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“The depiction of RAF stations on the
Provisional six-inch”

RC Wheeler

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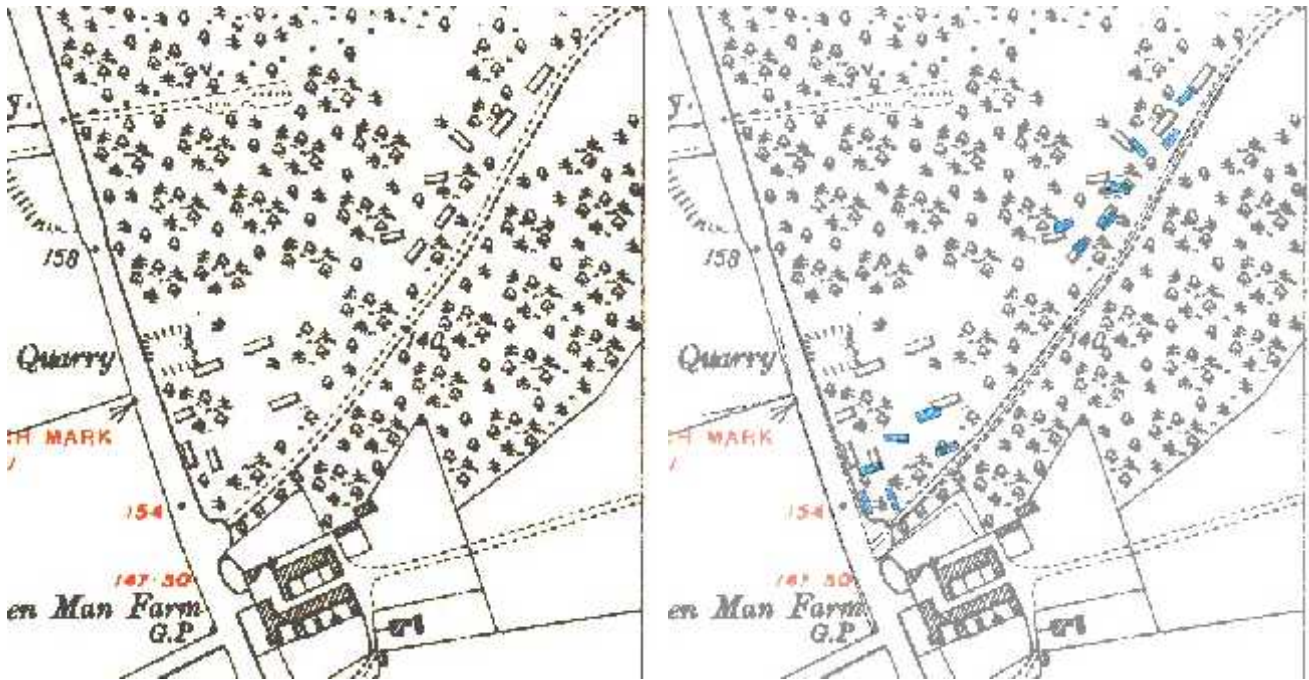
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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles 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 depiction of RAF stations on the Provisional (National Grid) six-inch RC Wheeler



During the Second World War, the RAF had more than 80 stations in Lincolnshire.¹ A large proportion of these were not the permanent stations so familiar now, but temporary affairs, whose buildings lay in scattered groups where it had been convenient to requisition land. It is well known that the OS was prevented from showing airfields on their maps in the immediate post-war period. However, the prohibition seems not to have applied to domestic sites that were separated by a public road from the airfield proper.² The Provisional Edition of the gridded six-inch, which came out in Lincolnshire about 1950, was well timed to record these scattered domestic sites before too many of them had been demolished.³

Figure 1 (*above left*) shows as an example an extract from Sheet 86NE (Revision of 1904 with additions in 1947 and 1948), at TF 018 593. The unfilled rectangles are buildings added to the previous (1904) revision and show

¹ Stewart Bennett & Nicholas Bennett (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire*, University of Hull Press, 1993, 131.

² Following discussion with Richard Oliver, I believe that the OS was provided with a list of features not to be shown which, in this case, would merely be 'airfield' with a grid reference. The OS would suppress anything of a military nature not separated from the reference point by a public road and anything that was evidently part of the airfield (like aircraft dispersals) extending beyond such a road; any groups of huts visible on air photographs which were separated from the reference point by a road, even if they looked like barrack huts, were deemed not to be covered by the prohibition. In view of the propensity for former RAF buildings to become camps for displaced persons, hostels for agricultural workers, and such like, this was probably a practical and acceptable solution to the problems arising from updating maps from air photographs rather than a matter of policy.

³ On the basis of a random transect I reckon that about one sheet in four shows RAF buildings.

Dispersed Sites 1 and 2 of RAF Coleby Grange, a Fighter Command station of 1940. The aircraft operating surfaces lay to the west of the A15 and are, of course, not shown. The definitive source for the infrastructure of stations at this date are the drawings made by the Air Ministry Works Department (AMWD); conveniently their drawings 4173 to 4175/49⁴ are almost contemporary with the six-inch map. For each structure, a building plan is referenced, and this tells us that all the structures on these two sites are of 1940 or 1941, so we do not face any problems from buildings having been added or moved at the time the map was being revised.

A comparison of the six-inch against the AMWD drawings shows that all the barrack huts have been shown but smaller buildings – latrines, picket posts, etc, have been omitted. This seems to follow the 16 square metre rule noted in the *Concise Guide*.⁵ Figure 2 (*opposite right*) plots the barrack huts as shown in the AMWD drawings, overlain on the six-inch: a blue fill has been used so that the reader can distinguish them. It is clear that one source or the other is lacking in planimetric accuracy. The AMWD had drawn on a tracing of the OS 1:2500. Presumably the originals were at that scale. That, together with a consideration of the uses to which they might be put – laying services, adding further structures, etc – incline one to suppose them reasonably trustworthy. In contrast, whoever prepared the Provisional six-inch sheets had perhaps reverted to the standards of the Special Emergency Edition in an attempt to meet ambitious targets.

For most potential users, who have, let us say, discovered foundations in a copse, this does not diminish the value of the maps. The absence of fill shows the buildings to be an addition; the irregular orientations seem to be characteristic of Air Ministry practice, and from inspection of a later one-inch it is normally apparent to what airfield they belonged. That is as much as most people will want to know, If they do want details of building function, or their exact position, then they will need to track down the AMWD drawings.

⁴ I am grateful to Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire for the loan of copies.

⁵ Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey maps – a concise guide for historians*, CCS, 2005, 77.