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“A persistent error”

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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.

*A persistent error**John Cole*

Thanks to book tokens I indulged recently in the luxury of Explorers 219 (A2 'Revised' 1999, selected change 2005, 2008), 220 (similar) and 244 (B1 'Revised' 2000, selected change 2005, minor reprint 2008). Amongst other delights this gave me complete coverage of all 1:1250 and 1:2500 work I did in Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield and more particularly the Black Country during my residence in 1952-64.

Explorer 219 was reviewed in *Sheetlines* 57 some ten years ago by David Kimber so it was interesting to see what notice OS had taken of some of his suggestions or indeed criticisms. From my own point of view I was surprised to find that almost a third of the areas I surveyed/revised had undergone little or no alteration (perceptible at 1:25,000) on maps comprising massive changes. Three Sutton Coldfield 1:1250 maps appeared to have altered not a jot (back garden and housing extension detail excepted). And similar applied to older originally council estates at Walsall and West Bromwich. But it is a different story where the M5, M6 and M54 plus other major new roads are routed, industrial complexes completely altered and railways and canals obliterated.

Which brings me to the point of this article. By and large the naming of canals on all three maps seems clear and complete. But given the complexity of the original West Midland system it is not surprising that a degree of inconsistency (in my opinion!) has crept in, whilst I feel obliged to expose a mistake as it falls within 1:2500 maps SJ9804 and SJ9805 revised by me in March 1960. These grid squares appear on both Explorer 219 and 244.

Initially I was most aggrieved because the mistake seemed to have arisen from a local OS procedure I took exception to at the time, but closer investigation revealed that the error was to be found on both the Seventh Series and New Popular versions of the one-inch sheet 119 and Popular sheet 62.<sup>1</sup>

The reason appears to be as follows. The Wyrley and Essington Canal winds its course from Wolverhampton to the east of Lichfield and a junction with the Coventry Canal, itself joining the Trent & Mersey Canal a few miles to the north. Along the way it, like many other canals in the area, throws off various branches which in the majority of cases had their own name. At grid square 9801 having turned north, it very sharply swings south-east towards Walsall, whilst what was known as the Wyrley Bank Branch continued north to a terminus at Cheslyn Hay. In County Series mapping days this figured on the large scale map as 'BCN (Birmingham Canal Navigations) Wyrley Bank Branch'. BCN having been superseded by British Waterways in the 1950s or before, there was some argument about OS treatment but what was eventually adopted seemed to me to be both cumbersome and wrong: 'Wyrley and Essington Canal (Wyrley Bank Branch) (disused)'. Thus 'Wyrley and Essington Canal (disused)' eventually on the Explorers, although this does not explain its appearance on the one-inch maps.

There may have been some kind of logic in quoting the parent canal but this tended to fall down in instances such as the Bentley Canal terminating at its east end on the

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<sup>1</sup> But not the D1 of Landranger 127 and C5 of Landranger 139.

Anson Branch (of the Walsall Canal), and the Daw End Branch (also of the Wyrley and Essington) which had an end-on junction with the Rushall Canal at the village of that name. Incidentally whilst it is not annotated on Explorer 244, it is shown as 'Daw End Branch' on 220.

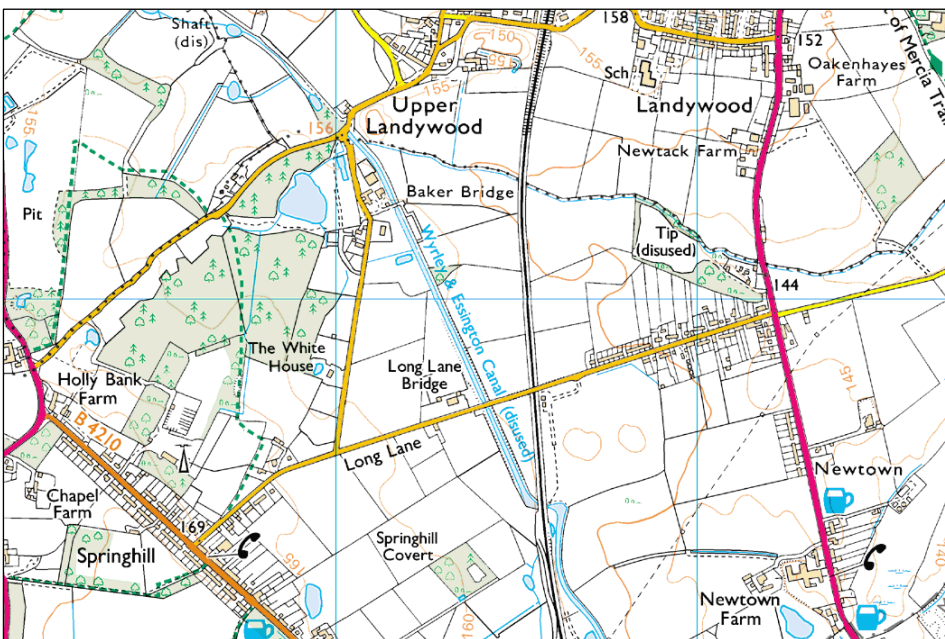
The Churchbridge Branch (9509 on 244) is shown simply as Canal (disused) and this may not be the best form for branches which have been legally closed but still exist and might still be used for fishing or boating. The Wyrley and Essington is quite properly shown as disused north-east of Brownhills as here it is simply a dry channel, obliterated in places.

Whilst the rest of 244 and indeed the whole of 220 look satisfactory to me as far as canal names are concerned, there are some problems in the Black Country area of Explorer 219. Just one branch is named. This is the Gower Branch (Canal added) joining apparently two Birmingham canals. But that named at 9791 should read 'Birmingham Canal Birmingham Level' the other at 9591, 'Birmingham Canal Wolverhampton Level'. There are of course detail congestion difficulties in writing these names in full. And there is indeed another existing section of the Wolverhampton Level from 9495 to 9595 (also known as the Wednesbury Oak Loop) which was by-passed as a through route when the Coseley tunnel was constructed in the 1820s by Telford, who was also responsible for the much more straight Birmingham Level.

Sections of other branches in order of length are: Balls Hill Branch (9891, 9992), Anson Branch (9898) and Lower Ocker Hill Branch (9894). Others are the approach canal to Brades locks (now gone) (9795), Toll End locks (also gone) (9895), the Titford Canal (9988) and the approaches to the north and south ends (and indeed the canal through it) of the Netherton Tunnel Branch. It would be difficult to add some or all of these names at 1:25,000 scale and for the sake of consistency it would probably be better

to remove the Gower Branch name.

The canal tunnels at Coseley (368 yards) and Gosty Hill (557 yards) are depicted by pecks and the long Netherton (3027 yards) and Dudley (3154 yards) are both named on the maps. But of the disused Lapal (3795 yards) centred approx 0083 there is not a trace.



*Wyrley & Essington Canal (disused) at SJ983048 on  
1:25,000 Explorer219 © Crown Copyright NC/00/1340*