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‘Elizabeth Cox, Mr Ward’s Map: Victorian Wellington Street by Street’

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Elizabeth Cox, *Mr Ward's Map: Victorian Wellington Street by Street* (Massey University Press, 2025), 560pp. Hardback. NZ\$90.00. ISBN: 978-1-9913-0906-8.

Heritage historian Elizabeth Cox is to be congratulated for bringing to life the set of Thomas Ward maps for 1890s Wellington – a resource which provides a virtually unique insight into the slice of a decade for the city. The author and publisher can feel particularly proud of the thoughtful design making this a delightful volume to flick through.

Legislation of 1886 required that local Councils draw up maps of their streets for planning purposes. In 1889 the Wellington City Council commissioned surveyor Ward to draw up detailed maps of the city; in 88 sheets he outlined every building on every street and portrayed their construction materials. For the next decade he updated the sheets as streets were altered and buildings disappeared or sprang up, producing a fine-grained picture of a city with its urban infrastructure on the cusp of tremendous change.

This book provides a compelling snapshot of Wellington in its prime as colonial settlement gave way to commercial and financial entrepot – with the New Zealand Company's 1840 grid of rectangular town acres still the central guiding principle to the city's shape. The book's introduction briefly outlines the city in the 1890s and the genesis and character of the maps. Cox draws extensively on her own work on heritage buildings and on the fantastic, free digitised newspaper resource that all we historians enjoy in Aotearoa New Zealand to describe rich elements of social history. The book provides an excellent resource for the understanding and preservation of Wellington's heritage.

The text and the Ward maps are complemented by a rich variety of images – photographs, plans of buildings, and colourful ephemera which the large format and full-colour print allows. But the sheer size and weight of the book is somewhat of a drawback to its casual use. One wonders whether all the maps needed reproduction, especially when they are available digitally; their detail is hard to discern. Would enlarged snapshots have sufficed?

We can rummage in elite Thorndon looking at mansions of the wealthy and the professional classes, travel the financial and shopkeeping commercial 'golden mile' along Lambton Quay, Willis Street, and Manners Street, observe in Te Aro the workings of industry and the struggling working-class slum areas, and wander around the new burgeoning 'suburb' of Newtown. All kinds of cameos are brought to light, especially for women (and women's suffrage, gained at that time), Māori (with some discussion of the fate of their reserves), and Chinese. Prisons, schools, philanthropic and charitable institutions, and temperance organisations find their place, as does the city's religious life. Localities are a springboard for depicting events such as floods, fires, royal tours, exhibitions, and jubilees. Along the way pictures are drawn of places of business and leisure – whether they be sports or recreation grounds, skating, theatres, circuses, public houses, or public baths. Encircling the city, Wellington's very distinctive 'town belt' is depicted – a vision going back to the New Zealand Company's formative 1840 plan.

Ward's maps also suggest that infrastructural developments might have featured more in the book: water reticulation (fire plugs marked), provision of electricity (electric streetlights marked), and the sewerage system (elevation of streets marked). Perhaps there could have been assessment of the Council's CBD restrictions on combustible materials?

The conclusion looks forward. There is discussion of street widening, the problem of private streets and their lack of integration into civic infrastructure (related to the original town acres and to slums), urban expansion, and the introduction of electric trams. Such trams allowed the city finally to break out of its confines set by the New Zealand Company plan to full suburban development.

This book is a welcome contribution to settler colonial urban history. The translation of an early-Victorian New Zealand Company vision of an antipodean settlement into a late-Victorian city is a story that needs to be told.

John E. Martin