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“Mere questions”

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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.

Mere questions

Michael Spencer

I recently got interested in roads across the border between England and Scotland (don't ask why), and obviously the first job was to find out where they were. I could imagine there might be a dozen or so, but I was not prepared to find almost forty.

At this point I stand in awe of the activities of the National Library of Scotland: all the maps of Scotland now out of copyright, available on my home computer, for nothing. And all zoomable, to bring out the tiniest detail, and with the six-figure National Grid reference displayed for the point of the cursor as it moves over the map. Gentlemen, my felicitations.

Clearly the early editions of the Six-inch and the 25-inch would have all the answers, showing all the mereings along the route, and the next job was to find out what the mereings meant.

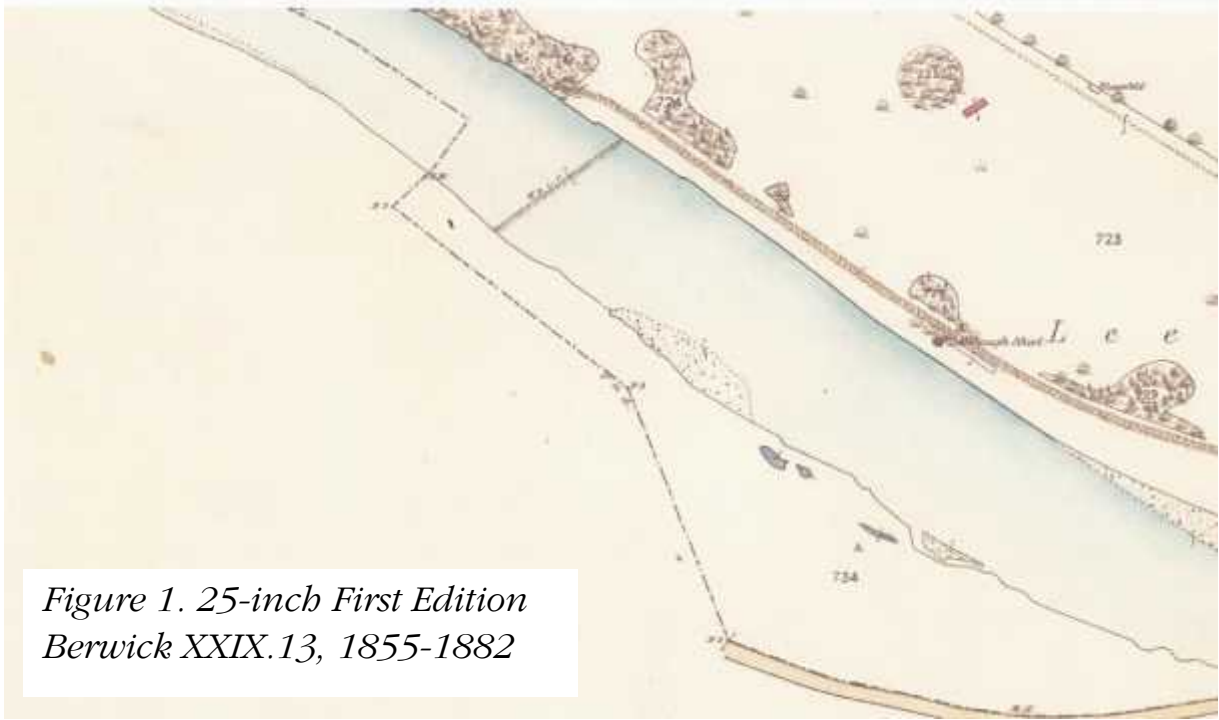
So off to the characteristic sheets. The first difficulty was with the symbol "T.C." which is defined as "Top of Cop." The OED devotes three columns to the word "cop," at the end of which one can only say that it means "top of something." So the phrase "top of cop" is at best tautologous. Did the word "cop" have some unusual dialectal meaning, known only to the OS surveyors?

I have to admit I've not found the mereing "T.C." anywhere on my (digital) perambulation of the border, but I have found a few oddities which raise questions in my mind. Let me take them in geographical order.

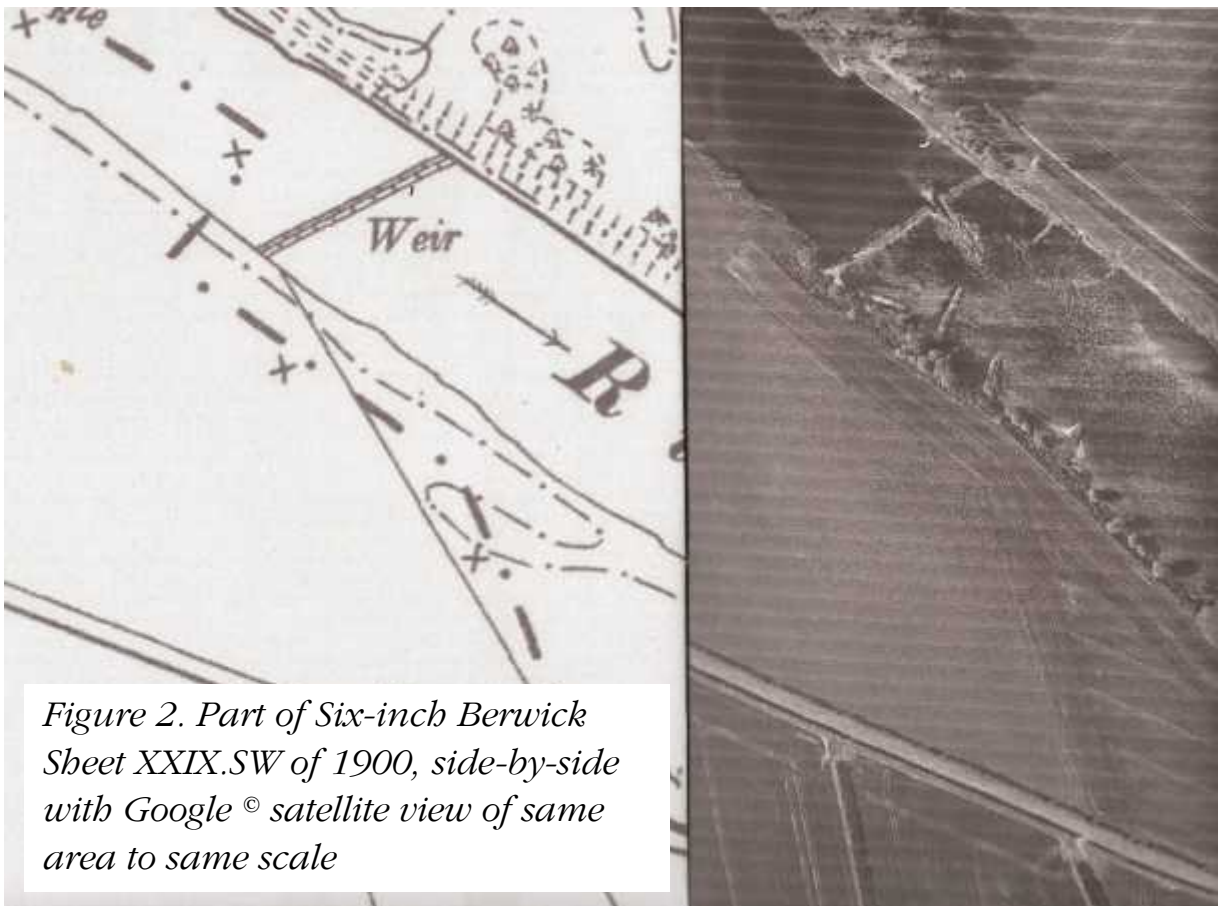
In the square NT8438 the boundary temporarily leaves the river (the Tweed) and runs for 400 yards at the root of the hedge on the north side of B6350, leaving a triangular salient of Scottish territory on the right bank of the river. It is not clear whether this used to be the course of the river, perhaps before the B6350 was built. A boundary stone at the west end of this stretch marks the departure from the hedge, and the start of a slightly kinked route back to the river. The boundary re-enters the river close above the weir to the north-west. From the boundary stone to the re-entry to the river, the First Edition 25-inch map of 1858 marks the boundary as "Undefined," which means that "it is not and never has been related to any detail along that portion of its length"¹; though the map also shows that this portion of the boundary is defined as straight-line sections between boundary stones set up at the kinks. These seem to me to be a clearly defined detail (*see figure 1*).

This seems to lead to a requirement for a different mereing. From one stone to the next, the boundary is indeed not indexed to any particular detail; yet it is defined as a straight-line section, which doesn't need such indexing. The mereing should have made this clear, perhaps by using "S.L.S." or something like it. Why didn't it?

¹ David EM Andrews, 'Merely a question of boundaries', *Sheetlines* 103, 33-34.



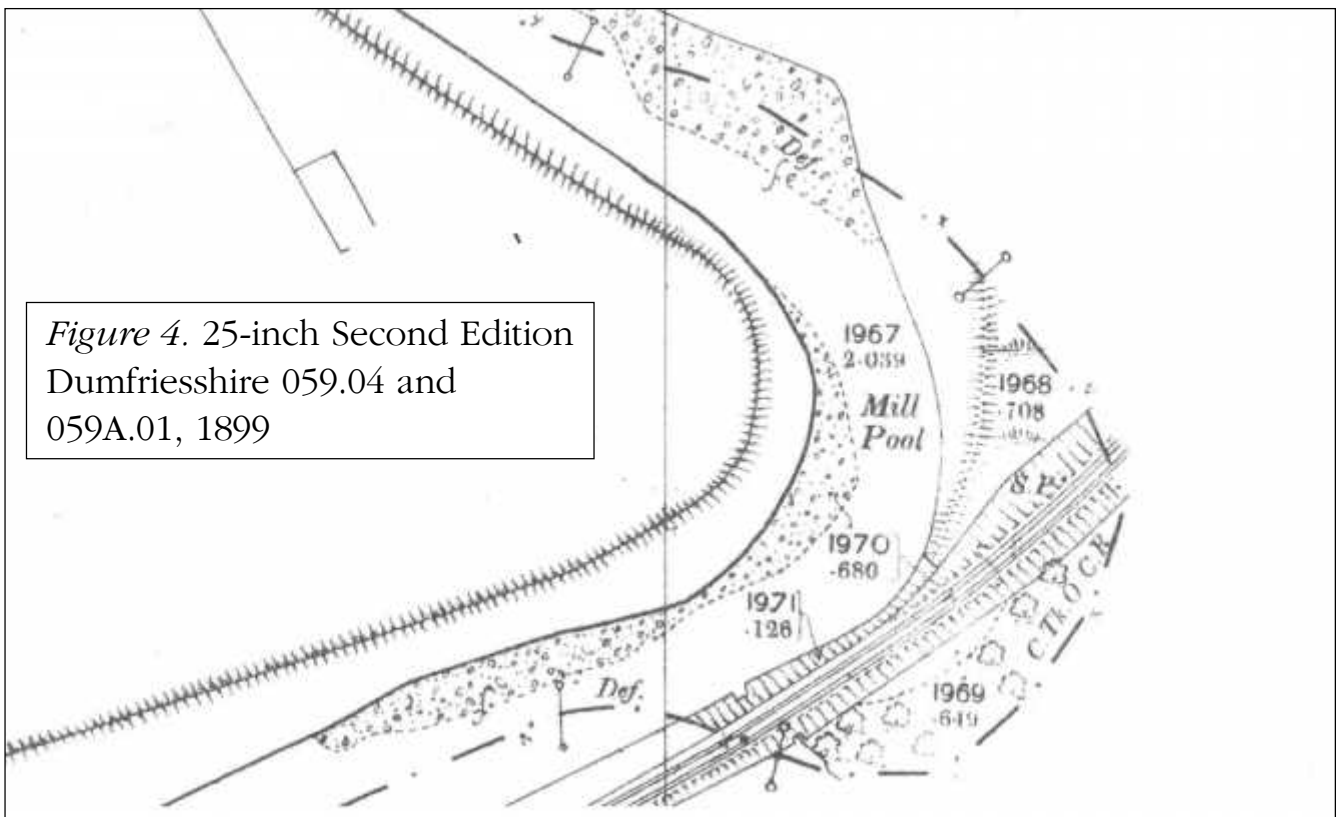
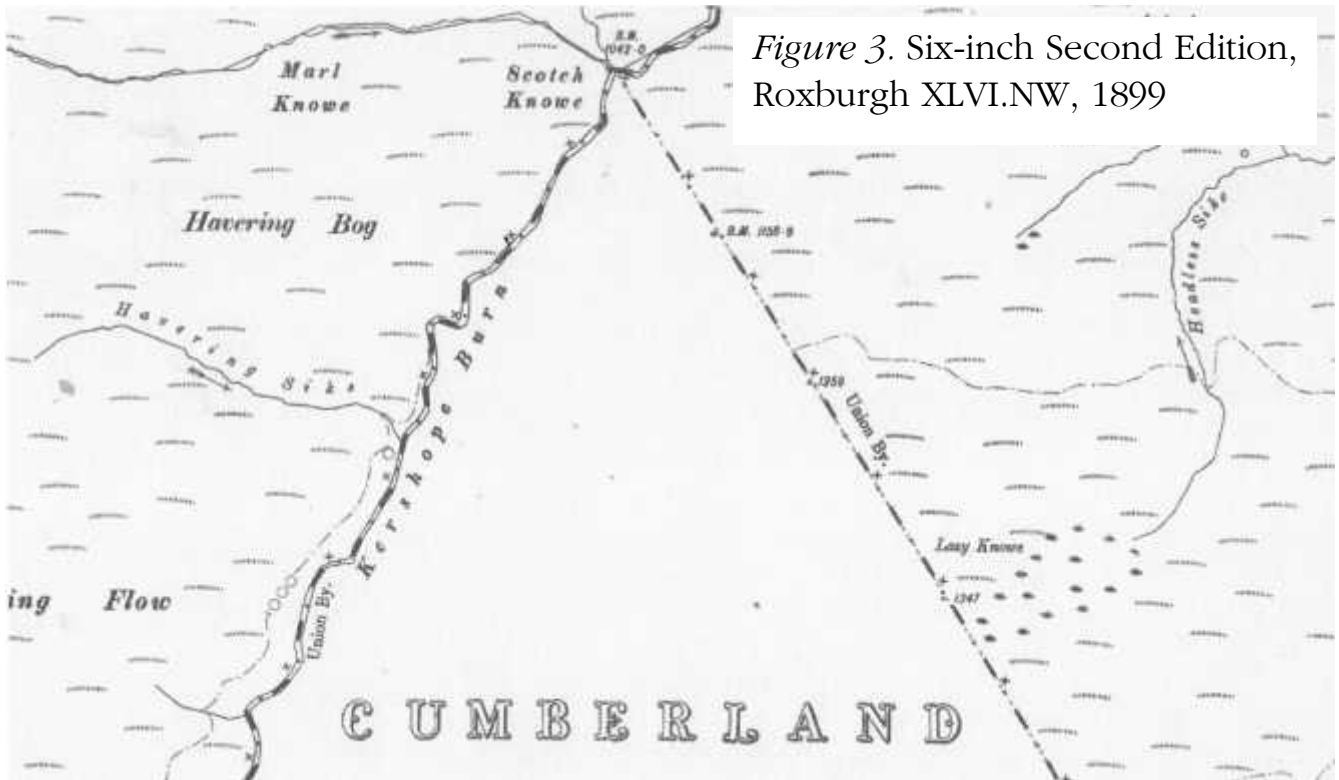
*Figure 1. 25-inch First Edition
Berwick XXIX.13, 1855-1882*



*Figure 2. Part of Six-inch Berwick
Sheet XXIX.SW of 1900, side-by-side
with Google © satellite view of same
area to same scale*

Are those stones still there? If not, maybe the mereing should have been “Def.” for “Defaced,” following “A boundary will be mered “Def” when the detail to which it is related has disappeared”.² The extract from the Google satellite view of the same area shows that the local farmers have no problem in recognising the position of the border (see figure 2). Nevertheless, I’m confused.

² *Ibid.*



At Scotch Knowe, NY561885, high on the moors beyond the Keilder Forest, the Six-inch map shows the Union Boundary as splitting into two arms, south-easterly and south-westerly, the junction indicated by a benchmark (*see figure 3*). This apparent anomaly results from the use of “Union Boundary” to indicate (1) the national boundary between England and Scotland, and (2) the boundaries between Poor Law Union Districts, an administrative concept which was abolished in 1929. No conventional sign distinguishes the one from the other.

Was the national border in those days considered of merely (sorry) minor importance?

Nevertheless, from modern maps, which carry a specific conventional sign for the national boundary, we can see that it follows the south-westerly arm; and that the south-easterly arm is in fact the boundary between Northumberland and Cumberland. We can also deduce that from the huge lettering “CUMBERLAND” on the map.

At NY402743, the border leaves the bed of the river (the Liddel Water) and crosses the railway twice before returning to the river (*figure 4*). Here we use the Second Edition 25-inch map dated 1900, sheet Dumfriesshire LIX.4 and LIX^A.1 with Cumberland Sheet VI.3.7; the NLS gives this the more usable name Dumfriesshire 059.04 and 059A.01 of 1899. The map merges this short section as “C. Tk. O C. R.” - Centre of Track of Old Course of River. The English Six-inch, Cumberland VI of 1868, calls it “C. of O.C.R.” - Centre of Old Course of River, and extends this mereing into the undisturbed course of the river. (This map annotates the single-track branch railway from the junction a mile to the north as “Canobie Branch”, which is a misspelling of “Canonbie.” In fact the later Scottish 25-inch seems altogether preferable.) There seems no reason why two different mereings should have been used to define exactly the same thing. The modern *Explorer* 324, revised in 2000, shows the border still in the same place.

Evidently the railway works included the construction of a short embankment to divert the river away from the foundations of the railway, which was a lot cheaper than two viaducts. The 25-inch map shows the southerly part of this embankment, exposed to the full force of the current, as being faced with masonry. Clearly the works were not allowed to influence the position of the border, which for a short distance lies to the south and west of the railway fence, enclosing a parcel of 0.649 acres. This is a bit of Scotland in England. Who owns it? If it's the Scottish proprietor of the opposite (right-hand) bank, how does he get access to it?

Presumably re-routing the border into the new bed of the river would have been more expensive (doubtless because of Parliamentary time) and more troublesome than it was worth. Perhaps there was no question of doing this, under the “doctrine of avulsion”.³ A long stretch of the border runs down the centre of the Kershope Burn, and where that stream has changed its course, the border has not. If these changes have been engineered, this must be for the same reason; does it also show the difference between an Act of Parliament and an Act of God?

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³ Paul Bishop, ‘The moving story of river boundaries’, *Sheetlines* 104, 37.