

**David Spaven & Julian Holland, *'The Times' Mapping the railways,* London: Times Books, 2011, ISBN 978-0-00-743599 9, hardback, £30**

The committee had been considering the scope for publication of a book on Ordnance Survey maps and railways. The appearance of this volume has certainly demonstrated that such a publication can appeal to a mass-market readership. Of its 303 pages, rather more than half consist of map extracts, mostly in colour. And the reproduction is good. The more important maps are reproduced in their entirety at a reduced scale, followed by one or more extract at full scale. These extracts often occupy a double-page spread with bleeding edges, so one can gauge the full visual impact of the map.

Visual impact and cartographic design are the aspects that chiefly interest the authors. Beck's London Underground map of course features prominently, but the book also covers George Dow's diagrammatic maps for the LNER and LMS, and modern equivalents too. Other aspects of visual design also appear: I learned (with dismay) that the style of design introduced by British Rail in 1965 influenced most of the railway operators in Northern Europe.

The book is pulled together by a potted history of railways in the UK. Anyone looking for a coffee-table book on the subject, or with an interest in graphic design will find the book a splendid one, especially if a copy being remaindered can be found.

As the reader may have come to suspect, I was hoping for something more. Having demonstrated that a study of maps of fen drainage can shed light on the history of that subject and vice-versa,<sup>1</sup> I had supposed that the same would be true of railway history. *Mapping the Railways* points to three fields where such a relationship might apply but fails to follow them up. The starting point for two of them is the OS five-foot plan of York station of 1851. Here we have a detailed representation of what was almost a standard design for 1840s Midland Railway termini: four roads under a train shed, with arrival and departure platforms on opposite sides, all four roads being linked transversely by wagon turntables midway and at the buffers. The plan shows us that these turntables took a segmental 'bite' out of the platform. Does that mean that trains could not load passengers while straddling such a turntable? Such turntables would be useful for unloading private carriages: for example, the officers of Christ's Hospital travelled to Lincoln in 1847 in the carriage they would use for visiting their Lincolnshire estates mounted on a carriage truck. A letter written shortly after complained of delays in unloading. Perhaps they were shunted to a siding for this; if not, the locomotive that had hauled their train was presumably trapped all this time at the end of the arrivals platform – there were no points there by which it could be freed. Perhaps a wider study of major stations on early five-foot plans can throw light on questions like these.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> RC Wheeler, *Maps of the Witham Fens*, Woodbridge, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Godfrey touched on the complexities of mixed-gauge stations when writing the notes on the Westminster & Victoria 1869 1:2500 sheet, numbered by the OS *London XLIII*, by Godfrey *London 75*.

This same plan also shows the electric telegraph running to a room adjacent to one marked 'Post Office'. Halfway along the arrivals platform (and adjacent to one of the wagon turntables) is 'Signal Lamp'. Can we make any deductions about Signal & Telegraph practice at York in 1851? If we chose a station with an early five-foot plan for which a detailed accident report survives – and there were plenty of accidents at that date – would the map offer useful insight, or would the accident report offer insight into the rules being applied by Ordnance surveyors?

The third field concerns the plans deposited with Clerks of the Peace to satisfy the requirements of Parliamentary standing orders. The style of deposited plans from after 1837 is well known; they are invariably lithographed, and though exceedingly useful are visually unattractive. Prior to the change in standing orders in 1837, such plans were made to a smaller scale and were often engraved. The book reproduces such a plan, dated 1820,<sup>3</sup> showing an 'Intended Railway or Tram Road from Stockton to Darlington'. This shows 'Mr Overton's Line of Railway' (intended for horse haulage) with every plot through which it passes delineated and numbered, as one would expect for a deposited plan of this date. It also shows 'Mr Stevenson's (*sic*) Line of Railway', which was laid out with gentler curves to facilitate the new-fangled notion of haulage by steam locomotive engines. The boundaries of properties passed through by this line are not marked in any way. The authors observe that the second line must be a later addition to the plate. What they do not remark on is that a map in this state would not be adequate for a deposited plan. Quite possibly a later state still exists in which the properties passed through by 'Mr Stevenson's Line' are delineated and numbered just like those on Mr Overton's Line. I do not expect the authors to have produced a cartobibliographic listing of all the states of this map, and I certainly do not aspire to do so myself. What I want to observe is that the survival of the state they reproduce suggests it had a reasonable print run. From what I have seen of other statutory undertakings of this period, I would presume that copies were sent out to subscribers or potential subscribers for shares. Investors in this era seem to have liked to satisfy themselves of the details of the scheme they were supporting. In contrast, once the new-style deposited plan appeared in 1837, this requirement to communicate topographical detail to investors seems to have vanished. Is this because 1837 just happens to mark the change from investment by local people in local schemes to speculative investment by outsiders who were quite happy to be told that the Lincoln and John O' Groats Direct Railway<sup>4</sup> passed through country well-suited for railways and likely to produce copious revenues from the mercantile and agricultural districts which the line traversed? There is scope for a book here which really would use maps to throw light on railway history and vice-versa. Let us hope it will not be too long before someone takes up this topic.

*Rob Wheeler*

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<sup>3</sup> This state is probably of 1821.

<sup>4</sup> A complete invention - but there were real schemes described in this manner.