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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

If you are passing Aberystwyth pier at dusk in winter, you will notice people walking along the promenade slowly come to a halt, look up into the sky and point. A scene similar to the opening pages of the first Harry Potter book. Something is happening here, and they don't know what it is, do they, Mr Jones? Thousands and thousands of starlings roost under the pier, arriving as wave after wave of black clouds which swirl around the pier and then zoom beneath it, with the subsequent noise of their chattering being tremendous.

A similar gathering occurs at weekends, especially in the summer, a short way along the prom at the beach café near the bandstand. Dozens of motorcyclists congregate, clad in shiny expensive black and multicoloured leathers, with lots of magnificent machines, all colour and chrome, standing at a slight angle on the wide promenade. A lovely scene, which the town council was recently trying to stop, despite it being a tourist attraction in itself. They arrive in threes and fours, park, have something to eat and drink and then depart, leaving space for new arrivals. None appear to be under the age of 65, men or women, and all are obviously enjoying retirement. We recently came across a similar gathering at the bus station café in Y Fenni (Abergavenny) one Sunday afternoon.

Like the starlings, how do they know where to go? If on holiday, are they able to seek out these meeting places? Are they advertised in motorcycle magazines, or is it just word of mouth? Probably both, but there is also a map, or rather a set of maps, to help them; with nothing for the starlings, so far. *The Touring map for motorcyclists* comes as a set of twelve maps covering Great Britain and the whole of Ireland. 'Weatherproof / Write on - wipe off / with list of bike meets' Scale 1:301,000, and published by Naumann & Göbel Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Cologne, [2006]. A nice compact 26 by 19 inches sheet size, laminated both sides with the set held within a plastic case. A large red circle with a number and motorcyclist within it indicates the meets, with details, such as meet times or days plus directions being in the legend panel.

I am quite keen on thematic maps and thought this an unusual subject, so I paid my pound and bought the set, but then realised that I had really bought them just because I found the maps attractive, and very satisfying to hold. A nice object, nothing really to do with their being maps. After looking at them for an hour or so, I decided that they were not thematic maps, the motorcycle symbols were really just overprints, something rather lightweight compared to a thematic map. To me, thematic maps are overwhelmingly concerned with their subjects, such as geology, land use and agricultural land use, or any of the 'Ten Mile'¹ maps published by the Ordnance Survey for the proposed National Atlas : iron and steel, population distribution, sand and gravel, all shown on a very faint 'ten mile' base map, and in need of wider recognition.² Many maps at the back of a world atlas are thematic, but do not catch the imagination, because they are on such a small scale.

My first appreciation of specialised maps was in the mid-60s, when a geography master held up a copy of a national daily paper and said 'Well lads, if you want to pull the birds, Eastbourne is the place to go. Females outnumber males two to one'. Two girls for every boy. Whatever rag it was, it featured a map from a piece of academic research showing that

¹ Actually 1:625,000

² A quick plug for Roger Hellyer's book : *The 'ten-mile' maps of the Ordnance Surveys*, Charles Close Society, 1992.

females did indeed greatly outnumber males along the English south coast. The only snag being that most were pensioners. Not exactly lying with statistics, but it was a good way to begin a lesson on mapping data of different sorts, and led to Snow's map of cholera in Soho and Charles Booth's maps of London poverty.

So, what is the difference between a thematic map and a map with an overprint? An overprint can be fairly simple, in one colour, on a fully coloured base map, for example most manoeuvre maps, the *Power line and obstruction overprint* on 1:50,000 sheets, or at its simplest, the coloured grid over standard Seventh Series sheets issued to the military as M722. All quite clearly overprints, with one series even named so. But sometimes, I feel that individual maps in the same map series can be either an overprint or a thematic map. On opening some trench maps, one is overwhelmed by a mass of red or blue detail, but on others, there is just a little bit of red in one corner which one ignores and immediately studies the grey base map detail, rather than the few coloured trenches. Here, the detail of an overprint is sometimes dominant and sometimes not. So dominant, in my opinion, that a map with an overprint becomes a thematic map.

The maps in the set I bought are overwhelmingly road maps, of equal use to anyone on a motorbike or in a car, with large symbols indicating the meeting places. Nice clear road maps, having a feel of a cross between Michelin maps and the old 1970s National petrol maps, which I particularly liked, and still use in emergencies. The meet symbols are very much an overprint which does not distract the eye from the base map, meaning they can easily be ignored and the maps used by motorists. For me, on a thematic map, the information is not only prominent but dominant, and the map cannot easily be used for other purposes.

And what of the actual maps? Well, despite having a rather dated Triumph motorcycle and motorcyclist on the front covers, they look nice, and are probably 'fit for purpose', which is to locate the meets and show the main roads leading to them. But as with most maps, one can find small faults, such as the symbol showing (I assume) a wireless tower which is not in the legend, the same symbol in blue or green for marsh or moor which appear the same even with glasses on, and naming all major roads motorways of some sort. Amongst the named tourist attractions we find Upper Bryn in Newtown, where the only thing of note is the chip shop, and I am still pondering the House on Crotches just south of Bishop's Castle. On the positive side, they are nice to hold, are a good size, weatherproof and washable, (but no indication is given of what writes and cleans off). Sheets have an overlap, which I like and is probably safer for motorcyclists.

Looking at the legend I was puzzled by symbols for both a National Border and an International Border. My first thought was that either side of a National Border would be two different countries, hence it was an International Border, the same thing. So why have two symbols? The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic was shown as International. Good. That between England and both Wales and Scotland was a National Border, despite defining different countries. Closer examination showed that this symbol was also used for county boundaries, so it appears that a National Border means within a country, an English county; but as so many of our world cousins do, they assume that England, Wales and Scotland are one country. After much thought, I still cannot think of a word or phrase to cover all boundaries such as those dividing English counties, German Länder or Russian oblasts.

These days, one would expect all aspects of a map to be correct, wherever it originated. Should we make allowances for maps of the British Isles not produced in this country, or for maps produced by British cartographers of areas beyond our borders? I would say no. There is enough source material available to produce an accurate map, whether obtained legally or otherwise, and talented translators exist. Throw in international standards plus computers, and a perfect product should result from even a modest cartographic unit. Hence these maps are shoddy in some respects, their strong point being their format: laminated and of a convenient size for use on a motorcycle.

But these are wonderful and saintly maps. Well, beatified, and deserving a certain reverence. Why? Because the legend has a small blue symbol of a steaming cup and saucer, which I have always wanted to see on a map.³ This identifies the location of a Kiosk, whatever that means. And having seen it in the legend, I just had to find one on a map. In blue, so associated with motorways I assumed. However, I knew the result before I started my search and having spent fifteen minutes following the motorways on the first six sheets, I stopped. Why? Because whatever a kiosk was, it was not British and would not be on these maps. Secondly, if I did find one, I knew that I would have to go and see it at the weekend, and the next sheet to look at was Scotland. If anyone has a kiosk it will be the Scots. I just could not spare the time. Five minutes later I was at it again, looking at Ireland where, like snakes, there is not a single motorway facility, north or south of the International Border. Well, not according to these maps. My beloved symbol was nowhere to be found. Tears of grief. But let us be positive, the most wonderful symbol in the world is now recognised and used by cartographers, and appears to be international, if only in the legend. Another ten years, and who knows what might be on the actual maps. Something really, really useful maybe?

³ *Sheetlines* 59, 52.