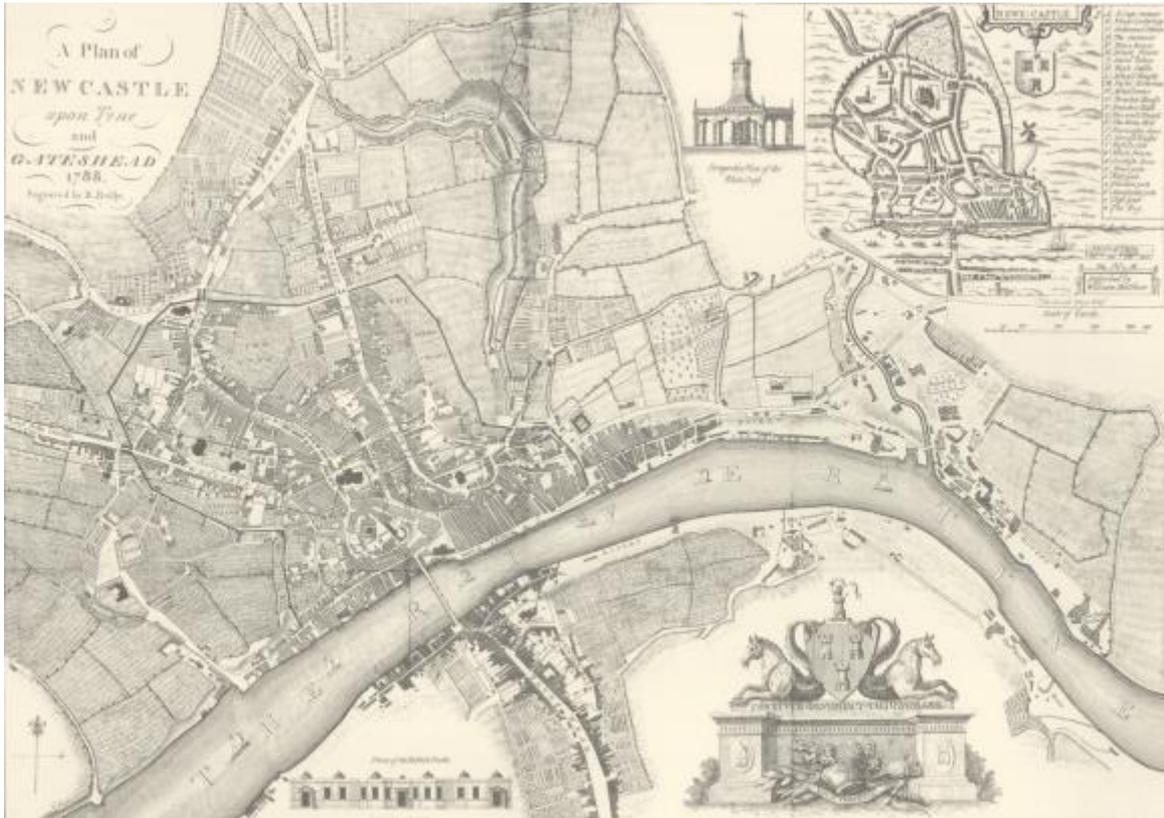# The Historian's Map

Sarah Collins

Northumbria University

A Plan of Newcastle uponTyne and Gateshead, 1788. Engraved by R.Beilby. *Courtesy of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums.*

The regeneration of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the 1990s saw the re-naming of its central commercial zone as Grainger Town in honour of the designer Richard Grainger who remodelled a large portion of this part of the city in the 1830s.[1] With this somewhat mythical and confusing rebranding, tourists visiting Newcastle's Grey Street would be forgiven for thinking they had found the city's historic core.[2] However, at least a century of remodelling had taken place before Grainger's designs were implemented, and a plan of Newcastle created by the engraver Ralph Beilby, in conjunction with the historian John Brand in 1788, sheds light on this process.

Beilby's map was the second surveyed plan of Newcastle to be produced in the eighteenth century and largely copied Dr Charles Hutton's plan of 1770.[3] Several bird's-eye plans had been produced from the vantage point of St Mary's church steeple in Gateshead, but they lacked the precision achieved by Hutton. However, Hutton's map was already out of date when correspondence between Brand and Beilby began. Brand had moved away from Newcastle in 1784, but kept up to date with improvements to the city through correspondence and newspapers. He even joked to Beilby in 1786 that 'you will make so many alterations that I shall be apprehensive of losing myself the next time I have the pleasure of visiting my friends'.[4]

The collaboration between Brand and Beilby was an interesting one. They were part of an intellectual network in Newcastle during this period. Brand had long been interested in Newcastle's history and had collected stone carvings, particularly Roman, during his period at the Grammar school.[5] Beilby was an important engraver at the forefront of his trade and went on to train his better-known apprentice, Thomas Bewick. In addition, they also knew Dr Hutton, a mathematician, and Mr Saint, a publisher in Newcastle who went on to publish Brand's history of the city. The collaboration between Brand and Beilby combined up-to-date technology with critical attention to detail. As a historian, Brand was drawn to Newcastle's antiquity, but he was also concerned for the accurate representation of its future. The insertion of John Speed's map of 1610 in the upper right corner of Beilby's plan served as a reminder of the Newcastle's progress, whilst also hinting at its antiquity. Similarly, the illustration of the *Perspective View of the White Cross* combined David Stevenson's new building of 1784 with a cross dating from the fifteenth century.[6]

Beilby's plan is most striking when compared with Hutton's. Only eighteen years passed between their publication and the differences between them demonstrate Newcastle Corporation's drive for rapid change. The limited textual information on Beilby's map suggests that map readers were expected to be familiar with Newcastle buildings such as the new Assembly Rooms on Westgate Road or the Theatre on Mosley Street. Beilby's map

was not aimed as a navigational guide but rather an accompanying illustration for Brand's text. The national importance of Newcastle meant that distant patrons had become familiar with the new architectural additions.

The inclusion of All Saints Church is worthy of note because it was under cinstruction during Beilby's commission. Brand referred to the demolition of the old All Saints church in correspondence dating to 1786.[7] The foundation stone was laid the same year but the church was not consecrated until November 1789, several months after the publication of Brand's history, and even longer after Beilby's plan had gone to press. The new All Saints church would not be completed until 1796, its final design having departed from David Stevenson's winning commission.[8] The inclusion of seven dots along the south face of the church on Beilby's plan suggests that he had taken note of Stevenson's original design. Because he was creating a plan at the same time as the construction was going on, it would have been impossible to foresee that the colonnade would never be built due to its high cost.[9] As Giovanna Dunmall observes in relation to twentieth-century Liverpool, Newcastle is full of small-scale compromised plans, to which Beilby, in attempting to produce a map ahead of its time, fell victim.[10]

The most notable departure from Hutton's plan was the inclusion of Mosley Street and Dean Street, completed between 1784 and 1788, which created a central communications route between Pilgrim Street and the Bigg Market.[11] The project was the brainchild of Edward Mosley, three-time mayor of Newcastle, and was in keeping with the Corporation's improvement strategy.[12] The combination of wide paved streets, Georgian architecture and the new theatre enhanced Newcastle's status as a stage for polite culture by providing an area for elite consumption. The new commercial zone created by Mosley Street and Dean Street contrasted with the map's depiction of a walled settlement dominated by surrounding field systems. On first appearance, Beilby's map presents a city with a largely medieval appearance, but comparison with Hutton's map enhances our understanding of the small-scale changes taking place in eighteenth century Newcastle. Mosely Street and Dean Street

were so new at the time of the map's creation that it is possible that Brand participated in naming them. Writing to Beilby in August 1788 he stated that 'I am surprised you have not called the new street "Dean Street", a name which it may be said to give itself'.[13] Brand was referring to the street's location over a dene (a wooded valley of a small river), but it is testament to his motto, '*Esto Perpetua!*' - let it be perpetual - that the name remained.[14] Beilby's map fits within broader eighteenth century trends which generated new spatial understanding of the urban landscape and included street naming and signage, property numbering, surveying and trade directories.

Brand was not an easy person to work for. Over the five-year period of his correspondence, Beilby regularly altered the plan to Brand's specifications. Brand was obsessive in his desire for accuracy, regularly citing his wish that critics of the future should not find disagreement with their work.[15] Beilby was also committed to the project. He walked the streets of Newcastle to provide Brand's readers with accurately mapped streets, buildings and names. Brand was even keen to apologise to Mrs Beilby for the 'dangerous though not very tempting females' that Beilby had been forced to encounter on an early morning excursion to the quayside.[16] Brand and Beilby's collaboration created a plan of Newcastle that marked a turning point between the city's past and its future. The plan can be seen in three ways: as a source of the city's antiquity; as a contemporary reflection of its new developments; and as a forward projection of what the city wished to become. Within the next thirty years an anonymous author would write *The Crow's Account*, a critique directed at the Corporation for Newcastle's development into a city which was no longer recognisable.[17] Apart from the street layout, much of Beilby's plan would become obsolete, despite Brand's wishes, and in less than a hundred years Newcastle would expand and its industrialisation intensify. Beilby's plan is an important reminder of Newcastle before Grainger, providing a snap-shot of everything that an eighteenth century provincial city aimed to achieve, just as it was on the cusp of achieving it.

[1] Fiona Cullen and David Lovie, *Newcastle's Grainger Town: An Urban Renaissance* (London: English Heritage, 2003), pp. 3-4.

[2] Thomas Faulkner, 'Architecture in Newcastle', in *Newcastle Upon Tyne: A Modern History*, eds. by Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster (Chichester: Phillimore and Co., 2001), pp. 242-243.

[3] John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 28 August 1784, Newcastle University Library, Special Collections, Edwin Clarke Local 2086.

[4] John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 14 August 1786, Newcastle UL, Edwin Clarke Local 2086.

[5] John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 5 April 1784 and 10 July 1784, Newcastle UL, Edwin Clarke Local 2086.

[6] Eneas Mackenzie, 'The present state of Newcastle: Streets within the walls', in *Historical Account of Newcastle Upon Tyne Including the Borough of Gateshead* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Mackenzie and Dent, 1827), pp. 160-182. *British History Online*, accessed July 6, 2017, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/newcastle-historical-account/pp160-182.

[7] John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 14 August 1785, Newcastle UL, Edwin Clarke Local 2086.

[8] Eneas Mackenzie, 'All Saints' church: The new church; clergy and lecturers', in *Historical Account of Newcastle Upon Tyne Including the Borough of Gateshead* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Mackenzie and Dent, 1827), pp. 302-322. *British History Online*, accessed July 6, 2017, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/newcastle-historical-account/pp302-322.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Giovanna Dunmall, 'Unbuilt Liverpool: the city that might have been', *The Guardian*, 4 July 2017, accessed 4 July 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jul/04/unbuilt-liverpool-city-might-have-been-in-pictures.

[11] Faulkner, p. 220.

[12] Mackenzie, pp. 160-182.

[13] John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 15 August 1788, Newcastle UL, Edwin Clarke Local 2086.

[14] Mackenzie, pp. 160-182; and John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 15 August 1788, Newcastle UL, Edwin Clarke Local 2086.

[15] John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 15 July 1788 and 15th August 1788, Newcastle UL, Edwin Clarke Local 2086; and John Brand, *The History and Antiquities of the Town and County of the Town of Newcastle upon Tyne, including an Account of the Coal Trade of that place and embellished with Engraved Views of the Publick Buildings, Vol. I* (London: B. White & Son, 1789), pp. iii-x.

[16] John Brand to Ralph Beilby, 8 August 1788, Newcastle UL, Edwin Clarke Local 2086.

[17] Lyall Wilkes and Gordon Dodds, *Tyneside Classical: The Newcastle of Grainger, Dobson & Clayton* (London: John Murray, 1964), pp. 150-153.