



Sheetlines

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“Kerry musings”

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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

I've joined another society. On the Saturday after our own AGM about eighty people met for the formal establishment of The Milestone Society. At an open meeting last autumn, a steering committee was appointed, charged with the founding of a society for anyone interested in milestones and other waymarkers. This was the outcome, a meeting at the Black

³ Tim Nicholson, 'Bartholomew and the half-inch layer coloured map 1883-1903', *Cartographic Journal* 37 (2000), 123-145; Tim Nicholson, 'Major Philip road maps c.1855-1939', Parts I and II, *IMCoS Journal* 84 and 85 (Spring and Summer 2001), 17-25, 19-30.

⁴ Carol Haines, *Marking the miles: a history of English milestones*, published by the author, 2000, paperback, £12, ISBN 0-9538885-0-9.

⁵ For the electronic version, go to URL <http://hds.essex.ac.uk>. The hardcopy gazetteer is: Roger J P Kain and Richard R Oliver, *Historic parishes of England & Wales*, Colchester, History Data Service, 2001, paperback, £12.95, ISBN 0-9540032-0-9.

Country Museum in Dudley, which formally established the society. As the day progressed, I appreciated just how far our own society has come since 1980 and how much we have achieved.

A lot of work had been done in preparation for the day, but there was still much talk of whether to have a journal or both a journal and newsletter. What about membership cards and a logo? Not to mention a website. Consistency in research records was considered desirable, and a database would be essential. The subscription had been set at £10 and £12 for families, but no, they had not considered corporate membership (let alone possible overseas members).

I felt there was a great similarity with the CCS in the age of members, and their enthusiasm, both for milestones and the OS maps they used, of which they were very knowledgeable. As opposed to collecting milestones (though some do), these people take photographs and had magnificent albums detailing the sequences of milestones along various roads. If you think about it, milestones between towns A and B are self-numbering and gaps are easily spotted. Missing stones,¹ if they exist, are often not far away, usually in the nearest pub garden.

Differences also became evident as the day passed. Each milestone is unique, even if of a standard style or a replacement for an earlier version. Theft is a problem, and we were shown a photograph of a magnificent stolen item whose list of places included St. Andrews. This, it was assumed, was destined for a golfing theme bar in America. Ordnance Survey maps usually exist as multiple copies and are not sitting beside the public highway, liable to theft or interference by building works. We have no real need for a rapid reaction force to protect the objects of our interest.²

Maybe I am now out of touch or have just become self-sufficient, but I was surprised at the number of times the word sponsorship was used: for the journal, for the cost of scanning photographs, for conserving stones etc. Without a membership, nobody knew what individuals could or would contribute. Our own society has a pretty good idea of the talents of many members and can call on them. We also have an enviable bank balance. But it was not always like this and it is a sign of maturity that we do know a lot about each other over and above our map interests. Many members have become good friends through the society.

I think that we have achieved much in the first twenty-one years. Over 700 people have sampled, and over 400 are currently members. We have a very strong journal/newsletter, which we keep in print, showing the value of contributions in every issue. The publications list is excellent and growing. Peter Stubbs is forever adding to the website and many members enjoy the *ordnancemaps* e-group. Above all, the Charles Close Society has a very high reputation within the map community. The way we run our affairs, our publications and the knowledge and abilities of members give class to the society. We have an authoritative stature when it comes to Ordnance Survey maps.

In considering the first twenty-one years, there are lots of things that we have not done: a meeting in Ireland, an AGM in Wales, monographs on half-inch or quarter-inch maps or even a good basic guide to Ordnance Survey maps. We have never had a meeting for beginners, introducing OS maps in general. Nor do we have any formal links to other societies by way of a subscription. No other society is a corporate member of the CCS. I would have thought that

¹ I use milestone to mean both milestone and milepost, either spelt as one or two words.

² Though a contingency plan would be most useful, should the Ordnance Survey announce that it is to abandon the Record Map Library.

by now we might have had formal contacts with the likes of the Railway and Canal Historical Society,³ the English Place Names Society, or even bodies connected with the history of printing.

Perhaps the Milestone Society⁴ will be the first with which we have a working relationship, as they are certainly very keen on OS maps for the detail they show on their subject.⁵ They will certainly turn up information on milestones that will reflect on the accuracy of milestone information on maps. Until now, such studies might have been undertaken by one of our members with an interest in milestones, but now it will probably be seen as a Milestone Society venture, appearing in their publications first. Similarly, odd pieces have appeared in *Sheetlines* about railway detail on OS maps, but I feel a vast amount appears in other journals, and, I assume, some very knowledgeable railway authors know nothing of us. Similar interest groups which exist for other map details such as post offices, bridges, windmills, troughs, canals etc, might also be unaware of The Charles Close Society and might be publishing articles which would fit quite nicely in *Sheetlines*.

In a similar vein, there are hundreds of people working on Rights of Way matters who use OS maps to argue their case. Whether the self-taught amateur, the knowledgeable academic, the local authority officer, the expert witness or the lawyer, they all approach Ordnance Survey maps from a different angle and tease out detail of interest to our members. Perhaps we should attempt to make greater contacts with other groups who use OS maps in order to have access to their researches.

So, after twenty-one years we are established. What now? I think that there are two areas that we might start to consider. The first is that of membership numbers, not now, but in the future. When we had two hundred members, I would suggest that about fifty per cent were under forty years of age. Now, with over four hundred members, less than ten per cent might be under forty. Unless we can attract more young people to take an interest in OS maps, the society might have a membership problem in the future.

The other possible weakness, about which I am less certain, is that of dilution of effort or interest in our society through members becoming active in other map related societies and areas of interest. For a very long time, the CCS has had a near monopoly as the only map society catering for those with an interest in easily obtained and less expensive maps. However, in recent years we have seen a society founded for road and oil company maps and a French society for Michelin maps. More than enough interest exists for the establishment of a railway map society, for railway maps and railways on maps. Perhaps consideration is already being given to a grouping of those using OS maps for legal purposes. In January 2001 a meeting was held in Greenwich for anyone interested in military mapping. One can well imagine a future call for a separate society for such maps and the effect this would have on our own activities, so interconnected are matters OS and GSGS. Such activities, especially if Ordnance Survey related, could drain enthusiasm for the CCS and contributions to *Sheetlines*. The Charles Close Society, I am positive will always be dominant, but could be weakened.

For the moment, however, let us give ourselves a pat on the back, and thank those who met at the British Library on 8 November 1980 to found The Charles Close Society.

³ Though we did undertake a reciprocal publicity mailing a while ago.

⁴ Contact Terry Keegan, The Oxleys, Tenbury Road, Clows Top, Kidderminster DY14 9HE.

⁵ At Dudley I was asked whether it was true that the OS archive held every nineteenth century surveyor's notebook, amongst other questions.