

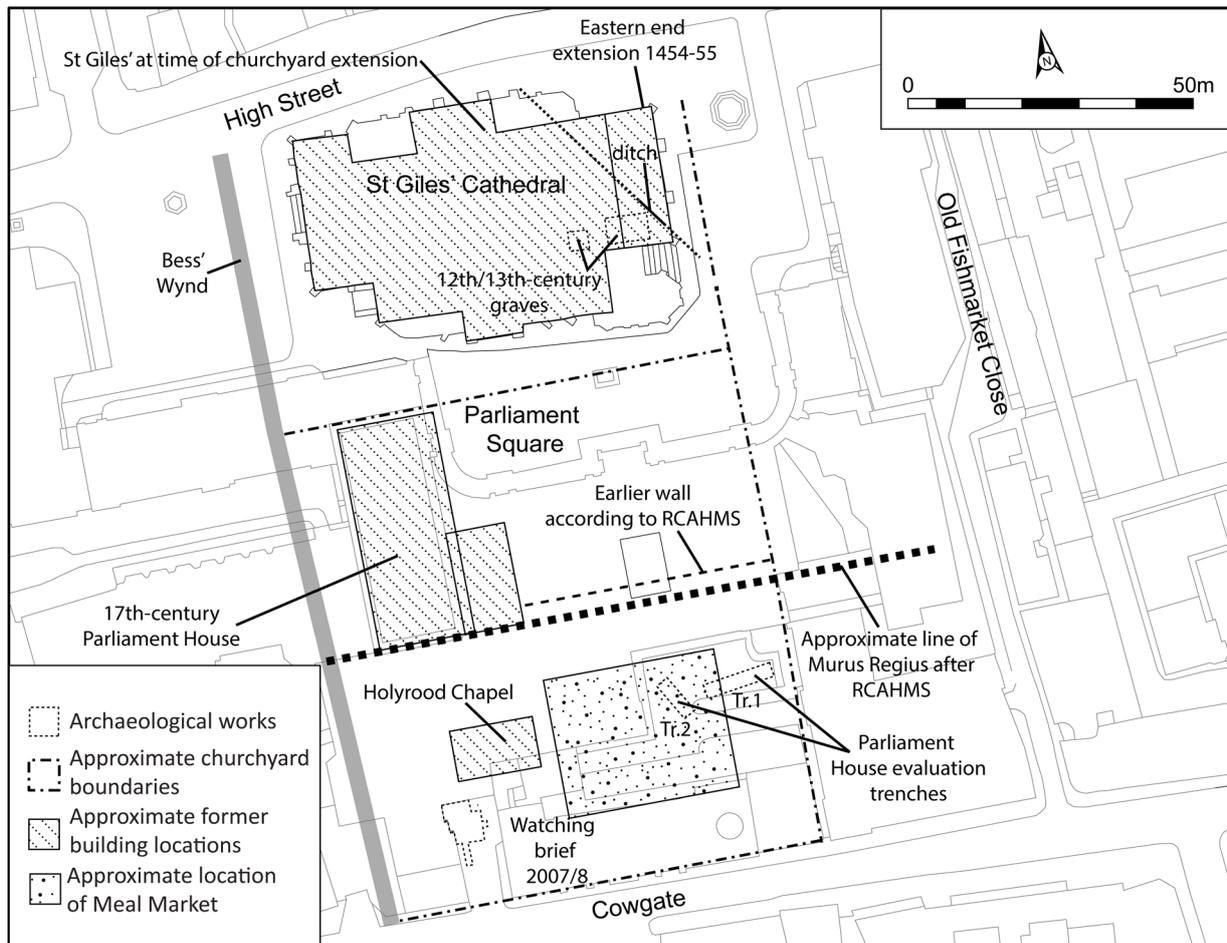
3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

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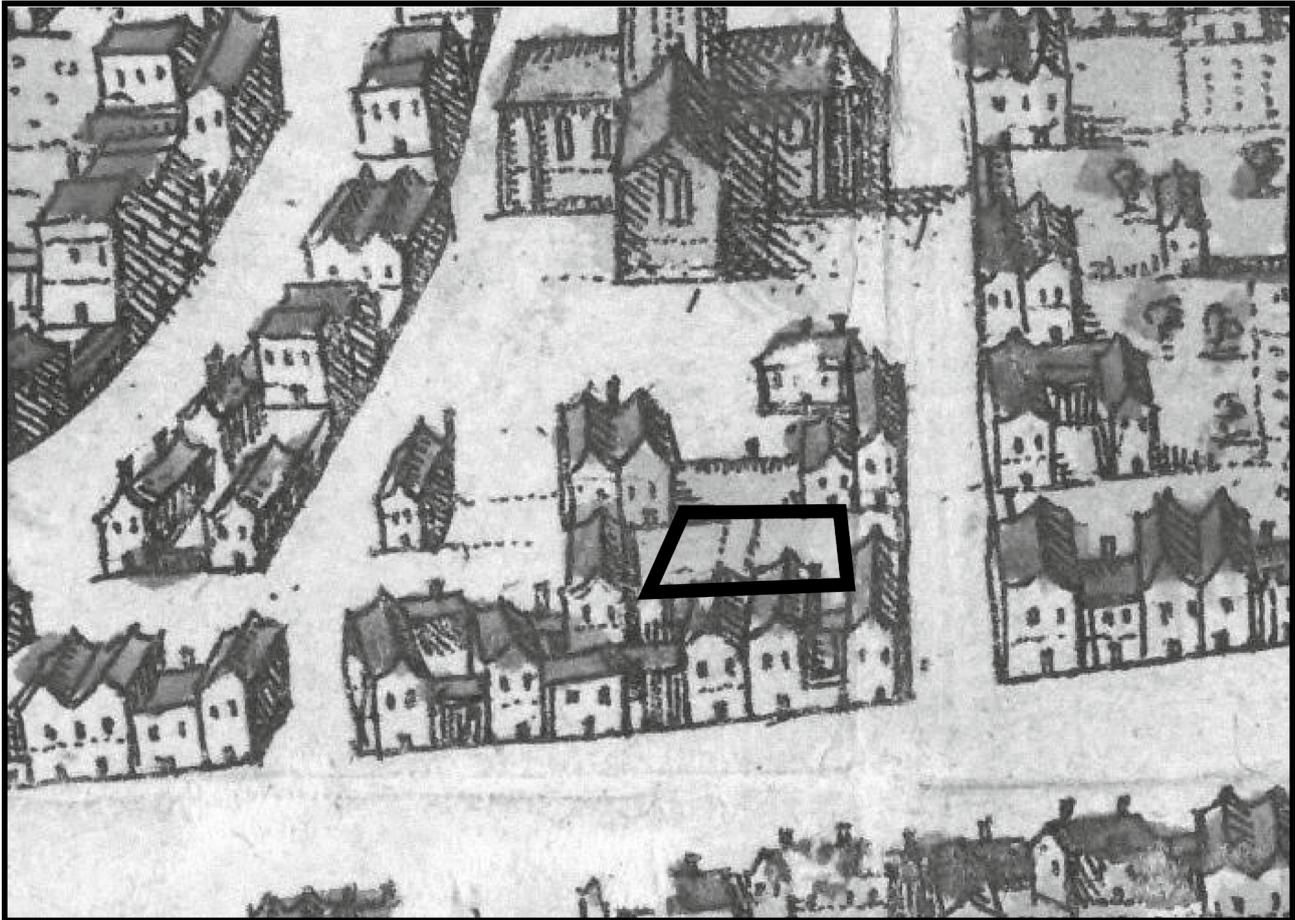
The site now occupied by Parliament House has for over 500 years been one of the major religious, commercial, administrative and legal centres of the city of Edinburgh. The Southern Courtyard lay within the precincts of St Giles' and formed part of a southern extension of its churchyard from around the mid-to-late 15th century (Illus 4).

The church of St Giles was probably an Anglian foundation; the existence of a church in Edinburgh (belonging to the monastery at Lindisfarne) was noted in AD 834 (Lees 1889: 2) and it was the parish church of the burgh from the 12th century (Collard et al 2006: 4). The earliest known surviving fabric is medieval, belonging to its use as Edinburgh's parish church, its original structure being concentrated at

the west end of the present building (RCAHMS 1951: 26). In 1981 excavations in the south choir aisle of St Giles' Cathedral revealed a ditch aligned north-west/south-east, which may have marked the eastern boundary of the parish church precincts from the time of its establishment under David I (Collard et al 2006: 9, 67–8). Collard, Lawson and Holmes projected the line of this ditch to form the later western edge of Kirkheugh, the steep vennel that ran along the eastern side of the churchyard (Collard et al 2006: 67, illus 5 and 6). To the south, the medieval town walls of Edinburgh, including the 15th-century *Murus Regius* or King's Wall, may have run roughly east/west across or very close to the Southern Courtyard area (Lawson & Reed 2003: 1; Illus 1). Nearby, at 144–166 Cowgate, a putative ditch, up to 4m wide, was identified to the south of the King's Wall (Dalland 2017: 10, 24–6), indicating potential for a similar defensive ditch feature to exist in proximity to the present site.



Illus 4 Reconstructed plan of St Giles' graveyard (© AOC Archaeology Group)



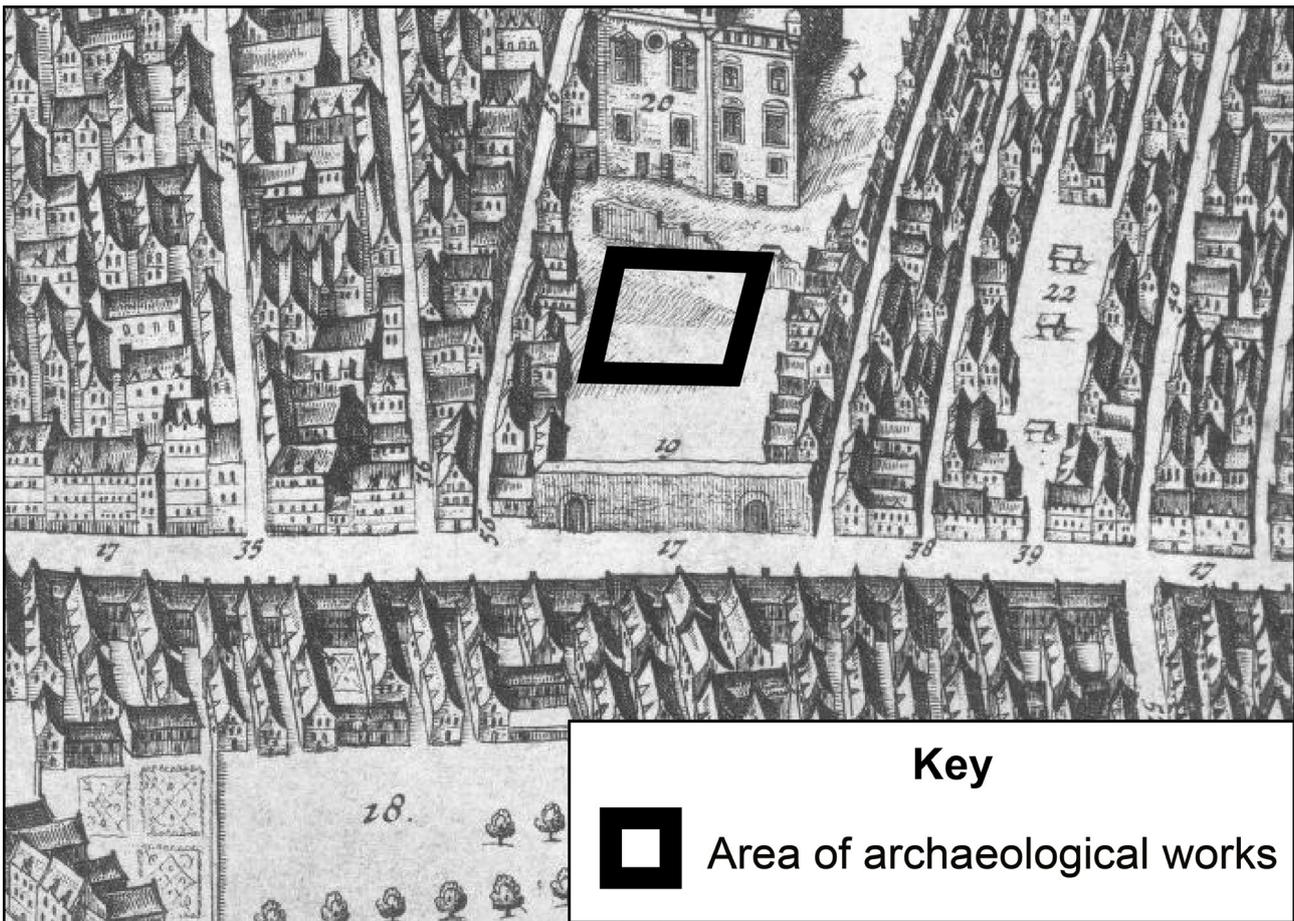
Illus 5 Braun, Georg & Hogenberg, Franz, c 1582, *Edenburgum, Scotiae Metropolis*, Cologne
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A massive ditch has recently been excavated at East Market Street, further demonstrating the potential for medieval defensive features on the edges of the burghs of Edinburgh and Canongate (Lowther 2018: 10–11).

Braun and Hogenberg's perspective view (Illus 5) depicts the church with its churchyard to the south and buildings lining the closes to either side, presumably Best's, Beth's or Bess' Wynd (Boog Watson 1923: 64–5) to the west and Kirkheugh to the east (Braun & Hogenberg 1582). The area is also illustrated, following the construction of the Parliament House, in Gordon of Rothiemay's perspective view of 1647 (Illus 6), which shows ruinous walls possibly associated with the churchyard or the *Murus Regius*. The building line to the east of the former cemetery, not quite perpendicular to the High Street, can be seen in Edgar's map of 1765 (Illus 7), preserved in Old Mealmarket Close, or Kirkheugh (Boog Watson 1923: 66–7).

The rental of various altars at St Giles', begun in 1369, provides one of the earliest descriptions of the townscape (*St Giles Reg* no. 156). The vennel leading to the burial ground seems to have had a north and south corner, suggesting a street lying east/west (*St Giles Reg*: p 276; p 280). Neither of two speculative reconstructions of the area shows such a street (Ross et al 1922: 128; Kerr 1925: 9) unless one may have run along the south side of the churchyard, which then only extended part of the way down the slope to the Cowgate.

An agreement to build five chapels on the south side of the church in 1387 (*Edin Chrs* no. 14) encroached upon an already limited external burial space. The glebe on the south side of the church was occupied by 'the priest with the cure of souls, the perpetual vicar' (*St Giles Reg*: p xxiv; Cowan 1967: 177), and in 1467–8, St Giles' was erected into a collegiate church, with 18 priests and four choristers (*St Giles Reg* no. 82; *Edin Chrs* no. 43).



Illus 6 Gordon of Rothiemay, c 1647, *Edinodunensis Tabulam* (© Crown Copyright, reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland)

Laing suggests the prebendaries lived on the west side of the churchyard, and the Provost on the east (*St Giles Reg*: p xxii).

In the mid-1440s, the churchyard was bounded to the west by a burgage plot and on the east by Kirkheugh (*St Giles Reg* nos 51, 62 and 66). The only direction to expand the burial space was south, but Provost Forbes' manse and garden stood in the way. However, Forbes donated much of his glebe in 1477–8, delineated as follows:

That part of my garden with the pertinents ... beginning at the vennel which lies on the east side of the garden, running from the south street commonly called the Cowgate as far as the said church and cemetery adjoin it; and extending from the east part of the said cemetery towards the west as far as my manse and the outbuildings on the east side of the manse, and then descending towards the south in a straight line as far as the south end

of my yard or garden lying contiguous to the south end of aforesaid manse, and then under my said garden or yard towards the south, extending to the west just as the west part of my manse extends; and then descending to the south, as far as the said southern street commonly called the Cowgate; and from the west side to the east end of the said garden ... as a burial ground (*Edin Chrs* no. 50; *St Giles Reg* no. 88).

This suggests that the Provost's manse lay east/west, with its office houses to the east of it, and the gardens to the south. The donation was within part of the yards beside the manse (Wood 1974: 24). In 1496, when even this became insufficient, Forbes relinquished the northern part of his remaining glebe, which probably formed a rectilinear section to the west of the original cemetery, for additional burial space.

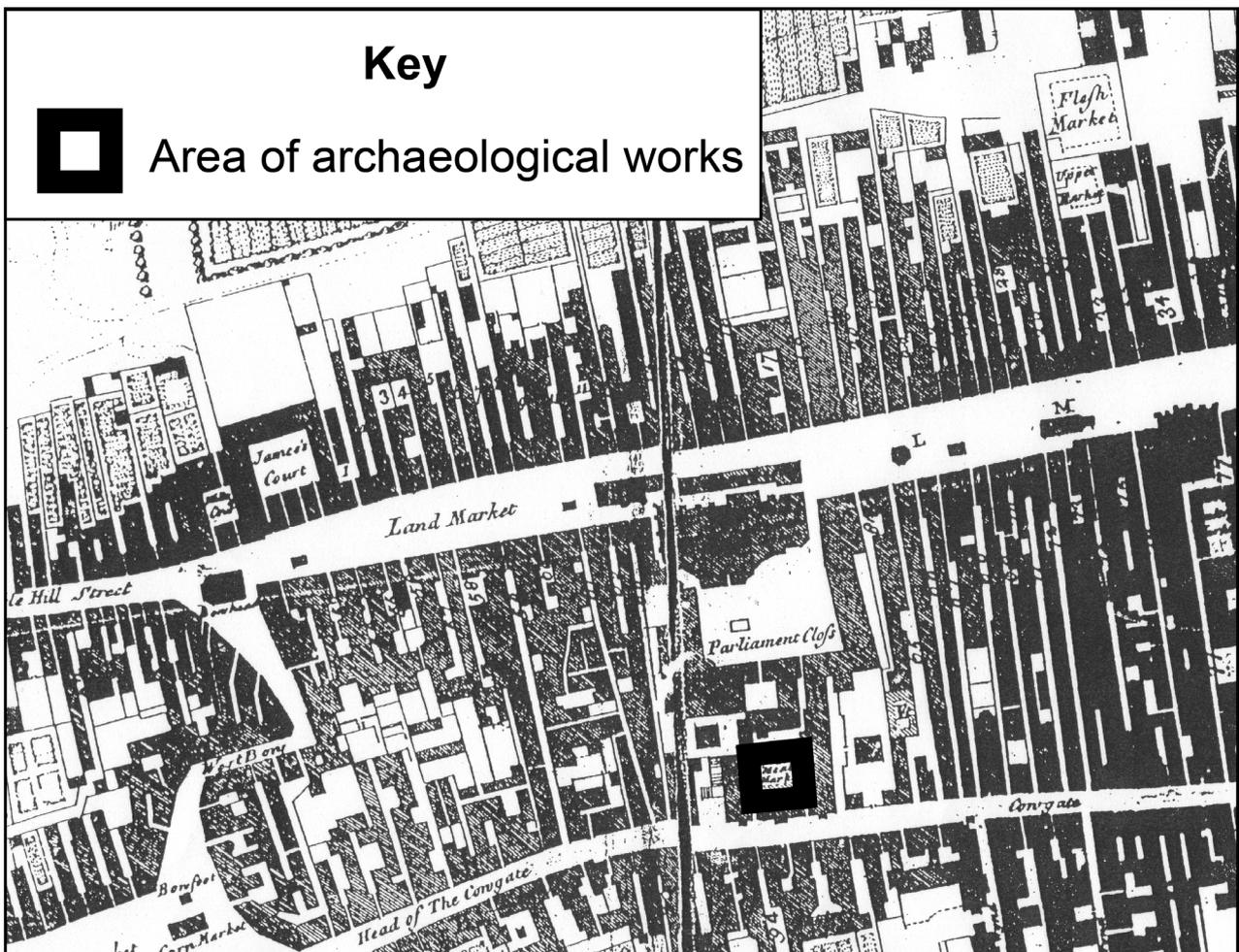
That north part of our manse and glebe of the aforesaid church, next to and immediately adjoining the manse, viz the land and chamber of the curate and the school below it ... extending from the said church to the north gable of the house commonly known as the stable, and from there directly in a line extending to the west as far as the lands of Alexander Gray and the late William Bigholme ... (*Edin Chrs* no. 57; *St Giles Reg* no. 111).

A sketch made in 1824 (ECL pYDA 1890 (1010)), after the fire of that year, purports to show part of the west wall of the churchyard, revealed during demolition work, some 250 feet (76m) north of the Cowgate. It had an ornamented entrance, which bore a date of 1620, just 12 years before Parliament House was constructed. It is possible, however, that

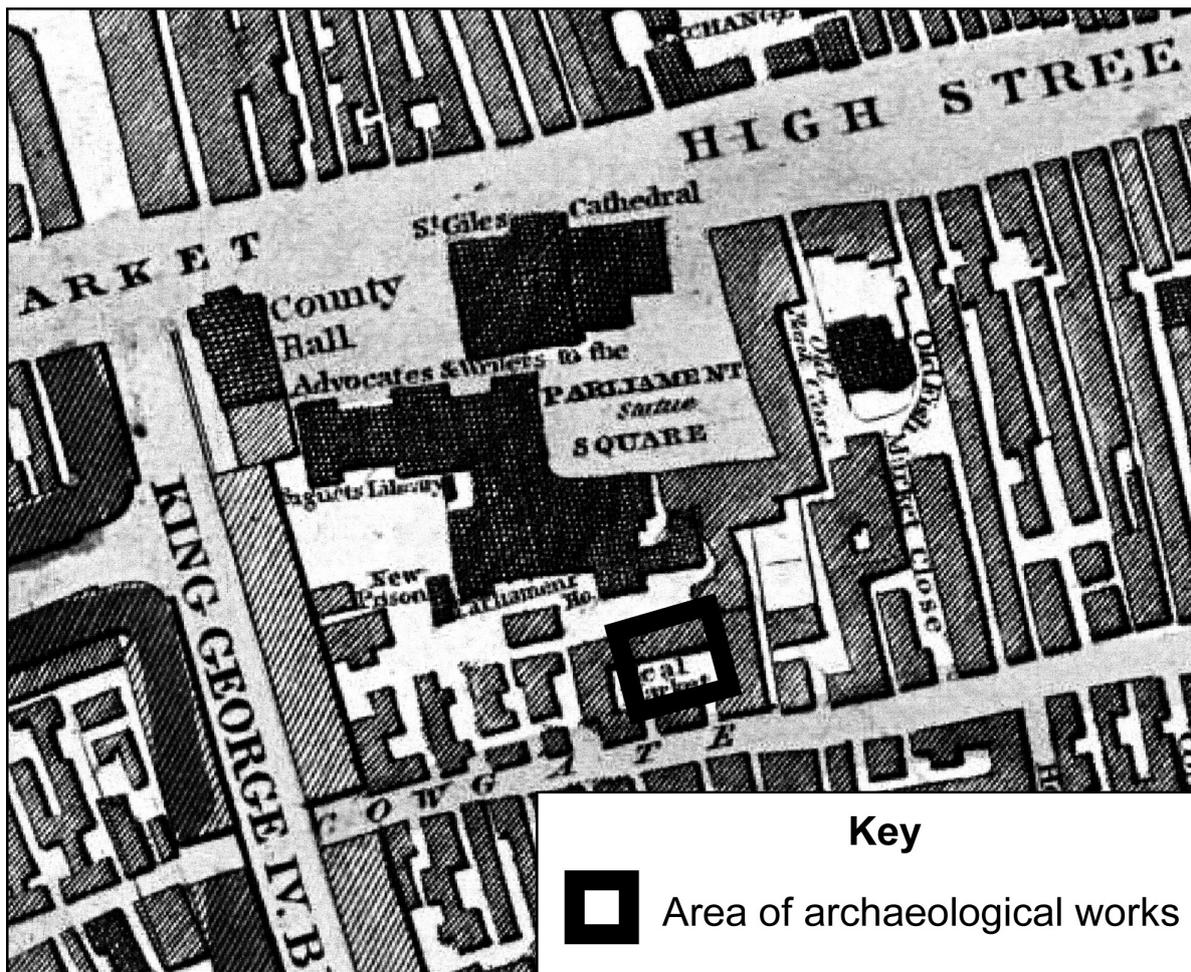
rather than belonging to the churchyard, it may have been an element of one of the houses of the clergy.

The western edge of the graveyard was lined by houses built on a tenement called after an early owner, Alexander Gray. This was in turn subdivided into five or six lands, bounded on the west by Best's or Bess' Wynd (Edgar's Close 63), which ran from the High Street to the Cowgate. The graveyard would thus have terminated at the eastern wall of the houses approximately in a line with the eastern facade of the 'New Tolbooth' (Kerr 1925: 13, fig 2), paralleling the pattern of the eastern precinct edge. Here the 15th-century church expansion eastwards forced Kirkheugh Close to dogleg around it to reach the High Street (Collard et al 2006: 68), suggesting that the original graveyard occupied the breadth of the church from east to west.

Property and financial transactions to the west and east of the churchyard were recorded by the notary



Illus 7 Edgar, William, 1765, *City and Castle of Edinburgh* (© Crown Copyright, reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland)



Illus 8 Wood, John & Brown, Thomas, 1831, *Plan of the City of Edinburgh, including all the latest and intended improvements*, P Brown and T Nelson, Edinburgh (© Crown Copyright, reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland)

John Foular between 1500 and 1534 (Macleod 1930; Wood 1941 and 1953; Durkan 1985). The individuals involved in property transactions to the west and east of St Giles' graveyard included a mix of metalworkers (goldsmiths, cutlers, locksmiths) and other burgesses or skilled craftsmen, clergy and legal officials, as might be expected around the courts (in the Tolbooth), the booth row, and church. The church precincts functioned as a public open space for both mercantile and solemn legal activity. Agreements for property outwith Edinburgh were signed in the cemetery in 1490, which may have symbolically represented these other places (Donaldson 1952: nos 356, 1101). In 1463 the town leased 'a hall with chambers and cellars in the kirkyard' to burgess Thomas Swift, and another space was let to William Baroun, probably to store merchandise (*Edin Recs* I: 22; RMS II no. 681). In

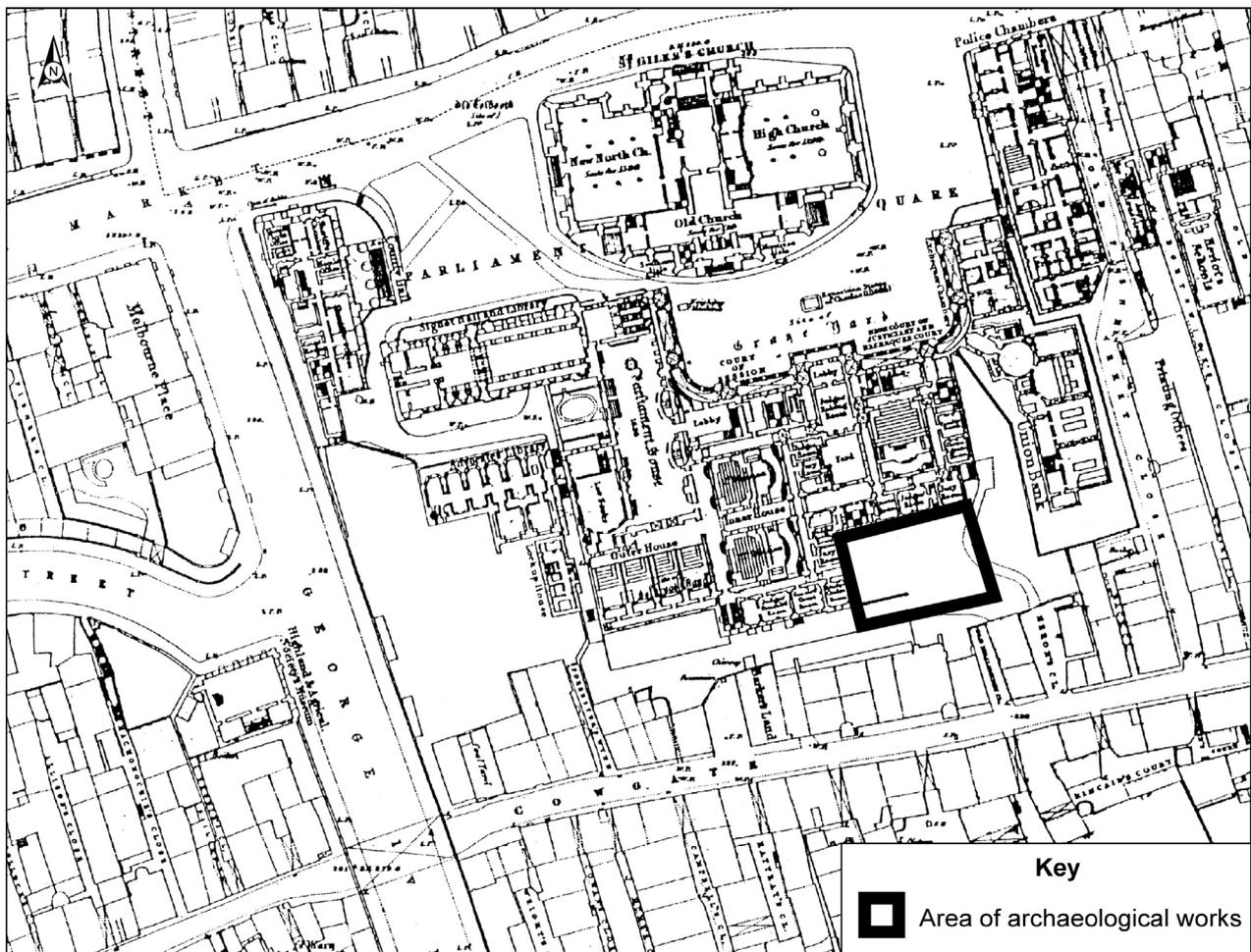
1538 the grass market was moved from 'aboue the Tolbuith ... to the fute of the kirk yaird' (*Edin Recs* II: 89), and in 1552 the burgh took income from 18 cordiners' shops, again, 'at the fute of the kirkyard'. In the 1550s the presence of a hospital and a song school in the churchyard are mentioned (*Edin Recs* II: 185, 192, 197, 285; Richardson 1910: 219).

As it was considered to be full, burial ceased in St Giles' churchyard around 1566, with the exception of the burial of John Knox in 1572 (Richardson 1910: 213–14). The Greyfriars burial ground then came into use – it had been given as a new burial ground for the town in February 1561–2 (RSS V, no. 3334; *Edin Recs* III: 132, 145–8). However, after the Reformation, at least some of the church ministers still lived in houses within the area of the churchyard (Richardson 1910: 216).

The Meal Market was moved to the lower churchyard in 1602, once timber sheds had been built on the site (Wood & Hannay 1927: 276, 300). Prior to this, it appears that shoemakers' shops were situated in the lower churchyard area (Maitland 1753: 185). Gordon of Rothiemay's 1647 plan (Illus 6) indicates the Meal Market area to be open, with a high wall fronting onto the Cowgate, pierced by two arched entrances, perhaps surviving elements of the *Murus Regius*. The Meal Market of the early 17th century was a relatively light structure made of wood, and landslip was a problem from early on (*Edin Recs* V: 289, 300, 374; VI: 135). Rothiemay's view of 1647 also depicts Parliament House at the northern end of the churchyard. Between 1632 and 1639 the original structure of Parliament House was built within the upper churchyard (Cullen 1992: 4), being erected over the site of three ministers' houses (Maitland 1753: 185; Cullen 1992: 2).

Following a fire in 1676, Thomas Robertson rebuilt the Meal Market in stone (Wood 1974: 32). The 'great fire' of 1700 destroyed most buildings east and south of Parliament Close (Maitland 1753: 112; Chambers 1824: 11–29). The redeveloped Meal Market, visible on Edgar's plan of 1765 (Illus 7), continued in its original function beyond the middle of the 18th century. By 1824 the Meal Market was a courtyard structure, as illustrated by Skene (ECL pYDA 1929 M48 (4952)), terraced into the hillside.

Another major fire, which began in the Meal Market in 1824, destroying all of Parliament Square east of Parliament House, prompted a new phase of redevelopment. The layout of Parliament Square around the 1820s can be seen in Wood and Brown's plan of 1831 (Illus 8) and between 1827 and 1835 the bulk of the present Parliament House complex was completed (Barber et al 2001: 66).



Illus 9 Ordnance Survey, 1849–53, Edinburgh, Sheet 35, 1:1056 (© Crown Copyright, reproduced by permission of the National Library of Scotland)

Human remains were noted during the digging of foundation trenches, both at the top of the slope near Parliament Close and beneath the supposed city wall (Anon 1833). During construction of court buildings in 1844–5, ridged, straight-sided oak coffins containing human remains were uncovered, 14 feet (4.27m) below the surface (Grant 1882: 245). The extensive development of the area at the time

is clearly visible on the 1849–53 Ordnance Survey (OS) map (Illus 9), with the northern, eastern and western ranges of the Meal Market being removed. Human bones, funerary sculpture and a north/south wall – possibly the original churchyard wall – were found during the construction of the Knights of the Thistle Chapel at the south-east corner of St Giles' (Inglis 1909).