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“Charles Frederick Arden-Close”

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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.

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CHARLES FREDERICK ARDEN-CLOSE 1865-1952

Colonel Sir Charles Arden-Close died 29 years ago, on 19th December 1952. For many of us today his name is kept alive principally by the republication of his book 'The early years of the Ordnance Survey'¹ of which it has been said that 'in writing these historical and individual notes, Close performed a service to the Ordnance Survey as well as to British geodesy and British surveyors'. In fact the book also provides more of a service to historians than Close could have realised at the time he wrote it. It is now regarded as 'a valuable piece of historical salvage' for much of it was based on the papers collected by Major-General Thomas Colby, Superintendent of the Ordnance Survey from 1820 to 1846, and of which Close had the custody. He presented these papers to OS in 1927, where they were sorted, indexed and intended to be bound, but were subsequently destroyed in the second World War.

When at the inaugural meeting of this Society last year we were trying to select an appropriate name for ourselves, without in any way implying a connection with OS itself, an inspired member suggested that we choose a suitable person's name with which OS was obviously associated. Legendary figures such as William Roy, Mudge, Colby and James came to mind, but none had such immediacy as that of Charles Close. A man of immense stature and accomplishment in his time he was, moreover, a link between the traditions of the nineteenth century and the future practices of the twentieth. He was responsible for the inception of many of the maps now sought after by collectors, and injected into OS a measure of geodetic excellence which it had not experienced since the days of Clarke in the 1850s.

In old age, Close remained a man of formidable intellect: only two months before he died, when he was still writing for publication, the Secretary of the Eugenics Society wrote to him 'I had no idea you were 87 years old; the quality of the articles you send us shows that you carry your years exceptionally well.'

The chronicle of his long and distinguished life begins at St. Saviours, Jersey, C.I., where on 10th August 1865 he was born, the eldest son of Major General Frederick Close R.A. (1830-1899) and one of thirteen children. The family was not wealthy and Close was educated not at public school, but at a crammer's at Woolwich from where, in 1882, he passed into the Royal Military Academy, gaining first place in mathematics in the entrance examination. At the end of the course he passed out first with prizes for mathematics and mechanics and was awarded the Pollock Memorial medal. Commissioned in the Royal engineers on 5th July 1884, he joined the School of Military Engineering at Chatham from where, in 1886, he was posted briefly to Gibraltar. There then followed two years back at Chatham where he was put in charge of the Balloon Section. R.E., and then became Assistant Engineer constructing batteries for heavy guns

¹ The early years of the Ordnance Survey. A reprint with a new introduction by J.B. Harley. Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1969. pp.xxxi, 164. illus. ISBN 7153 44773.

south of Calcutta. In 1890 he was attached to the Survey of India in Upper Burma and then worked on the Mandalay Meridional series of principal geodetic triangulation.

In 1895 Close was sent to West Africa to survey the boundary region between the Niger Coast Protectorate and Kamerun. A short appointment to OS followed under Sir John Farquharson during which time Close clearly summed up the organisation perhaps thinking of possible plans for the future: 'It was a regular machine ... and the work of making and revising the large-scale plans ... went on with accuracy and despatch ... but the small-scale maps left something to be desired and the Ordnance Survey was quite out of touch with the world of science, and was decidedly at a loss when anything out of the normal routine was put before it.'

In 1898, at the early age of 33, Close was appointed British Commissioner on the frontier delimitation between British Central Africa and Northern Rhodesia and German East Africa (the Tanganyika - Nyasaland boundary) for which he was decorated a year later with the C.M.G. In 1900 he took out a small survey section for the South African war, but was invalided home shortly afterwards. Here he became, in 1902, Chief Inspector in Surveying at Chatham where he introduced the methods he had learnt on the Survey of India. He also wrote the standard 'Textbook of topographical surveying' which was, in effect a revised and recast version of his 1897 'Textbook of military topography'.

It was owing to Close's initiative that on his appointment in 1905 to Chief of the Geographical Section, General Staff, that the Colonial Survey Committee was formed. And it was directly due to his influence in persuading the British Government to invite foreign official map-making organisations to London for a conference that the International Map of the World at 1:1,000,000 was transformed from a project which was little more than a 'pious aspiration' of several scientists into a practical working proposition which is still in operation today.

The successful launching of the 'Carte Internationale du Monde au Millioneme' served to consolidate Close's now considerable international reputation in the field of maps and surveying and he may not have been unduly surprised when on 18th August 1911, he received from the War Office the following note: 'Dear Close, will you inform me whether it would be agreeable to you to be appointed Director General of the Ordnance Survey.' Close's annotation on this letter reads 'ans^d. most agreeable'. Unfortunately the outbreak of war three years later curtailed his plans for developing the geodetic work of the Survey; nevertheless, the geodetic levelling of Great Britain was revised, the one-inch map redesigned, the archaeology division formed, and a vigorous marketing policy developed. During the war, the civilian work of the department ceased and an Overseas Branch of the Ordnance Survey was formed in France and OS resources were channelled into the production of maps for war.

When he retired in 1922 on reaching the age limit for his rank in the army, Close was to have thirty years of lively participation in his many spheres of interest; the breadth of his pursuits is mirrored in the diverse sources of his obituary notices, from the 'Eugenics Review' to the 'Palestine Exploration Quarterly'. His successor as DGOS, Brigadier M.N.

MacLeod wrote that 'his wide knowledge and great experience of all kinds of surveying, his keen mind, his energy and initiative, and, above all, his dignified yet genial personality, enabled him to fill, with unusual distinction and success, the office of President of a great number of organisations dealing with various aspects of geography.' Among offices which he held were those of President of the International Union of Geography from 1934 to 1938, President of Section E (geography) of the British Association in 1911, President of the Geographical Association in 1927, President of the Royal Geographical Society, 1927 to 1930 (he was on the RGS Council for 35 years) and was also Chairman of the Palestine Exploration Fund for fifteen years.

Close's numerous writings encompassed four books and many technical articles and papers - several of them on map projections, population problems and archaeology. He received numerous honours and distinctions and was made a C.B. in 1916, a K.B.E. for war services in 1918, and he was also an Officer of the Belgian Ordre de Leopold. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1919 and in 1928 received an Honorary Degree of Sc.D. at Cambridge. In 1914 he was invited to give the Halley Lecture at Oxford and spoke on the geodesy of the British Isles; he was awarded the Victoria Gold Medal by the Royal Geographical Society in 1927 and was elected an Honorary member of several foreign geographical societies.

In 1913, Close married Gladys Violet Percival, and they had two sons and one daughter. Sir Charles took the name Arden-Close in 1938 under the terms of a bequest. Lady Arden-Close survived him by only three months, and his younger son had already died in captivity in the second World War under the Japanese. His eldest son and daughter still survive. A first cousin wrote that 'his funeral service, which took place in the nave of Winchester Cathedral was conducted by the Dean. This was most fitting, for he was loved and honoured by great and small.'