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“Two interesting maps for ‘OS225’”

Richard Oliver

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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.

Two interesting maps for 'OS225'
Richard Oliver



The 225th anniversary of the official foundation of the Ordnance Survey is being celebrated with far less fanfare than was the bicentenary in 1991: the main tangible souvenirs appear to be the two limited-edition maps that are the subject of the present comment.¹ Some background to the production of the maps is given by Christopher Wesson in *Maplines*, and this has been drawn on here.² Both are based on current OS digital data.

The map of London (*figure 1, above*), at 1:31,680 and filling most of a 1000 × 890 mm sheet of paper, is intended to be in early nineteenth century style, and superficially it appears to fit the bill. Yet which style? The original Ordnance Survey style was monochrome, based on engraving on copper, and is exemplified by a range of maps, from the set of four Old Series 1:63,360s covering Essex of 1805 to the 1:10,560s of northern Britain that were appearing fifty years later: yet here principal roads are infilled a pale sienna. Now it is true that copies of these and similar maps are often encountered so treated, yet this colouring was an unofficial addition. Hatched infill and south-and-east-side ‘shading’ of buildings is ‘authentic’, but there is no corresponding shading either of principal roads or of water: the line-gauge for the building-shading seems rather heavy anyway, and is accentuated by the lack of the other shading. Railways are shown by an approximation to the ‘ladder’ symbol adopted in 1836 or 1837 for the one-inch, supplemented by single-line-with-crossbars, but no earthworks or bridges are shown: the result lacks integration, and looks like the box-ticking addition of

¹ *Western Highlands (225 anniversary special)* and *London (225 anniversary special)*: these two titles can be ordered from os.uk/maps: they are £12:99 each, including dispatch costs.

² Christopher Wesson, ‘225 years of Ordnance Survey’, *Maplines: The Magazine of the British Cartographic Society* 27(2) (Summer 2016), 16-17

railways to Old Series sheets in their dotage in the 1880s. The tree symbols have been traced from originals, and look well in parkland, but lack the density characteristic of early OS one-inch depiction of woodland: the feeling is far more that of 1930s practice. (Most of these traits can be seen in figure 1.) Churches are shown by crosses; at least two windmills appear (Brixton and Wimbledon Common), and though an ‘original’ style is claimed, this example (*figure 2*)

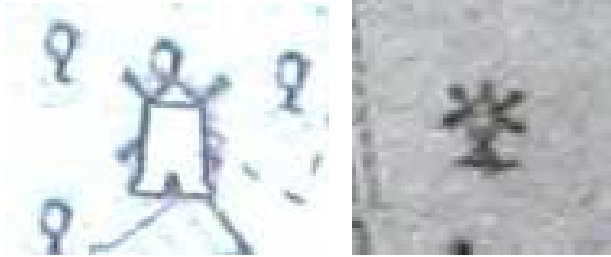


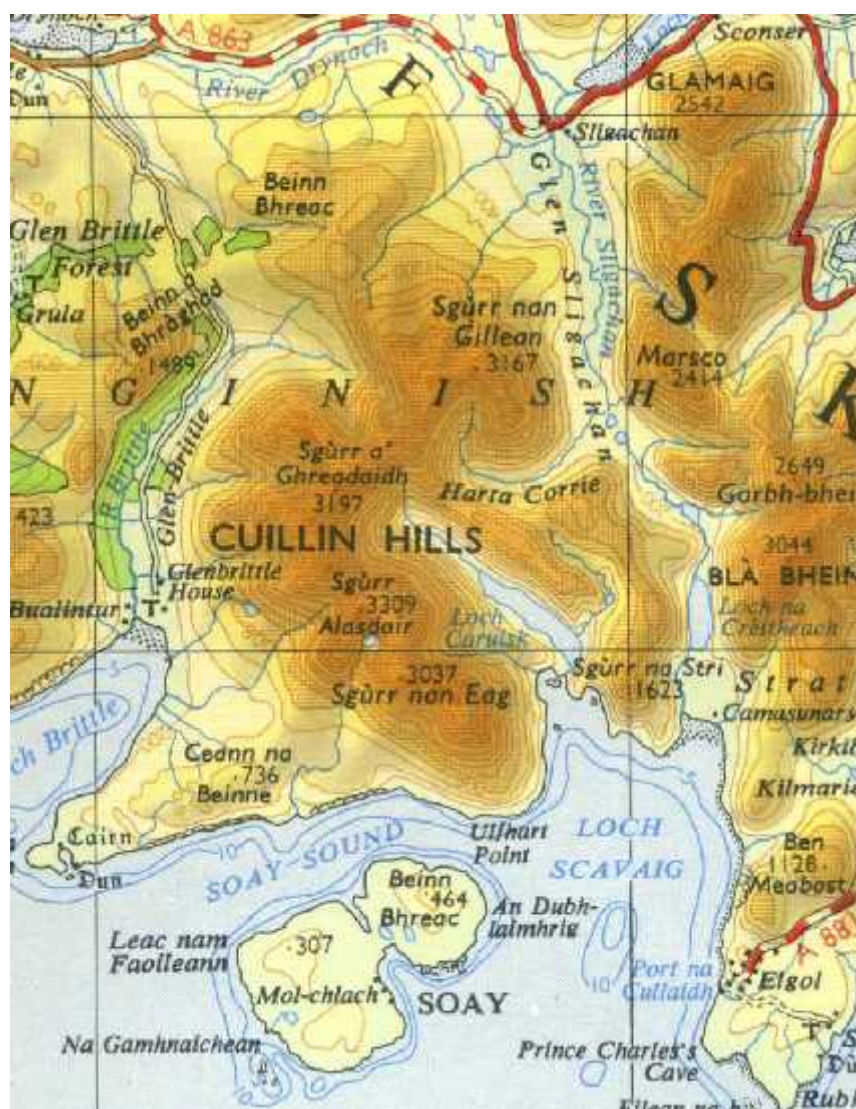
Figure 2 (far left). Windmill symbol at Wimbledon Common on London (2016).

Figure 3. Windmill symbol at Camberwell, from 1:63,360 Old Series sheet 7 (1822).

manages to look different even from the seemingly exhaustive range of designs used in the late 1830s.³ Whilst it is true that the OS made an attempt to distinguish tower and post mills, this was not original practice, before *circa* 1820, and standard OS practice from the 1880s to the 1970s was a ‘post-mill’ symbol (*figure 3*). The lettering is not wholly successful: it is neither a ‘modern’ style, of the sort used by the OS in the nineteenth century, nor an ‘old’ one used later, such as ‘Withycombe’ or Times. The treatment of names is open to question: why is Buckingham Palace treated as an ‘antiquity’? Why ‘The Regents Park’? (Old Series sheet 7 of 1822 has ‘Regents Park’, as today.) The scale is expressed as ‘Scale of Two Hands’: goodness knows why, as this is no recognised scale in any cartographic culture that I know of. What is wrong with ‘Two inches to a mile’?

The *West Highlands* map is intended to be a ‘replica’ of 1:250,000 Fifth Series sheet 4, edition B, of 1967: it is the work of Charley Glynn, which explains the ‘CG’ edition code bottom left. In many ways it is altogether more successful, partly no doubt because colour-printed hypsometrically-tinted maps are a familiar modern cartographic language. The most obvious difference between 1967 and 2016 is that the ‘replica’ uses a much heavier brown for the higher altitude tints: compare figures 4 and 5. However, ‘the devil is in the detail’, and this can be seen in comparing figures 6 and 7: notice on the ‘replica’ the sudden narrowing where the B8065 becomes ‘unclassified’, and the use of bold areas of stipple for buildings where the original has small individual black blocks. This is a relic of corner-cutting in digitising around 1989-90, not the analogue subtlety and graceful transition of twenty years earlier. The lettering of the ‘replica’ appears a good match for the original, until compared side by side: why, for example, have the island names been italicised? Nor is it clear why the paper seems to have artificial dirt on the margins.

³ Bill Bignell, *Mapping the windmill*, London: Charles Close Society, 2013, 71.



The coming of digital cartography has enabled alternative treatments of the same basic data to be readily explored, and anyone concerned with the possibilities of reimagination and revival of older styles will be interested in these two maps (A variation on this is relettering of analogue mapping: see Richard Oliver, 'A few notes on map lettering', *Sheetlines* 95, 33-42).

The London map is let down by a lack of thoroughness in researching the original style; the West Highlands map by some of the detail in the database. Nonetheless, I hope that someone from Ordnance Survey will 'try again' some time: faulty execution this time round should not preclude something more satisfactory in the future. Such restylings could be quite an interesting sideline, to say nothing of perhaps leading to redesigning of the main map series.

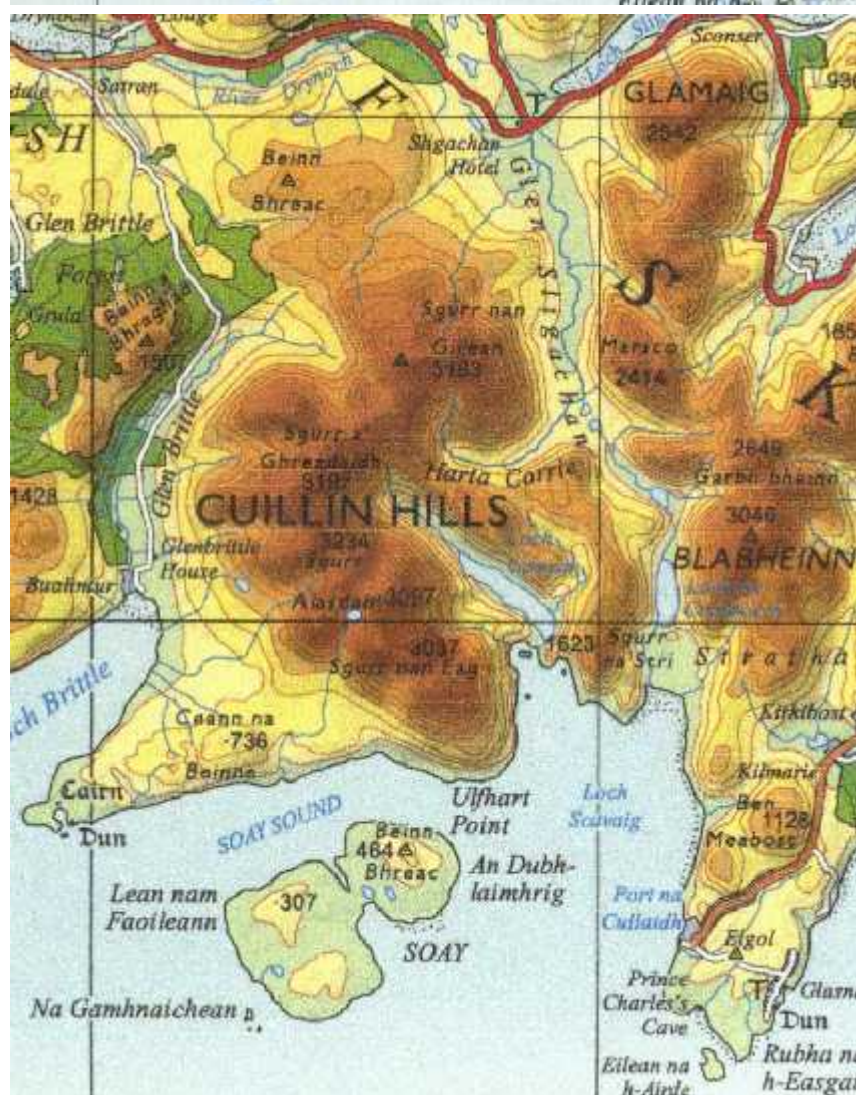


Figure 4 (upper):
 The Cuillins, from 1:250,000
 Fifth Series sheet 4, edition B
 (1967).

Figure 5 (lower):
 The Cuillins, from 1:250,000
 Fifth Series sheet 4, version
 'CG' (2016).



Figure 6 (upper): Tiree, from 1:250,000 Fifth Series sheet 4, edition B (1967).

Figure 7 (lower): Tiree, from 1:250,000 Fifth Series sheet 4, version 'CG' (2016).