“Popular revision: lessons from Leicester”

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Popular revision: lessons from Leicester

R C Wheeler

Development south of Leicester

One of the last printings of fully coloured pre-War maps for civilian use in the Second World War was the 5041 printing of the Leicester District one-inch, printing of which was completed 20 September 1941. What has not been remarked hitherto is the extent of the revision incorporated, compared to its 5036 predecessor. In particular, there is a roundabout, where what was then the A46 Narborough Road crossed the B582 south of Leicester. This roundabout is a feature which otherwise first appears on the New Popular, not being found even on the Second War Revision. Adjoining the roundabout to the north was a building, and this is something which appears neither on the regular Popular series, nor on the Second War Revision, nor even on the New Popular.

Was this some short-lived structure recorded only on this printing of the Leicester District sheet and nowhere else? Before getting carried away, I looked up the relevant edition of the six-inch. The 1931 Edition of Leicestershire 37SW, based on a revision of 1928, shows that the field north of the future roundabout had been given over to suburban development. Four plots 100 yards north of the crossroads had been developed, together with one plot 25 yards north, whose occupant must have been surrounded by cows – or perhaps by workmen building more houses.

This caused me to look into the stages by which revision material for this area beyond the southern bounds of Leicester was incorporated into the Popular one-inch. Up to and including the 1933 printing (minor corrections to 1933) the area continued to be shown as it was in 1918. Only with the 1936 printing was the available large scale revision incorporated, and that was done sparingly. For example, the six-inch map shows Glenville Avenue, off the Leicester Road in Glen Parva, with houses both sides and a further street at its west end; this is represented on the one-inch by three blocks of building parallel to a pre-existing track.

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1 Job file in CCS Archives.
with a further block at right-angles. The new roads are not shown and the buildings look more like poultry sheds than suburban houses. Over on the Narborough Road, the four contiguous plots are shown as a block of building at the edge of the road – they do at least look like suburban housing; the isolated house next to the crossroads is ignored.

1936 also saw the publication of the Leicester District sheet. Material from the 1931 six-inch was incorporated in a very similar manner, so similar that it could have been by the same hand. However, it was not copied mechanically (e.g. by transfer) from one sheet to the other. If one looks at the building – actually a large brick works – north of the canal (WOFO 019185), it will be seen that the regular sheet shows it as a square aligned almost east-west, whereas the District sheet aligns it almost diagonally. Over on the Narborough Road, the District sheet represents the four contiguous plots in the same manner as the regular sheet; it also puts in the isolated house, setting this back from the road in something more like its true position. So the ‘roundabout building’ appeared on the map before the roundabout.

No further significant revision appeared on the 3038 printing (with ‘minor corrections to 1938’) of the regular sheet. However, by 1941, major improvements had been carried out to the A46, with Narborough being by-passed, a new alignment adopted to avoid a bend north of the B582 crossroads and, one presumes, this crossroads being upgraded to a roundabout at the same time. These improvements (presumably included within ‘Road Revision’) are shown on the 5041 printing of the District sheet. That printing also shows the new boundary of the City of Leicester, which had been extended in 1935.

Finally, the Second War Revision shows all of this (apart from the roundabout), together with a lot more suburban development (derived no doubt from the 1938 ARP Revision) and provides a more accurate representation of the brick works. But the Second War Revision lies outside the scope of this article.
Much of this only reinforces and clarifies what is set out in Hodson\(^2\). *Minor corrections*, up to 1934, can be described as ‘a great deal\(^3\) of detail which is of little value to the public’ – coastguard stations and Wireless Telegraphy stations come to mind. There was clearly a change of policy in 1935 under which available large scale revision was generally incorporated.\(^4\) The date when a feature appears on the one-inch map by this route reflects the inner workings of the OS, not the date when the feature appeared on the ground.\(^5\) In contrast Road Revision, especially after 1934, caused changes to main roads to appear on the map fairly soon after they were made on the ground.

Three points stand out from the Leicester sheet. The first is the very sketchy manner in which available large scale revision might be incorporated. The second is the way in which revision might be drawn in parallel on two sheets. This could sometimes be so close as to be explicable only by the use of a common generalized drawing or the use of one as an exemplar for the other (as for Glenville Avenue) but could sometimes be divergent (as for the ‘Roundabout building’). Indeed, the manner in which the roundabout itself was shown on the 1941 printing of the District sheet but not shown on the Second War Revision, less than a year later, may be regarded as a further example of this variability. The third point is the manner in which the change in the city boundary was ignored in 1936 and 1938, being shown only in 1941.

**Corby: Housing estate**

For all the Leicester detail, the sources can be deduced. However, alterations at Corby are not so easy. Two areas are affected: a housing estate around grid reference SP 880900 and mineral railways at Gretton Plain (SP 895915). For the source of these, there is documentary evidence in the form of a minute in the job file addressed by Asst Supt R&S (R E Jurd) to Supt Litho and dated 7.6.40:

> Herewith are the documents, ie W D & A and Intermediate Revision and 2 tracings of 1" Pop 74 shewing corrections at CORBY (which are clear from the services) in connection with the reprinting of the above.\(^6\)

The note about tracings seems not to recur on any other job file. The rest of the minute (i.e. excluding ‘and 2 tracings ... CORBY’) also occurs on the job files for Dorking & Leith Hill (3.6.39), Middle Thames (5.6.39) and Manchester (29.6.39). Sadly, none of these files have the revision documents referred to.

The last state of the pre-war Popular (2038 M38 R37) shows development neither at the housing estate nor at Gretton Plain. The outline and water printing (1000/10/41 LR) acknowledges the housing estate by cross-hatching. The Second War Revision (5th Edition Style) (30,000/4/42 LR), which one assumes to incorporate directly the unpublished Fifth Edition drawings, shows the housing estate, complete with a church-with-tower. The A6116 adjoining it has been improved by the smoothing of two bends.

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\(^3\) The ‘great deal’ appears to be a figure of speech rather than a quantitative statement about the number of alterations.

\(^4\) See Hodson, p156, footnote 21.

\(^5\) The examples in Hodson, p157 of features which appear on the one-inch before they appear on the large scale plans do not conflict with this statement.

\(^6\) So what were W D & A? Intermediate Revision? What ‘services’? I regret I do not know.
The Leicester District printing omits the church and adds an oval track (for athletics, perhaps). The road improvements are more obvious because they are shown as additions to the pre-existing road rather than superseding it. More interestingly, the closes in the estate have rounded ends rather than square.

Clearly if the Second War Revision is an accurate copy of the Fifth Edition drawing, the Leicester District tracing referred to in the job file is not taken from that drawing. However, for the housing estate it tells us nothing that cannot be learned from the six-inch National Grid Provisional Edition (1944 printing) of Northamptonshire 17NE, which acknowledges ‘Additions in 1938’ (normally meaning ARP Revision) and shows the housing estate with round ends to closes, (RC) church, oval track (with club house adjoining). The road improvements come on sheet 11SE. As at Narborough, the large-scale revision finds its way onto different sheets of the one-inch with differences in the generalization.

*The Corby housing estate is in the SW corner and Gretton Plain in the NE corner of the extracts below.*

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**Corby: Gretton Plain**

Consider now the railways at Gretton Plain. Outline and water, Second War Revision and Leicester District all show the same track layout, except that the Second War Revision omits a short spur by the 364 spot height. What varies are the earthworks surrounding the loop. The outline and water edition shows this loop surrounded by a rock face as though sited in a former quarry. The Second War Revision shows (to its SE, at least) two distinct embankments, as though lines for dumping spoil formerly ran there. The Leicester District is similar but has filled up the depression between the two embankments.

So the Holy Grail of Popular revision – detail not shown on any other source – is hovering tantalizingly. Is it credible that the outline and water, the Second War Revision and the Leicester District show three separate surveys of Gretton Plain, or is the Leicester District
just a different generalization of ARP Revision? And where is the outline and water rock face derived from? It might help to answer these questions if a copy of the 1939 Special Emergency Edition of Northamptonshire Sheet 11SE could be located.⁷

Very often, the National Grid Provisional Edition of the six-inch can serve as a substitute for a missing Special Emergency Edition. The ‘A’ edition of this series (printed and published 1950) indeed acknowledges ‘additions in 1938’. However, the track layout (including the spur at the 364 ft spot height) has a pecked line around it and inside that pecked line is nothing at all. Is this a security deletion or is it an unusual treatment of something that does not qualify as permanent detail?

In this case, the 1:25,000 adds to the confusion. Sheet 42/89 (announced in the OS Publications Report of May 1949) shows the western part of a quarry lined with a rock face. The railways that are shown on the one-inch maps run up to the top of the rock face as though suicidal trains might fling themselves into oblivion. Sheet 42/99 (announced in the OS Publications Report of June 1949) shows the eastern part of the same quarry, but now it is edged by a scarp. Perhaps this is just a different representation of the same survey data; but clearly the 1:25,000 sheets represent a later state in the history of the quarry than that depicted by the one-inch maps.

There is also a ‘B’ edition of the six-inch National Grid Provisional series, which acknowledges ‘additions in 1938 and 1950’, was printed in 1952, and shows the quarry filled (over-filled, in fact) with spoil; indeed, it depicts trees growing on that spoil.

It does seem to be possible to make sense of all this, by postulating the following stages of development:

1. first quarry – as shown in outline and water edition,
2. back-filling – shown in Leicester District and Second War Revision,
3. second, larger & deeper quarry – shown in 1:25,000,
4. back-filling of this – shown in ‘B’ NG Provisional six-inch.

The last of these states can plausibly be regarded as representing what was there in 1950. What dates should we assume for the three earlier states?⁸ From where did the Ordnance Survey get its information on these? And if the OS had such frequent surveys available to it, should we regard the Leicester District and the Second War Revision (and perhaps even 42/89 and 42/99) as representing genuine differences rather than different depictions of the same raw data?

So whereas the additions south of Leicester turn out to fit into the pattern of Popular revision as it is generally understood, those at Corby quite definitely do not.

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⁷ Perhaps it does not exist: Cambridge University Library has a copy of the 1901 edition with print code 150/39, 75/41, 100/42. Is it plausible that so many wartime printings of the public sheet would be needed if a more up-to-date edition were available for official use?

⁸ Northamptonshire Record Office has an aerial photograph ZB1683/2-3 which can be dated to 1933 by the site clearance for the Tube Works and which shows Gretton Plain in its pristine state. Thus the whole sequence starts no earlier than 1933.