

Middleton's plans are very detailed and he gave precise instructions to the carpenters, masons, bricklayers, smiths and the men who would excavate the foundations for the prison. His instructions for the excavation of the foundations for the prison were as follows:

'The trenches for the foundations of the respective walls, cesspools, bogs, drains, and all other works of the like kind, except the wells, are from time to time to be dug out of proper depth and width, the ground round the same well and repeatedly secured; the water, if any, raised from the respective cavities and carried therefrom, when and often as occasion shall require; the materials, pumps, engines, and other utensils, necessary on the occasion, are deemed a part of the above-mentioned works, and such labour as may be necessary in attending the bricklayers and carpenters, in completing the drains, cesspools, and foundations, to the underside of all sub or other plinths, and in case there should be any ground wanted to complete the said work, the same to be found and delivered from all other parts within the premises, and if too much to be brought to such a level, the at the underside of the sub-plinth to the building, and the underside of the curb of the palisade fences, to the external courts, be each of them six foot, above the level of the paving at the north-east angle of Baine's Row, and Cold-Bath-Square; the ground of the external and internal courts to be laid for paving with declivity from the underside of the sub-plinths of the principle building, fence, walls and curbs of the iron rails, to the sink stones, and the ground from the underside of the external plinths and curb to the building, to be laid in straight lines from thence to the channel stones, round the inside of the said boundary wall carried to and levelled within fifty feet of the outside of the said wall, and disposed so as to form, at the end of the work, levels suitable to the quality of ground that may be to remove; and from time to time carry away all soil and rubbish that may be made during the completing the works. ...'

The 1992 excavation (Fig 24, Site 3) found extensive brick foundations and walls, which formed part of the prison.

Fig 8 shows that layout of the prison buildings and also shows the existence of a smallpox hospital on the site of the Sir John Oldcastle tavern, which had been demolished approximately 30 years before the prison was built. Pinks tells us that in the 1740s Oliver Humphries, who leased the site of the tavern, signed over the premises for the remaining period of the lease to a charity. The charity, run by a Dr Poole, inoculated people against smallpox and treated people who had contracted the disease and between 1746 and 1770 had treated 7,946 people. Pinks says:

'The building of the hospital did not commence until 1753, when the trustees of "the Middlesex County Hospital for Smallpox" pulled down the house of Oliver Humphreys, and erected their hospital immediately adjacent, leaving the old mansion called the Sir John Oldcastle's still standing. Patients who took the disorder in the natural way ...deposited on going in one pound and sixpence, to defray the expenses of burial in case of death.'

In the 18th century the smallpox mortality rate was around 35% (A. Miles pers comms), which meant, that out of the 7,946 people treated, approximately 2,750 people would have died from the disease. It is likely that they were buried in the

nearby Spafields Burial Ground (Fig 23, ref 22), which is approximately 150m to the northeast of the site.

It is unclear from cartographic evidence and documentary evidence if the older tavern building was converted into the smallpox hospital prior, born out by similarity of the outline of the main building on Rocque's map with that seen on Middleton's plan, or if a new hospital building was built within the footprint of the old tavern. It would appear that the latter is more likely as Pinks says that the building:

'the old mansion styled by Sir John's was finally removed in 1762, and the trustees at the same period completed the hospital. Noothouck, who saw it in 1772, describes it as a vary plain, neat structure, and observes that on the top of an angular pediment is placed a vase upon a small pedestal.

The gardens to the north of the hospital appear to have been the pre-existing tavern gardens.

In the 1790s a new smallpox hospital was built at the foot of Highgate Hill and the the hospital on Farringdon Road closed. The building was then used as a distillery and then a crape factory and, as Pinks describes, the centre portion of the building being in the occupation of a glass bender.

Middleton's plan also shows the existence of 'two main water pipes' below the prison. These pipes, which that would have been made from wood, would have connected with the New River Head, 345m to the northeast of the site. New River Head was a reservoir fed by a canal that was constructed in 1612 to bring water into London. The water would have flowed through wooden pipes into the City.

The prison was constructed with an extensive drainage system as can be seen on Fig 9. The drains all feed into a main drain that emptied into the Fleet. The prison had its own water supply and two wells, each measuring 4.25m across can also be seen. From Middleton's instructions to the bricklayers we know that the well for the infirmary was to be brick lined to a depth of 50 feet (15.24m).

A letter dated 10th December 1796 appeared in the Gentlemans Magazine along with a view of the prison from Gray's Inn Road (Fig 15). The letter described the construction of the prison:

'The spot on which it is erected having been naturally swampy and long used for a public laystall, it was found prudent to lay the foundations so deep and pile it so securely, that it is supposed there are as many bricks laid underground as appear to sight.,

The prison appears on the 1805 map of Clerkenwell (not illustrated) and the River Fleet can be seen defining the western boundary. Henry Mayhew's book the Great World of London, published in 1858, describes what the prison looked like from the outside.

'One of the main features of Coldbath Fields Prison is a tall brick wall, which surrounds the entire of the nine acres upon which the building stands, and gives the palace the idea of a strong fortress.

'..turning the corner of Phoenix-place, and entering into Dorrington-street, that the first evidence is obtained of the spot being inhabited; for there at rapidly-

recurring intervals, may be seen a black beam darting by, close to the coping stone of the brick-work, the mystery of which none can fathom but those who have visited the interior of the prison, it being the wings of the fan, or governing machine, which regulates the rapidity of the tread-wheel..

..On one side of the public road, passing along the front of the prison, is an unoccupied piece of ground, about half an acre in extent, which fronts the remaining portion of the wall; here the grass has grown so luxuriantly that it may almost be termed a field, especially as half a dozen sheep are feeding, within the pailings, on the long herbage..

..At the back, or northern side of the prison wall, lie the enormous yards of Mr Cubitt, the contractor.'

Mayhew describes Mr Cubitt's yards as being full of building material, scaffolding and rusting machinery. He also describes other buildings in the vicinity of the prison. He states that in Dorrington Street there were brass founders, grocers canister-makers and says 'turning down Phoenix-place, we see the yards converted into sawmills' and he describes how steam was seen coming from tiles roofs of sheds and that on the door of a 'dingy cottage' was a sign that read 'Fancy Brush-board Makers'.

The brass foundry can be seen on the 1871 Ordnance Survey map to the rear of terraced houses facing onto Gough Street. To the north of the brass foundry was a cartridge makers.

The prison was notorious for its brutal regime and overcrowding also seems to have been a major problem. The overcrowding was remedied in the 19th century when the original prison buildings of 1794 were extended (Fig 16). A new perimeter wall had been built by 1827 (see front cover) and in 1830 a vagrants' ward was added. This was intended to house 150 prisoners and shortly afterwards a female ward, later known as the misdemeanants' ward, was constructed which could accommodate 300 inmates. A house for the governor and was also constructed at about this time.

Mayhew goes on to describes the layout of the prison buildings within the perimeter wall:

'The old or main prison stands at a little distance behind the principle entrance, and is of a quadrangular form (with two wings attached), divided by a central passage, which is intersected at right angles by various yards – four on either side of the passage, and each having the cells arranged along one side..

..The vagrants' ward is on the left of the main entrance, and consists of five radiating wings, proceeding from a semi-circular building, upon the half-wheeled principle; and these five wings, with the four intermediate airing courts, constitute four yards, or divisions..

..The misdemeanants' ward, formerly appropriated to the female prisoners, stands at a little distance from the north-eastern corner of the old prison, and constitutes a distinct building, but does not differ much in its plan from the vagrants' ward.'

THE HOUSE OF CORRECTION FOR THE COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX. 1794.
Taken from Grays Inn Lane.

Genl. Mag. Supp.
1796. F.L.P. 1063.

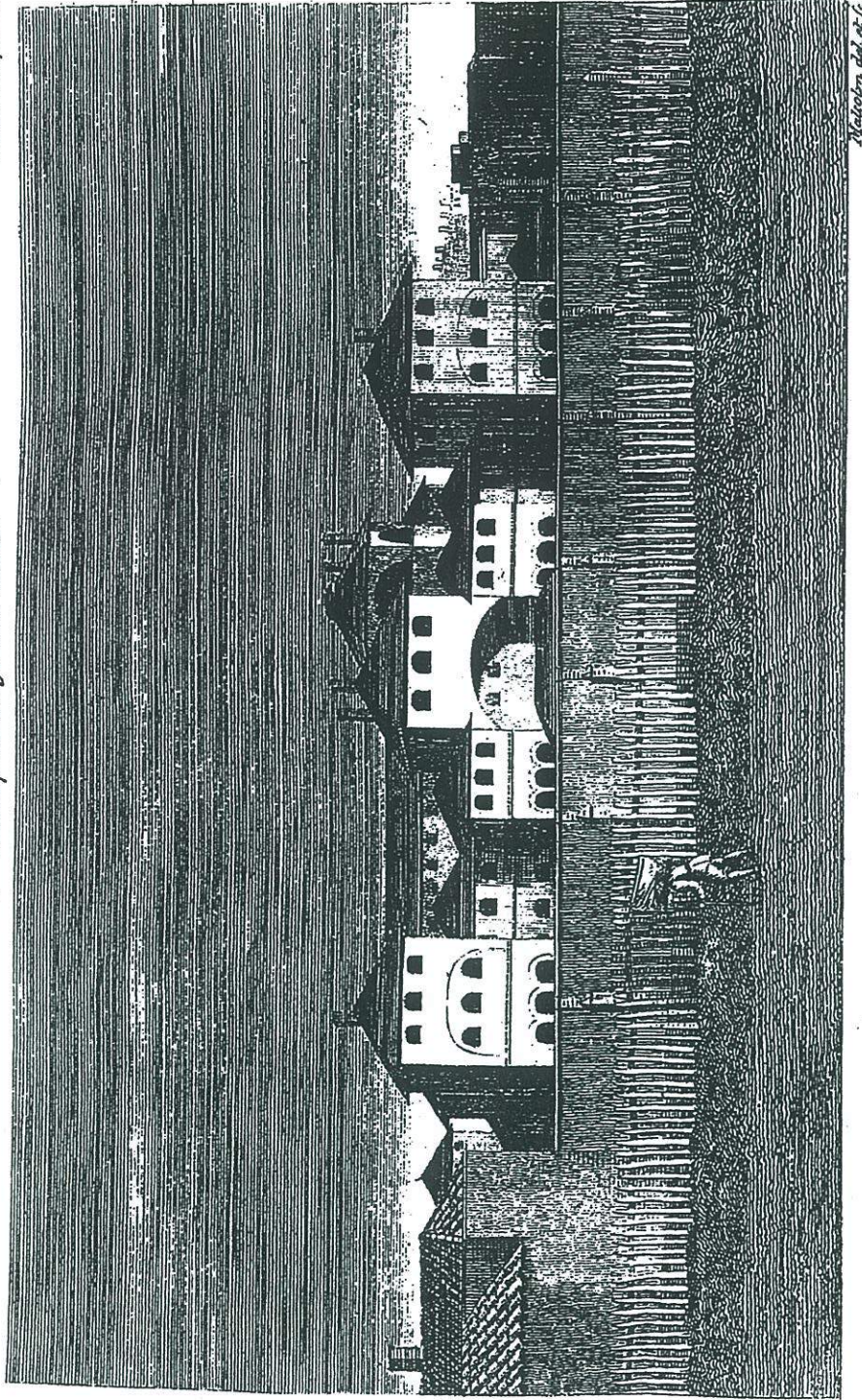
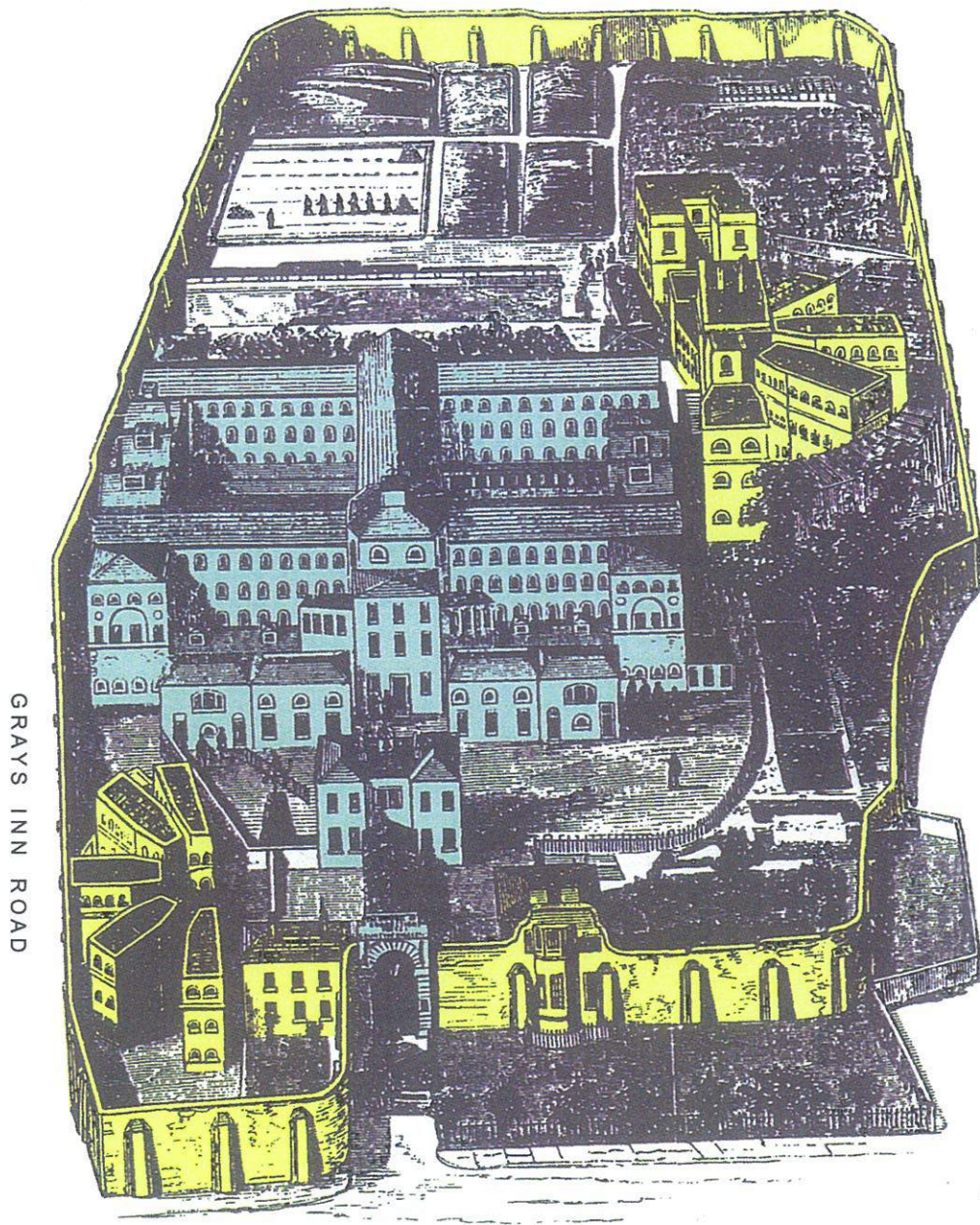


Fig 15 Illustration of the Middlesex House of Correction published in The Gentlemans Magazine, 1796



GRAYS INN ROAD

- KEY
- original 18th century prison buildings
 - 19th century additions

Fig 16 18th century prison buildings with 19th century additions

The 1871 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 17) shows terraced houses had been built on the area that had previously been the garden of the smallpox hospital. Oldham Place, which consisted of ten houses, was built in 1823 on the land formerly occupied by the smallpox hospital, these can clearly be seen on the 1827 Plan of the Parish of Clerkenwell (front cover). At some time between 1827 and 1860 a double row of cottages, known as Oldham Gardens, was built to the rear of Oldham Place.

The prison was closed in 1877, after being open for only 83, and the prisoners were transferred to Pentonville Prison. Under the Prison Act of 1877 the value of the site was calculated as £120 per prison cell which meant, as there were 1558 cells, the site had a value of theoretical value of £186,960, however the site was actually valued at £96,117.

The Post Office took possession of the site from the Home Office in 1887 and the Mount Pleasant sorting office was constructed on the site in 1889. A memorandum dated 20th June 1889 shows the Post Office planned to use a third of the site for sorting post, one third of the site for the telegraph factory and the other third was to be used for stores and offices.

The 1914 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 18) shows the houses facing onto Farringdon Road had been demolished and the whole of the southern area of the site had been occupied by a postal telegraph factory. The telegraph factory that made and repaired cables had been moved to the site in 1887 from Gloucester Road.

The 1914 Ordnance Survey map shows that the industrial yards and workshops to the rear of the terraced houses that fronted onto Gough Street still survived into the 20th century.

The factories and stores were removed in 1914 to enable the letter office and stamp office to be built (see Fig 19). In a report by Sir Henry Tanner, dated 28th January 1914, he says that of the old prison buildings:

‘quite a small part remains viz:- the chapel block and a short length of one of the cell wings.’

Beneath the sorting office is an underground railway used for the delivery of mail across London until May 2003 (see Fig 21). The 23 miles long tunnel network links Whitechapel with Paddington.

At the end of the 19th century there was increasing concern at the amount of time it was taking to get parcels across London. It was suggested that an underground railway would be the answer to the problem of above ground traffic congestion.

A committee was set up to look into the various possibilities for such a line and concluded that a two-foot gauge electrically-powered line 21 metres below street level would be the most effective design. Although the line itself is 21m below the surface, the stations were built much closer to street level, meaning that the line must rise and fall along a 1 in 20 gradient near stations. The route of the new line was to include Liverpool Street and Paddington national rail stations as well as several Post Office depots including one in Whitechapel.

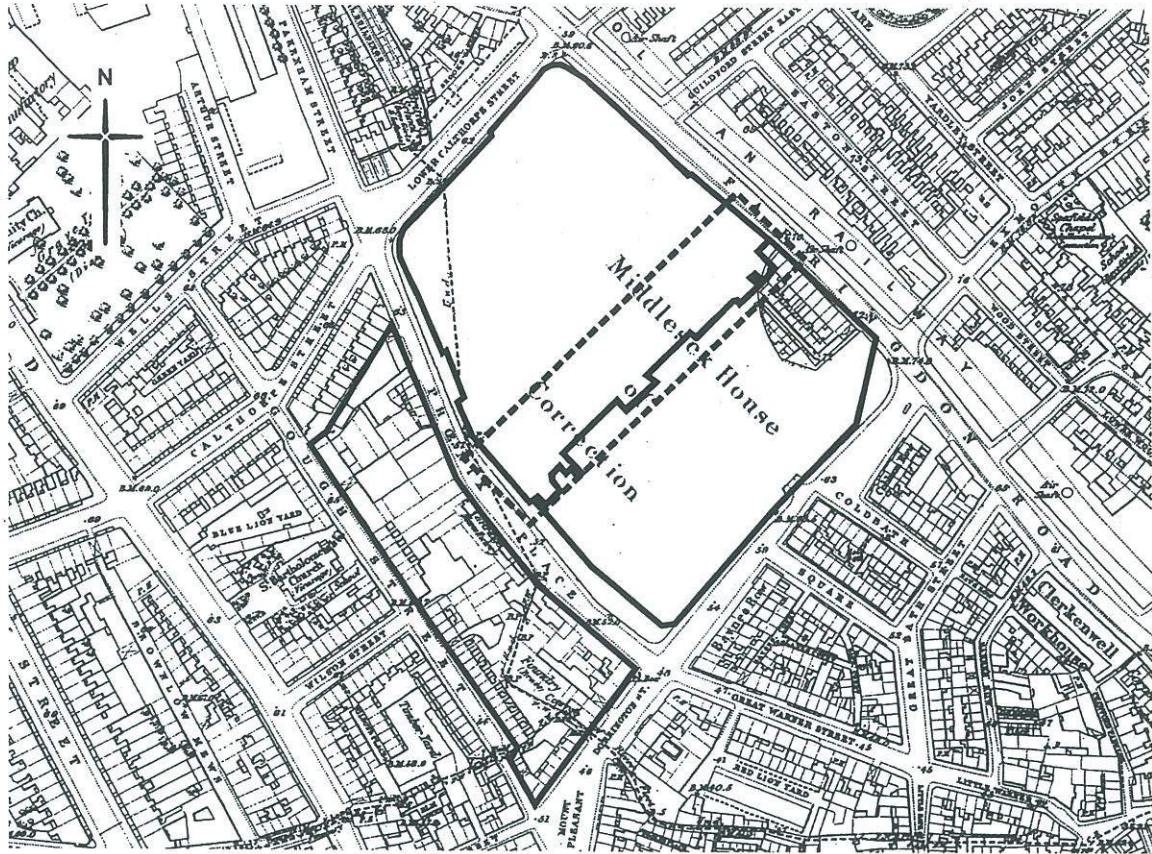


Fig 17 Ordnance Survey map, 1871

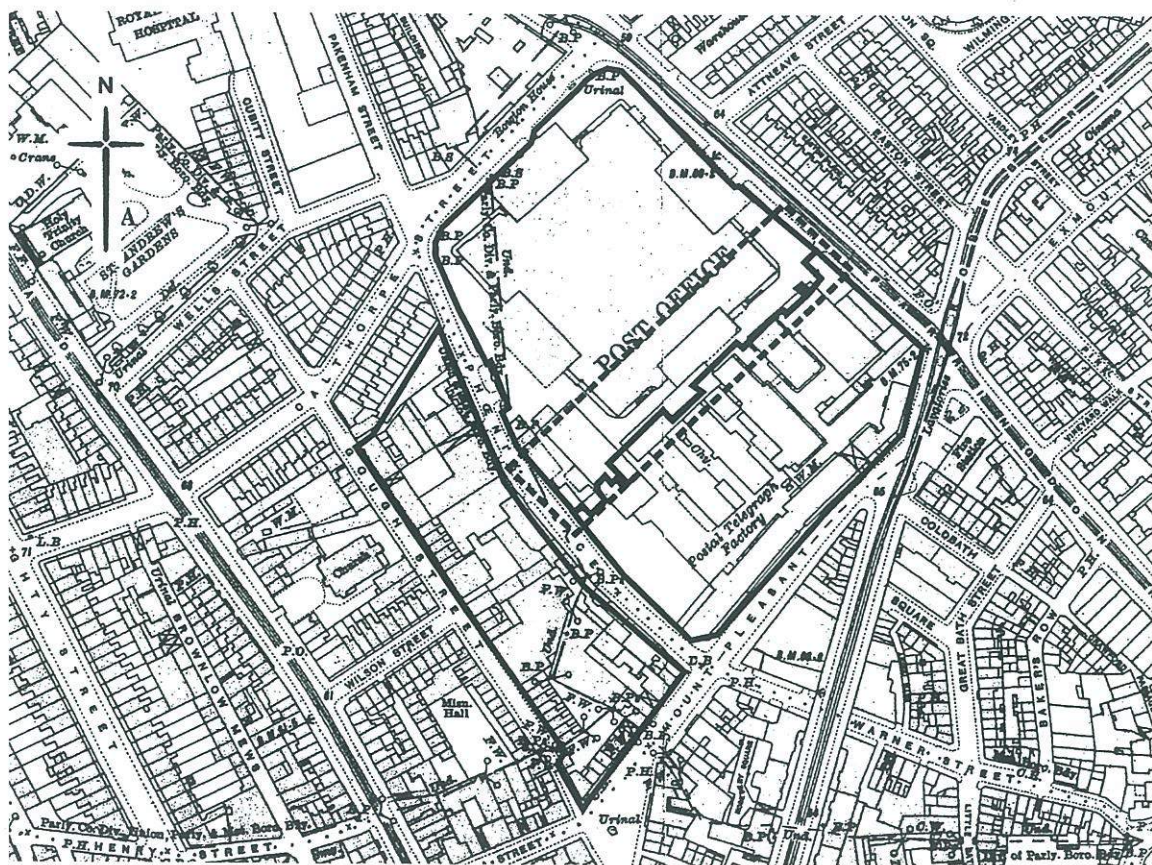


Fig 18 Ordnance Survey map, 1914

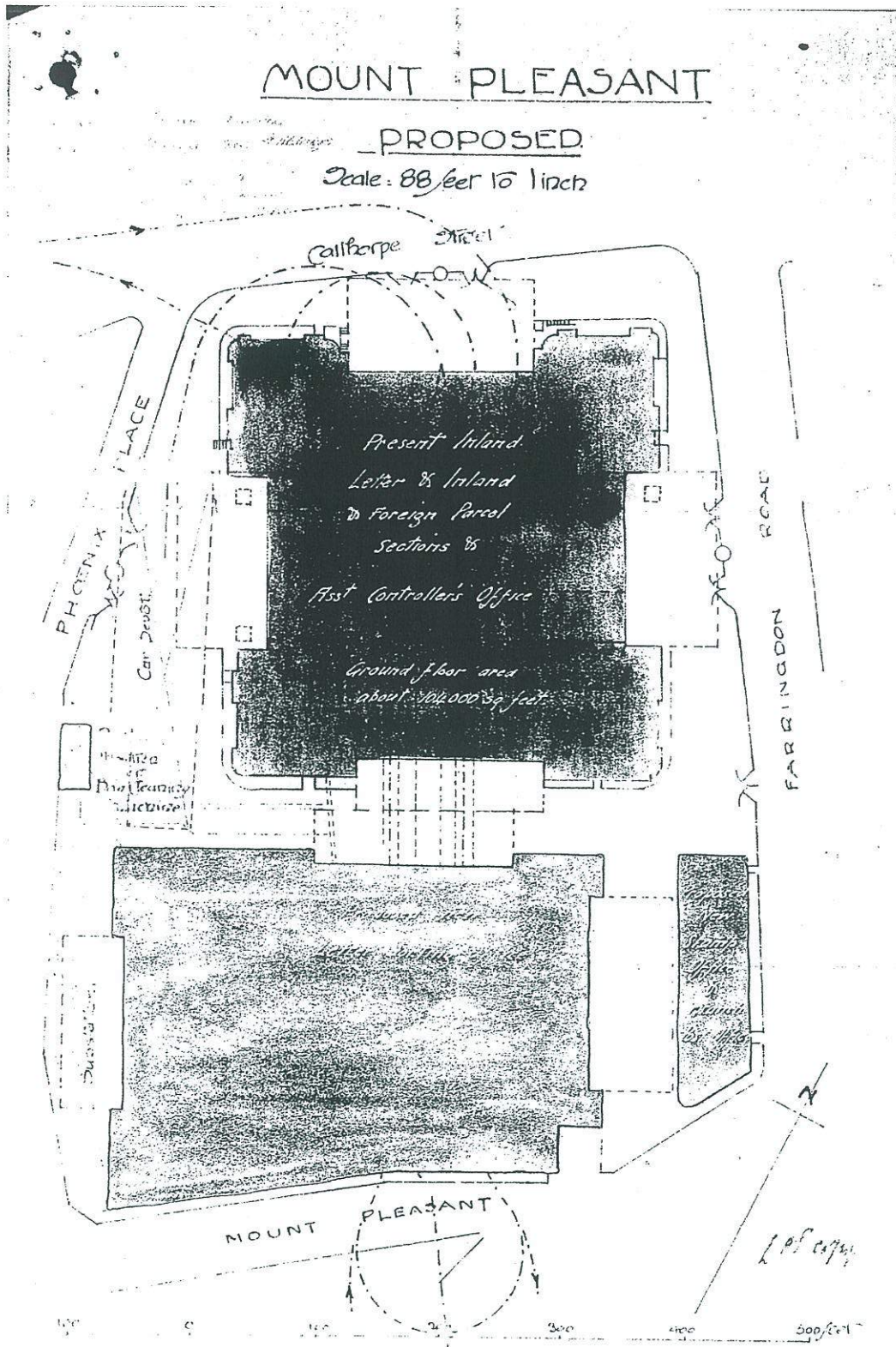


Fig 19 Plan showing proposed and existing buildings at Mount Pleasant, c 1914

The 1913 Post Office (London) Railway Act allowed for the construction of the line. John Mowlem and Company, who had won the bid for the construction of the line, began work on the tunnels, designed by Harley Dalrymple-Hay, on 24th October 1914. John Mowlem and Company completed the tunnels by 1917 using the Greathead shield system. This entailed the construction of 2.74m diameter circular tunnels lined with cast-iron segments that were bolted together. The stations, built by Charles Brand and Son, were accessed from basement level via 3.66m wide vertical or inclined shafts. The specification for the work states that the tunnelling work was to be executed from temporary shafts, these were to be 3.66m diameter vertical shafts, which were to be filled with concrete once the tunnelling had been completed. The location of these shafts can be seen on Fig 20.

The first section between Paddington and the West Central District Office on Oxford Street was in operation in 1927, with trains running to the Mount Pleasant sorting office.

In anticipation of the Second World War, hinged bunk beds were installed in the stations so that they could be used as night shelters for staff. The shelters were used throughout the war, and the line suffered little bomb damage however the worst incident was the flooding of Mount Pleasant station after a direct hit in 1943.

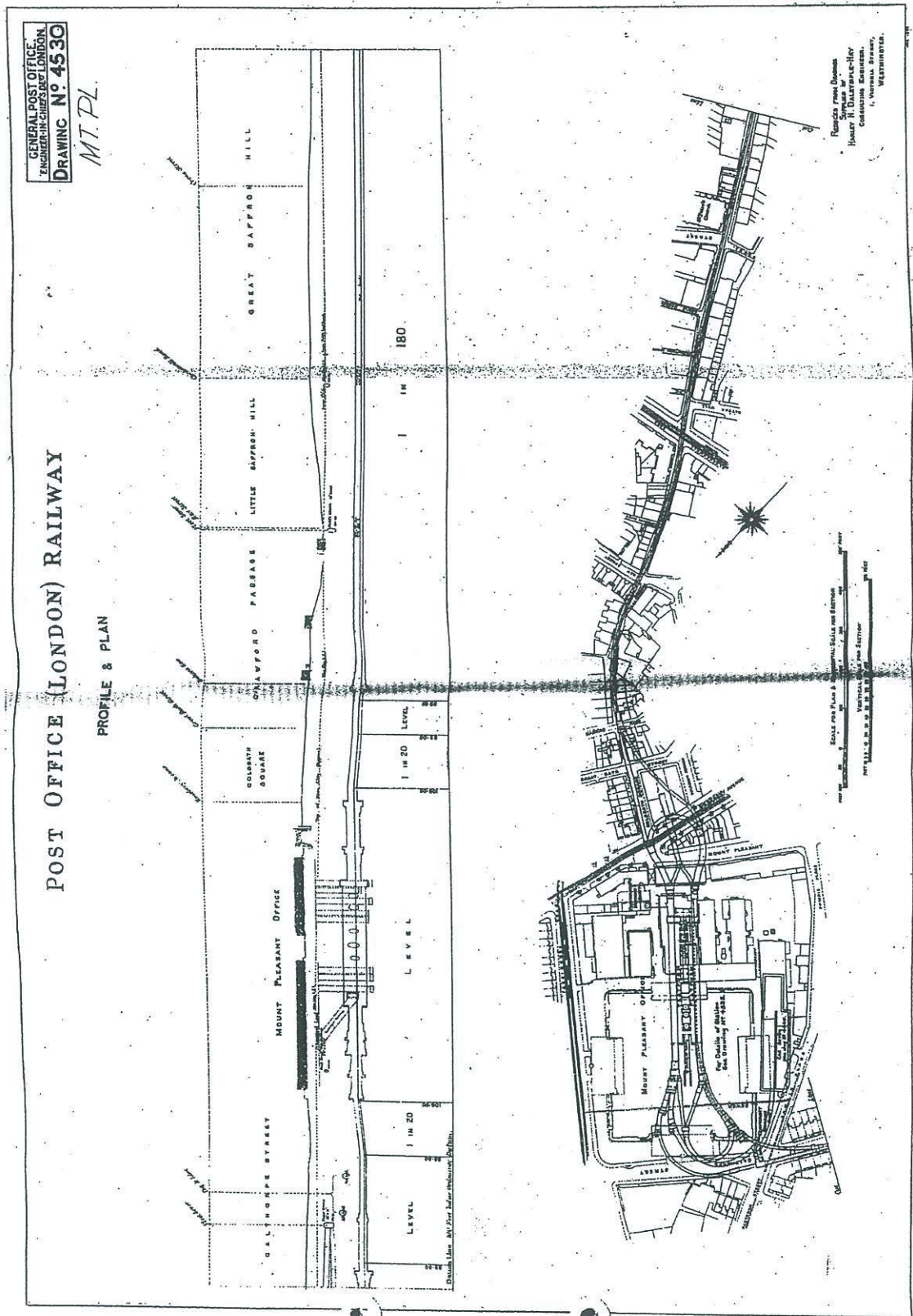


Fig 20 Dalrymple-Hay's Profile and Plan of Mount Pleasant Station