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James Corbridge and his Plan of Newcastle upon Tyne 1723

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SUMMARY

The Plan of Newcastle upon Tyne produced by James Corbridge in 1723 was the first detailed printed ground plan of the city. The Plan itself is often referred to in writings about Newcastle, but original copies are extremely rare, and very little has been published as to how it came to be produced.¹ This article looks at the early mapping of Newcastle, the circumstances surrounding the Plan's publication, and at what is known of Corbridge personally.

PLANS OF NEWCASTLE BEFORE CORBRIDGE

Although the history of urban mapping takes us back to mediaeval times, plans of English towns and cities are very few and far between until well into the sixteenth century.² Many of the manuscript plans which have survived are of coastal areas, and were often produced in connection with works of defence. One such shows the proposed fortifications at Tynemouth, drawn by an Italian Gian Tommaso Scala in 1545;³ what is believed to be the earliest view of Newcastle was perhaps the work of the same Italian surveyor at the same time. This beautifully coloured bird's eye view from the south clearly shows the walled city, the river, the Tyne bridge, and Gateshead in the foreground.⁴

Printed plans of a number of English cities began to appear shortly afterwards, Norwich by William Cuninghame in 1558, London (the so-called 'lost copperplate map' of which no complete copy has been found) at about the same time, a plan of Cambridge engraved by Richard Lyne in 1574, and of Oxford drawn by

Ralph Agas in 1578. A few English towns were also illustrated in the monumental *Civitatis Orbis Terrarum*, but Newcastle was not included.

It seems therefore that pride of place as the first printed plan of the city has to be given to the small plan, included as a corner inset in the map of Northumberland, contained in *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*, by John Speed. The map, which also included a plan of Berwick, is dated 1610, and the plan of Newcastle is particularly interesting in that it gives the name of the surveyor; it is *Described by William Mathew*.⁵

Speed's *Theatre* went through a number of editions, and his maps were being reprinted until well into the eighteenth century. Meanwhile Mathew's plan was also copied in a number of other publications. Very small versions appeared as insets in the margins of a number of scarce seventeenth century Dutch maps of the British Isles.⁶ It was copied for a set of town plans published by Roger Hermannides in *Britannia Magna* in Amsterdam in 1661;⁷ and Hermannides' version was used again by Pieter van der Aa in his massive 27 volume *La Galerie Agréable du Monde*, published in Leiden in 1729.⁸ Three printed maps, which are primarily of the River Tyne, but which also include a plan of Newcastle copied from Speed, are found in the book published by Ralph Gardiner (otherwise Gardner) in 1655, entitled *England's Grievance Discovered, in Relation to the Coal-Trade with The Map of the River of Tyne, and situation of the Town and Corporation of Newcastle*.⁹ Finally the plan was added to the map of Northumberland in Philip Lea's edition of Saxton's *Atlas* of c. 1689.¹⁰ At least four seventeenth century manuscript maps

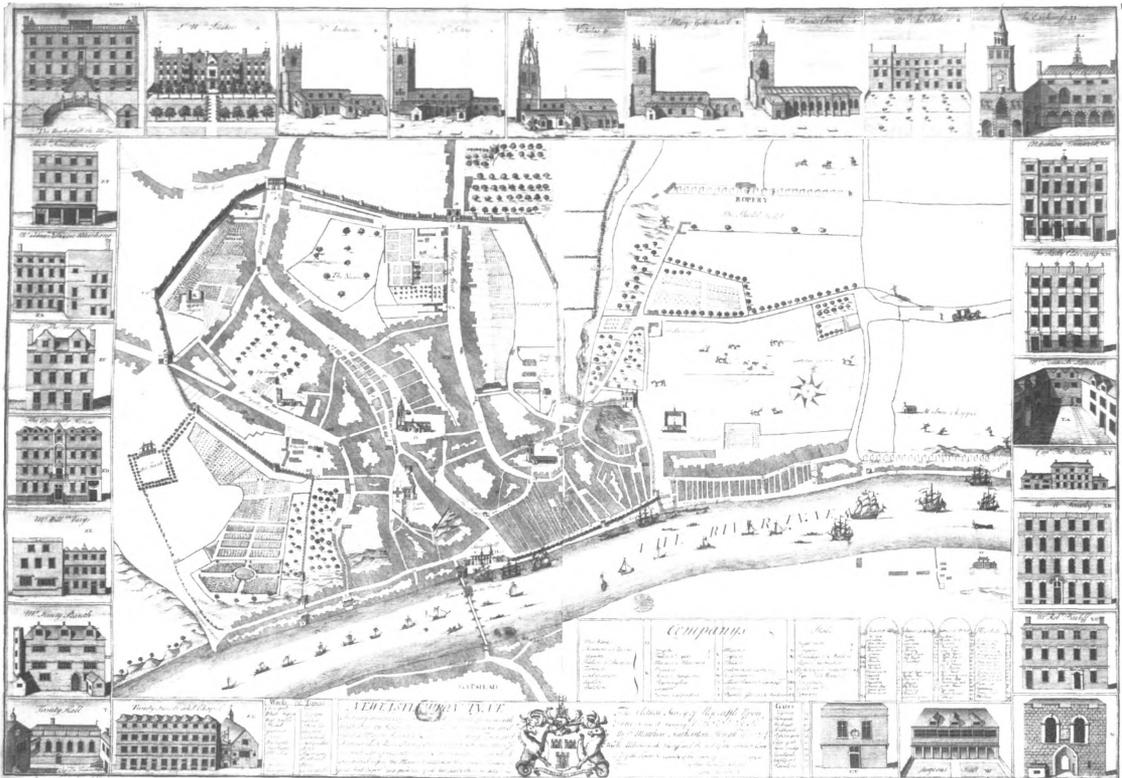


Fig. 1 Newcastle upon Tyne by James Corbridge, 1723. Size of original: 475 x 670 mm. Reproduced by permission of the British Library (shelfmark: Maps KTop 32.51).

have been recorded,¹¹ but Mathew's small plan can be said to have been the basis of further printed plans of Newcastle for over a hundred years.

There is very little in the maps mentioned so far which provides a precedent for the work of Corbridge (fig. 1). However a number of more accurate and detailed printed town plans begin to appear during the latter half of the seventeenth century, particularly several of London,¹² but also including Norwich by Cleer in 1696, and Ipswich, drawn by Ogilby in 1674, but not printed until 1698. Of particular interest in this connection is the plan of Bristol drawn by James Millerd in 1673, but revised and reissued at least four times in 1684, 1696, in c. 1710, and again between 1728 and 1730 (fig. 2).¹³ Although others have decorated vignettes, and

perspective drawings of individual buildings, the Bristol plan is believed to be the first to include detailed drawings of churches and public buildings in each of the margins. There seems every likelihood that this Bristol plan would have been known to anyone interested in urban surveying, and here we find the pattern adopted by Corbridge in 1723, and also by another North of England surveyor and contemporary of Corbridge, John Cossins, whose plan of Leeds was published in 1725.¹⁴

JAMES CORBRIDGE

The name Corbridge suggests a North of England origin. The birth of James has not been traced, but a Corbridge family was living in the

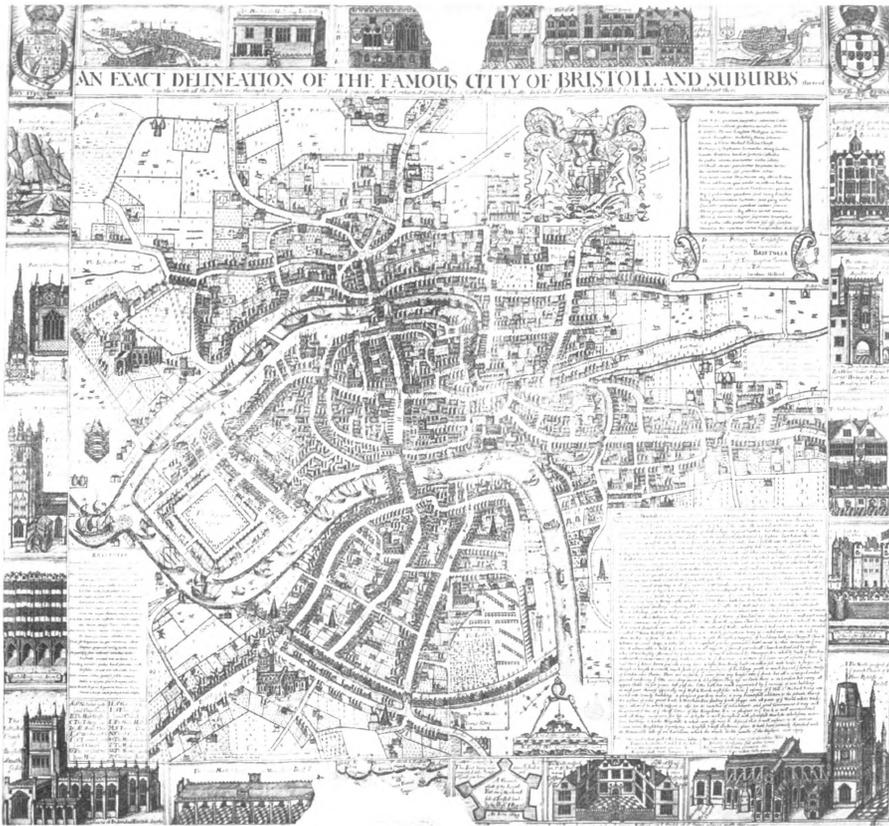


Fig. 2 *Bristol* by James Millerd, 1673 (c. 1710). Size of original: 815 x 755 mm. Reproduced by permission of the British Library (shelfmark: Maps KTop 37.32).

parish of All Saints, Newcastle, in 1702. In that year the parish registers record that John, son of Robert Corbridge was baptised, and it seem at least possible that James was another son of Robert. We know from the advertisement in the *Newcastle Courant* mentioned below that James was living in Pilgrim Street in the same parish in 1723, and again the parish registers contain the entry that Henrietta ('Henratta'), the daughter of James and his wife Mary, was baptised on 17 April in the following year. The quality of his work, and his subsequent career in Norfolk, suggest some professional training, perhaps as an assistant to another surveyor; it seems likely that he will have been born at some point in the final years of the seventeenth century.

THE PLAN OF NEWCASTLE

The first reference of any kind we have to James Corbridge is the announcement of his proposal to produce a Plan of Newcastle, which appeared in the *Newcastle Courant* for Saturday 12 January 1722/23:

THIS is to give Notice to the SUBSCRIBERS, and others that are willing to subscribe, That the plates for printing the PLAN of *Newcastle upon Tyne*, lately survey'd and Taken by *James Corbridge*, are now Engrav'd, and some of them already Printed, and the rest will be finish'd in a short Time. They are on two Sheets of Imperial Paper, and Engrav'd by one of the best hands in *London*. Those that are willing to Subscribe, are desir'd to pay in their

Subscription Money to Mr. *Jas. Harrison* at the *Sand-Hill* Coffee House in *Newcastle* aforesaid, where may be seen a Proof of the said Plates, and where they will be deliver'd to the SUBSCRIBERS &c.

N.B. The Prints will not be sold under 7s.6d. to any who are not Subscribers before they are deliver'd; but those who subscribe in Time, pays 2s. in Hand, and 3s. more at the Delivery.

In view of later events one is bound to come to the conclusion that Corbridge is being economical with the truth, when he says that the plates had been engraved and that some had been printed. It became apparent later in the year that this was certainly not the case, and that the announcement seems to be advertising hype for a speculative venture. There is however one possible reason why Corbridge may have been anxious to make his intentions known at this stage, and why there was then a delay in his carrying them out.

In the *Newcastle Courant* for 15 December 1722, and repeated up to and including 12 January 1722/23, was another proposal for a Prospect of Newcastle. This was to be a Perspective View to be produced by Samuel Buck, at a price of 3s., 1s. down; Buck says that when 200 prints had been subscribed for, he would begin work and complete it in six months time. Payment was to be made to Mr. Shaw, Bookseller, or Mr. John White, Printer, of Newcastle. Buck was rapidly earning a reputation for his Prospects, had an engraver available, and was able to give notice in the *Courant* of 6 July 1723 that the Newcastle Prospect would be 'ready before the Assizes'. This duly appeared as *The South Prospect of Newcastle upon Tyne from Gateshead Steeple*.¹⁵ It was dedicated to the Mayor, Aldermen, Sheriff and Council, and a minute of the Newcastle Common Council for 27 March 1723/24 reads:

Mr. Samuel Buck having with great labour and pains drawn the south prospect of this Town which he has presented to the Common Council It is ordered that five guineas be paid out of the Revenues of this Corporation for doing the same.

So what had Corbridge been doing in the meantime? There is nothing more heard of his

proposed Plan following his advertisement in January 1722/23 until another advertisement appeared in the *Newcastle Courant* of 21 December 1723:

PROPOSALS for publishing by Subscription, an actual Survey of all the Churches, Towers, Walls, Streets, Passages, Wards and Companies Halls within the Town of Newcastle, as also Gateshead and the River: By James Corbridge. – Any Gentleman who is willing to encourage this Undertaking, shall have the Prospect of their Houses in the Margin, Some Part of the Survey is already taken, and the Rest will be completed in Two Months. Those who will subscribe, is to pay Two Shillings at Subscription, and Three upon Delivery. Subscriptions are taken by the Said Mr. Corbridge at his House in Pilgrim-Street, at Mr. Jasper Harrison's on the Sandhill; and at the Printing-House in Newcastle. Those that subscribe for Six shall have a Seventh gratis. –

N.B. As soon as 300 have subscrib'd, the Copper-Plate will begin to be cut, And no more to be printed than are subscrib'd for. The Dimensions, 40 Inches long, 30 inches broad, so the Whole will extend to one Mile and a Half, and 900 Foot, from East to West.

It does seem that this time Corbridge meant what he said, that he had begun the survey, that he wanted to portray houses of subscribers, but that the Plan was not yet engraved. The dedication of the Plan includes the name of the Mayor, Matthew Featherstonhaugh, who was elected to office on 1 October 1723,¹⁶ and it becomes apparent that the members of the Council had been made aware of his proposals; at the same meeting of the Council on 27 March 1723/24 which agreed to make a payment to Samuel Buck, it was also minuted:

Mr. James Corbridge having also with great labour and pains drawn a Plan of this Town describing the several streets wards & other remarkable places therein It is ordered that five guineas be now given him towards engraving the same, and that if he finish it in the manner proposed five guineas more be paid him out of the Revenues of the Corporation.

So by the end of March 1723/24 the Plan had been drawn, but it still had to be engraved, and

he now had a financial incentive to get it completed; was there just a hint of doubt on the part of the Council that he might not do so? Anyhow we next read in the *Newcastle Courant* of 31 October 1724:

This is to give Notice . . . that the Plates for printing the PLAN of *Newcastle upon Tyne*. . . by James Corbridge are now Engrav'd, and some of them already Printed, and the rest will be finish'd in a short time . . . Engrav'd by one of the best hands in London. . .

Corbridge gives no address for himself, but says that a proof of the plates may be seen at Mr. Jas. Harrison's Sandhill Coffee House, where subscriptions are to be paid, and where the Plans will be delivered. It is not known whether this was sufficient for him to claim his payment from the Corporation, but it appears that there were further delays before all the Plans were printed, as the *Newcastle Courant* for Saturday 30 January 1724/25 carries this final, and doubtless to his readers surprising, advertisement:

THIS is to give Notice, That the Plan of Newcastle upon Tyne, lately surveyed by Mr. James Corbridge, will be deliver'd to all Subscribers, and others, on Munday first, at Mrs. Dawson's at the Black Horse in Pilgrimstreet, where any Person may have the opportunity of subscribing for the Plan of the City of Norwich, and the Prospect of Yarmouth, both of which will be adorned on the Margent with the most beautiful Buildings belonging to them, done by the said Mr. James Corbridge, and are now engraving, the Price being the same as the Plan of Newcastle.

This advertisement is the last we hear of James Corbridge in Newcastle, and we find that he had in fact left for Norfolk some months earlier. His departure must have been at some point after the meeting of the Newcastle Common Council in March 1723/24, and perhaps about the time of the birth of his daughter in April (possibly explaining the unusual lack of reference to his occupation in the register); he was certainly in Norfolk by July. An advertisement by Corbridge appeared in the *Norwich Gazette* of 1 August 1724, in which he sought

subscriptions for surveys which he was proposing to carry out of the city of Norwich, and the towns of Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn. No mention is made of the Plan of Newcastle.

It must be a matter of speculation as to why Corbridge suddenly left Newcastle. There is no evidence of any dispute or disagreement, or any dissatisfaction expressed by the Council with his work. He was not running away from his family, as his wife joined him in Norwich, and a son James was born there in 1730. Perhaps his Plan of Newcastle was less successful than he had hoped, (maybe a reason why so few copies survive), other work in the North may have been hard to obtain, and he was looking for somewhere else to pursue his surveying career. If that were so, Norwich and Norfolk had much to commend them. It seems very likely that Corbridge would have travelled by sea to Great Yarmouth; there was a brisk coastal trade between Newcastle and Yarmouth, and this is where he carried out his first work following his arrival. One suspects however that Corbridge's aim was Norwich, still one of the principal cities in the country, and Norfolk, where were to be found the estates of a number of leading families. His subsequent career suggests that the move was well justified.

COPIES OF THE NEWCASTLE PLAN

Original copies of the Plan are now extremely rare, and one reason may well have been that not many were printed in the first place. Once Corbridge had left Newcastle he had to rely at a distance on others to promote the sales. He said in an advertisement in the *Norwich Mercury* of 2 December 1727 that the Newcastle Plan was available for sale by a bookseller in Norwich, but no copies are known to have been sold in Norfolk. The Plan is also referred to in an advertisement by Corbridge for the sale of a map of the county of Norfolk in the *London Daily Courant* of 1 August 1730. While it is clearly possible that other copies will come to light (and I would be interested to hear if they do as a result of this article), only six copies have so far been traced.

The best examples are to be found in the Map Library of the British Library,¹⁷ at the Bodleian,¹⁸ in the Innys Collection in Holkham Hall in Norfolk, (but acquired in London), and in a private collection. A copy is held by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, recently the subject of major conservation,¹⁹ and another, unfortunately very fragile, is in the possession of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne. Boyle, writing in 1889, refers to a copy hanging in the Newcastle Treasurer's office, but in spite of extensive inquiries this has not been found; however interestingly the Report of the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle for 30 March 1887 contains this entry:

IT WAS resolved, on the recommendation of the Council, that the Secretaries apply to the Corporation of Newcastle for the loan of Corbridge's plan of the town in 1721 [*sic*] and for permission to reproduce it by photo-lithography for the members of the Society.²⁰

A full size reproduction was duly made in 1888 or 1889, and has the imprint *Photolith C. Angerer & Göschl, Vienne*. It seems that a considerable number of copies of this facsimile were produced, as examples are comparatively common; they were available for sale for some years in the Newcastle Central Library, and they are found in most public collections. One must wonder if the original was ever returned to the Corporation.

So much for original copies of the Plan. There is however a very close copy of the original which appears as a frontispiece to the *History of Newcastle upon Tyne* by the Reverend Henry Bourne, published in 1735. The surrounding buildings in the margins of Corbridge's Plan are missing, and there are consequential variations in the layout, but it is only on close examination that it becomes apparent that the plan itself is a copy and not the original plate; for instance the flags on the ships on the Tyne are blowing in a different direction! Although the *History* was published in 1735, Bourne himself had already died in 1733; there is no reference to the plan in the text, and it seems that the publishers decided to add the

plan as an extra attraction, without any reference to Corbridge, or acknowledgment of the origin of the survey.²¹

One other copy of Corbridge's Plan deserves to be mentioned. The name of Thomas Oliver is pre-eminent in relation to nineteenth century plans of Newcastle. He had produced very fine large scale plans of the city in 1831, and again in 1844. In 1830 he published a reduced copy of Corbridge's Plan engraved by George Aikman of Edinburgh, with the imprint *Reduced and Republished by Tho^s. Oliver, 1830, from Corbridge's Engraved Plan Published, AD 1723*. The buildings in the margin have not been included, and the layout incorporating the references has been changed, there are fewer ships on the river, but otherwise the plan is an accurate copy of the original.²²

CORBRIDGE IN NORFOLK

Following his arrival in Norfolk and his advertisement in the *Norwich Gazette* in August 1724 Corbridge did indeed produce a very fine three sheet Prospect of Great Yarmouth in 1725, and this was followed in 1727 by a two sheet Plan of Norwich, very similar in layout to that of Newcastle. In 1730 he published the first large scale map of the county of Norfolk, and further maps of both Norfolk and Suffolk in 1735. The maps, and the Plans of Yarmouth and of Norwich, were later reprinted, and they remained in London mapsellers' lists for much of the rest of the century. Unfortunately the Newcastle Plan was not with them.

In addition Corbridge was active as an estate surveyor, and between 1726 and 1737 he was responsible for a considerable number of maps of estates of leading figures in the county. In doing so he himself became a respected member of the Norwich community, and in 1727 he was able to move to an upmarket property in the Norwich parish of St. Giles. He was appointed Constable of the parish in May 1730, and his son James was baptised there on 21 December of that year. The Corbridges moved from Norwich in 1734 to a substantial property in the

village of Catton, just outside the city.²³ However within a couple of years they had left, almost certainly because Corbridge was asked to carry out a survey of a large estate in Devon.²⁴ He was back in Norwich in 1738, and in May of that year he was appointed Assessor and Collector of money raised for the Poor of the Parish of St Peter Hungate.²⁵ He was not reappointed the following year, no further references to him or to his family have been found, and the place and date of his death remain unknown.

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NOTES

¹ The only previous study is that contained in a booklet by J. R. Boyle, *Notes on Corbridge's Actual Study of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, Newcastle (1889). The plan is illustrated with notes in Frank Graham's *Maps of Newcastle*, Newcastle (1984), but it was admitted at that time that 'Nothing is known about James Corbridge'.

² For the best recent account of English mapping generally, including a chapter on the mapping of towns, see C. Delano-Smith and R. Kain, *English Maps: A History*, London (1999).

³ British Library Cotton MS. Augustus L.ii.7., illustrated in Delano-Smith and Kain, 196.

⁴ British Library Cotton MS. Augustus L.ii.4. The plan is illustrated in Graham, where it is referred to as 'probably drawn in 1590'; the central section is illustrated in colour in P. D. A. Harvey, *Maps in Tudor England*, London (1993), 70, in which the author suggests that the plan was drawn in 1545,

when the works of fortification were under way at Tynemouth.

⁵ William Mathew (Matthewe) was apparently a local man, described as an almanac-maker; he is known to have been working for Durham Cathedral in 1609 when he produced 'A Platt or Description of the land in Nunstainton [Aycliffe] sett out for the Dean and Chapter of Duresme' (PRO E.178/3756 m.1); Sarah Bendall, *Dictionary of the Land Surveyors of Great Britain and Ireland 1530-1850*, London (1997).

⁶ Described and illustrated in Rodney Shirley, *Early Printed Maps of the British Isles 1477-1650*, revised ed., East Grinstead (1980); maps incorporating a plan of Newcastle are those by Jodocus Hondius Junior, 1617 and 1625, Claes Janszoon Visscher, c.1623, and Pieter Verbist, 1629.

⁷ British Library 796.a.5. The 1661 edition was published in Latin in Amsterdam; further editions in Dutch were published in 1666 and 1685.

⁸ British Library 213.f.6.

⁹ The book is extremely scarce, and not all copies contain a plan. The maps are described and illustrated in an article by C. J. Spence, 'Notes on the plates and maps of the Tyne in Gardner's *England's Grievance Discovered* of 1655', *AA*², 13 (1889), 285-305. The finest of the maps (British Library G.3185) is *Described by Ra: Gardner-Gent* engraved by Wenceslaus Hollar, and printed and sold by Peter Stent in London. Both Hollar and Stent would have been familiar with the maps of Speed, from which the Newcastle plan has been taken. The other two maps are anonymous, and although they vary in detail, the Newcastle plans are very close copies of the plan engraved by Hollar. The book, including one of the two anonymous maps, was reprinted by D. Akenhead and Sons, Newcastle, in 1796.

¹⁰ The original of Saxton's plate of Northumberland disappeared after William Web's edition of the *Atlas* of 1645. It was replaced by a new plate by an anonymous cartographer, including plans of Newcastle and Berwick, after Speed. See I. M. Evans and H. Lawrence, *Christopher Saxton: Elizabethan Map-Maker*, Wakefield and London (1975).

¹¹ Two dated 1638 and 1639, (PRO MPF 1/333 and MPF 1/287), were drawn up to show the fortifications of the town. Another, *Plan de Newcastle* is French, c.1650, (British Library Add. Misc. 11564.14), a beautiful large scale plan but giving little detail of the town within the walls; the same comment applies to a plan drawn by Sir Martin Beckman in 1684, copied in 1742, (British Library Maps 4560(7)).

¹² The London plans are described in I. Darlington and J. Howgego, *Printed Maps of London 1553–1850*, London (1984).

¹³ Described and illustrated in James Elliot, *The City in Maps: Urban mapping to 1800*, London (1987), 47–49.

¹⁴ Illustrated in David Smith, *Maps and Plans for the Local Historian and Collector*, London (1988), 31.

¹⁵ Samuel Buck began his activities in the North of England, producing his first Prospect, of Leeds, in c. 1721. The engraver was John Harris, who was to engrave Corbridge's Plan of Newcastle, also his later Plan of Norwich. Samuel was later joined by his brother Nathaniel, and they were to publish another Prospect on Newcastle in 1745. Copies of the 1723 Prospect are rare; for an illustration see Ralph Hyde, *A Prospect of Britain – The Town Plans of Samuel and Nathaniel Buck*, London (1994).

¹⁶ See C. H. Hunter Blair, *The Mayors and Lord Mayors of Newcastle upon Tyne 1216–1940*, Newcastle (1940).

¹⁷ British Library Maps K. Top 32 (51).

¹⁸ Gough Maps Northumberland 10.

¹⁹ Boyle, *Notes on Corbridge's Actual Study of Newcastle-upon-Tyne*, writing in 1889, says that this Plan was 'tattered and fragmentary'. It has recently been the subject of major conservation treatment, described by A. Arribas, 'The conservation treatment of a plan of Newcastle upon Tyne by James Corbridge', *AA* ⁵, 29 (2001), 293–7. The Plan shows a number of differences from other original copies, and it was initially thought that it could have been an early draft. These differences can however be explained by earlier repair and restoration, including the redrawing in manuscript of certain lines and words which were damaged or missing.

²⁰ *PSAN*¹, 3, 16.

²¹ The *History*, including the plan, was reprinted by Frank Graham, Newcastle, in 1980.

²² Northumberland Record Office 309/N2/25/2.

²³ Norwich Gazette 16 March 1734.

²⁴ Cornwall Record Office ME (572) 1.

²⁵ Norfolk Record Office COL/13/177.