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“But for the grace of God ...”

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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.

But for the grace of God ...

Langdon Rowe's harrowing account of Ordnance Survey work in the grounds of a mental hospital⁴ prompts me to add the following letters which appeared in an OS *Field Bulletin* of 1949.

September 1949

Subject: Errors in Detail Survey

Sir,

I wish to express regret and admit responsibility for some errors in the detail survey of Detail Block XXXX.

The block covers the *X town* Private Asylum where trouble was expected from time to time with the inmates, one instance being when my field book was stolen for a period of four days. The individual concerned, I discovered, had been a Colonial Surveyor.

I could not report the incident because I knew the book could never be recovered from a mental case who would fear punishment on admission of guilt. I therefore had to bribe another inmate with tobacco who eventually recovered the book for me.

During the loss I continued to chain lines and booked in notebook. Unfortunately I made some mistakes in transcribing figures, consequently the plotting of detail was out. It was my intention to go back over the ground and check points but I was sent off on detachment to *Y town*.

Subject: Excessive finalling time

Sir,

My finalling time on Km XXXX has been questioned locally. I therefore submit my explanation.

The larger portion of the map is the house and grounds of *X town* Private Asylum which is not the best place to be in, from a work point of view. Both the Examiner and myself were being constantly hampered by the inmates, both in the grounds and courtyards of the building. Here are a few of the instances which happened during my visits as detail surveyor and finisher: my field content book was stolen, my metric chain was carved up by an inmate with a motor mower, my linen tape was torn in half, I had drill orders bellowed at me for an hour by an ex-ATS Commander. I was continually being shadowed about the grounds and shrubs. I have been threatened with violence on several occasions and generally delayed in the performance of my duties.

Taking everything into consideration I do not think that in this instance my time is excessive.

On first joining the Department I was in lodgings with an experienced surveyor who had just commenced work at such an establishment and I recall that he was in a state of deep depression at the end of the day during the time that he spent there. Some thirty years later I had occasion to do some revision at such an institution but, apart from conditions having apparently improved, my experience could in no way be compared with any of the preceding.

John Cole

⁴ *Sheetlines* 70, 44.