“A survey party pose(r)”
Richard Oliver

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Brigadier H S L Winterbotham’s *The National Plans*, a history and description of the larger-scale (1:10,560 and greater) OS mapping, was first printed in 1934 and reprinted (apparently as a result of wartime destruction of stocks) in 1950.\(^1\) The reprint is not an exact facsimile, as it omits a half-tone plate at the beginning depicting a group of five Royal Engineer surveyors, plus a very young civil assistant, stated to be preparing for a day’s work.

I had not taken any further notice of this until May 2002, when I acquired a copy of *The National Plans* which had been rebound in hard covers, and with the half-tone plate annotated as illustrated here. As an Exeter resident I was interested to see that the location of the photo was Exmouth, all of ten miles away, but other things intervened, and it was only an approaching *Sheetlines* deadline which stirred me into catching a number 57 bus (mid-day frequency every twelve minutes) to ascertain exactly where the photograph was taken.

The answer is that the camera was set up at about SX 99413 80923, looking about four or five degrees south of east into Camperdown Terrace. I cannot say why this location was chosen, but I can tell you that I had some difficulty in locating it. This is despite the fact that the street is evidently a pretty level one, that Exmouth is characterised by slopes, and that the only two likely level areas are those towards the docks, centred on SX 997807, and north-east of the station, centred on SY 002813. I had to hand 1:1250 sheets SX 9980 NW and NE, but these did not seem to offer the right pattern of bay windows, and so I alighted from the number 57 bus close by SY 002813. The was no joy there, and at first there did not seem to be much more hope in the vicinity of SX 997807 until, more out of curiosity that hope, I turned into Camperdown Terrace, and there ahead of me were the distinctive dormer windows that appear top left in the photograph: there seem to be none other of this pattern in Exmouth. Two minutes later, and I had my precise location.

Why were the bay windows missing? The answer seems to be that they are very slightly under the threshold for depiction on the 1:1250: a salutary warning to those of us who think that we are clever enough to locate photographs on an over-literal interpretation of the map.

It will be noticed that there are prominent shadows in the photograph and that they fall roughly north-north-east. Were the photo really of surveyors preparing for a day’s work one would expect the shadows to fall roughly west; the inference is that in fact it was very carefully posed, and evidently taken in the early to middle afternoon. (Or had they got up very late?)

Although there may be something contrived about the posing of the photo, the participants were real enough. What became of them subsequently? John Cole tells me that Bert Landon was the superior of a colleague of his at Wellington (Somerset) in the 1960s. What of the others? Are any still with us?

Oh, and whose bicycle is it?

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A FIELD SECTION.

Instructions for the Day's Work.

~ EXMOUTH 1933 ~

Clem Gay, Ernie Morandé, Bert Landon
L/Cpl. L.C. Guilder (½c), Jock Stewart.
Tape Boy Peter Lasbury.