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THE  
HERITAGE NETWORK  
LTD



**YORK HOUSE PLACE**

**Church Street, Kensington, London W8**

*(HN290)*

***Desk-based Archaeological Assessment***



# THE HERITAGE NETWORK LTD

*Registered with the Institute of Field Archaeologists as an Archaeological Organisation*

Archaeological Director: David Hillelson, BAIFA



YORK HOUSE PLACE  
Church Street, Kensington, London

HN290

## *Desk-based Archaeological Assessment*

*Prepared on behalf of GTM Car Parks*

by

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Report No. 110

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*The cover illustration shows the eastern elevation of York House in 1899, with the study area in the foreground (courtesy of the National Monuments Record)*

## Acknowledgements

The desk-based research for this project was undertaken by Helen Ashworth with the assistance of Judith Hillelson.

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## Summary

<b>Site name and address:</b>	York House Place, Church Street, Kensington, London W8		
<b>County:</b>	Greater London	<b>District:</b>	RBKC
<b>Village/town:</b>	Kensington	<b>Parish:</b>	Kensington
<b>Planning reference:</b>	n/a	<b>NGR (to 8 figures):</b>	TQ 2563 7990
<b>Client name and address:</b>	GTM Car Parks, tfm House, 69 Boston Manor Road, Brentford TW8 9JJ		
<b>Nature of application:</b>	Underground car park	<b>Present land use:</b>	Tennis Court
<b>Size of application area:</b>	1170m <sup>2</sup>	<b>Size of area investigated:</b>	n/a
<b>Site Code:</b>	HN290	<b>Other reference:</b>	n/a
<b>Organisation:</b>	The Heritage Network	<b>Site Director:</b>	David Hillelson
<b>Type of work:</b>	DBA	<b>Finds location/Museum:</b>	n/a
<b>Start of work</b>	n/a	<b>Finish of work</b>	n/a
<b>Related SMR Nos.:</b>	n/a	<b>Periods represented:</b>	n/a
<b>Previous summaries /reports:</b>	n/a		

**Summary:** In order to advise the the clients and the planning authority on an application for planning permission for the development of land York House Place, Church Street, Kensington, the Heritage Network was commissioned by GTM Car Parks Ltd to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment of the site.

The assessment has demonstrated that there is no previously recorded archaeology on the site, but that there is potential for the discovery of features and artefacts of all periods and from the prehistoric and post-medieval periods in particular in the course of developing the site.

# 1

## Introduction

**1.1** The present study has been prepared on behalf of *GTM Car Parks* in support of a planning application to develop land at York House Place, Church Street, Kensington.

**1.2** The study area focuses on an existing tennis court lying between York House and the Church Street frontage and centred on NGR TQ 2563 7990 (see Figure 1). The development proposes the construction of a private underground car-park beneath the tennis court covering an area of 1170m<sup>2</sup> to a depth of approximately 11m.

**1.3** The aim of the *Desk-based Assessment* is to provide a broad overview of the recorded development of land use in the vicinity, through a review of readily accessible primary and secondary sources. These include archaeological and historical databases and archives, archaeological research reports, cartographic and pictorial documents, geotechnical information, and museum collections. The assessment does not pretend to be exhaustive and was constrained by limitations on the time available for the research.

**1.4** The assessment report is intended to advise the clients on the archaeological implications of the proposed development. It may be used to support the clients' planning application to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, and, if appropriate, to enable the LPA to propose a strategy for any further work or mitigation measures which may be required.

# 2

## Geological

**2.1** The site lies very close to a geological boundary between London Clay and third terrace river gravels of the Taplow series. The boundary runs directly between the two blocks that form York House, with the northern block sitting on gravel and the southern sitting on a narrow tongue of London Clay.

**2.2** The site of the proposed car park should lie within the gravel area, though the southern end may well lie on the boundary between the two geological strata.

**2.3** There is no additional bore-hole or test-pit information available for this site.

# 3

## Historical and Archaeological Background

### *HISTORICAL*

#### *General*

**3.3** The first documentary evidence for a settlement at Kensington is in the Domesday Survey of 1086, when it was called *Chenesit*. It formed part of the Hundred of Ossulstone (possibly Oswulf's Stone).

3.4 Aubrey de Vere held the manor from the Bishop of Coutances. Before 1066 it was held by Edwin, a thegn of King Edward's. It measured 10 hides (approximately 1200 acres) and contained meadowland, pastureland, enough woodland for 200 pigs and vineyards. The survey lists 26 people, namely 18 villagers, a priest and 7 slave, giving an estimated total population of 104.

3.5 The entry in Domesday suggests that there was a settlement in Kensington from at least the late Saxon period, possibly centred around the site of St Mary Abbots Church (SMR 081643) at the junction between the present High Street and Church Street. The reference to a priest further suggests that there was a church on the manor and it may well have been on the same site.

3.6 The present study area lies in the parish of St Mary Abbots. The church, and accompanying land, was given to Abingdon Abbey in 1100 by Aubrey de Vere, in gratitude to the abbot who had successfully doctored his son during a serious illness. This formed a second manor in Kensington, called Kensington Abbots. A new manor house, later called The Parsonage, was probably built near the church (SMR 081646).

3.7 Abingdon Abbey was dissolved in 1538 and its lands, including Kensington, passed to the crown. The manor passed through various hands, until in 1599 it was acquired by Sir Walter Cope.

3.8 Most of the settlement west of the City of London was ribbon development along the line of the major routes from London. There were few north-south aligned routes. Kensington Church Street connected the village of Kensington with the smaller settlement at Notting Hill. There were two main roads in the parish, which followed the line of two Roman roads into London (SMR 081607 and 081608): one along Kensington High Street, the other along Notting Hill Gate.

3.9 By the early seventeenth century wealthy Londoners were beginning to buy estates in Kensington and to build houses. New residents included Sir Baptist Hicks, a city mercer, who built Camden House and Sir Walter Cope, who built Cope's Castle, later known as Holland House.

3.10 Sir George Coppin, a Clerk of the Crown to James I, built a house in Kensington in c.1605. When he died in 1619 the property was acquired by Sir Heneage Finch, Speaker of the House of Commons. It descended to his younger son, John, in 1631 and was bought by his older son, another Sir Heneage, in 1661. He probably rebuilt, or altered the house, which was known as Nottingham House after Sir Heneage was created Earl of Nottingham in 1681. In 1689, Nottingham House and estate was bought by William III from Daniel Finch.

3.11 Nottingham House became the nucleus of Kensington House, later Kensington Palace. The alterations were carried out by Sir Christopher Wren in 1689 and 1690. Formal gardens were laid out around the house, and the area of the gardens and associated parkland was increased during the eighteenth century.

3.12 The arrival of the court brought other people to live in Kensington and more land was enfranchised for developments such as Kensington Square, built between 1686 and 1699 (SMR 214001 onwards). But Kensington remained essentially a small village, surrounded by fields and pastures.

3.13 By the late eighteenth century the increasing population of London, and its attendant pressures, meant that development began to spread outwards along all the major routes, including westwards. In 1788 William Phillimore released some land fronting Kensington High Street to two London builders, who, over the next 25 years constructed terraces of 4 storey houses. (Sheppard, 1973, p.3).

3.14 During the nineteenth century the population of Kensington expanded rapidly. In 1801 there were 8,556 people in the parish, by 1851 there were 44,043 and by 1901 the population had grown to 176,628 (Sheppard, 1973, p.3). By the late nineteenth century, apart from the large parks surrounding Holland House and Kensington Palace the parish was largely built up.

#### *Site Specific*

3.16 The site of the proposed car park lies beneath a tennis court to the west of York House, a block of flats on the eastern side of Kensington Church Street. These flats were built in 1904 on a plot formerly occupied by two Georgian houses, York House and Maitland House.

3.17 The site of the present study lies on part of a plot known as 'the More' or Conduit Close in the early seventeenth century. Conduit Close measured approximately four acres and was part of the estate bought by Sir Baptist Hicks from Robert Horseman in 1616 (Sheppard, 1973, p.29). In 1656 the third Viscount Campden sold the northern half of the close: a part went to John Sams and another part to Thomas Hodges, vicar of Kensington, who then bought some of Sams' piece. At the time of his death in 1672 Hodges appears to have owned just under half of the close. The remainder of the close passed into the ownership of Sir Heneage Finch and later to the Crown.

3.18 The name Conduit Close probably derived from the site of the bath house and associated conduit, constructed by Henry VIII to supply his newly built manor at Chelsea. The evidence suggests that this lay to the south of the the present site, beneath the former Kensington Barracks (SMR 081613; 08166101).

3.19 Hodges built two houses on his part of the close. The 'upper house' (later York House) lay on the northern side and was the larger and more substantial of the two. It attracted distinguished tenants, including Anne, Countess of Salisbury and Sir Robert Eyre, lord chief justice of common pleas. In deeds of the eighteenth century the site of this house was usually called Little Conduit Close (Sheppard, 1973, p.29-30).

3.20 The 'lower house' (later Maitland House) appears to have consisted of two storeys and an attic. It was described in 1764 as 'decayed fallen or taken down' and was rebuilt by John

Gorham, who bought and rebuilt the 'upper house' in 1781. George III's fifth daughter, Princess Sophia, lived in York House from 1839 until her death in 1848.

3.21 York House and Maitland House were demolished in 1904. The site is now occupied by York House Place, York House, Church Close and the North Thames Gas Board.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL

3.23 The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) shows a number of sites of archaeological interest within 500m of the site of the proposed car park.

#### Prehistoric

SMR no. 081541 NGR TQ 259 799

A *Mesolithic* (c.10,000bc - 3,500bc) stone axe, was found to the north of the passage by the barracks in Kensington Gardens in 1912. The axe is now in the Museum of London.

SMR no. 081547 NGR TQ 254 797

Isolated find of a *Neolithic* (c3,500bc - 2,000bc) stone axe.

SMR no. 081542 NGR TQ 2588 7965

A 'winged' axe of *Bronze Age* date (c2,000bc - 700bc) was found in a deep cable trench in the middle of Kensington Court in 1935. Now in the Museum of London.

SMR no 081548 NGR TQ 254 797

A hoard of Bronze Age metalwork, found in a railway cutting in Kensington, at a depth of 17 feet, around 1866. The hoard consisted of ten items, including parts of axes, knives, gouges and bronze sheet, has been dated to c.800BC.

#### Roman

SMR 081608 NGR TQ 2450 7898 - TQ 2630 7963

The Roman road called Akeman Street roughly follows the line of Kensington High Street to join the Silchester road at Chiswick.

SMR 081607 NGR TQ

The Roman road between Silchester and Colchester roughly follows the line of Notting Hill Gate and Holland Park Avenue.

#### Medieval

SMR 081659 NGR TQ 258 800

The Abbey of Westminster owned three manorial estates in west London, Eyebury, Hyde and Neyt. The exact location for the manor of Neyt is not known, other than it lay to the west of Westminster. One theory places the site of the manor house in Kensington Gardens, possibly it was demolished in 1602 to make way for the building of the house that later became Nottingham House (see SMR 081882). The first reference to the manor house of Neyt was in 1386. The manor was divided after the Dissolution in the 1530s.

SMR 081646 NGR TQ 2557 7977

Aubrey de Vere gave a grant of land to the Abbey of Abingdon in c.1100. The manor house stood a short distance to the north-west of the church of St Mary Abbots. It later became the parsonage. The house was demolished by 1760 and the site redeveloped.



**SMR 081643** NGR TQ 2560 7970 St Mary Abbots Church

Original church and lands given to Abingdon Abbey by Aubrey de Vere in 1100. Rebuilt 1370 and 1696. The 14th century tower was rebuilt in 1722. Church entirely rebuilt by Gilbert Scott between 1867-72. There is a late 13th century coffin lid in the churchyard.

**SMR 081655** TQ 2555 7993

The site of the vicarage of St Mary Abbots church. There are records of a vicarage since 1260. By 1610 the building lay at the south end of the glebe, by the junction of the present Vicarage Gate and Church Street. It was rebuilt in 1774.

**SMR 081671** NGR TQ 2643 7850 - 2603 7970

Medieval and post-medieval road, following line along Gloucester Road, Canning Passage and north end of Victoria Road.

**SMR 081675** NGR TQ 2567 7967 - 2535 8047

Medieval and post-medieval road.

**SMR 081660** NGR TQ 256 797

First documentary evidence for settlement at Kensington is in Domesday Book. Manor held by Aubrey de Vere. Settlement probably around the site of St Mary Abbots church (SMR 081643).

**SMR 081642** NGR TQ 254 797

Domesday Book mentions "3 arpents of vines" in Kensington.

**SMR 08164601** NGR TQ 2557 7977

Parsons Yard lay north of Kensington manor house. A public right of way of the same name passed through it.

*Post-medieval***SMR 081613** NGR TQ 2565 7980

The walls of a building were traced with a divining rod in 1938. Excavation in a basement found a structure 23 feet in depth, with walls 4 feet thick, with cores of flint and lime concrete. It was initially identified as Roman, but it has been suggested that it may be Henry VIII's bath house. Numerous finds of post-medieval date were recovered from the excavations, including teaspoons, a shilling dated to the 1540s and a Cromwellian spur. A watching brief in 1988, by R. Whytehead of the DGLA, found no trace of the structure, only a layer of 18th century garden soil above the natural. No evidence of Roman activity was recorded on the site.

**SMR 08166101** NGR TQ 2570 7985

A possible bath house was found on the west side of Palace Green, in the 'King's Garden'. It was a low building with thick walls and a brick roof and is almost certainly that recorded in 1938 as being under the Kensington Barracks (SMR 081613).

**SMR 081661** NGR TQ 2570 7985 - TQ 2745 7770

Conduit system for New Chelsea Manor House, built by Henry VIII. In 1935, when Victorian Jubilee monument was removed from the junction of High Street and Church Street a collapse revealed a man-sized brick culvert with roof of perpendicular style - the course of the conduit was then traced by diviners round Kensington barracks.

**SMR 08166102** NGR TQ 2570 7985 - TQ 2585 8000

Diviners claimed that this was the line of a later extension to the conduit system, which extended to Nottingham House.

**SMR 213967** NGR TQ 25845 80025

Originally a Jacobean house, built c.1605, later known as Nottingham House. Rebuilt 1661 by Sir Heneage Finch. Bought 1689 by William III and remodelled under Sir Christopher Wren. Further work took place between 1718 and 1727, under W.Kent.

**SMR 081882** NGR TQ 25850 80002

Nottingham House, built c.1605. Bought 1689 by William III and became nucleus of Kensington Palace. It was a two-storey building with attics and a semi-basement.

**SMR 205103** NGR TQ 26000 80500 - TQ 26000 79700

Gardens and park begun late C17th, incorporating land from Hyde Park. Layout of gardens redeveloped early C18th by Stephen Swizer and Charles Bridgeman, followed by William Kent. Formal gardens extended 1730s when Kent created Long Water and Serpentine. Later C18th and early C19th formal layout softened, leaving largely open areas of grass & trees. Much WWII activity in the park, including air raid shelters, quarrying, aircraft obstruction, allotments and bomb craters.

**SMR 21396704** NGR TQ 25837 79925

Garden temple, designed by Wren, with apsidal end flanked by round headed niches. Grade II listed

**SMR 20510323** NGR TQ 2590 7973

Site of a master gardener's house in SW corner of Kensington gardens, shown on early plans of gardens. A larger building, the Superintendants house, stood on the site in the 1860s, demolished 1874. A low mound, bisected by present path, probably levelled remains of the buildings.

**SMR 20510330** NGR TQ 2610 7984

St Govor's Well, a spring in Kensington Gardens converted into a well in early C19th, given name in 1856. Possibly survives as small hollow where present drinking fountain sits.

**SMR 084422** NGR TQ 252 804

Site of gravel pits shown on Roque's map, placed on Notting Hill Gate road.

**SMR 214001; 214003; 214005; 214007-8; 214010-13; 214015; 214016-7; 214019-22; 214028-30; 214032-3; 21403201-2** NGR TQ 257 794

Houses on Kensington Square, originally built between 1686 and 1699. Grade II listed.

**SMR 21396703** NGR TQ 25830 79790

Former barracks, now houses, late C17th/early C18th in date. Grade II listed.

**SMR 084900** NGR TQ 2610 7996

Watching brief in Kensington Gardens, July 2000, by Sarah Hemley for AOC, recorded small section of collapsed C18th culvert.

**SMR 084901** NGR TQ 2610 7996

Watching brief in Kensington Gardens, July 2000, by Sarah Hemley for AOC, recorded subterranean brick vault, interpreted as ice house. Probably C18th in date.

### *Cartographic*

**3.29** The earliest known map of the area is the Survey of London prepared by John Roque in 1741-5 (see Figure 2). The plot of land occupied by the present York House appears to have been walled on the northern, eastern and southern sides. A building is shown in the north-western corner of the plot, close to the Church Street frontage, this may be the original York House (see Figure 3). Gardens lay to the rear, with planted beds occupying part of the north-western quadrant, with lawns or paths on the southern and eastern sides. Two small buildings are recorded lying along the eastern boundary. Enclosed garden areas lay to the immediate north and south, with Kensington Palace gardens to the east.

3.30 Starling's map of 1822 shows that although the basic plot boundaries had not changed in the intervening half century, the site of the present York House had been divided into two, with York House occupying the larger northern plot (see Figure 3). A second building, probably Maitland House, had been erected to the south of the existing house. The rear gardens had been laid out in a more formal pattern, with circular beds and winding paths. The area immediately to the south of the present site had become the King's Forcing ground and a Vicarage had been built to the north.

3.31 Daw's maps of 1848 and 1852 show that there was very little change to the properties between 1822 and the mid nineteenth century (see Figure 4). These maps define the eastern boundary of the property as the boundary between the parishes of St Mary Abbots, Kensington and St Margarets, Westminster.

3.32 The 1st edition Ordnance Survey of 1866 names the two houses on the plot (see Figure 5). The rear gardens are shown in detail, by this time they were chiefly laid to lawn and path, with bordering planted beds. A structure was attached to the back of York House, shown as glasshouses on the 2nd edition of 1895. The boundary of the Liberty of the City of Westminster is marked as running along rear wall of the properties. A passage is shown to the south of Maitland House, with the Kensington Palace Cavalry and Infantry Barracks to the south of the passage, on the site of the former King's Forcing Ground. To the east the road, called Palace Gardens, had been built, but there were no houses along it.

3.33 By 1895 the Vicarage had been demolished and relocated, from the western side of the plot, fronting on to the road, to the centre of the lawn area (see Figure 6). It appears that the northern part of the vicarage grounds had been sold for development and a new street called Brunswick Gardens was constructed, running north from Church Street.

3.34 The OS map of 1914 shows the present York House: two conjoined horseshoe-shaped blocks, with the open ends pointing east, towards Kensington Palace gardens (see Figure 7). This structure was constructed in the eastern half, the former rear gardens, of the plot previously occupied by both York House and Maitland House. It appears that Church Street was widened between 1895 and 1914, probably to allow for increased traffic. A row of houses, numbers 30 to 34 Church Street is shown along the western edge of the plot, along the street frontage, with possible stables behind, forming an enclosed courtyard. Large detached houses had also been built along Palace Green, with numbers 4 and 5 Palace Green backing on to York House.

3.35 No maps for the period between 1914 and 1968 were readily accessible in the time available for this study. However, by 1968 the tennis court to the west of York House, the site of the proposed car park, had been built (see Figure 8). Further building had taken place to the north of York House, with the construction of Vicarage Court and Hamilton House.

3.36 The 1990 OS map (not illustrated), shows that the barracks to the south of York House Place, had been demolished, though nothing had yet been built on the site. By 1996 a new development, Lancers Square, had been built on the site of the barracks. The garden area

to the south-west of York House had changed, with the construction of a pond to the south of the tennis court (see Figure 9).

## 4 Impact Assessment

### *Prehistoric*

4.2 There have been several isolated finds of prehistoric artefacts in Kensington, some within 500m of the proposed development. These include a Mesolithic stone axe (SMR 081541), a Neolithic stone axe (SMR 081547) and a Bronze Age hoard (SMR 081548).

4.3 The Bronze Age material appears to have been found at considerable depths below ground surface. The 'winged' axe (SMR 081542) lay 20 feet deep, and the hoard 17 feet deep. It is, therefore, possible that prehistoric artefacts will be encountered during the course of deep excavations on the site.

4.4 It should be borne in mind that most of the site lies on river gravels. The river gravels were a favoured spot for prehistoric settlement, and thus there is considered to be a moderate risk that features and artefacts of prehistoric date may be encountered in the course of groundworks.

### *Roman*

4.6 Two Roman roads run through Kensington. One runs from London to join the Silchester road along the line of Kensington High Street (SMR 081608); the other also runs east - west, along the line of Notting Hill Gate (SMR 081607). The presence of the roads, and a nearby navigable river, would suggest that the Kensington area was likely to have been settled at this period, but no clear evidence of occupation has been found in the area.

4.7 A number of isolated finds of Roman date have been recovered from Kensington, though none from the immediate vicinity of the site. There is, therefore, considered to be only a small risk that features and artefacts of Roman date may be encountered in the course of groundworks.

### *Saxon*

4.9 The first documentary mention of Kensington is in the Domesday Book, suggesting that there was a settlement here by the late Saxon period. The most likely centre for such a settlement would be close to the church, at the junction between High Street and Church Street, along the Roman road.

4.10 No finds or features for this period are recorded within 500m of the present site on the SMR. There is, therefore, considered to be only a small risk that features and artefacts of Saxon date may be encountered in the course of groundworks.

### *Medieval*

4.12 The available maps show that the village of Kensington spread north from the medieval centre around St Mary Abbots church, along Church Street towards a second centre of occupation at Notting Hill.

4.13 The documentary evidence indicates that the present site formed part of Conduit Close in the early post-medieval period. The use of the term *close* may suggest that this site was not occupied during the medieval period, but was possibly pasture land on the northern edge of Kensington village. There is, therefore, considered to be only a small risk that features and artefacts of medieval date may be encountered in the course of groundworks.

### *Post-Medieval*

4.15 The cartographic evidence shows that the gardens around the two houses, called York House and Maitland House were extensively redesigned on several occasions between the mid eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. It is possible that evidence for garden features and structures relating to the gardens may survive below within the study area. A watching brief on the barracks site to the south of York House Place, by R. Whytehead for the Department of Greater London Archaeology (DGLA) in 1988, revealed a layer of eighteenth century garden soil still surviving (SMR 081613).

4.16 The documentary evidence shows that the present site lies in part of a close, formerly known as Conduit Close, the site of Henry VIII's bath house and its associated conduit. Excavations beneath the Kensington Barracks, to the south of York House Place, in the 1930s revealed evidence for a substantial structure of probable post-medieval date (SMR 081613). This may well have been the site of the actual bath house.

4.17 The line of the conduit was traced by diviners during the 1930s (SMR 081661), and an extension to Nottingham House, later Kensington Palace, was postulated. It is possible that some evidence of the conduit may be encountered during groundworks on the present site.

4.18 Further evidence of post-medieval activity in the vicinity of the present site was recorded during July 2000. A watching brief by Sarah Hemley for AOC Archaeology recorded part of a collapsed eighteenth century culvert and a subterranean brick vault, possibly an ice house in Kensington Gardens.

4.19 There is, therefore, considered to be a moderate to high risk that features and artefacts of post-medieval date may be encountered in the course of groundworks.

### *Conclusion*

4.21 Although the present site is of limited size, it appears to have remained as an island of undeveloped land since at least the mid eighteenth century. The sources consulted suggest that, the site may offer the potential to contribute to a number of research topics which have been highlighted in recent years by English Heritage:

- The site lies on river terrace gravels which offer good potential for the preservation of prehistoric activity. It may offer the opportunity to study settlement during these periods, and during the transition between them.
- The site lies on the periphery of a known medieval village between two Roman roads that have continued in use to the present day. It may offer the opportunity to study the development of settlement to the west of London between the Roman and early post-medieval periods.
- The cartographic evidence covering the present site clearly shows changes in garden layout during the post-medieval period. It may offer the opportunity to study the setting and context of the Georgian buildings which formerly occupied the site.

## 5

## Sources Consulted

### *Archives*

#### **Greater London Sites and Monuments Record**

#### **National Monuments Record**

#### **Kensington and Chelsea Local Studies Library**

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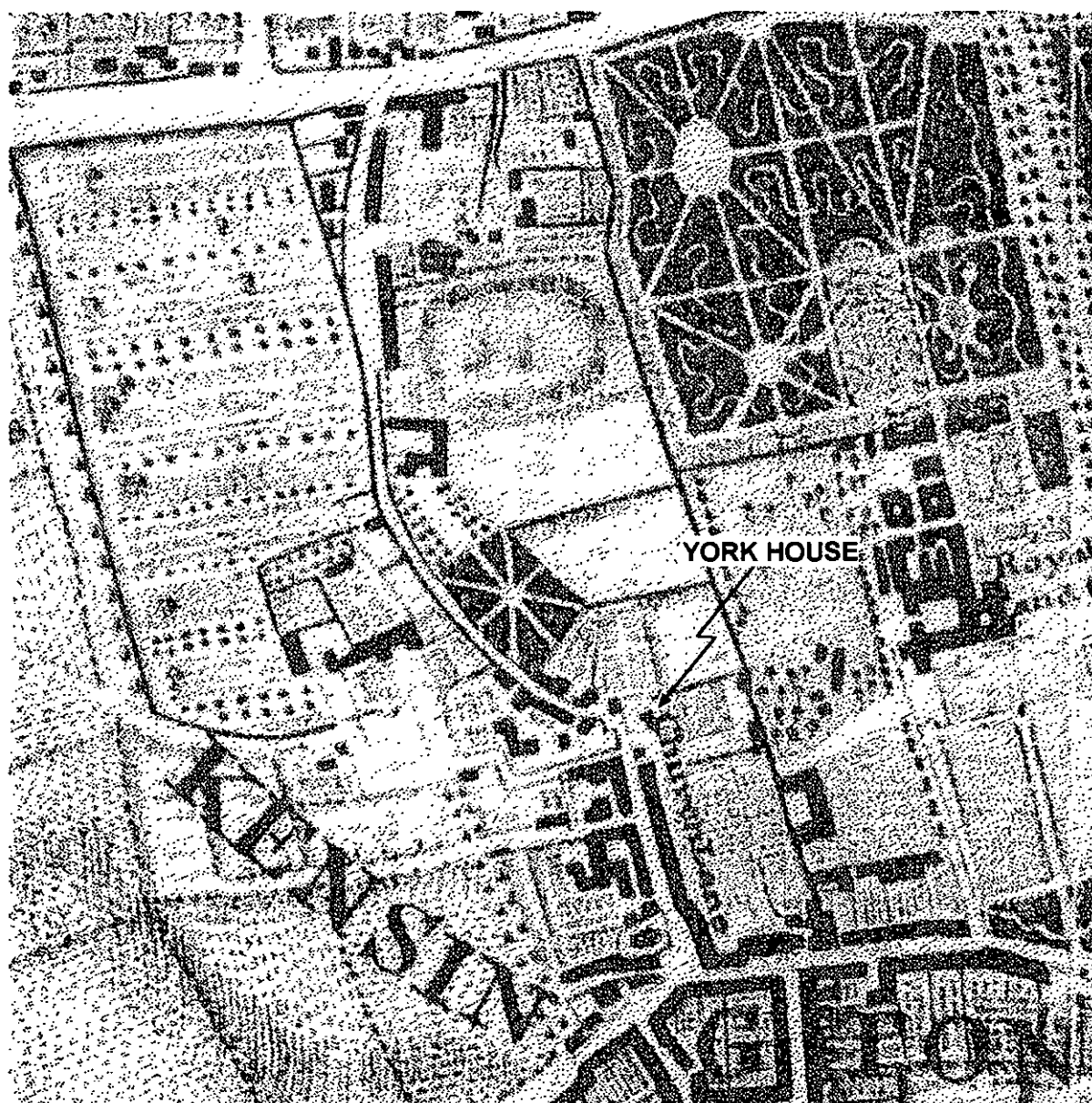
Site location plan

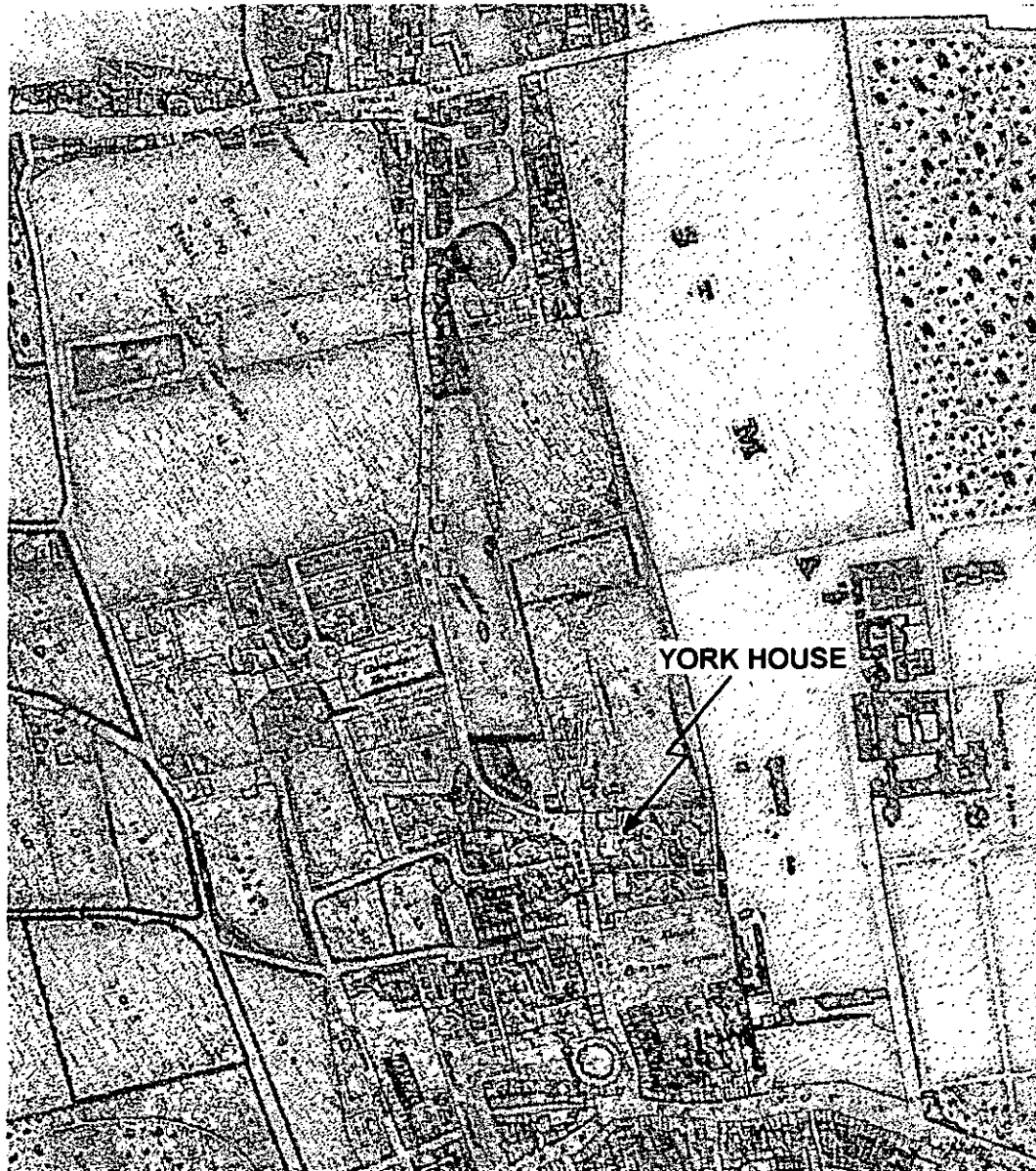
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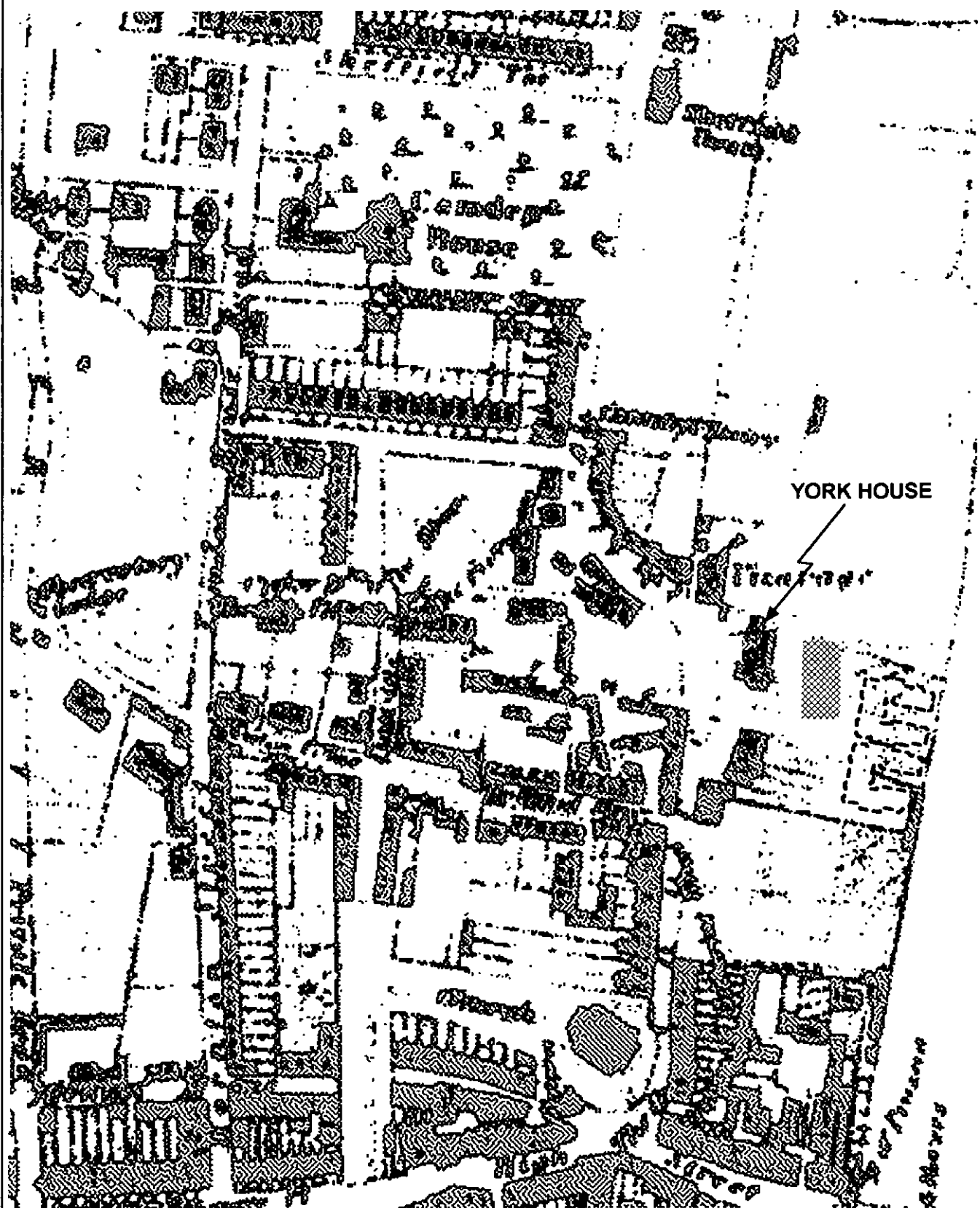
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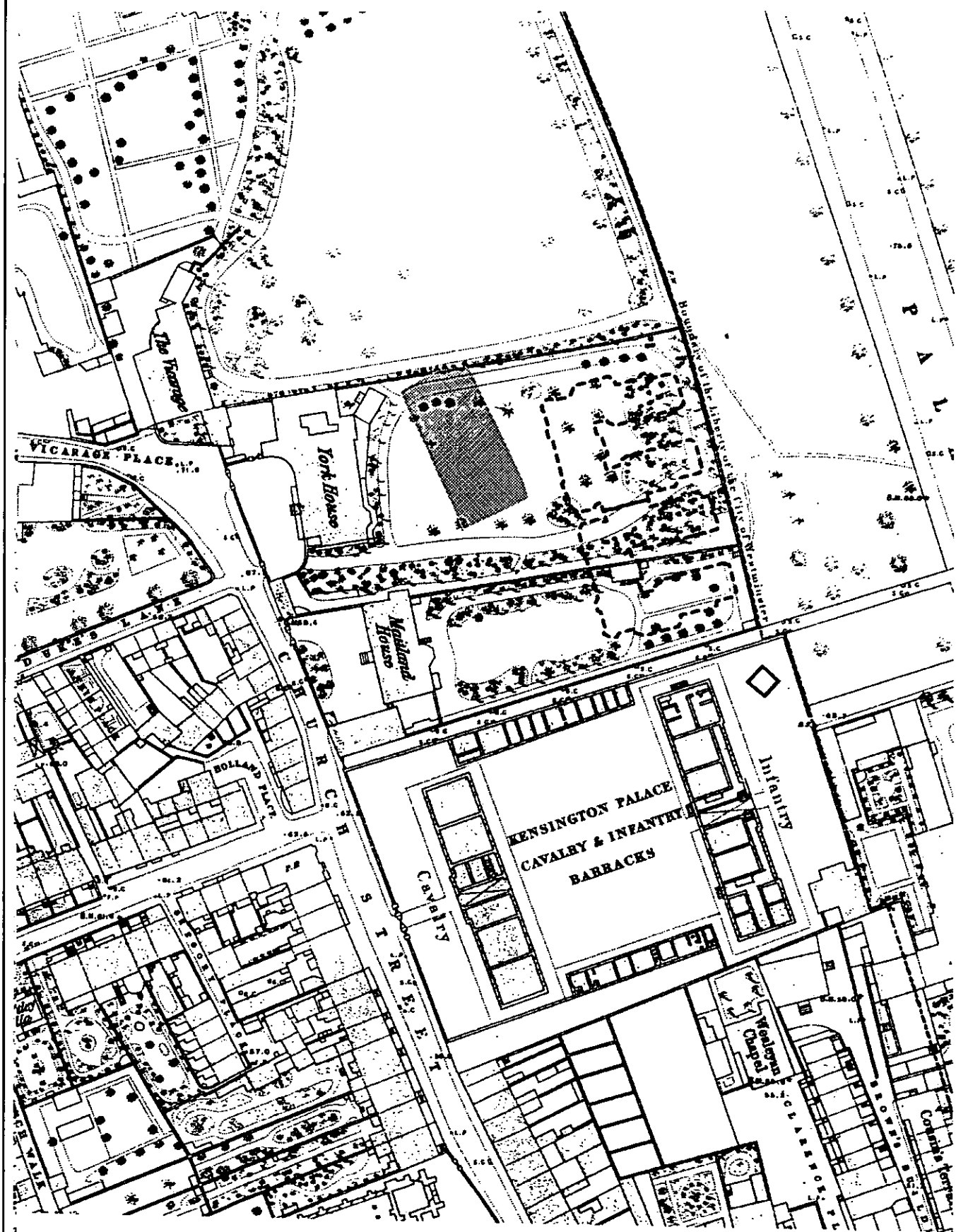
Figure 1











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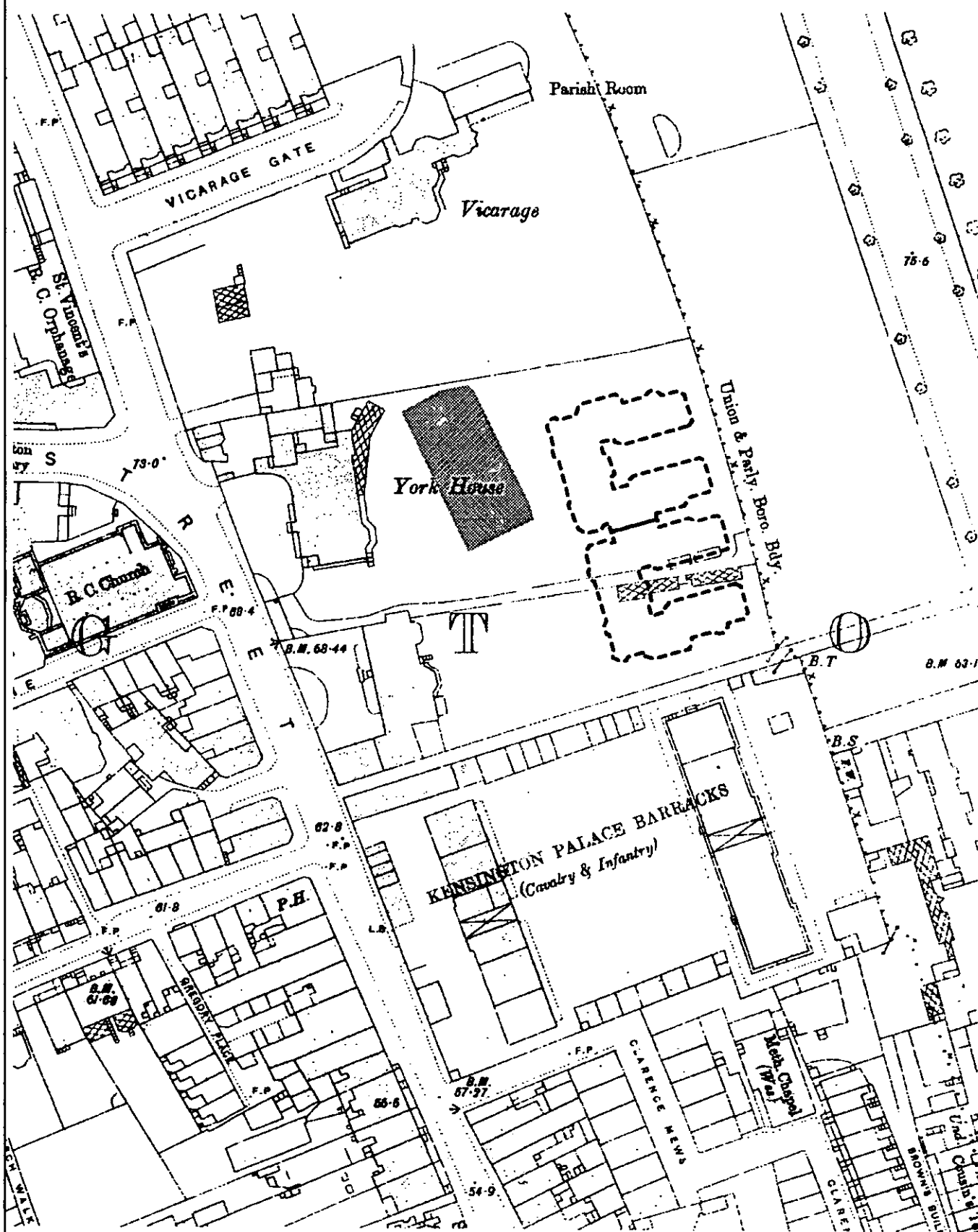


Figure 6

