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“Kerry musings”

David Archer

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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

A chronology of the Ordnance Survey, Benjamin Baker, Romsey Road Books, 2003. Vol. 1 *Chronology to 1896*, xxxii, 704pp; Vol. 2 *Chronology 1897 to 2001* 1200pp; Vol. 3 *Index and appendices*, xvi, 400pp; and a CD of the whole.

When did the fire occur in the Tower of London, causing the Ordnance Survey's move to Southampton? When did Sir John Farquharson cease to be Director General? When were the first sheets of the *Fifth Relief* and *Fifth Edition* issued? Such questions are not too difficult to answer by rummaging through *Sheetlines* and various books, but finding answers will take time. When did a select Committee of the House of Commons recommend that a trigonometrical survey of Ireland should be carried out by the Board of Ordnance? Or, when, in 1918, did the Overseas Branch begin using four Quad Demy lithographic presses? Two far more difficult questions, probably needing a library visit, if you know where you want to look for answers.

This new chronology answers all the above, and is a truly magnificent work, even if one needs a small trolley to carry it around. The author started a card index of Ordnance Survey events in 1930, focusing on the previous 130 years or so, but soon decided to record current events as well. The opening entry is for William Roy's birth on the 4th of May 1726, and the last is for the 31st of December 2001, covering in full, the first two hundred years of the Ordnance Survey. No starting date is given for the Ordnance Survey, just increasingly more entries after the 21st of June 1791. Similarly, the compiler does not express an opinion by giving a date for the first Ordnance Survey map.

I must admit to having a weakness for reference books, and chronologies particularly. If I become interested in a new subject, the first thing I do is obtain an up to date bibliography, a good history, and, if I am lucky, a chronology. For our subject, the chronology at the back of *The national plans* is really only concerned with matters of large scale, whilst that in Owen and Pilbeam is a brief list of major events.

The present work consists of three tomes, the first two being the list of events and facts in date order, and the third, an alphabetical index to the chronology together with various related appendices. The format of the work (Demy Quarto, 11 ¼" tall by 8 ¾" wide), allows for eight wide columns across a double page. The first is headed Date, and the others are Administration, Technology, Map development and publication, Field work, Large scales, Small scales, and Related events. A most useful feature is that every entry has a coded reference to the information source. All the reference sources are listed in an appendix in volume three and would make an excellent bibliography if published separately.

Typical entries are:

1858 March 15th Eclipse of the Sun map available.

1886 December 22nd Treasury authorises revision of original 10 feet, 25 inch and 6 inch maps.

1887 September 6th Sir Charles Wilson reads a paper on the Ordnance Survey in Manchester.

1897 January 1st control of map sales transferred from Stationery Office to Ordnance Survey.

New structure of map agencies established, and ordering at many head post offices introduced.

1916 April 25th all civil employees report for work at Phoenix Park despite Sinn Fein Rebellion the day before.

1916 December 11th new sub-division of the OS established to make relief models of the fighting areas in France, making on average 36 models a week.

1918 June 8th last day of printing at Wardrecques.

1935 June 18th decision to review the sheet lines of the Fifth Edition.

1961 July 26th printing of Seventh Series sheet 188 completes the first printing of this series.

Having spent several weeks dipping into this work, I doubt whether the compiler can identify any known information that he has left out. In the introduction, he does not give the criteria for including an entry, and it seems at times as if he has included every snippet of detail recorded in the last seventy years. Don't get me wrong, it is all really good stuff, but in other hands, one can see much that an editor would have cut. For example, on the 20th of January 1827 the entry reads that *Table of logarithms of the natural numbers from 1 to 108000* by Charles Babbage was dedicated to his faithful friend Lieutenant-Colonel Colby of the Royal Engineers. On the 17th of July 1877 we are told of the sale at 3, Cumberland Terrace, Southampton of household furniture and effects (by order of the Executors of the late Sir Henry James) sold by Southampton auctioneer Mr W Furber. Peripheral, secondary, call them what you will, but such entries have been included, are very unobtrusive and great fun to stumble across.

Where possible, specific day dates are given and a nice feature is that in order to break long runs, introductory headings, sometimes with short notes to set the scene, are used to introduce important changes of policy or the introduction of new technology. The text is further broken at least every ten years, by some very nice colour plates, which show, for the major map series the current state of revision and publication. So that, for the one-inch, in the mid-1930s, we see coverage is a mixture of the Popular, Fifth and Scottish Popular editions, whilst in the mid-1950s, the Seventh Series, New Popular Edition and Scottish Popular with the National Grid are needed for coverage. I understand that these illustrations were prepared some ten years ago, and feel that with today's technology, it could be a fairly straightforward matter to link a database to a graphics programme, which would enable almost yearly diagrams to be produced. However, those in this publication are well suited to their purpose.

Volume three is a superb index to the first two volumes. I spent a whole afternoon trying to find something in one and not the other, but failed. Meticulous is the word, and the entries are what I call full, in that a couple of words introduce each sub-entry not just a list of dates after the initial entry (Fifth Edition - first published 5.1934, - revision of sheet lines 18.6.1935; rather than Fifth Edition - May 1934, June 1935). One of several excellent appendices is for Ordnance Survey agents. Entries in an alphabetical listing of towns are sub-divided chronologically to show when businesses held agencies. Thus, we see that in Taunton, Barnicott and Pearce were agents from the nineteenth century, to well beyond the First World War, whereas Aberystwyth had a series of different agents and periods without any.

A most remarkable feature of this publication is that the whole thing is duplicated on a CD. However, the information in the books cannot be altered or deleted from the CD, but purchasers can insert their own information in the relevant places. It is also possible to copy all of the inserted detail as a single file so that it can be sent to another purchaser to add to their copy. Therefore, the whole work can be kept up to date as knowledge improves, changes occur and time ticks by. And in time, perhaps we might get a work such as the above, which of course is fantasy, conjured as light relief from reading a final draft of *An illustrated dictionary of the Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey maps*, by the same author and publisher.