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“WO 8450/31 : a previously-unrecorded imprint
of GSGS 3907?”

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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.

WO 8450/31 : a previously-unrecorded imprint of GSGS 3907?

John Ambler

Whilst gathering different versions of Popular sheet 114 'Windsor' to complete my analysis of the depiction of Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough (published in *Sheetlines* 123, 31-47), I noticed on eBay what to me at the time was a rather odd-looking map. It was headed Popular Edition One-inch Map, but what struck me was that the infill on railway station symbols and main roads was yellow not red, there was no green colouring for woodland and the grid and numbering was purple. Although the map appeared very worn and tatty, the price did not prohibit its purchase for its curiosity value alone.

On receipt, the map was just as tatty as it appeared in the eBay photos, but it had remained intact as it was mounted on linen. On examination, it had never had a cover, so was presumably supplied as a flat sheet and subsequently folded. The unfamiliar colour scheme is exemplified by the extracts showing Windsor from Popular Sheet 114 and the mystery map (Figure 1).

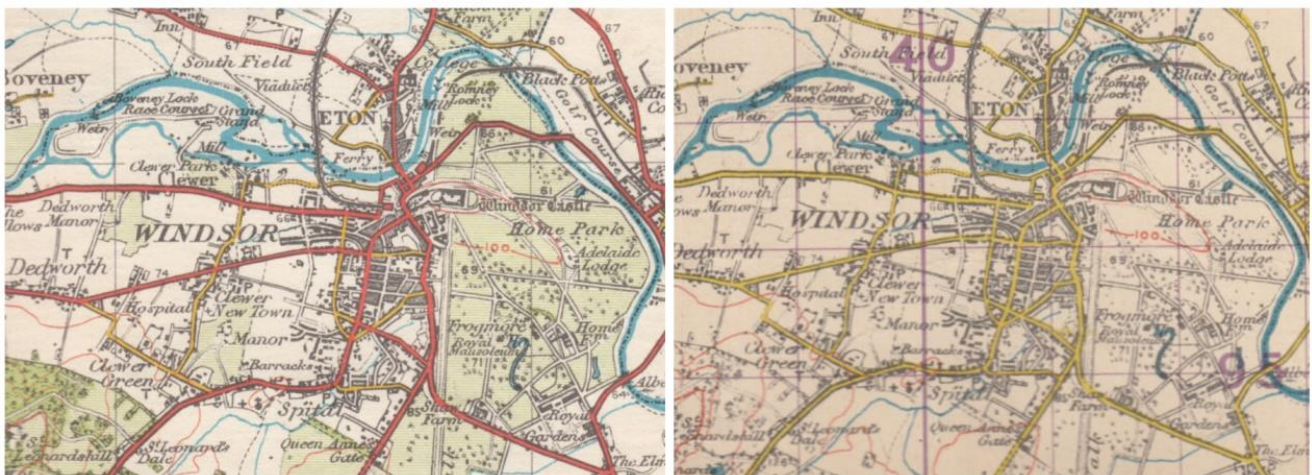


Figure 1: Extracts from Popular 500/29 (left) and WO 8450/31 (right).

The map appeared to be based on the second 1929 printing (500/29) of the Popular map of which I had a copy in my collection. In the bottom left-hand corner of the map I found another print code WO 8450/31. At this point the little bell rang and the light bulb lit up. WO is the abbreviation for War Office, so I realised that this might be a military map to which I had no previous exposure. I ordered a copy of Roger Hellyer and Richard Oliver's book on Military Maps¹ to explore this possibility, and yes, my suspicion was confirmed. What I had was a GSGS 3907 sheet, though the specific print code was not listed in the cartobibliography, so I thought I would record this in *Sheetlines* to add to the knowledgebase for this series of military mapping. The article may also serve as a brief introduction to those who (like me) are newcomers to the mysterious world of military maps.

¹ Charles Close Society, 2004

During the long gestation of this article, I consulted the CCS on-line discussion group on a couple of matters and had interesting exchanges with Rob Wheeler on revisions which opened up a complex new area for research. Also on the topic of revisions, Bill Henwood allowed me sight of an extract from the GSGS 3906 1:25,000 sheet showing Farnborough. This map carries the information “Reduced from GSGS. 2748 [1:20,000], Heliozincographed at OS Printed 1932” and “Published at the War Office 1931”. Surprisingly, this shows the Royal Aircraft Establishment site labelled as “Royal Aircraft Factory”, a designation which was discontinued from 1918 when the Royal Air Force was formed. As researching the topic of revision is likely to take some time, I will leave that story for another day and simply describe WO8450/31. Similarly Richard Oliver has given me information on revision and marginalia which deserves a more thorough research effort, so again, to avoid getting too bogged down I will add this to my list of research to be completed rather than widen the scope of this article which I never intended to be a work of great scholarship.

Description of WO 8450/31

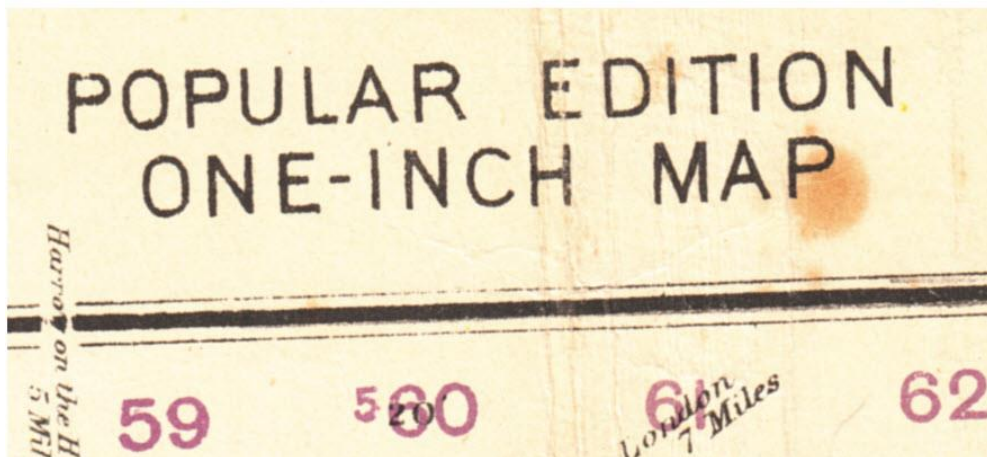
Although at first glance, the map appears to be a version of the 1929 civilian printing with modified colouring and the civilian grid replaced by the military grid, on more detailed examination other differences are found. The GSGS number is not shown on the map, whose overall size is 32.5" x 24.5", mounted on linen with wide borders. Like the civilian version, the map area is 27 miles x 18 miles. The civilian grid is not printed on the map, being replaced with the Modified British System overprinted in purple with purple grid numbering both on the margins and on the face of the map at 5km intervals.

The marginalia are not wholly consistent with the 1929 civilian Popular map in my collection (the second printing of that year coded 500/29). The differences are not limited to the purple overprinting. Some of the features printed in black are also different or absent giving the appearance of a “Pick-and-Mix” approach. Moving round the map clockwise from the top centre:

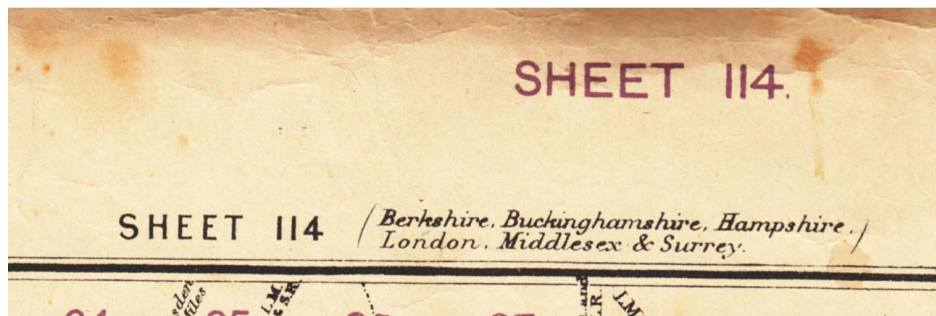


Figure 2: Map Title. WO 8450/31 (left) and Popular 500/29 and all other Popular maps in my collection except 2500/31 (right).

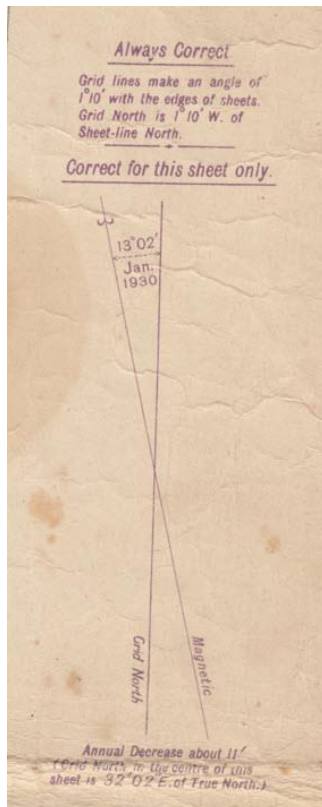
Title (*Figure 2*): The title “WINDSOR” has a full stop. This is omitted from the 1920, 1923, 1927, 1929 and 1933 civilian imprints in my collection, but it is shown on 2500/31 which is also the earliest I have found with the RAE buildings deleted (I have not found the elusive, earlier 6500/31 imprint – does a reader have a copy?).



Edition Label (Figure 3, above): this is consistent with the all the civilian Popular editions that I have seen.



Sheet Label (Figure 4, above): this is consistent with civilian Popular maps but “SHEET 114.” is duplicated in purple ink in the top right corner of the margin.



Magnetic Variation (Figure 5, left. Updated diagram in purple ink printed below the standard Popular diagram in black which persisted, unrevised through to printing 2500/31.)

The magnetic variation diagram in black ink dated Jan 1925 is consistent with civilian map 500/29 but overprinted below it in purple ink is another version dated Jan 1930.)

Revision Panel (Figure 6 below): The revision panel is largely consistent with civilian edition 500/29, but the “Minor corrections” value has been modified from 1928 to 193? (the final digit is not legible being either badly printed or abraded, but is presumably intended to be 0 as the residual ink mark has a rounded bottom and the publication date was 1931).

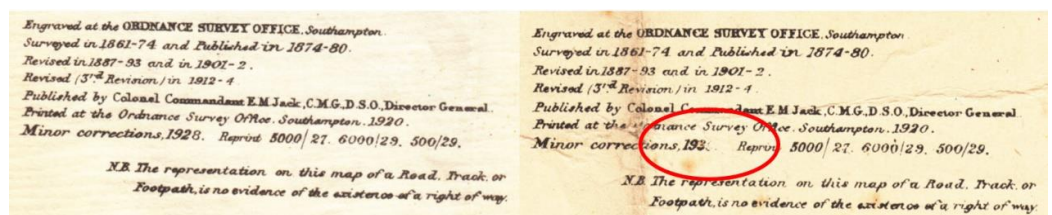
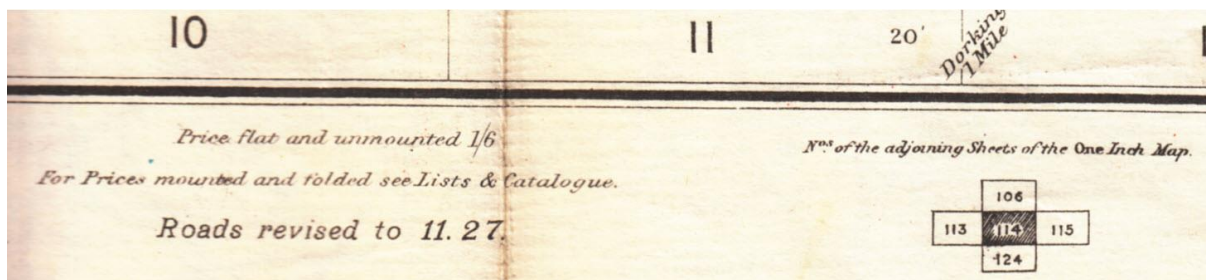


Figure 6: Revision Panel. Popular 500/29 (left), WO 8450/31 (right) showing the altered “minor corrections” date ringed.



Adjoining Sheets diagram: Consistent with other Popular editions (Figure 7, above).

Pricing and Roads Revised: Figure 7 also shows this on the Popular edition 500/29. This information has the same content (“Roads revised to 11.27”) on 500/29 and 2500/31, but on the former the revision date is printed below the pricing information, and above it on the latter. There was no inflationary pressure on pricing at this time both being offered at the same price, worded “Price flat and unmounted 1/6” on 500/29 and “Price flat and unmounted 1/6 net” on 2500/31. For those too young to remember, 1/6 is the pre-decimal equivalent of 7.5p (about £4 today taking inflation into account). This information is omitted from WO 8450/31 and replaced by a purple overprint giving referencing instructions for Norfolk Farm (Figure 8, below). The table shows the measurement unit as “metre” but perversely employs imperial units for “Nearest similar reference distant 300 miles”.

Miles
1000 Yards
Kilometres

TO GIVE A GRID REFERENCE ON THIS SHEET

LETTER See diagram of INCIDENCE OF LETTERS

FIGURES Pay no attention to the smaller coordinate figures at the corners and in margins. They are for finding full coordinates: viz 530

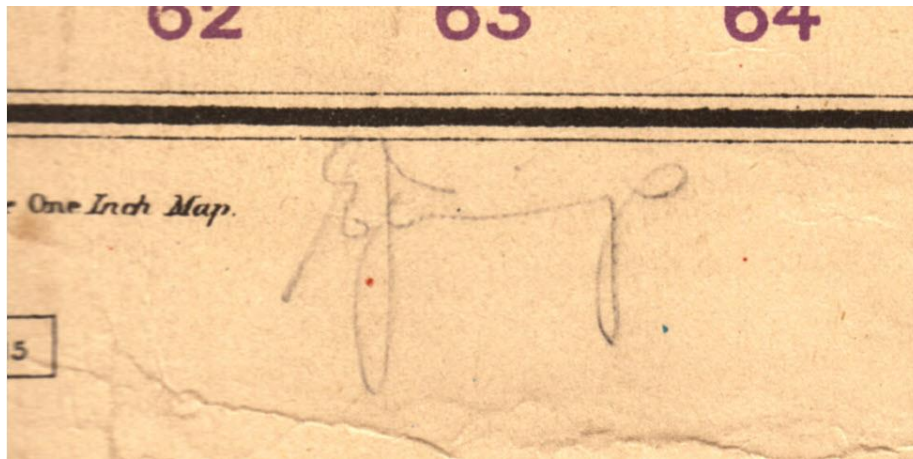
PAY ATTENTION TO LARGER MARGINAL FIGURES AND TO THOSE PRINTED ON THE FACE OF THE MAP: VIZ. 530

POINT NORFOLK FARM LETTER Q

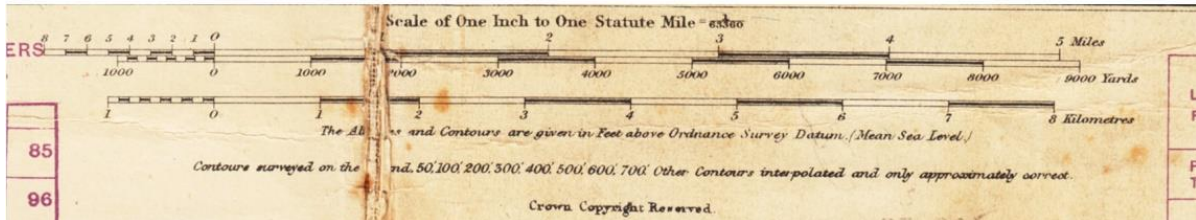
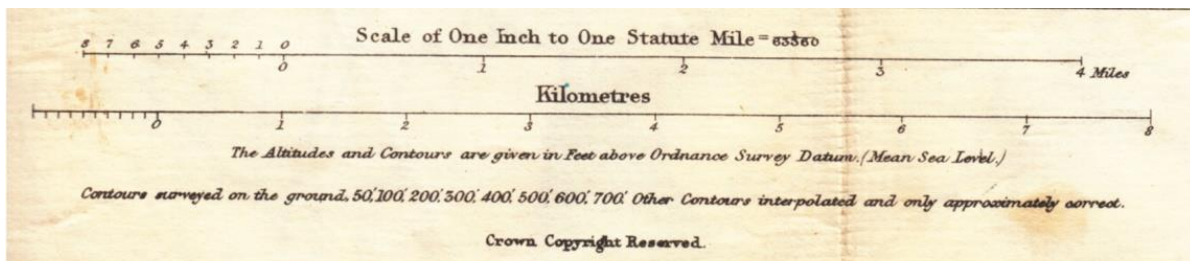
East Take west edge of square in which point lies and read the figures printed opposite this line (on north or south margin) or on the line itself (on the face of the map.) Estimate tenths eastwards	40 3	North Take south edge of square in which point lies and read the figures printed opposite this line on east or west margin or on the line itself (on the face of the map.) Estimate tenths northwards	89 6
East	403	North	896

REFERENCE Q 403896

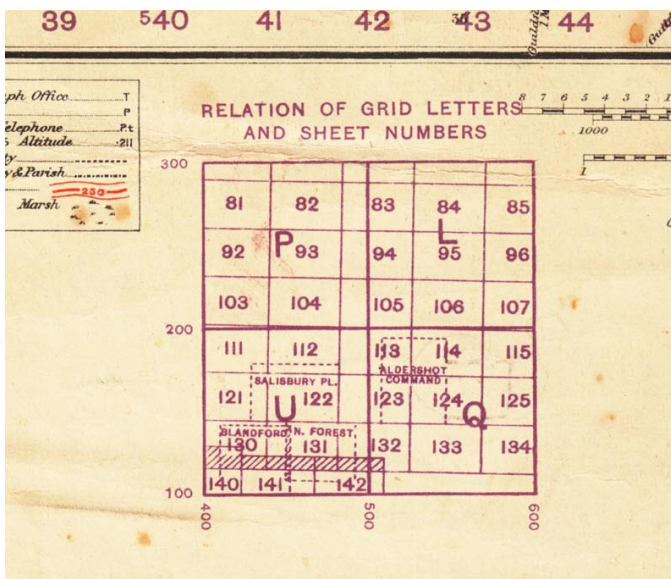
Unit	metre
Square	1,000
Reference to nearest	100
Nearest similar reference distant	300 miles



Signature (Figure 9): Not strictly marginalia, but a defacement in the form of a signature in pencil adds a human touch to the map (an imaginative reader might interpret the signature as that of E Jennings).

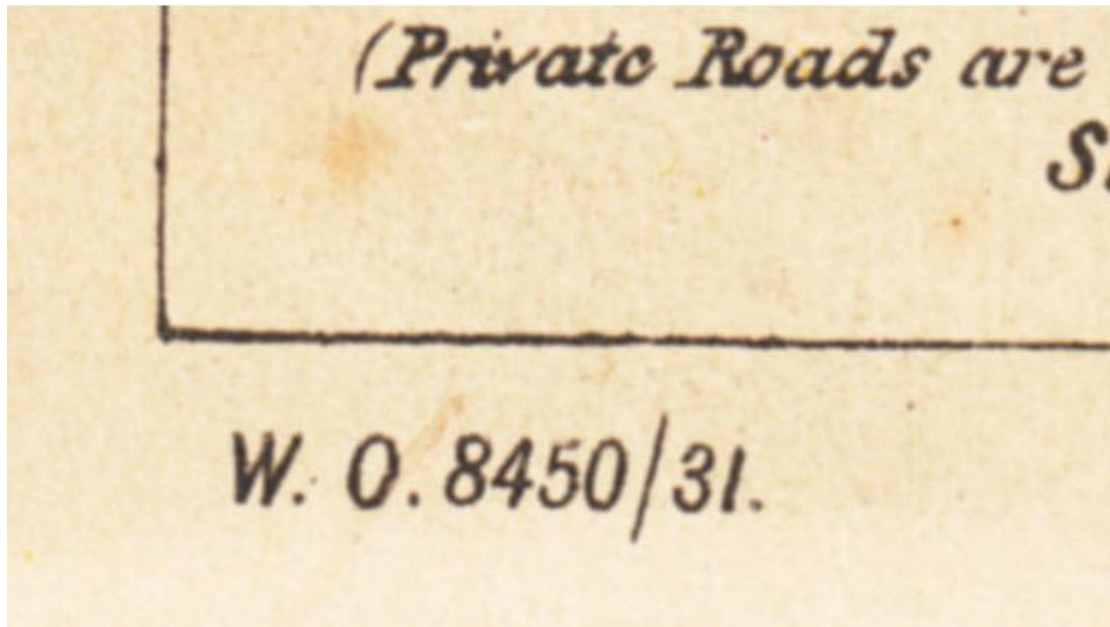


Scale Bars (Figure 10 : 500/29 above and WO 8450/31 (below) – the latter style being used on 2500/31 and later printings): The scale bars are of different style from 1929 and earlier Popular maps but are the same as on Popular maps 2500/31 and 10,000/33.



Relation of Grid Letters and Sheet Numbers (figure 11, left): Overprinted in purple ink between the scale bars and key (blank space on 500/29). Relates to the Modified British System – no equivalent panel on civilian Popular maps.

Key: Consistent with my 500/29 civilian map except for the modified colours (roads and railway stations in yellow, and no green fill for wooded areas or parkland).



Print Code (*Figure 12*): “WO 8450/31.” printed in black below the left-hand corner of the key.

Annotations or Defacements: Pencil marks on the face of the map and grid references in the upper right margin suggest that the area of interest to the user was south-west London, to the east of the Thames between Richmond and Malden, with the majority of the marks being in Richmond Park.

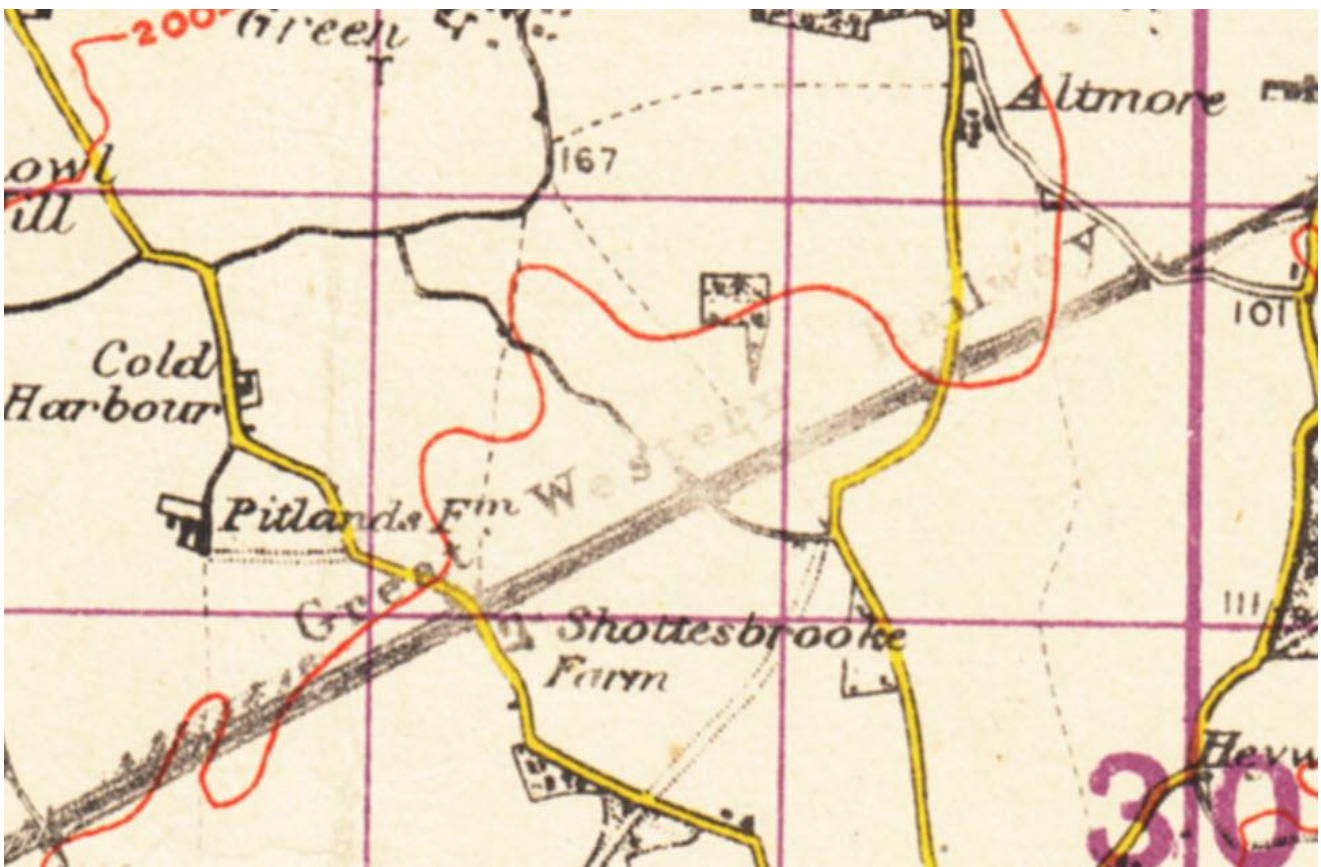
As my specific interest in the area covered by this map was the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE), I quickly homed in on another oddity of the map. Part of the RAE site appears to have been partially erased (*Figure 13, below*).



Figure 13: RAE Partial Erasure? Extracts from 500/29 (left) and WO 8450/31 (right).

I pondered on whether this partial erasure could be physical wear (given the tatty state of the map), a printing defect, or as the result of a deliberate act of erasure. On close examination the surface of the paper does not appear to be abraded and the area affected seems to have very clear boundaries, so I sway towards rejecting wear as a possible cause of the defect. On my copy of 2500/31 which post-dates the elusive 6500/31, the erasure of RAE including the railway branch, and the RAE housing at Pinehurst Cottages and Rafborough, is complete.

Looking around the map for other evidence of wear and tear or censorship I found a few more anomalies. In the north-west corner of the sheet, the “Great Western Railway” label (*Figure 14, below*) is somewhat faded, and similar labels on other stretches of railway are not similarly affected suggesting a printing defect.



On either side of Fleet railway station, two sections of railway in cuttings (ringed in *Figure 15*) are faded, with a similar, well-defined appearance to the fading as that at RAE. As these short lengths of railway would have no special military sensitivity, security deletion surely has to be rejected as a possible explanation of the fading. Following my appeal to the on-line Discussion Group, Bill Henwood drew to my attention the fact that the easternmost section corresponds to the site of Bramshot Halt, a private halt on the Southern Railway main line which had served the nearby Golf Course since 1913. The halt was not shown on any published civilian edition of the Popular or Fifth series maps, and the dating of this map predates by almost a decade the requisition of Bramshot Golf Club by the Air Ministry in 1940, so was not of military significance at the time this imprint was

produced. Bill tells me that the halt only became visible on the civilian New Popular edition of 1940 and on the GSGS 3907 Second War Edition of August 1940. The relevant section of the latter, coded WO 40,000/40 is illustrated in Hellyer and Oliver (2004) which does indeed show Bramshot Halt on Fifth Edition mapping within a Popular Edition frame and referred to as “Special Popular” in contemporary documents.

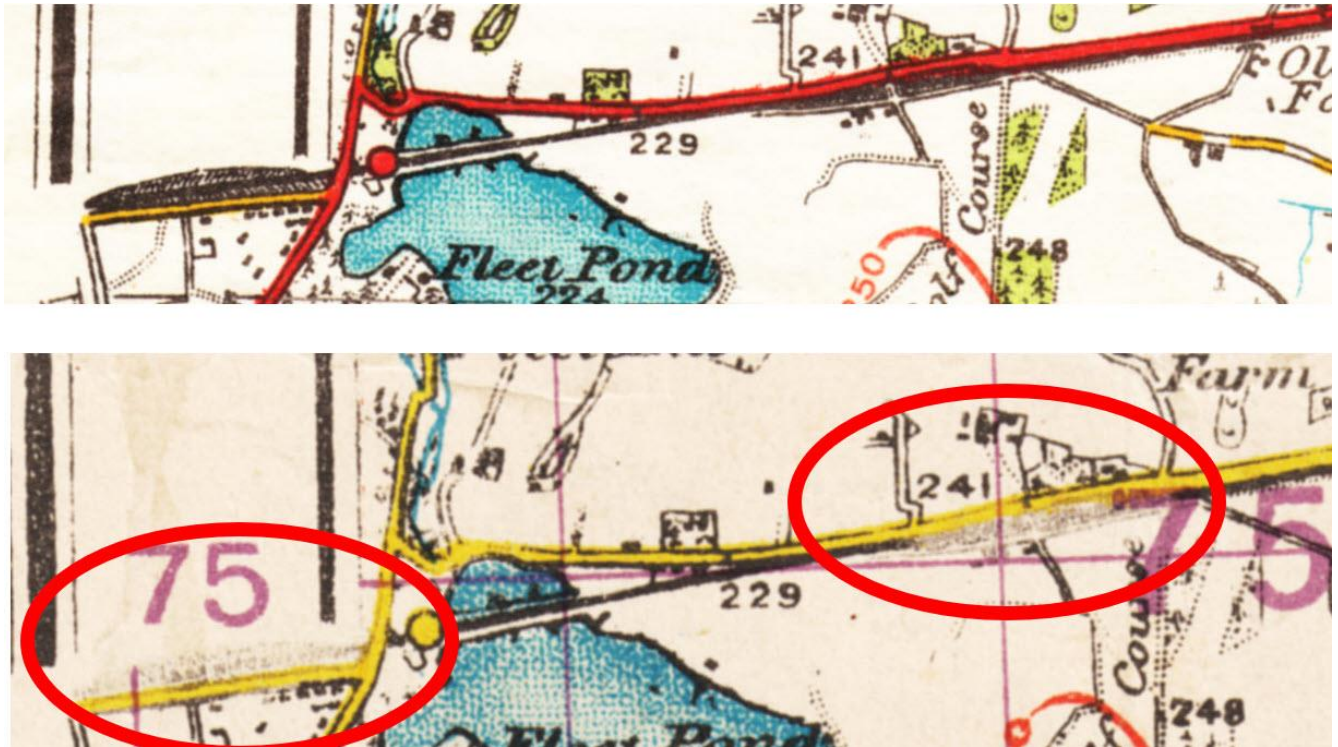


Figure 15: Extracts from 500/29 (above) and WO 8450/31 (below).

So, the jury is out on the nature of these defects, perhaps a reader can suggest another theory?

As a previously unrecorded (as far as I am aware) printing, should this map be transferred to a formal archive for the benefit of future researchers?