

# REGENCY BIRMINGHAM

## A HISTORY IN MAPS CONTINUED

John Townley

All printed maps originate in manuscript form. In order to produce a printed version, the map is transferred, in reverse, onto a copper plate by incising it. Every printed map is a mirror-image impression made by the transfer of ink from a unique incised copper plate. Later versions produced from the same plate are identical unless alterations have been made. Features can only be removed by hammering the plate from behind and rubbing the relevant part of the engraved surface until the soft copper spreads out, removing the incised lines. Both removal and any new engraving are irreversible. Every subsequent version will automatically include the alteration, unless it is later reworked.

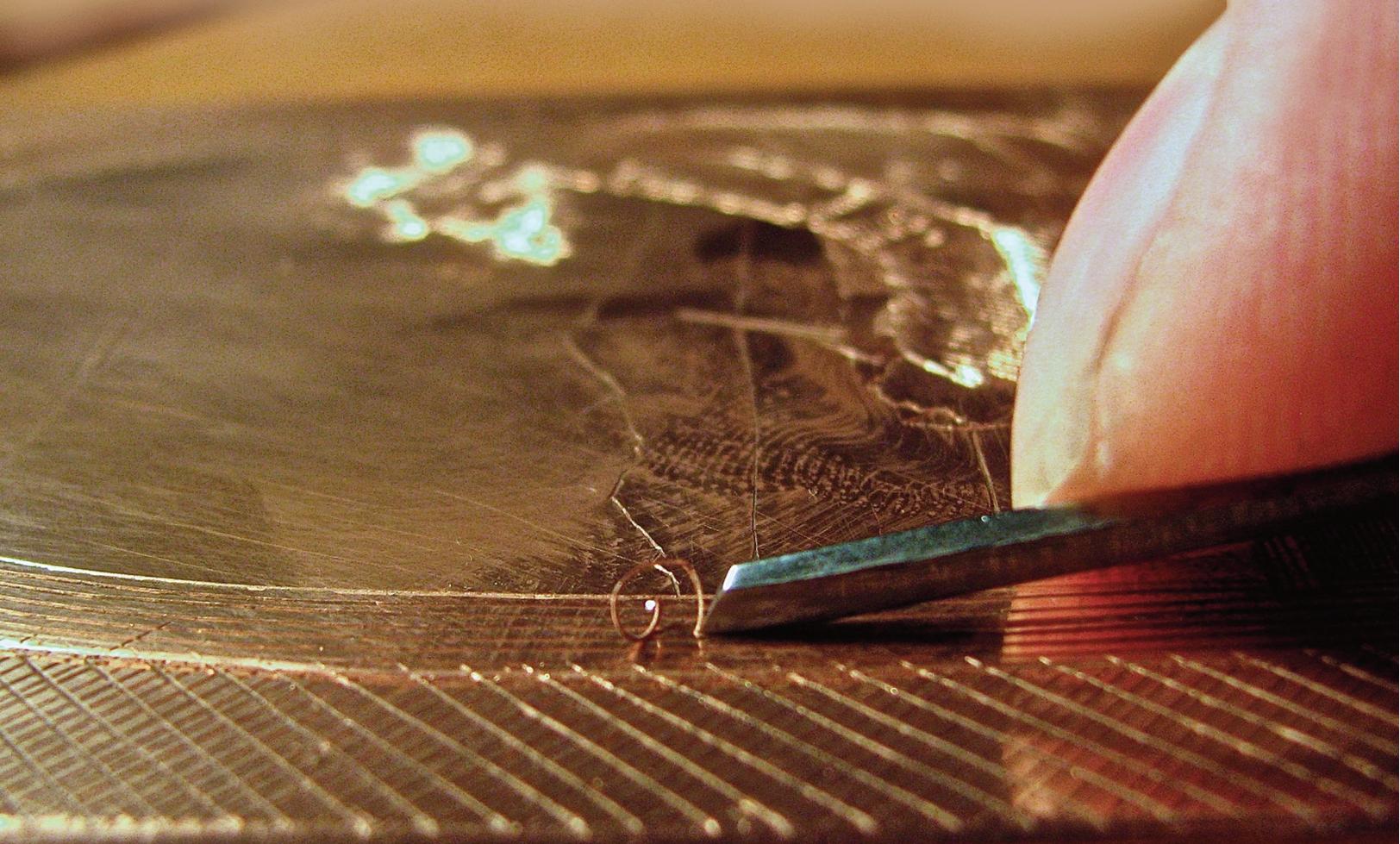
It is naive to assume that if map publishers had access to the latest geographical information they would automatically incorporate it into new versions of their maps without delay. As altering a plate cost money, publishers of early maps tended

to make changes as infrequently as possible, and then only because it made commercial sense. Many publishers failed to respond even to major changes in the geography of a town.

Most commonly, alterations to a printed map were of either the date, so that the map appeared to be topical; the publisher's address, for advertising purposes; or minor additions of topographical detail that required little if any erasures. Not dating the map in the first place avoided the problem of topicality which is why so many are undated. Where only one copy of a new version of a map was required, manuscript additions could be made to an existing printed version of the map without any change to the copper-plate.

Very few original copper-plates survive. As copper was a valuable raw material it was usual to melt down and re-use plates which were worn or carried out-of-date information.<sup>1</sup>

Incising a copper plate using a burin.



## LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BIRMINGHAM – A HISTORY IN MAPS CONTINUED

### John Kempson's Town Map and his Later Revisions

John Kempson served his apprenticeship with his father Henry, a Birmingham land surveyor with offices in Bath Street and then Spring Hill. In 1808, at the age of 26, when John produced his original version of his *Town of Birmingham* map, he appears in trade directories as a 'Land Surveyor, Auctioneer & Agent to the County Fire & Provident Life Office' with offices in St Paul's Square. In the 1815 directory he had moved to Cherry Street but at the end of the year a notice in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* informs us that he had moved to 'the Timber Wharf, Saturday Bridge' on Parade.<sup>2</sup>

Four original versions of his *Town of Birmingham* survive. The first, giving his address as St Paul's Square, was 'published 1 January, 1808'<sup>3</sup>. The second is undated but gives his address as Cherry Street, where he had offices c.1815.<sup>4</sup> The third, shown above, which gives his address as Parade, was first published in 1818. The fourth, with neither date nor street, describes him as 'Surveyor & Land Agent, Birmingham'.<sup>5</sup>

Kempson's 1808 map shows extensive growth of the town compared to Sherriff's map, with at least 20 new buildings and 30 new streets: in Hockley and the Jewellery Quarter; on both sides of Broad Street near to the canal; near the brewery off Newtown Row; and around the Digbeth branch of the canal. Strangely, it omits Sheep Street, near Gosta Green. Kempson appears to have added just a few new features for subsequent maps. The second map adds five new public buildings and Nelson's statue, erected in 1809. Sheep Street is still missing. His address, Cherry Street, suggests a date of c.1815. The third, shown above, first printed in 1818 and



*Town of Birmingham* [c.1818], by John Kempson, Surveyor, Parade, Birmingham, first published as a folded insert in *Wrightson's New Triennial Directory of Birmingham*, Birmingham, 1818. Facsimile reprint published by Frank Graham, 1969. This map appears to be derived from Kempson's 1808 map with minor revisions.

dated c.1818, labels some streets in the Jewellery Quarter and adds new streets by Summer Lane but still omits Sheep Street. His fourth map which includes the New Union Mill [1816-1817] on Mill Street, the Gas Works [1817] and the Union Brewery [1817], which removes the Moat [1815-1816] and re-instates Sheep Street, is later than the c.1818 map and has been dated c.1819.

A fifth version, labelled as 'Plan of Birmingham, surveyed by John Kempson, 1808', appears in *Birmingham: A History in Maps*, produced by Paul Line in 2009. This is the c.1819 version with the moat re-instated, the New Union Mill, the Union Brewery and the Gas Works removed but with the roads left. It is neither correct in date nor detail.

# LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BIRMINGHAM – A HISTORY IN MAPS CONTINUED



Reproduced with the permission of the Library of Birmingham

All four versions bear the legend *To the Commissioners of the Street Act, this Map of the Town and Parish of Birmingham shewing the Boundaries as Perambulated by them, in the Year 1810 is most respectfully inscribed by their most obedient servant, John Kempson Surveyor. Published April 1811 by John Kempson*. These extracts show the north of the town and immediate environs from each version of this map.

Images from: i) 1st version – LoB: Map/65453; ii) 2nd version – LoB: MAP/174791 ; iii) 3rd version – from *Plans of Birmingham and Vicinity Ancient and Modern ... copied and printed by Order of the Public Works Committee of the Town Council of the Borough of Birmingham from Plans in the Public Offices ...*, 1884; iv) 4th version – Revolutionary Players.

## John Kempson's Parish Map – is a Printed Date always Correct?

Four versions of this map survive. The first, presumed to be the original 1810 version, has the publication date printed in the bottom centre. As well as showing the whole of the parish outside of the town it shows all of the public buildings depicted on Kempson's c.1818 town plan, the latest of which, Little Cannon Street Meeting House, was erected in 1809.

Two copies of the second version survive.<sup>6</sup> The publication date is moved to the bottom right. There are minor changes to streets in the Jewellery Quarter and a few new buildings are added.

The original of the third version, presumably once held by the Rating Department, no longer exists but it survives as a printed copy [see above]. It is probable that all of the added detail (new streets and newly labelled streets in the Jewellery Quarter; new buildings in the same area; and property boundaries and property ownership details over

the whole area to the north-west of the town) were manuscript additions to a copy of the second version held in the Rating Department, where only one copy was needed.

The fourth version includes none of the added features from the third version but shows new buildings, including the New Union Mill [1816–1817]; new streets between Summer Lane and Constitution Hill, including the projected route of New John Street West; new streets on the north-west side of Great Hampton Street; and new streets extending west from Sheepcote Lane by the New Union Mill.<sup>7</sup> Comparison with dated maps of Birmingham suggests a date of c.1820.

Dating the second and third versions is problematic. They appear to fall after Kempson's c.1815 Town map and before his c.1818 Town map. An approximate date between 1815 and 1818 is the closest estimate. In 1821 John Kempson moved to New Street where he remained until his death in 1846, aged 64.<sup>8</sup>

### Kempson's Legacy – the Guide Book Maps

Birmingham's first guide book, *A Description of Modern Birmingham*, was published in 1820 by Charles Pye, who relied heavily on Hutton for its content. It contained a plan (cartographer unknown) of *Birmingham in the Year 1819*, based on Kempson's c.1818 town plan, but simplified to include only streets and principal buildings.<sup>9</sup>

Ten new buildings were shown, the latest being the Methodist meeting house in Steelhouse Lane which opened in 1818, Smithfield market replaced the moat and the positions of a few streets were slightly altered. As in Kempson's plan, Sheep Street is not shown. This was Pye's last published book. He died at his home in Essex Street on 23 March 1830, aged 80.<sup>10</sup>

The second guide book, *The Picture of Birmingham*, was published in 1825 by James Drake, an enterprising publisher, printer, bookseller, dealer and chapman with offices in New Street. This guide too contained *A New Plan of Birmingham* (again by an unknown cartographer); engraved by T. Sims, it appears to be closely based on Pye's 1819 plan.<sup>11</sup> Of the six new buildings, the Newsroom on Bennetts Hill, opened in 1825, was the latest. The plan shows two new streets, Waterloo Street & Bennetts Hill built after the expiry of the Colmore's 120-year lease in 1818, new streets in the Jewellery Quarter, in Hockley and by the river in Deritend/Bordesley. Sheep Street is still missing.



'Plan of Birmingham, with an Alphabetical list of the Streets, Churches, Chapels, Principal Inns, Coach Offices &c.', Published by James Drake, New Street', 1831, from *The Picture of Birmingham*, 2nd edition, James Drake, Birmingham 1831.

Drake's 2nd edition of his guide, published in 1831, includes the first street index to accompany a map.

*The Plan of Birmingham*, shown above, is surrounded by an *Alphabetical list of the Streets, Churches, ... &c* with each entry having a reference number associated with the division of the plan on which it can be found. Two new churches, St Peter's, Dale End (1827) and St Thomas's, Bath Row (1829) and a Fever Hospital, Bath Row (1828) appear for the first time. In the six years since the last edition, Birmingham has grown in all directions. New estates are shown between Bromsgrove Street and Bristol Street and the river Rea; where Bordesley meets Moseley; by Lee Bank on the edge of Edgbaston; along Islington (Broad Street) near the New Union Mill; in the Jewellery Quarter and Hockley; on both sides of Ashted; and on the Bordesley/Deritend border by the river Rea. Sheep Street is still missing. Sold separately for 2s 6d (less than 10% of a skilled man's weekly wage) as *Drake's Cheap Map of Birmingham*, the map was no longer the prerogative of the wealthy. Perhaps his prices were too low, for after publishing a third edition of his guide in 1837 James Drake was declared bankrupt on 12 February 1840.<sup>12</sup>

## LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BIRMINGHAM – A HISTORY IN MAPS CONTINUED



© J. Pigott Smith, 1828, A Street Map of Birmingham, Old House Books, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Map of Birmingham engraved from a minute trigonometrical survey made in the years 1824 & 1825, J. Pigott Smith, Surveyor & Engineer, Birmingham. Engraved by W.R. Gardner, Harpur Stt. Red Lion Sqe. London. Published 25 March 1828.

The map is dedicated to William, Earl of Dartmouth, Viscount Lewisham &c &c by the publishers Beilby, Knott & Beilby.

### John Piggott Smith's Map of Birmingham – from a Minute Trigonometrical Survey

At nearly sixteen inches to the mile [1:4040], this is the largest-scale map produced after Hanson's *Plan* of 1778 and the largest until Pigott Smith's *Survey of the Borough of Birmingham* 1850–1855. His reference to 'a minute trigonometrical survey'

implies that this map differed from every other contemporary survey in that it was produced by a process of triangulation. The large scale enabled Smith to show greater detail than on any other contemporary map. Outside of the built-up area the

## LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BIRMINGHAM – A HISTORY IN MAPS CONTINUED

ownership of most of the land is shown. Even within the town the shape of each block of buildings is shown, except for three small areas marked *Refused Admittance*. It appears that the Britannia Nail Company in Brewery Street, a brass founders, William Jenkins & Sons in Digbeth and premises owned by a Mr. Elliot, in Islington Row, were too afraid of industrial espionage to admit the surveyor.

Born in 1798, John Pigott Smith served his apprenticeship with a Land Surveyor and valuer. As well as producing his 1824 to 1825 survey of Birmingham he produced plans of Stratford-upon-Avon and county maps of Warwickshire and Gloucestershire. In 1835 he was appointed surveyor to the

Birmingham Street Commissioners and when they were dissolved, he became Borough Surveyor. He played a significant role in the improvement of Birmingham's streets and footpaths and the water supply and sewer system – so much so that he was consulted by other towns and cities. He retired in 1857 after disputes with the town council and died four years later.

– And what of W.R. Gardner, an engraver of undoubted talent? The following year he fled with his eight-year-old son to the United States, leaving a wife and three children but taking with him a supposed £10,000 derived from forged banknotes. He was never heard of again.<sup>13</sup> ●

**John Townley** is an independent researcher working on the early use of rotary steam power, especially in Birmingham. His interest in Birmingham's early town maps arose from a need to understand the geography of its developing steam-powered industry.

<sup>1</sup> Campbell, Tony, 'Understanding engraved maps', *The Map Collector*, 46 (1989 Spr): pp. 2-10.

<sup>2</sup> Trade Directories; *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 27 November 1815.

<sup>3</sup> LoB: MAP/384604.

<sup>4</sup> LoB: MAL/65453.

<sup>5</sup> LoB: MAP/308391.

<sup>6</sup> LoB:MAP/174791 is annotated "*The blue shade shows the Parish of St. Philip, J Kempson.*" On LoB:MAP/174791A the parish is divided into 5 areas and subdivided into 9 districts: Foreign - District 1 - highlighted in green; West - District 2 & District 3 - in yellow; North - 4 & 7 - blue; South - 5 & 6 - pink; & East - 8 & 9- green. [This version labelled 'Birmingham in 1810, by John Kempson' was included in a pocket at the end of Conrad Gill's *History of Birmingham*, Volume 1, 1952.]

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk/birmingham-in-1810/>

<sup>8</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 23 March 1846.

<sup>9</sup> LoB: MAP/174792.

<sup>10</sup> *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 20/03/1830

<sup>11</sup> LoB :MAL/65455.

<sup>12</sup> London Gazette, 14/02/1840.

<sup>13</sup> The Times, 21 September 1829.



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