



# *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***

Quite a few members have attempted to collect every cover illustrated in *Map cover art*, but I know only one to have succeeded. And like everyone, along the way, he has been distracted, and now has every one-inch map in sets, all the half-inch, quarter-inch and so on. Fine, so what you might say. And I would reply that in addition to being distracted by collecting whole series, he has also collected every state of a cover he has found within each series. By which, I mean he has eight, ten, twelve or more copies of some tourist maps, or possibly some Seventh Series sheets, all with slight differences on the front cover. Price changes, positioning of text, variant text, different borders; standard covers and benderfold covers, all vary. Do not ask me how he remembered what he had when out and about, just assume him to be my imaginary, and very capable friend.

Such a task is not everybody's cup of tea, and even he admits the series maps overwhelm the collection, distracting from the achievement of finding so many different covers. Which is why he has decided to start disposing of the whole lot, emptying the keep net and throwing things back into the pond. Done that. Whilst I agree with this approach, and believe it good that other collectors will thereby have a chance of adding some scarce, and not so scarce maps to their collections, I also wonder what might be salvaged from such an achievement? Could the society benefit from such monumental collecting?

It seems wrong that a collection which in other circles would be considered of national importance, should be broken up without being recorded, let alone kept intact. Hey, wait a minute, some shout, why 'of national importance'? Because nothing in any public collection in any way even starts to compare with such a collection as outlined above. A legal deposit library might have some sets of maps in covers, but this would only represent one state of each cover, and as for the illustrations in *Map cover art*, no public collection has them all, and few have any variants.

The *raison d'être* of the Ordnance Survey has always been to produce maps, and although recording the minutiae found in different map states is not everyone's cup of tea, as a society we appreciate the necessity of doing so, and applaud those who seek out and record such differences. But the OS was also expected to sell maps, and for over a hundred years, has been selling them in attractive covers, which in themselves are collected by members, sometimes with more fervour than the maps, giving equally compelling arguments for recording the minutiae of map covers and building The Charles Close Society's *National Ordnance Survey Map Cover Collection*. Sounds good? It will be fantastic, so label it as such.

Why build such a collection, one might ask? Because there is no comprehensive collection of Ordnance Survey map covers open to the public. Even if all the map covers in all the libraries in the UK were brought together in one place, they would lack many of the scarce covers and would not be

meaningful as a national collection. When we started selling OS maps, a couple of legal deposit libraries bought some tourist and district covers, in an attempt to have an example of each illustration from the *Map cover art* list. But to venture very far into the realms of cover variations was beyond their budgets. Such an approach is pretty half-hearted: buying a single blue octagon aviation map as illustrated, whilst ignoring the need to hold representative copies in small and large covers together with examples of green and red octagon bearing covers.

Can we justify building such a collection? Yes. It certainly falls within our society's objectives. At present, anyone wishing to study OS covers has to rely heavily on access to private collections, the contents of which are largely unknown, because as a society we have never asked what members own. For all of us a reference collection would help when something is found that is thought to be unusual. One could check a new find and, if absent from the national collection, details could be recorded or even a map donated, eventually.

So, what am I proposing?

My suggestion is that the society starts building a comprehensive collection of Ordnance Survey map covers, including all the byways and distractions that both the enthusiast and researcher will appreciate. For series maps, which usually have the same basic cover we might have examples of every variation, and detailed records of which sheets these appeared with, rather than physical examples of every variation of every sheet. For non-series maps such as tourist and district maps, I suggest that the collection actually does hold examples of every cover used and every state of a cover. The same cover with four different prices, and two of those prices shown in two different styles of lettering and so on. The sort of thing that one assumes would have been recorded in the job files. Such a collection could justifiably be assembled as part of the society archives held by the Map Department of Cambridge University Library, with a CCS member undertaking most of the work. We might even persuade the Ordnance Survey to sponsor the collection, or to donate copies of new covers, artwork and proof copies of proposed covers, most of which I assume are just destroyed for want of a better home.

How will we build the collection? I suggest that we view this as a long-term project and await donations. It would be wonderful if at an early stage a good collection were bequeathed to the society as a foundation, but a start should be made soon. I am quite happy to start giving items now: a small collection of half-inch training maps with different printer's details on the front, pre- and post-war archaeological maps, Populars, Fifth Edition and Tourist maps with labels changing the map name. Only for exceptional items should the society consider purchasing a map for its cover. And by exceptional, I mean unknown and significantly different from known examples to be considered important. All additions to the collection should be acknowledged to encourage donations.

Why do we need to have the actual covers to study? With maps, different states can easily be *described*: the next state has italic town names, or a new railway line is shown. Such indicators are easily understood by all. But with covers things are different. A change of lettering style is almost impossible to

describe to the average person, and giving each style a name is meaningless to most of us. However, put two maps side by side and such differences are seen in an instant, especially if prompted.<sup>1</sup> As with antiques, only by handling an item can the maximum information be obtained. The secrets held within some early laminated white covers, where 1:2500 maps and trench maps were used as inner layers could only have been discovered by holding them to a strong light.

This all sounds very nice, but at the 2017 AGM, only a handful of people said they had visited the society archives, so how else could the membership consult the collection in order to spot gaps or identify a map they hold? Answer: have a parallel collection of cover images on the society website, together with scans of maps not held. If everything in the collection were on the website, members could easily spot a difference between a cover held and similar on-line images, even at a bookfair with a smartphone. In the same way, when a large collection is dispersed, it will not be a great loss to the society as at present, as hopefully, scans of interesting items will have been passed to us, awaiting the donation of actual covers. Many library catalogues, even the British Library now have small book cover images, or even whole maps added to on-line catalogue entries as a service to users. If this is the way forward, with hard copy collections and on-line images of the collection, we should do the same for our members and must not lag behind. Members might even be able to download the image collection as a ready-made catalogue, awaiting items to be ticked.

Especially in the early, formative years, building the collection and acquiring scans will be very time consuming, beyond the resources of the Map Department in Cambridge, so as suggested, a CCS member could be responsible and have a small budget for certain expenses, to purchase items and acquire good scans in order to exercise quality control of images. The structure of any collection needs to be agreed upon. With Roger Hellyer's list in *Map cover art* being accepted by all, it would be churlish not to use and modify it as required.

What will be the benefits of building the covers collection and having the supporting images on-line?

Firstly, we would be establishing a collection of national importance, the only comprehensive collection of map covers, showing what the Ordnance Survey produced and how covers were used for sales promotion. As a resource for research, nothing would compare with it, and visitors to the collection would help the Map Department's usage statistics.

Secondly, by furthering the society's objectives, it will give so much pleasure to our members, many of whom have much thumbed copies of *Map cover art*, and dream of an updated list with more illustrations.

Thirdly, it would be a continuing project, which all members could participate in. Not all members are moved to contribute to *Sheetlines*, just as not all can attend meetings. But a far greater number collect maps and would be able to add

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<sup>1</sup> Whereas a map is a single sheet of paper, a cover might have four surfaces of interest, plus a leaflet, envelope or note stuck on. Such details are of interest to many members and need recording, preferably here, rather than in another database or collection.

to the project if luck were with them. Many collectors own at least one choice item, not necessarily a rare map, but frequently a scarce form of a standard cover.

Finally, an on-line images collection would draw attention and possibly new members to the society, and might well result in new information being supplied on the OS and its work.

To add to the mounting excitement, it appears that a start has in fact been made. A good while ago, John Davies put some cover images on the society website, and as I write, I understand another member is poised to add to these with around 300 cover images from his collection, so that most items listed in *Map cover art* will be illustrated, with the addition of variants and new discoveries.

Surely this is an excellent way of starting the new collection; establish the image collection first, possibly using captions in bold to identify items held as hard copy, so that anyone can easily see what is missing. Maps and more scans will then be offered by members, and the collection will expand. Plus, the archives has already started receiving cover examples. A while ago, my offer of two groups of covers was accepted, so it appears that both strands of my suggestion are already under way; all we need is formal recognition of a covers collection and the appointment of an organiser. If Cambridge has the space, and the Archives Sub-Committee can continue to keep the ball rolling, the society is destined to have its own superb map collection.

Several CCS visits are currently being organised, as listed below. Dates and details are not yet fixed, but members interested in joining are requested to contact Bernard Anderson on 01255 670072 or [visits@CharlesCloseSociety.org](mailto:visits@CharlesCloseSociety.org) to express interest; this will help in finalising the arrangements.

Late September / early October: Map libraries and other cartographic attractions in and around Glasgow and Edinburgh.

Early 2018: Manchester University library and Chetham's library, both of which have extensive collections of maps and atlases.

13-15 April 2018: Weekend of walking and talking at Shap Wells Hotel, Cumbria.

Cambridgeshire Records Society has re-issued Jonas Moore's *Mapp of the Great Levell of the Fenns, 1658* in the form of map, CD and accompanying booklet, price £36, available from [www.cambsrecordsociety.co.uk](http://www.cambsrecordsociety.co.uk)

The British Cartographic Society has published a list of major map collections in UK at [www.cartography.org.uk/map-collections](http://www.cartography.org.uk/map-collections)

*The Red Atlas: How the Soviet Union Secretly Mapped the World*, by John Davies and Alex Kent, showing comparisons with OS maps, will be published by University of Chicago Press in November. See [RedAtlasBook.com](http://RedAtlasBook.com)

Copies of out-of-print Ordnance Survey books about its history, such as Owen & Pilbeam's *Map Makers to Britain since 1791* and others are available for free download at <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/about/overview/history.html>