CHAPTER 9

The Edinburgh of the South: Seeking the New Town

Robin Skinner

Since the 1860s Dunedin, New Zealand, has been called the 'Edinburgh of the South'.[1] This is not surprising, as the name 'Dunedin' or 'Dun Eideann' is the Gaelic form for that northern capital.[2] Emigration brought many Scottish resonances in the south of New Zealand. Towns with names such as Glencoe, Bannockburn, Stirling and Caberfeidh are scattered through the region, and Presbyterian churches abound. Dunedin's civic crest is supported on either side by a Māori and a tartan-clad Scotsman, while the region's professional rugby team is called 'the Highlanders'. There are many links between the design of Dunedin and that of its northern namesake. Dunedin's suburbs and streets are named after those of Edinburgh, and some claim that the town evidences other characteristics of Edinburgh New Town. Some writers have stated that Dunedin's design was blindly undertaken in Britain, or that its plan is a literal copy of that of Edinburgh.[3] This chapter considers the design of Dunedin in light of the Edinburgh town plan in order to assess the validity of these claims.

After the European discovery of New Zealand in the seventeenth century, British colonisation of the country was enthusiastically debated in the late 1830s. Relations with Māori, who had been in these islands since the thirteenth century, were improving. A flax trade, timber-milling, whaling and sealing were underway, and missionaries were at work. Edward Gibbon Wakefield's scheme for systematic colonisation which would create a stratified community of all classes except those at the top and bottom of society was

gaining support. Led by Wakefield, the New Zealand Company proposed to apply his principles based on a sufficient price for land. Landowners, whether in the colony or remaining at home, would receive a combination of town, suburban and rural sections. Workers who arrived without funds could work in order to earn money to buy land eventually. New Zealand Company settlements were established at Wellington (1840), Wanganui (1840), Nelson (1841) and New Plymouth (1841).

The Otago Scheme

The establishment of a Scottish settlement in New Zealand was discussed too. In 1842 the East Lothian-born sculptor and politician George Rennie proposed a Scottish settlement on New Zealand's South Island under the name 'New Edinburgh'.[4] Former army officer Captain William Cargill quickly joined the project and a base office was established in Edinburgh. Talks were given, speaking tours were programmed, magazines were distributed and letters were answered. The Disruption of 1843 within the Church of Scotland further strengthened the project. This dispute, which centred on the relationship between the Church and the State, in particular the right of congregations to appoint ministers, prompted the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland. The New Edinburgh scheme became a joint undertaking between the New Zealand Company and the Lay Association of the Free Church of Scotland. The Company would provide land, transport settlers and survey the site, while the Lay Association would sell the properties and select emigrants. In 1844 the Company surveyor, Frederick Tuckett, determined that the principal settlement of New Edinburgh should be at the head of a 20 km long harbour in the lower part of the east coast of the South Island.[5] The southern climate was considered similar to that of the north of Britain.

Opinions differed within the leadership regarding the composition of the settlement. Rennie, who favoured a more religiously diverse community rather than a settlement that was solely Free Church (as preferred by the other officials), was ousted. Perhaps to reinforce that the project now had new direction, the principal

settlement was renamed 'Dunedin'. In order to attract prospective settlers from the west Lowlands of Scotland, the river then known as the Molyneux or the Matau was renamed the Clutha, which was an early name for the River Clyde. Taking its name from the Māori settlement near the harbour entrance, the greater area became known as 'Otakou'. In order to reduce the possibility that this name would alienate prospective emigrants, the officials of the New Edinburgh scheme adopted the spelling 'Otago' (which closely maintains the Māori pronunciation), with the project then becoming known as 'the Otago Scheme'.[6]

The name 'Dunedin' held several familiar resonances. Appearing in poems, including works by Walter Scott, James Hogg and David Macbeth Moir, it was embedded within the Scottish Romanticism of the first decades of the nineteenth century.[7] Sometimes 'Dunedin' or 'Dun-Eidin' was listed as the place of origin for Edinburgh-published books written in Gaelic.[8] There was a small Dunedin Theatre in Nicolson Street, Edinburgh, within the site of the present-day Edinburgh Festival Theatre. In addition, between 1843 and 1844 there had been a novel proposal: the Dunedin Bank. This initiative, which offered the small investor advantageous borrowing and lending rates, would accept smaller deposits than those of the established banks. It attracted a great deal of attention in Scotland and England.[9] Although the venture soon folded, in the mid 1840s the word 'Dunedin' was associated with the lot of the common people. Giving the proposed settlement a name that held these resonances was a strategic move to tap Scottish consciousness in order to build support for the project and attract potential emigrants.

Design of Dunedin

In the early 1840s, the English surveyor Charles Kettle surveyed large tracts of land in the colony's lower North Island for the New Zealand Company. When his employment ceased in 1843 he returned to Britain, gaining work with the New Edinburgh scheme.[10] Between 26 September 1843 and 13 January 1844 he worked alongside the project leaders, attending meetings in various parts of Scotland and speaking on the colony's resources and its advantages as

an emigrant destination.[11] With first-hand knowledge, he produced an up-to-date map of the colony for the New Zealand Company. While in Scotland he became acquainted with the plans of Edinburgh's Old and New Towns and the drainage of the Nor' Loch, in addition to the layouts of other Scottish settlements or planned towns. Later in September 1845 Kettle was appointed to survey the Otago settlement, taking up his position in New Zealand in February the following year.[12]

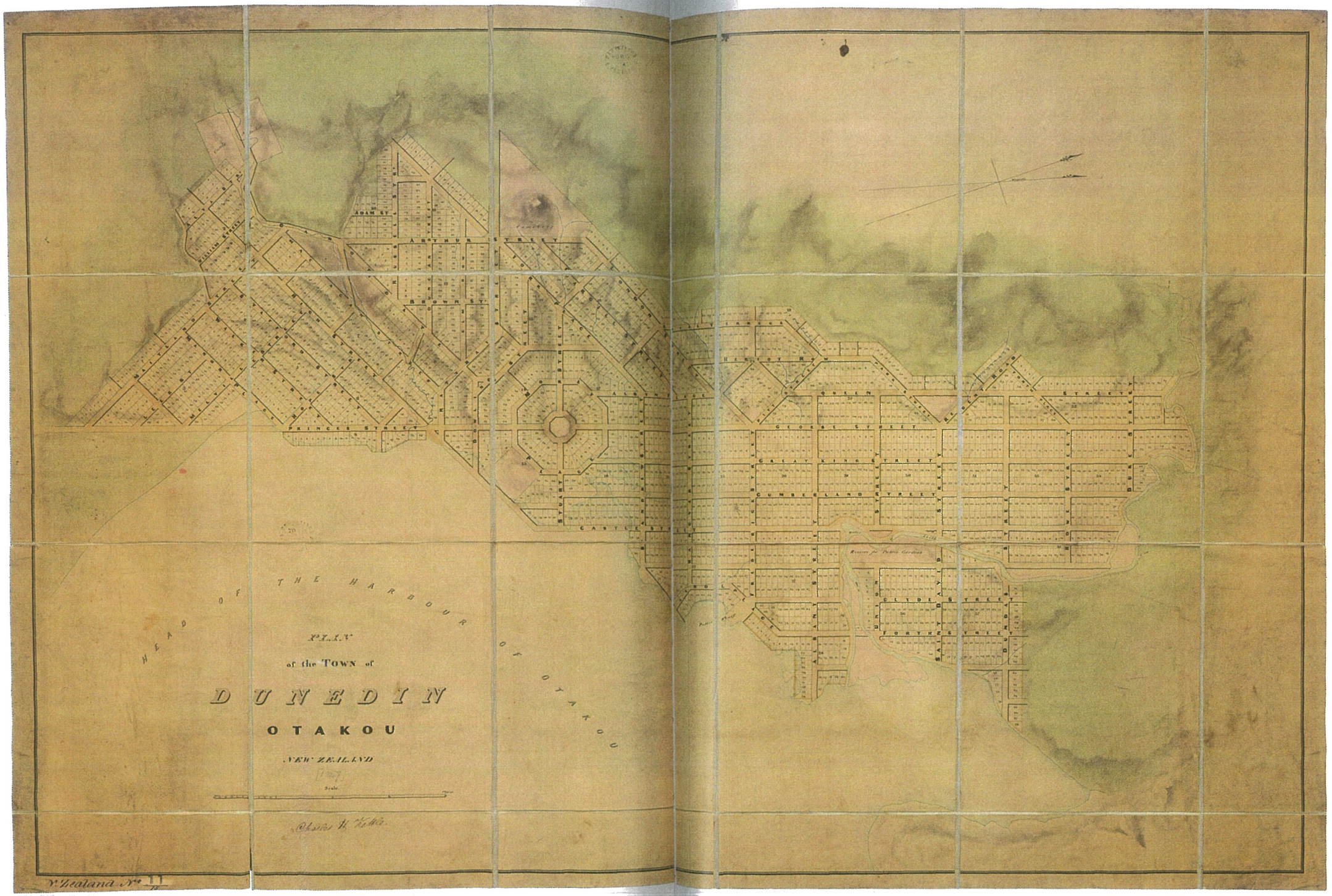
Frederick Tuckett had recommended that the principal settlement be sited on a coastal strip of flat land bounded by hilly terrain. Each landowner was to be allocated a town allotment of a quarter acre (0.10 ha), a suburban lot of 10 acres (4.05 ha) and a rural lot of 50 acres (20.23 ha). After undertaking an assessment of the area, Kettle had to produce plans delineating these sections. Up to 2,400 combined properties were to be allocated in the first five years of the scheme. The job was complicated as the low-lying flat land in the north-east was swampy and a prominent spur separated it from a narrow band of flat land to the south. This effectively bisected the flat area of the town. A chain of hills rose steeply to the west.

Aided by his assistant surveyors, Robert Park and William Davison, Kettle prepared a plan in late 1846 that showed a named street layout with almost 2,300 sections superimposed upon the shaded topography (Fig. 9.1).[13] Although the rugged terrain was obviously dissimilar to the topography of Edinburgh's New Town, as has been noted, some have suggested that the grid plan of the New Town was the inspiration for Dunedin's design. In order to achieve the requisite number of rectangular quarter-acre town sections, long rectangular blocks were positioned on the flat land in the north-east, which to an extent maintains the regularity that we associate with James Craig's design of the New Town. Where this grid meets the steep western slopes, Kettle projected roads at 45-degree angles. These alignments lessened the street gradients, provided drainage and formed inclined grids with further rectangular blocks and sections on the hillside. Some of these road alignments appear to take advantage of the topographic alignment of the hill spurs and gullies. Nevertheless, significant earthworks would be required to achieve trafficable gradients on parts of these rising angled streets.[14]

Kettle was required to deliver 'streets and roads of sufficient width for both health and ornament', and sites for fortifications, public buildings, baths, wharves and cemeteries, as well as sites for 'open Squares, or Town Belt or Park, and other places for Health and recreation of the inhabitants'.[15] Accordingly, he ran a green belt along the length of the town on the excessively sloped terrain above all of these planned streets. This separated the town from the suburban sections to the west. Kettle would have been aware that town belts were being established in other colonial settlements such as Adelaide and Wellington.[16] In addition, he may have been familiar with John Sinclair's earlier proposal for New Thurso of 1812, which included a rectilinear green belt. In time, the town belt running across Dunedin's city rise became a much-prized feature, which remains to this day. Upon receipt of the 1846 plan, the Principal Agent of the New Zealand Company, William Wakefield, stated that he thought the arrangement of the proposed town belt and reserves was 'judicious'.[17] His remark must be understood in terms of Kettle's instructions and within the context of other colonial settlement plans. By the time they arrived at Otago, Kettle, Park and Davison already had substantial experience surveying rural land and colonial towns in New Zealand. They were familiar with Wellington and Nelson, which were each surrounded by hills and harbour; Park had journeyed from Wellington through the sites of Wanganui to New Plymouth. They knew other colonial settlements through published plans. In part, the Dunedin design must be seen as a response to earlier colonial layouts, although that investigation remains outside the scope of this chapter.

Although Kettle's plan shows a regular grid formation, in the 1850s there was significant discontinuity because of the topography. Princes Street was interrupted by the prominent spur that was later known as Bell Hill. Kettle's vision was only achieved when substantial earthworks finally completed this road in the early 1860s.[18] With knowledge of the formation of the Mound in Edinburgh between 1781 and 1830, he would have understood the scale of works that would be required in Dunedin. To the present day some of the connections shown on the 1846 plan are only achieved via steep foot pathways. Kettle had earlier written of the possibility of harbour reclamation at Dunedin and he clearly envisaged continuing the northern grid alignment to the south.[19]

FIGURE 9.1.
(Overleaf) Plan of the town of Dunedin, Otakou, New Zealand, late 1846. (CO 700 New Zealand 11/15, Kew, National Archives)



N. Zealand No. 11

Prior to the Dunedin survey, the harbour settlement of Port Chalmers was planned with a street layout determined by the hilly topography and the size of sections required. For the Dunedin plan the approximate layout of the grid formation was determined before the detailed survey began. Robert Park's survey book indicates that an octagonal circus was envisaged before the line of the long road (Princes Street–George Street) was surveyed.[20] The octagonal form reconciled the 90-degree alignment of the northern orthogonal grid with the inclined alignments of the 45-degree hillside grids, while echoing the circus formations in some British cities. Kettle probably designed his town with an awareness that after Bell Hill was excavated and the southern reclamation was undertaken, this octagonal formation would unify the town design in an elegant, coherent urban arrangement.[21]

Dunedin and the New Town

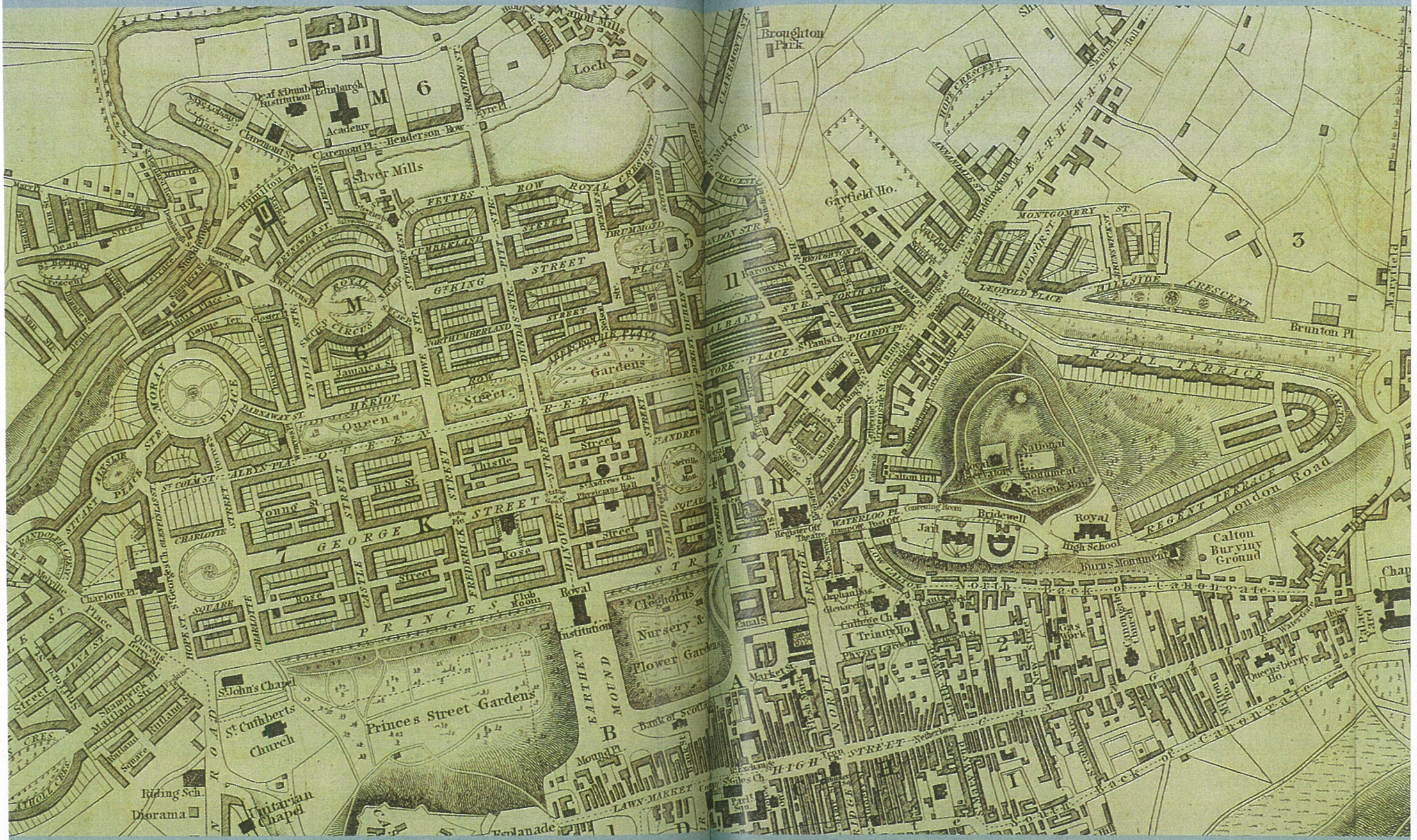
If Kettle received directions on urban planning or the specific layout, these have not survived. Such matters were usually seen as decisions best left to the colonial surveyor. Kettle's plan makes many nominal connections to the design of Edinburgh. He named Dunedin's principal watercourse 'The Water of Leith' and he labelled fifty street names, most of which recall those of Edinburgh's New Town. The plan shows street names such as Royal Terrace, York Place, Elm Row, St Andrew Street, Hanover Street, Albyn Place and Alva Street. Two streets take names from the Old Town: Canongate and High Street. Possibly mindful of the prominent location of the Canongate in Edinburgh, Kettle gave this name to a street running above a long prominent escarpment in Dunedin. Ten street names recall people from New Zealand or Scotland including Cargill Street, Dowling Street and Park Street. Dionysius Wilfred Dowling was a clerk in the St Andrew Street office of the New Edinburgh Scheme when Kettle was employed there. While many of the street names of Dunedin's northern grid follow those of the first New Town, the ordering and alignment of the streets are dissimilar. Whereas Princes Street and George Street run parallel in Edinburgh's New Town, in Dunedin they are on the same alignment. In a perpendicular orientation to

this principal spine there is a progression of random street names taken from the New Town: St Andrew, Hanover, Frederick, Albany, Union, St David, Dundas, Howe and Duke. Appropriating forty street names from Edinburgh suggests that Kettle may have relied on more than his memory of the place, possibly referring to a city map, such as those that were readily available in a *Post Office Directory* or another cheaper publication (Fig. 9.2). If this were the case, it indicates that Kettle may have intended to refer to the Edinburgh design before he designed his colonial town in detail. While he could easily have discussed this prospect with people he met in Britain, there is no record of such communication.

Responding to Edinburgh's topography, the architect James Gillespie Graham had placed the Moray Estate network of Moray Place, Ainslie Place and Randolph Crescent on the falling slope north of the first New Town.[22] With limited space and the requirement for 2,400 sections, Kettle was unable to implement a similar spacious gesture. Nevertheless, the unnamed garden reserve in the centre of the octagon followed a feature of Graham's design and, as stated earlier, it was to provide Dunedin with a central focus and a place to gather – something that the New Town lacks.[23] While Moray Place is a prestigious duodecagonal circus in Edinburgh, on Kettle's map it appears as a large ring road with sections on both sides. A small unnamed eight-sided road and reserve that would eventually become officially known as 'the Octagon' lay at the heart of this formation. Although there were no purely eight-sided street formations in Edinburgh, contemporary plans of St Andrew Square show a central octagonal grassed-space (Fig. 9.2). At about the same dimensions as Dunedin's Octagon, with no through-road and located very near the Edinburgh office where Kettle had been based, this space may have provided an additional prompt for the design of Dunedin's future town centre. Similar shaped grassed spaces were included in the Old Town's George Square and in William Playfair's unbuilt 1819 proposal for Edinburgh's Eastern New Town.[24]

Otago historian Tom Brooking has observed that colonial New Zealanders were very concerned with fairness.[25] In the Dunedin plan we see no evidence of class distinction. Without the alternating hierarchy of major and minor streets that exists between Princes

FIGURE 9.2.
(Overleaf) Detail of Plan of Edinburgh and Leith, by W.H. Lizars, 'From the best Authorities'. Engraved expressly for the *Letter Carriers Directory* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840). This map appeared in the *Post-Office Annual Directory and Calendar for 1841–42*. (Copyright National Library of Scotland)


Broughton Park
Loch
Deaf & Dumb Institution
Edinburgh Academy
Claremont St.
Claremont Pl.
Henderson Row
Silver Mills
Hamilton Pl.
Fettes Row
Royal Crescent
St. Mark's Ch.
Garfield Ho.
Montgomery St.
Leopold Place
Hillside Crescent
Brunton Pl.
Royal Terrace
Regent Terrace
London Road
Jamaica St.
Queen Street Gardens
Heriot Row
Queen Street
Tusile Street
Young St.
Hill St.
George Street
Princes Street
Rose Street
Charlotte Sq.
St. George's Ch.
Register Office
Theatre
Royal Institution
Cleghorns Nursery & Flower Gardens
Princes Street Gardens
St. John's Chapel
St. Cuthberts Church
Unitarian Chapel
Riding Sch.
Diorama
Esplanade
Earthen Mound
Mound Pl.
Bank of Scotland
Canals
Waterloo Pl.
Calton Hill
National Monument
Nelsons Mon.
Observatory
Jail
Bridewell
Royal High School
Burns Monument
Calton Burying Ground
Trinity Ho.
Gas Work
Physic Garden
Market St.
High St.
Trap
Netherbow
Lawn-Market
Parl. Squ.
Queensberry Ho.
Palace Yard
Back of Canongate
North Bridge
South Bridge
Canongate
Leith Walk
Tolls
Maryfield
Chap

and Queen Streets in the New Town, Dunedin's equal-area sections were to be allocated by ballot, so proximity to the commercial centre (then on Princes Street) determined desirability. Pointedly, while Kettle repeated most of the street names of the New Town, he ignored the names of the minor streets where the tradespeople lived. Dunedin has no Rose, Thistle, Young or Hill Streets. Making no attempt to echo the social hierarchy that is fundamental to the layout of the New Town, the Dunedin design makes a significant departure from its supposed model. While this prevented a spacious Edinburgh-type streetscape developing, the lack of major and minor streets ensured that Dunedin would have double-sided shopping streets of an appropriate scale, which is another feature that has been identified as absent in the New Town.[26]

The Site Settled

The majority of settlers on the first two ships, the *Philip Laing* and the *John Wickliffe*, were from villages and farms in the south with many from Midlothian; there were only a few Highlanders.[27] News of their arrival came at very short notice, and hasty arrangements for emigration barracks and baggage storage were attempted. When the first ships moored in March–April 1848, there was no awaiting church, school, public buildings, parkland or jetty. Pegs indicated the unformed street locations.[28] Nevertheless, lots were allocated and makeshift dwellings were erected. Initially the Dunedin site proved difficult, which prompted criticism of the town layout.[29] The streets were rutted and muddy, and streams required culverting[30] (Fig. 9.3). One of Kettle's survey staff, William Davison, criticised his superior for laying out the roads without regard for the topography, a criticism which was restated in subsequent decades.[31] However, such a strategy would have resulted in less regular sections and, consequentially, a more sparsely populated settlement.

In 1863, during the Otago gold rush, a British visitor and campaigner on behalf of women's emigration, Maria S. Rye, complained to *The Times* of London that the Dunedin plan and its street names were prepared in Edinburgh without knowledge of the natural difficulties or capabilities of the country.[32] This was duly

FIGURE 9.3.
Otago Emigration Office letterhead showing Princes Street Dunedin (1859). The view dates from 1858. (AAAC/707/D500/131a – 287, Dunedin, Archives New Zealand)

reprinted in the colony.[33] Presumably this reflects what she heard in the colony. Kettle was unable to respond as in the previous year – in a town overrun with immigrants drawn by the discovery of gold – he had succumbed to typhoid. However, an anonymous letter writer who had formerly worked under Kettle defended the design.[34] It was probably Robert Park who replied that Rye's assertion was absurd, adding 'a comparison of the plans of the two cities shows that in neither the arrangements of the streets, or form of the squares or open places, does Edinburgh and Dunedin correspond in one iota . . .'. While this was not one of Rye's observations, it may be that the writer was attempting to clear a misconception already circulating in the colony. He further stated that in order to best identify the requisite number of town sections Kettle fixed upon the present site '[a]fter repeated and careful examination'. Significantly, he added that the decision to name the streets after those in Edinburgh was an idea of Kettle, rather than the home authorities.

After Kettle

As the century progressed, the wealth from the gold fields created a streetscape that matched the substance and materiality of an established, old-world town, albeit without the Georgian grandeur of Edinburgh's New Town (Fig. 9.4). By the end of the century, when Dunedin had become industrialised, with significant harbour works and reclamation, the integrity of Kettle's plan was largely maintained, which is testament to the success of his design (Fig. 9.5).

Writers at that time and since have continued to make observations on the design of Dunedin in relation to Edinburgh. In 1898 Dr Thomas Hocken notably claimed that Kettle was instructed to reproduce the *features* of Edinburgh.[35] However, there is no earlier written record indicating that Kettle was directed to do this.[36] More recently, Peter Entwisle fancifully interpreted Kettle's alleged instruction to reproduce the *characteristics* of Edinburgh to amount to 'a specific aesthetic brief' which resulted in the cities sharing a romantic composition juxtaposed with formality in a dramatic setting.[37] Dunedin writer Ian Dougherty has soundly stated that Edinburgh's New Town gave Kettle ideas – but not a blueprint – to the extent that much of the similarity between the two cities is superficial. The sites, he stated, are so dissimilar that Kettle could only make token gestures towards reproducing the special features of Edinburgh.[38] This is an astute verdict which is supported by the findings of this chapter.

These claims for connection between the two city designs provide a valuable prompt for study and reflection. The Dunedin plan had many sources beyond its Scottish namesake. Much of the desire to interpret Dunedin as a New Edinburgh ignores the fact that, before coming to Otago, Kettle, Park and Davison already had substantial experience surveying rural land and colonial towns in New Zealand. Through first-hand experience or by studying plans, they were familiar with other colonial settlements in New Zealand and beyond. While many people have been keen to link Dunedin's design with that of James Craig's New Town, it must be acknowledged that colonial precedents are also likely to have contributed to the town's design. Nevertheless, within the public mind at least, the connection between the designs of the two cities remains strong.

FIGURE 9.4.
(Opposite) Frank Coxhead, *Princes Street, Dunedin, N.Z*, showing the Cargill Monument (1880s). This is the same streetscape as that shown in Fig. 9.3. (From the album: Australasian Scenery, Reg. O.033275, Wellington, Te Papa Tongarewa)

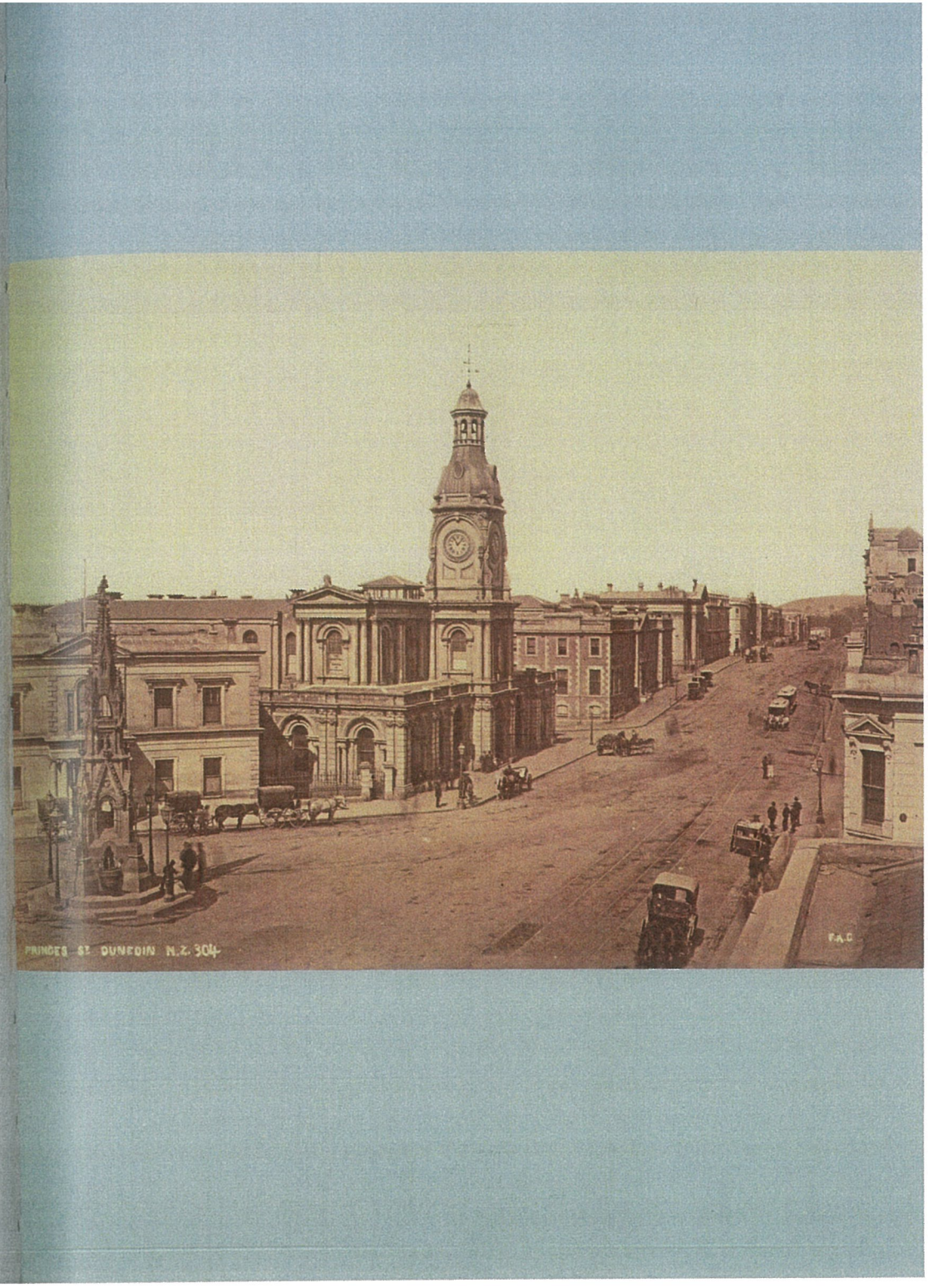
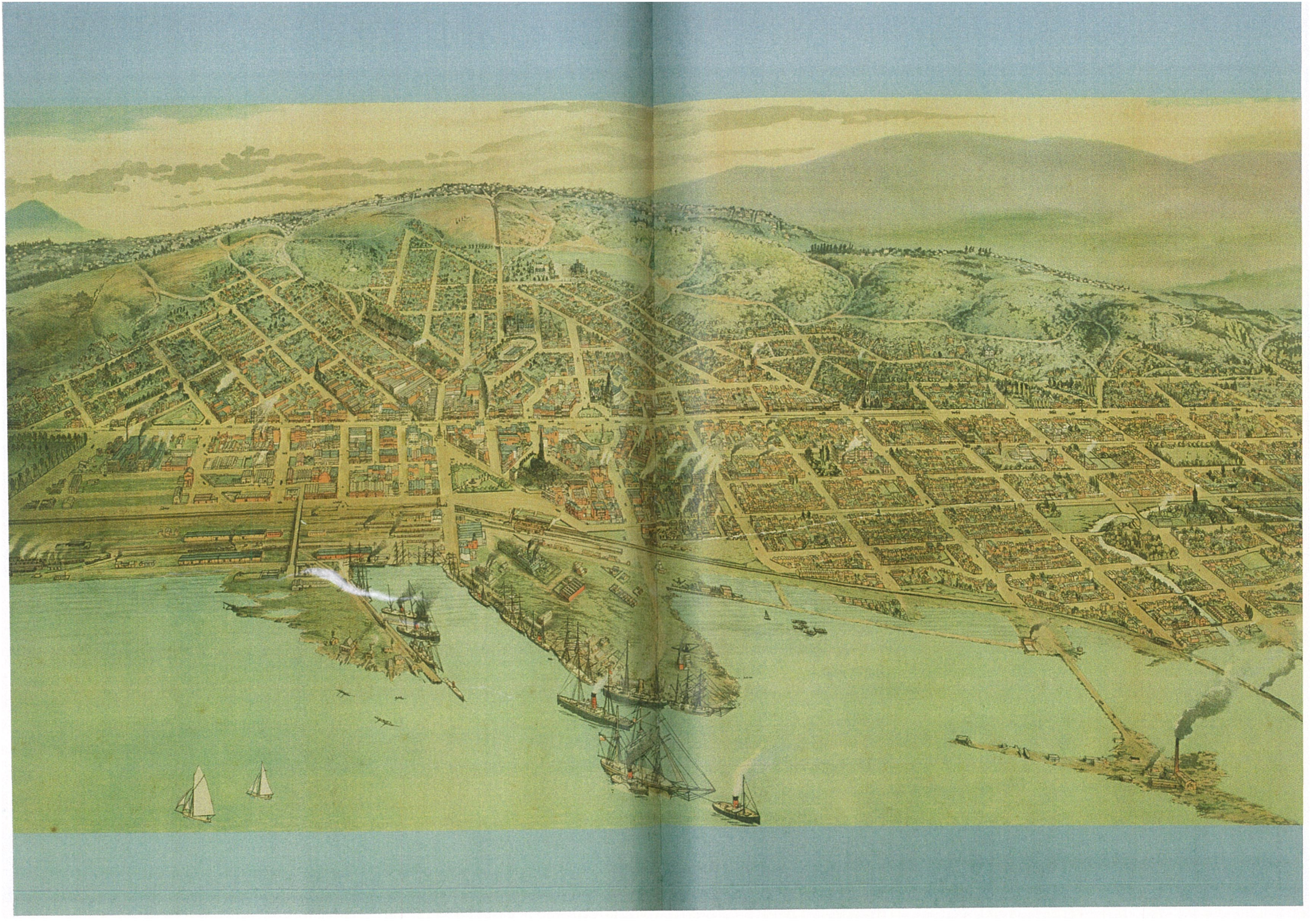
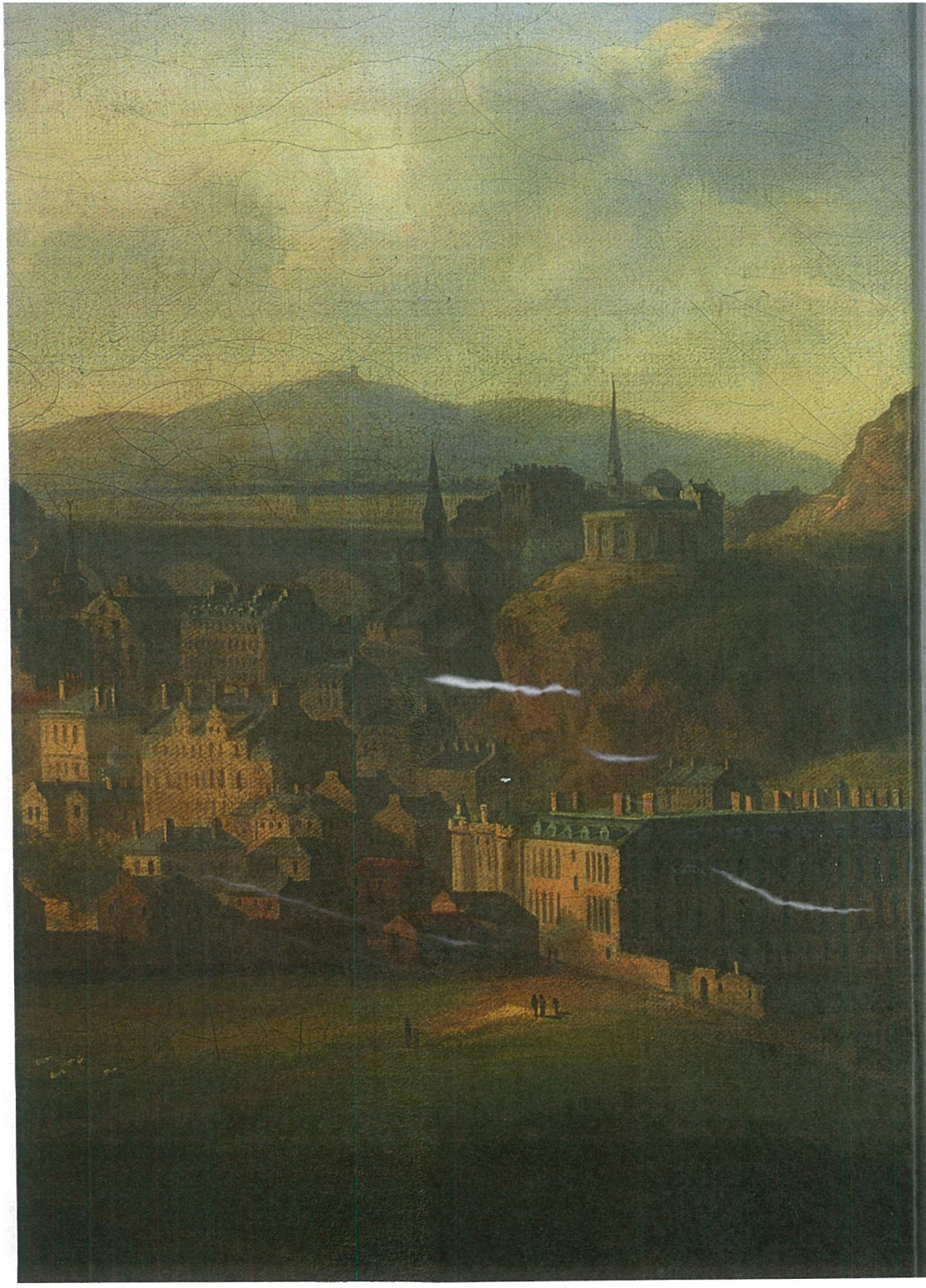


FIGURE 9.5.
(Overleaf) *Jubilee of Otago: Dunedin 1898*, J. Wilkie & Co. litho, New Zealand, 1898. (National Library of New Zealand, Wellington, Map Coll. 834.5292ap 1898)





The New Town *of* Edinburgh

An Architectural Celebration

Edited by

Clarisse Godard Desmarest

John Donald

ENDPAPER:
James Craig, Plan of the New Town of Edinburgh, 1768
(Courtesy of the National Library of Scotland. Available under
Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 International Licence)

FRONTISPIECE:
George Walker, *Edinburgh from the South East*, 1797. The New Town was seen from the outset as coupled with the Old Town, and Calton Hill was quickly adopted as part of the ensemble. (City of Edinburgh Council)

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