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“Kerry musings”

David Archer

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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

“Have you got any swaps?”, a question most of us have not been asked since childhood. But for those who collect Ordnance Survey maps, it should be forever in the air. For various reasons, most collectors have maps they do not particularly wish to keep, and so often they sit in a box, of no use to the owner and separated from someone who would like them. I am sure that in the past, the map market at the AGM has been advertised as being for those who wish to buy, sell and swap maps. But very little swapping takes place. Maybe we should add a note to the details of other meetings : Bring your swaps with you. But we don't. As early as the second issue of *Sheetlines*, Campbell Kennedy tried to encourage us by mentioning a few surplus maps and what he was looking for. Over the years, others have tried the same thing, but it has never become established as a regular fixture at the back of the magazine.

Maps become swaps for two reasons, the first being that they are unwanted. They might be duplicates, where a map already held has been bought in error, or a better copy acquired, or where variants of a map or cover have been collected and are no longer of interest. They might be purchases that could not be passed by, even if unwanted for the collection. Unsolicited gifts and collection weedings can also end up as swaps. The second reason maps become swaps is because the owner desires other maps more than those held, and the second collector will not sell, only exchange. A little reluctantly, a deal is done. Surely this is all part of collecting : I want, how do I get it? In the nicest possible way, of course.

When we were young and collected cards of various sorts, my memory is that we knew some cards came up frequently, and others less often, but the basis of exchange was always one for one. We never demanded extra for a card which Brook Bond printed in limited numbers in order that more packets of tea were purchased in the search for them.

In such an area of collecting, with no ‘structure’, swapping is easy and painless, as one does not have to worry about parting with mega rare items; it might cross our minds, but we do not worry because nobody knows what they are. I might have mentioned that at one time, I had a contact in America who collected both oil company maps and credit cards. So did I, and we swapped these one for one. It did not matter if he sent me exceedingly common 1960's American VISA cards, I did not know, whilst the maps I sent him were of equal value in my mind; even today, I only know one British collector of oil company maps who can reel off a list of the scarce and rare items. I most certainly cannot, but they do exist, or are rumoured to.

Again, when telephone cards first appeared, they were of interest as I am fascinated by the variety of designs one can get on such a small area. I amassed hundreds of standard British Telecom green cards and when we went on holiday to France, took a bundle. As over here, one can find collectors' shops, and I was able to swap my cards for some French telephone cards, with minimal French spoken. All a bit primitive, and rightly so. Ah, bring back the barter economy,

two dozen eggs for a pound of butter, or fives Pops for fifteen Seventh Series (depending on which sheets). Surely we should indulge in more swapping of maps as it is both useful and enjoyable. If you swap, you get rid of stuff which has been annoying you and cluttering the place for far too long. You do not want it, and have taken leave of it as part of your collection. So it would be wonderful if someone were to take it off your hands, and if in return they gave you something you want, things are looking up, especially as you have not spent a penny, given that we never remember what we paid for clutter. A few sought after maps replace clutter, with wallet intact.

So, off-we-go-a-swapping, mindful that any swap must be fair to both sides. Once two parties desire something the other owns, negotiations can commence. As when children, the easiest path to follow is one for one, which is quite possible with maps from large series such as the 1:50,000, where vast swathes of sheets are fairly common and one can freely swap one for one in the same condition. Similarly for the Seventh Series in England and Wales, where there are not that many less common sheets to be careful of. Exchange, expand the collection and enjoy it. The same goes for anything about which little is known by collectors in general, with no common or scarce items being common knowledge. Unlike most series, I have never kept records of the frequency with which pre-1923 Irish one-inch maps appear, and do not know the less common sheets, so could happily swap one for one. They all look the same to me.

Once we venture into the realm of less common, scarce and rare maps, things become trickier and both sides need to be alert, as things can get complicated. Although knowing market prices can help, they are often poor indicators of elusiveness. Someone might have been after a less common, medium price map for years and never found one, so might be willing to offer a scarce map selling at a higher price. In my experience, a lot of less common maps fetch very high prices as they have, in addition an attractive cover, whilst many exceptionally rare maps will only find a buyer if cheap, because they are rather dull maps in standard covers. When we pull away from the more easily found maps in any series, we drop the one for one exchanges. In the Popular Edition, Sheet 34 *Mouth of the Humber* would only merit parity with a few other scarce sheets, and one would usually have to offer several less common examples from the same series to win it.

But at the top end, for those maps which are both truly rare, and sought-after, I suggest that parity would again reign. Maps which the lucky few will only ever have a single chance of obtaining must be swapped with the same. I repeat, a scarce and sought-after map should always be swapped, not sold. The sort of price they fetch is usually known, but try going out with a bundle of £50 notes to buy one. Impossible. This is why long established, white haired collectors have a wants list; some maps just do not appear. If someone badly wants your rare map, they will try to find something of equal interest to swap, which can only be beneficial to you. Sell your really rare map and you lose a bargaining tool for something you are desperate for. Suggesting a swap will often succeed where an exceedingly favourable financial offer would fail.

Forget the very rare maps, most of us do not have any, let alone several. Nor do some members have many maps to swap, so should they consider 'buy to swap' as a tactic? Yes, I would answer, you need to get swaps from somewhere. If, when you are out and about, you come across a very desirable map and the price is reasonable, my advice is to buy it, whether you want it or not, finances permitting. Should you not want it for any reason, it will give you a good swap, or could be a useful 'thank you', where money would be rejected. This holds for bright clean maps in any series, but does mean that you need to keep an eye on prices, and better still, get a feel for the scarce maps in any series or group.

Wherever the maps come from, the risk is that you will seldom find anyone who both has what you want and is willing to swap. So the extra maps mount up and you take one of two paths, either you have a stall at the AGM and start selling rather than swapping, or you take the swaps into your collection. I knew someone who collected early Giles annuals, some of which fetch a high price. He would buy second copies to swap if he came across them cheaply, and eventually realised that he had so many that he might as well try to put a second set together, without having completed the first. I have a vague memory of the same thing having happened with OS map covers, where a set of the Third Edition in any cover was being built, with swaps also purchased. After a few years, it was realised that the collector was well on the way to having both a set in white covers and another in decorative covers. The decision was taken to collect both, and the swaps held diminished.

Collecting is either in you or isn't, and it is in me. And if one is not careful, it will lead to the pursuit of minutiae. Bring home a second copy of something as a swap, compare it to that held, spot a small difference and you are hooked. At one time I had about eight copies of the pre-war Oban cover, all slightly different.

As a mapseller, I like to swap if at all possible. It gets away from the sordidness of having to consider prices, and luckily, most customers who bring maps to swap say they expect, nay want, to go away with fewer items, although arriving with a handful of choice tourist maps can mean leaving with armfuls of more modern items. A lot of people are uneasy with the commercial process; they dislike selling, having to consider an offer in order to sell. They much prefer to swap. When most collectors swap to fill gaps, they seek a single copy of each sheet, whereas with a business, one holds multiple copies, and must take numbers held into consideration when swapping. I am far more likely to swap a scarce map for standard series sheets if I have several of the former in stock. Scarce, but locally abundant in Kerry.

I have seldom refused to swap, and generally, useful stock has been acquired, which saves having to find it, whilst the reduction of handling, cataloguing and packing means one can be generous when swapping with visitors who offload unwanted material and go home with additions to their collections. Sometimes one is offered something, OS maps, non-OS maps, an atlas, or whatever, and one does not really think it will sell, but would like to have it around for a while. In this case, a swap often works well, especially if as often happens, the owner wishes to take maps from a standard series, of which we have duplicates. A

situation where the customer is happy, and I can own and study the item whilst not missing the maps that have gone.

Readers muse back:

In Kerry musings (*Sheetlines* 102), David Archer challenges the use of the title Ordnance Survey to describe the organisation that produced Ordnance maps, as it existed before 1855. True enough, Portlock's Memoir describes this organisation as 'the survey', and published references before 1855 usually refer to 'the trigonometrical survey'. It is also interesting that, in 1858, whereas Col Henry James is described as Superintendent of the Ordnance Survey, he refers to General Colby as a previous Superintendent of the Survey.

However, insiders often truncate the names of their own organisation whereas outsiders need to make clearer distinctions. As early as 1820, the Times, on the death of William Mudge, refers to him as the Director of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain. The minutes of the Hydrographical Office refer in March 1828 to 'arrangements for the co-operation of the Naval and Ordnance Surveys' ie the two organisations. Colby throughout the 1830s wrote to the Admiralty Hydrographer simply from the 'Ordnance Survey Office'.

Nevertheless, as references to the organisation and its task are sometimes ambiguous, I found it harder than I expected to find other examples to dispute the Kerry musings. So it seems that they deserve our attention.

The Scottish puzzle proved easier. The Edinburgh Postal Directory from 1851-52 shows the Ordnance Survey Office (sic) at 13 Royal Circus, in the fashionable West End, and quite distinct from the addresses of the Ordnance, at the Castle and at Leith Fort. In 1853-54 it also includes the office chief, Capt Henry James RE at Erneston, Granton. This appears on the six-inch map as a substantial property in its own grounds, appropriate to the son-in-law of a major-general, if not to an army captain.

David I Walker

About the question of the Ordnance map and what users called it, I have a couple of pieces of evidence which may be relevant. I presented a paper for the conference on William Smith and his map on the occasion of the Bicentenary of Smith's iconic 'Delineations of the Strata of England and Wales with part of Scotland'. It was about the maps behind the map.

I have a copy (from Oxford University Museum of Natural History) of a draft note by William Smith from 1825, probably February (although it is undated, it was together with a similar draft 'Scarboro' Feb'y, 1825' about geological colouring of maps. He was giving a series of geological lectures at the time at several locations in Yorkshire). This draft lists maps that he had obtained for field mapping. Most of the references are of counties 'large' and counties 'small'; I can figure these out from the pre-BO/OS one-inch mapping (=large) available to him in his active period 1795-1824. The reference for Kent is, however, specific as 'Kent-Ordnance Survey'.

In his 1830 book, *A Geological Manual*, Henry De La Beche refers to 'sheets ... published by the Ordnance'. De La Beche went on to work within the Ordnance in the Geological Office created for him. So we have here two professional users in the same time frame using both alternatives. This might signal the period when the change in usage came about.

John Henry