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“Timothy Robin Nicholson 1930-2009”
Rob Wheeler and David Archer
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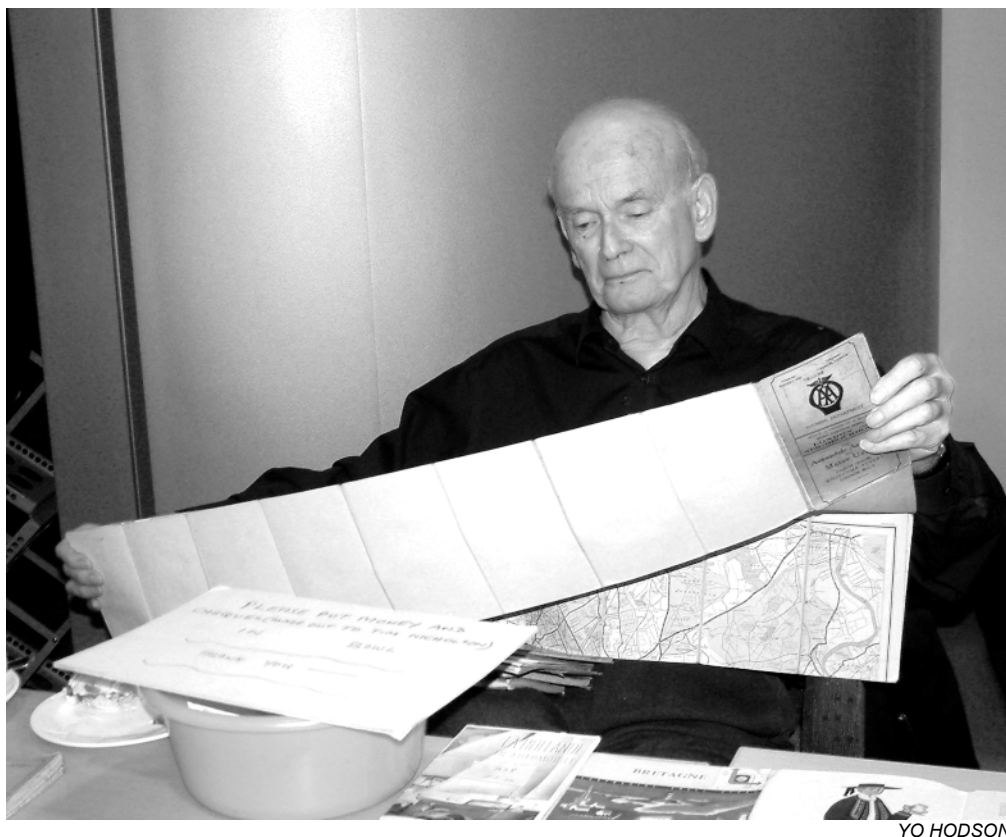
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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles 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.

Timothy Robin Nicholson

1930–2009



YO HODSON

After growing up in the Dutch East Indies and then Australia, Tim Nicholson followed a career in publishing, working first for J M Dent, then as a senior editor for Readers' Digest. He made his publishing knowledge available to the Society by serving on its Publications Subcommittee for some years while we were still finding our feet in such matters. However, his interests were always diverse and motoring perhaps came before maps: he wrote or edited some twenty books on the subject between 1957 and 1982; he took part in an expedition driving the length of the American continent which featured in *The Guinness Book of Records*, and he owned a succession of vintage Rileys, one of which he took almost to the most northerly point of Norway in 2000. He was also a long-standing member of the Ephemera Society.

What really spurred his interest was when these spheres overlapped: motoring maps and Riley ephemera come to mind. The former overlap led to a paper in *The Cartographic Journal*¹ and also to his final book, on the Revised New Series in colour,² the first OS one-inch maps aimed at 'tourists, pedestrians and cyclists'. He also wrote numerous articles on non-OS mapping of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in particular for *The Cartographic Journal* and the IMCOS Journal, which represent a substantial part of what is available in print on these subjects.

Tim was not a map collector of the normal, accumulative, sort. He would acquire things because he wanted to study them or write about them and then dispose of them to make space

¹ Tim Nicholson, 'Cycling and motoring maps in Western Europe 1885-1960', *The Cartographic Journal* 41(3), Dec 2004, 181-215. This continued the theme of his book *Wheels on the Road*, published in 1983.

² Tim Nicholson, *The birth of the modern Ordnance Survey small-scale map*, Charles Close Society, 2002.

for new interests. He was therefore a regular attender at the AGM map markets, with a table unique in the diversity of its wares. In that respect, his appearance at the 2009 AGM was no different from previous ones.

Tim's journey through life ended suddenly and unexpectedly – rather like the Norway expedition. I do not think he would have wished it otherwise.

Rob Wheeler

Tim, the collector

How many others members, when entering a book fair, have stood at the door and heard a familiar voice going from stand to stand, asking, “Have you any Ordnance Survey material?”, “Have you any Ordnance Survey material?” The question continuing to be put all the way around the room. ‘Methodical perseverance’ was Tim’s trademark when applied to collecting.

In March 1982, I put a note in *Sheetlines 3* seeking to contact owners of the Quarter-inch Civil Air Edition maps. Tim wrote to me, and I went to see him in his flat in Russell Square, right in the centre of London, an eyrie, from which he would swoop down to book and ephemera fairs each weekend, returning with choice tit-bits to feed his current collection. On that first visit he showed me runs of the pre-war Ordnance Survey large and small scale *Descriptions*, told me which editions were lacking and indicated a few that were duplicates. Having never seen any before, I wanted one. Of course I could have one, two if need be, but only as a swap for one missing from his run. This was the first of many things that I learnt about collecting courtesy of Tim Nicholson. A good ‘swap’ will achieve far more than a thick wad of bank notes.

Tim had come to Ordnance Survey maps via an interest in motoring and road maps, which in turn, sprang from his love of vintage cars. He had been collecting motoring maps, including OS road maps for some time, and soon wrote them up in his book *Wheels on the road*.¹ With the book finished, and a young Charles Close Society in existence, he then focused on Ordnance Survey maps and ephemera. Initially, he concentrated on pre-1940 map covers, collecting all the different cover designs, the numerous variations, stickers added to change the sheet title, the same map in different covers. It was endless. He wrote it all up for *Sheetlines* and gave great support to John Paddy Browne when writing *Map cover art*.

Having ‘done’ covers, he moved on to aviation maps, and again concentrated his collecting on these. When venturing into a new area, he appeared to Hoover up all that was easily found, contacting dealers for what might be available, and undertaking research in libraries, especially the British Library, which was just around the corner. Such research enabled him to know the significance of what he found and what in particular to look for. As with all the topics he focused on, once he had satisfied himself that he had got to the bottom of a subject, he wrote it up. Many people consider his aviation article to be outstanding.²

When Tim went to a book fair or into a bookshop, he knew exactly what he wanted, and had no interest wasting time looking at what was on offer, he just asked his question and passed on if nothing was forthcoming. Such an approach paid handsome dividends over the years. If a bookseller bought something that looked interesting, he would save it for the person who asked for OS material at every fair he attended. And there were few that Tim did not attend. Two, maybe three in one weekend, usually travelling by train to get to them.

¹ *Wheels on the road: maps of Britain for the cyclist and motorist 1870-1940*,. Norwich: Geo Books, 1983.

² ‘An introduction to the Ordnance Survey aviation maps of Britain 1925-39’, *Sheetlines 23* (1988), 5-18.

When our society had a meeting in the British Library in 2005, Tim only appeared in the afternoon, as he went to a book fair in Oxford in the morning.

How many fairs must he have attended? At the very least seventy a year, for over thirty years. This figure does not include visits to bookshops. Bookshops in towns where fairs were held and bookshops visited for their own sake. Tim would investigate every lead that he picked up, book shops, antique shops, ‘a man with some maps’, no matter what distance he had to travel. Think of how many book fairs you attend and you will see why he could build such fantastic collections. Fantastic in both size and quality, because he put so much into looking.

In parallel to his map collection was a collection of Ordnance Survey ephemera: leaflets, letters, advertising material and so on. By the time I met him, he was a prominent member of The Ephemera Society and acquired wonderful material from their meetings, called bazaars. It was Tim’s suggestion that our society have a bazaar (a term he always used) after lunch at AGMs, and for many years he would supervise the setting up of the tables, and only go for his food once things were in place. Tim however was not interested in selling maps. His aim in having the bazaar was purely so that he could find maps for his own collection. He could not wander around if he was trapped behind a stall, so he set his up, with a large wooden bowl (in London, plastic elsewhere) for people to put any money in, whilst he went from table to table asking for his current interests.

Once his collection was well under way, he started refusing wonderful maps at book fairs because he already had a copy. Maps that most people would give their right arm for. He had no real interest in making a profit from his searching. As long as he had some good ‘swaps’, his overriding desire was to add to his collection. The fact that he lived in an exceedingly small flat with only limited shelf space was also a factor. Tim had strong self-discipline, and was focused beyond belief, he knew exactly what he wanted and would refuse anything that fell outside his specification. If he did not want it, he could not be tempted. At one time, he told me he was collecting post-war tourist maps in the red and cream covers. I soon acquired a really nice group of slightly later maps with the royal crest in the top left corner. No, they were not wanted, too recent; so I sold them. A few months later, a revised wants list arrived, and he had extended his dates to include these maps, which had gone.

Eventually, Tim decided to move on and sold his collection of Ordnance Survey maps because he needed empty shelves in order to collect, (or should we say study?) something else. Bartholomew’s maps came next,³ then a return to matters OS with the publication of his study of the Revised New Series coloured maps,⁴ before returning to his original interest in motoring maps.⁵ I can remember discussing his early ventures into Michelin maps and his going to France to meet someone who collected Michelin material, again, following a lead he picked up. He joined the *Association des collectionneurs de guides et cartes Michelin* and would go to their equivalent of our AGM, with a talk, full French lunch and of course, a bazaar.⁶

Tim never stopped collecting Ordnance Survey ephemera, though he did trim his collection. Advertising material was especially dear to him, whether it be a decorative

³ ‘Bartholomew and the half-inch layer coloured map 1883-1903’, *The Cartographic Journal* 37 (2000), 123-145.

⁴ *The birth of the modern Ordnance Survey small-scale map : the Revised New Series colour printed one-inch map of England and Wales 1897-1914*, London: Charles Close Society, 2002.

⁵ See for example: ‘Major Philip road maps c.1855-1939: part 1’, *Journal of the International Map Collectors’ Society* 84 (2001), 17-25; part 2, 85 (2001), 19-30. ‘Cycling and motoring maps in Western Europe 1885-1960’, *The Cartographic Journal* 41 (2004), 181-215.

⁶ Looks familiar? www.acgcm.com/english_bourges.html

nineteenth century letterhead or a stunning Ellis Martin poster. And again, he wrote it up.⁷ I cannot remember him ever enthusing over any item in particular, no matter how rare it was. All seemed to be of equal interest, but one knew something was really special when he started the sentence “Of course, this is the...” When Tim held a map and said “Of course...” one listened very carefully. Tim was a very generous person, with his ‘swaps’, with information, and when he gave the Society an Ellis Martin watercolour to present to Yo Hodson when she stood down as Chairman.

I last saw him in May at the AGM when he seemed fine, if more stooped than when we last met, but still the same old Tim. He had this little tradition at the end of every bazaar, where he would present me with his handful of unsold maps, so that he did not have to take them home to clutter his limited space. I will always have very fond memories of Tim. He was good company, liked his food, was exceedingly knowledgeable, generous, helpful and kind. He could form a super collection of maps on a particular subject faster than anyone, and would write it up for all to enjoy. Again, good old Tim.

David Archer

⁷ ‘Ordnance Survey ephemera to 1939’, *The Map Collector* 54 (1991), 2-7. ‘Ordnance Survey ephemera 1945-1991’, *The Map Collector* 59 (1992), 8-12. ‘Road maps and advertising in Britain 1860-1940’, *The Cartographic Journal* 45 (2008), 43-61.