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AN UNDOCUMENTED PLAN FOR  
EDINBURGH'S FIRST NEW TOWN BY JAMES CRAIG

VOLKER M. WELTER

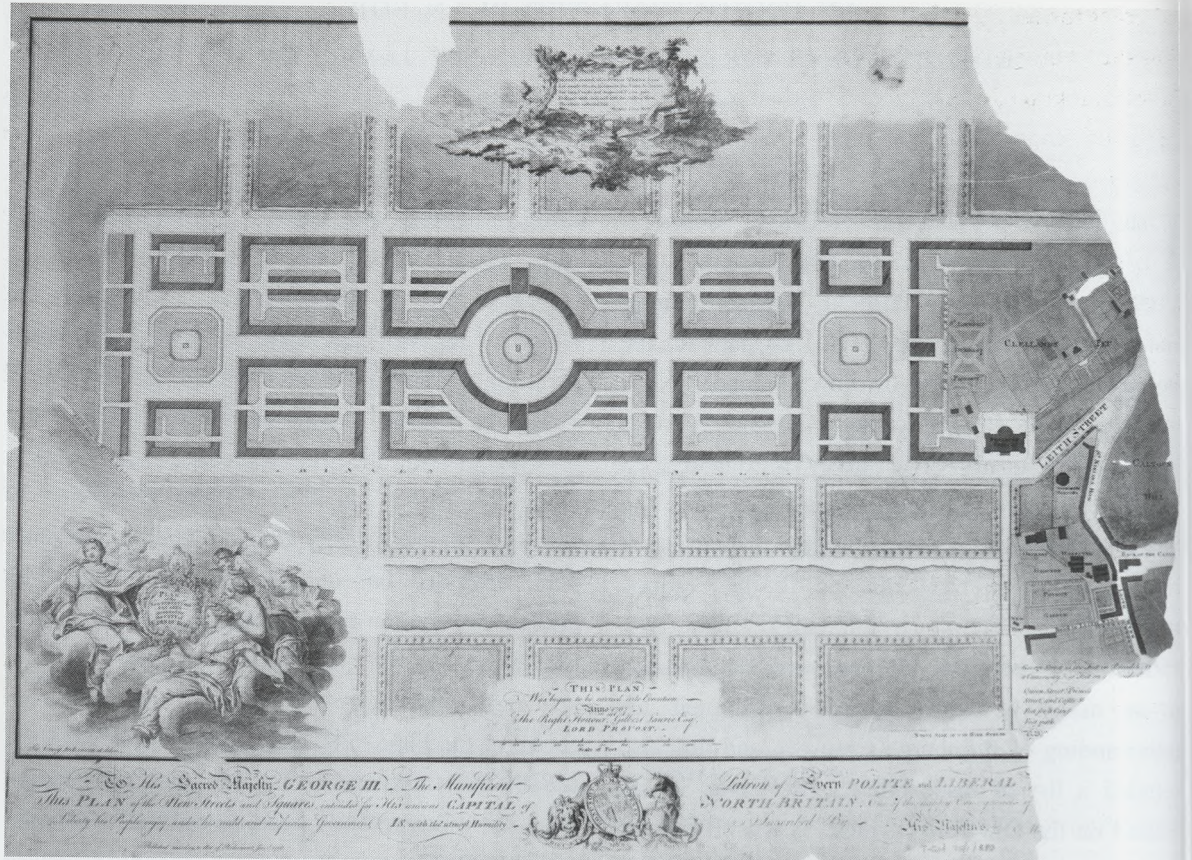
THE ROYAL INSTITUTE of British Architects celebrated the first British Town Planning Act of 1909 with an International Town Planning Conference in London in 1910. As part of the celebrations an exhibition of drawings and models was held at the Royal Academy.<sup>1</sup> Patrick Geddes contributed to this his 'Civic Survey of Edinburgh', a collection of maps, etchings, engravings, plans and photographs illustrating the historic evolution of Edinburgh that he had collected in the Outlook Tower, Castle Hill, since the early 1890s. The exhibition of the Civic Survey was accompanied by an essay in which Geddes explained his understanding of Edinburgh's growth, and this also included a list of his exhibits.<sup>2</sup> His Civic Survey focused on the Old Town, which, as is well known, was closest to Geddes's interests as a practical urban reformer. Nevertheless, Geddes did not neglect the New Town in the exhibition. Rather, he illustrated Edinburgh's eighteenth century expansion with an exhibit that is described in his essay cum catalogue as 'Craig's Plan for New Town, 1765' (though the date is clearly a mistake as the competition for a plan for the New Town was not held until 1766, and the engraved version of the plan was not published till 1768).<sup>3</sup>

At the same exhibition, though in a different section, the Corporation of Edinburgh displayed an 'original plan of the New Town of Edinburgh, by James Craig, Architect, dated 1767'. As well as this plan, No. 2 in the catalogue, the Corporation also showed an alternative design, described as an 'original Plan of the New Town of Edinburgh, being amendment on No. 2. (not carried out), by James

Craig, Architect; not dated'.<sup>4</sup> While it is unclear which Craig plan Geddes put on display in London, the items lent by the City can fairly safely be identified as two large-scale ink and colour wash plans that are still in the possession of the City today. Plan No. 2 was almost certainly Craig's 1767 drawing showing the grid of streets and feuing plots in the New Town, signed by the Lord Provost on 29 July 1767 as the formally adopted scheme. The other plan, amended but unbuilt, was presumably the undated companion drawing by Craig that now hangs beside the adopted plan in Huntly House Museum, showing a circular garden flanked by crescents in the centre of the First New Town. This 'circus' plan has usually been assumed to be later than the adopted plan, but it has recently been argued that it actually predates the adopted plan and was probably produced in December 1766.<sup>5</sup>

In 1911 Geddes brought to Edinburgh his Cities and Town Planning Exhibition, which incorporated the Civic Survey of Edinburgh. He again included Craig's New Town design, although this time with two plans. Entry No. 50 in the *Explanatory Guide Book and Outline Catalogue* reads: 'James Craig's original Plan of the New Town dated 1767. (The property of the City of Edinburgh)'. However, the next entry, No. 50A, is intriguing: 'Alternative plan for the New Town by Craig – not executed – Reduced copy.'<sup>6</sup> Thus Geddes had borrowed Craig's original drawing of the adopted plan from the City, but with regard to the alternative, unexecuted design – presumably again a version of the circus plan – he had access to an exhibit which he could describe as a 'reduced copy', apparently not owned by the City.





James Craig, Plan of a Circus for Edinburgh's First New Town, 1774, engraving with central section hand drawn in ink. (By courtesy of University Archives, University of Strathclyde, T-GED 22/1/431.)

It is known that in 1774 James Craig returned to the idea of a circus at the intersection of Frederick Street and George Street to form a central feature in the First New Town. To illustrate his idea Craig reworked the engraved version of the New Town plan, whose central section he replaced with an ink sketch of the proposed circus. This plan, part engraving/part drawing, is also now in the possession of the City, though its provenance is uncertain.<sup>7</sup> The 1774 design differs in a number of ways from Craig's original circus proposal, particularly in the addition of a church in the middle of each crescent and the arrangement of the housing along the service lanes behind. As it is drawn on a copy of the published engraving, which was on a smaller scale than the

Huntly House circus plan, it might be described as a 'reduced copy', though this would appear to gloss over the differences between Craig's two proposals for a circus.

A previously unknown version of Craig's circus plan has recently been found in the Geddes papers deposited in the University of Strathclyde Archives (see figure), and it seems most likely that this is the actual exhibit described by Geddes as a 'reduced copy' in the 1911 *Guide Book and Catalogue*.<sup>8</sup> Like the 1774 engraving/drawing of the circus idea, Geddes's exhibit is an engraving with a central section drawn in ink. The street layout and service lanes are very similar to those in the 1766 circus plan but two newly inserted churches interrupt the circus,



and point towards the final layout of the 1774 plan. Thus the plan that was once in Geddes's possession shows an intermediate stage of Craig's circus design, conceived some time between the versions of 1766 and 1774.

Geddes's plan is clearly an initial draft for Craig's 1774 engraving/drawing, a conclusion that is supported by pencilled notes and street names on it. The Geddes plan is heavily annotated in pencil along the bottom margin, and the final version of these annotations appears again in decorative ink lettering on the finished 1774 plan: 'This improvement of a Circus was presented to the Magistrates by Mr. Craig in A.D. 1774'.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the street names in the central section of Geddes's plan are added in pencil, with those for the north-south streets written from bottom to top: all earlier drawings and engravings of Craig's New Town plan show the names for these

streets written from top to bottom, apart from the 1774 plan where they run in the opposite direction.

Nothing is known about the provenance of this working draft for the 1774 circus proposal, neither when exactly it came into Geddes's possession, nor its whereabouts before that, though it seems likely that Geddes acquired the plan between the two exhibitions, i.e. between 1910 and 1911. There is no mention of a circus plan by Craig in the Outlook Tower collection in the list of plans of Edinburgh compiled by William Cowan in 1923, nor in the revised edition prepared by Charles B. Boog Watson in 1932.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of its unknown provenance and the circumstances of Geddes's acquisition of it, this previously unrecorded plan is a valuable document, which sheds a little further light on the development of Craig's alternative, unrealised, design for a central circus garden in Edinburgh's First New Town.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), *Town Planning Conference London, 10th to 15th October, 1910: Exhibition of Drawings and Models at the Royal Academy from the 10th to the 22nd October* (Clowes and Sons, London, 1910).
- 2 Patrick Geddes, 'The Civic Survey of Edinburgh', in Royal Institute of British Architects, *Transactions of the Town Planning Conference London, 10-15 October 1910* (RIBA, London, 1910), pp. 537-574.
- 3 Geddes, 'Civic Survey of Edinburgh', p. 539. For the New Town competition in 1766 see Stuart Harris, 'New Light on the First New Town', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club (BOEC)*, New Series 2 (1992), pp. 1-13.
- 4 RIBA, *Exhibition of Drawings and Models*, p. 36.
- 5 For the dates and illustrations of both plans see Andrew Fraser, 'A Reassessment of Craig's New Town Plans, 1766-1774', in Kitty Cruft and Andrew Fraser (eds), *James Craig, 1744-1795* (Edinburgh 1995), pp. 25-47, figs 3.2 and 3.4.
- 6 Patrick Geddes and Frank Charles Mears, *Cities and Town Planning Exhibition, Edinburgh, 13th March to 1st April 1911: Explanatory Guide Book and Outline Catalogue* (Hutchinson, Edinburgh, 1911), p. 53.
- 7 The history and technical complications of this plan are discussed in Fraser, 'Reassessment of Craig's New Town Plans', pp. 38-41, and the plan is reproduced as fig. 3.7.
- 8 University Archives, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, T-GED 22/1/431: James Craig, [Plan for a circus for Edinburgh's first New Town], dated 1774 but based on engraving from 1768, engraving with central section hand drawn in ink, colour wash, pencil annotations (64.6 x 47.4 cm, incomplete).
- 9 The pencil annotation reads 'This [improved] version of a circus [w]as presented [several illegible words] Mr. Craig in 1774'. The word 'version' is crossed out and replaced above by the word 'Design', and above the year has been added 'A.D.'
- 10 William Cowan, 'The Maps of Edinburgh, 1544-1851', *BOEC*, 12 (1923), pp. 209-247; William Cowan, *The Maps of Edinburgh, 1544-1929*, 2nd edn, revised by Charles B. Boog Watson, with census of copies in Edinburgh Libraries (Edinburgh 1932).