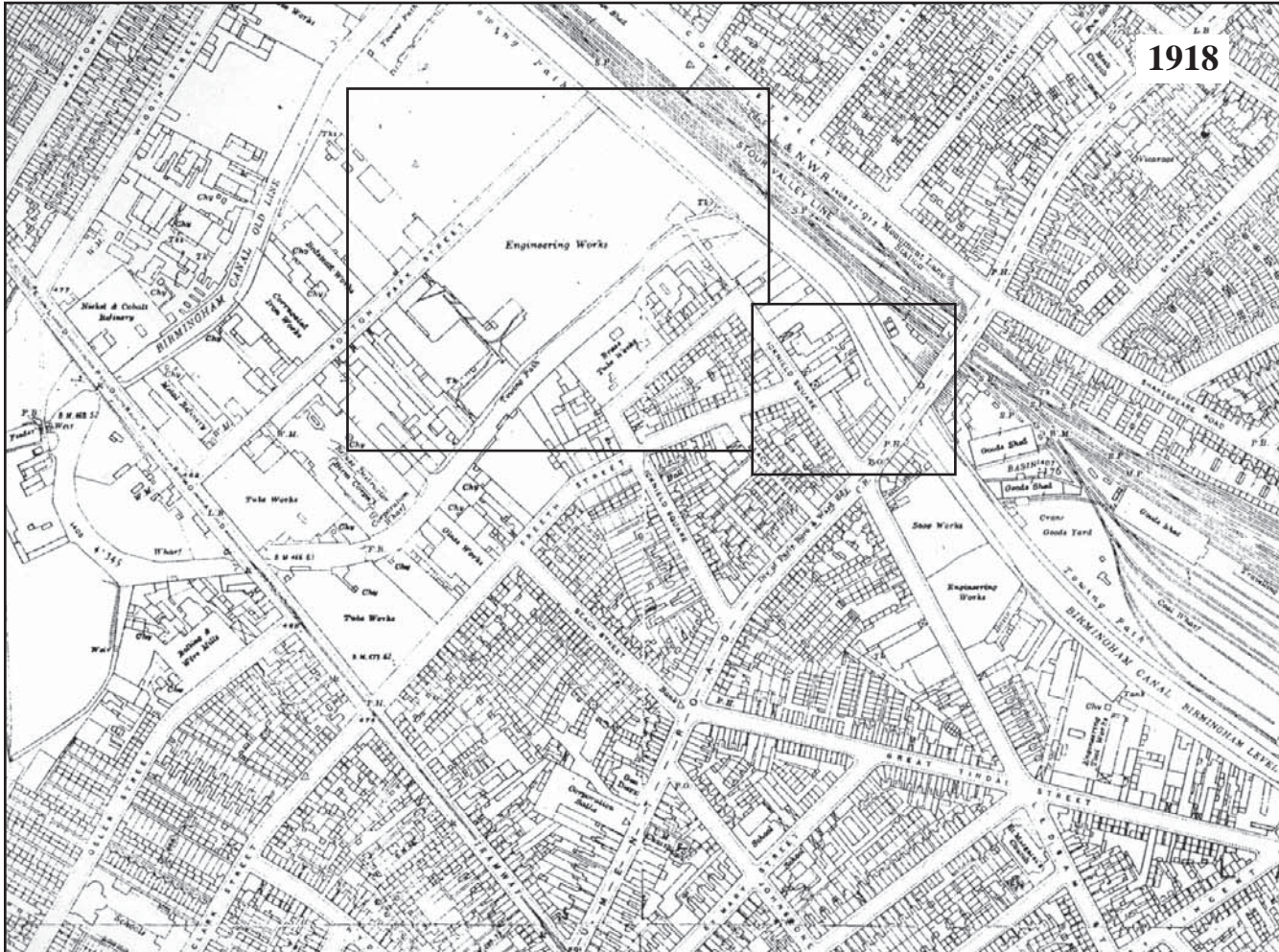


**Bellis and Morcom Site**



**Biddle and Webb Site**

Fig.9



**Bellis and Morcom Site**



**Biddle and Webb Site**

Fig. 10



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7



Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12





Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15



Plate 16



Plate 17



Plate 18



Plate 19



Plate 20



Plate 21



Plate 22



Plate 23



Plate 24



Plate 25



Plate 26



Plate 27



Plate 28