



# *Sheetlines*

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“Kerry musings”

*David Archer*

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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*

A good number of years ago, I accompanied a friend to a lecture on railways in the main hall of Welshpool High School. We were surprised that the place was full, nearly all men in middle life and older, quite a respectable looking crowd. I cannot remember what the topic was, but the audience fidgeted and coughed through the first thirty minutes of rather turgid stuff until the speaker just happened, in passing, to mention Dr. Beeching. En bloc, the seated listeners swayed forward ever so slightly and a universal and loud hiss surged towards the stage. They then sat back as before, as if nothing had happened. My next sentence will probably cause a similar reaction from a good many members. I have come to the conclusion that the most attractive Old Series are those which have had a bit of hand colouring added. Just as I could not eat brussels sprouts until I discovered they were bearable with HP sauce, so I have never really been happy with the Old Series, but am now aware that I quite like them if hand coloured.

As with so many members, my first introduction to these maps was the purchase of a couple of David and Charles reprints in green and white benderfold covers. My memory is that Foyles had a roomful and were selling them off cheaply. I think that I was pleased with them, bought more and was glad to be able to go a long way back in time for little outlay. I then came across the same maps in the paper Ellis Martin style envelopes and considered these 'difficult' because they were a fiddle to open. I also noticed the poor quality of the original maps reproduced, with almost impossible to read hilly areas (regardless of the covers they were in). In addition, there was something not quite right about the dates, but I was not sure what. Old Series maps were now considered a real pain.

As my small accumulation of maps increased, so the odd Old Series crept in, meaning I came across it priced very reasonably (cheap). Most of these acquisitions were in fact bits of Old Series maps, dissected, usually with small annotations, and lacking margins. All eventually turned out to be New Series or small sheet Thirds. How was I to know? All black and white one-inch maps lacking margins looked the same to me (and many still do). I knew that the Old Series came with and without hachures, so it was safe to consider anything that *looked* like an Old Series to be one. And what did an Old Series look like? Small-scale, oldish-looking, without colour. Hachures were a clincher. Anyway, nobody ever mentioned New or Revised New Series in those days. One went from the Old Series straight to the coloured large sheet Thirds. Well, me and my sort did.

I was aware of the Harry Margary reprints of early states in book form when they were coming out, but could not afford them. And anyway, the maps were rubbish, as I knew courtesy of Messrs David and Charles. I could get nowhere with them, so why consider the books? True, they had essays, but these did not seem to follow on from each other, and one had to wait so long for the next instalment. When I began trading, I bought the available volumes and started using them. Overnight, I was converted – to the Margary volumes, but still only lukewarm with regard to the original maps.

I suppose that I warmed to them as I became more familiar with the maps. In those days, interest in the Old Series appeared to centre on watermarks, and initially, looking for watermarks was a major problem because I could not find any. Never having seen one, I would hold a sheet to a strong light and thought that yes, maybe that was a pattern in the

paper, but no way did it say Whatman, let alone give a date. However, once you see one, and know what you are looking for, everything changes. Pure frustration evaporates and is replaced by intense frustration, as most watermarks have a densely hachured hill printed over the important bit. Yes, in most cases one can make out the words, and usually the '18' in the date is easy, but the last two digits of the year, the most important thing are a pest. Threes, fives and eights apparently come up in so many different styles of similar writing. And you are relying on these to date the map, having been fired with enthusiasm by the writings of Messrs Mumford,<sup>2</sup> Clark<sup>3</sup> and Clarke.<sup>4</sup> Today, watermarks are still great fun, and the Old Series has lots of them. For beginners, I suggest looking at the Isle of Wight or other coastal full sheets with lots of white paper.

Gradually, I worked out my own way of dealing with the maps and actually began to enjoy them. I stopped using the Margary cartobibliographies for dating and used the maps themselves. Later, for the first time, I came across some really early states which are just so different that one falls for them. The paper seems thick, soft and fluffy without being so. The ink is a warm brown rather than cold black, and the overall effect is one of great age, so much older than maps printed twenty years later. Somehow they are exceptional.

Subsequently, I found some early states with the roads colour washed yellow which appealed and made me consider colouring in a totally different light. I conducted an experiment and laid two identical post-1850 states, side by side. The hand coloured map was far nicer.

I would not say that I am passionate about the Old Series, but am now very fond of them, despite everything. Meaning? Meaning that in my book, a map series should be set out on neat sheet lines, be numbered logically, tell the user what the symbols mean and have an indication of how up-to-date the various features are. As a series, the Old Series fails miserably. Only one sheet has a title, others are referred to by number. 'Sheet 60' is pretty meaningless to most people. On sale for over a hundred years and no sheet titles. Secondly, there is no legend, no key to the symbols, abbreviations and conventions used. OK, most people can guess what a small windmill means, but a circle with a dot in the middle hardly evokes a coal pit.

Perhaps the most irritating aspect of these maps is that despite changes to the map detail, with few exceptions, the original publication dates were never changed, and only in later years did the small print say that railways had been updated. No other revision was acknowledged. Eventually, there were maps on sale with a publication date of over seventy years earlier. Such maps must have been like seeing an atlas in Waterstones: published 1940, motorways revised 2007. Even Sir Henry James did nothing about it. James, who was full of himself and who crowed about the wonderful modern Ordnance Survey, let newly revised maps be sold showing a publication date of up to fifty years before. A marketing nightmare.

Or, consider the arrangement of sheet numbers. What a mess of a series, second only to the Explorers of today. Initially issued as county groups of maps, the sheet numbers reflect this, so that England, south of London is covered by four and a half distinct blocks of maps, with the numbering in each block being separate and clockwise. From Swindon – I'm sorry –

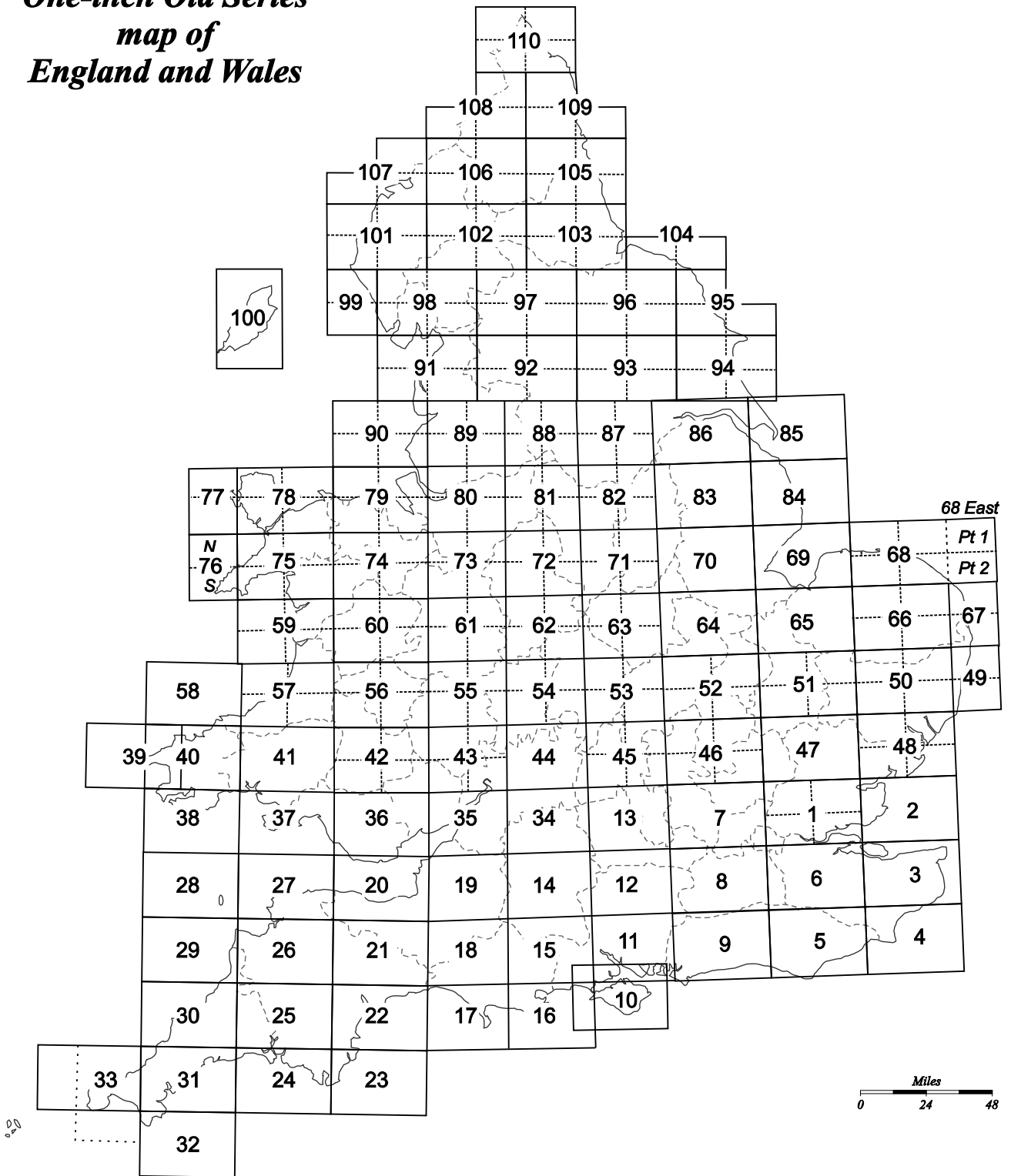
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<sup>2</sup> I Mumford, 'Engraved Ordnance Survey one-inch maps - the problem of dating', *The Cartographic Journal* 5 (1968), 44-46.

<sup>3</sup> I Mumford and P K Clark, 'Engraved Ordnance Survey one-inch maps : the methodology of dating', *The Cartographic Journal* 5 (1968), 111-114.

<sup>4</sup> R V Clarke, 'The use of watermarks in dating Old Series one-inch Ordnance Survey maps', *The Cartographic Journal* 6 (1969), 114-129.

**One-inch Old Series  
map of  
England and Wales**



*Dashed lines indicate sheets issued as quarter sheets, suffixed NW, NE, SW, SE (except as shown). Sheets 1 and 48 were originally published as full sheets. Sheets 43 and 55 were reissued as full sheets. Sheet 33 was reissued in portrait format.*

*This is one of a series of index diagrams which have been prepared for the relaunch of the Society's website. Go to [www.charlesclosesociety.org](http://www.charlesclosesociety.org) and select 'Maps, Covers and Indexes' – CJH*

from sheet 34 northwards sheets are numbered along boustrophedon lines, with one row of numbers reading left to right and the one above reading right to left, and above that left to right again. As for the actual numbers used, 1, 2, and 3 are fine, but 'Sheet 68 East Pt No. 2' is not exactly elegant, or did someone miss this teeny weeny bit of land at the planning stage so that we now have to refer to sheet 68 as published in six quarters?

Someone in the Ordnance Survey knew what was needed, as is seen by the clear numbering and truly beautiful sheet lines of the Scottish one-inch First Edition, and eventually there was some good news and bad news. The OS did what they should have done years previously, and renumbered the maps. But only the northern sheets, which were henceforth referred to as the first issues of the New Series, thus giving a name to the existing maps, the Old Series. Un-named by the Ordnance Survey until into their seventies, how sad. The Scottish maps were of a uniform size, 24" by 18". A set of paper flat copies forms a neat pile. Not so the English and Welsh cousins, where it would not be too far fetched to say that no two maps were the same size (a little far fetched maybe, but the message is clear). And the shape varied quite frequently. Initially issued as full sheets, *nominally* rectangular 36" by 24", but with variations, followed by quarter sheets, *nominally* rectangular 18" by 12", but often narrower and tapering northwards. Look at a good index diagram to see how the sheets for middle England are squeezed, and are not rectangular, how full and quarter sheets are jumbled and many lines are wonky. Not a pretty sight.

I know several people who like a neatly ordered life and changed to collecting a set of Seventh Series in large covers, when they discovered that a set of small covers was not possible. Lucky them that they were not interested in the Old Series. Sheet numbers all over the place, large and small sheets, noticeably tapering small sheets, not to mention fifteen different sizes of dissected maps when folded, all would drive them crazy, as would the visual impact of the various sized sheets if kept flat. Imagine a set of paper flat Old Series with large full sheets at the bottom, quarter sheets on top, and the tapering and ever smaller sheets of middle England above these. Something more akin to a paper pyramid than a map series.

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