



# *Sheetlines*

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

“CIM O’Brien”

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*Sheetlines*, 104 (December 2015), pp57-58

Stable URL:

<http://www.charlesclose.org/files/Issue104page57.pdf>

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Published by  
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY  
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps  
[www.CharlesCloseSociety.org](http://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.

### ***Charles Ian Milward O'Brien 1927-2015***



Ian was born in Alvechurch in Worcestershire in 1927. His father, Clare O'Brien was then an agricultural advisor in Tanganyika, who married Esther, the daughter of Colonel Charles Milward. She rejoined Clare in Africa returning only for the birth of Ian's sister Mary. Ian remained in England and would eventually attend Beadles school near Petersfield as a boarder. Ian's National service in the Royal Engineers was spent as a sapper before going up to St John's College, Cambridge to read Geography in 1948.

After graduating in 1951 he started post-graduate research but by 1953 had begun a job as a map curator in the Directorate of Colonial Surveys (DOS). Thus he began a lifetime working with maps, his great passion since discovering his paternal grandfather's six-inch to the mile estate plan around Alvechurch. It is likely that he walked over that ground during the holidays as this was his chosen outdoor pursuit. He travelled by train or on foot and never learnt to drive. His knowledge of railways was acquired from maps and books which accompanied a growing collection of maps of Britain, Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Those who have been privileged to visit his home in Epsom will know how massive was his collection of maps. Many of them were annotated by him, as a record of when they were bought, where, from whom and their price. A large proportion of the map collection unusually consisted of flat sheets not exclusively OS, but including European and colonial series.

The first ten years working in DOS were spent first in air photography, followed by stints in the map and book library and later the Survey Data Library. He was instrumental in the production of what proved to be the sole complete catalogue of DOS maps replete with many sheet indexes, published in 1960. In 1963 Ian was promoted to Assistant Director superintending mapping services. In the same year he married Marion Lloyd who worked in the DOS Library and they moved to Epsom, where Ian had space for his considerable collection.

It was in 1964 when I first met Ian when he was Vice-chairman of the working group preparing English technical terms in cartography for the International Cartographic Association. Frequent meetings at DOS, then in Tolworth revealed the quiet competence of a very experienced practical map user embedded in this map-making body. Dedicated to supporting the development and route to independence of British colonies Ian never lost touch with Europe. His competence in German made him the ideal link with the German chairman of the Commission. With the help of a secretary who worked in the DOS Library, he became our Chairman on the death of WDC Wiggins (1971). Although the Royal Society published our English terms in 1966, the multilingual dictionary did not appear until 1973. This work took Ian to Germany and to ICA conferences in several countries, although his regular work with DOS led to several reports. He did find time to be President of the British Cartographic Society (1980-82) and subscribed to several societies in the field of cartography and geography.

Invited to the inaugural meeting of the Charles Close Society, he became a founder member number 14 in 1980. After early retirement in 1984 he was persuaded to take over as Editor of *Sheetlines* in 1987. His cartographic knowledge was quickly demonstrated in his editorials, when he outlined the scope of topics the CCS should embrace. By December 1988 he established his editorial policy and matters of copyright. A year later he confidently distinguished a newsletter from a magazine, which *Sheetlines* had become. Letters to the Editor were lively and forceful, raising some fundamental issues, but no one resigned over them. His tenure of office marked a new standard of typing professionally done, but illustrations remained a problem, especially when trying to render those red OS covers from early folded maps. His association with Peter Clark, who had moved to the Royal Geographical Society on retirement, helped us to frank and distribute *Sheetlines* through the RGS. Contents were listed on the front cover and our logo designed by Bill Batchelor first appeared during his tenure. Under Ian's editorship our journal matured.

DOS merged with the Ordnance Survey in 1984, and had continued to pass its registry files to the Public Record Office (PRO). A change of policy around 1997 resulted in further transfers of such files to be limited to those discussing high policy, not day-to-day technical work in up to sixty countries. Consequently many files recording the history of this work from 1970 onwards would have been destroyed

By 1998 it had been agreed that Ian O'Brien, whose knowledge of this work was unparalleled, volunteered to grade the files and OS was prepared to present those he had selected as significant to the CCS Archive in Cambridge University Library. This important collection, safeguarded by Ian's efforts, today resides in Cambridge.

For these achievements and others less conspicuous he was awarded an Honorary Membership in 2008. By then the illness of Marion and her death in 2009 saw Ian, increasingly frail, less able to travel on map collecting to the near continent. Doubtless his collection of guide books allowed him vicarious travel. Perhaps his considerable collection of railway histories allowed him to relive previous journeys now impossible.

Ian remained aware of what was happening in cartography and the history of cartography. He got much pleasure from reading and was always open to offer advice and information based on his prodigious memory. In recent years he found it hard to attend even meetings in London. His legacy will live on through his generosity and various contributions to the CCS. Self-effacing and modest, avoiding cartographic politics, Ian's career in DOS and retirement will be celebrated as conscientious and reliable – a model public servant.

***Christopher Board***

*I should like to acknowledge the help of Richard Porter and John Barney for information used in the above text. **CB.***