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“Kerry musings”

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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.

Kerry musings

David Archer

Ask me to rank my favourite subjects whilst a student (the current term for anyone in education aged 5 to 21), and I would probably choose Economics, then Biology (especially the rude bits) and Economic History. The last, despite the annoying way it was written in those days, and might still be. A few events with dates would be given, then some about 75 years later, followed by a few about 30 years before this, and then the author would say, 'during this period, output increased', or whatever. Said in such a way that you had no idea whether the whole 75 year period or the final 30 year era was meant. Annoyingly vague, but a useful technique when writing essays if, like me, you cannot remember dates.

I have had a similar feeling when reading accounts of the early history of the Ordnance Survey. Things are not nailed down but left floating in the air. And then in the twentieth century, word meanings change. For example, when was the Ordnance Survey founded? The debate continues. The OS voted for 1791, so that they could cash in on a bi-centenary as soon as possible in 1991, and not have to wait until the first map they were associated with was 200 years old, ten years later. Here we have one of the main things that upsets me, the use of the two words Ordnance Survey before the word founded. The OS was never founded, not as the Charles Close Society was; it emerged, developed, as did early life in the swamp, with an embryonic existence long before a name appeared. And in my book, when a name did appear, it was the Ordnance survey, one capital letter. The survey carried out by the Ordnance, short for the Board of Ordnance, short for the little mentioned Honourable Board of Ordnance. During this early period, only two words ever appeared before 'survey', trigonometrical and topographic. Ordnance came later. I know that I will be sticking my neck out for the rest of this piece, but please remember it is a musing, I am pondering, not writing a scholarly article,¹ merely giving the scholars something to correct, or hopefully dispute (meaning less wrong) in the next issue.

It can be argued that the foundation of the OS had already occurred by 1791, when the staff of the Drawing Room at the Tower included a Chief Draftsman, a Chief Surveying Draftsman and a survey party, to which were added Ramsden's theodolite, Mudge, more men and eventually Colby. If this group formed a recognised unit, did it have a name? Dalby and Richard Oliver both refer to 'the service', and if anyone spoke of 'the survey', it could mean one of several, a trigonometrical or several topographical surveys, all being undertaken by the Ordnance. I noted above that mention of the 'Ordnance' is short for the Board of Ordnance, but no historian of the OS has confirmed this in writing, and just as our accountant always refers to the Revenue, it is assumed we know what is meant.

Richard is not over keen on the 1791 foundation date, and suggests 'the direct

¹ So no bibliography or references, and certainly no footnotes of any sort.

history of the Ordnance Survey is *best* traced to the year 1717' (my italics). Without a positive act of foundation, why not use 1717? I prefer 1805 as being the take-off moment, not a foundation date: 'As well as being the first maps produced wholly using the Ordnance's own resources, the Essex sheets also demonstrated a particular 'Ordnance style'.² Suggesting that if a distinctive style only appeared in 1805, including anything earlier, ie Mudge, is a fudge. No, the name Ordnance Survey, as opposed to the task Ordnance survey, was built, starting with the phrase 'the Ordnance map', which was quickly adopted for the early maps, including the Mudge, and remained in use throughout the nineteenth century and well into the next.

'The Ordnance map' was not a shorthand for Ordnance Survey maps, but a name for the maps produced by the small unit within the Board of Ordnance. Writing of this period, authors of the time or modern commentators all use the term, as did the general public, despite, in later years, the Board of Ordnance having been abolished a good while previously. Ignoring bad publicity at various times, government backed 'Ordnance maps' implied quality and accuracy, and, it was believed, would eventually show the whole country to the same high standard. In evidence to the 1892 Dorington Committee, Edward Stanford believed the term 'Ordnance map' was an indication of quality which should be protected by refusing use of the term 'reduced Ordnance map' (the same but smaller) to commercial publishers, whilst allowing 'reduced from the Ordnance map' (modified). And the name persisted. In literature of the 1920s and 30s, one still meets characters 'consulting the ordnance map'. Our society's namesake used it in the title, dedication and text of *The map of England or about England with an ordnance map*, published in 1932.

When we moved to Kerry in 1982, an elderly neighbour told us that her son-in-law worked in the ordnance office in town, "Do you mean the Ordnance Survey?", "Yes". It therefore follows that for possibly the greater part of the nineteenth century, one would have been said to collect Ordnance maps, rather than Ordnance Survey maps. Certainly not OS maps.

When did the maps become Ordnance Survey maps and why? Did the national mapping organisation get fed up of everyone calling their products after a body that had been abolished? As the initial survey finished, were there discussions about corporate identity, with the realisation that 'the Ordnance Survey', with a very capital 'S' could now be taken to mean an organisation, rather than a task? Whatever prompted events, the series of descriptive booklets that started to appear from 1888, led the way by having 'Ordnance Survey maps' or similar, in their titles. I have never been told to consult *the* Ordnance Survey map, only *an* Ordnance Survey map. 'The Ordnance map' is now a term of the past.

² Richard Oliver, *The Ordnance Survey in the nineteenth century: Maps, money and the growth of government*. 2014. I have used this magnificent work extensively for this piece, which Richard has kindly read, corrected and does not necessarily agree with. Comments on Richard's writings are observations, not criticisms. An interested reader should be able to find the other sources. If not, please let me know.

If ‘the Ordnance survey’ was a task that became an organisation, how was the map making body referred to before Ordnance Survey became the norm? Until it was abolished in 1855, the Board of Ordnance had responsibility for conducting the surveys in various parts of the realm, with the actual work being undertaken by a small, but expanding body of men who get little credit, let alone a name, as everything appears to be done in the name of the Ordnance. A lack of clarity sometimes emerges as to whether the larger or smaller unit is referred to: when Richard writes ‘the Ordnance ordered Colby’, is this the opposite of Close’s ‘Colby laid down that the Ordnance should’? Writing in 1855, Sir Henry James favours ‘the Ordnance’ as the name of the body that got things done, even if it did not do them itself: ‘the Ordnance, ... were directed [by the Treasury] to lay down and draw the counties of’ and ‘the Ordnance has had to resurvey large districts’. Surely the Treasury would never lower itself to communicate directly with the survey chappies? So how about the Ordnance were directed to see that counties were drawn, and had to see that large districts were resurveyed? The work being undertaken by the smaller nameless unit.

Therefore, if until after mid-century, *responsibility* for producing the maps was with a unit known as ‘the Ordnance’, not the Ordnance Survey, what, I repeat, was the smaller map making unit called before supervision of the Ordnance survey was transferred to the War Office in 1855? Richard refers to the Drawing Room as an organisation, and soon the Map Office at the Tower takes over. We know that the September 1841 fire in the Tower damaged the Map Office which moved to Southampton in 1842. The name of the accommodation, as appears on letter headings? Yes, but also of the unit it housed, which undertook the surveys and published maps? Probably not, as The Ordnance Map Office, and Southampton Map Office appear in the literature, as well as Ordnance Survey Office followed by various town names. That Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton or Dublin is dominant on engraved maps, implies a location or address.

Elusive it might be, but surely the cheery band who went forth with their little theodolites, chains and field books had an umbrella name to keep them dry? The Department appears quite often, but is it short for something or similar to one of us referring to the office? An Ordnance Department crops up, with ‘the Ordnance Office’ used in Colby’s time, and mentioned by Stanford as late as 1892. My money goes on the progression from ‘The Officers of the Survey Department’, noted in *The Times* in November 1841, and by Palmer in 1873, to the ‘the Ordnance Survey Department’, the term favoured almost exclusively by the Dorington Report. The Ordnance Survey Department sounds convincing, and although I have never heard anyone refer to the modern OS as ‘the Survey’, this was a favoured term at one time, especially by those who worked for it later in our period, with Close using it all the time in his chapter 2. The Ordnance Survey Department’s work was the Ordnance survey?

It would be useful to have an agreed term for the period before 1855, so why not use ‘the Survey’, following John Andrews’ usage: ‘A capital ‘S’ for ‘Survey’ implies a reference to the Ordnance Survey department; ‘survey’ in lower case

refers either to some other survey or to the actual operation of surveying'. Note: Survey would not be short for Ordnance Survey.

I am always uncomfortable when someone uses Ordnance Survey, the organisation, for activities much before 1855. It is akin to the Mormons retrospectively baptising whole family trees of new members. To me, it is wrong, the term was virtually never used and is a convenience for historians of the OS in the absence of a known name for the goings on during this period. Brian Harley used 'Ordnance Survey' all the time, usually making sense if one reads 'Ordnance survey' in the right places, but frequently he baptises unsuspecting groups. In his book but not elsewhere, Richard Oliver appears reluctant to follow, favouring 'the Ordnance' until the mid-1850s.

The change from task to organisation was gradual, but the name change from Ordnance survey to Ordnance Survey was given impetus by events. Of the early 1840s Richard writes 'to organisations such as the Ordnance Survey' (premature baptism?) and 'At the same time the Ordnance Survey had an increasing identity by that name, rather than being referred to by misleading or inexact euphemisms, notably 'the Trigonometrical Survey'. After the demise of the Board of Ordnance, the beast that was transferred between different departmental parents was always known as the Ordnance Survey, whether it needed a capital S or not. By the time I was born, the initial Ordnance survey as a task to be completed was long finished, and had been revised several times, so that I have only ever known the Ordnance Survey to mean an organisation producing Ordnance Survey maps. In both instances, Ordnance Survey can be replaced by OS.

Which brings us to this week's puzzle, names of OS headquarters. The Ordnance Survey of England and Wales had The Tower and London Road, the Ordnance Survey of Ireland had Mountjoy, the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland has Colby House, what did the Ordnance Survey of Scotland have?

Two clues: 1. John Andrews might help you. 2. The first known coupling of the words Ordnance and Survey appear in the heading of Old Series Sheet 10, dated 1810: *Ordnance Survey of the Isle of Wight and Part of Hampshire*, which of course never had a headquarters as such.

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