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“The National Grid Provisional six-inch
in Cambridgeshire”

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The Society publishes a wide range of books and booklets on historic OS map series and its journal, *Sheetlines*, is recognised internationally for its specialist articles on Ordnance Survey-related topics.

The National Grid Provisional six-inch in Cambridgeshire

Rob Wheeler

The Provisional Edition of the six-inch map on National Grid sheet-lines gets a bad press. As Richard Oliver observes,¹ the great bulk of the series – those sheets published after 1954 – are similar to the final (Provisional with National Grid) edition of the County Series, except that they incorporate revision undertaken for the one-inch Seventh Series. Thus only those features which were shown at the one-inch scale have been updated. The sheets are emphatically not ‘snapshots’ of the landscape.

Looking at some sheets in Cambridgeshire, it would appear that the sheets tell us more about the post-War landscape than the above description might lead one to suppose. What I have done is to compare the National Grid provisional sheets against the final state of the County Series six-inch along the line of the A10 from Royston to the outskirts of Cambridge. The choice was influenced in part by the extent of development along this swathe in the 1940s and 1950s, in part by a certain familiarity with the road as it is today, but I have only drawn to a minimal extent on collateral sources for what happened when in this period. All the National Grid sheets in question were published in 1960 and bear the note ‘The whole sheet was revised for major changes only in 1952’. That date corresponds to the revision date for one-inch Seventh Series sheet 148.

My initial assumption was that the final County Series sheets were amended (and, of course, recast on National Grid sheet-lines) to produce the NG Provisionals. I have attempted to check this assumption: one can find examples of damaged lettering or ornament on the latest County Series sheets which appear in the same damaged form on the NG Provisionals. However, this does not prove that in some cases the draughtsmen did not start again from the 1939 security enamels.

I will start by drawing attention to changes which are editorial in nature and do not add to the information supplied by the maps.²

1. BMs were not to be shown, except in six-inch basic areas.
2. Remaining pumps were to be deleted; also railway company names, Poor Law unions and similar obsolete detail.
3. Buildings where part was hatched and part (being derived other than from large-scale plans) unhatched were to be redrawn so that the whole was treated in the manner of the larger part.
4. This change reflects an elaboration of the specification: whereas unhatched buildings had been introduced in 1938 to speed the drawing of the Special Emergency Edition, they now became an indicator of accuracy of survey: anything from large-scale plans made to proper standards was to be hatched, anything from air photographs or small-scale revision was to be unhatched.

¹ Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey Maps: a concise guide for historians*, Charles Close Society, 2005, 43.

² These are from *Six inch Provisional series Drawing Instructions (Issued March 1955)*. I am grateful to Richard Oliver for this information, and for much useful discussion.

5. Limited redrawing of names was anticipated.

‘5.1 Names already shown which are still correct will not be replaced unless they are illegible, or very difficult to read due to faulty quality.

5.2 Names which are replaced due to bad quality ... will be shown in the monotype style and size nearest approximately to the original type...’³

Comparison of the Cambridgeshire sheets suggests that redrawing of names, especially names of villages, was extensive.

In what follows, these changes will be taken as given: it is changes in the topographical detail that interest me.



Fig 1 (top): Extract from Cambs 58.7 (2nd edition, 1903)

Fig 2: Extract from TL 34SE

Let us start in Melbourn, between Cambridge and Royston, is a side-street called Water Lane. Figure 1 shows a house on the corner of Back Street – by 2015, renamed Orchard Road. The area has been redeveloped in recent years but in 1952, so far as I am aware, the house had not changed since it was surveyed in 1903. Running from the house to the road is a narrow building about 2m wide. It might be cart sheds, except that these would normally be open-fronted.⁴ Almost certainly, its visual impact is small. Turning to the NG six-inch (*figure 2*), we find a complete travesty: the house is shown with an attached wing 6m wide, projecting towards the road. This misrepresentation actually dates back to 1903: there appears to have been a rule that buildings on the six-inch must not be less than about 0.7mm wide, in order to give sufficient space for shading and diagonal hatching. (For the first edition, with solid black buildings produced by direct photographic reduction from the 1:2500, this would not have been a problem.) This problem was avoided for buildings of squarish proportions by omitting anything below a certain area, but long thin buildings could be of sufficient area to qualify to be shown and the smaller dimension would have to be enlarged to the minimum.⁵ Here, the expansion in the width of the building has turned a detached outbuilding into an attached wing.

Continuing north out of Melbourn on the A10, we turn right into a new cul-de-sac of council houses, called Portway - though the street name does not appear on either the County Series or the National Grid Provisional.

³ Fortuitously, the paragraph numbering in the original document fits that required here!

⁴ There is no point in visiting the site: everything has been swept away and replaced by modern houses.

⁵ This is only my interpretation, but I have noted other examples, such as a wing of the Judges' Lodgings just outside the east gate of Lincoln Castle.

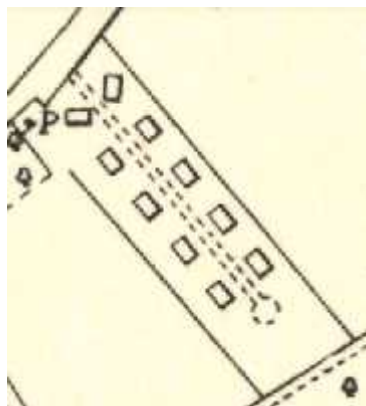
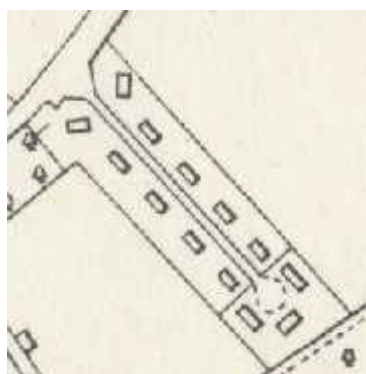


Fig 3 (top): Extract from Cambs 58NE (Revision of 1901 with additions 1946-47)

Fig 4: Extract from TL 34NE

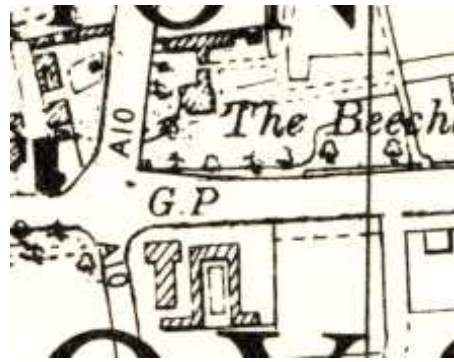


A quick comparison of the two sheets (*figures 3 and 4*) indicates that three blocks of houses have been added at the end of the cul-de-sac. A more careful inspection reveals that all the blocks have been redrawn – the change in proportions stands out more than anything else. This type of redrawing turns out to be very common. An inspection of 23 County Series ‘additions’ between Melbourn and Harston revealed seven instances where major redrawing had taken place, four instances of simple redrawing (defined as a building remaining the same shape but being moved slightly or having its dimensions changed), and one instance where the main structure had not been changed but outbuildings had been added; in eleven instances no change was discernible. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that all ‘additions’ have been inspected on the ground and where necessary their position has been corrected.

Note also that Portway – the new road itself – has been redrawn, and now has canted corners where it meets the main road. This too can be seen in other places where ‘additions’ had been made: it is not only the buildings that have been subject to graphical revision but also the edges (ie fences) of roads.

At Portway, we can see that a fence has been added separating the older from the newer development. In the sample of 23 ‘additions’ mentioned earlier, there were six instances where fences had been added. These were normally fences defining a land-use boundary: residential on one side, agricultural or horticultural on the other. The new fence at Portway is unusual in that it is internal to the development, merely separating two phases. I will return to this point.

Some sheets present peculiar problems. At Royston, for example, there was large-scale revision of 1937-40,⁶ which had been generalised for incorporation in the post-War County Series. This reduction and generalisation seems to have been



done afresh for the NG Provisional sheet: figures 5 and 6 compare the treatment of Royston’s eastern cross-roads.

Fig 5: Extract from Cambs 58SW (with additions 1946-48)

Fig 6: Extract from TL 34SE

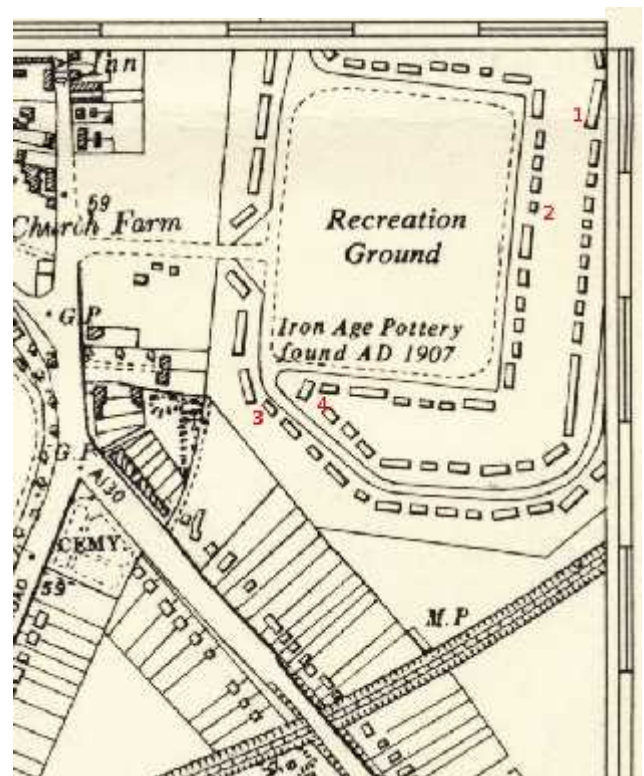
⁶ Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey Maps: a concise guide for historians*, Charles Close Society, 2005, 203.

immediately south-east of the cross-roads was an Art Deco cinema: note the difference in shape between the two editions. In figure 5, there is a certain vagueness about the projections on the eastern and western walls: are they rectangular? are they intended to be opposite one another? Perhaps it was poor draughtsmanship on the County Series that caused so much redrawing to be done. That said, the drawing of the NG Provisional leaves a lot to be desired. For example, the building east of the cinema was a swimming pool, being labelled as such on the County Series. It seems to have been an open-air swimming pool: the rectangular shape in the middle is shaded on its west and north sides, indicating a hole in the ground. (Query: does this mean it was empty of water when surveyed?) The NG Provisional leaves the central rectangle unshaded, but there are also many unshaded buildings. The draughtsman simply appears to have never got round to doing the shading. Note the redrawing of the road boundaries at the crossroads. This may be associated with the change in the course of the A10 through the town, but I have failed to ascertain exactly when that happened, let alone whether the road junction was remodelled at exactly the same time.

Another oddity is associated with TL45SW, or rather with County Series Cambs 47SW. This latter sheet came out as a Provisional c1945, based, presumably, on a Special Emergency Edition. Most such sheets appear also in a later edition making use of RAF Air Photographs; this sheet did not. Thus in the County Series, the houses SW and SE of the cemetery in figure 7 are shown crudely as two elongated blocks. In contrast, figure 7 shows them neatly drawn and with all, or most of, their dividing fences shown. Such care to delineate individual gardens is not uncommon on County Series 'additions' from air photos, but it is not normally encountered on work done for the NG Provisionals. So why do we find it here? I would suggest that the final version of Cambs 47SW was indeed drawn but because the RAF air photographs of urban areas were retrospectively classified, this sheet too was classified and was never put on public sale (or released to the copyright libraries). By the time that the NG Provisional was being drawn, the matter had been considered more carefully, it had been agreed that the depiction of suburban houses on a main road was not going to imperil national security, and in consequence the classified and otherwise unrecorded 1950(?) edition of Cambs 47SW was used as a drawing base for the NG Provisional.

The housing estate laid out around the Recreation Ground on figure 7 can usefully be compared against a modern *Googlemaps* satellite image. The OS map looks sloppy, and it is.

Fig 7: Estate at Trumpington, TL 45SW



- a. The block at **1** ought to be aligned with the other houses alongside it.
- b. The pair of semis at **2** should have the same dimensions as the three pairs to its north.
- c. The change in set-back of the blocks at **3** is far less than is shown.
- d. At **4** the Eastings of the western end of the blocks facing N and SW should be the same.

The sloppiness here is not unique: Queens Close, Harston, (TL432513) is even more hastily drawn. In fact much of the housing that appears for the first time on the NG Provisionals is drawn to standards reminiscent of the Special Emergency Edition.

Thus the ‘white’ buildings on TL45SW fall into three categories:

1. Those drawn from air photographs as part of the County Series additions of c1950.
2. Redrawing of these additions, based (presumably) on graphical revision on the ground.
3. Additions based on the 1952 revision undertaken for the one-inch, and drawn to something like Special Emergency Edition standards.

For most sheets, we can distinguish (1) from (2) by looking at the latest County Series edition; here the only indication that allows us to separate the phases is the inclusion of details that were being ignored in phase (2). In contrast, phase (3) work stands out – at least, *some* of it stands out – by the poor draughtsmanship.

If both (2) and (3) were drawn in 1952, why is there such divergence in styles of drawing? I can only suggest that they were not actually contemporary. They cannot have been greatly separated in time: (2) must have been done between 1950 and 1952; but it is conceivable that the sheer volume of revision material that arose from the one-inch revision overwhelmed the available drawing effort.

One piece of evidence that tends to support the idea of a separation in time between (2) and (3) has already been mentioned: the internal fence at Portway. I suggest that this fence was drawn in phase (2), whereas the houses beyond it were drawn in phase (3). Thus, when the fence was drawn it would have separated a built-up area from farm land, in line with the other phase (2) fences.

What conclusion can we draw from this? The assertion that the NG Provisional sheets are not a snapshot can indeed be endorsed. What has emerged is that the sheets do provide topographical information that adds to what can be learned from the latest County Series and the earliest one-inch Seventh Series, particularly in respect of buildings erected after the last full revision of the County Series but before the visit of the surveyors responsible for the Seventh Series. Unfortunately, the *interpretation* of that information can be exceedingly difficult. For example, where late County Series ‘additions’ are redrawn on the NG Provisionals, is the new map correcting poor photo-interpretation, or is it recording a change in the buildings that took place subsequent to the date of the photographs? To get the most out of the NG Provisionals, one ideally needs other sources, documentary, archaeological⁷ or photographic.

The map extracts are taken with thanks from National Library of Scotland website.

⁷ I use the term to include the examination of standing buildings.