

**PEABODY TRUST**

**CGMS ARCHAEOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS**

**Nottingham House, Neal Street  
Covent Garden, WC2  
London Borough of Camden**

**NGR TQ 3018 8116**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT**

**OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT  
JULY 1997**

## SUMMARY

*The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a Watching Brief at Nottingham House, Neal Street, WC2, London Borough of Camden, for CgMs Archaeology and Environmental Consultants, on behalf of The Peabody Trust in June 1997. This watching brief followed on from watching brief work carried out previously by OAU in September 1994.*

*During pile-probing an OAU archaeologist monitored mechanical excavation to a depth of 3.5-4 m. Due to the depth and instability of the surrounding ground, no hand excavation could be carried out although spoil-heaps were rigorously examined for archaeological finds. No layers associated with Saxon occupation were observed, although a peaty deposit which lay over the natural gravel was recorded.*

*The site was recorded as two trenches, along the north-east and the south-west sides of the courtyard. These followed the sequence established by OAU in 1994. In this phase trial-pits were numbered from 1-14, during the 1997 phase the trenches for pile-probing were assigned 15 and 16 respectively.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The OAU undertook a watching brief at Nottingham House, Neal Street, WC2, in the London Borough of Camden for CgMs Archaeology and Environmental Consultants, on behalf of The Peabody Trust in June 1997 (Fig. 1). This work was the second phase of works. The first had required the trial-pitting of the courtyard and site boundary on Neal Street, and was carried out previously by OAU in September 1994, (OAU, 1994)
- 1.2 Pile-probing of the courtyard was carried out to ascertain whether any large obstacles lay buried below the surface. To this end the deposits beneath the courtyard were almost entirely turned over, uncovering the layers overlying the natural gravel, through which piles would be augered.

## 2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

- 2.1 Nottingham House is situated at NGR TQ3018 8116 at the junction of Neal Street and Short's Gardens, north-west of Covent Garden and south-east of St Giles' (Fig. 1).
- 2.2 The natural geology is Thames Gravel above London Clay. Boreholes investigated by Harrison and Company in 1994 located gravel between 3.6 and 4 m below ground-level (OAU, 1994).

### 3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Archaeological and historical background has been presented in an archaeological desk study of the site and the OAU evaluation report and is not repeated here.
- 3.2 The site lies between a well preserved 8th-century site on the corner of Short's Gardens and Earlham Street and a findspot of a 7th-century pot at 141-7 Drury Lane. Other Saxon activity has been found further south down Drury Lane. A single sherd of Ipswich ware was recovered from a layer of silty clay at 27-29 Macklin Street (Cowie, 1989).
- 3.3 It is possible that the settlement originated as a small, seasonally occupied market place, centred on the Strand and the edge of the river (Cowie and Whitehead 1989), but recent excavations have shown that, by the end of the 7th century, it had grown to cover an area of 60 hectares or more.
- 3.4 By the end of the 9th century *Lundenwic* had been relocated within the Roman city walls. The most likely reason for this was a reduction in international trade and the need for defence, both due to an increasing number of devastating Viking raids on European towns, including *Lundenwic*.
- 3.5 Throughout the medieval period this area formed part of the Bedford Estate was in open fields, and subsequently in market-gardens (Braun & Hogenberg, 1572; Hollar, 1658), which served the City's fresh food needs.
- 3.6 The development of Covent Garden from 1630 by the Earl (later Duke) of Bedford and Seven Dials in 1693 by Sir Thomas Neale were elements of the development needed as London expanded during the 17th century (Hollar, 1658; Faithorne & Newcourt, 1658; Morgan, 1681); the Great Fire only speeded up the process.
- 3.7 Following the Great Fire in 1666 the previously gradual urbanisation to the west of the City increased in speed and density, so that by the 1680s what had been open land to the north of the Strand was a warren of compact and low-rise housing between the Cities of London and Westminster.
- 3.8 The site is situated on the junction of Neal Street and Short's Gardens, a name which preserves the pre-17th century use of the land. Following the Great Fire in 1666, much of London to the west of the City was redeveloped in a comparatively short time. That this district was outside the immediate area of the fire, in open fields and market gardens, permitted rapid development in the later 17th century. This is visible in Morgan's map (1681), where two properties front King Street (now Neal Street). By 1791 (Horwood), the properties have been subdivided (Figs 3, 4 and 5), and Nottingham Court has been developed to the rear.
- 3.9 By the 19th century there were many poor and "Vicious, semi-criminal" (Booth, 1889) quarters to the south of High Holborn and west of Lincoln's Inn Fields, which were concealed behind the more well-to-do houses of the arterial

streets. Nottingham Court was notorious for its poverty. For this reason the slum-houses here were demolished. Nottingham House was erected in 1925 by the Peabody Trust as relief housing for the local poor. The Mission Hall was subsequently built in 1935.

#### **4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 In 1994 the OAU carried out an watching brief of the site to inform the design and planning process Beneath backfilled basement. Greenish brown silty clay deposits were observed and recorded. It was not certain whether this layer was alluvial in nature or the fill of features a small number of . Sherds of late Saxon pottery were identified as coming from this layer. Below this greenish brown layer was the natural gravel. On the basis of the data recovered possible Saxon activity was predicted.

#### **5 METHODOLOGY**

- 5.1 The watching brief was carried out during pile-probing. A 360-degree mechanical excavator removed overburden and *in situ* deposits under archaeological supervision. Due to the depth of excavation (3.5-4 m) it was not possible or safe to accurately record deposits; instead deposits were recorded during examination of the spoil-heaps, and depths estimated with the assistance of the site engineers.
- 5.2 The site was conveniently divided into two areas numbered 1500 and 1600, which represented the north-east and south-west sides of the courtyard (Fig.2).
- 5.3 A single find, a piece of animal-bone (part of a pig pelvis, identified by N Scott OAU), was recovered from the greenish clay overlying the gravel during the watching brief.

#### **6 ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS**

##### *Trench 1500*

- 6.1 The lowest observed deposit was 1504. This tenacious greenish grey silty clay, containing c. 20% peagrit gravel, was approximately 1m thick. Observed at the bottom of the excavation it was c.3.5 m below current ground level.
- 6.2 Overlying this deposit was a black clay loam (1503) containing ceramic building material (CBM) and various other construction debris including plaster and slate. A small quantity of mixed unsorted gravel's were also observed. This deposit was also c.1 m thick.
- 6.3 A number of cellar walls (1502) overlay the black clay loam (1503). Some were oriented along the line of the former Mission House (the site party-wall), others were perpendicular to the site north-east boundary. These cellars were backfilled with demolition rubble, 1501.

*Trench 1600*

- 6.4 The lowest observed deposit in Trench 1600 was a yellowish-brown deposit of sands and gravel's (1605). The gravel's were unsorted though were characterised by being rounded-surrounded and ranged in size from 5-60 mm. This is suggestive of their having been deposited by a slow-moving current. This deposit was recorded at a depth of 3.7 m below current ground level and was visible during all the pile-probing in Trench 1600.
- 6.5 At a similar depth to 1605, a patchy black/blackish-brown peat (1606) was observed. Up to 1 m thick in places, it was oriented north-east/south-west (parallel to Short's Gardens) and appeared to be more desiccated than might be expected of peat in humid conditions, despite being c.3.5-4 m below current ground level. A noticeable quantity of fine sands and gravel's were present. Due to non-archaeological factors no environmental samples were taken. However, it was felt that the peat was so dessicated that no meaningful environmental data would have resulted from analysis.
- 6.6 Overlying both gravel's (1606) and the peat (1605), was the same greenish-grey layer (1604) observed in Trench 1500. Also c.1m thick, 1604 was c.3-3.5 m below current ground level.
- 6.7 Black clay loam (1603) lay over 1604 and in contrast to 1503 there was a great concentration of slag and iron in addition to CBM within this context.
- 6.8 Cellars (1602) backfilled with demolition rubble (1601) lay over 1603, as was the case in Trench 15. Similarly, these cellar walls were both parallel and perpendicular to Neal Street. None appeared to pass below Nottingham House.

## 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Deposits similar to those recorded in 1994 were observed during this watching brief. The depth and loose nature of the overburden meant that more precise recording of the deposits was not possible for safety reasons. Nevertheless, it would appear that the archaeological deposits recorded were alluvial in nature confirming the suggestion made in 1994 (Early 1994, 7.1). The suggestion that the clay may be associated with Saxon London is not confirmed. Late Saxon pottery was recovered in 1994 (St Neot's ware of 10th- to 11th-century date) and by that time the Saxon settlement was within the Roman walls (see above 3.12). The homogeneous nature of the clay and the scarcity of finds may indicate alluvial deposits rather than Saxon occupation.
- 7.2 It seems likely that the peat and alluvial clay represent an area of low-lying wetland to the north of *Lundenwic*. The find spots of Saxon activity peter out in this area and so may also indicate the edge of the Saxon occupation (see above 3.10). These deposits were sealed by homogeneous deposits containing pottery, building materials and slag dating from the 17th to the 19th century. These layers probably represent garden soils related to properties seen on maps from 1658. The cellars may relate to either the Mission Hall or the tenements indicated from Horwood's Map (1794-9, Fig.4) and which remain relatively unchanged until 1894.

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## Map Sources

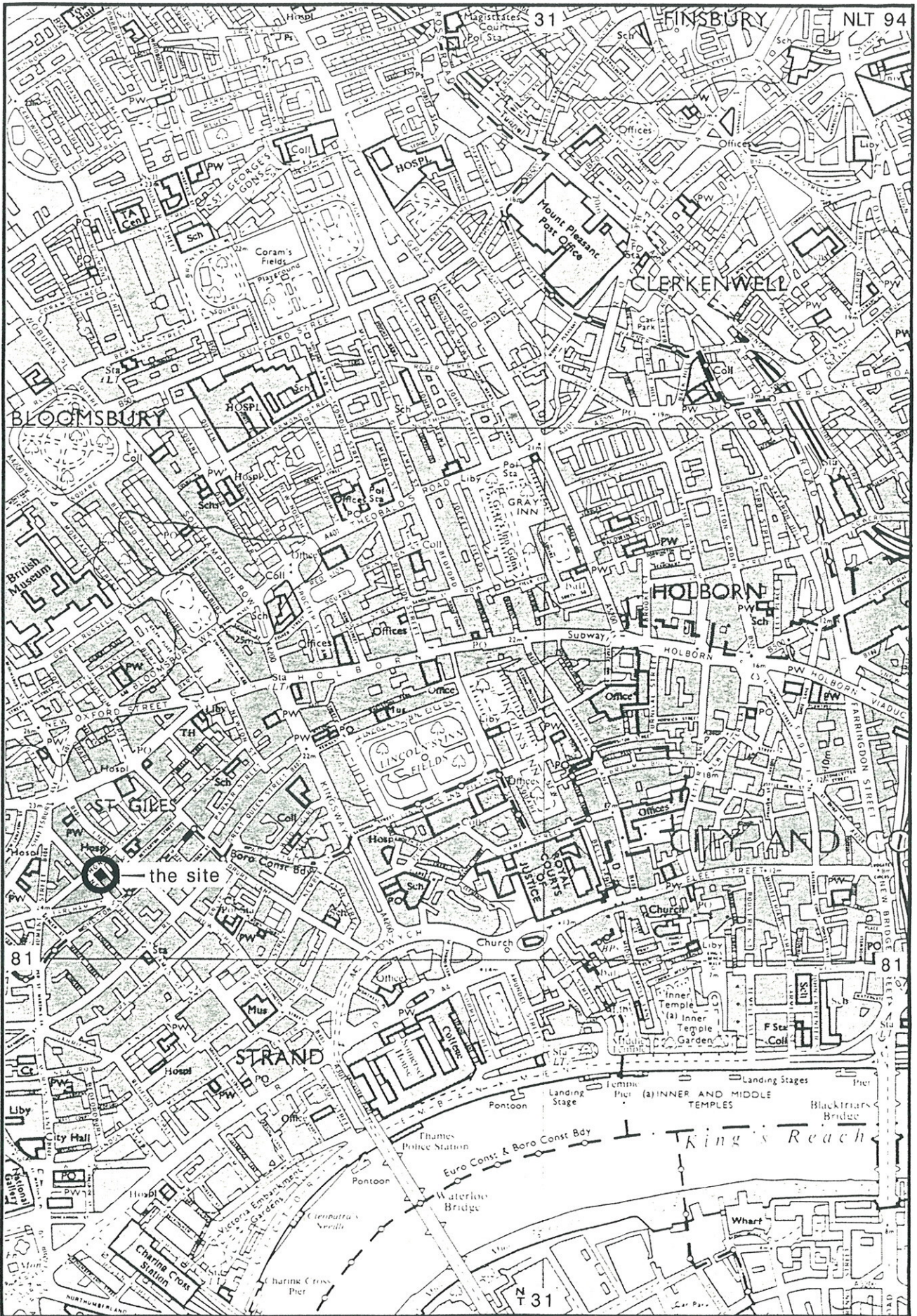
- 'Agas' map of London (c.1553)
- Braun and Hogenberg's Map of London (1572)
- Newcourt and Faithorne's map of London (1658)
- Hollar's map of London (1658)
- Leake's Survey of London after the Great Fire (1667)

Ogilby and Morgans Map of London (1682)

Horwoods Map of London (1819)

Booth's Poverty Map of London (1889)





scale 1:10000

Figure 1 Site location

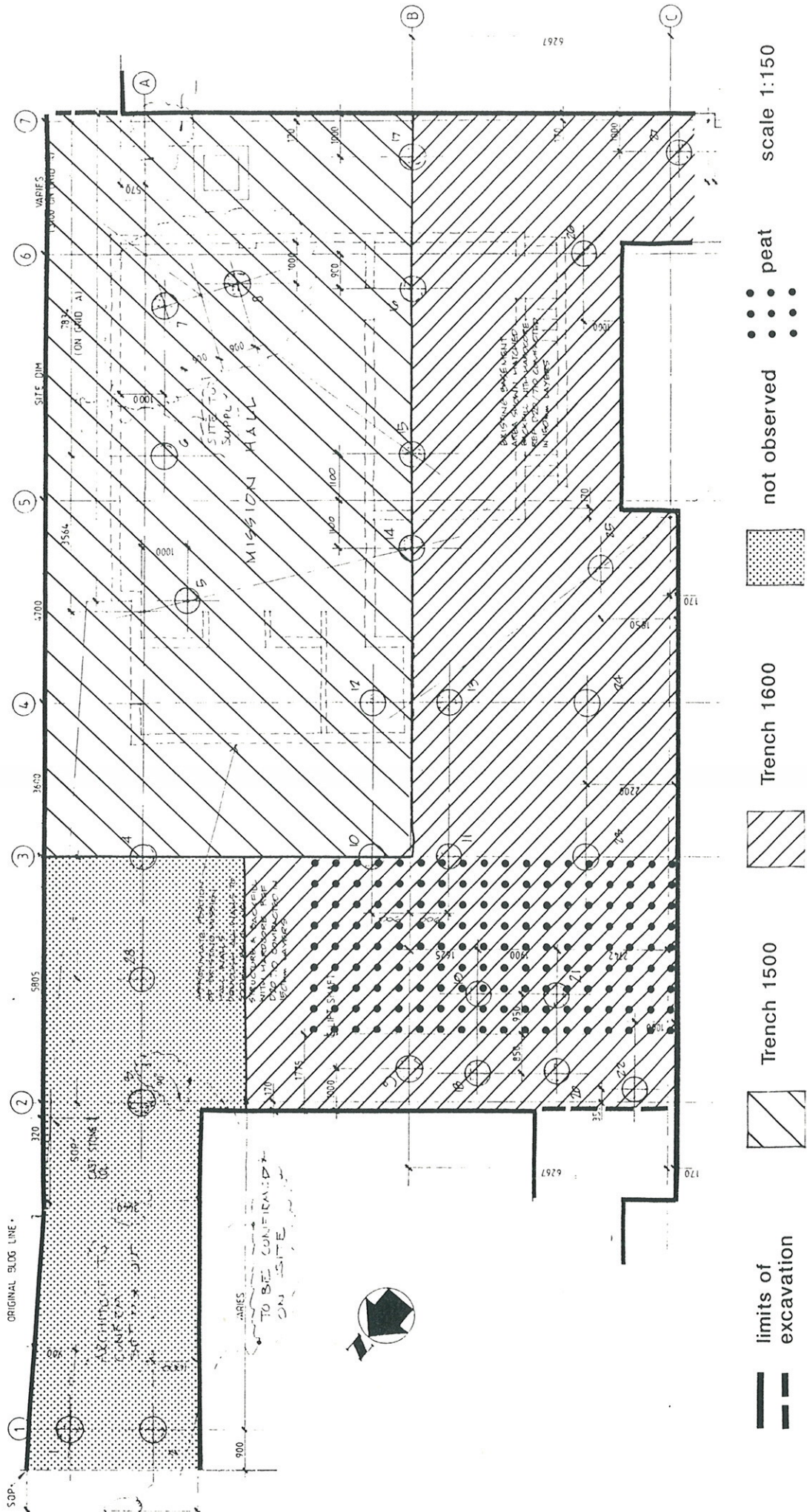
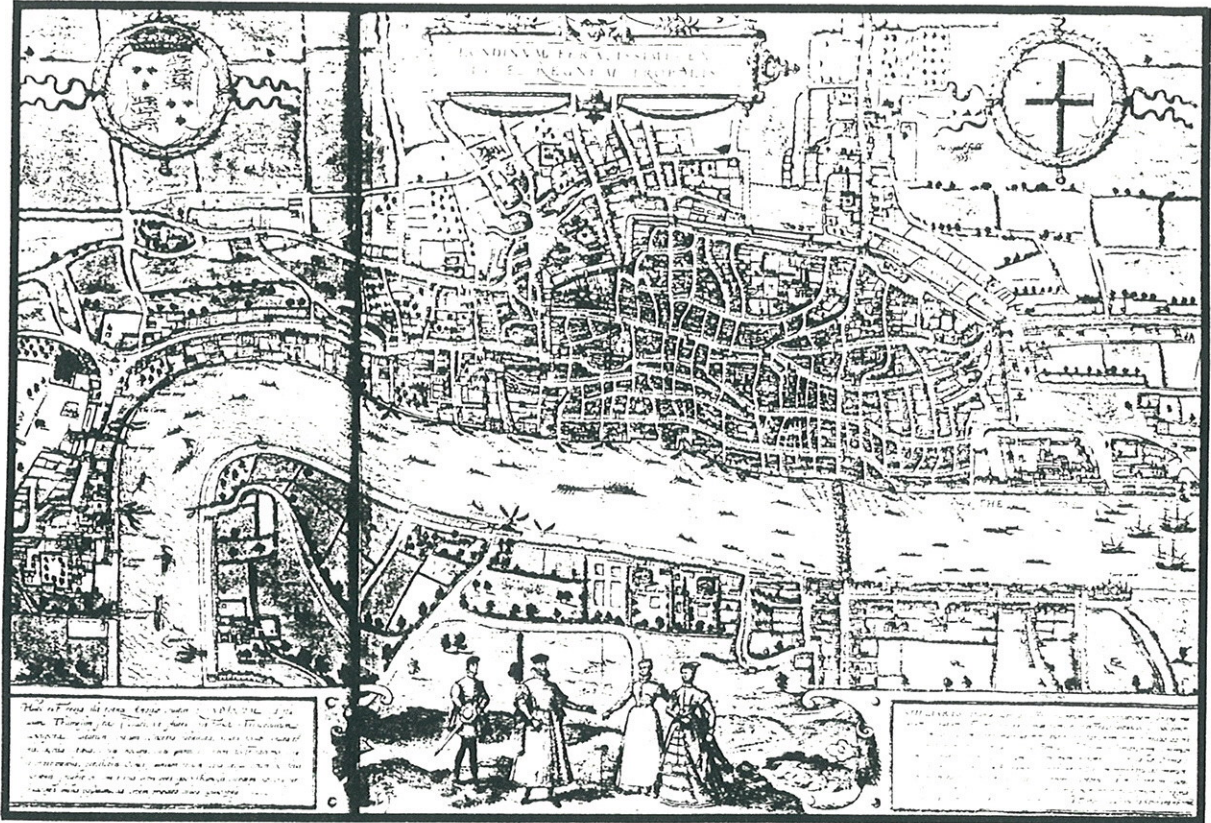
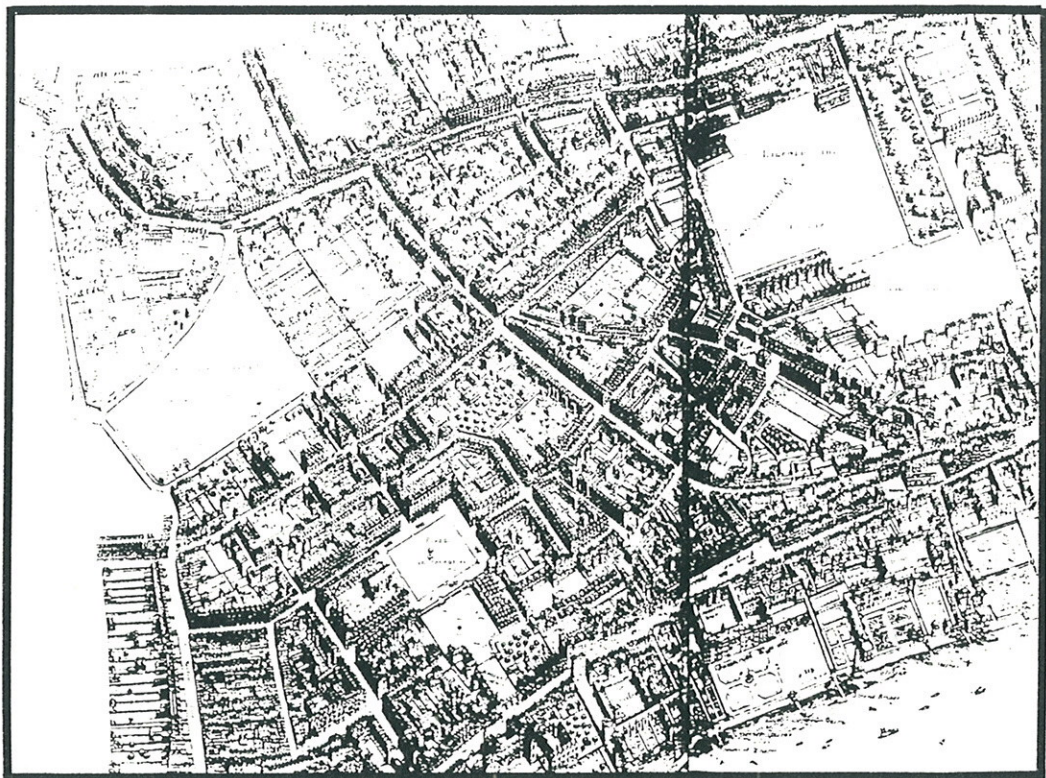


Figure 2: Location of observed trenches (1500,1600)

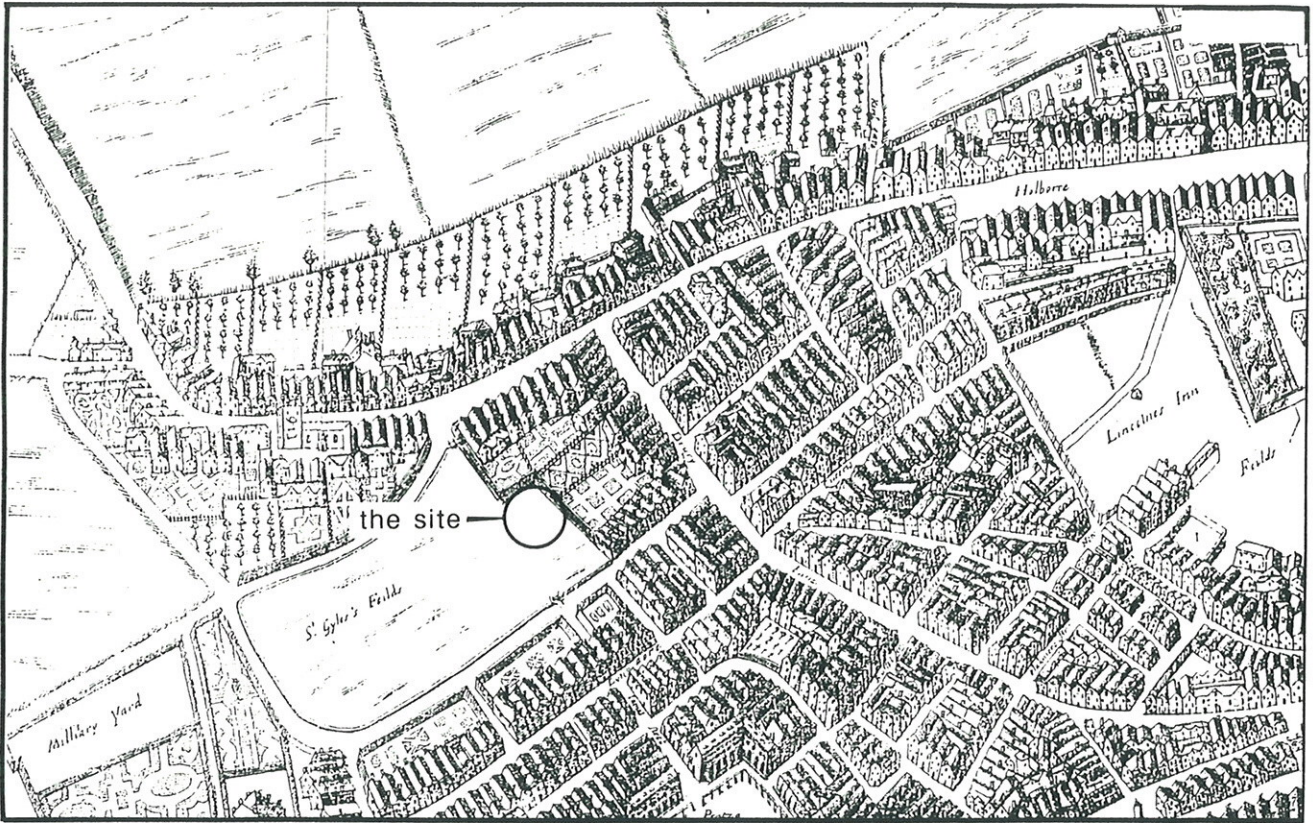


Braun and Hogenberg, 1572



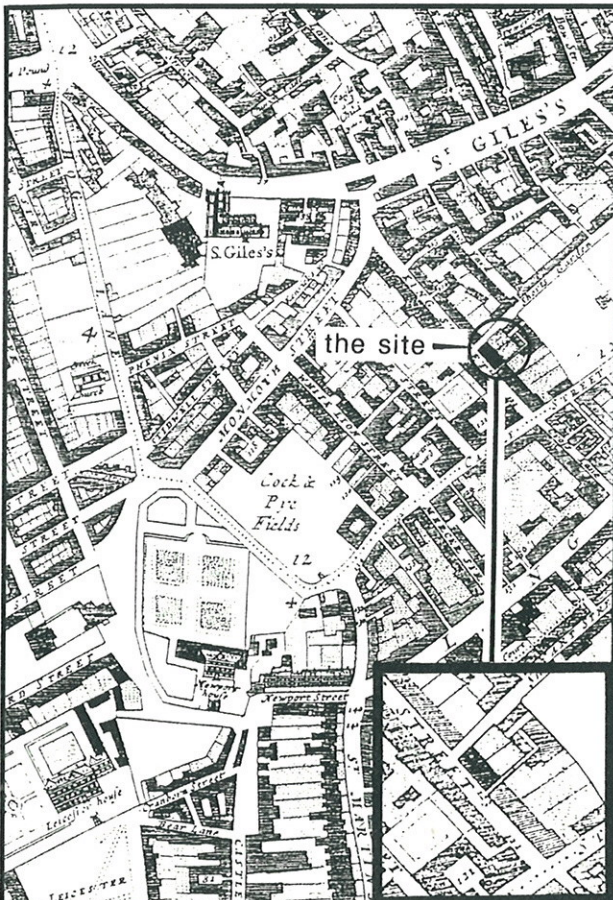
Hollar, 1658

Figure 3: Historic maps

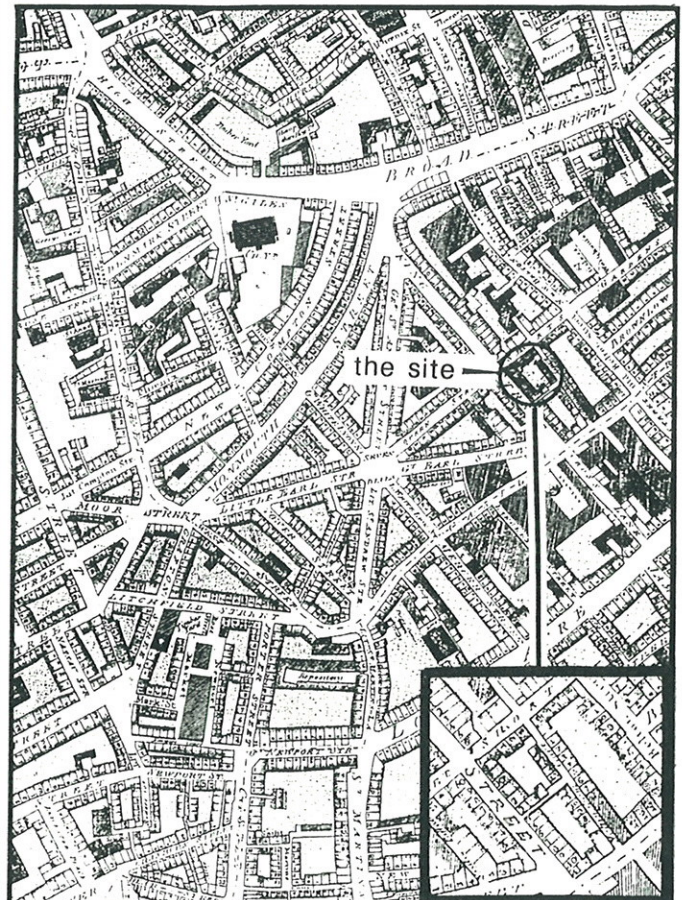


Faithorn and Newcourt 1658

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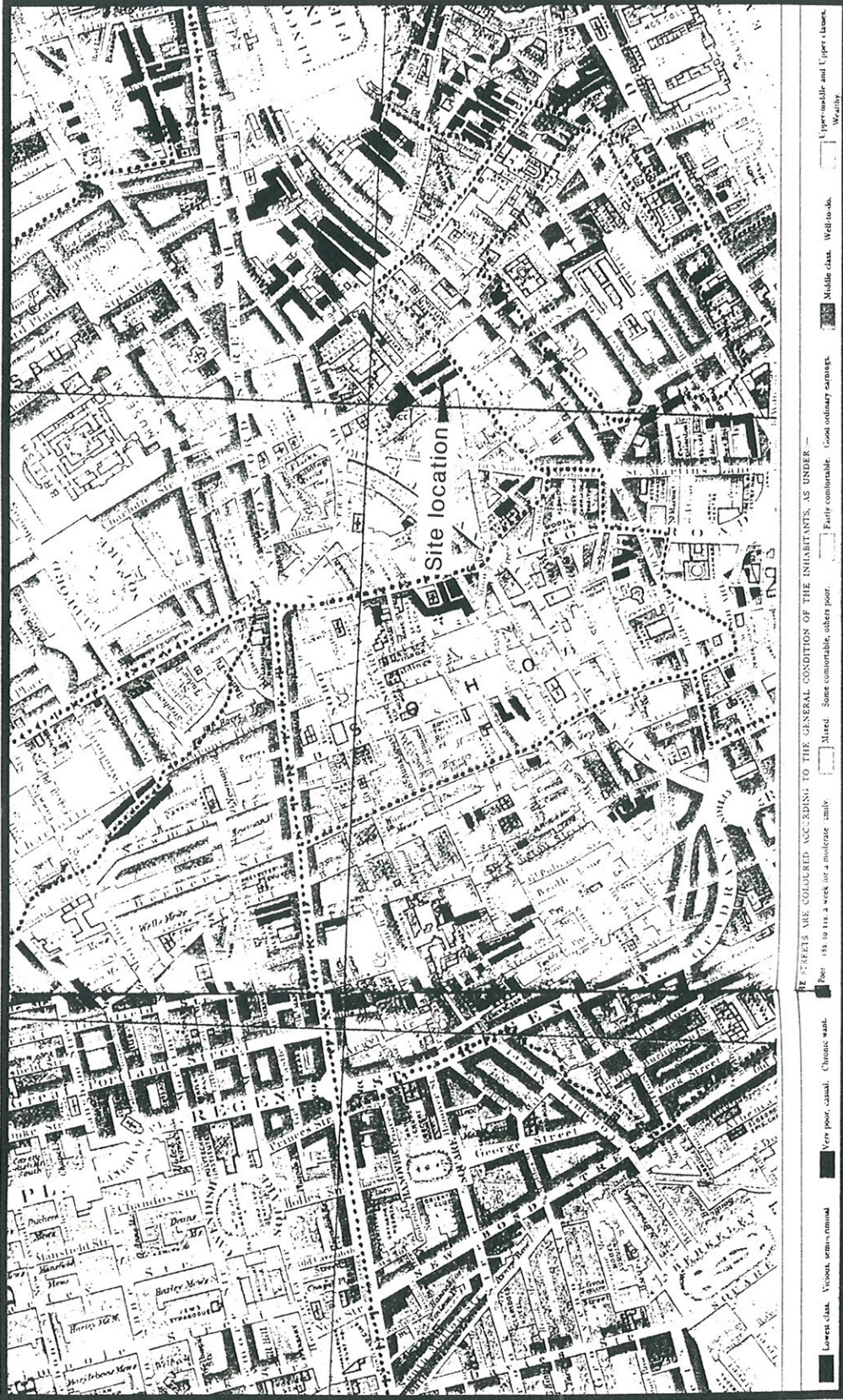


Morgan 1681-2



Horwood 1794-9

Figure 4 Historic maps of site location



Booth, 1889

Figure 5: Historic map



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