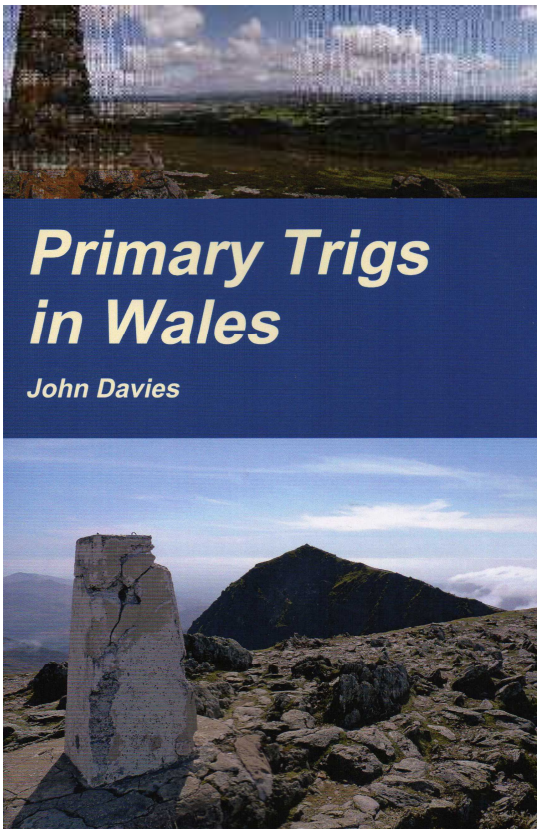


John R Davies, *Primary trigs in Wales*, self-published via www.lulu.com, ISBN 978-1-291-23048-2, pp 209, illus, maps, hardback, £12.50



Interest in the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain's triangulation pillars has grown as their importance has diminished. They came into being as part of the retriangulation of Great Britain that was begun in 1935, suspended during World War II, completed in 1962 and finally published in 1967. Like other national triangulations, that of Britain was divided into primary, secondary and tertiary orders: most of the stations for the first two were marked by pillars, though some, for example on church towers, were marked in a more discreet manner. A number of them continue in use, in order that the 'OSGB36' triangulation can be related to more recent GPS observations. Whereas both triangulation and GPS observations function as a skeleton to control detail survey, triangulation depends on intervisibility between stations, which means the ability to sight for 30 to 40 miles for primary stations, and 5 to 10 miles for

secondary stations. Whilst a minority of primary stations were located in reasonably accessible places in populated areas, such as on cathedral towers, most were on hilltops, often pretty remote.

Up to the 1980s the pillars were, well, just there: purely utilitarian things. Then, around 1990, it became known that the development of GPS would make many of them redundant, and the prospect of their loss stirred many people to their defence. In the event the cost of wholesale removal, combined with the 'adoption' of some of them, has ensured that the majority of the redundant pillars continue in being. Not only that: there is a sport of 'trigpointing', the logging of visits, which has now extended beyond the pillars themselves to the flush-brackets for levelling which are set into all the pillars, as well as many other structures. It is therefore unsurprising that 'someone should have written a book about it': in fact the website www.trigpointinguk.com advertises some related ones, such as on 'trig walks'.

Primary trigs in Wales describes the selection of sites, building the pillars, and the early observations from them, and gives a summary of information for each pillar. This information is largely from OS records, some of which are in process of being transferred to The National Archives, and it demonstrates that there is considerable scope for similar books for areas elsewhere in Britain. Not the least valuable part of the book is the guide to pillar numbering, on page 36. The accounts of pillar construction are accompanied by contemporary news items:

such context is to be commended, though I could do with rather less sport. There is other interesting information, such as on landowners, though some passages, such as the paragraph on the Duchy of Lancaster (pages 45-6), seem unnecessarily prolonged. These asides are not always well integrated with the text: one has an impression that they may have been afterthoughts. However, they are bound to add to the interest for those who are not narrowly focussed on maps and survey.

So far the book is good in principle, but there are several faults. Some of them can be attributed to self-publication: often one wishes that a second pair of eyes had been at work for malapropisms, for example 'voracity' rather than 'veracity' on page 100. Similarly, surely 'Great Britain' rather than 'United Kingdom' (which implies inclusion of Northern Ireland) is meant on page 16. And it is puzzling that, on page 191, Aberystwyth and Aran Fawddwy pillars seem to have been repaired before they were built! It is also unfortunate that the list of chapters lacks page numbers. It is for this sort of thing that we need proof-readers and publishers' editors. Other faults are less likely to be picked up by a publisher, but undermine the author's authority: many of these come in the first chapter, and include death-dates of 1791 and 1821 respectively for William Roy and William Mudge, and evident confusion of purpose: did the 1:25,000 really replace the county series (page 12)? Some of the text might be reorganised: the character-sketch of Martin Hotine on page 162 surely belongs in chapter 1.

Illustrations are scattered through the book, but the best of them are in a six-page section of photographs from the 'Ordnance Survey Archive'. A few of these, such as that of Hotine and others at Turiff in 1937, are relatively familiar, but I believe that most appear for the first time, including one of what can only be described as a cowboy pillar-builder. They are printed on the same paper that is used for the letterpress, which is adequate for whole-tones, but not really so for half-tones.

An advantage of self-publication-on-demand is that it is possible to correct the text without waiting for bulk stocks to sell out. This book is a worthwhile read, and at the price is a fair buy compared with some broadly comparable books that have come my way recently, but with the text cleaned up it could be considerably better.

Incidentally, the author is not to be confused with the Editor of *Sheetlines!*

Richard Oliver