USING ORDNANCE SURVEY MAPS FOR DATING PURPOSES

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Ordnancemaps (https://groups.io/g/ordnancemaps) is an online group for anyone with an interest in Ordnance Survey Maps to ask questions, assist in research, and pass on information on any aspect of Ordnance Survey maps. The following exchange (of July 2022) may be of interest to railway historians/chronologers who might be tempted to use OS maps for dating purposes.

Q (message #1637): I have been asked to comment on the use of OS 6-inch maps for dating new railway infrastructure in the 1850s. The map in question is the NLS copy of 6-inch Yorkshire Sheet 187 (Otley). The NLS *[National Library of Scotland online map archive https://maps.nls.uk]* copy indicates that the survey date was 1847 to 1848, the map was engraved in 1851, and published 5th November 1851. There is no revision dating on the face of the map. The NLS 'Record Map' stamp is not dated.

The issue is that the map shows a label for the railway line east of Otley station as being North Eastern Railway, however the NER company was not formed by an amalgamation of several other companies until 1854, and the branch line that Otley was situated on wasn't opened in full until as late as 1865.
My view is that this is a later printing of the map which incorporated railway only revision that was not acknowledged on the face of the map.
Am I thinking correctly?

A (message #1638): Yes, you are thinking correctly: railway revision, undated, was added up to c.1867 to the 6-inch - which neatly captures the line from Otley. In practice, only **new** construction seems to be recorded, rather than name changes, and thus there are sheets in which 'North Eastern Railway' apparently co-exists with one or more of its constituent companies!
*** This response was from Richard Oliver – the compiler of* Ordnance Survey maps: a concise guide for historians *(Charles Close Society, 2013).*

The Charles Close Society exists "for the study of Ordnance Survey maps".

The National Library of Scotland website – which hosts a wide range of Ordnance Survey and other mapping - provides general guidance and, for the various series of maps, more detailed information about 'revisions' may be found therein – examples are:

- Town Plans (scroll down to 'Post-publication revision');
- here (acknowledging Richard Oliver's compilation mentioned above); and
- here (despite specifically relating to England & Wales 6", the paragraph 'Interpreting survey and revision dates' may be found to be of more general interest).

So while OS revisions may give *pointers* to changes to the railway infrastructure and ownership they cannot (alas – *pace* Lt Col Cobb) be regarded as definitive.

Richard Maund
