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“What makes a good society?”

John Fowler

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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.

What makes a good society?

John Fowler

I subscribe to twelve collectors' societies, covering my interests in maps, railways, London, publishing and the Post Office. I have served as treasurer with two and journal editor for eight years with one, so I feel I have some experience of what members can expect from their subscription.

What should we expect from our (often paltry) subscriptions? In my view, a regular journal, with articles covering a wide range of interests and suitable for both specialists and general collectors, is a prerequisite, and many people subscribe solely for this benefit. Nowadays, few societies (but not few enough) manage without a website, and those which allow members to raise queries and pass on information are far more useful than the ones which are merely to field applications for membership. If they also include links to articles previously published by the society, they are even more of a benefit, and provide an incentive to others to join.

Meetings held fairly frequently in varied locations, particularly weekend ones which offer a range of talks or activities (such as visits to local sites or organisations with a particular relevance), are particularly welcomed by those wishing to share their interest with like-minded individuals. If the society publishes monographs, thus forming an outlet for members' research in permanent and publicly available form, they are providing a service for future readers and researchers. Some societies are able to provide such publications free to members, but economics usually dictate that there is a special reduced rate for these.

What should a society expect from its members? A good society will welcome contributions of information either as news or articles for its journal, and it is reasonable to expect members to respond to such requests. It is a regrettable fact that a high percentage of members of any society are happy to receive all the benefits without lifting a finger to assist in any way with the running of the group, by putting their names forward for necessary society offices or sending in articles. As a society can only be as good as its members allow it to be, some simply have to fold because there are no replacements for the often elderly officers.

Where does the Charles Close Society rank in my experience of societies large and small? It seems to me that it ticks all the boxes for a good society. Other thriving societies which tick almost all include the London Topographic Society (for its fine publications in particular), the Railway Philatelic Group (an excellent magazine), the Penguin Collectors Society (more good publications) and the Forces Postal History Society (a well organised website with a popular queries and responses section). All these societies have one thing in common – their membership increases each year, and it's easy to see why.

I congratulate the Society and *Sheetlines* on passing the hundredth milestone and only regret that I won't be around to see the two-hundredth.