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“Manchester ship canal and early large
scales revision”

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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close, OS Director General from 1911 to 1922, and initiator of many of the maps now sought after by collectors.

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 Manchester Ship Canal and early large scales revision

Richard Dean

Prior to World War I the Ordnance Survey had a fairly rigid policy of only surveying and revising their large scale plans on county-wide cyclical basis. Not only did the opening of the Manchester Ship Canal have a major impact on the economy of the region, but it is a rare example of the Ordnance Survey being moved to partially revise their large scale plans outwith the normal cycle.

The whole of Cheshire had been surveyed and published in 1870-5. Because Lancashire already enjoyed an excellent, if very outdated, six-inch survey dating from the 1840s it was at the end of the queue for 1:2500 coverage,¹ and publication of the new maps at the larger scale was not finally completed until 1894 – and these were not entirely new, being enlarged replottings of the earlier survey data, revised on the ground in 1888-93.

The Manchester Ship Canal was under construction during this period, being opened for business on New Year's Day 1894, with a formal ceremony by Queen Victoria in May. It was a massive feat of civil engineering which completely transformed the valley of the Rivers Mersey and Irwell, but the OS seems only to have recorded any works that were substantially complete, other areas where the original topography had already been disturbed being simply left blank on the plans. In a couple of cases² there is a note 'Manchester Ship Canal works in course of construction'.

It does not seem to be recorded whether OS themselves decided on issuing amended sheets to show the completed canal, or if there was external pressure,³ but a revision of the whole Ship Canal route from Eastham to Manchester was undertaken in 1894⁴ and the relevant revised 1:2500 Lancashire sheets and derived six-inch revisions appeared with a publication date of 1895 or 1896. The most common twenty-five inch survivors in map collections are later reprints of these sheets, with a bold 'SECOND EDITION' added to the heading.⁵

The policy was to fully revise the whole of any sheet that contained a length of the canal.⁶ Along the county boundary the twenty-five inch plans were completed to their edges with revised Cheshire detail; the six-inch quarter-sheets used this as far as it extended, and were filled up to their limits with redrawn but unrevised detail from the earlier Cheshire survey. However, within the Mersey estuary⁷ (Sheets 117 and 118), publication, except for 118.4, was only at the six-inch scale, although the revision pattern appears to have been the same. Quite a

¹ Although six parishes were dealt with earlier, including Eccles in 1876.

² Sheets 104.9 and 104.13.

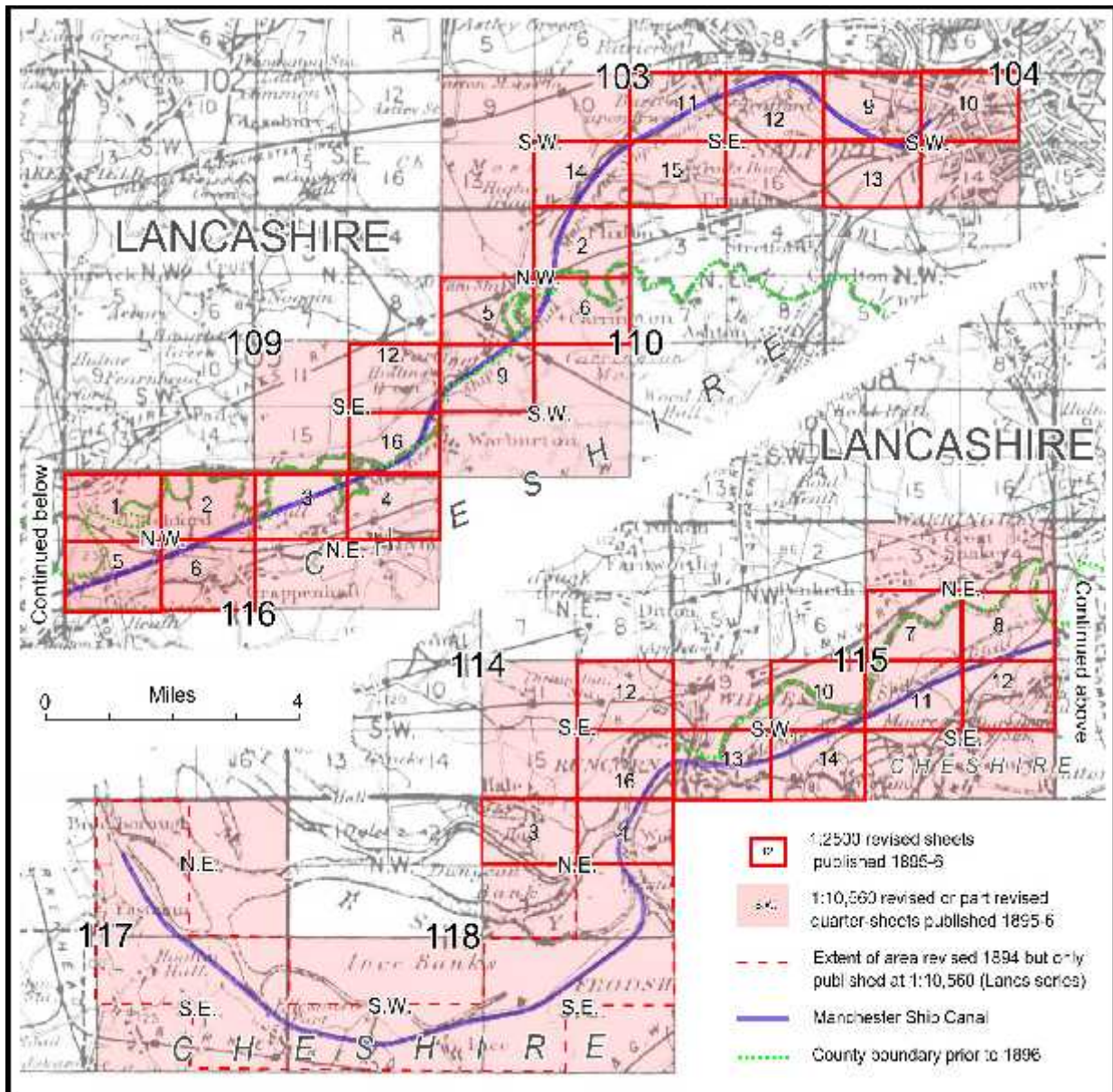
³ Richard Oliver wonders if Henry Crook had anything to do with it? He lived at Eccles!

⁴ Perhaps using the same surveyors who had just finished the county-wide work.

⁵ See for example the Lancashire Record Office collection (www.digitalarchives.co.uk).

⁶ But this does not explain the inclusion of 114.12 (Ditton) and 118.3 (Hale).

⁷ Below Runcorn Gap the OS seems to have been uncertain whether the estuary was in Lancashire or Cheshire and hedged their bets by including it in the initial surveys of both counties.



Lancashire revision 1894

bit of Cheshire, including Ellesmere Port and some Wirral villages, was captured by the revisers.

During 1897 the first cyclic revision of Cheshire took place, and this included all the parts of the county that had been revised only three years earlier in connection with Lancashire. On publication in 1899 these sheets, on both scales, reverted to the old policy of not filling up with Lancashire material, giving in parts a very broken view of the canal, but showing the first moves near Warrington towards a rationalisation of administrative boundaries to follow such a well-defined feature – this process was completed in stages 1896-1933 for the length between Moore and Irlam, later extended all the way to Manchester. Cheshire was revised again in 1904-9, and Lancashire 1904-12.

This interaction between revised areas and the county boundary has given an interesting sequence of frequent revisions for a few areas in Cheshire. The best example is Runcorn, as illustrated by the series of extracts below.



Cheshire 1:2500 sheet XXIV.3, surveyed 1874



Lancashire 1:2500 sheet CXV.13, revised 1894



Cheshire 1:2500 sheet XXIV.3, revised 1897



Cheshire 1:2500 sheet XXIV.3, revised 1905

A sequence of frequent revisions of Runcorn