

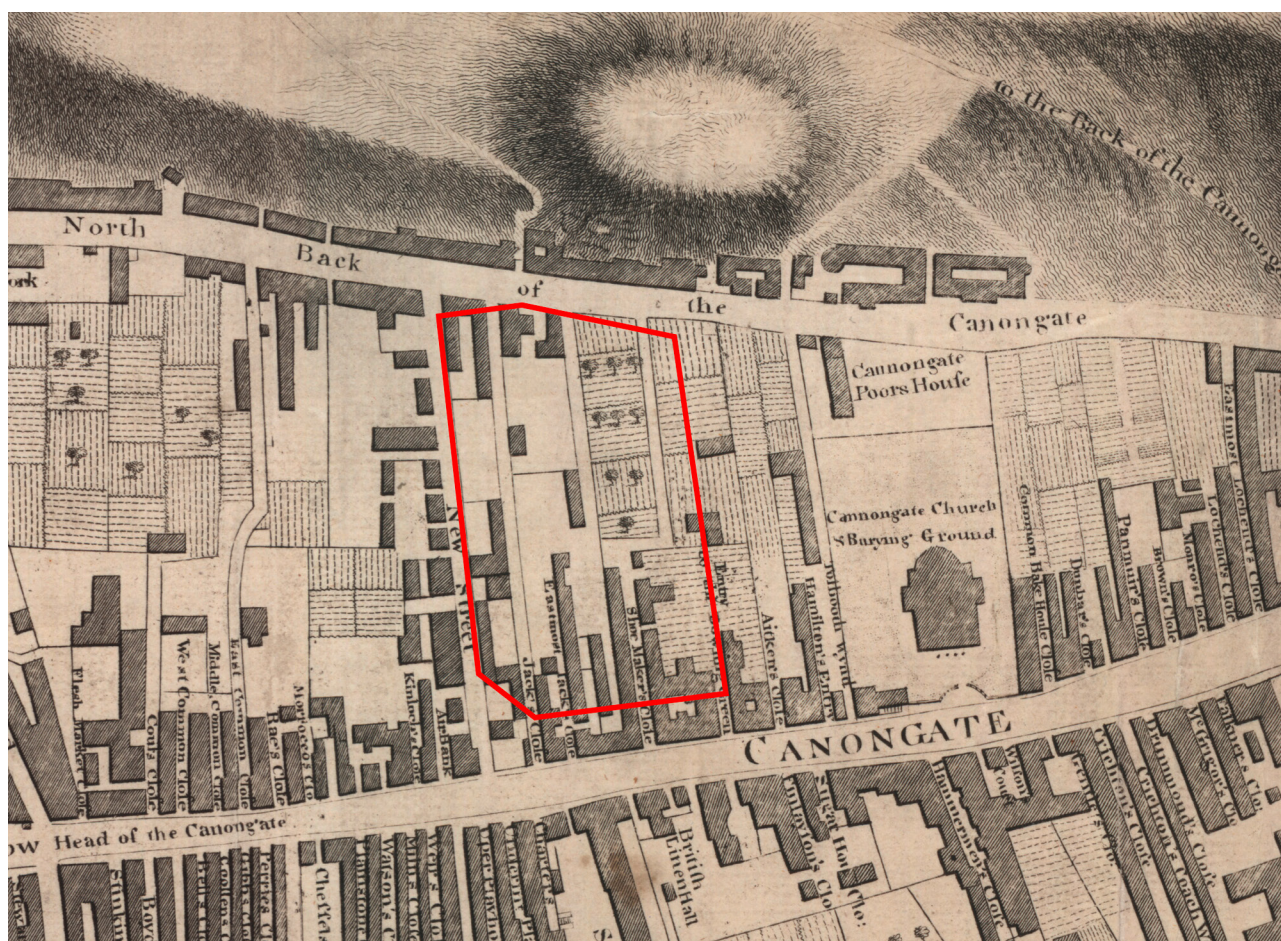
### 3. THE HISTORY OF CANONGATE AND THE NEW STREET GASWORKS

#### 3.1 Before the burgh (c 8000 BC–AD 1128)

Sporadic activity from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age was found at the New Parliament site to the east of the Caltongate site (Carter et al 2008), while there is also evidence for the survival of late prehistoric and Roman archaeology at Edinburgh Castle on the strategic castle rock to the west (Driscoll & Yeoman 1997). An Early Bronze Age flat axe was discovered at 183–187 Canongate, Bibleland, on the north side of the Canongate, south of the former gasworks site (Canmore ID 52133; Coles 1969: 83). A bronze coin of the reign of Augustus was found embedded in a ball of clay during excavations at Moray House (Canmore ID 52313; Macdonald 1924: 328) to the south of the Canongate.

#### 3.2 The medieval burgh (AD 1128–c 1560)

The Canongate, located east of Edinburgh, was bestowed burgh status, to support Holyrood Abbey, during the reign of David I, possibly as early as 1128 (Dennison 2008: 59). The Canongate represents the linear development of settlement along the road leading east from Edinburgh Castle towards Holyrood Abbey and the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Burgage plots extended north and south from this thoroughfare, and to the rear of the backlands of these plots were the two back lanes, called the Strands, one to the north and one to the south (Dennison 2005: 11). To the north was the North Back of Canongate (now Calton Road) and to the south was the South Back of Canongate (now Holyrood Road) which can be identified clearly on Kincaid’s map of 1784 (Illus 3). The North Back of Canongate was a route favoured by royalty in travelling from Holyrood Palace to the city. An



Illus 3 Detail from Alexander Kincaid’s 1784 *Plan of the City and Suburbs of Edinburgh* (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland and under Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0))

Act of James VI called for it to be rendered and maintained as a thoroughfare suitable for royal passage (MacKay 1879: 115–16).

While the New Street Gasworks and other post-medieval and modern developments have caused major alterations to the Canongate Burgh area, much of its traditional herringbone street pattern layout remains (Adamson et al 2016: 6). There were ‘many traditional trades ... established in the area, including brewers, masons and tailors [and] ... trades such as shoemakers, tailors, weavers and hatters, along with stablers and coachmakers [who were] established to service the merchants and resident population of the burgh, and also to trade outwith the burgh boundaries, especially with the adjoining burgh of Edinburgh. Grocers, bakers, brewers and vintners also established themselves in the area, to feed and water the population’ (ibid: 10, 38). The various craftspeople sometimes worked in the backlands of their properties, ‘... using the sources of water at the foot of their burgage plots’, these areas being occupied by ‘middens, wells, workshops, gardens and animals’. Meanwhile, the frontages of the properties on the Canongate often saw commercial use, as booths or brewhouses (Dennison 2005: 14).

On the frontage, the Canongate Tolbooth, a Category A Listed Building (Canmore ID 52527), is located to the south-east of the Gasworks on the Canongate. Although the present building was constructed by Sir Lewis Bellenden in 1591 (Historic Environment Scotland Designations Portal: Listed Building No. 27582), a Tolbooth is first mentioned as early as 1471 (Dennison 2008: 59); it was the administrative centre of the Canongate, serving as its courthouse, burgh jail and the town council chamber.

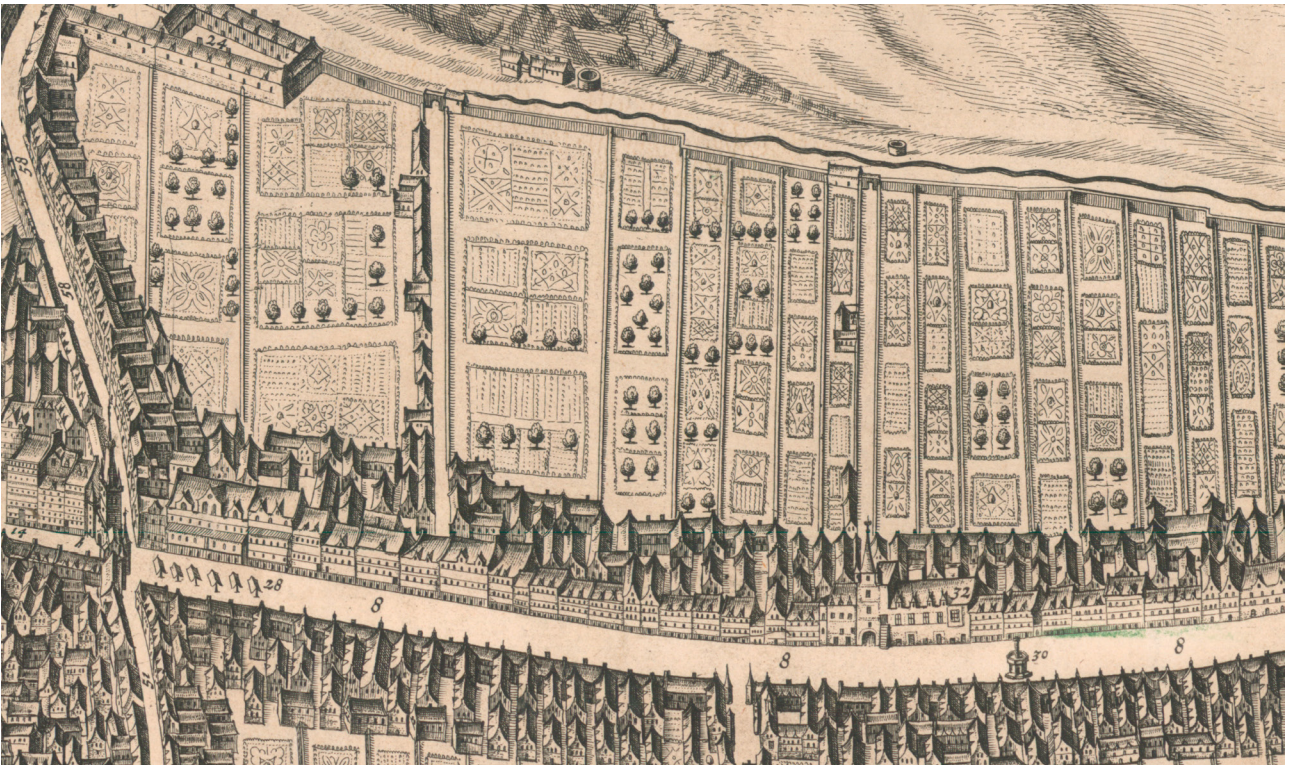
The medieval and post-medieval burgh was marked by the variety of its inhabitants, as ‘the south side of Canongate attracted a multitude of wealthier residents, with many of Scotland’s landed gentry building large townhouses with extensive gardens stretching down to the South Back of Canongate ... to be close to the Royal Court based at Holyrood Palace. Land to the north of Canongate was more densely packed, with the lower classes filling the tenements fronting onto the street, and also squeezed into the backlands down to North Back of Canongate’ (Adamson et al 2016: 10).

Pottery dated as early as the 12th century was recovered during an earlier evaluation of the New Street Gasworks site (Gooder 2000), while pottery dated to the 14th century has been recovered from Canongate Churchyard to the east of the Gasworks (Canmore ID 52463; Simpson et al 1981: 58). To the south, at 146 Canongate, Huntly House, excavations in 1988 identified a large pit with pottery sherds dating to around the 13th century (Holmes 1987). Deposits from 22 Calton Road (Jones & Holden 2003) to the east of the Gasworks contained 13th- to 15th-century garden deposits and soils, while nearby the excavations at Canongate Poorhouse (Engl forthcoming) confirmed the extent of the medieval ‘backlands’ north of the Canongate.

### 3.3 Post-medieval Canongate (AD c 1560–1900)

Through the 16th and 17th centuries important nobles established houses along the Canongate (Dennison 2005: 76). However, while many of these were associated with large gardens, giving much of the Canongate a rural aspect, there was some evidence for backlands repletion, marked by ‘the emergence of closes giving access to the properties to the rear of the forelands’ (ibid). Pre-Ordnance Survey maps of the Canongate area can give some idea of the nature (and in particular the density) of settlement. One of the earliest depictions of the Canongate appears on *Edenburghum Scotiae Metropolis* in 1582 by Braun and Hogenberg (not illustrated), which depicts a profusion of buildings fronting on the Canongate and occasional buildings in the backlands on the north side of the Canongate.

James Gordon of Rothiemay’s map of 1647 (Illus 4) shows the built-up frontage of the Canongate with largely undeveloped gardens behind, with only occasional buildings in the backlands, for example along the western side of Tolbooth Wynd (now known as Old Tolbooth Wynd). A wall is shown to bound the northern limit of these backlands, with closes linking the North Back with the Canongate. No buildings appear to have encroached within the area which was to later become the New Street Gasworks behind the busy Canongate frontage, with the possible exception of the aforementioned buildings along the western side of Tolbooth Wynd, and a building on the north wall at the northern end of Tolbooth Wynd.



**Illus 4** Detail from 1647 *Bird's Eye View of Edinburgh in 1647* by James Gordon of Rothiemay, Edinburgh: W & A K Johnston (published c 1870) (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland and under Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0))

Rothiemay's map identifies the relatively less dense occupation of the burgh of Canongate in comparison to Edinburgh at this time, as 'Canongate was far more open, with much of the land behind the main street frontages ... used for semi-agricultural purposes' (Adamson et al 2016: 12).

Several other early maps show the largely undeveloped nature of the Canongate backlands until the late 18th century, with the backlands 'utilised to grow food for the residents (north side), or as ornamental gardens for the wealthier landowners in the burgh (south side)' (Adamson et al 2016: 38). The lack of depicted industrial sites is notable although 'John Ainslie's map of 1780 ... does show Chessel's Court being used as an Excise Office, indicating that ... a substantial amount of trade was crossing the burgh boundary' (ibid). However, this lack of visible large-scale industrial sites belies the extent of craft and trade activities that took place in the area in this period. Dennison suggests that in the 17th century '... the craftsmen of Canongate continued to outnumber merchants since the burgh now functioned very much as a manufacturing suburb of Edinburgh' (Dennison 2005: 98).

Of particular interest in understanding the trades practised on the Canongate to the south of the future gasworks site at this time is the presence of the Category B Listed 195 and 197 Canongate, Shoemakers' Land (HESDP: Listed Building No. 28437). According to Adamson et al (2016: 91), 'the stretch from 185 to 197 Canongate has long associations with the Incorporation of Cordiners (shoemakers). The 17th century tenement at 195–7 Canongate, known as Shoemakers' Land, was rebuilt and added to in 1725 by the Incorporation'. This represents much of the Canongate frontage just south of where the New Street Gasworks would later be built. Nearby, the Category B Listed Bible Land, 183–187 (Odd Numbers) Canongate, Edinburgh (HESDP: Listed Building No. 28434) 'was built for the Incorporation of Cordiners in 1677' and has a 'pedimented cartouche, dated 1677, [which] depicts the Cordiners' emblem, the shoemakers' knife, flanked by cherubs' heads and an open book'.

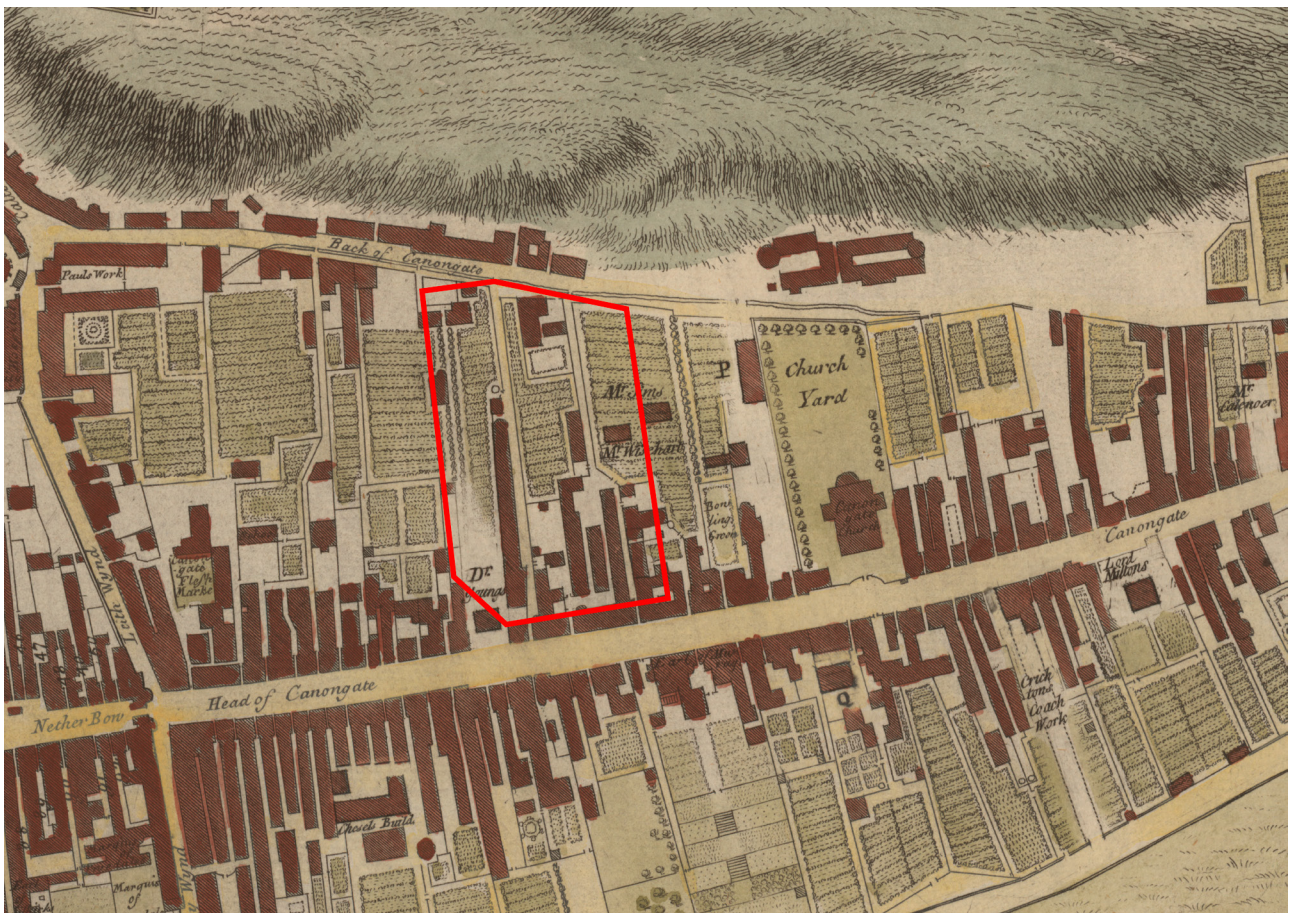
The south side of the Canongate, in particular, was marked by a concentration of wealthy residents, attracted by proximity to the Parliament and the Royal Palace at Holyrood. However, with the Act of

Union of 1707 removing the Scottish Parliament, and the monarchy being absent from Scotland from the Civil War until 1822, such wealthy residents gradually moved away (Adamson et al 2016: 55). Between 1775 and 1790 the population of the Canongate rose from *c* 4,500 to *c* 6,200 and by this time the area contained a multitude of dwellings, both of the wealthy and the poor, the area being marked by an assortment of closes and the insertion of new streets, including New Street. First known as Young Street in the late 1700s, New Street was seen as a bold civic improvement scheme ‘designed to avoid the lack of privacy and squalor of the main street’ (ibid: 117).

Edgar’s 1765 map (Illus 5) shows several building lines extending northwards from the Canongate, expanding into the future Gasworks site from the south. While open ground, the map shows that cultivation plots still predominated in the north of the backlands, with occasional

buildings marked against the north wall, and structures within the future Gasworks site also include properties belonging to ‘Mr Sims’ and ‘Mr Wisehart’. New Street had been broken through to link the Canongate with the North Back by the time of Kincaid’s 1784 map (Illus 3). Cultivation and trees appear to be limited to the east side of the area between New Street and Tolbooth Wynd. Several closes running from the Canongate into the area where the Gasworks would be constructed are named on Kincaid’s map, including Shoe Maker’s Close, Jack’s Close, Eastmost Jack’s Close, Entry to the Bowling Green (Bowling Green Close) and Aitken’s Close.

In 1799, a Mr Dougal MacDougal, cowfeeder of Tolbooth Wynd, having bought land and several ‘old houses’ in Tolbooth Wynd from the heirs of Francis Montgomery, obtained a warrant from the Dean of Guild to erect a stone-built, three-storey tenement in the area. In the course of this development part



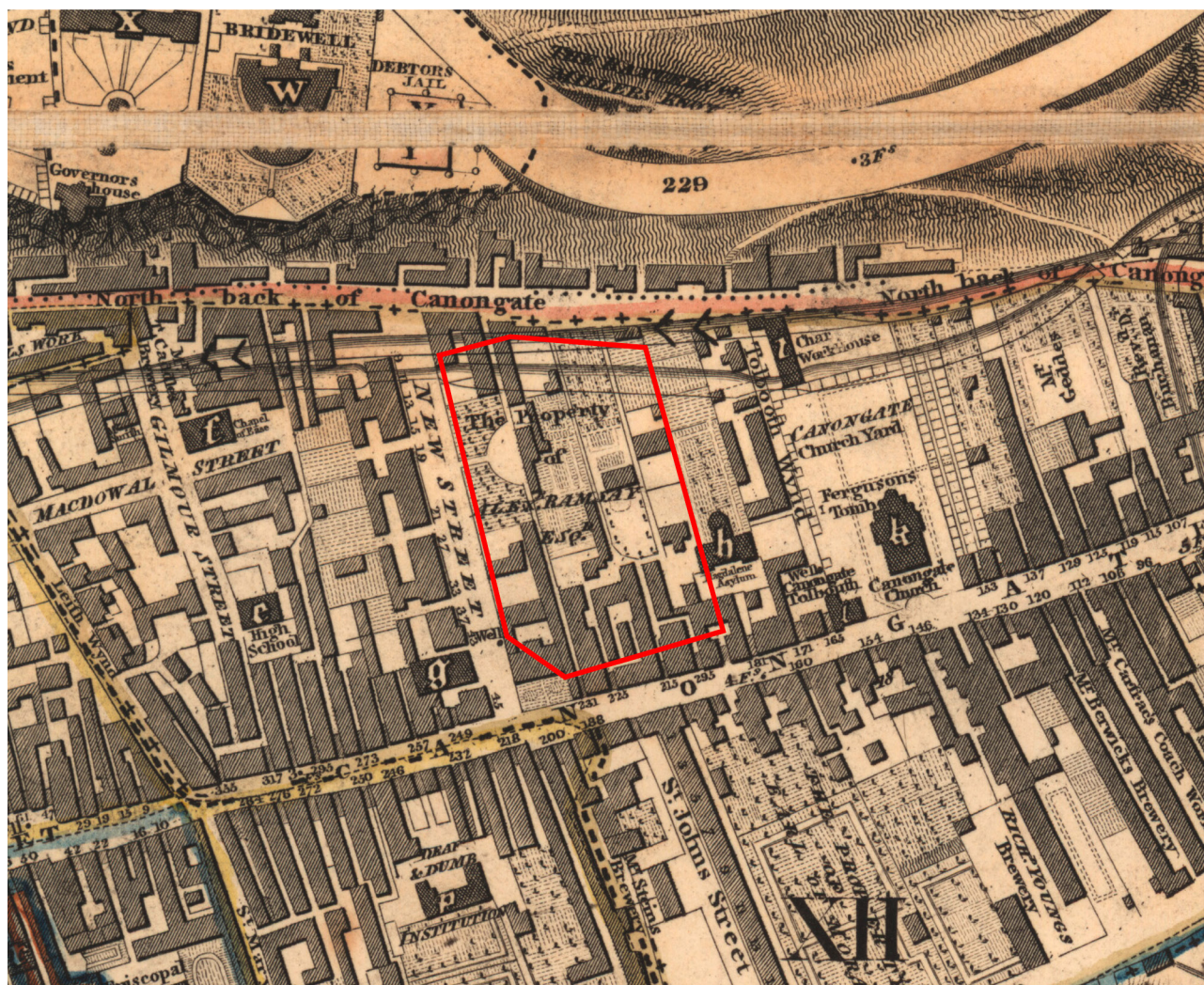
**Illus 5** Detail from *Plan of the City and Castle of Edinburgh* by Willm Edgar architect anno 1765 (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland and under Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0))

of an old tenement 'which was built with lath and plaster' was demolished (Edinburgh City Archives: Dean of Guild Court April 1799). It would seem, therefore, that up to this date some timber-built structures survived in this area of Edinburgh. Indeed, timber construction may have been prevalent in the initial spread of domestic buildings into the future Gasworks site during the early 18th century.

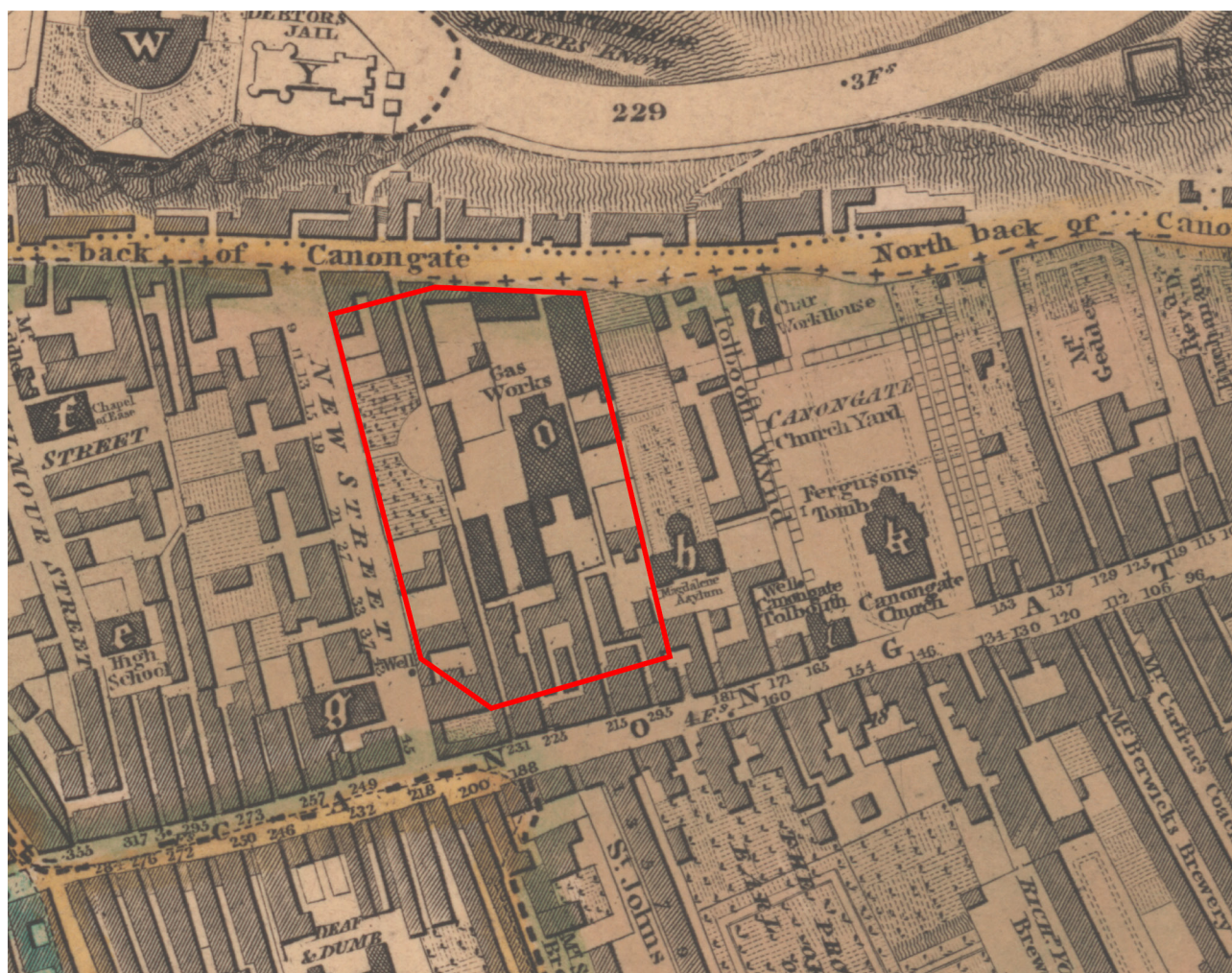
Robert Kirkwood's map of 1817 (Illus 6) depicts the area north of the Canongate, between New Street (to the west) and Tolbooth Wynd (to the east) just prior to the construction of the first buildings of the Gasworks and can be compared with James Kirkwood's 'New Plan' of 1821 which depicts a large building annotated as 'Gas Works' in the centre of the plot (Illus 7). The Canongate frontage is well

developed, and there are numerous buildings on the south side of the North Back of Canongate, although much of the area where the Gasworks would be constructed appears to be gardens, surrounding broadly spaced buildings in the centre of the area between the Canongate and the North Back, an area labelled 'The Property of Alex[ande]r Ramsay Esq[ui]r[e]' in Illus 6. This could be a descendant of the poet Allan Ramsay, whose daughter is known to have lived on New Street in the late 18th century (MacKay 1879: 123; Grant 1883: 18).

One of the buildings in this area, though unlabelled, can tentatively be identified as the former property of Mr Wischart, shown on Edgar's map a half century before, and imminently to be removed by the construction of one of the largest Gasworks



Illus 6 Detail from *This Plan of the City of Edinburgh and its Environs*, 1817. Edinburgh: Kirkwood & Son (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland and under Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0))



**Illus 7** Detail from Kirkwood's *New Plan of the City of Edinburgh*, 1821 (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland and under Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0))

buildings. The Kirkwood maps also provide early depictions of the Magdalene Asylum, recently built to the east of the area where the Gasworks would be constructed, and marked as an 'h' on Illus 7.

The loss of the Scottish Parliament and the absence of the monarchy in Scotland throughout the 18th century reduced the status of Canongate. This was exacerbated in the later 18th century by the building of the New Town and was further driven in 1817 by the opening of Regent Street 'along the foot of Calton Hill', which became the main route into Edinburgh from the east, in lieu of Canongate High Street (Dennison 2005: 130). The gradual departure of Canongate's wealthier residents in the later 18th and early 19th centuries perhaps facilitated, or at least permitted, the construction of industrial sites such as the Gasworks and the various Canongate

breweries. Pollution from the Gasworks was one reason for the movement of wealthier residents out of New Street and the wider Canongate area to the New Town.

The National Record of the Historic Environment records further post-medieval sites in the vicinity of the Gasworks and the western Canongate, several of which indicate the importance of the brewery industry in the late post-medieval period, as 'the "cottage-industry" style of brewhouses within tenements and their backlands expanded into commercial operations making use of underground springs ... accessed via a number of wells the length of the Canongate' (Adamson et al 2016: 39). A 17th-century tenement (later a brewery) is present at 124 Canongate (Canmore ID 52374) to the east of the Gasworks, while a 19th-century brewery

and tenement is located at 114–120 Canongate (Canmore ID 332344). Geology and water quality in the vicinity of Calton Hill suited the brewing industry, with the Drybrough or Dryburgh's brewery being set up around the North Back of Canongate in the 1780s (Adamson et al 2016: 144). A variety of maltings and brewery buildings were to be found at the foot of Calton Hill and north Canongate in the early 19th century (ibid: 145), including the Calton Hill Brewery. The expansion of the breweries in Canongate during the middle and late 19th century saw 'most sinking their own boreholes on site to tap into an uninterrupted and more easily controlled water supply, thus avoiding any contamination' (ibid: 39).

The coming of the North British Railway to Edinburgh in the mid-1840s boosted industrial activity in Canongate, permitting the easier importation of raw material and exportation of products. Industries established in the Canongate around that time included several in proximity to the Gasworks, most pertinently the Canongate Iron Foundry on Old Tolbooth Wynd. Other industries operating in the area included an aerated water works, various iron and brass foundries, the Holyrood Flint Glass Works, tanneries, a corn mill, a confectionery works and smithies. Adamson et al (2016: 156) also note the development of premises for storage of goods and raw material including 'several large timber yards ... in the north-western section of Canongate, and an associated cooperage ... probably manufacturing barrels for the nearby breweries'. As late as the 1890s the provision of transport for the import of raw materials and export of products for the New Street Gasworks (and the other gas-producing plants then active in Edinburgh) 'was confined to the North British Railway System' (Herring 1907: vi).

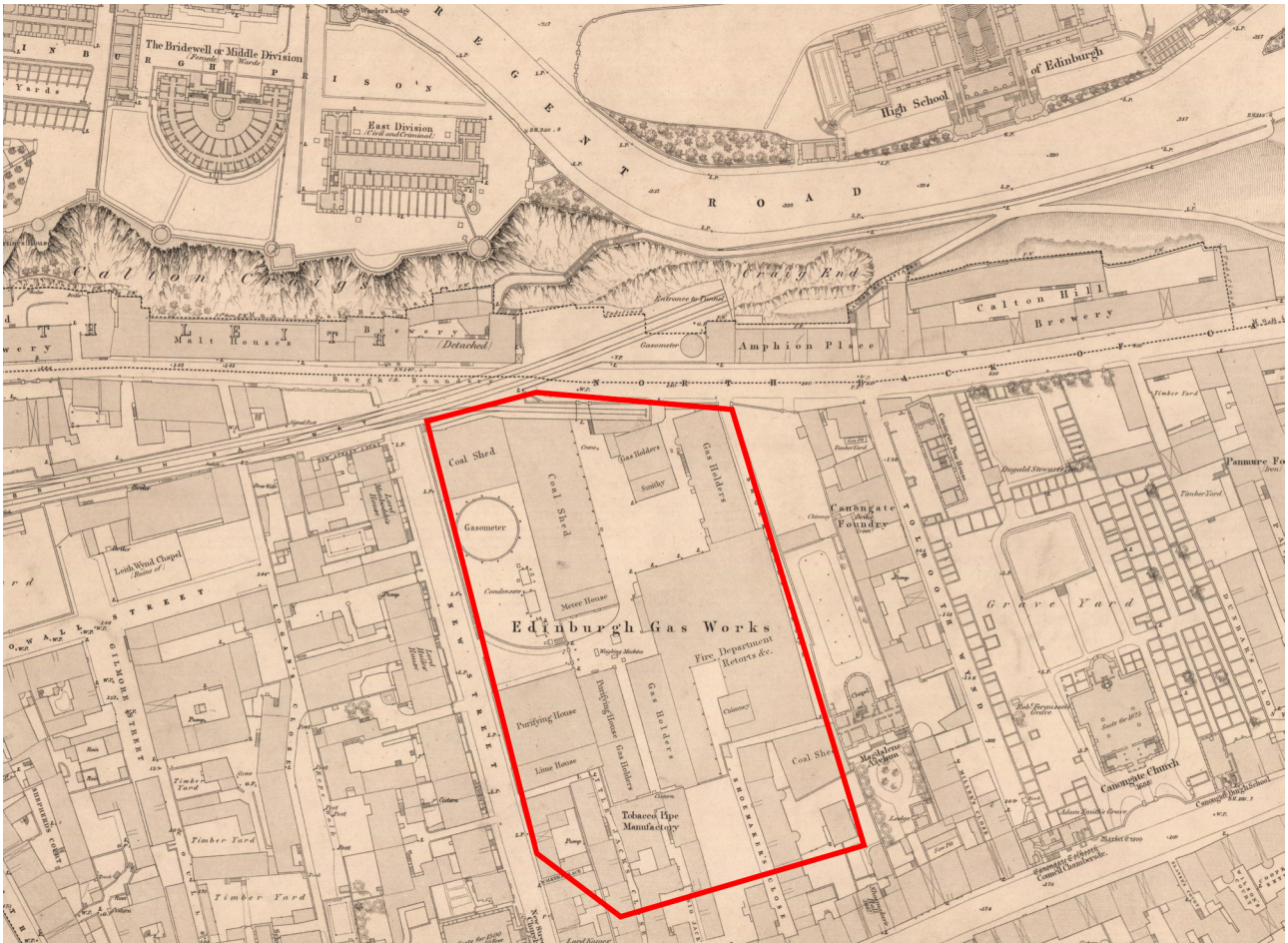
By the later 19th century, the burgh of Canongate had been joined with Edinburgh, with the passing of the Edinburgh Municipal Extension Act on 23 June 1856 (MacKay 1879: 22). Major urban improvements were undertaken following the Edinburgh City Improvement Act 1867, with tenements being improved and new streets created across the area (Adamson et al 2016: 17). However, Dennison records the poverty in housing of many of the area's inhabitants, as 'in 1861 the Canongate Registration District had 47 per cent of families in

one room dwellings' (Dennison 2005: 150) and even in the late 19th century the area was still marked by poverty in housing provision, as 'the Canongate ... was suffering from a lack of investment and severe overcrowding' (Adamson et al 2016: 20).

### 3.4 New Street and its vicinity

New Street, to the west of the Gasworks, originated as an improving development around 1760, when it was known as Young Street, providing access between Canongate and the North Back of Canongate. Several buildings were cleared for the insertion of New Street, including the mansions of the Earls of Angus and of Henry Kinloch, the latter 'a wealthy burgher of the Canongate in the days of Queen Mary' (Grant 1883: 18). Inhabitants of New Street in the 18th century included high-status individuals such as the eminent judge Henry Home, Lord Kames, who was one of the Lords of Session between 1752 and 1782; Sir David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, a Lord of Session between 1766 and 1792; Lady Betty Anstruther, and Christian (or Jean) Ramsay, daughter of the poet Allan Ramsay, and Dr Thomas Young (MacKay 1879: 122–3; Grant 1883: 18). The last was 'a pioneering Professor of Midwifery at University of Edinburgh (1756–83)' for whom the street was likely originally named (Adamson et al 2016: 140); his detached house is visible at the south end of the street on Edgar's plan of 1765 (Illus 5). Lord Kames' house is marked on the Ordnance Survey map of 1854, surveyed in 1852 (Illus 8) on the east side of New Street, close to the Gasworks.

MacKay's description of New Street notes that 'the houses, as originally designed and occupied, consisted of self-contained dwellings of three and four flats and sunk areas ... tenanted by members of the aristocracy and the elite of the citizens' (MacKay 1879: 122). The street was 'a private one, with posts and chains, till declared a public one in 1786', though essentially it was only made public in 1819 'when power was reserved by the late Dr Thomas Young's representatives to make New Street a public access from the High Street of the Canongate to the road at the foot of Calton Hill' (Boog Watson 1923: 95). By the late 19th century the street was 'sorely faded and decayed' but it was still said to contain 'a series of semi-aristocratic, detached, and not



**Illus 8** Ordnance Survey 1854 (Surveyed 1852) *Edinburgh* Sheet 30, scale 1:1056 (Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland and under Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0))

indigent mansions of the plain form peculiar to the time' (Grant 1883: 18). MacKay notes that by 1879 'the houses in New Street are now divided into shops and separate flats, and what was a garden fronting the houses, is now occupied by the Edinburgh Gas Company Works' (MacKay 1879: 124).

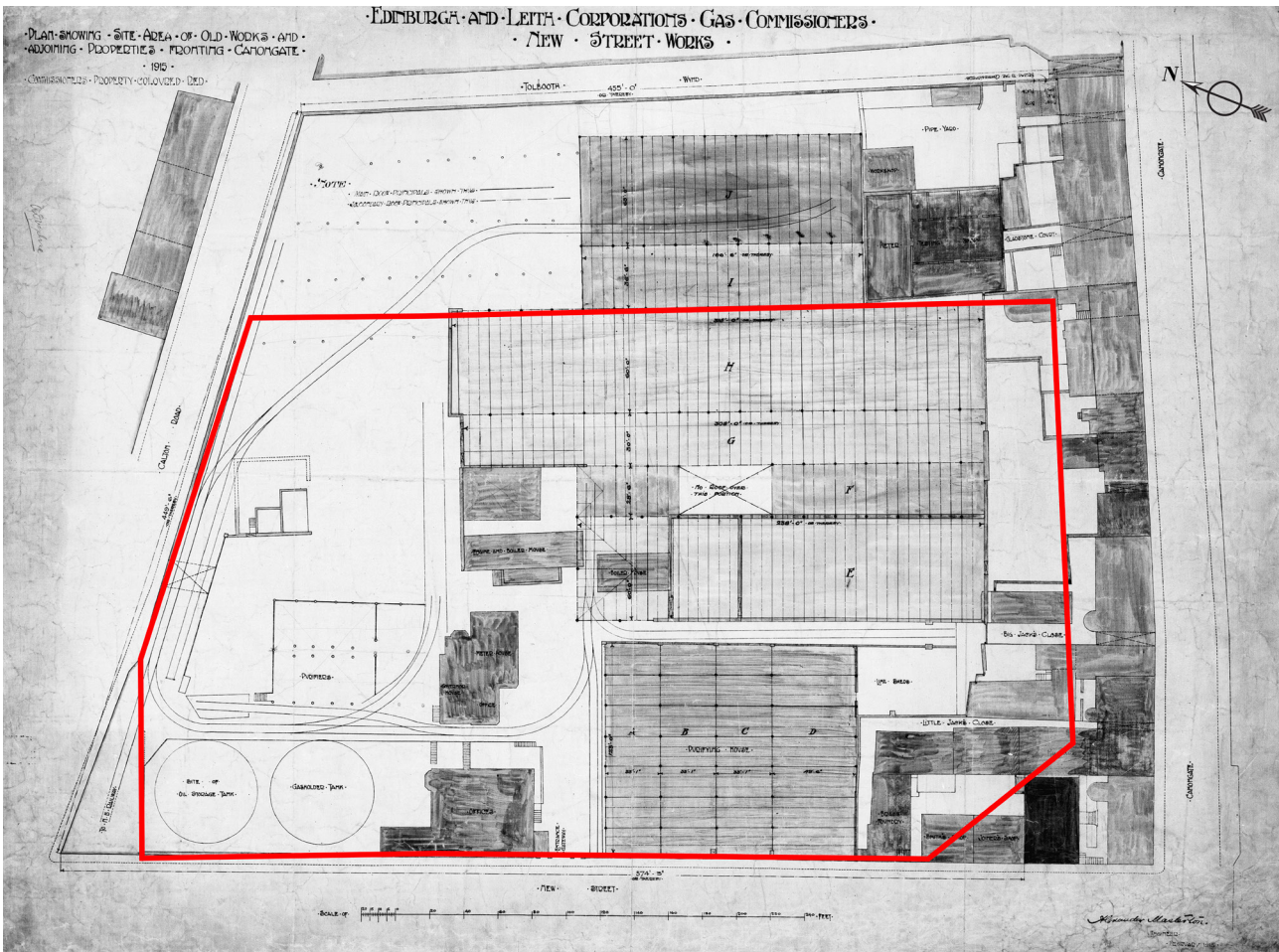
Old Tolbooth Wynd to the east of the Gasworks was another route from the high ground of the Canongate down towards Calton Road to the north. It 'takes its name from the Tolbuith of the Canongate, the entrance to the close being a vaulted pend under the Tolbooth itself' (Boog Watson 1923: 98).

The main entries to the north of the Canongate between New Street and Tolbooth Wynd were two closes: Little Jack's Close (to the west) and Big Jack's Close (to the east), both visible on historic mapping. 'Jack's Closs' appears on Ainslie's map of 1780 (not illustrated) between New Street and Shoemakers' Close. Much later, the two Jack's Closes are also marked on a 'Plan showing site area

of Old Works and adjoining properties fronting Canongate 1915' (Illus 9), made by the Edinburgh and Leith Corporation's Gas Commissioners, which shows the New Street Gas Works in detail (HES EDD 747/1). According to Boog Watson, the close was:

known formerly as Mausie Smith's Close. Massia or Mausey Smith was wife of Patrick Heart ... The subjects on the east side of New Street, sold by Dr Thomas Young to Henry Home, Lord Kaims, were bounded on the east by subjects belonging to the heirs of John Jack and the close called Mausey Smith's Close or Jack's Close (i.e. Little Jack's Close; the 'Big' and 'Little' refer to the width of the entrances). Mausie Smith seems to have owned the property in her own right. The two closes take their names from Jack's land, which lies between them; it was built





**Illus 9** Edinburgh, New Street Gasworks Survey site plan, Alex Masterson, Engineer, Edinburgh and Leith Corporation's Gas Commissioners EDD 747/1 (© HES)

by Robert Jack, slater, and finished after his death by his brother John, also a slater. Robert had acquired part of the property from John Riddle, M.D., and his wife Jean Livingstone, on 10th May 1738, and partly from Robert Tod, senior, merchant in Edinburgh. John Jack was a captain ... a slater by trade, a bailie

of the Canongate, with property there and also in Edinburgh; he died before 27th July 1753 ... There are frequent references in the protocols to John Jack, tiler or slater, and his scattered properties ... Big Jack's Close was known also as Jack's Close or East Jack's Close. (Boog Watson 1923: 96-7)