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"The GeoInformation Group"

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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.

The GeoInformation Group

John Winterbottom

Fly with Google Earth to Aberdeen, Coventry, Bradford, or to one of many UK cities and you will see at the bottom of the image the copyright notice for The GeoInformation Group whose Cities Revealed ™ product range has supplied the aerial imagery you are admiring.

The company is located in the attractively modernised old pumping station building in Fulbourn, near Cambridge, where seven members of the Society were made very welcome indeed by Dr Seppe Cassettari, CEO and joint owner, and by Chris Going, MD of GeoInformation Historic.

Seppe introduced us first to the 'modern' high-resolution imagery of their flagship product and talked about their ground-breaking use of aerial photography and cutting edge computer technology since the company formed in 1994. We learned about the relationship between image scale, flying height and camera lens size, the change from film to digital cameras about two years ago and about some of the factors that affect aerial surveys such as weather, time of year and day, and flying restrictions imposed by air traffic control. A key to the success of this product is the processing that is carried out on each frame to ensure that the combined mosaic has a consistent appearance. Imagery can be supplied to customers' special requirements: an example of this being a request to make the rivers more blue and the trees greener for a tourist publication. The GeoInformation Group have production operations in India and South Africa where much of this post-processing of images is carried out.

Full details of the full range of *Cities Revealed* products can be found on their web-site;[1] but during the visit we were privileged to have Seppe show us examples from the 'Historic', 'Building Class', 'Land Use' and 'Building Height' products and to have their key features explained.

For the historic product the aerial imagery has been sourced from archives of RAF, Luftwaffe and USAF aerial survey film taken between 1939 and 1952 and is used by clients in many ways. One example would be to see if new building developments are at risk from unpleasant legacies such as contamination from previous chemical works or even from unexploded bombs. The historic images can be viewed superimposed onto modern data using software supplied with the product.

Customers often need answers, not just data, to help with their decisions; the building class and land usage products are examples of how this can be provided by means of imagery processed to show the age and type of building structure and the way in which land is used. The imagery is colour coded to show seven age bands, seventeen structure types and 52 categories of land usage.

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[1] *www.citiesrevealed.com*

LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) surveys are used to provide the 'Building Heights' data base which can be viewed as a colour coded image showing the height of the ground above sea level and with building heights indicated to an accuracy of ±0.5m. This data has many uses for planning such as predicting the appearance of a skyline in a proposed development.

In this largely paper-free environment we were seeing examples of the *Cities Revealed* brands from a projector connected to a laptop; and now Chris Going took over the controls. Chris is a leading authority on all matters concerned with historic archives of reconnaissance photographs from the Second World War and cold war period and his presentation was informative and enjoyable. Millions of aerial photographs were taken during the period and inevitably many have been lost or destroyed. Many have, however, survived and can be found in archives such as The Aerial Reconnaissance Archives (TARA), at Keele University.[2] We looked at examples of photographs of an area surrounding a railway bridge in Germany which was bombed on an almost daily basis by the Allies and were shown how it is possible to see, amongst about 2,500 craters, the smaller ones made by bombs which did not explode. This information is still being used today to locate unexploded bombs in areas of new building development. We also saw a mosaic of reconnaissance frames taken on D-Day beaches with amazing clarity such that individual soldiers can be seen on the beach. The D-Day aerial reconnaissance is a subject that Chris has researched in great detail and his work in this area is recorded in an excellent book [3] which he co-authored with Geo-Information Group colleague and Managing Director Alun Jones.

This was a most interesting and enjoyable visit, providing us with an insight into the world of aerial photography both past and present. Our thanks are due to Seppe and to Chris for giving up their valuable time for us and for their warm and friendly hospitality.

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[2] *www.evidenceincamera.co.uk/who.htm*

[3] Chris Going, Alun Jones, *D-Day: the lost evidence (above the battle)*, Crecy Publishing, 2004, ISBN 0-85979-097-5.