



Sheetlines

The journal of
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps

“How and where”

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Sheetlines, 100 (August 2014), pp47-51

Stable URL:

<http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue100page47.pdf>

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Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
www.CharlesCloseSociety.org

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.

How and where

Roger Hellyer

On 9 May 1888, a letter was sent from the Ordnance Survey in Southampton to their Dublin office:

I send you one copy of a Pamphlet which contains general information respecting characteristics and character of writing &c, used on the O. Survey Plans.

Should you consider that more copies would be of service to you, they can be obtained by application to O. Maps.

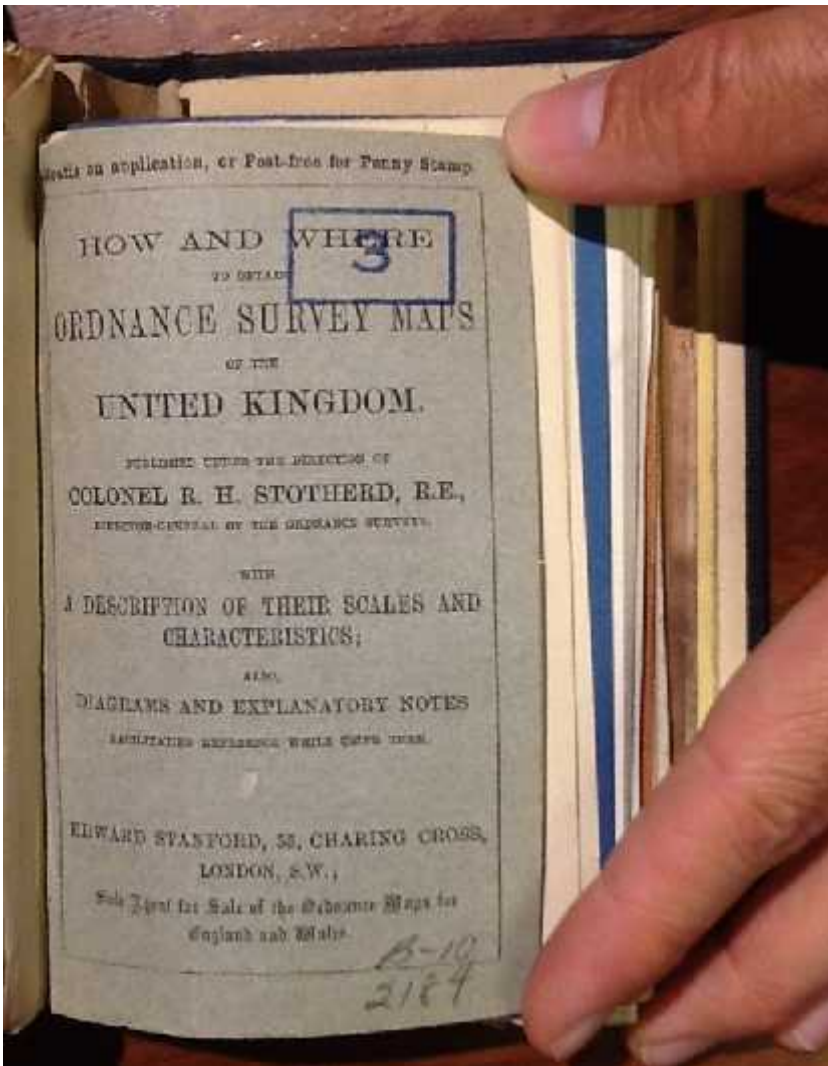
It was signed by G Herb Bolland, Lieut-Colonel, RE. The letter accompanied a copy of the first of a succession of Descriptions booklets, the descendants of which were to become so popular between the world wars thanks in large measure to the artwork of Ellis Martin and Arthur Palmer. However, before the first world war the booklet was clothed in the typically austere buff paper wrappers of a publication of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, foolscap in size, with the unappealing title *Ordnance Survey maps of the United Kingdom. A description of their scales, characteristics, and character of writing; also diagrams & explanatory notes to facilitate reference whilst using them. Colonel Sir C.W. Wilson, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., R.E., Director-General of the Ordnance Surveys.*

The booklet contained a wealth of detail intended to assist the user to find the map best suited to his needs. Following a list of agents and postal rates were remarks giving details of all the map series in print, from the one-inch to the 1:500 Town Plans, and their associated indexes. The remainder concentrated almost completely on County Series mapping – the abbreviations used, details of how areas were computed with supporting tables, illustrations of lettering styles and other symbols. The booklet concluded with a section *Character of writing for Ordnance Survey plans*. This was a revised version of an internal Ordnance Survey paper which had probably first been issued as OS 404 to Survey staff in November 1881.¹ The Description booklet was reprinted a dozen or so times before the first world war, the most significant development being that by 1897 the *Character of writing* section had been dropped and replaced with extracts of current mapping. This change required a revised title to the booklet, but otherwise there were only minor alterations to keep it up to date until it was completely redesigned for the interwar editions.²

This tale might be considered scarcely worth the telling were it not that the 1888 Description, while bearing all the hallmarks of being the first edition, did in fact have a predecessor. This was in the form of a tiny booklet, no more than six centimetres tall and four wide, 24 pages in total, in a grey wrapper. The booklet came with not one, but two complex titles, each rivalling in verbosity that of the 1888 Description. On the title page we find *How and where: or, a description of the maps produced by the Ordnance Survey of the United Kingdom; their scales*

¹ See the appendix for further details.

² A union list of copies of each of the known editions may be found on the CCS website at www.charlesclosesociety.org/descriptions



and characteristics; with directions for obtaining them, and diagrams and explanatory notes facilitating reference while using them. Colonel R.H. Stotherd, R.E., Director-General of the Ordnance Surveys. I will not bore the reader by quoting also the rather more fluent wording of the title on the cover to the booklet, which is illustrated in figure 1 (left). While the wording may be different, the detailed summary offered of the contents is much the same in each version. What differs in emphasis is the identification of the author – from the title page it might be construed that Director General Stotherd himself was responsible, while the cover version confirms the much more probable scenario, that

he directed members of Ordnance Survey staff to do the work.

Also worthy of note is the publisher – the Ordnance Survey's agent and independent publisher Edward Stanford. It was an unfortunate omission that he did not provide a publication date for *How and Where*, nor are there any print codes to guide us, so we must seek clues for this detail elsewhere. The most obvious is Stotherd's period of tenure as Director General which was from 1883 to 1886. Narrowing the range further is Stanford's description of his firm in the imprint as the Ordnance Survey's *sole* agent for sale of Ordnance maps for England and Wales, an attribution the company had achieved by the beginning of 1885. A detailed examination of the content against the publication dates of County Series maps might reduce the date range even further. But how is it that Stanford was chosen as publisher in preference to the Stationery Office or the Ordnance Survey itself? Does this collaboration with a third agency suggest that the project was experimental with little or no official authorisation? Or was this genuinely a Stanford initiative, and somehow he persuaded the Director General of the Ordnance Survey to associate his name and his office with it? Whatever the reason, Stanford ensured that the booklet would be a strong advertisement for his own business: the inside surfaces of the cover were packed with the titles of his products, and the introductory page of text was written to inform readers of the

available for each scale. The booklet concludes with a section on Characteristics and Symbols. These all reappeared, somewhat revised, in the 1888 text.

Also revealing is the section about the one-inch maps on offer to the public. In its description of the *New Series* (italic upper case heading) of England and Wales, *How and Where* states that “The new series (N.B. lower case) is in course of publication. Sheets Nos. 1 to 73, exhibiting the four northern counties and the Isle of Man, with the northern parts of Yorkshire and Lancashire, are now on sale.” The reference in the *Old Series* section corroborates this view, with “All the counties except the four northern counties and northern halves of Yorkshire and Lancashire have been completed on the old series (N.B. lower case), and published”. The implication that sheets 91 to 110 of the Old Series were in fact New Series publications is probably explained by a decision that there was no need to confuse the public with the nicety that, though conceived as Old Series, their sheet numbers had by the mid-1880s been replaced by their New Series equivalents. The much more concise section in the 1888 Description explaining the variants of the one-inch map tells us that “In England (sorry Wales!) there are two series, known as the Old Series and the New Series” (now upper case, those who incline to the expression First Series please note). It continues with a description of sheet sizes, depiction of hills, and sheet prices. All mention of sheet numbers is dropped.

In spite of its diminutive proportions, it is clear that there are more textual descriptive sections in *How and Where* than in the 1888 Description. But there are instances of identical wording. For instance, in the *How and Where* Characteristics and Symbols section, we find “In order that reference to the Maps published by the Ordnance Survey Department may be made more easy and intelligible, boundaries are marked by clearly defined strokes and dots; and territorial demarcations by characteristic styles of writing for the names, which render them plainly distinguishable.” This is copied word for word in the 1888 Description, save only for the alteration of the word Maps to Plans, a point of distinction that runs throughout. Lastly, to complete the picture, it must be recorded that there were two important sections new to the 1888 Description that were not in *How and Where*. One was the *Character of writing for Ordnance Survey plans*, the other a list of abbreviations to be found on County Series mapping, which would occupy two full pages of the 1888 publication.

Finally I would draw the reader’s attention to the heading on the *How and Where* front cover “Gratis on application, or Post-free for Penny Stamp”. In spite of Stanford’s giving the booklet away, this writer knows of only three surviving copies. These are held by one of our members, whom I thank for permission to illustrate figure 2, by the Shropshire Archives,³ and lastly by that most venerable of institutions, the New York Public Library,⁴ the cover of whose copy is reproduced in figure 1.

³ Catalogue number 4756/1/41.

⁴ Catalogue number B-10 2184.

Appendix

OS 404 Character of writing for Ordnance Survey plans

This booklet was apparently first made available to Ordnance Survey staff in November 1881.⁵ In its four foolscap pages, bound in a flimsy blue paper cover, it comprised a comprehensive list of features to be found on County Series mapping at the six-inch and 1:2500 scales and on the 1:500 Town Plans, from Alleys and Courts to Workhouses, detailing in each case which style of lettering was to be used for names at each of the different scales. These were identified as Egyptian, Open Egyptian, Roman, Open Roman, Italian, Open Italian, mostly capitals, as well as Roman Print, Ornamental, Stump, with further options that the lettering could be open, shaded, open shaded, sloped or thin. Antiquities were to be in Egyptian Capitals when Roman, Old English when Druidical or Saxon, German Text when Norman or later.

As mentioned earlier, *Character of writing for Ordnance Survey plans* entered the public domain when it formed the final section of the 1888 Description. Though still dated November 1881, it had been revised and reformatted to include a column showing writing used at the one-inch scale. New entries were added such as Canals Dismantled or Abandoned, Railway Junctions that are *not stations* (their italics) and Shipbuilding Yards. Others, such as Latrines, are deleted. It made further appearances in the 1890 reprint of the Description, and in the only known Ordnance Survey county catalogue, of Nottinghamshire, in 1888.⁶ In its internal OS 404 format, two later editions are recorded, revised to November 1891,⁷ and June 1914,⁸ this last classified For Office Use Only. Both were extended by incorporating some of the sections already to be found in the Description booklet.



Members on a recent visit to the Bodleian Library Book Storage Facility in Swindon pause briefly whilst browsing in the collection of over a million maps.

⁵ The only recorded copy is held by the National Library of Scotland at Map X3.234.

⁶ *Ordnance Survey of England. County catalogue and reference book. Nottinghamshire. Abstract of areas of Civil Parishes, with the Poor Law Unions and Parliamentary Divisions to which they belong; and a description of the scales, characteristics, and character of writing used in the preparation of the plans of the Ordnance Survey.* Colonel Sir C.W. Wilson, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., R.E., Director-General of the Ordnance Surveys, London: HMSO, 1888 (Publications issued, November 1888). The only recorded copies are held by the British Library at Maps 5.bb.5, and Trinity College Dublin.

⁷ The only recorded copy is in a private collection.

⁸ The only recorded copy is held by the National Library of Scotland at Map X3.234.