



Sheetlines

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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

This is an experimental musing, where the reader can contribute to the nonsense. I will start it off, set the scene, give a few examples, and you can add more from your own experience. And if there is a good response, maybe something will appear in the next issue, Editors willing. Similar to crowd funding, which is all the rage, or at least was increasing in popularity when I started this piece, which might be years before you read it. If I get an idea for a musing, I jot down as much as possible and frequently put it aside, only returning to it a couple of years later. Which probably explains a lot.

So, to set the scene. You are on a business trip to the other end of the country, where they all talk funny and lack a sense of humour. On arrival, the taxi from the station turns on to the main road and immediately passes a second-hand bookshop which you decide to visit when returning home. All goes well with your meeting, but you get to the bookshop with only twenty minutes until your train leaves. Being a Charles Close Society member, you instantly find the box of maps and after two minutes, decide there is nothing of interest. On leaving, you glance behind the desk and see some exceedingly interesting maps on top of an open box of books. You recognise the edges of at least four megareare covers amongst the dozen or so maps dominoed across the books. Each has been the subject of endless daydreams. The find of a lifetime. The only snag being that although you have found them, they do not appear to have been priced. Indeed, from experience, you can tell that they have been left along with the books for the shop owner to look at and offer for. Work in progress.

With eighteen minutes to go, what happens next? You curse, and leave the shop as a coffee and sandwich are needed to take on the train with you? You take a business card from the pile on the desk and vow to telephone first thing tomorrow morning? You tell the person behind the desk that there is a fire in the back room, grab the maps, leave two twenties and leg it? No, being a CCS member, you take a deep breath, approach the desk and start talking. At the very least one would be honour-bound to make enquiries there and then. "May I have a look at those maps on the box, please?" "Yes, but I have not bought them yet," or "Yes, but I have not priced them yet", which is slightly more promising.

Four minutes later, and you are pale and shaking. Does it show? Could you possibly speak? No. So you croak "I would quite like some of these, but my train leaves in fourteen minutes, could you possibly price them now?" This is where I start it off, and you can add your experiences.

"... could you possibly price them now?"

"No. I must get these books priced for an important customer coming in later on."

"No. I want to put them on my website", or "No. I want to try them on eBay".

"No. I want to take them to a book fair next weekend."

"No. I have not decided whether to sell them or not", or "No. I want them for myself".

“No. I never rush pricing. These look more interesting than any I have had before, so will need careful consideration.” Meaning, I know they are good but I will need to think carefully how many noughts to put on the end.

“No. I have mentioned them to a good customer who buys maps, and he is coming in tomorrow to look at them.” And by the speed of his twitch, I can tell how good they are and adjust the price accordingly.

“No. A good customer who collects maps saw them this morning and will check his list when he gets home.” Absolute rubbish. Any collector would not need to consult a list and would have refused to leave the shop without them.

“No. I want them for a window display of 1930s novels.” Great, then they will fade and curl at the edges.

“No. I am just shutting the shop and have a train to catch in fourteen minutes.”

“No. My wife prices the maps. She will be in on Saturday.”

“No. I’ve lost my glasses. I must have left them on a bookshelf somewhere.”

“No. And when they are priced, I will dribble them into the map box over time as I never reserve maps for anyone. If regular map customers fail to find something nice once in a while, they stop coming in, which would be a great loss as most drift on to the books after the maps and usually buy something each visit.”

“No. And when they are priced, we do not send anything by post.”

“No. They are not mine yet.”

“No. I sell all my Ordnance Survey maps to David Archer.” Over the years, various customers have reported being told this by different booksellers. Alas, totally untrue. Ten minutes to go.

Now it is your turn, “No,”

For second-hand bookshop, read antiquarian bookshop; leather bindings everywhere, smell of polish and book cleaner, nice carpets and armchairs, soft music and no other maps in sight.

“could you possibly price them now?”

“No. I have never seen anything like these before, and I am curious as to how they will be received by my customers.”

“No. I want them to add interest to my next catalogue.”

“No. I have an arrangement with another bookseller, he takes my cheap maps and paperbacks, whilst I take his antiquarian material. Not that he ever comes up with much, but then neither do I for him.”

Second-hand bookshop again.

“ could you possibly price them now?”

“Yes certainly. The whole collection cost a lot and I need to get some money back quickly.”

“Yes of course I will. I know how frustrating it is to want something that is not priced.”

“Yes, but not until I find my glasses, I must have left them on a bookshelf somewhere.”

“Yes, and if you take them all, there will be a small discount as I don’t like

maps in the shop. They make the place look untidy. I just want rid of them.”

“Yes, certainly, I like maps in really nice condition to sell quickly, otherwise they get scuffed in the box and when they look sad they fail to sell.” “Excuse me” you reply, “but these maps would sell for a very good price even after a tank had been over them on a muddy battleground.” As a CCS member you *would* feel obliged to say that, wouldn’t you?

“Yes, which ones are you interested in?” The killer question. The pit-with-upward-pointing-sharpened-spikes-at-the-bottom question. Do you identify the cream, or say that all are of interest and make the prospect of pricing them quickly seem like too big a job? But they are all cream, the *crème de la crème* of Miss Brodie is merely semi-skimmed milk compared to these beauties. So, you shrug, and mumble a croak that all are of interest. “All OS maps are £2.50 each.” Hah, hah, I am only joking. They never say that. Although I once went into a bookshop where the older the maps, the lower the price. Clean 1:50,000s were £1.75, Revised New Series in colour 25p. “Nobody wants out of date maps” the bookseller said. But books were different. Nine minutes to go.

“Yes, but I have never seen these before, and they are in lovely condition with quite attractive covers. What would you offer for them?” Same pit, but with poison on the end of the spikes, and needing the benefit of a manual of negotiating tactics twelve inches thick. The price offered must be high enough to get agreement there and then, but alas for the shop owner, and original seller, not sky-high, as befits the maps. Anything way above the usual shop price would give rise to suspicion and alarm. “That’s a lot, they must be really unusual, perhaps I should investigate them before pricing them. There’s a society for OS maps, isn’t there?” In my experience, if the price seems fair and not over generous, thus not arousing suspicion, the shop owner will agree and will not try to nudge you up. And if they do, so what, the mortgage is paid off, you want them and will never get a chance such as this again. If you had to bid against other collectors in an auction, the final price would be far higher.

“Your offer is far too high. I see that you do not know much about Ordnance Survey maps.” In the very early days of eBay I came across a couple of quite scarce maps and asked the seller whether he had second copies available, thus initiating a dialogue and not breaking the rules as I understood them. No second copies, but I was asked to make an offer for those listed, and was told it was too much, so we agreed on a lower price, and as no bids had been placed the seller felt he could withdraw the maps from eBay. My new friend turned out to be a bookseller, with a shop.

“Yes, I am sure that will be fine, but I cannot let them go as I have not agreed a price with the seller yet. Can you come back next week?” Six minutes.

“Yes, that offer is fine. Would you like a bag?” Four minutes. “Oh, and there are another three boxes of maps from the same source in the store room if you would like to look at them.” Once in a lifetime, one just has to catch the later train. Four hours, thirty-two minutes and twenty seconds. Merry Christmas.