



## Notes on Bath as a Roman City

Emanuel Green F.S.A.

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NOTES ON BATH AS A ROMAN CITY.<sup>1</sup>

By EMANUEL GREEN, F.S.A.

Much has been written about Roman Bath, but excepting the records of actual finds, nearly all seems speculative and conjectural. Further speculation however cannot be out of place, as only by such efforts, accompanied by good reasoning, can we make any advance in our knowledge.

The first question which occurs is the origin of the pentagonal form of the city. It has been generally supposed that Roman camps and cities were always rectangular. This is only partially true as there are many exceptional cases, caused generally by some peculiarity in the site chosen. The fine city known to us as Silchester is octagonal, and is so because its walls were built on the lines of a British encampment. Pevensy is an irregular oval, the plan following the form of the ground.

Adhering to the first theory, in a paper printed in the Proceedings of the Somerset Archæological Society, vol. 31, 1884, it is argued that the outline of Bath was originally rectangular having the full dimensions of a large Roman camp. The argument was accompanied by a plan which greatly aids towards making it clear. In this plan the North Gate has a central position in the northern line, somewhere near the now top of Milsom Street, but suggests no road attached to or passing through it. The pentagonal form, it was argued, was the outcome of circumstances, such as when peace reigned after the subjugation of the Britons, there being no necessity for a full-sized camp, the plan was reduced

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, May 7th, 1891.

practically to one-fourth the original size by cutting off the northern part and building a wall at the offcut on the line now known as the Upper Borough Wall. But the part remaining must have still been rectangular and no way pentagonal. With this suggestion the North Gate must have been shifted from its assumed central position in the first wall, a necessity overlooked or left unaccounted for by the writer. Continuing his argument, the same author, in the next year's Proceedings of the same Society, vol. 32, attempted to show that Bath was a military station occupied by the XX Legion, but the evidences here were not more satisfactory than in the previous suggestions and could not be accepted. There is no evidence of any change of plan or that Bath was ever either a camp or a military station. A small guard it may be assumed would be there, and soldiers as well as strangers came there as invalids and died there, leaving in the form of altar or grave stone or otherwise, some token or record for us to discover. When thus considering the origin of the outline of the city, the mind's eye must be cleared entirely of all present surroundings, of every building and street now familiar, and the spot pictured as a void neglected marsh, over or through which flowed the water from many cold springs as well as the water from the hot ones, forming a bog filled with reeds or rushes extending down to the river side. The Romans, as new comers, having first protected and enclosed the hot springs, would proceed to lay out and wall in their new possession. Like an earlier people, they "walled in the town for their habitation and had the suburbs for their cattle and for their goods and for all their beasts."

Taking the lower part of the site, many places along it must have been found too marshy and too wet to bear a heavy wall, thus the outline was determined here by the suitableness or firmness of the ground. Guidott<sup>1</sup> mentions that when digging some foundations in the south-west and north-west of the city, the workmen came to a soft yielding mud, through which on being probed no bottom could be discovered. This was under some yards of gravel supposed to have been laid down by the Romans to make a firm surface. The northern line of wall, where

<sup>1</sup> Discourse &c. 1676, p. 100.

the ground was dry and firm, is straight enough after the expected and usual manner.

Mr. Scarth in his book, *Aquæ Solis*, p. 108, treating of the Roman roads near Bath makes a statement which would be startling except for the qualifying supposition. He says, "after uniting at Batheaston with the road from Silchester, the Fosse road passed along Walcot and is then supposed to have passed up Guinea Lane to the head of Russell Street. At this point the two roads again diverged and the Fosse passed through the North Gate and left by the South Gate, crossing the river by a bridge." He does not say how the road got to the North Gate from Russell Street, or where his North Gate was, but the full result is gathered in conjunction with what is said on an earlier page, p. 8, when treating of the Roman walls. Here he writes, "the great Fosse road ran through the city from north to south entering it at what is now the eastern angle of the Mineral Water Hospital, and passing down Union Street and through Stall Street, quitted the city at the South Gate." The reading of these two paragraphs together means that the Fosse road came down Russell Street to Union Street, where must have been the North Gate, and so passed on through the city southward. A very novel and strange idea. In this statement may perhaps be detected the key to the suggestion already noticed, that Bath was originally a full sized camp, as by the plan given in that argument the same route must have been followed for entering the city on the north side. There never was a gate at the spot here indicated. The North Gate was not at the top of Union Street, and further Union Street is not a Roman Street, nor on the site of one; it is not even medieval but quite modern. The Roman Street hereabouts would be the present Union Passage, a street as Roman in appearance now as when the Romans left, except that the houses on either side are higher. But more than this Stall Street is not a Roman Street, but an early English one, laid down say when the priory grounds were enclosed, and forming as we know their outer boundary along the western side. The many finds in this street prove this assertion. Although already often published a passing notice of some of these must be given to clear

the argument. In 1753, an inscribed stone was found when digging a cellar in the lower part of Stall Street; four feet lower coins were found. In the same place other stones having inscriptions were found at the same time. There was also a find in Stall Street at the west end of the Pump Room. In 1754, an altar to the Leucetian Mars was found in the upper part of Stall Street. About this date also an altar by one Sulinus was found at the lower end of Stall Street. In 1727 when digging a sewer in the centre of Stall Street, about sixteen feet below the surface was found the well known bronze or brass head called that of Apollo. When this was found there was such good evidence of the whole statue remaining in the same spot that a number of curious gentlemen entered into a subscription to indemnify for digging for it, but the Corporation absurdly refused lest the course of the water should be affected by the search.<sup>1</sup> There is thus possibly a good find awaiting and ready for some one. The Society of Antiquaries offered a tempting price for the head but could not get it.<sup>2</sup> There was yet another find in this year near the same spot, of which a careful account with a coloured drawing, is preserved for us in the British Museum. It is entitled a representation of the subterranean antient stoves as discovered in 1727 in Bath, where the brass head was found near 16 feet below the surface of the street. It was drawn and measured upon the place "at Bath 20 Aug. 1727 by Bernard Lens" and copied by Priscilla Combe. The original is now in the Bodleian. The top line represents the street or road surface, which was vaulted or underbuilt with wood for support whilst a sewer was being laid. The "east side" of this vault is shown "as it runs upwards the street." The mouth of the hole was "dug over against Alderman Ford's house in Stall St. the 25 July 1727, to make a common sewer in the middle of the street, and to convey the drains of the neighbouring houses by that means into the antient sewer," which is emptied in the river about ten yards westward of the bridge. This sewer is seen in the drawing descending in the lowest right hand corner. The depth of the hole was 15 feet 10 inches. Just below the surface

<sup>1</sup> Gough's *Topography*, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> Cruttwell's *Guide*, 1784.

was "a gutter of freestone of no use at present being underground, the foot seemed all composed of rubbish, coal, mortar, &c. to the gutter." On the extreme left was "a solid brick wall that went athwart the hole," and following this was "a row of bricks twenty in number made in the nature of stoves all of one piece, hollow, a half-inch thick within, sixteen inches high, five inches wide and six inches deep." Between each of these was put a strong and reddish cement of mortar and brick dust and a single tile; in the inside was found sticking "a black stuff very like soot." The stove bricks were placed pretty regular one behind the other, so that a stick of three or four feet long could be thrust in towards each side going towards the king's bath, "was it not for the earth that had got into them perhaps a great deal farther; they came about a foot further the other side and that was their end or closing; they had all pieces of tile clapped before each hollow. N.B.—They stand on a clayish ground." Drawings are given of one of the hollow bricks taken out for the purpose; also of one of the tiles from the top, and one of the single tiles placed between. Again, in 1790, when digging for the Pump Room, with many remains of columns and friezes an altar dedicated to Minerva was found at the western end; these were supposed to belong to the Temple of Minerva, especially when remembering the well-known record of Caius Julius Solinus otherwise known as Polyhistor, who writing about A.D. 250, mentions the Temple of Minerva at Bath. But it was soon detected that such a building must have encroached on Stall Street, a difficulty got over by the conjecture that it was erected after the street was made. Such a conjecture cannot be received as having the slightest foundation or approach to probability. About twelve feet below the level a pavement of freestone was discovered having a channel at the extremity to carry off water and with steps fronting the east.<sup>1</sup> This pavement it was seen extended under Stall Street, but not enough of it was laid open to determine the form or size of the building to which it belonged. On it the foundations of the Pump Room were laid. Again, in 1867, on the destruction of the far-famed White Hart to make way for

<sup>1</sup> Cruttwell's Guide, p. 17; Archæologia, vol. 10, p. 327; Brown's Guide, p. 38.



the present Grand Hotel, a bed of paved concrete was found which had been apparently surrounded by a court and smaller buildings. A fragment of cornice was precisely similar to another piece found in 1790 on the opposite side of the street under the Pump Room. The base of a wall uncovered was formed of very large stones, some measuring more than five feet in length, probably part of an outer court. Drawings were made, it is said, of these things with the intention or hope of determining the plan of the building and for publication, but so far they have simply disappeared. It was at once concluded that these remains, as with all others previously found, belonged either to a Temple or the Forum, their front here facing the east, as those found opposite on the site of the Pump Room were the remains of a temple which faced the west, Stall Street passing between them, as it does between the modern buildings there to-day. The simple fact is that Stall Street not being a Roman street does not pass between, but is made or laid on, and really passes over the plan of an important building which covered the ground here in Roman times. It can readily be judged that this was the hall, the ante-rooms, and the hypocaust, part of the frontage of the fine system of baths now partially exposed.

But if Stall Street be not a Roman street and so not the original main central thoroughfare of the city as it is always assumed to have been, where was that street?

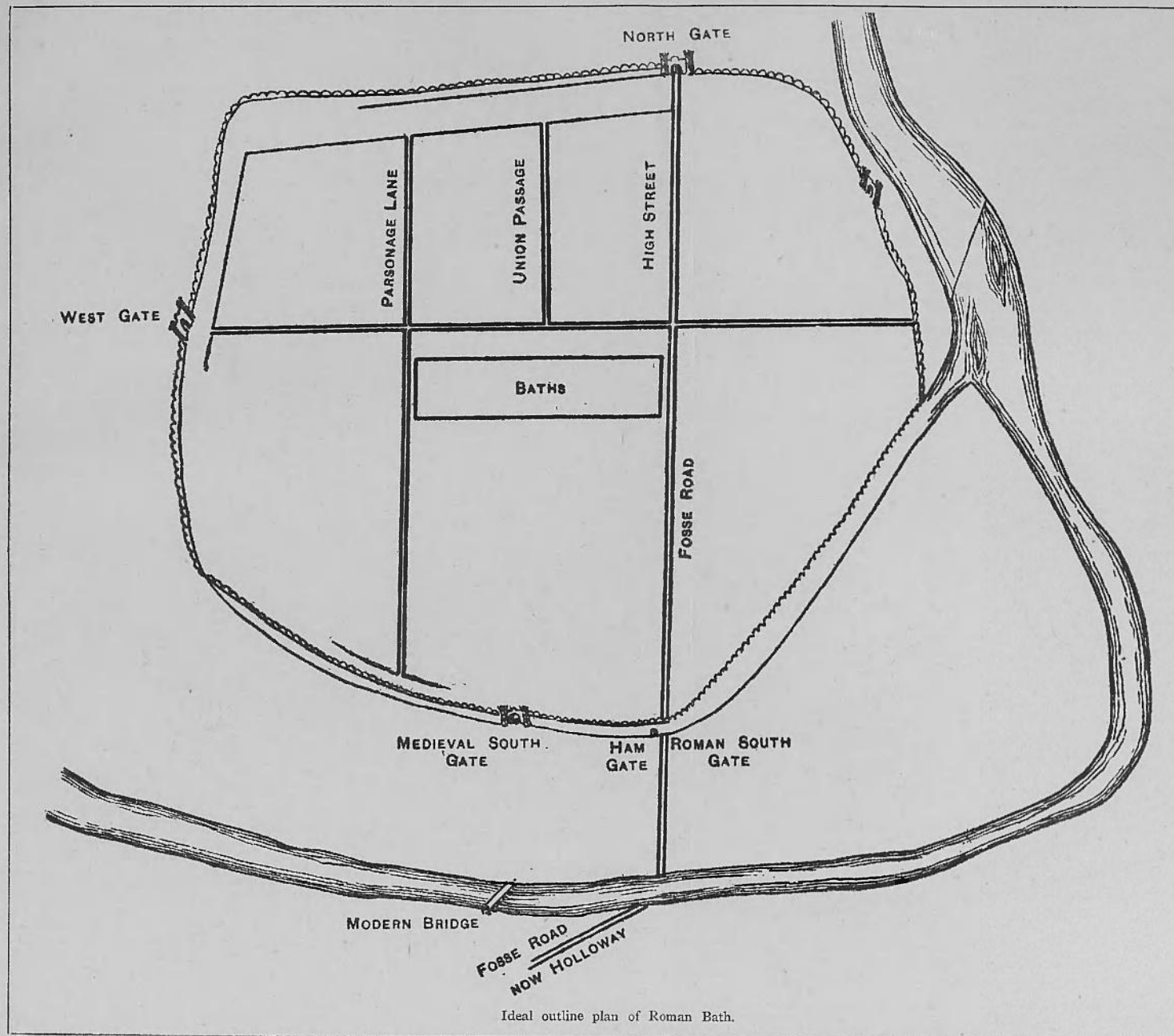
Northward of Bath, the Fosse Road coming by Bath-easton reached Walcot. About the point where now stands Walcot Church a road known now as the Via Julia branched from it, passed up the hill about the site of Guinea Lane and by the head of Russell Street to Weston, and then on across the Severn. The Fosse, continuing its own line, went on by our Walcot Street into Bath through the North Gate, which stood at the end of the present Northgate Street. Bath had the usual four gates at the compass points, so that opposite this point would be placed the South Gate. Besides these four there was in the medieval wall also a postern. This postern, known as the Ham gate, led from the Priory to the Ham meadow. It stood a little eastward of our South Gate.

The supposition or accepted idea, other than the

suggestion already quoted, has hitherto been that the Fosse after entering by the North Gate and traversing High Street, turned to the right along our Cheap Street and then to the left down our Stall Street, and so out on the site of our South Gate. Such a road as the Fosse, a royal highway, ever going straight onward after the known Roman plan, could hardly have twisted about in such an unusual manner. This latter idea has been produced by the obliteration and obstruction caused by the Priory church and grounds; just as the former idea was the result of the usual conviction that the ever present cross roads found in Roman plans must have crossed in the centre of the city; but this was by no means always the case. At Ilchester, on the same Fosse road, and in the same county, it was not so; at Silchester it was not so, as also at Gloucester and other places.

By clearing the ground of all accustomed buildings, by giving up these fancies and continuing the Fosse from the known North Gate through the city southward in the usual straight line, it is brought not to the site of the known South Gate, but to near about the postern or Ham gate, which may be claimed to have been on part of the site of the larger Roman gate. The position now becomes clearer. When the Priory was enclosed, the Fosse road was cut and stopped by its northern boundary, and Stall Street being formed in its place the South Gate was moved westward to meet the new street; the site of the Roman gate becoming thus private property was utilised as a way to the Ham meadow. The line of the Fosse then, entered by the North Gate, passed along our High Street, through near the transept of the present church, on by the site of the Ham gate and across the Ham meadow to, presumably, a bridge in line with it eastward of the present bridge, and so over the river to Holloway. The direction of Holloway from the hill side, as may be seen to-day, is towards such a bridge. To meet the abutment or land end of the later bridges the direction of the road has been changed somewhat at the extreme bottom of the hill. The position can be clearly seen in the outline sketch map here given and in Stukeley's map printed in 1724. Thus the crossing of the highway, always looked for in a Roman town, would have been at the junction of our High Street and Cheap Street.





One more suggestion must be made, viz., that the line of our Cheap Street was continued in a straight line to an East Gate which stood near the house now known as the Athenæum. Hereabouts long years afterwards, just on the boundary of the Priory grounds, were the Spring Garden stairs and a ferry across the river. Such an outlet is all the Romans could have had on this side. The present East Gate would thus be medieval, and like the South Gate, its position was changed when the ground was enclosed; when the site of the ford was wanted by the Priory; when the mill, known as the Monk's mill so recently burned down, and the weirs made with it were built.

Next an attempt may be made to glance at the interior arrangement or plan of the city, and here it must be remembered that the Fosse road must have been surveyed or made before the city was built; the city is built on the road, not the road through the city; the direction and position of the road, influenced the plan and direction of the streets, which are all parallel with it. However irregular the outline or walls may have been, the streets within were always symmetrical, running parallel with the high road as to one direction, and parallel with the main street which always crossed it, in the other. All the streets thus formed a rectangle at every junction. There was no deviation from this rule.

First, then, must be taken the south-eastern quarter of which most is known, where existed the fine system of baths, now in part visible. Hitherto nothing has been made of the plans of these baths so often published. By the plans given in various books on the subject, such as by Dr. Spry, and reissued in Scarth's *Aquæ Solis*, the front of the baths is supposed to be buried in the space between the end of the large rectangular bath and Stall Street, but the recent discovery that this space is occupied by a round bath makes the idea impossible. By abolishing Stall Street, and so giving space in front, the whole plan can be completed. The Roman street which ran in front of the baths when so completed, is with but a slight exception discernible now. It is known as Parsonage Lane as far as Westgate Street, which it crossed and passed through what is now the back-yard of the Grand Hotel, but which was once the stable-yard of the White Hart

Hotel, and then through exactly No. 11, Bath Street, across that street and on by St. Catherine's Hospital. The continuation on this, the south, side is under the colonnade of Bath Street, and by substituting a colonnade for No. 11 on the north side, the whole street or way would be again open from north to south. By measuring depths and examining generally this position is clearly discerned. The side or foot pavement on the south side of Westgate Street, at the entrance to the stable-yard, shows or marks a former continuation of the now Parsonage Lane. It corresponds exactly with the side pavement of Parsonage Lane and must be there from some cause, as no such work would be put at the entrance to a stable-yard, but would rather be removed as an obstruction. Thus by simply clearing away No. 11, Bath Street there is formed a street duly parallel with the Fosse, giving the line of the western front or end of the baths and giving room for the outer court yard, for colonnade and steps, for entrance hall and side chambers, and all that is wanted. Moreover the flue tiles of the hypocaust which heated the buildings, are still lying *in situ* under Stall Street. It may then be predicted that nothing will be found in connection with the present exposed plans westward of this line, or eastward of the Fosse Road as herein laid down. At the eastern or opposite end, having the Fosse Road for its boundary, is another bath on a smaller scale. This is known to be complete having hypocaust and all usual rooms fairly perfect. Complete drawings and plans were made in 1755 when the remains were uncovered. This bath was supplied from its own hot spring, which in later times was suppressed to avoid or prevent competition. Whether this was a public bath, say for women, or whether it was a private bath attached to some large house seems difficult to determine. The sexes often bathed together then, as near the same spot they did long years afterwards, so that the large bath may have been sufficient for general use. If the Governor's residence could be placed hereabouts, nicely southward, in the sunshine, and on the high road, then it may rather be suggested that this bath was a private one attached to his house. The rooms seem too small for public use. Taking finally a view of the whole system we may imagine the

ground open on the south having promenades and gardens and accommodation for various games.

In the north-east quarter, in the angle now formed by the corners of High Street and Cheap Street, may have stood the Forum and the Basilica, always an important official centre, the Market Place and Guildhall of our day, and not far in fact from the present offices. It is found so placed at Silchester, the only example known. In this block too may be placed the principal shops and artificers, for it was along the high road by the North Gate, still known as the High Street, that all traffic passed.

From the finds in the north-west quarter a different plan may be judged. In 1738 a tessellated pavement was found when the Mineral Water Hospital was being built, also another in 1859, and an inscription on marble in 1861, thus marking the site of a house of some consequence, which probably occupied the frontage between our Union Passage and Parsonage lane. In 1860 a tessellated pavement and other remains were found on the site of the Blue Coat School, showing another good house westward of the last and westward of our Parsonage Lane. Tessellated pavements it may be concluded would only be found in the principal or official houses.

Of the remaining quarter, the south-west, little can be said. It is still almost virgin ground. Some remains have been found there around the present baths, as also an altar in 1774 near the Hot bath and another in 1776. Another altar was found in 1809 near the Cross bath, and in 1825 a stone was unearthed under the United Hospital. Hereabouts may be placed the general Infirmary, an institution usual in Roman cities, but beyond this as a suggestion there is little to guide. Around these springs centres our own history of the Bath waters as public waters, and here now, still all around them, are placed the oldest as well as the most modern Infirmaries. In 1789 an Act of Parliament enabled the Corporation to build five new streets, all of these being near the Cross bath and the General Hospital. One went from Barton Street, near the General Hospital, to Stall Street; the second was Bath Street; the third went from north of the Cross bath to Westgate Street; the fourth from the west side of Stall Street near Bell Tree Lane to the

Borough Walls; the fifth from south of the Cross bath to the Borough Walls. Also the houses in Cheap Street were rebuilt and some houses at the corner of the bridge removed.<sup>1</sup> Consequently this quarter has been so much changed and altered that any Roman plan can hardly be traced.

There is one other point which must come to the thoughts when endeavouring to realize the old position, but regarding which no suggestion has been made, viz.:—how were strangers and invalids housed or lodged. The small rooms, often so great a puzzle in the plans of Roman houses, were used for bedrooms, mere alcoves closed with a curtain when in use. The larger houses had rooms especially for strangers, wings adjoining the private apartments and having separate entrances. Seneca—Ep. 89—rallying the Romans on their restlessness, says, somewhat opportunely for the present occasion,—there is no lake, river, or mountain where your villas do not erect their lofty tops. Wherever veins of warm water abound new lodging houses (*nova diversoria*) will be immediately built to gratify your luxury. Whether the meaning here would be equivalent to anything we know as a lodging house must be left an open question. Some accommodation there must have been as the place, with such magnificent baths, may be judged to have been much what it has been and may be still, a place of ease and idleness; a mixture of groans, music, and flippancy; a resting place for humanity, old, infirm, and in ruins; a comfortable thoroughfare from this world to the next.

Where a ground plan has been so closely built over as here at Bath fresh discoveries are necessarily somewhat difficult to make. Caution, too, should be exercised before determining the use of any remains. Of Temple or Forum nothing is known, but now that so much is known of the extent of the baths, the architectural details found may have belonged to them rather than to a Temple, especially as Minerva who is so often indicated in the finds, was directly the patroness of such waters as these of Bath. Also, after so long a lapse of time, many changes will have occurred, so that the line or frontage of any street or way, as seen, must not be too rigidly accepted

<sup>1</sup> Brown's Guide, 1802.

as original. The line of Westgate Street and Cheap Street probably, in the process of widening and shifting southward, will be found like Stall Street, to be over Roman remains. Other less important ways will have deviated to meet later requirements, whilst others, especially in the north-eastern block, will have entirely disappeared. Some portion, too, would be garden ground. But the chief points herein humbly suggested may be even now easily and inexpensively proved and without inconvenience to traffic, by the employment of a couple of men for a short spell with those useful and necessary exploring instruments, the ordinary pick and spade.