“Cardiff: Revision for defence – and attack”

Chris Higley

Sheetlines, 115 (August 2019), pp23-25


This article is provided for personal, non-commercial use only. Please contact the Society regarding any other use of this work.

Published by

THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps

www.CharlesCloseSociety.org

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.
Cardiff: Revision for defence – and attack!

Chris Higley

Government cutbacks are nothing new. Enforced manpower reductions in the years after the First World War led to OS large-scale mapping becoming seriously out of date. Considerable development had taken place in Cardiff but as figure 1 shows, with World War II approaching, Glamorgan six-inch Sheet 47NE was still based on a 1915 revision.

In 1938 a Special Emergency Edition of the six-inch map was produced for built-up areas. Intended for Air Raid Precaution planning, copies were not put on public sale and are now hard to find.\(^1\) Whatever revision was available was used, and the quality of the printing was sacrificed to achieve speed of production. Figure 2 is actually taken from a later ‘A’ printing of the post-war six-inch Provisional Edition, published c.1947. This uses the same revision detail as the SEE but the peace-time print quality does allow clear reproduction here.

The new building in Grangetown, to the west of the River Taff, looks to have been sketched in from enlarged one-inch revision material with the short terraces and tight-packed semi-detached houses all reduced to a vague continuous outline. However, we do get some road names, presumably from another source, and the end result, while not pretty, would have been perfectly adequate to plan air raid precautions and dispatch fire appliances and ambulances as necessary.

Cardiff was heavily blitzed and the outdatedness of OS mapping must also have been something of a nuisance to the Germans. They had acquired copies of pre-war six-inch OS mapping by entirely legitimate means and Glamorgan Sheet 47NE was used to provide one of the 1:10,000 maps included in a Cardiff area folder of maps and photographs of sites of military interest.\(^2\) When several raids had already taken place, a second edition of the sheet appeared, updated from air-photo interpretation of January 1941. This is shown in figure 3 and it is interesting to compare the German air-photo revision with the British SEE revision.

Cloud and hostile fire would not have made for ideal conditions for Luftwaffe aerial reconnaissance and this probably accounts for the Germans missing the new industrial building immediately to the east of the River Taff. However, Grangetown is represented far more accurately and would be easily recognized from the air – no street names of course, but then you don’t need to know the name of a street in order to drop a bomb on it!

Some conventional OS large-scale revision did continue during the War.\(^3\) Figure 4 shows the 1949 ‘B’ printing of the six-inch Provisional Edition, revised 1941-42 (with additions in 1947). This is as close as we shall now get to the true detail of wartime Grangetown.

---

1 WA Seymour, *A History of the Ordnance Survey*, Folkestone: Wm Dawson and Sons Ltd, 1980, p281; Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey Maps: a concise guide for historians*, third edition, Charles Close Society, 2013, p44. Locations of known sheets of the Special Emergency Edition are provided by Roger Hellyer at https://www.charlesclosesociety.org/SEE (I am grateful to the Royal Geographical Society for access to Glamorgan Sheet 47NE). The series also formed the basis of the wartime GSGS 3906 1:25,000 mapping, Scottish sheets of which have recently been put online by The National Library of Scotland.


3 Seymour, p283.
Figure 1 (above) Glamorgan six-inch sheet 47 NE., revised 1915.
Figure 2 (below) Revision of 1915 with additions in 1938.
Figure 3 (above) German 1:10,000 ‘Stadtplan von Cardiff’, BB 32c, 1941. 
Figure 4 (below) Glamorgan six-inch sheet 47 NE., revised 1941-42 with additions in 1947.

Figures 1, 2 and 4 are reproduced by kind permission of the National Library of Scotland.