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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

When asked to give a talk on maps to the newly formed Kerry Local History Group, I agreed at once, without considering what it involved. After all, I have given a couple of short talks to our members, so it seemed no trouble. Six weeks later, things appear different.

I know almost nothing about “antique” or county maps, on which hills are shown as pimples, so this will have to come from a book. Or should I just begin by saying that I only know about Ordnance Survey maps? I will assume that the audience knows virtually nothing about maps, sitting around the saloon bar of the Kerry Lamb. Ah, snag one. A talk on maps to such a group must have illustrations, preferably the actual maps, but I will not have copies of all that I mention, and certainly not in multiples. Neither do I have slides, but I might be able to borrow an overhead projector. That will need transparencies being made, or failing that, simple black and white handouts. Lots of them. All at once everything takes on a much greater dimension. This is going to be hard work. And I can see that at the end of it I will frustrate and disappoint a lot of people who will want to buy copies of things I mention. Things which I might be lucky enough to dig out a single copy of.

The obvious answer is to invite Robert Davies from the National Library of Wales to speak. He can bring plenty of examples and will be sure to have illustrations on a laptop computer that projects onto a screen and a pointer that shines a light onto the picture. At the end he can invite everyone to visit the Map Department to look at the examples and many other maps, any time they wish. No, that’s unfair. Robert must have given dozens of such talks, so I will just have to do it myself.

I could begin by saying that I will only talk about OS maps and then give a brief run through covering Mudge, how the Old Series took forever to complete, the start of the large scales, and the first coloured one-inch maps. For dessert, they can have the National Grid and post-war large-scale maps, ending with the wonders of computers. A talk on OS maps in general would mean that I could include the wonderfully detailed town plans at 1:500, which all local historians should know about, but which do not exist for Kerry, as it is a village. I could show one for Newtown, but what’s the point of whetting their appetites with things they cannot have for their chosen area of study?

The answer is to discuss what OS maps can offer those researching the history of Kerry parish, to show what maps exist for Kerry and what they do or do not show. The changing paper landscape. But in such a rural area, very little changes. The only exception hereabouts would be the famous Kerry tramway, which managed never to appear on an Ordnance Survey map, despite being in existence twice. This is quite a good example of the “snapshot” element in maps of any sort. They only show what the surveyor saw on the day.

The Kerry tramway was a 2ft narrow gauge light railway that was used to get felled oaks and sawn timber from the hills to the GWR main line station a couple of miles away at Glanmule. It was in existence from 1887 to 1895 when the track was lifted, and was rebuilt in 1917 by German prisoners of war. Thus, it missed the first large-scale survey that ended in 1887. On the Second Edition of the 1:2500, (resulting from the revision of 1900-01) one can see wide white lines through the woods, indicating where the tramway had been, but no line is shown in situ. Is this a good idea? Would my audience appreciate the wonders of old maps

if I used a local example that shows the OS to have twice missed an important part of our history? Probably not.

What about the illustrations? Keep it low-tech. Black and white photocopies of Old Series and large-scales should be fine. I will photocopy any bits of coloured local maps that illustrate a point, on the assumption that even a black and white copy will be of interest to someone who has never seen an old map of the local area. The main problem will be locating originals to copy. I cannot produce my own collection of local maps, as I do not collect them systematically. I have a small cardboard box into which I drop folded maps, if I remember, but this was only started about five years ago. I also have a drawer that contains most of the twenty-five inch scale maps of Kerry parish, and another drawer containing a lot of the rest of Montgomeryshire. Local six-inch maps have never come my way, so perhaps I should get photocopies, as these really must be shown.

Even as I write, I can hear warning bells and see pitfalls ahead. If I draw up a list of all the maps that Kerry appears on I will then have no excuse for not trying to collect everything on the list. This will lead to collecting every state of every edition, which in turn will open up the collecting of non-Ordnance Survey maps. Speeds and Blaeus are really not my cup of tea, except for some of the colouring, but I have a vague memory of starting to collect local Bartholomew and Michelin maps, if I could find them.

The best thing would be to move to Bournemouth and give a talk there. The early printings of Old Series sheet sixteen show absolutely nothing except roughish looking land crossed by a piddling little stream and the words 'Bourne Mouth' trailing into the sea from where this town now stands. Not a single house. This would surely impress anyone. Starting with nothing, one could just show edition after edition with an ever-expanding urban area. This sounds both easy and fun, and Robert Davies could handle Kerry, I'm sure.