“Coloured urban roads on the one-inch Third Edition”
R C Wheeler

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Coloured urban roads on the one-inch Third Edition

R C Wheeler

The manner in which some minor roads in towns appear in colour, and thus nominally Second Class, has long been a source of puzzlement to me. Knowing that the tarmacadam surfaces were starting to be employed about the time the maps were produced had caused me to suppose that the partial introduction of such surfaces had resulted in the patchy effect one sees. Without independent data on which roads were tarred and when, the hypothesis remained untested.

I then came across R A MacBrair’s Annual Reports in his capacity as Lincoln’s City Surveyor. Up to 1915, these give a cumulative list of tarmacadam roadways made, with dates of each, and conclude with the sound advice that

it is believed that economy in maintenance, sweeping and watering, results from this substituted kind of roadway, except where the street was previously paved with setts.

Having also acquired a Third Edition Large Sheet Series of Lincoln (Sheet 47, revised 1906, first published 1909) it was an easy matter to make the comparison. What was difficult was to make any sense of the results, to find any rational explanation for the choice of coloured roads. The following examples should make this clearer.

White roads with tarmacadam surfaces:

Park Street (from High St to Beaumont Fee) (1896)

East Bight (1896) – this is a narrow lane and the work in 1896 seems to have been in the nature of an experiment.

Bank Street (1904) – quite a busy street now, as a result of a one-way system, but in 1904 as important as any street in the centre that was not actually a main road.

St Mary Street (1906) – principal access to GNR station.

By 1906 only a dozen or so stretches of road in the city had such surfaces.

White main roads:

Corporation Street – a new street cut in the late C19 to provide improved access from the present A57 into the town centre. It was given a tarmacadam surface in 1906.
Coloured roads scarcely passable for vehicles:

North side of St Swithin’s church – road here is 6ft wide.

Steep Hill – Even the Roman Ermine Street at about this point resorted to steps. It is said that at some date round about 1820, Charles De Laet Waldo-Sibthorp for a wager drove four-in-hand down Steep Hill, but since at least 1842 there have been iron railings closing off the top of Steep Hill to wheeled traffic.

Little Bargate Bridge – the route across Sincil Dyke here is of undoubted antiquity but when Sincil Dyke was re-dug about 1826, only a footbridge was provided, not least because any vehicular access would make it possible to avoid the toll gate at the Great Bargate. There is another footbridge across Sincil Dyke two hundred metres west of the High Street which is also coloured up to 1912 but this is deleted on the 1920 printing.

Coloured roads that are entirely fictitious

Road along north side of Sincil Dyke west of High Street – the terraced houses here front directly onto the Sincil Dyke and the ‘road’ consists of a series of private pedestrian accesses from each of the cross-roads. These are dead-ends, continuous access being prevented by boundary walls which show every sign of being contemporary with the houses. The generalization from the large-scale to the New Series one-inch was perhaps ill-judged but is at least ambiguous. A one-inch reviser marking in the status of roads from inspection on the ground could not possibly have supposed that this was even a third-class road.

Connection from Webb Street to Henley Street – Private yards at the end of Webb Street are contiguous with private yards reached from Henley Street, but there is no indication that they interconnected, either in 1906 or subsequently.

Overall, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that whoever selected the minor roads in Lincoln that were to be coloured did so solely on the basis of guess-work.