

# Absolutely Positively Not the First Plan For Wellington

## Unravelling popular misconceptions about the process of planning New Zealand's capital city

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There is a popular view, one which has gone largely unchallenged in both historical and scholarly narratives to date, that Captain William Mein Smith arrived in Port Nicholson in 1839 armed with a map for Wellington designed by a Mr Samuel Cobham of London who had been commissioned by the New Zealand Company to draft a plan for Surveyor General Smith. Smith was expected to overlay this design on the fringes of the chosen harbour as best he could, so the story goes, but the landscape, the weather and the meddling behaviour of Captain William Wakefield forced the poor Surveyor General to vacillate between one end of the harbour and the other in a futile attempt to execute this orderly and loftily conceived arrangement. The effort was soon abandoned and, so the myth continues, a more pragmatic albeit less symmetrical but rather tastefully rendered design was produced by Smith himself and sent to London for approval and reproduction for marketing and propaganda purposes by the New Zealand Company. In this paper I attempt to prove conclusively that such an account of events is wholly inaccurate. I argue that neither Cobham nor Smith produced the first map of "Britannia" which was the working title for the capital until November 1840. The balance of evidence suggests that Charles Heaphy, a then junior employee of the Company, was in fact the first individual to render an outline of the new city. I conclude that the functional redundancy of Cobham's Plan notwithstanding, it has a useful role to play in the history of planning theory.

**Keywords:** Samuel Cobham, Charles Heaphy, manuscript maps, lithographs Wellington history, propaganda.

## Introduction

In spite of its seismic vulnerability Wellington, the capital city of New Zealand, enjoys a certain sense of security in having been the seat of government since the earliest days of organized European settlement. This is reflected in city branding strategies which, prior to the introduction of the current “Wellington – blown away” catchphrase, used the slogan “Absolutely Positively Wellington” for some two decades in its marketing campaigns.<sup>1</sup> For a city so positive about its place in the world it is surprising, then, that the actual process of its design and laying out as a major settlement is so poorly understood.

The popular view is “positively” wrong but it is one that goes largely unchallenged in academic and historical narratives. Apparently, Captain William Mein Smith arrived in Port Nicholson in 1839 armed with a map for Wellington designed by a Mr Samuel Cobham of London which he was required to overlay on the fringes of the harbour as best he could.<sup>2</sup> The landscape, the weather and the meddling behaviour of Captain William Wakefield, so the story goes, forced the poor Surveyor General to vacillate between one end of the harbour and the other in a futile attempt to execute this orderly and loftily conceived arrangement. The effort was soon abandoned following a serious flood at Smith’s preferred site and shortly thereafter Cobham’s plan was discarded, so the myth continues, and a more pragmatic albeit less symmetrical but rather tastefully rendered design was produced by Smith himself and sent to London for approval and reproduction for marketing and propaganda purposes by the New Zealand Company.

The facts, such as they exist, do not support this imagined sequence of events. The available facts suggest a more deliberative and collaborative process than the one described above. In this process Mr Cobham could not and did not have featured at all. By examining the only original piece of cartographic material available, the correspondence of the time between key figures responsible for the planning and execution of the Port Nicholson settlement and the biographical profile of Samuel Cobham I argue that neither Cobham nor Smith produced the first map of “Britannia,” the working title for Wellington until late 1840. The balance of evidence suggests that Charles Heaphy was in fact the first Company employee to render an outline of the new city. I conclude with the observation that although Cobham’s Plan is functionally redundant and although it routinely continues to be misunderstood in the history of Wellington it nevertheless deserves standing in general narratives on the evolution of planning theory.

### The first “plan” of Wellington: the orthodox view

Over the past few decades a number of authors have either stated explicitly or casually inferred that when Captain William Mein Smith, Surveyor General to The New Zealand Company, arrived at Port Nicholson in January 1840 he was in possession of a pre-drawn town plan design, namely Samuel Cobham’s ‘A Proposed Plan of the City of Wellington in the first Settlement in New Zealand, founded 1839-40.’ According to the printed text at the bottom left hand corner of lithographic copies that have survived, was ‘drawn’ by Samuel Cobham of Newgate Street (London). Understandably it has come to be referred to as the ‘Cobham Plan’ and this ambitious design is usually associated with the failed attempt by Captain William Mein Smith, Surveyor General to the New Zealand Company, to establish the principal Company town of “Britannia” at Petone, or “Pito-one”, on the banks of the Hutt River during the first three months of 1840. Following a serious flood event on the Hutt River

which washed away a number of tents and belongings, this initiative sank in the mud, so to speak, when Britannia was moved from Petone to the Thorndon flat and Te Aro valley area, a decision presided over by Colonel William H. Wakefield, the New Zealand Company's Principal Agent.

The Cobham Plan was thus discarded and, as most commentators have acknowledged, it ceased to play a part in the history of New Zealand settlement by Europeans except as an object of curiosity or as proof of a pervasive and ill-conceived colonising paradigm, where reality mattered less than grand ideas and grid plans were routinely laid out in topographically inappropriate locations. However, in this process of academic discarding an error of association has been assumed and perpetuated up until the present, one which I will call a "fallacy of familiarity." This assumes that the Surveyor General was not only aware of the Cobham Plan but in possession of it from the moment he left England. This error has been committed in print or on a web resource without contest on at least fourteen occasions over the past seventy five years (Anderson, 1997: 145, Butterworth 1988: 31, Byrnes, 2001: 61, Carman 1971, De Vries 1966: 194-195, Hamer 1990: 235, Johnston 1991, Manson and Manson 1962: 100-102, McGill 1992: 24-25, McLean 2000: 23, Mulgan 1939: 94, Park 1997: 137, Patterson 1984: 30, Temple, 2002: 267, Wilson 2013).

For the purposes of illustration a few are worth discussing. Mulgan refers to the plan in a footnote as follows:

A plan for a town in the Hutt Valley was drawn in London by Samuel Soundy Cobham, who came to New Zealand in the Company's service and afterwards practised as a surveyor in Wellington. The plan, based on the misapprehension about the Hutt River, shows a river-mouth harbour with a tunnel running under the river. The town was laid out in the form of a rectangle, with forts at the corners, and generous provision for public buildings, which included a 'Covent Garden' theatre and a 'President's Palace.' (1939: 94)

Perhaps because he had not checked on Cobham's actual movements Mulgan omits to point out that Cobham did not arrive in New Zealand until several years after the founding of the settlement. Cobham appears to have emigrated as an independent settler in the 1850s (probably 1854) and he seems to have found work as a surveyor in private practice rather than as a New Zealand Company employee, the Company being all but defunct by the mid-1850s.<sup>3</sup>

This is not to say that Cobham lacked any personal connection with the New Zealand Company and its projects. He sent newspapers to the Wellington Mechanics' Institute in 1842, for example. Yet it is clear from his own pamphleteering activities in London in the early 1840s that he was not present in the ranks of the first survey teams sent from England between 1839 and 1842 and at least one of his pamphlets was an open attack on the way the Company operated.<sup>4</sup> Nor is there any record of his employment with the New Zealand Company in London at this time.

A more lively commentary on Cobham's plan appeared in the early 1960s as a chapter entitled "Dream City" in the Mansons' *Curtain-Raiser to a Colony: Sidelights on the founding New Zealand*. In a style more redolent of Dickens than historical narrative they reconstruct Cobham's drafting of the plan:

In a dingy office in one of the Georgian buildings which lined Newgate Street in the City of London, Samuel Cobham, Esq., had spread a large sheet of draughtsman's paper on a drawing board by the window. Then he took his pencil and wrote across the top, "A Proposed Plan of the City of Wellington in the first Settlement in New Zealand, founded 1839-40" (Manson and Manson, 1962: 100).

The authors go on to imbue Cobham with the spirit of a mid-nineteenth century social reformer's zeal, and, to their considerable credit, and unlike most authors who have been content to treat the plan as something of a footnote in their particular colonial historiographies, they discuss the details of the plan at length, seeing in the design a utopian paradigm of the day (pp.101-2). Unfortunately, nowhere in the book are any sources of information cited directly, making it difficult to verify the Mansons' assertions.<sup>5</sup> Nor do they shed any light on the date of the plan's drafting and whether or not it was part of the official surveying instructions. They do, however, make an important point about its purpose: "The New Zealand Company encouraged – possibly actually commissioned him – to make the plan, the intention being that intending settlers might consult it before setting out from England" (ibid.). In other words its primary role was to influence settlers rather than surveyors.

At a more formal level, researchers of New Zealand's surveying history have made more direct inferences about the Cobham plan and its familiarity to Smith. De Vries, for example, notes that

He [Cobham] assumed there was a navigable river very like the Thames, and beside it planned a rectangular grid town surrounded by terraces, with forts in each corner. Within this town he attempted to cram all the cultural and market facilities of London, including the Smithfield Market, Billingsgate, to Covent Garden Opera House and the Royal College of Surgeons. There is no record that Mein Smith actually intended to use this fanciful plan, nor that he ever took it seriously. (1966: 194-95)

Although De Vries gives Smith the benefit of the doubt concerning the practicality of the Cobham plan, she seems satisfied that Smith was aware of the plan, or had the item with him, at the time of his surveys. In the same vein, Patterson, in an exhaustive doctoral thesis examination of the New Zealand Company surveys in the lower half of the North Island between 1839 and 1845, views the Cobham Plan as integral to Smith's instructions:

To reinforce this vision, an elaborate 'master plan' of the town, drawn up by a Newgate draftsman under commission from the Directors, was provided. Though its compiler had been given little information beyond that the likely site would be in the lower reaches of a valley with a large river crossing its plain, his scheme faithfully incorporated all of the directors' expressed wishes. While the existence of this master plan has long been known, it has commonly been regarded as no more than a curiosity, perhaps a publicity piece, certainly not a true "blueprint". The weight of contemporary evidence suggests otherwise. (1984: 30)

In a footnote to the last statement Patterson adds the following:

The antecedents of what has become known as the 'Cobham Plan' have been independently investigated by the writer and P. L. Barton. While the supporting evidence for the contention is fragmentary, and in some respects circumstantial, both are agreed that the plan had an

important guideline function. Mr Barton will be presenting the findings in published form. (Patterson, 1984, Vol. 3: 4)

Unfortunately, it appears that in the thirty years since the above statement was made no article of this kind was published and in subsequent discussions with the author Patterson has agreed that the Cobham Plan had less influence than suggested here.<sup>6</sup>

On a broader level, more than once the Cobham design has been taken to represent the apogee, or nadir, depending upon one's own ideological position, of the Wakefield vision of planned settlement insofar as it epitomises the orthogonal grid plan of would-be empire-building. Park, for example, in a discussion of the ecological imperialism that characterised early the town-making practices of the New Zealand Company, singles out the Cobham plan as paradigmatic:

The quintessential expression of Wakefield's dream, of course – with its own roots in American colonial grid towns, its own echoes of Rome – is what his company's settlers briefly knew as Britannia. From its Presidential Palace and Government Offices to its Hungerford Fish Market and corner forts and cemeteries, Britannia offers an insight into the Britain of the South that Wakefield and his New Zealand company [sic] intended to create out of antipodean riverbanks – the carrying across the world of everything of England but the soil and climate... (Park, 1997: 137)

Before noting that "Britannia has slid into history as a curiosity" (ibid.), by which the author presumably means the plan drawn by Cobham, Park expresses his main concern about the consequences of such thinking on the wider landscape i.e., the colonial grid violated the unique biogeography of Aotearoa/New Zealand. While Park's thesis about ecological imperialism may have some merit, his failure to note that the plan he refers to specifically mentions Wellington and not Britannia, merely adds to the confusion surrounding the role that the Cobham plan played in the settlement of Port Nicholson.

### **The Wellington survey as actually carried out**

In order to clarify the confusion about the Cobham Plan one has to look closely at a number of factors. Most important among these are the timing of events, the time gaps in communications between London and New Zealand, the actual instructions provided to the Surveyor General and his team and the difference between an original sketch map and lithographed items. The most perspicacious commentator on timing to date has been Anderson (1997). The design for "Britannia/Wellington" presents something of a conundrum for Anderson and he questions the use of the name "Wellington" on the Cobham Plan and he concludes that this particular artefact cannot have been in Mein Smith's possession in the early months of 1840:

Given that the name 'Britannia' was still being used by Edward Jerningham Wakefield in June 1840, its 'Wellington' title can hardly have been on the plan used by Mein Smith at the Petone foreshore six months earlier." (p.145)

Instead, Anderson he sees a possible amalgam between Cobham and Mein Smith:

Perhaps it is a tidied-up version used for advertising, or perhaps Samuel Cobham still did not know of the new restricted site at Thorndon. Whatever its provenance, there are several indications of thoroughness in town planning and civil engineering terms which suggests Mein Smith's involvement. The original may have been an ideal arrangement to be aimed for, and to be used as a measure when examining possible sites. (ibid.)

Anderson's speculation is intriguing, and his commentary is important in terms of pointing out a logical contradiction in the title of a plan for Wellington dating 1839-1840. However, Anderson is implying that Smith may have had a rough version of Cobham's concept at hand and the difficulty with that is firstly that there appears to be no official reference to such a document in the extensive New Zealand Company correspondence and secondly the lithograph is the only contemporaneous rendering that has surfaced to date. There simply is no manuscript version of the "Cobham Plan" it appears.

Smith's instructions, issued to him by the New Zealand Company Court of Directors in July 1839 shortly prior to his departure, instruct him as to what should comprise the content of the town but they defer to Smith on its form:

The Directors wish that, in forming the plan of the town, you should make ample reserves for all public purposes, such as a cemetery, a market-place, wharfage, and probable public buildings, a botanical garden, a park and extensive boulevards. It is, indeed, desirable that the whole outside of the town, inland, should be separated from the country sections by a broad belt of land which you will declare that the Company intends to be public property, on condition that no buildings be ever erected upon it.

*The form of the town must necessarily be left to your own judgment and taste (Author's emphasis added).* Upon this subject the Directors will only remark, that you have to provide for the future rather than the present, and that they wish the public convenience to be consulted, and the beautiful appearance of the future city to be secured, so far as the these objects can be accomplished by the original plan, - rather than the immediate profit of the Company. (Ward, 1840: 134)

Smith thus had a list of requirements, rather than a fully illustrated town plan, from which to work. Indeed, specific design and mapping skills presumably comprised the attributes that the Directors considered would justify the £600 *per annum* salary for Smith and the additional salaries of his assistants, averaging £200 each, all of whom could reasonably have been expected to have had adequate drafting and cartographic abilities. In this light the inclusion of a plan from a non-salaried or non-appointed individual simply does not make sense.

Others have detailed the troublesome events that followed (Burns 1989, Patterson 1990, Temple 2002). The Principal Agent, Colonel William Wakefield, and his team arrived in Port Nicholson in August 1839 after a remarkably swift passage. They had left London in haste to try to avoid government sanctions. Smith's passage, by stark contrast, took some 175 days and his team arrived only in December of that year. The first waves of Company settlers arrived less than three weeks after Smith reached New Zealand. When Smith arrived he selected a location at the northern end of the harbour (Petone). This conflicted with Wakefield's preference for the southern end of the

harbour (Thorndon). Both had their own priorities. Wakefield was preoccupied with port and landing facilities while Smith was concerned with township and rural surveys.

During the first few months of 1840 this impasse produced rival European settlements at Port Nicholson. One grouping was located at Te Aro and Thorndon at the southern end of the harbour. The other grouping was on the lower reaches of the Hutt River, with "Aglionby" (Ward, 1975: 46) a little upstream, the more substantial "Britannia" close to the river outlet and "Cornish Row" straggling along the Petone beach. Where an individual or family settled often depended upon which vessel they had been aboard, suggesting a kind of parochialism, derived either from bonds formed during the voyage from England or Scotland, or by virtue of affiliation with a particular "home" county.

The impasse was broken by a damaging flood which struck the lower reaches of the Hutt River during March 2-4, 1840 after some ten days of rainfall in the catchment. Smith had argued strongly for settlers to be levied and money set aside for draining and flood protection work at this site but there were no such sums available. Consequently, on April 6, 1840, spurred on by settler lobbying, Wakefield wrote in a despatch to London that stated "I cannot but decide, with however much regret, to fix the City on a safer and more available site" (quoted in Millar 1972: 32). He also pointed out that the Company's earlier intelligence had been inadequate in respect to the "impractical plans for the new town drawn up in London, in an erroneous conception of this part of the Country" (Ibid.). It is crucially important to recognise here that Wakefield refers to "plans for the new town" in the plural rather than to a single plan. This lends weight to the notion that both he and Smith were both issued with written instructions rather than any single master plan or blueprint.

The transfer of principal status and activity from Petone to Thorndon was not, however, instantaneous. The rather fanciful name of "Britannia", which had first been applied to the Petone site by popular approval, continued to be used there, but was at the same time applied, rather confusingly, to the new villages at Te Aro/Thorndon. This is amply demonstrated in Louis Ward's (1975) compendium history of Wellington, first published in 1928, which is based on quotations from early correspondence and newspaper reports. The name "Britannia" is used by people situated in a variety of locations (pp. 39-70).

Smith's work, under these circumstances, was understandably more challenging than it might otherwise have been and several authors have documented or commented upon his trials, not least of which was William Wakefield's constant meddling (Patterson 1984, 1990, Wakefield 1987: 149, Ward 1975: 55-58). Land selection was meant to take place at the start of July, 1840 but, amongst other things, an error on the main selection map led to delays and the first round was not completed until mid-August. It is critically important to remember at this point that any maps or plans would have to have been rendered in hand-sketched or traced form. A map or maps could not have been lithographically produced at this early point. The means for lithographic production, in contrast to a conventional monotype printing press, which was shipped with the first settlers in 1839, was to arrive over the coming months i.e., much later than August 1840 (Ellis and Ellis 1978: 87-88).

The convoluted and difficult circumstances surrounding the siting and opening up for purchase of a main town site may go some way to explaining the apparent absence of surviving authentic official survey maps from Port Nicholson during July and August 1840. In principle, there should have been

several draft maps, including working drafts and officially signed-off copies, presumably for the town or city of Britannia, since virtually everyone at Port Nicholson would have been under the apprehension that this was going to be the name of the capital. At a conservative estimate between five and ten manuscript versions would have been generated, some for local daily use and others for dispatch to England to the Directors of the New Zealand Company and to officers of the Crown such as the Colonial Secretary.

### The “City of Britannia” manuscript map

At the present time only one item has come to light locally that may qualify for the status of an official manuscript map. It has rarely been viewed outside of the confines of archival storage although it was digitised in the late 2000s.<sup>7</sup> According to curatorial and archives staff at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa it appears to have come into the Dominion Museum in 1933 as part of the Horace Fildes Collection and it was kept in the Museum’s History Collection for several decades (Fitzgerald pers. comm., Twist pers. comm. 2005) The item in question is the “Plan of the city of Britannia in Lambton Harbour, Port Nicholson, New Zealand, the Principal Settlement of the New Zealand Company” (See Figure 1: Plan of the City of Britannia in Lambton Harbour, Port Nicholson, New Zealand, the Principal Settlement of the New Zealand Company).



Figure 1: Plan of the City of Britannia in Lambton Harbour, Port Nicholson, New Zealand, the Principal Settlement of the New Zealand Company (Image courtesy of Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. CA000433/001/0001).

The condition of the map is fragile and the water colours have faded, making any close forensic examination quite difficult. However, a simplified black and white line drawing copy or tracing appears to have been made in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century which captures almost all of the information. The first point to note is that the title in the top left hand corner includes the word “city.” This is at odds with the most well recognised “official” map of Wellington where the word “town” is used: the Smith and Elder lithograph (discussed and illustrated below). A key, or legend, of public buildings and amenities, listed from A to P, is included and appears upside down at lower centre right. A table of the names of land purchasers and their lot selections is shown at right centre. Material appears to have been added and subtracted over a period of time. One of the annotations notes that purchases by a settler named Natrass are marked in red. Company and Church Reserves are marked in pink and yellow respectively. Pa sites, stream courses and topographical are noted.

Despite the age and condition of the map it is clear that a number of individual calligraphic styles are present. It is possible that this was only one of a number of selection maps but the additions and annotations suggest equally that it was a main map. This is reinforced by the fact that the main calligraphic style appears to belong to Charles Heaphy and in the bottom left hand corner a partial signature can be detected which museum staff have looked at closely and have attributed to Heaphy (Fitzgerald, Twist 2005). Heaphy was not a surveyor but rather a draughtsmen/artist who was part of the team that accompanied Wakefield on the Principal Agent’s voyage to New Zealand and he seems to have made himself indispensable in many forms at an early point. Smith made extensive use of him. Interestingly, and in contrast to the more well-known depictions in early survey maps such as those reproduced by Smith and Elder, the layout shows Lambton Harbour appearing on the right. Most others show it on the left. The only other map that follows this orientation is New Zealand Surveyor General Felton Mathew’s later map of October 1841 which appeared in lithographic form in the British Parliamentary Papers of 1842. Since the New Zealand Company would have had to forward copies of their initial maps to the Government for approval it is possible that a copy of the Britannia map was sent to Mathew and used by him for reference and then subsequently lost or destroyed.

### **The official Wellington map**

Perhaps due to its fragile nature, rather artless rendering and its oblique entry into national cartographic collections the Britannia map has remained in complete obscurity. Most have looked to a cartographic item entitled “Plan of the Town of Wellington, Port Nicholson, the First and Principal Settlement of the New Zealand Company, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1840” with the elegantly written signature “W. M. Smith, Captain, Royal Artillery, Surveyor General” (See Figure 2: Lithographic map entitled “Plan of the Town of Wellington, Port Nicholson, the First and Principal Settlement of the New Zealand Company”).

Very conveniently, the date 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1840 on the lithograph tallies entirely with written records. Yet the above map is in fact a counterfeit, historically speaking. Unless Captain William Mein Smith was somehow clairvoyant it would have been impossible for him to label this map “Wellington” on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1840. The New Zealand Company Board of Directors in London did not officially assign the name Wellington to the principal town at Port Nicholson until May 1840, in a belated gesture of appreciation to the Duke of Wellington, no fan of the New Zealand Company at that point, but a statesman who had earlier helped the Company’s cause (Burns, 1989: 147). News of this

change did not reach Port Nicholson until November 14, 1840, when the emigrant vessel the *Martha Ridgway* arrived and brought the latest news from home (Wakefield, 1908: 297). To mark this change in nomenclature the *New Zealand Gazette and Wellington Spectator* (hitherto the *Britannia Spectator*) printed the following editorial statement on November 28 explaining its modified name:

We appear for the second time written a few months under a modified title but trust our friends will not consider it typical of our character. When we first issued our journal, the name and the site of the town were alike uncertain, we therefore abstained from using a special designation. The time arrived when the site of the town was surveyed and the name declared, and we adopted the one and rescinded the other at our earliest convenience” (Ward, 1975: 73).



Figure 2: Lithographic map entitled “Plan of the Town of Wellington, Port Nicholson, the First and Principal Settlement of the New Zealand Company” (Image courtesy of the National Library of New Zealand reference: MapColl 832.4799gbbd 1840 316-8).

Furthermore, the August 14, 1840 Wellington lithograph shows the town section numbers with the ballot order-of-choice numbers held by settlers for all 1,100 sections. At August 14, 1840 not all town sections had been selected (the initial ballot for 990 sections in London in late July 1839 had been fully subscribed – See Burns, 1989: 106-7). Added to this, the “official” map shows the streets

as named. According to at least one source, however, the naming of streets did not take place until October 15, 1840 (Reed, 1968: 53).

How, then, did such a contradictory item come into existence? One explanation is that one of Smith's manuscript maps of Britannia arrived in London at some point in the latter half of 1840 or perhaps early 1841, at which point it was "corrected" by a New Zealand Company draftsman, or by a printer working for the Company's favoured printing establishment, Smith, Elder & Company, in preparation for release to the public in England. A manuscript map or bundle of maps was almost certainly forwarded to the Company in London by Smith or Wakefield, perhaps sent as early as August 1840. If sent around this time, and arriving in London in early December, may have been prepared for lithographic reproduction with the substitution of the name "Wellington" for "Britannia". In this case Smith would have had nothing to do with the laundering of the information that appeared on the lithographs carrying his signature.

Alternatively, Captain Smith may have waited until early 1841 to send a similarly "improved" i.e., backdated, manuscript map to London that was then set up for lithographic reproduction. Either way, surveyors in New Zealand could not control the map reduction process by lithographers in London. The latter would have been taking their orders from New Zealand Company Directors who had a propagandist agenda. It was in any case common practice to "improve" the information on maps and make them conform with historical events where it was deemed appropriate.

Despite some remaining ambiguities about the two plans shown above I believe that at this point it is possible to say that both are connected insofar as they belonged to the New Zealand Company and they evolved during the process of actual survey. The same cannot be said of the plan by Samuel Cobham. As noted earlier, he was not on the company payroll, so to speak, in London in 1839-1840 and he did not arrive in New Zealand until the 1850s. As others have observed, his plan was a "dream city" (Manson and Manson 1962: 130-33) that spoke more of utopian ideals than of pragmatism or commercial instructions, but it does not mean that it lacks value and in the context of planning history.

### **The Cobham Plan and its function**

Samuel Cobham's "A Proposed Plan of the City of Wellington in the first Settlement in New Zealand, founded 1839-40" is a marked departure from the maps described above (See Figure 3: Lithographic map entitled "A Proposed Plan of the City of Wellington in the first Settlement in New Zealand, founded 1839-40").

Apart from the obvious lack of topographical sophistication - the river has merely been pasted onto the grid pattern - it is plain and yet remarkably dense with features. It is worth recalling the New Zealand Company instructions to Captain Smith:

The Directors wish that, in forming the plan of the town, you should make ample reserves for all public purposes, such as a cemetery, a market-place, wharfage, and probable public buildings, a botanical garden, a park and extensive boulevards. It is, indeed, desirable that the whole outside of the town, inland, should be separated from the country sections by a broad

belt of land which you will declare that the Company intends to be public property, on condition that no buildings be ever erected upon it. (Ward 1840: 134)

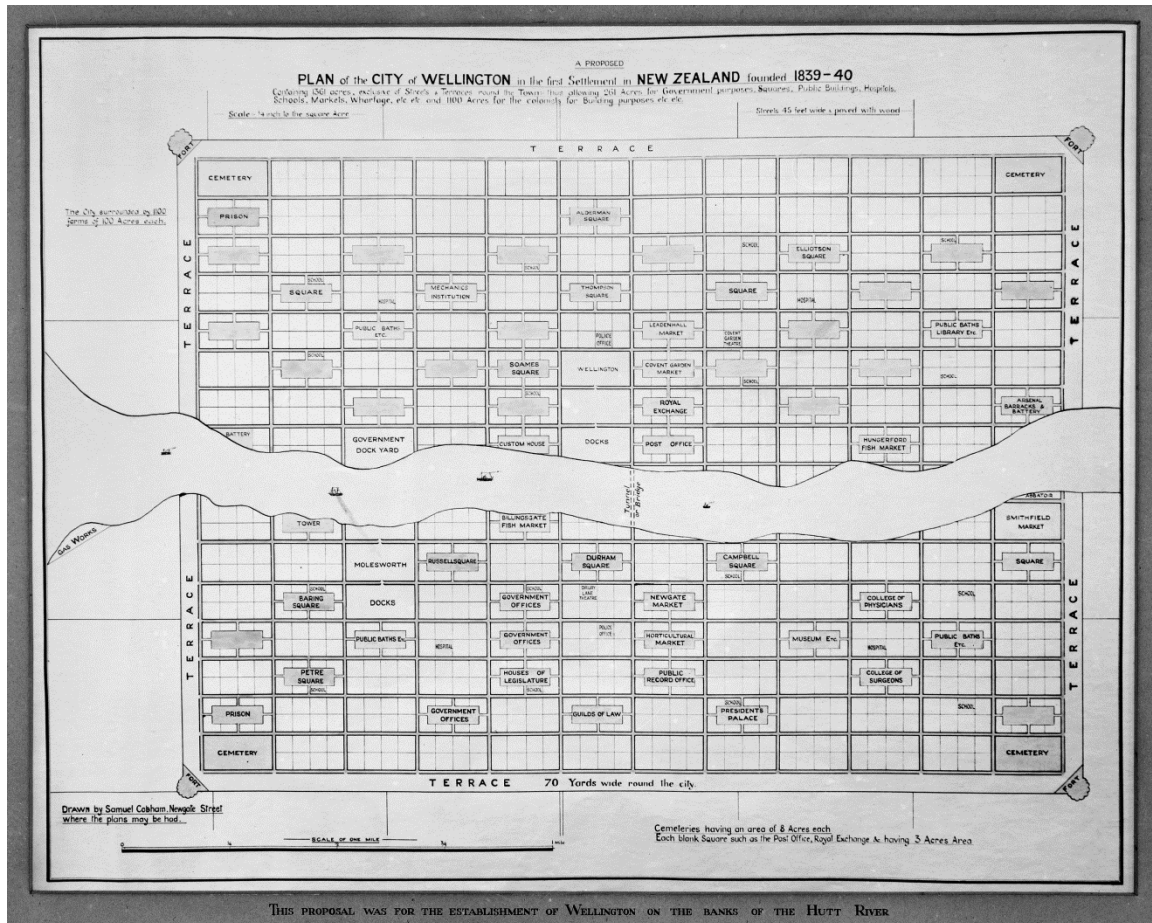


Figure Three Lithographic map entitled “A Proposed Plan of the City of Wellington in the first Settlement in New Zealand, founded 1839-40”. Image courtesy of the National Library of New Zealand reference: MapColl-832.4796a/1839/Acc.15648.

There is a standard list of reserves and buildings on Heaphy’s Britannia Plan. On the Smith lithograph there are none. Such minimalism contrasts with the grand vision of a civic society set out here by Cobham. Of a total of 1361 acres for the city itself some 284 acres, a little over 20%, are given over to public or civic uses. This would surely have outraged the Directors of the New Zealand Company who were peddling minimal government interference in their projects. Cobham specifies forts at each corner of the city, barracks and an arsenal, features not specified by the New Zealand Company. He may have been aware of disputes with Maori when some of Wakefield’s despatches were published in London in the *New Zealand Journal*. Forts would probably have helped reassure prospective settlers that their lives and property were protected, but the New Zealand Company was not interested in raising armies or garrisoning its settlements.

Apart from the four “Terraces” ringing the city no streets are named. The named squares are as follows: Petre, Baring, Russell, Soames, Thompson, Durham, Alderman, Campbell, and Elliotson. This seems a rather half-hearted and random nod to the New Zealand Company and with some twenty-two of Cobham’s squares left unnamed, one wonders at his actual connection with the Company. He seems more preoccupied with his own view of the utopian city and, considering the facilities and institutions envisaged by Cobham, the list is impressive to say the least, for what was going to be a relatively modest Antipodean colony. I have tabulated the elements by type in order of area below (See Table 1: Public Institutions and other amenities contained in the Cobham Plan) to show Cobham’s priorities and pre-occupations.

Table 1: Public Institutions and other amenities contained in the Cobham Plan.

<b>Type of institution or amenity (NB. ▼ indicates town acre)</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Total acreage</b>
Unnamed squares (possibly parks)	22	66
Commercial dockyards	5	40
Cemeteries	4	32
Public markets	6	26
Named squares	8	24
Public baths and library	4	12
Schools ▼	16	10
Government Offices	3	9
Government dockyard	1	8
Mechanics Institutions	2	6
Prisons	2	6
Medical Colleges	2	6
Hospitals ▼	4	4
Arsenal, barracks and battery	2	4
Post Office	1	3
Custom House	1	3
Public Record Office	1	3
Royal Exchange	1	3
Houses of Legislature	1	3
Courts of Law	1	3
Tower	1	3
President’s Palace	1	3
Museum	1	3
Police Offices ▼	2	2
Theatres ▼	2	2
Forts	4	unclear
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>284</b>

The plan seems to speak very much about Cobham's daily walks around the neighbourhood of Newgate - Charles Dickens lived in the same neighbourhood at this time - and nearby parts of the City of London. It betrays his enthusiasm for fish and fresh produce. It reflects his world-view, which seems a hybrid of utopianism and Hobbesian paranoia i.e., public baths and libraries for the enjoyment and education of all, combined with a very heavy bureaucracy and a panopticon-like fortified and enclosed city environment. This is hardly the light-handed laissez-faire vision of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his followers. It is, in my view, a fantasy of the comforts of the city, minus its dis-amenities, as seen by a well-intentioned middle-aged urbanite of the early Victorian era.

It must also be remembered that in terms of Cobham's reference to "Wellington" the decision regarding the naming of Wellington was made by the Directors in May 1840, so the earliest that Cobham could have drafted the plan bearing this name was May 1840; the "1839-40" of the title is thus a fiction. If Cobham executed the plan at this point it then it would explain the misapprehension about a large navigable river. Cobham would have based it on the first intelligence received from Colonel William Wakefield. Wakefield's surveys had been only cursory but they mentioned the Hutt River, and the first reports arrived in London in March 1840. In any event, Cobham's Wellington plan could not have reached NZ before November 1840 as it took that long for the return despatches to arrive as noted earlier.

Furthermore, it is important to note here that no manuscript version of the Cobham plan has been located to date. There are no drafts in Cobham's hand, and the copies to be found in New Zealand are either photocopies or re-drawings of a lithograph struck by 'W. Lake, lith. 50, Old Bailey, London' the only version of which is kept in the Mitchell Library, a branch of the State Library of New South Wales. This particular copy was apparently acquired by Sir William Dixson who bequeathed the item to the State Library of New South Wales in 1952 (Evans 2005).

There is also the question of Cobham's inspiration for the form or geometry of the plan. One needs to look no further, perhaps unsurprisingly, than London. In this instance it is a London never built. In 1666, after the Great Fire, a number of designs for rebuilding the city were generated by way of a competition. Entrants included Sir Christopher Wren and Sir John Evelyn. Less well known is the entry submitted by Richard Newcourt who used a very geometric design based on rectangular units and "squares" within the larger rectangles with a church at the centre of each square. Cobham's plan bears an uncanny resemblance to the Newcourt plan except that Cobham has created individualised sections and he has erased the religious content in favour of more earthly institutions. Since the Newcourt plan survived intact and remained in London not far from where Cobham resided at the Guildhall Library (where it remains today) it is quite possible that Cobham had access to this earlier reimagining of London.

## **Conclusion**

I have argued elsewhere that the processes by which city and town maps were created in a number of New Zealand and Australian settlements meant that junior survey staff often ended up by default as designers of towns and I have also proposed that our writings of planning history and historical geography ought to assume multiple rather than singular attribution for city founding (Montgomery and McCarthy 2004, Montgomery 2006a, 2006b, 2008). The fact that Charles Heaphy, an important figure in New Zealand history from the 1840s onwards, but someone who, as of 1840, was still trying

to get his foot in the door of salaried employment with the New Zealand Company, should be handed the job of drawing up the first plan for Britannia/Wellington thus comes as no surprise. It may be a rather lowly piece of cartographic execution but the “Plan of the City of Britannia in Lambton Harbour, Port Nicholson, New Zealand, the Principal Settlement of the New Zealand Company” is nonetheless as important as the Cobham Plan.

Regarding the latter, it is my view that Cobham’s plan never really left the confines of his own eccentric musings. He may have circulated it at his own expense as an alternative to the official plans already under way in the early 1840s. Cobham’s plan may have filled a gap in the flow of cartographic intelligence returning from Port Nicholson during 1840, since despatches tended to arrive fitfully in bundles rather in monthly instalments. It would certainly have done the New Zealand Company no harm. Any publicity was good publicity and a slightly overblown vision of the New Zealand Company’s principal city would have been grist to the mill in terms of its propaganda value.

If it is true that the Cobham Plan was always a fantasy, or a Wellington of the mind that neither Captain Smith, William Wakefield or Charles Heaphy laid eyes on as they tried to create a capital on the other side of the world this should not reduce its standing as an important record of early-Victorian thinking about the European colonisation of New Zealand. Indeed, the idealisation of society embodied in Cobham’s construction puts it in the company of Ebenezer Howard, Robert Pemberton and others and it that sense it deserves greater recognition as a serious urban design concept.

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<sup>1</sup>This is a play on the slogan “Absolutely Positively Wellington” which was coined during a city marketing campaign of the early 1990s and which is still in use. See <http://www.wellingtonnz.com/about-us/absolutely-positively-wellington>. Accessed 9 August 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The introductory webpage for the conference at which this paper was presented is a case in point: As the second Wakefield private colonisation experiment in Australasia, a pre-planned grid city was patched into a paucity of flat land and arrayed across steep inclines at the edge of *Te Whanganui-a-Tara* (the great harbour of Tara). <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/fad/research/uhph2014> [accessed 4 August 2013]

<sup>3</sup> For example, a manuscript map of surveyed sections in the Hutt Valley area which carries Cobham’s signature and which dates from c. 1856 is kept in the Map collection of the Alexander Turnbull Library (See MapColl-832.479gbbd/1856?/Acc. 17028).

<sup>4</sup> Amongst Cobham’s self-published outputs are the *The “Charter”*, a broadsheet printed by William Lake in 1842, *Improper conduct of joint-stock companies and of the New Zealand Company*, another broadsheet from 1844, and *The income tax, the property tax and free trade: peace, retrenchment and Captain Warner’s awful engines of war*, a 24-page booklet printed by Lake in 1848.

<sup>5</sup> The Mansons thank the staffs of the Alexander Turnbull Library, the Wellington Public Library and the New Zealand National Archives Office on their Acknowledgements page.

<sup>6</sup> Phillip Barton (1925-2010) was Map Librarian at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington during the 1970s and 1980s. I corresponded with Mr Barton briefly in the early 2000s and with Brad Patterson in the hope of confirming their suspicions but the evidence could not be found and Barton concluded that there was less to Cobham’s involvement than he had once believed.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/objectdetails.aspx?irn=319051&term=britannia> [accessed 5 September 2013]

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