



# *Sheetlines*

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

“Kerry musings”

*David Archer*

*Sheetlines*, 85 (August 2009), pp.51-54

Stable URL: <http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue85page51.pdf>

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Published by  
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY  
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps  
[www.CharlesCloseSociety.org](http://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.

*Kerry musings**David Archer*

I would not go as far as to say that they were life changing, but they certainly made life far more interesting, exciting even. The most wonderful thing since the sixties. The first from each source was always the most thrilling, because the source was previously unknown, and they arrived totally unexpectedly. Every one was guaranteed to have new information, another piece to help complete the jigsaw, nay, to help put the edges on the jigsaw. All would

be read and re-read, studied and studied again, days, weeks, months later. Endlessly. Over and over, in the absence of substantial help from other sources. The joy of having received one was immediately followed by the sorrow that the arrival date of the next was unknown. Ah, happy days.

The first to arrive really was momentous. This was handwritten and contained a list of about fifteen or twenty Ordnance Survey maps that Campbell Kennedy had for sale. I think that Campbell used to advertise in the Cyclists Touring Club magazine wanting to buy Ordnance Survey maps, and I must have written asking if he had any for sale, hence the list. It was just so exciting to have made contact with another person, the first person, who also had an interest in OS maps. And he had duplicates. The prices seemed reasonable, but even with a simple list there were things that a near novice just did not understand, and Campbell was more than patient when replying to my questions.

Within two weeks an unsolicited Alan Godfrey catalogue arrived. I never discovered how Alan got my address, but am pretty certain that it must have been passed on by someone who advertised in *Exchange and Mart*<sup>1</sup> wanting geological maps. And of course I wrote seeking contact with another map minded person, but had no reply. Until the arrival of Alan Godfrey Catalogue 54, April 1981, *Ordnance Survey maps: 1900-1920*. Eight pages full of maps, and more importantly, information and ‘pointers’ for those who had yet to really study and pull the information from the maps they held. Thus, he offered Half-inch maps, both Layered and Hill-shaded (aha, two styles); or Small Sheet Series (All hill-shaded) and Large Sheet Series (Hill-shaded) (aha again, two sizes, but did both sizes come in both styles?) One-inch maps, Second Series, revised: Coloured edition (no idea what these are); Third Edition (Large Sheet Series) (yes, I think I know what these are); District Maps (nice to have the term confirmed); Ireland (I am positive that I had never seen any Irish Ordnance Survey maps at this stage).

Catalogues appeared monthly, with the May catalogue devoted to the Seventh Series, whilst June had a fantastic picture of the Old Sarum cover on the front. Just so exciting. I knew in my bones that this sort of stuff must exist, but to have it confirmed was wonderful. In my copy of this catalogue there is still a leaflet announcing the formation of the Charles Close Society. A society for OS maps. What more could one ask for? Surely 1981 must be remembered as the greatest year since 1967, and neither have been bettered for sheer joy and excitement. Discuss.

And so it continued, relentlessly, month after month, six-inch, twenty five-inch, ten-mile, geological, all things that were new to me. New terms were introduced: electrotype, zincograph, hachuring, War Revision, manoeuvre maps, District Maps (outline edition). But the best bits were the occasional paragraphs of *information* ... the first coloured series, issued a decade later ... Especially attractive are the earliest of these sheets, issued up to about 1902 ... the revision dates are often totally misleading ... this rare and beautiful map. I just absorbed it all, and still wanted more. Catalogue 60, Autumn 1981, announced that ‘Due to the very disappointing response, there will be no more Open Days.’ I was doubly heartbroken as I had not known about them, and even had I known, would not have been able to afford to go to Gateshead anyway. A missed chance to actually meet a map person.

The year progressed, more catalogues from Alan Godfrey and the prospect of a society, hopefully with information to divulge. I would study the latest offering, then re-read the few

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<sup>1</sup> I had been buying the *Exchange and Mart* since primary school days, when we used to study it endlessly for sources of terrapins, newts and such things. A wonderful publication.

earlier issues and try to make sense of what was in them, so as to make sense of my own small accumulation.

Why do I keep saying that I wanted information? Because there was virtually none available, well, easily found. The two main or only sources were Brian Harley's *The historian's guide to Ordnance Survey maps*, 1964 and his *Ordnance Survey maps : a descriptive manual*, 1975. The first was essentially a brief guide, aimed at historians, not collectors. Very much a quick romp through what was available, it left more questions than it provided answers, (and it called the Popular Edition the 'Fourth Edition', which everyone else followed for years). The historical detail in the *Descriptive manual* was provided in order to support the descriptions of current OS mapping. Forget all that you know about OS maps, get these two books out and try to make sense of your collection. Neither will tell you anything about the different covers, nor give more than brief facts concerning the basic series. The *Guide* has six lines on the half-inch, and three on the Fifth Edition, with no mention of the Fifth Relief. But it was far better than nothing for someone who lived in isolation from other OS map collectors. Catalogues certainly had infinitely more to offer.

In October 1981, the first issue of *Sheetlines* appeared, a sweet little eight-side newsletter which contained a bombshell for me. On Saturday the 12th of December there would be a *meeting* in Upper Norwood, virtually just around the corner. Walkable. The snag was that it was over six weeks away. Needless to say I went, and I met most of the prime suspects in the society's early history. It was a wonderful bright day, snow everywhere. Bill Batchelor has never been the same since.

A list of members and addresses appeared in the second issue of *Sheetlines* in December, and in January 1982 a catalogue arrived from Mike Ivory, with one from Richard Dean popping through the letterbox soon after. Things were decidedly on the up. Lots of information from the new catalogues and an avalanche from the early issues of *Sheetlines*, together with meetings and people to contact from the membership list. Even our move to Mid Wales in April 1982 did not really dent things.

It was not until March 1983 that John Coombes issued his Catalogue 84, *Ordnance Survey Maps, 1805-1974*.<sup>2</sup> Exceedingly organised, with headings for all map series, large and small scales, sheet sizes, print codes, publication *and* survey dates. But the size, 94 pages and 3675 items, was enormous. I think that his codes for map formats (flc) are still used by one railway ephemera auction house.

During 1983, so soon after being founded, the society reached what Rostow called, when referring to developing economies, the point of take-off into sustained growth. Everything was in place, the momentum was such that the society should survive and grow. And it did. December 1983 saw issue 8 of *Sheetlines* with Richard Oliver in full flow, John Paddy Browne had written on map covers, we knew how to find our way around the New Series and Richard Dean had submitted his wonderful Fifth Edition index as early as issue 4. Everything since has been just *so* tame.

Thus it was, that by the end of 1983, the great era of mapsellers' catalogues as the major source of information on Ordnance Survey maps had ended. After that, *Sheetlines* and other society publications took over.<sup>3</sup> We will never see their like again, certainly not for the

<sup>2</sup> No new-fangled and much despised 1:50,000 maps for John? Well, there were four.

<sup>3</sup> Two truly memorable catalogues did appear later. In the Autumn of 1985, Richard Dean's Catalogue 16 had more tourist and district maps than any previous list, but we had to wait until April 1988 for the finest catalogue of OS maps ever produced. A J Coombes Catalogue 98 *Ordnance Survey Maps 1809-1979* had over 201 pages, ending with item

excitement and information gained. John Coombes, Richard Dean, Alan Godfrey and Mike Ivory all attended the founding meeting, and helped weld the society in the early years, introducing people to membership and providing information via catalogues, greatly supplementing the meagre details available elsewhere. And they did give a lot of information, if you looked for it. Map series and sheet numbers that did *not* appear in catalogues told almost as much as those that did appear. Catalogues confirmed a lot of what we assumed to be the case, and they certainly gave me the confidence to be able to speak about OS maps in conversation with others. Catalogues told us what maps we had, what they were called. They helped one get a feel for what came up, and provided excitement at seeing the unusual, if only listed. More importantly, they encouraged us to go out and search for more maps, hopefully finding the very rare items that we knew must exist.

The Society's archive has a set of all known catalogues, with an additional set of Alan Godfrey catalogues in the National Library of Scotland. Alas, I have none of the handwritten lists from Campbell Kennedy, and I hope that he has none of my letters with their endless questions.

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9721. All scales, and books. I remember that it arrived just before an AGM, and someone asked the person sitting beside me whether he had seen a copy. His reply was to the effect that he had spent two days going through it, but would easily need another two to finish.