



Sheetlines

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

“Kenneth Guy Messenger”

Richard Oliver

Sheetlines, 38 (January 1994), pp.1-4

Stable URL: <http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue38page1.pdf>

*This article is provided for personal, non-commercial use only.
Please contact the Society regarding any other use of this work.*

Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
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.

It is always a sad occasion when a Society has to report the death of a member; Guy Messenger died in November, aged 73. Until the end of his fruitful life he continued to send items to *Sheetlines* and I am pleased to be able to include them in this edition. Regretably, it also includes his last puzzle, many of which have graced the pages of *Sheetlines* and pleasurably taxed members minds.

---000---

Kenneth Guy Messenger

27 February 1920 - 25 November 1993

Guy Messenger was born in London, but some of his ancestors came from Leicester and other parts of the east midlands, and he lived in Uppingham for most of his adult life. The son of a dentist, he was educated successively as a weekly boarder at a prep school in Hendon (where they wore Eton collars and straw boaters) and then at Felsted School in Essex. He then went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, changing after a short while from dentistry to botany. After spending most of the war as a staff officer in India, he returned to Cambridge. From there he went to Uppingham School, where his main subject was biology, but where he also taught chemistry. He retired from teaching in 1980, but continued G.C.E. marking work for some years. He also continued to play the double bass in the Uppingham School orchestra and to contribute to the life of the school.

Mr Messenger senior had bought Ordnance Survey maps in the 1920s (with carto-bibliographical consequences sixty years later which he could surely be excused for not foreseeing!), but Guy's early experiences were with the Bartholomew half-inch. After the war he started to buy maps in some quantity, though more for immediate use than for collecting reasons. One particular immediate reason was botany; he was an active member of the Botanical Society of the British Isles, in 1970 he published the Flora of Rutland, and during the last few months before his death botany rather than cartography was his main preoccupation. He was a long-time Fellow of the Linnean Society. One is therefore unsurprised to finding him protesting against the omission of parish boundaries (much used in botanical recording) from the 1:50,000 Second Series. (He acquired a set of the First Series shortly

after it was issued.) However, even in the 1950s as a modestly-positioned and paid schoolmaster, he was buying older mapping, including a fine part-set of the One-inch Old Series. In the late 1970s dealers started to issue catalogues, and this enabled him to expand his collection considerably. Retirement gave him the opportunity both to collect maps and to study them. He was in the first group to join the Charles Close Society, as soon as membership was advertised, though he did so with some reservations, thinking that he would have far more to learn than to offer. He learnt something: he was to offer a great deal, including the first monograph on a twentieth century OS map series, three substantial carto-bibliographical booklets, and numerous contributions to Sheetlines. His interests were broad, and are exemplified by his 'revisions' of the carto-bibliographies in Volumes I and II of the Margary Old Series facsimiles, his work on map covers, his work on pre-1914 Ordnance Survey one-inch maps in colour (some of which remains unpublished), and his article on the One-inch Fifth Edition in Sheetlines 3, which he later dismissed as 'naive', but which contains comments on grid line spacing and sheet line changes of permanent value, of a sort which far too seldom find their way into print.

His greatest contribution to OS studies is, of course, The Ordnance Survey One-inch map of England and Wales, Third Edition (Large Sheet Series): a map study monograph, on which he began work at the turn of 1981-2, and which was published by the Charles Close Society in March 1988. With the Society's subsequent publishing successes it is easy to forget that six years ago a venture like this was distinctly speculative, and that CCS funds were inadequate to pay for the venture. It had to be financed partly by advance subscription and partly by Guy paying some of the bill out of his own pocket, thereby enabling 300 copies to be printed rather than the originally projected 100. The speculation was justified, both Guy and the Society recouped their investment, and it laid the basis for the success of future CCS publications, in both intellectual and financial terms, as the eventual profits formed the nucleus of a publications fund, which has enabled the Society to publish without having to embark on advance fund-raising to pay the printer's bill. This monograph was not the first of the Society's publications; that was a makeshift booklet on the One-inch Seventh Series, issued in time for the Society's Annual General Meeting in May 1986, which relied heavily on Guy's work in various map collections, and, indeed, without which it would probably not have been issued.

Guy was elected to the Society's Committee in 1984, and from 1987 to 1991 he acted as its Publications Manager. As well as storing and distributing the increasing number of publications, he even printed some of them, in the form of back numbers of Sheetlines, run off on the Uppingham school photocopier. Unfortunately, the demand started to outstrip capacity, whilst still being too small to justify using a commercial printer, and it was Guy who, on the spur of the moment at a CCS Committee meeting, had the idea of cutting costs by reprinting in combined volumes. This both cut the printing bill and led to an unexpected rise in the demand for back issues of Sheetlines, and helped the Society out of a very awkward situation. In 1991 this and similar work on behalf of the Society was recognised by the conferment of Honorary Membership. In expressing thanks for the award Guy said that membership of the Society had enabled him to make several new friends at a time of life when the tendency was usually the other way. In conversation earlier, he had said that one of the enjoyable things about the Charles Close Society, unlike certain others to which he belonged, was that there were no axe-grinders. Something else about the Society which he liked was the way in which members were willing to share information rather than to hoard it: he was particularly pleased in March 1993 when two members found a (so far) unique copy of the 1909 printing of 'Third Large' Sheet 118, and passed it on to him. (Incidentally, he was very careful with the use of English and disliked such phrases as 'nearly unique'. And he would not have called either the monograph or the maps the 'Third Large'.) His last substantial contribution to the Society was organising a study meeting in Uppingham on 6 March 1993, on the OS half-inch map.

Though the 'Third Large' study is Guy Messenger's most substantial contribution to Ordnance Survey studies, his outright magnum opus in the conventional sense is probably The Flora of

Rutland. In terms of influence both are almost certainly dwarfed by his real magnum opus, that of teaching at Uppingham School for over thirty years. One suspects that he must have possessed considerable authority as a schoolmaster; as one who only came to know him after his retirement, this writer could not help noticing his gift for being able to put over some comment differing greatly from one's own fixed ideas with such authority that the best one could say was 'Er, well...', leaving him with the field. This was anything but dominating; one suspects he had the valuable quality of being able to communicate with pupils man-to-man. He seems to have been drawn to Uppingham School by its strong tradition in music. Guy's interest in music was considerable. For visitors to his home it took the tangible form of an impressive collection of the music of Mozart on long-playing records; as he feared, in a letter to the Gramophone in January 1986, the displacement of LP by compact disk narrowly defeated his hope that it would one day be 'comprehensive', at any rate on vinyl, but he also enjoyed English church music, and applied himself to such problems as to which of Schubert's works might provide a finale for the Unfinished Symphony. (He was not impressed with the suggestion of using the B Minor entr'acte from Schubert's Rosamunde!) It was unfortunate, to say the least, that increasing hearing difficulties in his last years restricted the sorts of music which he was able to enjoy.

Of Guy's main interests, that in music seems to have interacted least with Ordnance Survey matters, though it probably helped develop his friendships with some similarly-minded CCS members, and his Mozart-collecting is of a piece with his tendency to 'complete sets' of novels by certain authors and of certain OS map series. He was a voracious reader, and took a particular interest in landscapes in fiction: wholly real landscapes, wholly fictitious landscapes, and those which were a mixture of the two, with an unrecorded change somewhere on a railway journey, say. He was interested in railways, as had been his father before him, but his active interest declined with the passing of steam, and with what he saw as the deterioration in the quality of railway journals, which culminated in a letter to one of them in 1978, saying that, after 59 years of family subscription, he was giving it up. That he did not do so a year or two before can be regarded as fortunate, as thereby he might not have come across map dealer's advertisements, and, in 1981, through those map dealers, the Charles Close Society. His reminiscences of past railway journeys, and indeed much else, brought the past to life in a way that it never does in a book. (Notably memorable was a twenty-four hour journey in a troop train from Aldershot to the Clyde in January 1941, prior to embarking for India.) Not that this was done with any histrionics; his approach was very much a plain-cooking one, going for substance rather than for show. He was aided by a very good memory: I have seen him work out a complicated route for driving across London via the Blackwall tunnel, and then traverse it twenty four hours later entirely without prompting. And often, when looking at a map, however old it was, he could recognise a route which he had taken years before. He thoroughly enjoyed motoring, and took a keen interest in the construction of the A1-M1 link (now the A14).

Guy Messenger first introduced himself to the Charles Close Society as 'a botanist with a fixation on OS maps'. As well as writing *The flora of Rutland* (and keeping careful record of subsequent changes), from about 1986 onwards he was interested in the distribution of elms and in their revival in the wake of Dutch Elm disease. Some remarks at a Botanical Society of the British Isles meeting in Glasgow were followed by elm reports from BSBI members all over Britain, and even specimens: one morning in October 1987 the breakfast table was covered with sprigs of elm and elm leaves. 'I told them not to send specimens', he observed with a thoroughly schoolmasterly mixture of authority and resignation as the biggest spray of the lot emerged from a padded bag. This was followed by extensive travel in England and Wales, recording and photographing elms, with a view to proposing a reclassification of the English elms. With characteristic modesty, he once ventured to doubt whether he was a 'scientist', though employing scientific methods; anyone looking at the 'elm albums' compiled following the elm journeys would have been impressed by the thoroughness, and anyone who compares his carto-bibliographical work with that of some other

writers will find a concentration on what has observed rather than what might reasonably be inferred to exist. This rigorous integrity and honesty was the most obvious manifestation of Guy's religious beliefs, which were both strong and undenominational; the revival of the elms suggested to him an analogy with the continuation and resurrection of the spirit after death.

With the passing of Guy Messenger the Society loses one of its earliest and most valued members. For several of us the both the real and mental maps of the east midlands are irrevocably altered.

Richard Oliver

---000---