



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

Bird watchers call them LBJs, Little Brown Jobs. Meaning small brown birds they cannot immediately identify. I call them Little Marbly Jobs. Meaning anonymous small black and white maps, usually in a variety of marbled (and occasionally plain) covers with the agent's details on the front, which I find hard to identify, immediately or otherwise.

I have two large drawers of these, over six hundred maps, and I just add to them without really trying to move any on. Why? Because I shy away from the work involved in deciding what they are. Ninety-eight per cent are dissected on cloth with the margins trimmed to the framed borders, so one has to go on internal evidence in order to identify them. And I hate it, because the three main series involved all look similar at a glance.¹ I am only consoled by having had Richard Oliver look at some and state that he could not be positive of what they were without comparison with another map.

The culprits were mapsellers and agents for the Ordnance Survey, who trimmed and dissected the maps and usually put them into nice boxes and slipcases of various sorts. Though why they had to get rid of the margins I cannot figure out. I do have some very nice ones *with* margins and they are lovely. Yes, one often finds a key stuck to the back of the map, which should help, but it need not be for the map on the other side. Sometimes a more recent key was used for an older map and vice versa (no Trading Standards Officers in those days).

The main map series found in marbled covers are one-inch outline editions of England and Wales with sheet lines laid out on 360 sheets. Even with margins present, people find the 360 sheet period the most difficult to grasp. First there was the Old Series which stands alone. Then we had the 360 sheet layout used for the New Series, followed by the Revised New Series and the Third Edition small sheet series.² The one-inch map then changed to a larger sheet size for the 152 sheets of the Third Edition, Large Sheet Series. There are plenty of things to muddy the picture, for example Old Series quarter sheets, different versions of the New Series (advance editions, hachured with contours...), Scottish maps, scales other than one-inch... all appear in marbled covers.

Whenever I am forced to give an opinion on a marbly job I have to get out my notes. These are based on an excellent article in an early issue of *Sheetlines*³ and help to some extent. Thus I can tell a New Series sheet from a Revised New Series if it has P.O. for Post Office, rather than P. And I know that a map is not a New Series if a church symbol has a black square or circular blob under the cross. Even better is when I have two versions of the same sheet to compare, and three different versions are usually a clincher.

¹ Just like Bartholomew's maps, which have very similar blue covers for each series.

² Followed by the forgotten *Fourth Edition* of which, only seven sheets were published.

³ Richard Oliver, What's what with the New Series, *Sheetlines* 5 (1982), 3-8. This is probably the most useful article ever to have appeared in *Sheetlines*, and would merit revision and republishing with better illustrations.

I keep telling myself that I must try to make a diagnostic test for marbly jobs in order to identify them; a flow diagram with YES/NO at each stage. Does it have windmills (YES/NO), does it have a symbol for railways stations (YES/NO)? The major drawback with diagnostic testing is the absence of a single feature that appears on every sheet yet is different from one series to another. Contours are about the most common feature and help identify the New Series as they are shown by dots with contour heights, whereas later series have dots and dashes plus contour heights. But, in the absence of colour, deciding between the Revised New Series and the early Third Edition small sheet series, is a killer without margins.⁴ With margins, I can identify any Third Edition sheet at thirty paces as they all say *Third Edition* in the top left corner. The ideal solution would be to visit a library, get out the most commonly found series and compare every sheet, noting a detail specific to each series for each sheet. A sort of cartographic fingerprint. This would be a winner, and in book form would sell well to mapsellers.

Why were the margins trimmed on these maps? I cannot see any point in it. Yet they all did it, most of the time. It would certainly have involved more work to trim the margins and paste only the key on the reverse, but both marbly jobs and many maps in agents' covers are usually without margins. Maybe at first they wanted to avoid drawing attention to how out of date some of the New Series maps were when issued as such, and this set the trend for the following series. Certainly, the Revised New Series and Third Edition small sheet series were OK for currency when issued. As they are, the maps are not even suitable for butting together, since the border frames get in the way.

Is there any significance in the different marbling designs? The main ones are those produced by Edward Stanford; either a white base with blue marbling or a dark maroon ledger style marbling. Both usually have the agent's label on the front cover. Some maps have a very nice capital R in pencil to the right of the sheet number. Using the contour test, I once thought that this stood for Revised New Series and was to help the agent, who could not easily identify the new maps either. But now I am not sure.⁵ At last, help is at hand. I have decided that the way forward is to invest in a reference set of the one-inch facsimiles, based on the 360 sheet layout, being published by Alan Godfrey. All have full margins. This will mean that I always have at least one identified sheet available for comparison. And with a bit of luck, the little marbly job in hand will be the same as the reprint. Too easy.

⁴ See *Sheetlines* 5 (1982), 4.

⁵ Bill Bignell has noted that hand-coloured versions only appear in ledger style marbled covers, and Richard Oliver that Philip used red covers for coloured and black for uncoloured versions.