

Road Maps

PART I METAPHORS AND MINIATURES, OF COURSE

I first found Derbyshire at Turnford. The East Herts College of Further Education had a set of the old tourist Ordnance Survey maps of The White Peak. It was colored for altitude as if to intimate the contours of the land and was liberally scattered with the qualifiers “lead mine”, “Mine” or “mines (dis.)”, that I sought assiduously amongst the other signs and signifiers that held little allure to my youth.

Occasionally, little black circles would pock the paper or course their drunken paces along the hidden rakes. As I got older and consulted newer maps the “mines” and even “mines (dis.)” unaccountably dwindled and the little circles died in total like living creatures who had succumbed and been cleansed from a collective memory like the corals of a Carboniferous sea, leaving but their shells and skeletons concealed for a grateful posterity.

As this happened the paraphernalia of industry vanished also. The trackways and tramways, the “Chys” and the hatchured spoil heaps until scarce a surficial vestige was recorded to remember a once great trade.

Between and beyond the grandeur of the letters stretched a placental reticule of roads as a primogenitrix of fantasy of where I might go and what become, symbols of an earthly reality anchored in the fact of the past and the land, and yet midwife to passage and futurity.

The cartographers attempted to convey some drivable notion of the quality of these lineaments by coloring different classes of roads, red or green or yellow and yet even as a boy I knew these artefacts were but a token as the phenotypes were all, if colored, actually black or black flecked with a feldspathic gray and if they shared with paper some carbonaceous base then they were not paper, or of the papery kind.

Helpfully, the lesser class of roads, the yellow ones, if you ascertain my meaning, were of two widths. The narrow ones were surrogates for seven-foot wide strips of tarmac suited to the passage of a single vehicle. But it was understood, if only by grown men, that this metric was merely nominal, and a big tourer or a tractor may find its wheels plowing the verge or even a ditch. Better unclassified roads, and yes, being unclassified does of course denote a class membership, were signally wider and represented fourteen-foot strips where two vehicles could, allegedly, pass in opposition though this might be done gingerly or not at all.

All roads had black fimbriations. This artefact was not merely to herald roads special status, superior to and separate from the common terrain, but had like the figures on ancient family bearings more arcane import. Pecked fimbriations represented unfenced roads though the character of that liberty was not further declared. For example, could you pull onto the unpaved land to let a pursuivant pass or would that enmire you or founder you in a ditch? And where a fence was advised, was it an open barbed-wire fence through which the passenger might peer to forewarn himself of hazards, or a hedgerow that may in Summer occlude the view or even a drystone wall that not only blinded a car driver to the facts beyond the next turn but furnished an immovable obstruction to evading coachwork.

Solid coal-black lines were double sets of railway lines, and alternating black and white ones single. Railways were protected by statute and trains enjoyed priority but this was not clear from maps, even where a bold red cross betokened a

level crossing. It seemed, at least from the road maps, that contrary to the nervous and hesitant trajectory of the motorable roads, and the positively inebriate stagger of the lanes, the railways inevitably lay with an easy anguine elastica, as if drawn with a draftsman's spline, which I suppose they were.

But as time went by the black and the badger-colored sinews of steel dissolved from the maps to be replaced by anaemic revenants of white carpel, sometimes here and sometimes lost and sometimes even built upon denying all promise of resurrection.

As years turned to decades a thick new blue road snaked across the symbolic landscape. A literal-minded man would feel little compunction in taking out his ruler to gage the width of this, inevitably fimbriated, innovation. These six-lane motor-only highways were designated motorways to distinguish them from any foreign archetype, never of course to be admitted.

They were not of course blue roads. Not at least in the literal sense of "of course". They were sometimes black and sometimes white and latterly even red in parts but never blue.

Their nominal width was around ninety feet allowing for a six-foot central reservation and excluding hard shoulders and other generous easements for the embankments or cuttings that usually flanked the course. However, our literal-minded man armed with his old school ruler or even a much more trustworthy, or at least expensive, Blundell Harling rendition of the same, measured several sections and averred that the width of these splendid structures was never inferior to 209 feet.

Occasionally, an enigmatic blue-fimbriated white lozenge obstructed the bold blue course with a portentous big blue "S" printed in its midst. Cognoscenti would recognise this as a surrogate for "Services". The Services become notorious. The road map would give no hint as to whether the Services were Moto, Forte, Welcome or some other grating disyllable or whether they featured a Wendy or a Tesco. They always boasted a gas station and a lavatory, because motorway lavatories are protected by statute, unlike those on vulgar rural roads which were always designated "PC" long before such things were understood.

The road maps of Britain are highly ambiguous but never controversial. I would like to show you an example of one but they are protected by statute and I lack the necessary permission from The Comptroller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

The road map of the Middle East is quite unambiguous and sometimes controversial. Notwithstanding that, the map does not make it clear whether Hebron is in Israel or Palestine, whether it has a Wendy or a Tesco or even a lavatory. The sage, who are never of course consulted in these matters and are neither protected by statute nor "PC" concur among themselves that Hebron is in The Holy Land.

The Romans were sagacious and they did not understand Palestine either but thought they understood roads and were the first to attempt to lay those of Britain on a scientific basis.

Using gromas and beacons and maybe other tools forgotten they attempted rectilinear courses dauntless of terrain. But all neglected to apprise these literal-minded men that the planet is an oblate spheroid and that the shortest way between two places is a geodesic trace, first cousin to the loxodrome. Now it can be shown that the length of a geodesic is the outcome of an elliptic integral that is an incalculable value, with several algorithms of estimation which all disagree among themselves and so are of course ultimately wrong. Hence we concur with Zeno, and

confute the Romans, to know that whilst travel is possible and sometimes even protected by statute, arrival can never ensue.

PART II AN AMERICAN IN ENGLAND

As usual, I was looking for whatever vestiges of disused lead mines. The rain had soaked my cloth cap as I plodded more from aimless duty than with pleasure out along the strip of tarmac South from Wetton.



The Strip of Tarmac South from Wetton

I stepped aside as a too-polished white Mondeo blared and swerved into the gutter ahead of me. I wondered at what offence I had offered the irate occupant. Out stepped a burly figure, fully seven foot nothing it seemed to me, below a cerule baseball hat emblazoned “Trenton Doves”. I wondered if the figure, at once impersonal and menacing, would be a harbinger of peace as I measured the chances that a 53-year-old five foot six diabetic might try conclusions with it.

“Sir, can you show me the way to Ash-born?”

challenged the frame in an accent at once unsuspected and familiar. I was disconcerted by both the honorific and the posture, and reverting to the pedantry for which I was once notorious I defensively replied:-

“You mean Ash-bn”

“Look I have been cruising these dog-gone lanes for three hours and I do not need a lesson in the niceties of diction. Just take me there.”

Reader, this is my last attempt at any lazy and insolent attempt at caricature, and you may now take it as read that the rest is paraphrase.

“Get in this car and direct me”

responded the exasperated visitor.

“But my car is at Ecton and I need to return by evening”, I objected.

“Don’t worry: I will bring you back, even to Ecton, wherever in hell that is: Get in”.



“But my car is at Ecton...”

Too astonished to be affrighted I complied and found myself the instant and immediate victim of any speculation you may imagine.

“Look at this”, said my new “friend” as he flung a rain-limp leaflet into my lap.

“I got this in the Tourist Information office in Buxton. Have you been to Buxton?”

I first saw Buxton, maybe thirty-five years ago. Fred Broadhurst had traipsed us freshmen dripping through the fog to visit fossiliferous old coal-pits on Axe Edge and later bussed us through the dog-eared Edwardian splendor of the ghostly resort.

“Have you seen their new ‘Idomedeo’. Terrific. What a dinky little house. Usherettes. I tried to sample the waters but the place was closed. They keep lizards or something in it. What’s this thing with snakes? I didn’t know you had snakes in Britain”.

My frantic mind wondered if he meant the blazon of the Dukes of Devonshire or something altogether more intimidating. I also wondered how, starting I presumed at Buxton, he could possibly have mislaid the arrow-straight reach of the A515, as celebrated in countless petrol advertisements as it extends its unambiguous invitation to Ashbourne and to Rome, and has for two millennia since molybdophagous Romans (pardon my Greek) first paved its course.

“Turn left down this narrow road”, I counselled.

My driver lunged with trusting decision down the six-foot wide strip of tarmac, occluded on all sides by drystone dykes, and swerved its several corners as if the only user.

“Now turn carefully right and keep to the left”, I advised, solicitously, as we reached the A515.



Highfields Lead Mine

A staccato swerve. A shrieking spin of the tires on the wet road. The Longstone Aggregates lorry blared his horn and lights in anger as by apparent luck we missed his leading fender by seeming inches. A lash of blinding spray was his parting retribution.

“Did you see that?” exclaimed my driver, “he must have been doing over fifty. Your truckers can’t do more than fifty, can they?”

We hurtled on straight to those galvanised steel railings at Drakelow’s blind corner and missed with a sickening shot as if on the rails of a ride at Alton Towers.

By now I was stupidly nervous and offered back the map on the tourist leaflet with a forced triumph:-

“See; we are now on the A515, direct from Buxton to Ashbourne, barring the odd chicane, straight as the Romans laid it”

The American tore the soggy paper from my grasp, removed his hands from the wheel, crumpled it irately and threw it rearwards.

“You can shelve that. Folding thing”

Now, gentle reader, if I dissemble the expletives it is not for respect of your delicacy, but rather for fear of the censoriousness of Internet search engines. ([Click here to get more messages like this](#)). If you are a native English speaker, I have every confidence that you shall supply the defect. But further, other crawlers, less reputable, scan the libraries of servers worldwide to find the vagrant words and betray their source to the tedious and profitless correspondence of a whole new public. I would rather get emails from people like you.

Whether in remorse for his abruptness, or for whatever, my friend offered me one of his smokes.

“Don’t worry: They aren’t Cuban”, he said with an affected chuckle. I found both the message and its manner less assuring than intended but lit the cigar gratefully.

“I’m from Texas and I work in advertising”, he confided with the inexactitude with which he explained his provenance to strangers.

“I come from Birmingham”, I responded with the imprecision I reserve for strangers.

I tried to assess my companion’s age. His bluff tanned muscularity and ash-blond hair seemed to betoken a youth far behind me and yet he may have been my age or even older. Was he recently widowed or retired? Was some personal disaster or dissatisfier the urge that drove him to pastures if not greener then far away from whatever private ghosts had clouded his prospect or arrested his fleeting progress?

“I am an English Existentialist”, I added after a brief hesitation that may have betrayed the several inaccuracies inherent in the label. The truth is of course that I am unemployed but like many others of my class dissemble the fact with pretentious qualifiers like “freelance web designer”, “author” or “IT consultant”; much to the relief of a careless government.

As we struggled to find common ground beyond the mechanics of shared language the trite, the commonplace and the redundant too frequently obtruded.

“You people have wonderful accents”, my driver remarked, “You can call me Chuck”

“I would rather call you Charles”, I quipped with irritable ill-grace.

“Charles!?” “What a jerk!”

“Not you!”, he quickly added, seizing my nearer bicep in a grip of manful reassurance as the vehicle concurred correction with a thrilling little wriggle.

“I meant Prince Charles”

The clarification received my unspoken intellectual assent, and yet I felt strangely affronted that my future king should be so slightly acclaimed in the midst of my own land.

“You can call me Jim”, I responded.

“I am James Warren”, I added with Pavlovian provocation.

“Oh, he whose wife is Mercy and who dived through the Meeting House window without opening it”, chuckled Chuck.

“I haven’t heard that one before”, I said.

“To think”, added Chuck, “when I tell the folks back home that I have had a real Old Etonian English Existentialist in my car complete with cloth cap, cigar and accent. I love you English. That reserve, restraint and litotes ...”

“What is litotes?” I interrupted idly.

“Ah, Jim...”, sighed Chuck with a patient smile as if buying time to find the right frame of words, “to define that would be no mean feat”.

For a few moments an awkward silence superseded as Chuck negotiated the shallow bends and sudden declivities at the approach to Fenny Bentley.

I saw little merit in correcting Chuck’s misconceptions with which he was evidently boy-happy.

I certainly am an ex-public school product, but in the Texan rather than the English sense. I attended Ware Secondary Modern School behind a council estate in outermost London. A church school, it made an intentional attempt to ape Eton, with which it had some less-than-holy alliance: Even the school ties were identical. But Ware SM School (as the name was always written in those days, unblushingly of course) was a co-educational, day school most of whose students were very poor and so the emulation was not so much partial as ludicrous.

There was plenty of Rugby and religion but no Classics or chemistry as such were well beyond us and wallball was unheard-of: After all, we could not afford a wall to park our bikes behind, as they used to say.

One day Eton College canvassed a possible Scholarship boy from our school: Girls were not of course eligible. My Mother thought this would be an ideal opportunity for me to change class in both senses of the phrase. The Ware headmaster duly gave me a perfunctory interview in which he stated that he would not put my name forward on the grounds that I had no Latin; an unsurprising lack in a school that did not teach it.

“Wonderful cars these Fords. I didn’t know you had Fords in Britain. Hug the road like leeches”.

With this I readily agreed though truth to tell I have been driving Volvos for nearly twenty years. They seem largely to have supplanted the Ford, at least in this country.

As we entered Fenny Bentley in its verdant little dell, Chuck seemed to have noticed the forty-miles-per-hour speed limit signs and I pointed out the tower house.

“That is the most Southerly peel tower in the World”, I gestured with a fatuous patriotism.



“...I pointed out the tower house”

“Ah, no:”, responded Chuck with decision, “Blarney”.

“How do you mean?”, I replied, surprised at such frontal rudeness.

“Blarney Castle is a lone keep at 51°56’02” latitude. Here we are at 53°02’55”, give or take”.

I did not know if he was making fun of me or whether this almost autistic exhibition of arbitrary exactitude was either true or serious. For one who since boyhood has taken every vain pride in his real or imagined knowledge of geography this was a trump at once trifling and intolerable.



Fine Weather on The White Peak

Across the windswept glaucous pastures of The White Peak the A515 cannons through straight but switchback segments whose azimuths adjust with sharp shallow bends. In the old days it was an exhilarating drive across an empty karst plateau. You could press the lever to eighty and leave it there for the eighteen miles from Buxton to Fenny Bentley and enjoy a Wild Mouse career as your car bounced through the troughs and summits, swept along the straights and locked through the sea-course angles. You were alone and a man with a car was free, perhaps as free as bodily freedom is possible on Earth. It comes with no Health Warning, whether from a Surgeon General or any local proxy. Today cars and lorries are everywhere, nose to tail, even in uplands, and you have to watch and wait through each weary meter.

Chuck had perforce to moderate his high plains panache as we entered the final tree-lined twists and dives into Ashbourne. He seemed to find the strange and liminal little town claustrophobic. There was no opera house, dinky or otherwise, not so much as a cinema. Parking was negligible, but once one had descended from the last escarpment of the last Pennine hill and entered the crowded Georgian precincts of this most obscure of spas return or escape was the work of a full hour. But he seemed intent to return directly to the high and windswept places.

It seemed to me that he was the most fortunate of spirits, like a well-armed and self-reliant private soldier who has somehow lost contact with his cohort in some forlorn foreign forest. No Publius Varus is here to check his pace or lead him to disaster; no Arminius commands his pointless victory, or uses him as the edge to divide forever The Occident. No wife is here to find fault with his driving, his smoking, or his choice of venue, no neighbors to censure, cops to ticket him or bosses to time his charge.

Chuck was as good as his word. He returned me to my car at Ecton and as I waved and watched his ardent tail-lamps seared the darkling dusk and hoary veil of rain. I stood and gazed as the sheeting freezing fall breezed and blustered and then his brake lamps stabbed the gray distance whether to slow before some obstruction invisible to me, or for some wistful hesitation to preserve a raptured moment. Then

these too suddenly extinguished and to me he was one with the miners, the shepherds and the marching centuries, the maps and the mapped and the uncharted.

PART III WORKS AND WORSE

Thomas Carlyle¹ stated that spirituality is impossible without freedom, and then examined a few flaming facets of that flawed jewel.

The tension between Free Will and bestowed Grace is of course an old paradox, and father of several old controversies. Maybe today the disputants are like as not to champion Heredity versus Environment, or whatever, but though fashion dictates the jargon, and the style of debate, the substance of the contraries remains the same.

And yet the choice of freedom is the last and only act of Will.

So to speak of “Free Will” is perhaps an unconscious pleonasm. Yes, I see the logical pitfall in even thinking about “choice of freedom”, and the redundancies and necessities that signal its presence, and am painfully aware of my lack of apparatus. And I suppose that notwithstanding Redemption through Works, few would deny that spirituality is conferred by God, at his sole instance.

And yet, gifted Grace seems to arrive through insupportable suffering. What is this nexus of suffering, freedom and Grace? For sure, the slave suffers and is unfree but is not unreachable by Grace or the inevitable stranger to spirituality.

There are, you might say, several distinct forms of Freedom: An inner peace of the soul to travel whither it listeth, following its preferred map to a future of its faith; An outward vagility of the mind to seek its passage across the charts of symbol and genotype; And of course the temporal liberty to take the actual track, whatever and wherever that is, and whither it may lead. This glib list cannot of course be an exhaustive catalog of the infinite possibilities, only a point of departure, if that.

Despite what some might say, or even think, freedom is not protected by statute and as Dr Lucy Mair² reminded us from her then Tanganyika it cannot be imposed upon alien ground, and as the old song says, it is a bashful darling, for if you say you love it, it will run away.

Carlyle surprised me by grouping St Paul amongst a roster of slaves, but then moved on to draw an interesting distinction between their “social” slavery and the “personal” slavery of Epictetus. At first I did not know what he meant. But then it seemed that the stonemason’s son probably shared with me an essentially plebeian understanding of liberty, realising that no indenture or other formal contract need certify servitude: Merely the invisible chains of class, nation or circumstance.

Paul was a Citizen of Rome and used to play this trump to his advantage, but though it spared him scourge and cross the licence did not remit him shipwreck or epiphany, or ultimately the headsman’s sword and The Martyr’s Crown.

Some months ago I watched the local television news. A small church, with, it seemed, a black pastor, had been denied permission to build a wooden cross in their yard, with the intention of informing locals that their new premises were a church. The local council planning committee said it would be an “advert”. The token of Redemption through Suffering would have been separate to the fabric of the church building, six feet high, made of traditional materials, and illuminated at night.

Somehow an enormous rumor gained currency (so to say) and reached the BBC. It was that if the votaries could pay £75 to the appropriate officers the permission could be obtained and the cross built. This was confirmed by the officers concerned, who of course blamed legislation, and that is protected by statute.

I was thoroughly confused. I could not decide whether the cross was banned because the applicant was black, or because he was Christian, or because he could *not* lay his hands on a ready three ponies, or for some other shortcoming, or a medley of all these.

As always in such times of crisis, I reached for guidance from my road map.

I consulted the helpful legend in which little ideograms are explained in English, French and German. A little black square surmounted by a cross signified a church with a tower; a full black circle with a cross a church with a spire; and a church bereft of both a simple black Greek cross. But what I thought of churches with *separate* eminences? By now I was beginning to suspect, heretically, along with some other aging map enthusiasts, that the OS had maybe, ...I don't say definitely, omitted to plan for a changing Britain.

Realising that I could be mistaken, it at last dawned upon my slow brain that we have under discussion a "leading Light". Now these were more than adequately allowed for by our prescient cartographers, even for land-locked Staffordshire as for more maritime counties. An ithyphallic little stump signalled a "lighthouse (dis.);" and one with a corona of little dashes a "lighthouse". A hyphal little black stalk surmounted with a blob was a "beacon" or "leading light".

I checked my map.

Many of the intersections of our local roads sport a MacDonald's sign. Always a reliable beacon to those in want of taste, they are usually higher than six feet, are made of non-traditional materials, and are illuminated at night. Some may even trespass the curtilage of the planners in question. And *none* are mapped as "leading lights" or "beacons".

Again, as if further proofs were required, the OS is failing to maintain its duty to chart Conspicuous Features.

But I digress.

Clearly, the OS should not be too harshly castigated. In recent years reticent annotations of "Mosque" or "mosque" have hovered vaguely over certain inner-city districts. Whether the absence of a little ideogram is a concession to the Muslim dislike of iconography, or due to some even more recondite consideration I cannot tell.

I wonder if, like the mines, these old and new resorts of devotion shall scatter from our maps like the fallen leaves of autumn, or the lights shall snuff and vanish from England's shores.

Let us turn from Works *for* God if not *of* God, for other "Works" of man also grace the English road map.

Sprinkled around our coast are bold black-bordered rectangles of orange cross-hatch with delicate little webs of feint black lines tracing away in all landward directions. They are innocuously annotated "Works". The bland distinction sounds much nicer than "Nuclear Power Station" and occupies a quarter the paper.

They are less specific than the "murex works", "muriatic acid works", "alkali works" and "oil works" which so fascinated Victorian cartographers and persisted on urban A to Z's well into my time.

When I was a little boy many Undocumented Features graced the Sussex shore where I lived. Rather obvious were the massy concrete pill-boxes that crouched at every mildly strategic juncture where maybe a road crossed a bridge or entered a downland defile. These could even be found in the uttermost Highlands of Scotland. There were also phalanxes of concrete cubes between the dunes. One day I

even discovered a cosy log-lined lair beneath a beach dune, and wondered which ingenious boys had wrought this strangely-sited tree-house and why they did not want to play in it as I was anxious to do. One day my Dad placed me on his bicycle and took me to the local triad of radar masts at Poling. With Mum we cycled past the shattered windows of the abandoned guardhouse and into the empty chambers that a little before were alive with secret activity. These forlorn great rooms were coated within using that unreproducible pastel green paint that those of my generation will always associate with those times. There was no remaining furniture of any kind except electrical trunking and a curious wide rectangular-sectioned forced-air ducting that appeared to discharge, or perhaps inhale, ventilation from floor level. Forced air is rare in Britain even now, and this was the first time I ever saw it.

They appeared on no road map but the German aviators must have charted their presence and even many of the ubiquitous blockhouses, cubes and dragon's teeth.

My countrymen, indeed my living ancestors, had intellectually accepted that their tiny sanctuary was about to be annihilated by the combined might of Fascist Europe, but were resolved to make a final immolative defence and rejoin their ancient motherland inviolate in a kind of unspoken but deeply-felt Valhalla, free for ever in the honor of history, a special island in Paradise.

I understand the Japanese had schemed something similar for themselves. Fortunately for all concerned, this last phase of apocalypse did not eventuate.

None of these features, you may argue, are as innocent as that quintessentially British creature, the traffic roundabout, a more diffident, and ultimately more successful, incursionist of our Southern shores.

Here and there, in a small way at first, it interposed itself at vulnerable crossroads, sometimes softening its bald crown with nests of perennial flowers as if to ingratiate itself with a friendlier, more feminine, solicitude. But it was careful not yet to affront any road maps.

Gradually, as it gained in confidence, it proliferated. Individuals emboldened, grew, threw off soft berets, and even donned circlets of ugly steel chevrons.

Eventually, road maps had to capitulate, and gradually became infested with viral ganglia of little red circles at their nodes.

Gradually, too, Undocumented Features began to step, or rather sidle, out of the cartographic closet. Larger scale maps began to show, here and there, but usually on some blasted heath, ranks and files of tiny rectangles with hippodamus meshes of pecked avenues between. Many of these new apparitions were discretely surrounded by deep layers of the dark green reserved for coniferous forestry, so discretely that had they been plotted on maps in wartime an enemy would have ignored them for fear of wasting precious bombs upon a nudist colony.

What were they? Ammunition dumps? Concentration camps? Rocket establishments? Nuclear arsenals? All four, and even more bizarre installations, have come to light, yes, even in the UK: But history often remains silent.

Amidst such distractions the pestilential roundabout continued her determined assault upon all crossroads. But she was not the first facility of imposed order ever to seize those often ill-fabled junctions.

My maternal Grandad, a man who shared Carlyle's century, would often tell me, *a propos* nothing, that "there will be dirty work at the old cross roads" and often would even sing it, as maybe his elders sang it to him when he was little.

Sometimes today road workers, not necessarily installing roundabouts, will unearth a crossroads skeleton. When they call the police, the latter quickly lose interest, and refer the matter to local archaeologists. I first read that murderers, suicides and witches were interred at the unhallowed carfax when I was a boy, but did not really believe it, at least not in relation to the UK. But the evidence is sometimes unearthed, literally.

Road map makers always seek a Conspicuous Feature. As in the case of church towers, themselves often on hilltops, surveyors may actually triangulate therefrom. But towers and lighthouses were ever useful to the wayfarers they served, and a lantern glimmering above distant trees might in bygone times have meant the difference between sanctuary and death.

Gibbets were sited at crossroads or conspicuously upon wild heathlands in order to be seen as frequently as possible by the largest practicable number, and early road map surveyors had no qualms about mapping, naming or even depicting these macabre waymarks. Many years ago I read that in certain states of the breeze, the Cavendish family in their new great house of Chatsworth would have their sleep disturbed by the screams of men hanging in chains upon the windswept wasteland above. The ladies of the house complained, and the lord proved powerful enough to have the practice stopped, at least within his earshot.

As years turned to centuries the leading classes grew more compassionate, or at least squeamish, and public hangings, and worse, became less frequent and less widespread. In 1820 a law was enacted to prohibit the flogging of women or any other exposure of criminals, and unlike other torture embargos before or since this was enforceable, because it proscribed something by definition public. So the old stocks and gibbets, pillories and whipping-posts were left to rot and by the time of systematic government mapping they were no longer reliable Conspicuous Features and were usually omitted, but their baleful memory would linger in the occasional Gibbet Lane, Gibbet Wood, or, as at Chatsworth, Gibbet Moor.

In 1963, when England was still hanging in private, my Father took me to see the great gibbet at Caxton Gibbet in Cambridgeshire. It stands at the carfax of the old (Roman) Great North Road, A1198, and the Oxford to Cambridge road, A428. The gnarled black gallows, warped and worn by weather, bent its aged frame to its sinister North like a stroke-crippled man too proud for crutches. I do not know whether it is still there. It had not been touched for over a hundred and fifty years then, and I suppose it was a kind of monument to the quality of eighteenth-century craftsmanship and materials.

Despite such tokens of death, landscape is a living thing, and road maps, made like gibbets of dead trees, are too static to display this life.

When I was a research student I wanted to apply Fourier Analysis and its various statistical embellishments to river morphometry, and Ordnance Survey maps were obvious potential data sources. But there was something wrong with our British maps. I could not put my finger on it but somehow the mathematics did not seem quite right. Especially with regard to natural features like streams which moved and might be expected to conform to physical laws.

During the Second World War the RAF took standardised perpendicular photographs of every part of The United Kingdom, presumably intending to come back and bomb selected features when the ground fell under Nazi occupation.

After the War, the resulting photomosaic became of interest to cartographers, photogrammetrists and other scientists and I wondered if such pictures might be a reliable source of data for my studies.

I purchased two or three with the course of the River Devon in Clackmannanshire and certainly the river's lineament seemed both finer and more complex than on similarly scaled OS maps.

Intrigued by these discrepancies I walked to Gilmorehill to consult a photogrammetry expert at The University of Glasgow.

Though mutual civility was maintained throughout my surprising interview, he poured a condescending scorn on my naïve trust in the camera, and described *ad nauseam* the precautions he and his colleagues took, using the most complex optical and mathematical processes, systematically to de-distort the aerial photographs to produce flat maps that would, within the limits inherent in representing terrestrial curvature upon a Euclidean plane, enable tolerable charts to be drawn.

Just in case I had failed to take his point, he then showed me the instruments in the form of the most complex contraptions of steel armatures, electrics and lenses I had then seen, or have since, or are likely to again in this age of the digital microcomputer.

As a parting memento he gave me one of his fine maps of The Island of Rhum, a scientific nature reserve in The Hebrides. I have it to this day.

I decided to stick with maps.

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