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“London area AD map”

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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.



LONDON AREA.

A. D. MAP.

SCALE: ONE INCH TO A MILE

London area AD: a mystery map

Gerry Zierler

At Christmas I treated myself to just one book-fair, and noticed a large folded map with this enticing cover title printed on marbled paper. The seller knew nothing about it, and the title meant nothing to me,

but lifting a corner I saw that its base was Third edition OS one-inch mapping. I'm glad to say a deal was struck on my second stroll past, and how intriguing this purchase has turned out to be.

It's a huge, dissected, 7ft square uncoloured map of greater London and more, with an extension into part of south-eastern Essex. Obviously a composite of 4/5 sheets, the cover title is printed twice along the top, with a repeated imprint at the bottom: *Ordnance Survey, September, 1917*. The Essex addition is part of a coloured sheet dated 1908.

So far, not much mystery apart from the title, but the intrigue starts with the 133 neatly annotated placenames in manuscript. These are throughout most of the area but noticeably in a broad circle around the metropolis, roughly where M25 was to go decades later. Each name labels a symbol, also in black, which is one of: (a) a single dot; (b) a small open circle; or a pair of dots joined by a straight line, of differing lengths and directions. There is no legend, so what do they and the titular 'A.D.' mean?

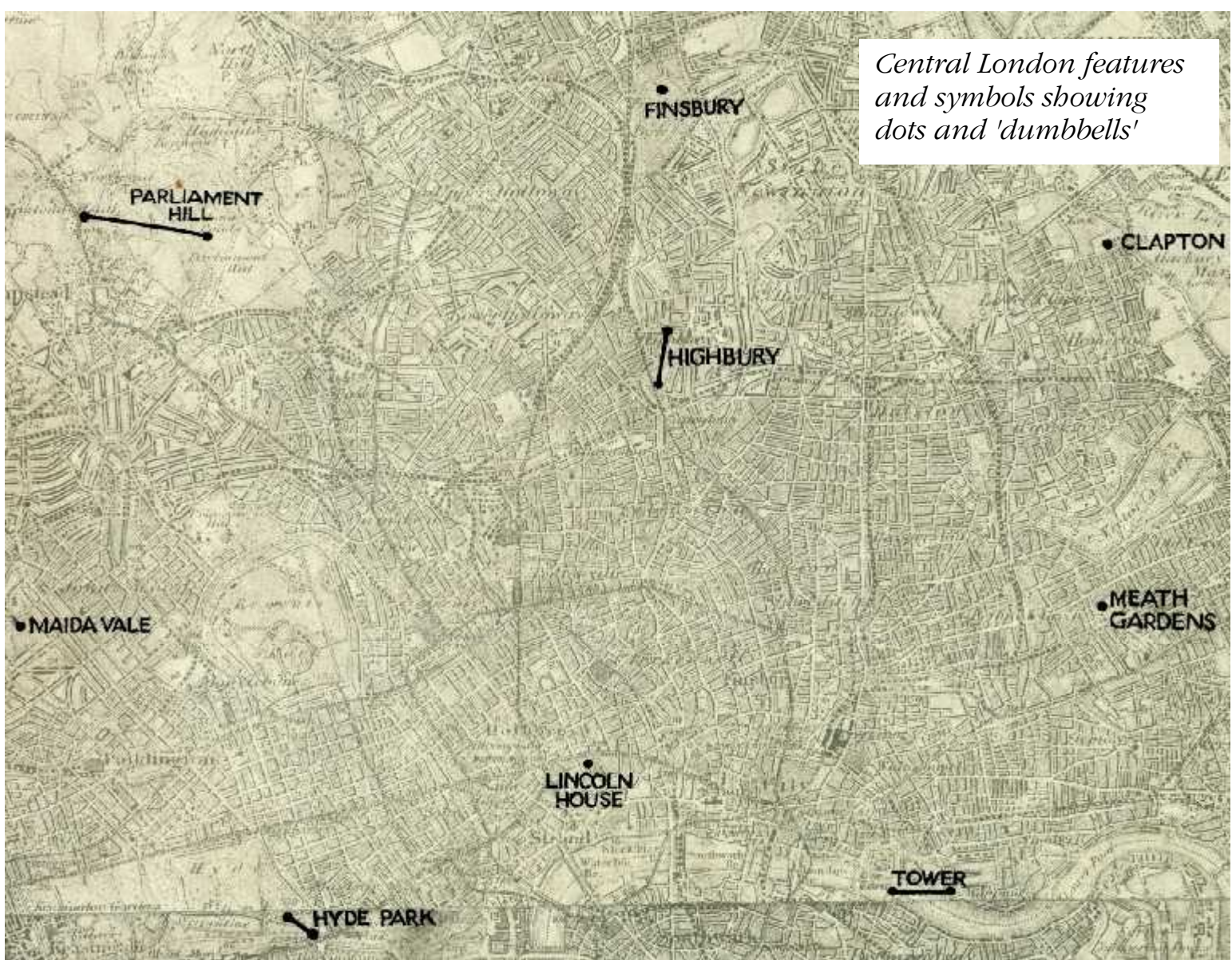
First impressions from the main base map date was that this was late World War One material, though not apparently GSGS. However, the cover (*above*) has a pencilled inscription beneath an illegible signature: *Capt P.C/T.) Horse Guards, London SW.1*. The captain's organisation's initials have defeated us so far, but below them in a different hand is: *1/7/17*, a date earlier than the OS imprint!

Analysis of the symbols of two dots linked by lines (I'll refer to them as 'dumbbells') shows an interesting preponderance of certain directions: about half were aligned roughly east-west to SE-NW. The lengths are typically up to half a mile, although half a dozen were a mile or longer. As an example, one dumbbell of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile is on my home patch and linked two high spots on Parliament Hill Fields, though not the highest locally. They could not have represented anything continuous on the ground, and were probably not even line-of-sight at that time (*see extract opposite*).

What of the other symbols? If indeed military, could the open circles be searchlights? Analysis showed that all bar one of the open-circle symbols are in Essex, and all ten of the symbols in the Essex extension to the map were indeed open circles. Maybe the single dots were guns. So, in perhaps the likeliest place to defend London from raiders from the east, just searchlights and no guns? Unlikely.

Encouraged by suggestions and separate bits of information from CCS members and several other cartographic experts, I decided to research whether there was a flying connection to the strange symbology. Was it chance that most

Central London features and symbols showing dots and 'dumbbells'



dumbbells were at right-angles to prevailing winds for example? But why were all the airfields and other military establishments there at the time not annotated at all? RAF Museum Hendon's head of archives Peter Elliott produced for comparison their large and fascinating contemporary (Bartholomew's) map of London, annotated with gun emplacements, their control lines and searchlights.

Although of just inner London this undated map showed some corroboration of my map's symbols – but differences too, so were these just coincidences? For example, the centre of Tower Bridge (!) and edge of London Docks showed the same (dumbbell) line on both maps, between a three-inch gun emplacement and a searchlight (a large yellow blob on his). Was there really a gun emplacement on the middle of that bridge? His map showed another 'sub-control station' with three-inch guns on Hackney Marshes, where mine showed a single dot named Clapton. The gun emplacement shown as 'Parliament Hill' was however nowhere near that toponym's dumbbell, however.

Rob Wheeler had meanwhile found useful notes on a remarkable man, Major General Edward 'Flash' Ashmore, who had trained as a pilot with the RFC, and recalled from Ypres had created the Metropolitan Observation Service. This was to coordinate effort in the London Air Defence Area, soon extended out to Essex. So perhaps 'A.D.' is at last explained? Observers were drawn from the police service, which may explain too why the map is not overtly military (Ashmore later went on to organise all the UK's air defences, which led to the founding of the Royal Observer Corps, but that's another story).

In May 1917, the Zeppelin airship bombing raids had given way to fixed-wing Gotha bombers, and their raids had been sporadic but successful. Moral outrage was expressed after more than 20 bombers attacked London, largely unopposed, in June 1917. 'Flash' took command of the LADA later in July 1917: the same month as the pencilled date on the map cover.

Gothas gave way later in 1917 to the three-times larger Staaken bombers. One big raid had come from the east, but had overflowed Essex, wheeled over Hendon (ironically, where I was reading this history), and attacked London from the northwest. So maybe that's why there was such a predominance of dumbbells to the north, west, and south. But what did dumbbells represent?

The RAF Museum library had a copy of Ashmore's own 1929 book, *Air Defence*,¹ a recommended read. This book mentions that after a night raid there was established a 'balloon apron barrage' linked by cables with wires hanging down. The frontispiece has a grainy aerial photograph (*see opposite*) of such an array: three balloons in a straight line, linked together. Could this be a 'dumbbell' on the map?

This book also explains that information on aircraft sightings was phoned through to 26 sub-controls (a term also used in the legend of the RAF Museum map) which then phoned their plotted positions through to... Horse Guards, the world's first air-situation operations room, manned by ten plotters. There's an evocative drawing of this room (*see opposite*), in another excellent book, *Attack Warning Red* by Derek Wood.²

So, it would seem that this 'mystery map' is possibly a one-off, and that its origin although datelined Horse Guards is in fact from the police service, explaining its outwardly 'civvy' appearance. We need some more research on the symbology but almost certainly these represent a mixture of balloons, guns and searchlights, possibly also sound 'ranging' stations of some sort.

I am grateful to those who have helped so far with this fascinating conundrum. All further suggestions are very welcome!



left: evidence of a 1917 air raid on a plaque in St John's Lane, Clerkenwell

opposite top and bottom right: London area map and sketch of the operations room at Horse Guards, from Derek Wood's Attack Warning Red

opposite bottom left: photograph of balloon apron barrage from Ashmore's Air Defence

¹ EB Ashmore, *Air Defence*, London: Longman, Green & Co, 1929.

² Derek Wood, *Attack Warning Red: history of the Royal Observer Corps*, Macdonald & Jane's, 1976.

