



# *Sheetlines*

The journal of  
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY  
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps

“Kerry Musings”

*David Archer*

*Sheetlines*, 105 (April 2016, pp.62-64)

Stable URL:

<http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue105page62.pdf>

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Published by  
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY  
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps  
[www.CharlesCloseSociety.org](http://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.

## *Kerry musings*

*David Archer*

Popeye once had a map, or it might have been a chart, with **SECRET** in large black letters at the top. It showed only sea with a small island in the middle, and offshore, to the east of the island, again in bold black, a big **X**, with an arrow pointing to it and the word 'Treasure'. He and Olive Oyl set sail, with Bluto in pursuit, and when they sailed into the waters on the east of the island, there was the big black **X** floating on the sea as shown on the map. In my limited experience, this map, and that in *Treasure Island* are the only 'Secret' maps I would call exciting. Anything else has always been a disappointment.

On a map or a document, whether in bold red or black, the single word 'Secret' is pointless: it neither indicates who is allowed to see the item, nor who it is hoped will be kept in the dark, yet it alerts many who would have ignored it if their attention had not been drawn to it. Yes, I am aware there are all sorts of secret papers, some with distribution lists, some with a time embargo, some that will explode and destroy themselves if even a hint of garlic is breathed on them, but the fact still remains that many have only a single word intended to protect them against all evils. Giving the same sense of bewilderment are maps headed 'NOT TO BE PUBLISHED', with print codes showing thousands printed, or for the French speaking 'PUBLICATION INTERDITE' and 'NE DROIT PAS ETRE PUBLIÉ'. Where is the force behind such warnings? I repeat: pointless. They can only be classed with the lone three-worded sign in an alleyway in Newtown : Beware, protruding sign.

I have a jaundiced view of such map headings because secrets appear always to have been in favour with the military, civil service and governments, and when the time comes to share them under the thirty year rule or whatever, the secrets are so painfully silly and pointless that one weeps. And the same goes for maps headed 'Secret', which in my experience have always been rather dull. Or maybe I have not seen the good stuff kept on the top shelf behind the counter.

I can understand the desire to draw attention to a special map, but why 'Secret'? I can also understand why there is frequently no legend showing what the symbols mean. A two-step security measure I assume, whereby even if the map gets into the wrong hands, it might not be immediately obvious what one is looking at. Having the word 'Secret' hand-stamped is a higher level of security, since it does not alert those printing the map, with the stamp being applied once the maps are within the secure environment. However, this falls at the first hurdle as any map printer will spot out-of-the-ordinary items. Surely nobody would have a map headed 'Secret', with an explanation of what it is shown on the same sheet as Popeye had? For a secret map lacking a legend to be of use to those not in the know, more information is needed.

Consider two maps that I have beside me. The first is Sheet 33, Hull, in the one-inch Third Edition Large Sheet Series, with railways revised to October 1914. 'SECRET' is stamped in large red letters on the white Ordnance Survey front cover and in the lower margin of the map. The front cover has a purple elliptical stamp 'Officer in charge, Electric lights & ????'<sup>1</sup> Humber defences', with another stamp at the bottom 'Capt. C.B.R.E. O i/c E.L.&T. Humber Defences.'. The map has beautiful hand-drawn symbols and lettering rather than an overprint, showing ten pairs of symbols, one red the other

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<sup>1</sup> Word stamped over dark royal crest, possibly 'telephones'.

orange, both within a blue ellipse, and each with a name written close by, Killingholme Marshes, Paull, Marfleet and so on. In Hull there are two further orange symbols. And that is it. So secret that we do not know how powerful the lights are, in which direction they shine and when they operate, assuming one of the symbols represents lights. But perhaps these are not the secret. The secret is that they exist at all, how many there are and where they are located. This secret can be seen at a glance by anyone with a small amount of wit, although the locals probably knew long before the map was drawn. Conclusion : a nice map but lacking an explanation of the symbols, not exciting.

The second map is far more interesting with an extensive legend on the back. France 1:25,000 43/18 SW Deauville has the top margin drenched in coloured inks : 'TOP SECRET until issued for briefing ground troops, thereafter SECRET; BIGOT copy no. 196, Information as at 19 May 44; STOP PRESS EDITION OF 20 MAY 1944; This map will NOT be carried in operational aircraft'. The map is thick with red and blue symbols around the coast and inland of Trouville. Turn over, and the legend is as full as one could imagine, with symbols for guns of all sizes, obstacles, minefields, signal installations, dumps and so on. In this case, 'TOP SECRET until issued for briefing to ground troops', does give an indication of who will know of the secret, but why have 'thereafter SECRET'? No mobile phones in those days, so who might the ground troops have had a chance of gossiping to? As I say, to me, this is far more interesting, but still lacks the tingle factor, and I can assure you that under the right conditions, I tingle with the best of them.

Whereas a true secret involves an element of concealment, one could say that *anything one does not know about* is a secret. And here, when considering maps, things get much more interesting, exciting, tingling even. Someone new to collecting Ordnance Survey maps, who has not had time to read all that has been written in the past thirty years, will soon experience the tingle feeling. Many begin by noticing that some pre-1940 maps have an ER cypher on the front cover and get excited (as I did), thinking they must be scarce, until they study *Map cover art* and see they are not too unusual. They might then notice that two styles of map lurk within the standard covers of the Snowdon District, the standard and relief editions. On a similar theme, finding the early Ellis Martin hand drawn covers on the New Populars, or seeing their first quarter-inch map in a long red sky cover, location labels stuck on Populars, or finding their first benderfold Popular, all these were exciting to many of us when we first came across them. We wondered whether what had been spotted was significant or not, and whether other members had noticed the same. Today, a little research reveals many such things as recorded, but the observant collector is on the right track for making their own discovery. Indeed, they might then spot something not mentioned in the literature, but unknown to them, it *is* known to a small group of members. This is a problem that I have mentioned before. How do we get such information into general circulation?

Roger Hellyer has found such things hundreds of times, putting each detail into his cartobibliographies and sharing the information. Other authors of society monographs or articles in *Sheetlines* have also shared their discoveries, with Rob Wheeler being quite consistent in working observations into short pieces. Such pieces are what the Rowley Award hopes to encourage. But so many of the interesting discoveries by members are isolated nuggets, described concisely in a couple of sentences, not enough for a short piece in *Sheetlines*. So, how might these observations be harnessed for the benefit of all?

Here, I am again returning to the suggestion that we should try to recreate the job

files for all OS maps. We have cartobibliographies for many series of maps, but need similar in-depth work on map detail and covers; both a much harder and easier task. For covers, easier in that fewer elements are to be studied and recorded. Harder in that extensive public holdings of map covers are few, and private holdings are not publicised. Gathering minute details of map covers would certainly be challenging. But it can be done as Keith Andrews and collaborators have shown with post-war one-inch maps. Hold on, someone says, the society archives hold the job files for the Seventh Series, so why was this work needed? Because it gives an overview of what was happening to the whole series, whereas the job files record details sheet by sheet with no attempt to pull everything together. And anyway, it would be fun to try and re-build them, a bit like creating a dinosaur from fossilised DNA.

The search facilities on computers are now extremely powerful and could be used with advantage. Even if we did not set up a file for each series, we could consider a single file which housed *any* small comment notified by members, as long as each entry states the series and sheet number referred to. Searches would show what has been reported for the *Civil Air Edition*, *Country round Aldershot* or *Dublin District*. Results might be an observation on the covers of sheet 9, another on sheet 11 and a longer piece for the whole edition, which could all then be pulled together. Small, seemingly insignificant details when combined can be quite important, but first we have to gather them, and at once hit a brick wall : most collectors are reluctant to share information as it alerts others who might start competing, and helps those already competing. I do not see this as selfish and do not mind as long as information is recorded for the future. Again, I am labouring an old theme, which I believe is important. Several times I have looked through specialist collections unable to spot the significance of many items. Unless the owner had written notes, published or unpublished, such information will be lost when they pass on. Before the book was published, I remember Roger putting two copies of the Loweswater cover (*Map cover art 97*) in front of me and asking what the difference was. After a few minutes I gave up, and was shown that one had two and the other four sheep. How many members have spotted this for themselves? And have you mentioned it to anyone?

I like to believe that I am not competitive, meaning I should be willing to share information on my collecting interests. But I don't, not wanting to draw further attention to them. Instead, I have detailed notes which will either be shared sometime or passed to the society archives if time runs out. A disadvantage of not coming out with our collecting interests, is that if they knew, others would sometimes offer information or maps they no longer want. Sometimes. But we do need to gather members' observations. Somehow.

Olive Oyl wanted Popeye's birthday cake to be a secret, so she enrolled his nephews Pipeye, Peepeye, Poopeye and Pupeye to keep him out of the house whilst she finished the icing. She poured white and then black mixtures into the icing bag, and when she squeezed and piped the icing onto the cake, it formed a smooth black and white chequered design like a draughts board. How she did that is her secret and has nothing to do with maps. I just thought you might be interested.

*If there is an enthusiastic response to David's suggestion we will investigate setting up an interactive 'wikipedia' on the CCS website for members to share their findings [Ed].*