



THOMAS OLIVER.

From a painting now in Australia.





FROM MINIATURES OF THOMAS OLIVER AND HIS FIRST WIFE, MARGARET LORIMER.

IX.—THOMAS OLIVER AND HIS PLANS FOR CENTRAL NEWCASTLE

BY MARGARET E. JONES AND H. L. HONEYMAN

(Read on 25th October, 1950)

There is now an impression, fostered by the filial piety of his daughter and latterly by the Northumberland and Newcastle Society with its "Dobson Group", that John Dobson, Senr., was the only architect in Newcastle in the first half of last century and that he replanned the town. There were, however, others and the recent gift to our Library of two original drawings by Thomas Oliver gives an opportunity for bringing one of them back to memory.

I.—Life

Thomas Oliver was born at Over Crailing, now known as Crailing Hall, near Jedburgh, on the 14th of January, 1791, the youngest child and only son of Adam Oliver, weaver, and Elizabeth Bell his wife, and he was baptized in the Blackfriars Church, Jedburgh, on the 6th of March in the same year. His grandfather was a tailor and the family had lived in the Oxnam neighbourhood for at least a century before his birth.

Adam Oliver died when Thomas was two years old and we can only speculate on his early life and the possible influences which led him to adopt the profession of architect and surveyor. He was educated at Jedburgh School. As a youth he may have worked for his future father-in-law, James Lorimer, mason in Kelso, and progressed, like one

of his mediaeval forerunners, from the bench to the drawing-board. Whatever the cause of his choice, the period could hardly have been more favourable. The Industrial Revolution was under way and new industries and a growing population ensured ample employment for his talents.

We do not know when Oliver crossed Tweed but, according to W. H. Knowles, he "was for some time assistant with John Dobson". Dobson, who was four years older than Oliver, began to practise in 1810 but at first had a hard struggle to persuade anyone to employ an architect who was not also a master-builder and contractor. His prospects improved in 1813 and it was probably then that Oliver joined him. At any rate in 1814 Oliver was earning a large enough salary, eked out perhaps by drawing plans for builders, to get married, in St. John's Church, to Margaret Lorimer, James Lorimer's second daughter, and set up housekeeping in High Friar Street not far from the birthplace of Richard Grainger who was later to be one of his patrons. The Lorimers appear to have moved to Newcastle, as Margaret is described as "of St. John's parish", Oliver was "of St. Andrew's".

Oliver left Dobson and began independent practice in 1821 when he issued the following circular, a copy of which, addressed to Messrs. Losh, Wilson and Bell, Quay-side, has survived:

Thomas Oliver, Land Surveyor and Architect,
16 Rosemary Lane, Newcastle,

Most respectfully informs his Friends and the Public that he has commenced Business as above, and begs leave to solicit a Share of their Patronage and Support. He hopes, by an assiduous and conscientious Fulfillment of his Public Duties, together with the minutest Accuracy, Pespicacity, and Neatness in the Execution of his Plans, to merit a continuation of that Patronage with which he may be favoured.

Young Gentlemen instructed in Architectural and Perspective Drawing, Planning, Surveying, etc. *January, 1821.*

Oliver may have had relations in Newcastle where there

were several families of the name. A Robert Oliver had been Mayor of Newcastle in 1382, five Olivers had been householders in 1665, and among the contemporaries of Thomas, though not known to be a relation, was Daniel Oliver, founder of a well-known Quaker family, through whom he may have met William Holmes, 1792-1858 (grandfather of Alfred Holmes, so long Secretary of the "Lit. and Phil.") who became his friend, and collaborated in his town improvement schemes.

Oliver moved from Rosemary Lane in 1828 to 69 Newgate Street, thence in 1833 to 43 Blakett Street and then to 3 Trafalgar Street, where his wife died in 1838. She lies in Westgate cemetery, from which it is evident that she was a nonconformist or perhaps a Quaker. Two years later Oliver married Elizabeth Best. Since 1834 his office had been in the Royal Arcade, but from Trafalgar Street he removed his home to 3 Picton Place, where he died in December, 1857. A drawing of his house in Picton Place, by G. B. Richardson in 1842, was presented to our Library in 1904 but cannot now be found.

By his first wife Oliver had four sons—Adam, born 21st January, 1815, civil engineer and architect; James, 28th June, 1820, also a civil engineer; Thomas, born 8th September, 1824, a member of our Society from 1857-1902 and author of a paper on *The Ancient Parish Churches of Newcastle*, read in 1881 but not printed; Thomas, Junr., after practising in Sunderland came back to succeed his father in 1858 and later founded the well-known firm of Oliver; Leeson and Wood. The youngest of the brothers was John, born 1826. There were also two daughters, Jane, 11th October, 1818, and Eliza, 21st August, 1822, who married the Revd. Mr. Marcus and settled in Australia, where a good portrait of Oliver is still preserved. Her daughter married the late Leonard Holmes.

By his second wife Oliver had only one child, Charles William, born 12th May, 1847, who died young.

Plate. XXVI shews Oliver and his first wife from minia-

tures in the possession of his descendants and Plate XXV is from a later portrait of him, now in Australia. The plan in his hand may be that of his own house.

Thomas Oliver's architectural ability did not die with him, for both his son Thomas Oliver, Junr., and his grandson, George Dale Oliver, 1851-1928, sometime County Architect for Cumberland, were well-known architects, and maintained the high standard he had set. Another grandson, James Lorimer Oliver, 1853-1913, founded the firm of Jas. L. and F. S. Oliver, Incorporated Accountants, Newcastle.

The librarian of the R.I.B.A. informs us that Oliver was never a member of the Institute and he is not among those architects mentioned in the great *Dictionary* of the Architectural Publication Society.

II.—Literary Work

In the early days of Oliver's practice he had no doubt a good deal of spare time and he seems to have spent it in the study of geography and topography in general and Newcastle upon Tyne in particular. Indeed one might say that Newcastle was his hobby and for the rest of his life he surveyed and resurveyed it until he must have been better acquainted with every acre of its surface and every detail of its growth than anyone else has ever been, or is likely to be now.

Among his first publications were *The Geographical Synopsis of the World* and *A Topographical View of Great Britain and Ireland*, both published before 1831 in which year he had printed *A New Picture of Newcastle upon Tyne*. This was meant to supersede an earlier *Picture*, by an anonymous author, whose second edition, in 1812, was said by its editor to have been partly rewritten "by another hand". The date seems too early for Oliver's to have been the "other hand" and there is a difference, perhaps due to editorial orders, between the books. *The Picture etc.* has

references for most of its statements and has footnotes on nearly every page—*A New Picture* etc. has not.

The conspiracy of silence which prevents our press from naming living architects other than municipal officials had not yet developed and both *Pictures* give useful information about the works of Stephenson, Newton, Stokoe, and, in the *New Picture*, John Dobson, John Green, and Oliver himself.

Oliver's map of Newcastle in 1830 was accompanied by a book entitled *Reference to a Plan of the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne and part of the Borough of Gateshead and grounds adjoining*.

This, by means of reference numbers repeated from the map itself, gives particulars of areas and ownerships of land in most parts of the map. For instance, in Jesmond Township, Armorer Donkin, a well-known member of our Society, owned among other property:

	A.	R.	P.
133. Jesmond Park House and ground	23	2	3
134. Field	1	0	36
135. Ditto	2	0	0
136. Ditto	3	2	26
	<hr/>		
	30	1	25
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Of more general interest are the historical descriptions of churches, chapels and public buildings. The following is one of the shorter ones and concerns us:

ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY.

"The apartments occupied by this society are on the ground-floor of the building containing those of the Natural History Society and are approached by the same exterior door in Library Place.

"This Society was formed in 1813, for 'Enquiring into subjects of Antiquity, but more especially into those of the North of England, and particularly to those that appertain to the counties of Northumberland, Cumberland, and Durham.' The ordinary members pay

an admission fee of two guineas, and an annual subscription of one guinea; honorary and corresponding members are elected free of fee. A variety of miscellaneous relics of antiquities, and Roman altars are now collected, and the library contains a large collection of valuable books on antiquities. The anniversary meeting was held in the new apartments for the first time on the 2nd of January, 1825. Number of members, 200 (in 1844).

INTERIOR DIMENSIONS.

“The passage south of the entrance is 9 ft. 1 in. by 16 ft. 7 in. and adjoining is a room 35 ft. 8 in. by 14 ft. 10 in., in which is a stuffed walrus, and various other curiosities. The furnace room on the south is 30 ft. 5 in. by 14 ft. 7 in. On the west of the passage and these rooms there is a piazza 78 ft. 4 in. by 10 ft. 4 in., with 7 stone pillars 2 ft. 3 in. square, and double pilasters at each end, which unites at right angles with another piazza 37 ft. long and 8 ft. wide, having similar pilasters. The Egyptian room at the south-east angle is 26 ft. 2 in. by 14 ft., and the library room to the west is 33 ft. 2 in. by 21 ft. 6 in.; both of these rooms contain a variety of antiquities, among which are two mummies; one of them being open is enclosed in a glass case.

Librarian—John Bell.

Secretaries—John Adamson and Henry Turner.”

Thomas Oliver was not a member of our Society. “A Mr. Oliver” was blackballed by us in November, 1815; this may not have been Thomas but the only other candidate we ever blackballed was Eneas Mackenzie, in 1824, who was also a historian of Newcastle. David Stephenson, the Greens, and Dobson, who between them destroyed so much local history in stone, were members; Oliver, to whom local historians owe a debt, was not.

The *Reference* was re-issued with Oliver's 1844 map and in 1851 he published *The Topographical Conductor, or Descriptive Guide to Newcastle and Gateshead*, with maps and plans and this was, as far as we know, his last literary work.

Two volumes of poems by Oliver, printed after his death, are attributed to him in the catalogue of Newcastle Central Library—*Poems: lyric, martial and devotional*, published

by J. Clarke, Newcastle, 1859; and a pamphlet of poems issued from *The Guardian* office in Newcastle in 1865, but this seems to have been another Thomas Oliver. William Oliver, poet and member of the Corinthian club, whose poems were printed in 1829, was not related to Thomas.

III.—*Surveying and Cartographical Work*

Oliver is probably most remembered for his maps of Newcastle, his re-planning of the central part of the town being forgotten or credited to others; of his 1830 map the late R. Oliver Heslop said, "it is so perfectly executed as to invest the name of Thomas Oliver with a reputation that will continue to be associated with the town itself".

In 1824 Oliver prepared a plan of Newcastle showing frontages, but not individual properties, with the lines of all water and gas mains indicated. This does not seem to have been published and, as the original drawing, now given to us by Mr. Guy Allgood, came from the Clayton collection, it was probably commissioned by John Clayton or through him by the Common Council. Oliver proceeded to make a more detailed survey and the Common Council Order Book on 27th March, 1828, has the following entry, for a copy of which we are indebted to Miss Joan Fawcett:

"Plan or Map of Newcastle upon Tyne by Mr. Thomas Oliver, Surveyor.

It is ordered that Mr. Thomas Oliver, Surveyor, be and he is hereby allowed to dedicate to this Body a Plan or Map of Newcastle upon Tyne which he has recently executed. And it is further ordered that four copies of the said Plan or Map be purchased at the Expence of the Corporation."

In 1830, Oliver submitted to the Mayor and Common Council "a general plan of improvement" for straightening and extending existing streets. This plan seems to have been lost but it was no doubt the basis of the 1834 plan, to be

referred to later, and some of its proposals are shewn by dotted lines on the 1830 general map. In the same year Lizars of Edinburgh engraved a panoramic view of Newcastle and Gateshead "from a drawing made on the spot by Thomas Oliver, Architect", from the Windmill Hills, which preserves a valuable record of the cityscape as then existing; for instance it proves that the pinnacles on St. Andrew's church tower had not yet been removed.

The map which Oliver was preparing in 1828 was finally finished and engraved by Lizars in 1830. As it measures 52 in. \times 41½ in. over the margins, it is too large to reproduce here but a reduced engraving of it was published and Plate XXVIII shews this from a copy in the possession of Dr. Hunter Blair. The full-sized edition is to a scale of three chains to the inch and shews every property, numbered for reference. It is embellished with the city arms and a dedication to the Common Council and includes an inset with a complete plan of the Town Moor and Castle Leazes. At the bottom is a reduced engraving of the panoramic view from the Windmill Hills, and altogether this map is a very handsome piece of engraving. The map covers from St. Peter's Quay in the south-east to Todd's Nook in the north-west and from Byker in the north-east to Rye Hill in the south-west.

The survey of the Moor, from which the inset was made, was ordered on 30th March, 1830:

"It is ordered that a Plan or Map of the Town Moor, Castle Leazes and Nuns Moor be prepared in duplicate, and authenticated by the signature of the Mayor and that one of them shall remain among the Records of this Corporation and that the other of them shall remain with the Stewards of the several Free Companies. And it is further ordered that Mr. Thomas Oliver, Surveyor, be and he is hereby appointed to execute such Plan or Map and that he be paid for his Pains and Trouble in executing the same such sum of Money out of the Revenues of this Corporation as shall be agreed upon between him and the Revenue Committee."

The street improvements indicated on the map are as

follows: Clayton Street, but not exactly on its present line. Blackett Street, to continue straight on to Barrack Road, by-passing the Gallowgate bottleneck. A road on the line of Lovaine Crescent curving round Pandon Dene and continuing across New Bridge Street to the Quayside near Sandgate, thus joining the North Road to the Quay without passing through the middle of the town. A road on the line of Northumberland Road but continuing across Northumberland Street and Percy Street, and curving to join the Blackett Street extension: Extension of Mosley Street straight on, with a bridge over the Manors, to join Shields Road: this was blocked by Grainger's building the Royal Arcade in 1831. Grainger Street. A street from Groat Market to the Castle. And a re-planning of the Thornton Street area. The High Level Bridge had already been proposed and the Groat Market extension was to prepare for it.

We now come to the second drawing presented to us by Mr. Allgood from the collection at John Clayton's home. It is entitled PLAN OF BUILDING GROUND TOGETHER WITH PROPOSED AND PROJECTED IMPROVEMENTS IN NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE. July 8th, 1834. Drawn by Thomas Oliver, Architect, No. 11, Royal Arcade.

It shews work already begun and some intended but not yet, and in some cases never, carried out; and, by means of blue lines, indicates the plans of properties to be demolished. Names of property owners are marked on the plots belonging to them.

The "building ground" is divided into three parts. An area coloured light stone colour described in detail in the bottom margin under the heading "Intended to be built by Mr. Richard Grainger". This includes Grey Street, the cross streets between it and Pilgrim Street, one of which was omitted in execution; Grainger Street, the Market, and the part of Clayton Street between Newgate Street and Blackett Street. A second area, coloured red, is similarly detailed under the heading "Proposed to be built by a Joint

Stock Company". This includes the remainder of Clayton Street and Clayton Street West; Neville Street, but with a crooked junction to Collingwood Street in order to avoid the demolition of St. Mary's Hospital; Bewick Street, but continued across Clayton Street northwards. This scheme was much modified in execution, chiefly owing to the coming of the railway and the intrusion of the Central Station. Thirdly an area coloured light brown and marked "Mr. Thomas Anderson's Building Ground". This is the Blenheim Street, Blandford Street, Marlborough Crescent lay-out, much as now existing in plan but the detached villas shewn in Blandford Street were never built and it would appear that the class of property actually built in those streets is not what was intended when they were planned though, when new, these rows of neat little terrace houses must have been quite attractive.

The Theatre Royal is shewn on the west side of Grey Street, a church was to stand on the north side of Grainger Street, opposite the Central Exchange, and the site of the present Town Hall was to be occupied by a spacious Corn Exchange with a semi-circular end towards St. Nicholas's Square. These variations from what now exists add in some ways to the interest of the map and altogether it is a not unworthy addition to our collection of local records.

Oliver continued to revise his survey and keep it up to date so the Council records tell us that on 11th January, 1843, it was "Resolved on the motion of Mr. Ingledew, Seconded by Sir John Fife, that Mr. Thomas Oliver, Architect, be allowed to dedicate to this Corporation the plan of the Borough of Newcastle upon Tyne which he is about to publish". Oliver had meanwhile been employed by the Council to make "a Plan of All the Property of this Corporation which lies or is situate within the Liberties of the Town" and also plans of the Walker and Willington Estates and a reduced plan of the Walker Estate.

The 1844 map is less ornamental than the 1830 one, there being now less vacant space to fill up, but it is equally

carefully executed and just as the 1830 map is of historical value as shewing the town before it was re-planned, so this one is of interest as the last map of the town before the intrusion of the Railway. A feature was the provision in the margins of references to all public buildings and to all the many churches and chapels with their denominations. An invaluable record of early nineteenth-century Newcastle ecclesiology. A reduced edition was printed and Plate XXIX is from a copy in the possession of Mr. H. W. Green who lent it to us for reproduction.

The coming of the Railway greatly affected the plan of the central part of Newcastle and in 1849 Oliver published a revised map which for the first time shews the Central Station and the High Level Bridge and is therefore another dated record of interest. Like the other editions it was published to more than one scale and we reproduce it from a block kindly lent by Messrs. Reid with permission of the *Newcastle Journal* and Mr. Middlebrook (in whose *History of Newcastle* it is an illustration) as Plate XXX.

Oliver continued his studies of the town plan all his life and at his death; in 1857, he was working on a new revised edition which was published in the following year. In 1851 he had extended his survey and issued a map of the Environs of Newcastle, shewing parish and other boundaries.

A reprint of the 1830 map, with later roads printed in red, was published by W. Boyd in 1904, with an introduction by R. Oliver Heslop.

IV.—*Architectural Work*

A detailed study of buildings carried out from Oliver's designs would require more research than we have yet undertaken: it is a subject to which we may return later. The following are known works, mostly from statements in Oliver's own *New Picture*:

In 1824 he designed for John Baird two stone houses beside the entrance to Elswick Court from Northumberland

Street. These, he claims, were the first stone-fronted dwelling houses built in Newcastle for over a century, "although freestone quarries abound in the vicinity of the town". The builder was William Brown, mason, so it is obvious that Dobson and Grainger were not the first to begin the transformation of central Newcastle from brick to hewn stone.

Also in 1824 the Common Council bought the land outside the Town Wall between Newgate and the Fickett Tower, demolished the wall, and prepared to develop the land as a building estate. Oliver's account is as follows:

The Council "had matured a plan, but for particular reasons, Mr. T. Oliver, architect, was required to prepare a design, plans for which, together with a model of the same, were submitted" to a meeting of the Common Council "when the opinion of Mr. J. Dobson, architect, was taken, who afterwards furnished a plan containing several alterations, agreeable to which the ground for building sites was directed by the Common Council to be sold to the public, first by public auction, and the remainder by private contract".

The houses in Eldon Square were built "to an elevation designed by Mr. J. Dobson" but those in Blakett Street "to designs and plans drawn by Thomas Oliver, architect", who evidently draws a distinction between the mere designing of façades and the planning of a complete house. Eldon Square was Dobson's first known attempt at design of town terraces, his previous practice having been entirely in the alteration and enlargement of country houses and the design of Presbyterian and Methodist chapels: it is one of his best and we cannot now regret his poaching on what might have been Oliver's preserve. But it was Oliver's type of front, not Dobson's, which for the next quarter of a century became the basis of the standard Newcastle house front, endlessly repeated; refined, well-proportioned, neat, and attractive when clean and new, and as characteristic of Newcastle as the bay windowed terrace houses of Sunder-

land and the quite different bay windows of Hartlepool are of those towns.

In 1829 Oliver prepared plans for an extension of the Friends' Meeting House in Pilgrim Street. This work was not carried out till 1833 when, according to Steel's *The Society of Friends in Newcastle and Gateshead*, his friend William Holmes acted as "honorary architect". Holmes, "though not his business, had a natural talent for planning, and acted as architect for the erection of many buildings". According to family tradition Holmes collaborated with Oliver in his town plan, as already noted.

A little earlier Oliver designed Leazes Crescent for Richard Grainger, and the pleasantly formal groups of houses between it and Leazes Park Road, or Albion Place as it was then called. These were followed by what is probably Oliver's best-known work, the block of houses called Leazes Terrace whose foundation stone was laid in February, 1829. He was pleased with it himself and wrote: "in regard to situation, uniformity, general appearance, accommodation and design this Terrace will rival with the noblest improvements for similar purposes in this kingdom". (Plate XXVII.) It is certainly a fine composition.

Oliver was probably responsible for the stone frontages in Clayton Street, excluding the Grainger market; and possibly for the following: parts of the Blenheim-Blandford Street area; the older part of Rye Hill; St. Thomas's and Lovaine Crescents; Picton Place; the east side of Trafalgar Street; Carlton Terrace and the west part of Jesmond Road; Ancrum House and the lay-out of Ancrum Street and Oxnam Crescent. He is also stated to have designed the Londonderry Institute at Seaham Harbour, a refined and dignified Greek Doric design. He was a more consistent classicist than Dobson and always worked in a simple Greco-Roman style. One might almost say that pure classicism in Newcastle architecture was buried in Oliver's grave in Jesmond Old Cemetery in December, 1857.

Andrew Oliver, architect, 37 Collingwood Street, in

whose office our late member Septimus Oswald was trained, may have been related to Thomas Oliver. Adam, son of Thomas, was living with Andrew at 17 Howard Street in 1851 and remained there when Andrew removed to 20 Villa Place.

V.—Civil Engineering

Thomas Oliver, like John Dobson, was employed on a good deal of survey and other work connected with railways and docks, but this is hardly the place to deal with that side of his activities, though we may mention that he is understood to have surveyed the first line from Manchester to Liverpool, to have been a witness of the tragic death of Huskisson, and to have refused a knighthood offered to him for his services in connection with that line.

Acknowledgments

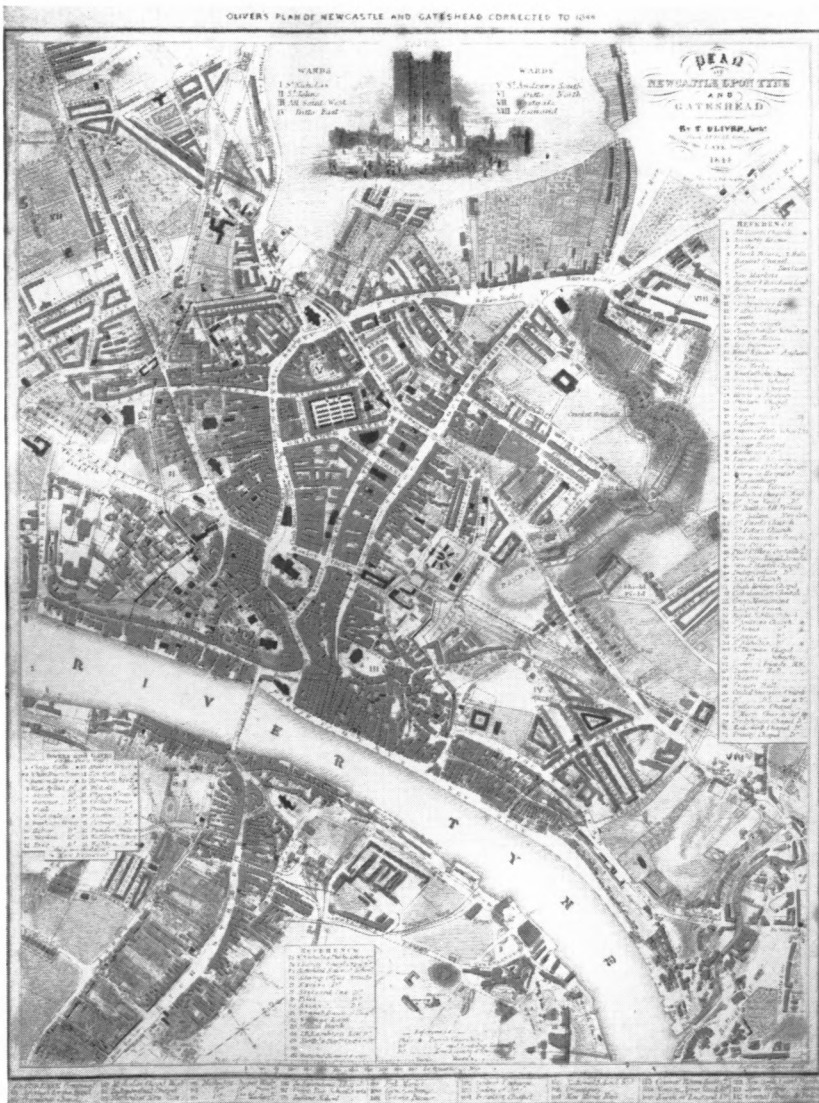
We are grateful for help received from various descendants of Thomas Oliver at home and abroad, and from the following members of our Society: Dr. Hunter Blair, Miss M. M. Buchanan, Miss M. Hope Dodds, and Miss Joan Fawcett.



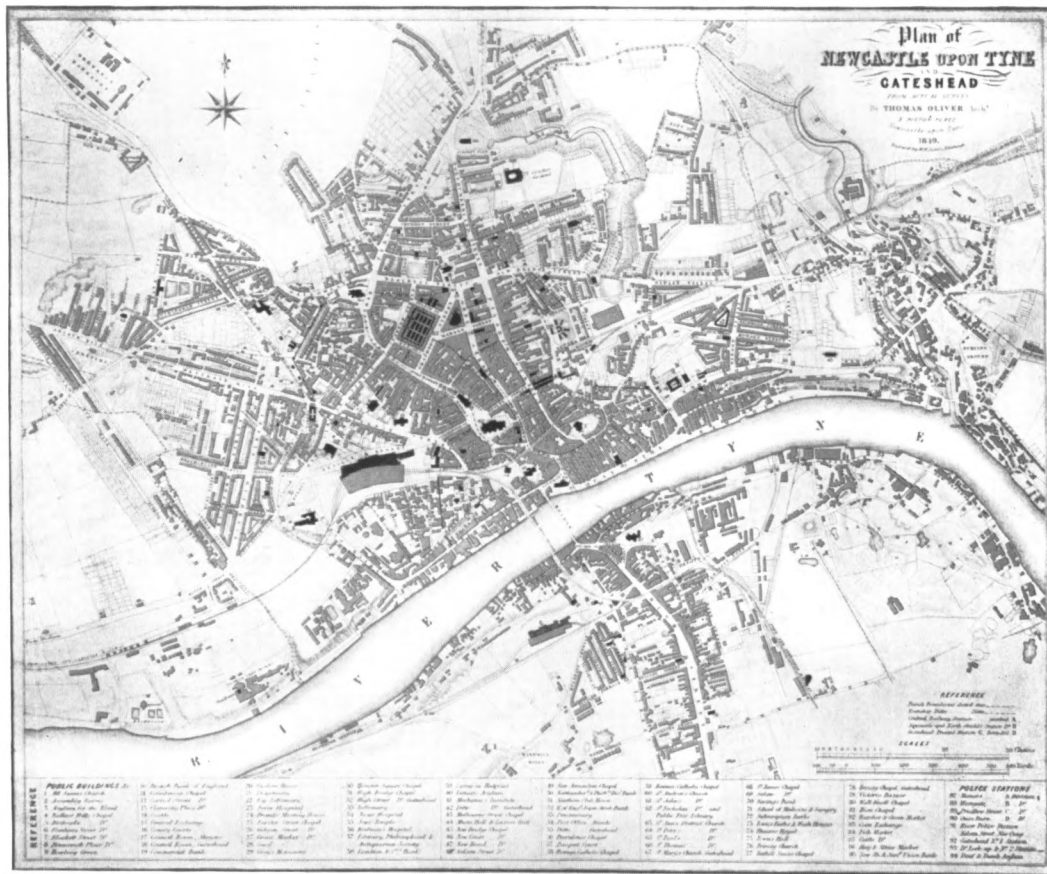
LEAZES TERRACE

From a drawing by J. W. Carmichael, engraved by W. Collard, 1841.





T. OLIVER'S PLAN OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, 1844.



T. OLIVER'S PLAN OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, 1849.

