

Placemaking Areas

KINGSMEAD

The area covered by this study, which includes Rosewell Court, Kingsmead House, the Telephone Exchange and Plymouth House, roughly forms a rectangular block bounded by Monmouth Street on the north, Kingsmead Square on the east, James Street West on the south and Charles Street on the west.

Historical Development

In the middle ages most of this area belonged to St.John's Hospital in Bath, who owned various lands outside the city wall to the west, in the Manor of Walcot. In this case it formed part a large ground known at St.John's Mead (later, Little King's Mead) bounded by the then main road to Bristol (now Monmouth Street) and the great meadow by the Avon, Great King's Mead, belonging to the King's Barton in Walcot. This ground, sloping steeply down to the meadow, stood above the flood plain and therefore mainly contained orchards and market gardens, but approaching the West Gate it turned sharply southwards to form a long strip of meadowland extending to the river, now site of Avon Street. Other grounds nearby belonging to St.John's Hospital were Butthays, a strip ranging along the city wall (now site of Westgate Buildings), and a large ground on the north side of the Bristol Road now mainly occupied by Beaufort Square and its environs. Except for St.John's Barn just outside the West Gate, the Londonderry Inn in the Seven Dials triangle, and an inn called Kingsmead House adjoining the Bristol Road, there were no other buildings in this area at the beginning of the Georgian period.

In 1717 St.John's Farm, of which these lands were part, was leased for development purposes to John Hobbs, a Bristol Merchant, who employed the architect John Strachan to lay out Beaufort Square, Kingsmead Square and Avon Street. Rows of houses were also built along the Bristol Road (renamed Monmouth Street, with a tollgate at the western end for the main road, now turnpiked), together with a new street parallel to it on the south side called Kingsmead Street. The latter (formerly a field way to the meadows) led west from Kingsmead Square, more or less centrally through the study area. Since these were among the earliest Georgian developments outside the city wall, completed in the 1720s and 1730s, they were built in a more decorative and homely style than the grander Palladian order introduced by John Wood which predominated from then onward.

Initially the houses in Kingsmead Street only extended for a few hundred yards, where there was access back into Monmouth Street and Beaufort Square by a cross passage called Cross Lane containing a row of cramped artisan cottages. However, during Bath's third building boom in the 1760s the street was extended considerably further westwards, to Stanhope Street, together with Charles Street, a new cross street with access to Queen's Square. As a result, the new extension of Kingsmead Street beyond Charles Street began to acquire a separate identity, and by the end of the 18th century had assumed the name New King Street (resulting in much confusion among later historians).

During the next building boom from the 1770s to 1790s, associated with the development of Norfolk Crescent, Green Park and Kingsmead Terrace, James Street was laid out parallel with, and on the south side of Kingsmead Street. This originally appears to have served as a service road to the surrounding new streets, extending from Norfolk Buildings on the west (as today), but terminating at Milk Street on the east, where a narrow cross lane, later called Trinity Street, connected with Kingsmead Square. Also, being built at the level of the great meadow, James Street always remained prone to occasional flooding.

This area, situated along the main road, soon became occupied by professional people attracted to the booming city, accompanied by their associated artisans and tradesmen. Already by the early 19th century it had become a densely populated community in its own right, requiring its own church, Holy Trinity, built c.1820 in James Street by the architect John Lowder junior, and various schools, including the Holy Trinity church school and the Bathforum Free Schools for boys and girls built in Kingsmead Street in the 1850s.

From the late 18th century onward the only change to the street plan occurred after the opening of the Midland Station at Green Park in 1869, when better access to James Street was provided from the city

centre through Kingsmead Square via New Street which cut off at an angle from Trinity Street, forming the present triangular piece of open ground. The railway also appears to have encouraged further commercial activity in this area, including a number of Timber Yards, Sawmills and other light industries on the south side of James Street.

This situation remained unchanged through to the 20th century until the Bath blitz in April 1942, when this area became one of the worst parts of Bath to suffer from the bombing, practically all the buildings being either completely destroyed or damaged beyond repair. For many years after clearance it remained an open area, part used for a car park, until the few remaining ruins, together with the roadways (Cross Lane and most of Kingsmead Street), were finally removed in the early 1960s for the development of the present buildings.

Historical Associations

Although this area possesses few significant historical associations, it can nevertheless claim to be the birthplace of several of Bath's most influential commercial and artistic enterprises:

Printing and Newspapers

Not long after Kingsmead Street was built, in about 1733, the city's first printing press was established 'outside the West Gate at the sign of the Shakespeare Head' by Felix Farley, a Bristol printer, its most impressive production being John Wood's *The Origin of Building*. In 1741 this business was taken up independently by Thomas Boddely, possibly an employee, who went on in 1742 to produce Wood's *Essay towards a Description of Bath*. Boddely's premises can now be identified as No.6 Kingsmead Street, on the south side, 'at the sign of the 'Pope's Head', situated in what is now the public car park in front of Rosewell Court.

In 1744, on the 27 February, Boddely launched Bath's first newspaper, the *Bath Journal*, which achieved a monopoly for some ten years until challenged in 1755 by his ex-apprentice, Stephen Martin, who set up a rival printing shop nearby in Monmouth Street where he was able to produce his own paper, the *Bath Advertiser*, issued in October that year. Martin's premises, 'at the Brick House' outside the West Gate, still exists as No.4 Monmouth Street, dating from 1731.

However, Boddely died in 1756, and production of the *Bath Journal* passed to his brother-in-law John Keene who was able to continue the business successfully despite the competition from the *Advertiser*. Indeed, a third newspaper appeared in 1760, set up in Stall Street by Cornelius Pope, former manager of the *Journal*, with the title of the *Bath Chronicle*. As a printer, his most substantial commission was from Sarah Fielding for her translation of Xenophon's *Life of Socrates*, but later owners of the business, such as the Cruttwell family were able to attract many more influential clients. Although the *Advertiser* seems to have ceased publication by the 1780s, the other two continued to flourish. The *Journal* was still being produced in Kingsmead Street by the Keene family into the 20th century, whilst the *Bath Chronicle*, after passing through many incarnations, still continues to this day.

Coachbuilding and Painting

By the second half of the 18th century the road systems had improved sufficiently to produce a growing demand for high quality carriages and coaches in Bath, attracting a number of ambitious coachbuilders. The most notable of these was Charles Spackman (1748-1822) who, with his partner Edward Morton established a carriage works in 1773 beside the Bristol Road at Nos.21-22 Monmouth Street, at the back of his own house at No.24 Kingsmead Street, now all roughly on the site of Plymouth House and the Telephone Exchange.

This proved to be very profitable, and Spackman soon became an influential citizen with sufficient resources to follow other interests. Since Bath attracted many aspiring English artists at that time (Gainsborough, Lawrence, Hoare, Beach, &c) he became a connoisseur of art, accumulating a respectable collection of Dutch and Flemish masters. About 1781 his attention was drawn to the artistic talent of Thomas Barker, aged 15, son of one of his coach painters and decorators who lived in Cross Lane, and in 1785 he took over Thomas's education and his apprenticeship as a painter. This was probably under the tutelage of Joseph Sheldon, a bookshop owner, artist and drawing master who also lived in Kingsmead

Street, and who later became well known for his construction of a scale model of Bath.

In the meantime Spackman also started to branch out into property development and architecture in partnership with banker and builder John Lowder senior of Monmouth Street, and the architect John Palmer who lived nearby in Charles Street - Spackman acting as 'projector' or agent for the supply of building materials. Their first works included Lansdown Crescent (initially known as 'Spackman's Buildings' or 'Lansdown Place') and All Saints Proprietary Chapel below, followed by a joint undertaking for the building of St.James's Square and a water supply system to the upper part of the city. When the Bath Improvement Act was passed in 1789, Spackman and Palmer were duly appointed Improvement Commissioners along with other prominent citizens.

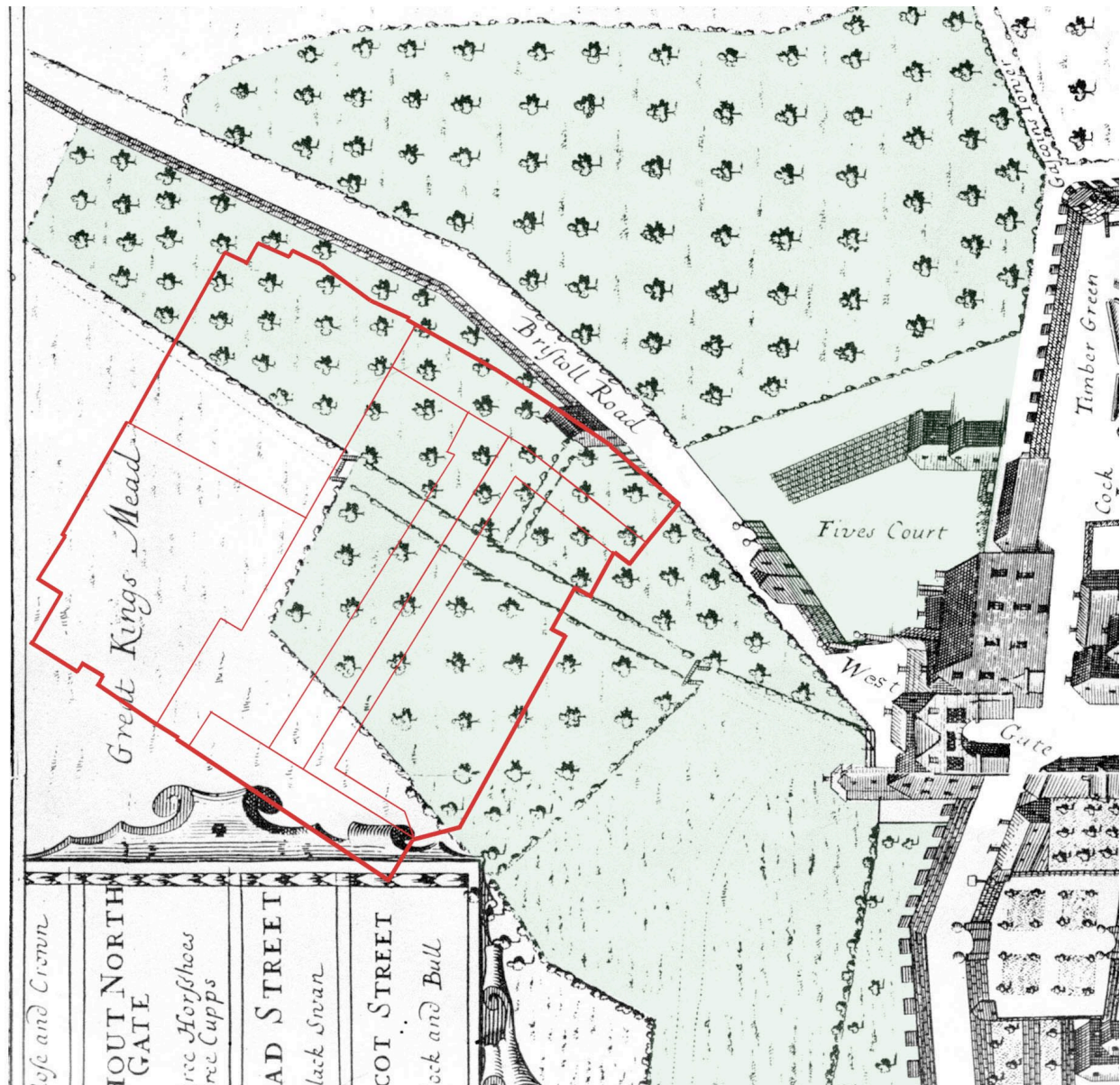
In 1790 Spackman opened a gallery to display Barker's work (probably the first in this country devoted to a single artist) at 23 Kingsmead Street, next door to his own house, whilst Thomas was sent off on the Grand Tour to Italy. In about 1791, after exhibiting Thomas's work at the Royal Academy, Spackman gave up his partnership in the coaching business to concentrate on his development projects and to set up a prosperous business as an Art and Property Appraiser and Auctioneer, his share in the carriage works being taken up instead by John Fuller who eventually took over the whole business.

Unfortunately, in 1795 there was a severe building slump in Bath, and Spackman, having overstretched his resources, was declared bankrupt. Nevertheless, after moving to London in 1800 he eventually built up a successful career as an Art Dealer, supported no doubt by his reputation as the patron of Thomas Barker who by this time was achieving fame in his own right. Although Spackman never returned to Bath, other members of his family went on to found a firm of architects, surveyors and land agents which continued in business in Terrace Walk up to the 1950s.

The coach-building business also continued to flourish and expand under the Fuller family, and by the 20th century had accumulated a fine collection of early carriages. Part of this was eventually dispersed as the firm, under S&A Fuller, evolved into motor builders and dealers from the early 1900s onwards. Following the Bath 'Blitz', when the carriage works along with the rest of the Monmouth/Kingsmead Street area was destroyed, the firm found new premises in Circus Mews until, in the 1980s, it was finally taken over by Hartwell Motors at their present premises in Newbridge Road.

MAP REGRESSION

1. From Joseph Gilmore's map, *The City of Bath*, of 1694.

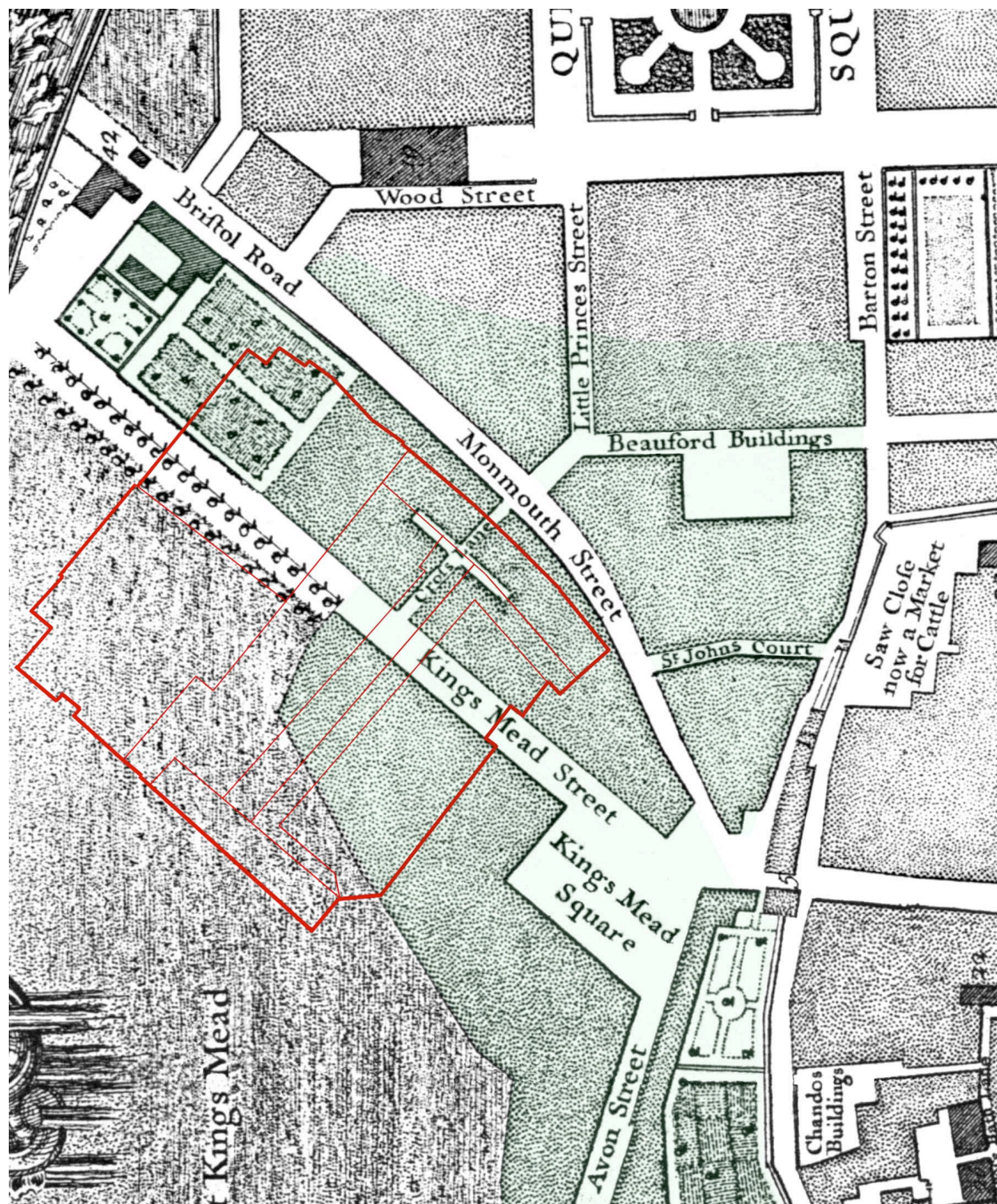


The study area is superimposed by the red lines.

St. John's property is superimposed with a green tint.

The only buildings outside the West Gate are the Kingsmead House Inn (next to the Bristol Road), and the Fives Court in the Seven Dials triangle, presumably part of the premises of the Londonderry Inn. St. John's Barn which stood near the farm gate outside the West Gate, later site of Kingsmead Square, had already disappeared by this time. The field way or lane leading between the orchards later became Kingsmead Street.

2. From John Wood's map, *A Plan of Bath in Somerset*, of 1735.

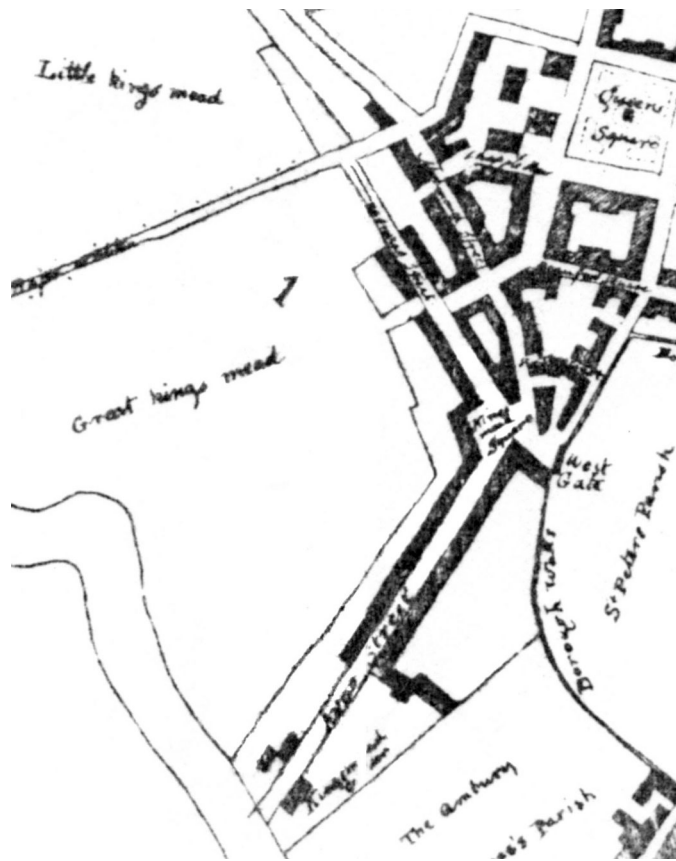


The new developments of John Wood and John Strachan (green tinted, on St. John's land) are shown here, superimposed in red with the study area.

The buildings on the south side of Kingsmead Street only reach as far as Cross Lane, the rest of the street towards Cumberland Row remaining as a tree-lined avenue or walk.

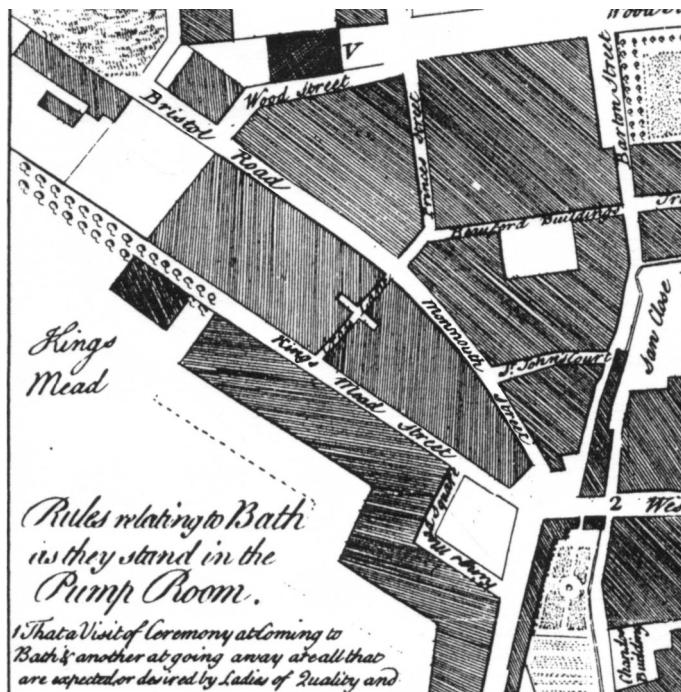
The number 42 denotes the turnpike gate near Cumberland Row, installed after the establishment of the Bath Turnpike Trust in 1707. The West Gate is indicated by the number 5.

3. From Thomas Thorpe's *A Plan of the Parish of Walcot in the County of Somerset, 1740*

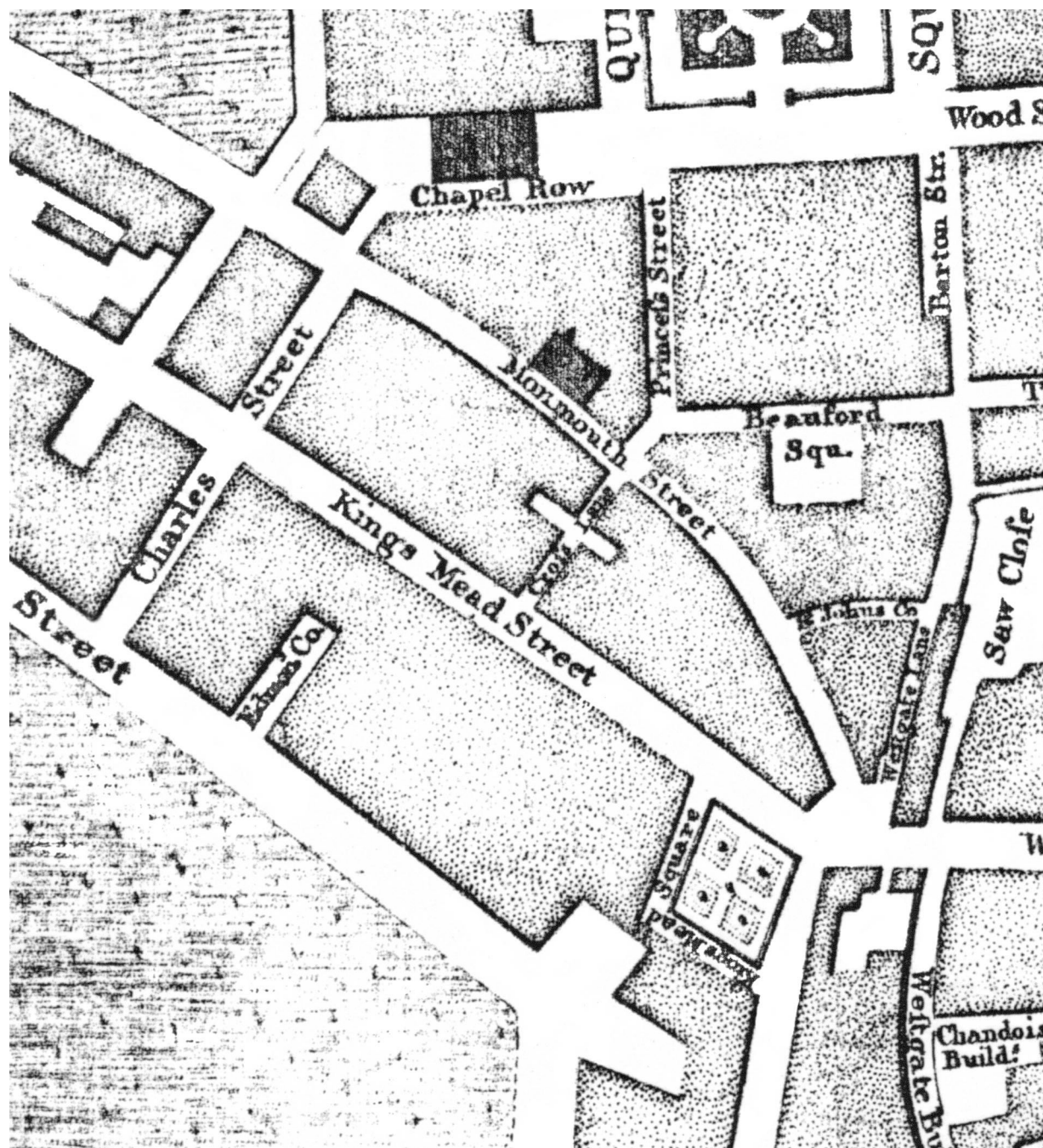


These maps indicate only minor changes in the study area between the 1730s and 1760s, including additional housing developing along Kingsmead Street. Little Kingsmead is shown as a new division of the great meadow, marked by a rope walk.

4. From *A New and Correct Plan of the City of Bath and places adjacent*, published by Taylor and Meyler, 1750-1751

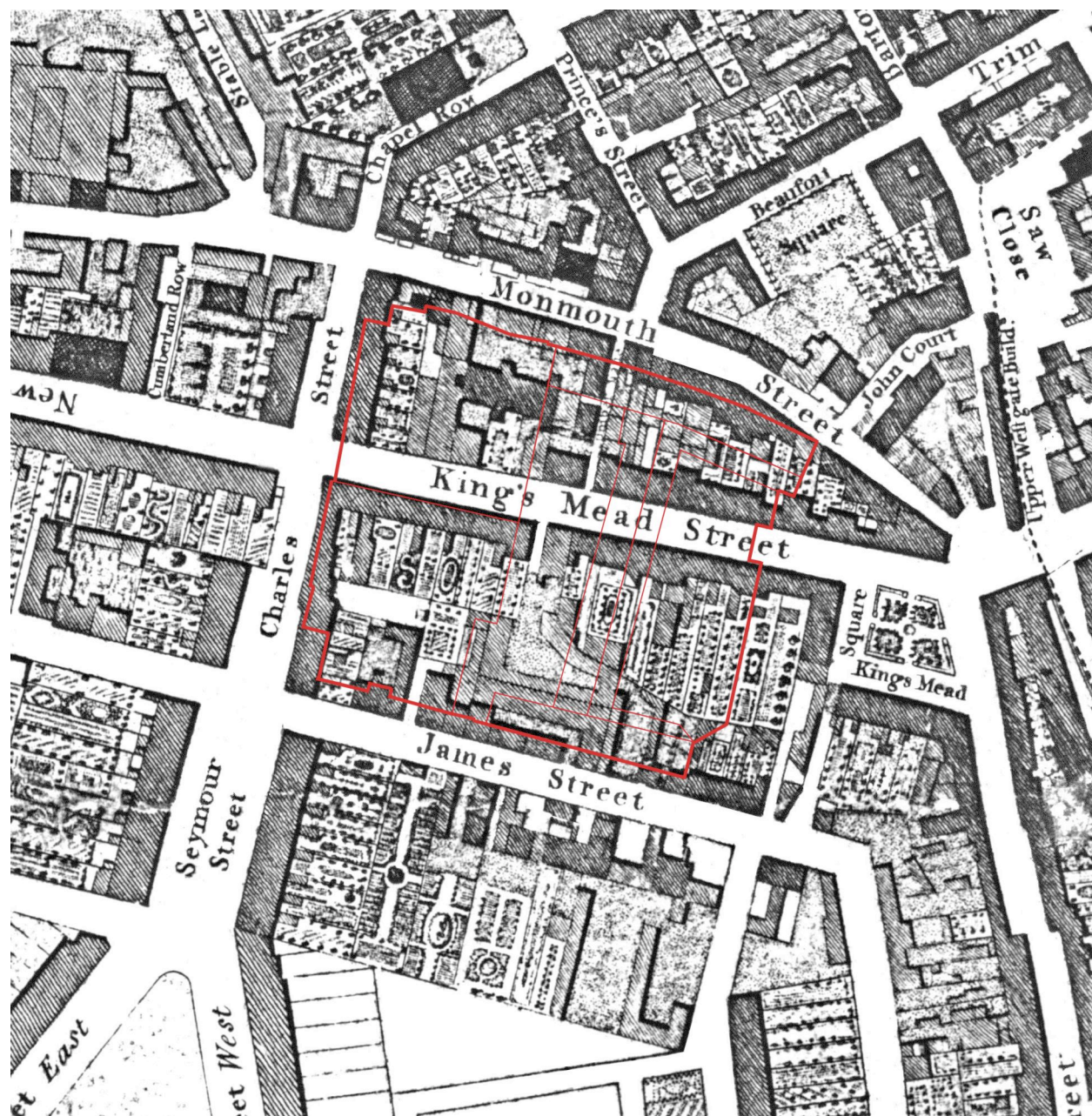


5. From *A New and Correct Plan of the City of Bath with the New Additional Buildings*, published by Leake, Frederick and Taylor, 1770.



By 1770 Charles Street has been built, together with the extension of Kingsmead Street, later known as New King Street. James Street, including Edmond's Court (later Edmond's Place) and Milk Street have been laid out, but nothing has yet been built on the south side, on the great meadow. A large open area is shown on the south-west side of Kingsmead Square, possibly the origin of Trinity Street. Note the ornamental garden in the centre of Kingsmead Square. By this time the West Gate had been demolished.

6. From Harcourt Masters' *Plan of the City of Bath, 1795*.



By the 1790s the area had reached its final stage of development, including the south side of James Street, Seymour Street, Green Park East and West, Trinity Street and Kingsmead Terrace. Spackman's carriage works is possibly the large rectangular building in the centre of the north-west sector of the study area.

7. From Cotterell & Spackman's MS plan (sheet 20) of water supply in Bath, 1852-1853



This large-scale map produced for the Corporation of the water supply system in Bath shows that the only new features in the study area by the mid 19th century were the building of the Holy Trinity Church in James Street, and the Bath Forum School in Kingsmead Street. Adjoining the latter however is a large area of commercial buildings which appears to represent the expansion of Fuller's carriageworks.

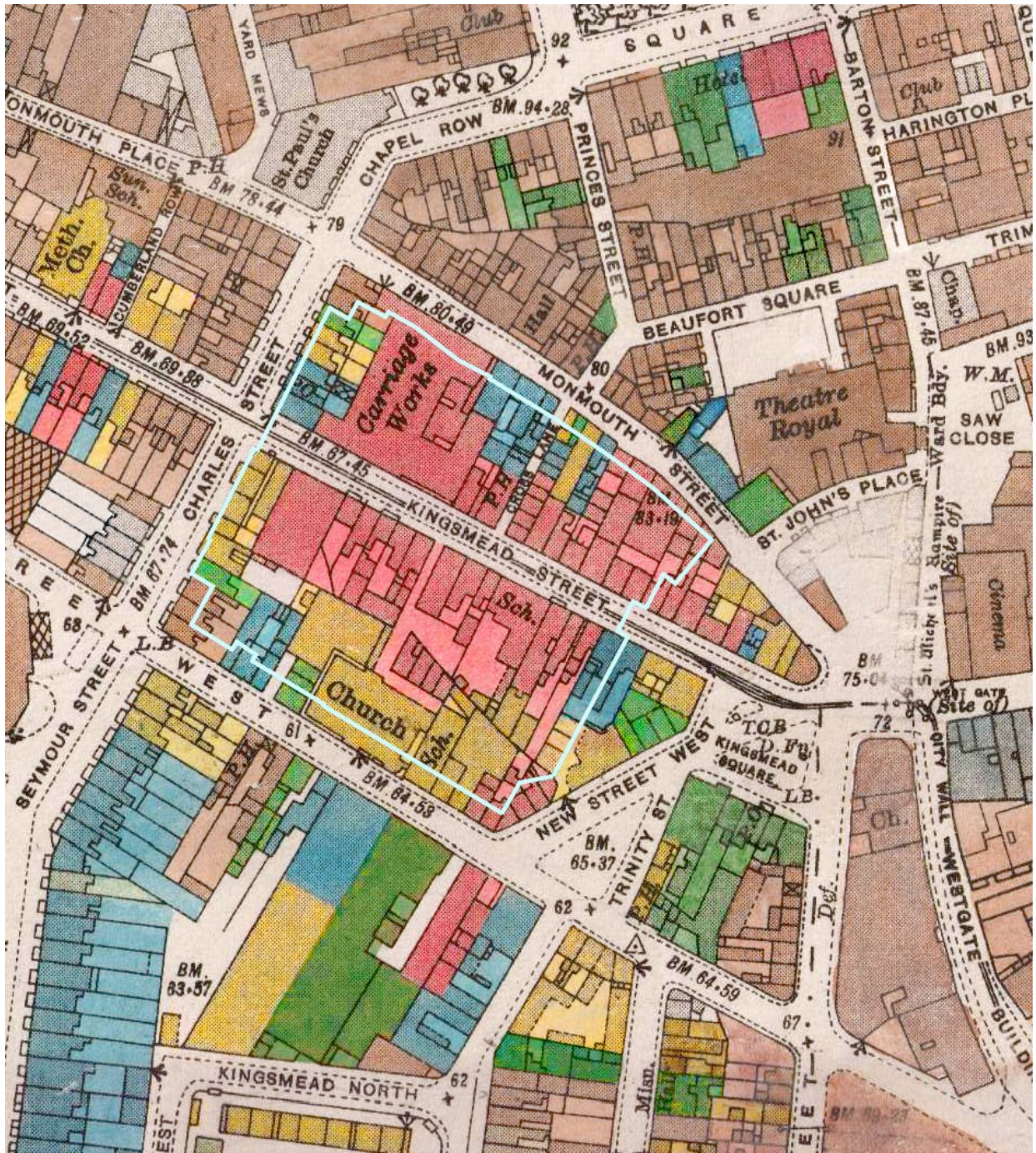
8. From the OS 1:500 map of Bath (sheet XIV.5.9), 1885.



The most notable feature to appear in the study area in the late 19th century is the Midland Railway Station in Green Park, opened in 1869. New Road also appears, together with the road driven through the middle of Kingsmead Square, no longer a quiet area. Note also the Saw Mills on the south side of James Street.

Letter A marks No.6 Kingsmead Street, printing shop of the *Bath Journal*.
Letter B marks No.4 Monmouth Street, the 'Brick House'.

9. From the OS 1:2,500 map of Bath (1936 edition), sheet XIV.5.
[annotated in 1942 to show air raid damage]



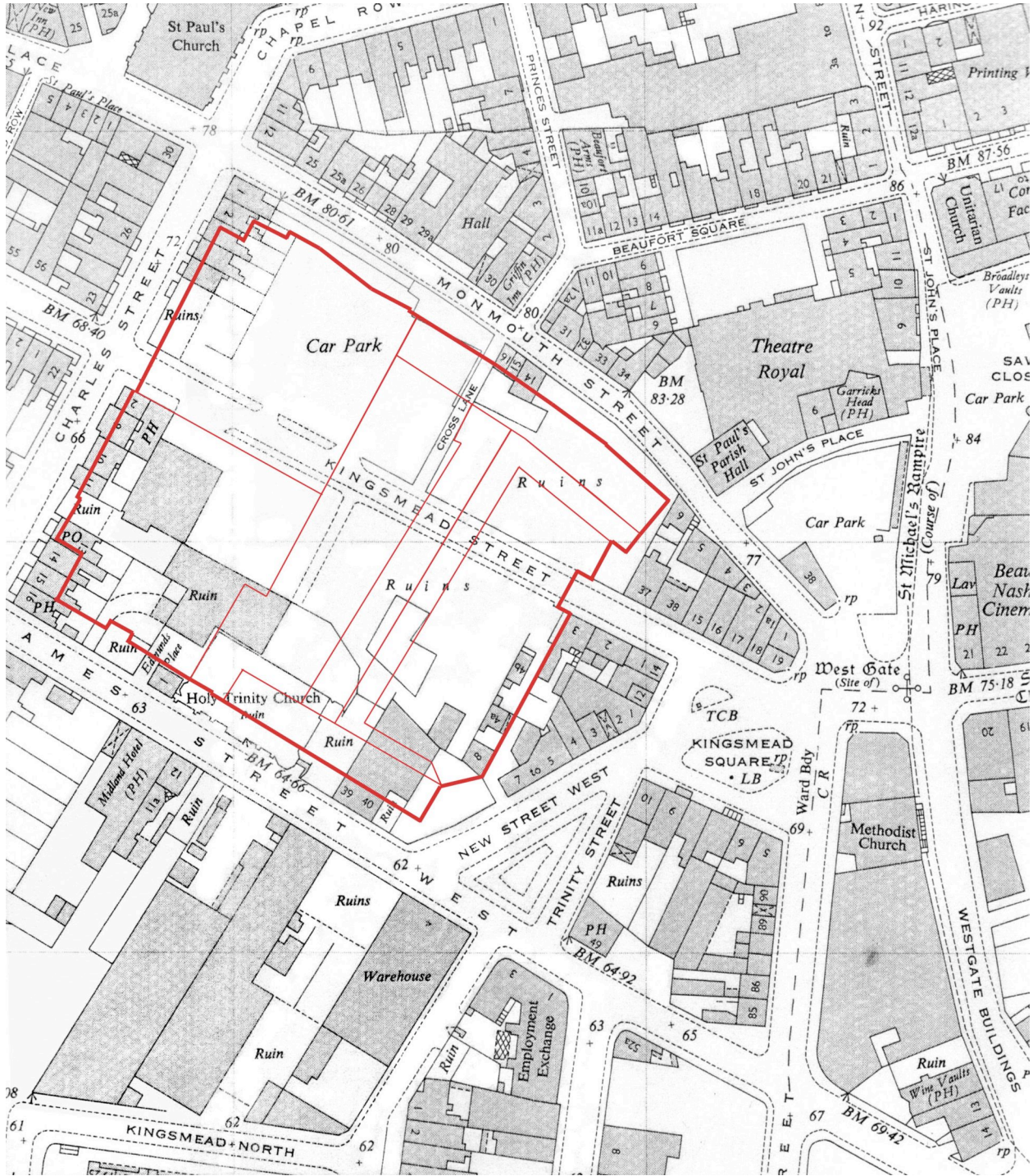
The colour key attached to this map shows how much of the study area was destroyed in April 1942:

- RED – Totally Destroyed
- BLUE – So Badly Damaged that Demolition is Necessary
- GREEN – Seriously Damaged but capable of Repair. Still Usable
- GAMBOGE YELLOW – Evacuated or to be Evacuated. Pending Repair
- BURNT SIENNA – General Damage – Slight
- PAYNES GRAY – General Damage – Glass Only

The study area is outlined in pale blue.

Note the electric tramway line passing along Kingsmead Street (avoiding Monmouth Street), installed 1904 and removed in 1939.

10. From the OS 1:1250 map of Bath, 1957.



Surveyed prior to the redevelopment of the study area in the early 1960s.