

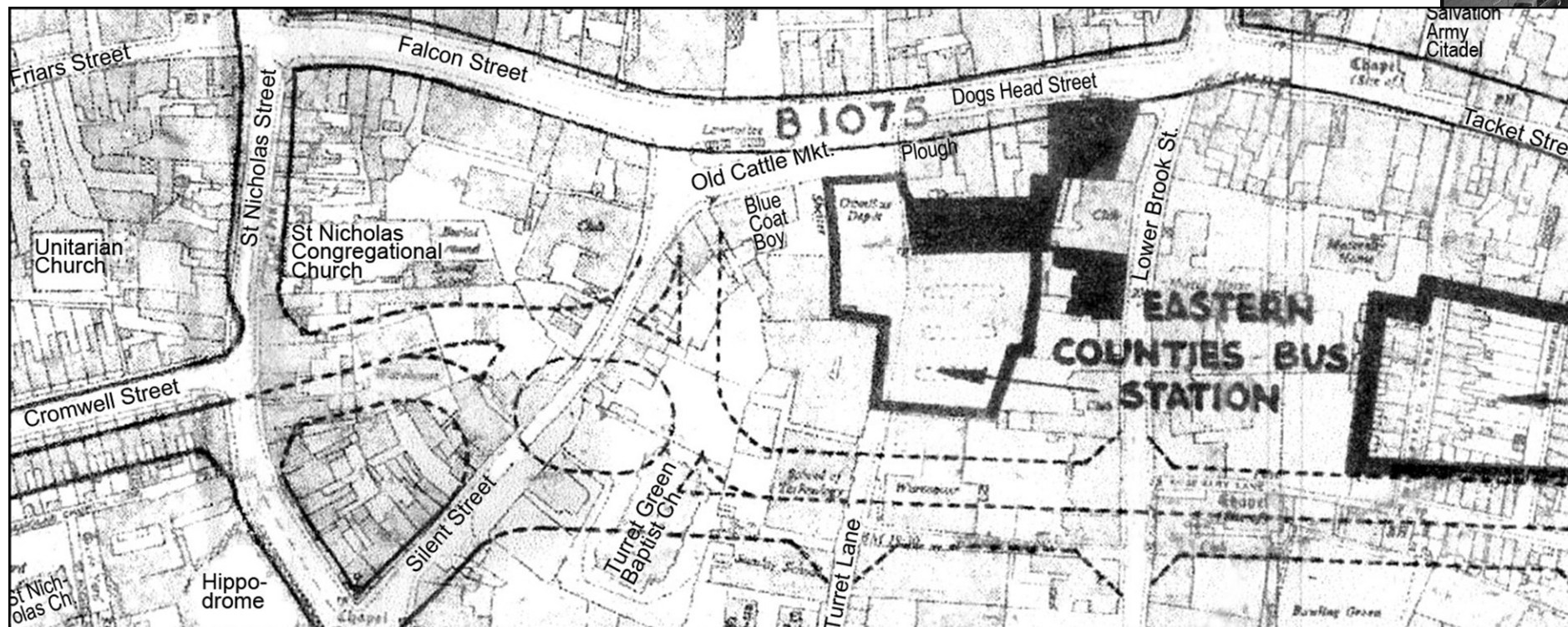
■ The Ring-Road that never was ■

Just imagine a government deciding that a town's population should double; the town preparing for such an influx of population by demolishing, reconstructing, providing new infrastructure and the means by which a large new population could be absorbed into the framework of a town.

Imagine the building of the new roads including Civic Drive; the construction of a new shopping centre, Greyfriars; the preparation for further expansion, all being undertaken with the vigour and the enthusiasm that the prospects of increased population can bring to a town – even a ring-road eventually to encircle the town centre as a dual carriageway.

Imagine the first phase, well under way: roads constructed, preparations for further stages including the demolition of buildings along planned routes for extensions of roads; the concerns and worries of local people and interested parties in the history and archaeology of that place swept aside by a great plan for the future success of the town. Imagine all this only to find that the government has changed its mind. The London overspill programme hadn't been a roaring success. Evidence was to be found in Haverhill, Thetford and Great Cornard; so, a new town was developed, Milton Keynes. Ipswich was no longer to double its population. Ipswich was to get nobody at all.

The construction of the planned ring road came to a halt. People were listened to, the worry about the destruction the road would cause to the town's ancient fabric was heard and, anyway, the pressure was off Ipswich. However, work had already started to clear the route for the next phase: Richard Felaw's house in Foundation Street had been demolished and the remnants of Blackfriars monastery were threatened. Today we can see Peninsular House, carefully chamfered to fit a roundabout in Lower Orwell Street and the multi-storey car park in Foundation Street proudly stands on Richard Felaw's house which had originally been cleared for the new road. Then there is Cromwell Square. This car park is formed from the last section of the dual carriageway to be built which ended at St Nicholas Street.



The demolition approaches St Nicholas Street

Photographs from the Society's Image Archive. Below: Detail of the 1958 map of the ring-road with our annotations.



Path of the dual carriageway

For Ipswich during the 1960s there was no question that some improvements were needed. It was a traditional but booming market town where the livestock market was still operational, farmers and rural Suffolk people came into town regularly. There were great local shops: Ridley's, Footman's, Cowell's Department Store in the Butter Market and Sneezum's as well as many successful manufactories.

Various individuals opposed to the destruction of the town's historic buildings and streets grouped together to form The Ipswich Society in 1960.

But there was a demand for new roads as the numbers of commuters and traffic coming into town grew. A wave of prosperity was flowing over Britain and over the town; people wanted better, newer things, so this was reflected in the aspirations of central government and local government too.

If we look at a current street map of Ipswich it is possible to see the sweep of Civic Drive from St Matthews Street down to Saint Nicholas Church. This is the remains of the ring-road plan and the vestiges of the last stretch head eastwards through Cromwell Square car park.

Had the plans come to fruition the ring-road would have destroyed the jettied, timber-framed, 17th century buildings around 25-29 St Nicholas Street, putting a large roundabout over Silent Street, striding through Turret Lane, Lower Brook Street, Foundation Street, and Upper Orwell Street (see the map detail on the back page). *(cont.)*