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“Bogus Bognor: the early states of the
1:25,000 Provisional Edition”

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Bogus Bognor: the early states of the 1:25,000 Provisional Edition

Rob Wheeler

The period 1939-1951 saw massive changes to the landscape of Britain. Opencast mining and quarrying occurred in places that would previously have been sacrosanct. Airfields were constructed, often with a scattering of domestic sites around them. Barracks sprang up in the parkland of great houses. When the military moved out, such buildings often accommodated prisoners of war or displaced persons, or became workers' hostels. The sites sometimes returned to farmland but often became research establishments (eg Harwell) or industrial estates. By such means what happened over little more than a decade has had a lasting effect on our landscape.

The period may be important, but historians have been a bit chary of dealing with it. One reason is the sheer difficulty of establishing what happened. Most cartographic coverage is on the basis of the 'best available information', whose date may or may not be known. Security deletions affected many of the categories listed above. Deletion may be straightforward at the small scales but how it was handled at the larger scales is not always clear.

The sources available to the OS in the period were primarily the ARP revision of 1938, RAF air photographs of c.1947, small-scale revision, and the very limited full revision work. Establishing what was used for a given map is often difficult, as I found at Corby.¹ That example also showed that the 1:25,000, though nominally a derivative scale, can appear to show a stage not found at the primary scales. There is a great need for studies of all the OS maps of a particular locality in this period which relate them to reliable independent information on how (and when) the landscape was changing in that locality.

I am not in a position to offer that here. What I propose to discuss is the changes that took place to one particular sheet of the 1:25,000. Specifically, I shall be comparing the 'A' and 'B' editions of sheet SU90 (41/90 at the time) published in December 1948 and November 1951.²

The first change one notices is that the railways have acquired a lot more earthworks, especially in the vicinity of Barnham Junction. Those in the vicinity of Woodgate, a mile to the west, are particularly instructive (Figure 1). The new embankment is shown with a fence halfway up it and this is a symptom of the underlying problem, that the 1:25,000 is an unhappy compromise between a map and a plan. (Recall that, at the time, the OS used the latter term for a product in which everything was represented at its proper scale.) Now field boundaries are very difficult to show other than at their proper scale, but field boundaries include the fences by the side of railways. It is apparent from the six-inch³ that railways occupied a strip of land upwards of 10m wide; cuttings or embankments increased this to at least 18m and sometimes 30m. The problem for the 1:25,000 draughtsman was that a railway with its flanking fences occupied a width of about 1mm on the map (corresponding to 25m

¹ R C Wheeler, 'Popular revision: lessons from Leicester', *Sheetlines* 71, 52-6.

² Roger Hellyer, *A guide to the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 First Series*; London: Charles Close Society, 2003.

³ Whether the six-inch shows railway land exactly to plan is not relevant here. So far as the draughtsmen for the 1:25,000 were concerned, the six-inch represented ground truth.

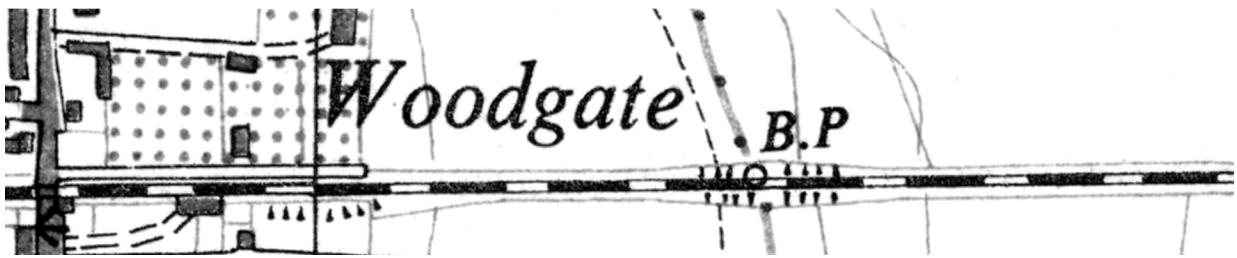


Figure 1: SU 943043, A edition (above) and B edition (below), $\times 3$ enlargement



on the ground); with earthworks, this extended to 2mm (50m on the ground). The field boundaries for the 'A' edition had been distorted sufficiently to allow the 1mm needed on the flat but insufficient allowance had been made for embankments. The hachures often tried to accommodate themselves to this. Thus, the embankment over the stream in Figure 1A is carefully squeezed between the fences; the cutting further west is rather improbably drawn outside the railway land, except for the east-most hachure. However, the most widespread solution was to omit the lesser earthworks altogether. Presumably someone – the Army? – had complained about this and the omitted earthworks were shown on the 'B' edition, though now without regard to the field boundaries. From inspection of Figure 1 it is clear that the new hachures were simply added to the existing drawing.

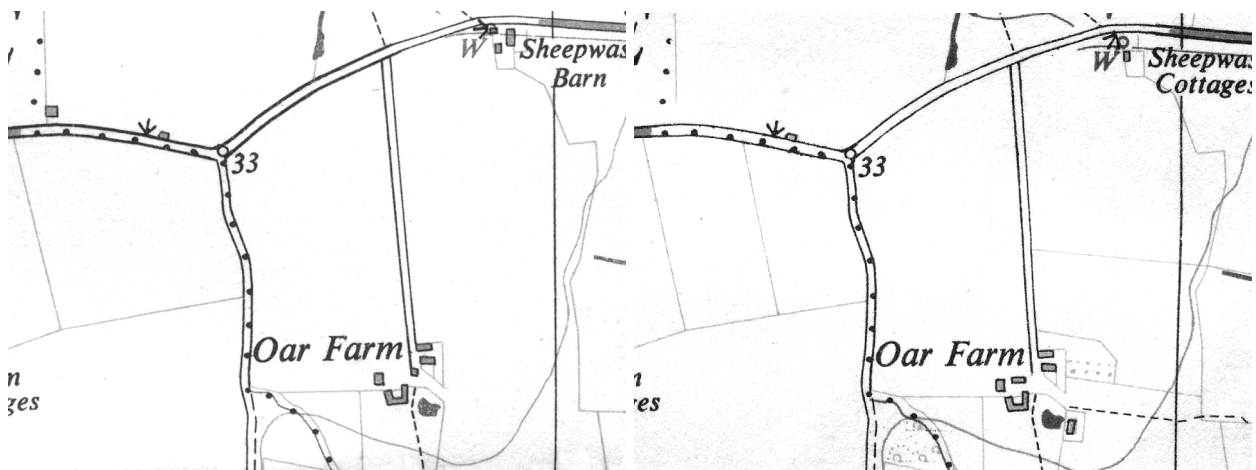


Figure 2: SU 916054, A edition (left) and B edition (right), $\times 1.5$ enlargement

The second aspect to command attention on this map is the treatment of the two airfields, RAF Tangmere and RAF Ford. The A2074 was cut by both airfields and this was indicated by leaving the road in place but omitting the brown fill. But should the road still be drawn with lines of the appropriate thickness for an A-road or with thinner lines for an unclassified road? The draughtsman for the 'A' edition seems to have been unable to decide. As Figure 2

shows, this was tidied up for the 'B' edition. Similar tidying-up took place at Ford, only there the hangars suddenly appear. (I believe they were no longer in military use.)

Railway earthworks and airfields aside, there is a whole host of minor changes introduced on the 'B' edition. Indeed, I tried to establish which grid squares contained such changes and rapidly decided that almost all of them either had modifications to field boundaries, or minor building changes, or both. The only unchanged squares were in those very rural parts where there had probably been no changes on the ground. Inspection of Figure 2 will show such changes at Sheepwash Barn, and at Oar Farm. This farm stood directly in line with the secondary runway, so had almost certainly been razed to the ground. Whatever the source for these changes was, it certainly did not involve surveyors walking the ground!

With that thought in mind, and prompted by some correspondence with John Cole, I compared the two 1:25,000 editions with some of the contemporary six-inch maps for the area, and with the air photo mosaics to provide ground truth.⁴ Now this area had benefited from large scale revision in the period 1937-44, but this did not appear at the six-inch scale until Provisional Edition sheets were published about 1950. The latest published six-inch when the 1:25,000 'A' edition appeared had a revision date of 1932 in the southern part around Bognor and some twenty years before that in the northern part of the sheet.

The 1:25,000 'A' edition appears to have been compiled as follows.

- i. Field boundaries and land-use (e.g. parkland) are generalised from the last *published* six-inch.
- ii. Buildings are generalised from the unpublished six-inch, where significant change has occurred. In some instances a less accurate source (perhaps ARP revision) has been used. In other cases, the last published six-inch is the source.
- iii. Roads are generally taken from the unpublished six-inch.
- iv. Hachures, e.g. for pits, are taken from the last published six-inch.
- v. 'Additions' on the Provisional six-inch, i.e. unfilled buildings derived from sources other than normal large-scale revision, do not appear on the 1:25,000.

The 'B' edition updates all material from the old six-inch where this differs from the new – except that 'additions' are still not reflected.

Taking field boundaries from one edition and buildings from the next might be expected to produce some horrendous clashes. Actually, in most cases it merely means that new houses are shown without gardens – and gardens tend to be generalised anyway. But occasional horrors appear, as Figure 3 shows. At the top, we see a square of parkland set diagonally, with a building in the centre of the NW side and another at the southern corner. If they look a little incongruous that is because the buildings are actually houses set in private gardens; they and the parkland never existed at the same time.

At the bottom of Figure 3, parkland runs between the beach and a row of buildings; a road threads its way between those buildings. One can see from the air photo mosaic that the houses are set too closely together for the road to pass between the first and second house as shown. The road and the parkland come from the 1932 revision; the houses had been built between then and 1939 and stand in conventional gardens.

⁴ At Tangmere, the air photo mosaic has been skilfully touched up to show the landscape depicted on the 'A' edition of the 1:25,000.

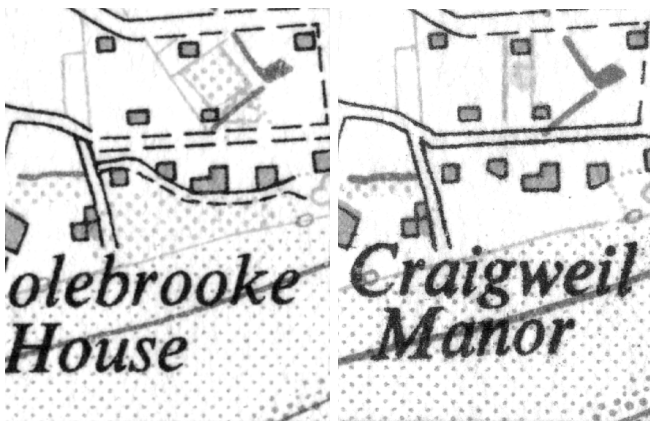


Figure 3: SU 909982, A edition (left) and B edition (right)

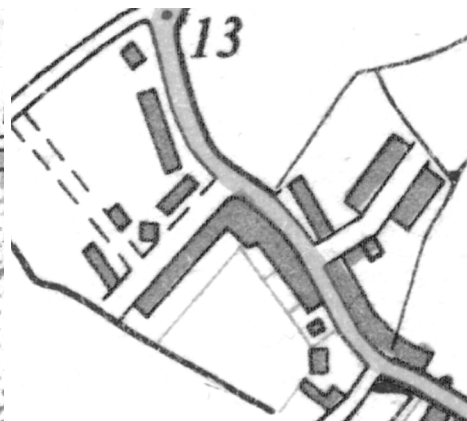


Figure 4: SU 918012, all ×3 enlargement

Figure 4 shows an example of ARP-standard detail. The cul-de-sac pointing NE (Bucks Ham Avenue according to the six-inch) should actually have a sharper bend so that the houses are placed midway between the two streams that bound the plot. On the opposite side of the main road, the buildings at the junction of Greystone Avenue (shown dashed) and Brazewick Avenue (mostly solid) are very inaccurately drawn. This remains unchanged on the 'B' edition.

Figure 5 shows a pit from 1932 with a line of houses which has been extended since then to intersect its edge. The hachures have been deleted where they intersect the houses but one of the houses would appear to have a precipitous back garden! More oddly, see how the building behind them changes position between editions. Although the 'A' edition has extended the row of houses to match the 1938-40 revision, the building behind was left as in 1932 and was only updated to reflect the 1938-40 revision on the 'B' edition. Such a juxtaposition might suggest that the 'A' edition was initially drawn in its entirety from the 1932 six-inch, the buildings only being updated to reflect the 1938-40 revision where the draughtsman spotted changes.



Figure 5 (above): SU 920008, A and B editions, ×3

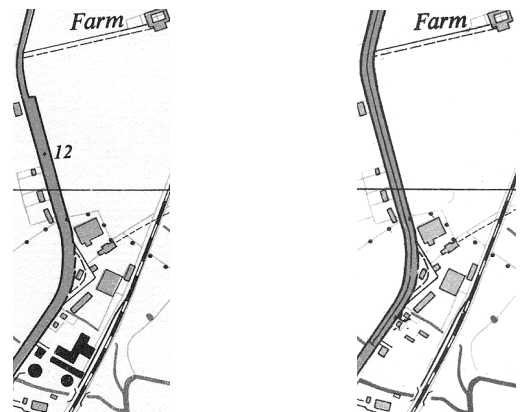


Figure 6 (right): SU 942010, A and B editions, ×1

Finally, Figure 6 shows the improvements to the A29 north of Bognor. First of all, note the industrial buildings in solid black on the 'A' edition. The air photo mosaic shows them still there in October 1947 (albeit with the western cylindrical building/silo moved east) but they are not on the six-inch Provisional Edition. This looks like a security deletion that the 'A' edition was early enough to escape. But now consider the road. In 1932 improvement had not started. Our 'A' edition shows it widened as far as the new building on the west side.

The Provisional Edition six-inch shows widening further to the north. Is this the state in 1938-40? The air photo mosaic shows widening further north still but, with the exception of a short length where the corner has been cut off, only the eastern carriageway has been laid. The 'B' edition shows the improvement complete. This is the single instance I have found where SU90 provides information not available from any other source: that the dual carriageway was open by November 1951. The 'A' edition may *possibly* indicate an early stage of works – perhaps captured in ARP revision but such a conclusion would be highly speculative.

All this is rather depressing. One recognises that the 1:25,000 is 'a hybrid, and unsatisfactory as a precise historical source'.⁵ I had, nevertheless, hoped that careful disentangling of the different sources might yield information additional to that which can be derived from the six-inch. For Bognor at least, this would seem to be a false hope.

⁵ Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey maps, a concise guide for historians*, second edition, London: Charles Close Society, 2005, 46.