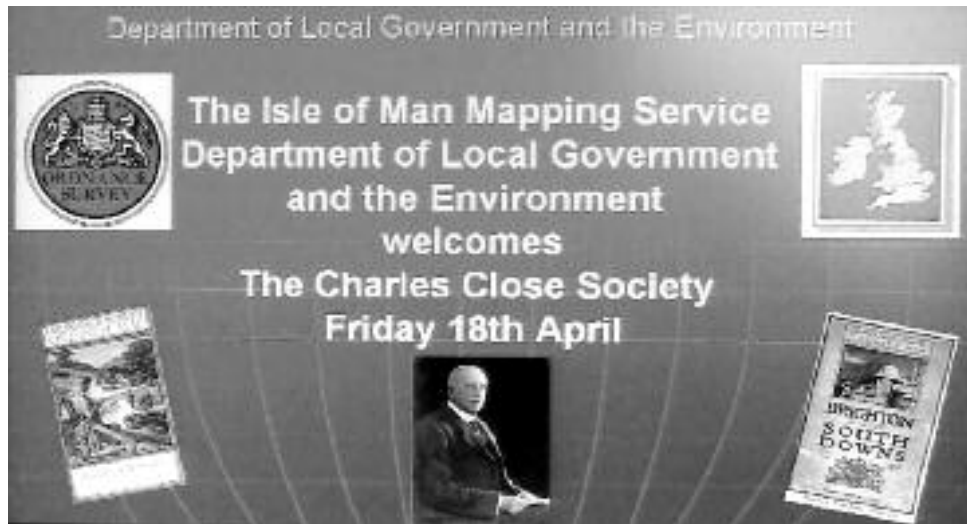


## *Visit to Isle of Man, 18 April 2008*

*John Davies*



*Sir Charles Close himself featured on the impressive welcome screen at the front door*

How much do you know about our nearest neighbouring island? Try these: [a] is the Isle of Man part of United Kingdom? [b] Is it part of European Union? [c] Does it owe allegiance to the Queen? [d] Is it included in British National Grid? [e] Is it mapped by Ordnance Survey? [f] How big is it? [g] Where is it? [h] Are the natives friendly?

I think many of us would have been unable to confidently answer all these questions before our visit, but we quickly learnt these basics so as to better understand what we were about to see.

The answers are: [a] no, it is an independent state with its own parliament (Tynwald, the oldest in the world), laws, taxation, postal system and currency; [b] no, but has a relationship with EU; [c] yes, it has been a Crown Dependency since 1765 and relies on UK for foreign affairs and defence; [d] yes, it lies in grid squares SC and NX; [e] OS produces only 1:50,000 and smaller scale mapping; [f] about 33 miles by 13 miles with an area of 221 square miles and a population of 80,000; [g] about two-thirds of the way from Liverpool to Belfast (these ferries passing south of the island); [h] yes, very friendly and very hospitable!

Our morning hosts were the Isle of Man Survey where we met the complete establishment, comprising Rob Clynes, senior cartographer and Chris Keown, mapping and planning technician, having been warmly welcomed by the Director of Planning, Ian McCauley. Isle of Man Survey is the government's official mapping service, part of the Directorate of Planning and Building Control of the Department of Local Government and the Environment.

The Survey was established in 1986, prior to which the work was contracted out to Ordnance Survey. The maps produced are the 1:25,000 Outdoor Leisure map in two sheets (now in its ninth edition and 25th year) and 1:1250 and 1:2500 plans of major towns and most other areas respectively. The large-scale plans are accompanied by vertical aerial photographs, overprinted with names. A new product, designed for the tourist market and proving very popular, is the 1:100,000 *Photomap*, with an aerial photograph of the island on the front and a road map on the reverse.

Since the 1990s the maps have been digitally produced (*Manxmap* being the equivalent of OS *MasterMap*); since 1996 the actual surveying has been contracted out to BKS Surveys Ltd of Coleraine. The current sea level datum was established at Douglas in 2002. In addition to map production the Survey provides mapping and GIS services to support the work of the Planning Directorate and other government departments.

The Survey acts as technical advisors to MANNGIS, a major government-wide initiative in 'joined-up thinking' to bring the benefits of GIS and corporate data sharing to all the activities of the public sector and the utilities. MANNGIS enables each Department to manage its own 'data layer' and makes on-line mapping and associated data available to 6,000 users within the administration and, in a more restricted version, to the general public via the Internet.

The Survey co-operates with the Manx Gaelic Society (*Yn Cheshaght Ghailckagh*) in an attempt to establish correct place names where these have become corrupted or Anglicised over time. Another activity is to maintain and make available a complete archive of all published maps back to 1:2500 County Series of 1868.

Independent cartographer Vic Bates, who works closely with the Survey, was on hand and showed us some of the work he has been doing, including town plans for tourism and a series of themed maps of the island designed for school children of various ages.

Our afternoon host was Alan Franklin, librarian at the Manx National Heritage. Here we saw many examples of Manx mapping through the ages, the earliest being Ptolemy's map of AD150 (reprinted at Basle in 1552) showing the Isle of Man as a tiny speck off Northern Ireland. Thereafter the island appears in various maps and atlases, with varying degrees of accuracy, until the first accurate depiction of the coastline in McKenzie's nautical chart of 1775. The most accurate and comprehensive portrayals of the island before the coming of the Ordnance Survey were Benjamyn Smyth's 1:60,000 map of 1826 (showing sheadings and parishes, roads and buildings and with hachured mountain land) and Busk's 1:59,000 map of 1861, prepared for the Disafforestation Commissioners.

OS surveyed the island between 1866 and 1871 and produced the following maps: 1:500 of Douglas and Ramsey, 1:2500 of the whole island by parish, 1:10,560 and 1:63,360 of the whole island. The reference book accompanying the 1:2500 plans is arranged by parish and shows acreage, land type and land use of each plot. Although the one-inch map was revised at intervals, the large-scale mapping was not revised until the 1950s, making it difficult to trace the development of the towns, harbours and railways.

Alan demonstrated and discussed examples of many of these historic maps and atlases and, in particular, brought to our attention the Atlas and Gazetteer produced by James Wood, surveyor to the Asylum Board who was mapping the island between 1861-64, published, in 1867. This magnificent work comprises seventeen maps describing the civil and ecclesiastical boundaries of parishes, boundaries of baronies, freeholds, quarterlands and farms and includes tables detailing all land ownership outside of the main towns.

We would like to thank Rob Clynes and Chris Keown of Isle of Man Survey, and Roger Sims and Alan Franklin of Manx National Heritage, with their respective management, for their generosity and hospitality in making these visits not only possible but very enjoyable.

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Isle of Man Survey website: [www.gov.im/dlge/planning/cartography.xml](http://www.gov.im/dlge/planning/cartography.xml)

Vic Bates website : [www.vicbates.com](http://www.vicbates.com)

Manx National Heritage website : [www.gov.im/mnh](http://www.gov.im/mnh)

A cartobibliography of historic maps can be found at [www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/maps](http://www.isle-of-man.com/manxnotebook/maps)