



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

An invitation to look at someone's map collection should always be accepted, because it is bound to contain something slightly unusual. No matter how small the collection, fifty or eighty maps, the owner will always say "And what do you make of this?" producing something that I have never seen before. Not that I claim to have seen everything, you understand. It is just that the Ordnance Survey has produced so many maps that have not been included in a cartobibliography, nor mentioned in *Sheetlines*, that by the law of averages, most people have something not recorded, which often means, not known of. This is not to belittle the cartobibliographers, who set out to detail only certain elements of a map, leaving an open field for investigations into the unrecorded features. "And this one has no sheet number on the cover, have you ever come across that before?" they ask. Spelling mistakes, transport routes going over when they should go under, tourist maps invariably found in pictorial covers turning up in hiker covers, the list is endless and finding these things is one of the joys of collecting and studying Ordnance Survey maps. But should not the results of such discoveries and study be shared with everyone in our Society, rather than passed verbally to the few? For if these observations are not written down, they can easily be lost again. I cannot think of anyone who 'writes-up' their collection, either by slips of paper in the maps, marginal notes in soft pencil or in a more permanent way. Maybe our hobby is not mature enough for this to have arisen yet. Postcard collectors and philatelists are great ones for having albums with the results of research appearing alongside a stamp or postcard. However, compared to ten years ago, *Sheetlines* has an increasing number of short articles initiated by casual observations, so perhaps we are at least on the right track.

On a much larger scale, though far fewer in number, some of our map collections, and more pointedly, some sections of many more collections, are important and not only should they be written up, they should also be kept together in the future and be made available for public inspection. Again, in many cases, it is only the current owner who is able to identify the significance and importance of such maps. As a mapseller, I know a little bit about most map series and usually have an idea of which are the more common or less common sheets. But a collector of any specific series will know far more than I do, as they concentrate on only one series. They will know the really rare print codes, variant cover titles or any combination of these and other features. Very common sheets might sometimes be found with a rare cover price, which only avid series collectors will know. Any collection boasting a substantial number of such maps will be worth keeping together. But, unless the specialist collector shares the information with others, a notable collection could well be dispersed.

Unless such collections are written-up they risk being broken up and the compiler will not have the pleasure of sharing discoveries and increasing our combined knowledge. Other map enthusiasts will miss out on the details gained by the collector, and if sold, the true monetary value of the maps might not be realised. This is not to say that all of these funny little differences will have any monetary value, but they might. If a collection were written up, it would certainly increase its value, both monetarily and in usefulness.

Increasingly these days, we are accustomed to having objects and events ‘interpreted’ for us, to having the unusual pointed out and its significance explained. No longer will it pass just to point to a group of maps and call it a great collection because it was put together by member so-and-so, who really knew their stuff. Today, such a collection needs to be justified; each item must be shown to be interesting; the reasons why, are demanded by the audience. Should the great collector not be around to explain, then a written guide to the collection is vital, although there will always be oddities that go unrecognised by owners, and things that will never be recognised. However, most specialist collectors hold such information only in their heads, and only a few write a book or a *Sheetlines* article about it.

I am guilty of an even worse crime. For several years I put anything I *knew* to be unusual or worthy of study into a box until I had time to investigate further. This activity lapsed, and when I came across the box a couple of years ago, I had no idea why most of the maps had been put aside, except the few that had a very light pencil note, and even then, I did not know what most of the notes meant, e.g. price?!!!!?. Map after map was pored over, but I just could not remember why it had been set aside as unusual in some way. Now that email has arrived, things are a little better. I can quickly jot down brief details and send them to whoever I think is working on that particular series, in the hope that they will one day share the earth shattering discovery with one and all.

So, what sort of thing should we note when writing up our collections? Basically, anything you think is or might be unusual and the *reasons* why you think this. Anything you have discovered or observed and think that others might not know. If in doubt, note it. If possible, research it. Articles in *Sheetlines* have frequently mentioned that certain maps are not in the copyright libraries, so if you find this to be the case with one of yours, note it. On acquiring a map listed as “Not found” in a cartobibliography, note it. A friend rang recently to say that he had just bought a copy of the 1936 tourist map of Oban lacking both the monarch’s initials and a price on the cover. Sounds unusual, so note it. Note too that a previous owner J T Blank was the first person to be awarded the Queen’s medal for whatever, or that dissected maps in Ordnance Survey covers are, from observation, extremely rare in this particular series. Such things might or might not be important, but alert others to what you think is significant, in case they are lost again and go unrecognised. If you observe something that relates to previous CCS research or a cartobibliography, tell the person who undertook the work.

Perhaps we should initiate a competition at each AGM whereby members display the results of a piece of research on a three-foot square board. Thirty pounds for the winner. Even small research projects can be very time consuming, but if it is part of the hobby, why worry? One of my favourite articles in recent issues of *Sheetlines* is that by Peter Warburton in number 64, in which he combines his interest in Scottish history and OS maps. Read it again, look at the sources he used and consider whether this sort of thing is beyond your ability? No. So why not start following up one of those little things that you have always pondered, yet never done anything about?