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

For us, the new millennium arrived in mid-December in the form of a new computer. Lots of colour, fun and frustration, with instruction manuals leaving no infinitive unsplit. Eventually, we decided to stick a toe in the water and surf, although initially we were more like jumping seagulls.

The Ordnance Survey site was an obvious early port of call, not because it was of interest, but because I knew they had a site and I wanted a successful search. For anyone who has not seen an Internet demonstration, the Ordnance Survey site can best be described as an on-line, very glossy and colourful folder containing lots of leaflets on anything OS; history, products and services, just as one might expect.

However, there are also games, downloadable images and information not available elsewhere. All for free. All items have the OS logo, which, if on paper, would be prized collector's items in fifty years time. Some images will only be available for a few weeks. Might we call this the new ephemera and does it need our consideration?

What do I mean by "the new ephemera"?

The new ephemera appear first on the Ordnance Survey website[1] and can be copied (downloaded) by an individual onto their own computer or a floppy disc.[2] Whilst writing this, in February 2000, the Ordnance Survey is offering "Free wallpaper to download in February", "Free downloadable mapping for the whole of Great Britain at a variety of scales", "Free GB maps: download small scale maps of Great Britain in a variety of formats", "Free! Osview: a new version of the newly enhanced software that allows you to view digital map data products", a map puzzle game and more. In fact, everything on the site can be copied onto an individual's computer.

In the last issue of *Sheetlines*[3], Jon Risby mentioned changes to the OS website. The original text and any illustrations have now gone. The free wallpaper (background screen illustrations) mentioned above will be changed after February (I assume). Was there one for January? All very ephemeral.

How does the new ephemera differ from the old?

The new ephemera (by my definition above) can only be seen on a computer screen. It can be copied and stored on floppy discs. An appropriate computer system is needed to view it. The old ephemera was on paper and could be viewed anywhere in good light.

What are the implications of the difference?

Most examples of the old ephemera have survived because they have been tucked away and forgotten – frequently as bookmarks or slipped inside books. Paper ephemera is often in the form of leaflets, usually advertising Ordnance Survey products or services.

To survive, the new ephemera must be collected, stored and have suitable machines

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[1] I consider anything *issued* by the Ordnance Survey on a computer disc as a halfway product between old and new ephemera.

[2] I do not consider a subsequent printout of the item to be real OS ephemera, even of the old variety.

[3] *Sheetlines 56* (1999), 4.

available to view it. Very little will turn up by chance. I just cannot envisage the computer equivalent of secondhand bookshops, with shelves of old computers amongst which someone exclaims "Hey, this one's got some old OS webpages saved to disc". The technology is changing so fast that what we save on a floppy disc today might not be readable in the future unless we keep the computer as well.

So, what are the chances of CCS members in 2050 being able to study the development of the Ordnance Survey website between 1998 and 2005 by viewing the actual material? Very slim I would say. I am sure that the OS does not have a policy to create an archive of website material. Individual members of our society might start to collect webpages and free stuff, but will soon get bored, run out of space or rediscover maps.

Which leaves the Charles Close Society to pick up the pieces, if it is thought to be worthwhile.

This is the first of, we hope, a regular series of columns from the Sage of Kerry.