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“Constructing the M1”

Rob Wheeler

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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.

Constructing the M1

Rob Wheeler

In Roger Hellyer's cartobibliography of the 1:25,000 First Series,¹ the B//* printing of Sheet SP 59 qualifies for a note 'Showing the M1 under construction'. I recently acquired that printing and realised that motorways under construction on a 1:25,000 map are rather more interesting than at a smaller-scale, because of the depiction of fences. The OS might well follow the principle that temporary works were not to be mapped, but the fences that bounded the works were permanent features and therefore needed to be shown.



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

In fact one can distinguish three states of completeness on this sheet, all of which appear in figure 1 (*far left*).

a. North of the B582, the bounding fences are shown. In the space between is the 'Motorway under construction' symbol but nothing else, except for the faint remains of an imperfectly-deleted fence.

b. Immediately south of the B582 is a section where the 'Motorway under construction' symbol is simply overlaid on the previous field system. In principle, this might represent a section where construction had not started. It seems more likely that there was a depot of some sort, a temporary feature whose presence delayed the construction of the permanent bounding fences.

c. Just a little further south is a section where the earthworks were deemed to have reached a permanent state; they are shown in addition to the boundary fences.

All this seems to imply a genuine 'snapshot' of the state of the works at the time of survey. Figure 2 (*near left*) provides further evidence for this. At the southern end, we see the new bounding fences where a minor road is being re-aligned to go under the motorway at a less acute angle. At its northern end, the bounding fence to the east is broken just south of where a track crosses over the motorway. In due course, a ramped access to the field east of the motorway would be provided at this point. One might well imagine that the new embankment was still in a temporary state and the fencing was still in a temporary state.

However, closer inspection shows that what we have is less than a proper revision. The bounding fences are always the same distance apart, whereas common-sense (or inspection of a later state of the 1:25,000) would indicate that they will be further apart when the motorway requires an embankment or cutting than when it is on the level. Bridges also are shown schematically rather than being surveyed. Thus towards the bottom of figure 1 it will be seen that the bridge over the A46 is wide enough to carry not just the motorway but the embankments as well. Consequently the junction of the A46 with the old route through Narborough is under the bridge. In fact it is west of the motorway. Railway crossings are similar: the line to Nuneaton tunnels under the motorway's embankments rather than just its carriageway. Further south the embankments of the former Great Central Railway, as well as its track, are carried over the new motorway.

The most obvious explanation for this is that the works in progress were drawn on the basis of air photographs but that no measurements were taken from those photographs. Thus the new boundary fences were indeed inspected and even the small gap at figure 2 was noted, but everything – even bridges – was drawn at a standard distance from the motorway centre-line.

Of course, this is only speculation, but I shall certainly look more closely at any other works in progress I may encounter on 1:25,000 sheets.