



Sheetlines

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

“Kerry musings”

David Archer

Sheetlines, 87 (April 2010), pp.51-53

Stable URL: <http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue87page51.pdf>

*This article is provided for personal, non-commercial use only.
Please contact the Society regarding any other use of this work.*

Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
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*

One Saturday in 1982, one of our members bought a particular map from a market stall. Another member bought a copy of the same map last Saturday. Both were very pleased with their purchase and thought the map might be rare. How were they to confirm this, one in the very early days of the Charles Close Society, and another nearly thirty years later and with a host of publications available? In both cases, for most maps, they would have to ask someone. They would have to conduct a conversation with another member, speak and listen, something I suggest is happening far less often these days than in the past. As I often mention, in the very early days of our society, there were virtually no publications on OS maps that members could refer to. In the first issue of *Sheetlines* we were promised monographs on various small scale map series, and in the meantime just had to keep our ears open and listen in order to pick up facts about maps. If you wanted to know whether a map was rare or not, you asked one of the few people who might have known.

In conversation, beside facts, if one can spot slight hesitations, enthusiasms and so on, one hears the verbal equivalent of reading between the lines. Positive and negative comments are all valid and worth noting. "The maps were in beautiful condition but were only ..." The word only implying common and not worth bothering about. "It would have been nice if they were ..." Suggesting that what they were not was far better than what they were. "I could not believe my luck and started shaking." "My wife had to go and ask the price as I felt faint even holding it." Definitely keep an eye open for these and buy at all costs. "A complete set, including sheet 4." Go home and work out why sheet 4 is so marvellous. But beware, even if someone knows their stuff, both map collectors and map sellers must decide whether their opinion on certain matters has commercial relevance. Meaning? Meaning that they might know a given map to be extremely rare and an item they have sought for years, but others just would not want it, even if offered free, gratis and for nothing.

When discussing maps, and hoping to hear something to one's advantage, caution is the word at the back of most minds, especially with a person or persons unknown. Mention a map being really unusual, and it might be withdrawn from sale, or it might be offered at a higher price than a minute ago. If we express an interest in something, we fear that the price will go up. We have all walked into a book shop, asked for Ordnance Survey maps, and immediately feared that we had alerted the shop owner to the fact that this was our special interest, and maybe he should re-consider his prices. But had we not mentioned it, the box of maps would not have been brought from the private back room. A no-win situation. The art is to ask whilst giving the impression that it really does not matter if no maps are forthcoming, but if any did appear, you would be very gracious and look through them. Not that you really want to buy any. Not that you would know a rarity if you saw one. No, you just have a fancy to look through a box of tatty old maps on the off-chance that one might appeal to you, goodness knows why.

Collectors listen primarily for indications of rarity, something I am extremely wary of. I have always felt uncomfortable when maps are said to be rare. I try not to use the term,

as I can only go on my own experience, and sometimes an item will not come my way, but frequently appears elsewhere. I prefer common, less common and scarce, as in “From my experience it is scarce.” I am most reluctant to say “It is rare.” When someone asks me whether a particular item is rare or not, my rule of thumb is that if the person has been collecting OS maps for three or more years and consistently searches for them, then if they have not seen one, they are not thick on the ground. Such individuals probably know most of what any map seller knows about rarity. Specialists of a given series will always know far more than any map seller. They live and sleep with their favourite series, whilst map sellers have to know a bit about all series.

So, almost thirty years on, new OS map enthusiasts can buy a good set of publications, and can look up a lot of what they would previously have had to listen out for. But our publications seldom give any indication as to which maps are scarce. True, some say, ‘a copy exists with..’ implying something unusual, or one could get an idea of the number of copies in existence from adding up print code details. The books do not set out to tell us which maps are scarce and which are really common. Look as long as you will at *Map cover art* or *Popular maps* and you will generally find only hints as to which maps mentioned are scarce. *Map cover art* has 199 small pictures of map covers, but no indication of which are the ten hardest to find. From experience or looking at *Popular maps*, one knows that Sheet 133 is the most common sheet, but which printing of Sheet 133 is quite hard to find? No help from the book.

Working alone, as the years go by, one can easily believe that the longer a map is elusive, the scarcer it is. True or false? The 1906 map of *Hyde Park & Kensington Gardens* is a truly beautiful map in a lovely small blue cover. So desirable; yet I would bet good money that less than twenty copies were ever sold to the public. Extremely Rare (there, I’ve used the word, and given it a capital as emphasis). Rare and desirable should equal a very high selling price, surely in the top five for folded maps. But no, it is not too hard to find, and most people who want one have a copy. In the 1980s, a box of maps in mint condition was discovered, and the maps trickled on to the market, making them fairly easy to find. Extremely Rare and probably unknown in 1960; well known and so-so scarce in 2010. One never knows what might come up, so I do not like to use the word rare with an air of certainty. All right you say, give us an example of what you consider a rare map that we might find in our collections; New Popular, sheet 160, *London N.W.*, in a cover, with a 1203 print code - an example where most readers will say “so what?”

People ask about rarity, yet seldom continue by discussing prices, obviously preferring to decide for themselves what price they are prepared to pay. On balance, I am pleased that so little has been written to identify the less common OS maps, mainly because it makes us talk to each other. A general guide would be useful, but not one with an emphasis on individual maps. Otherwise we would spend ages arguing about prices and rarity, spoiling the fun of collecting. If you want to be bored stiff by the joint subject of rarity and prices, listen to certain postcard dealers, or imagine having the equivalent of a Stanley Gibbons catalogue for OS maps; boring beyond belief, with no reason to talk to each other, and no resulting friendships.

We still have to listen as keenly as ever, but this is becoming more difficult. My feeling is that there is less contact between individual members than in the past, with email killing the art of telephone conversation. eBay is fostering collecting in isolation, something I consider a very bad thing, with members reluctant to talk about certain maps in case they give something away. This is a great shame, as most CCS members are extremely generous with information. The gap has been filled to some extent by ordnancemaps,¹ supplying answers to questions on a public email forum, but there are so many questions that one prefers not to ask under the gaze of others. And some people will not give answers for all to see. Might I suggest that, as a society, we try to have more day meetings where people can talk to each other, besides over lunch? My feeling is that the trend has been to have more and more visits rather than meetings. Put rather crudely, on a visit one stands around and is shown things, whilst at a meeting one sits and exchanges ideas and information, with plenty of time to *show things to people* and discuss them. There might need to be a minimum of structure, such as having a theme for the day, say Tourist and District maps with a brief half-hour introduction, and then it is open to anyone to ask questions, show maps or whatever. I know that we have meetings, but feel that more are desirable, keeping them scattered all over the place. All we need is someone to book a venue with food nearby and off we go. The sort of place Lionel Hooper found in Bath a few years ago, a city centre church hall with a meeting room, offering refreshments and lunch on Saturdays.