



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

On a beautiful sunny Saturday in August, we went to Aberystwyth for the Fourth International Punch and Judy Festival. As a bit of light relief from the serious side of the day, I popped into the second-hand bookshop, and whilst browsing, heard a customer ask for a long out of print book. The owner replied that she knew the book but did not have a copy at present. After the customer had gone, the owner sighed and said that she had held a copy for five years, knowing that it was a very interesting but low value item, and had sent it to the skip a few weeks before. Don't we all know that feeling? Without even being ruthless, we sort out garages or kitchen cupboards, discarding things that were kept as they might be useful, and six years into the future have not been needed. Until the week after the binmen have taken them.

On the domestic front, this is fairly easy to rectify, as one can usually go out and replace an item, but for a mapseller or bookseller things are slightly different. One is aware that a rarity element is involved, and one might be discarding a rare state or one which is currently fairly common, but might be scarce in the future. Yes, I have been known to bin Ordnance Survey maps. Occasionally. Old Series, once flat, now rolled as tight as a sausage and so brittle that they split when one peeps into them. Large-scale sheets, so dusty and torn, that it would take a bakery to clean them and a week to iron flat again. Quarter-inch maps, made for the car, crammed into a glove compartment for ten years and showing it. Folded maps of any age just do not survive forty years exposure to the elements and saddlebags. These are the easy ones to deal with, and sleepless nights do not follow sending them on their way. The difficult decisions only arise when maps are in nice condition and nobody wants them. I still have hundreds of maps which I bought in my early years, especially flat sheets, which I really should part with, as I have never been asked for them, don't know anyone who might need them, yet can imagine somebody, somewhere, wanting them. So I keep them. Sad teaching sets, thirty very well used and mostly annotated copies of a *Snowdon* tourist map. Slightly sad but not tatty. Even in bright or mint condition I do not want thirty copies. I have had multiple copies of one-inch Populars, folded into covers, but well used by students. A few go, but the rest get boxed up and forgotten, when they should just be used to fatten worms, since there are ample numbers of good sound copies around.

So why keep them? In the beginning I believed that the odd one might be really unusual, that I was a guardian of these things and had a responsibility to the map community not to destroy rare maps. But they are not rare, and I now have no time to go through them looking for any rareness. Print codes, price stickers, unusual folds, all *might* be there, but even if discovered, they will not be earth shattering. Not now, given the in-depth analysis most map series have received. I might be destroying a rare map in grotty condition, but not an unknown map. Most unlikely. But still possible. So I keep them. In boxes where nobody ever looks, and in years to come, I or someone else will peep into the boxes when conducting the final clear out, and just put them into the skip without delving further. So why not do it now? Because I have several little corners in which to keep them, and they make the place look lived in. Less space would most certainly mean fewer boxes.

I do not only keep my own sad maps. Friends, customers and libraries pass on items they have weeded for quality and cannot bring themselves to throw out, just as I sometimes take maps to charity shops. Let somebody else take the decision. In the early days, I was reluctant to

throw things out as others have always known more about the maps than I do. But one cannot ask someone to come round and spend a couple of joyful hours going through boxes full of absolute tat in the hope of finding a rarity. Although it does happen. Years ago, I had a carton of sad maps sitting on the kitchen floor, unexamined. Whilst I was on the telephone an excited cry came from the kitchen; Dr Oliver had been spruting and had found a really tatty specimen of the first state of Third Edition sheet 118. Previously only suspected, never seen before.

Consider a public reference library that has to reduce a map collection of flat sheets. They might decide to keep a set of each of the one-inch series, so any duplicates are discarded, usually keeping the one in best condition. If the choice were between a common or a less common printing, condition would be the main consideration. So a rare map might be withdrawn and put in the annual book sale. A more specialist library with space problems, might decide to keep all print codes within a series, discarding duplicates. But some might have different prices from retained sheets and be rare. An even more specialist library might have a policy to keep every known state of a sheet, yet end up discarding rare maps because unidentified internal differences exist. Where does one stop? How many map libraries have budgets generous enough to pay people to look for these things and store such maps?

If anyone decides to withdraw a map from a collection, private or public, the key question is what will happen to it? If it were passed on in some way it would still exist, and if unusual, might stand a chance of being recognised as such. If it were sent to the skip and destroyed, it would be gone forever. One has to be very confident to send something to the skip, which is one reason why map librarians, quite rightly, fall over themselves to try and place discarded maps in good homes. Any home, other than the skip. But as a few members of our Society recently discovered, one just has to accept that occasionally, it is impossible to find a home for good interesting maps within a certain time, and off they go.

As far as I am concerned, the most unenviable job that I have heard of, is having to make a decision on library holdings no longer needed by the Ministry of Defence. Imagine yourself sorting through the hundreds of different maps produced for D-day, many headed *Top Secret* and dated to the day, not all of which will be needed to give a balanced file to be forwarded to what was the Public Record Office. For the ultra sensitive maps, was the decision between the PRO or the shredder? If any were disposed of, many must surely have been maps not in any other collection, different states, preliminary planning maps and such. Here, I assume that the question was not "Will anyone want it?" but "Is it an *essential* map that must be kept?" If the answer was no, then it was sent to be destroyed.

I once bought the residue of a geography department map collection. Ninety per cent of the maps were flat teaching sets of one-inch Seventh Series in quite good condition, which I did not want and had no space for. Few would ever be wanted. The map librarian knew this, but was not allowed to throw anything out. They must be sold and the agreement was that I had to take everything. Initially, my plan was to hire a van, collect the maps, drive home and take the unwanted sheets to the recycling centre in Welshpool. After some thought and a couple of telephone calls, I found a recycling centre ten minutes drive from the university, thus saving the van hire. Two journeys with a full Renault Five were thrown into the paper container, the only time I have ever taken small-scale maps. After the second trip, the foreman of the centre sold me some new transport books with slightly sad dustwrappers, which had been thrown in the skip by a printer. This, I took as a good omen for having gone there. But it did make me wonder, were all of my maps and those from the MOD and other sources really shredded and recycled once they left the collection?