



Sheetlines

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

“John Beer (1930-2010)”

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Sheetlines, 89 (December 2010), pp.3-4

Stable URL: <http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue89page3.pdf>

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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.

John Beer (25 April 1930 – 19 September 2010)

H J J (John) Beer was one of the earliest members – number 26 – to be enrolled into the Charles Close Society, in 1981. He represented the ‘amateur’ strand in the Society in a distinctive way. His father was in the Navy and John was born



in Portsmouth, though of Cornish stock. World War II disrupted his education and he left school at fifteen and was a woodworker for a while. After National Service in the Army, when he was introduced to the delights of beer-drinking, he worked for a time as a stone mason, but wanted something else, and so he joined the RAF, where he trained as a male nurse. After returning to civilian life he worked in a naval hospital in

Portsmouth, and he liked to say that he had been a member of all three armed services. Cutbacks in the early 1980s led to premature retirement, and late in 1984 he moved to Shrewsbury and became a leading member of its Civic Society, though he retained strong links with Portsmouth.

Work didn't impede John from following an autodidactic course, and by the time that I came to know him in 1983 his bookshelves were testimony to his interests in music, psychology, religion (how many know about *episcopi vagantes*, never mind have met one?), theology (not necessarily the same thing as religion), history, beer (good collection of mats), scouts and, not least, maps. Although never a professional cartographer, he had the necessarily neat, tidy instinct of the born draughtsman. Two of his interests led him to form the Scout Mapping Service, which enjoyed a small but distinguished output: maps of scout campsites, including Gilwell Park in Essex, and some facsimiles, including Ordnance Survey one-inch Old Series sheet 1 NW and New Series sheet 317. A project that got no further than a manuscript stage was ‘A backwoodsman's guide to maps’: it would have embraced simple surveying, drawing, map-reading and some history, and also index diagrams to the main OS small-scale series. Unfortunately the scheme was overtaken by the fading away of the world of amateurism, the ability to make the most of limited technology on a limited budget, and a desire to do it for oneself rather than be spoon-fed. Like John, it belonged to a world of straightforwardness; of what you saw was what you got, with no complicated behind-the-scenes wiring. He was an early member of the British Cartographic Society, and indeed might have been at the inaugural meeting but for being in Oman at the time, but left it later on the grounds that ‘it's all computers now’. He was ‘hands on’. However, he remained loyal to the Charles Close Society to the end, and was fertile with ideas for short-run booklets, and was prepared to turn ephemeral ‘preliminary lists’ into

neat little booklets to grace his shelves. His last appearance at a CCS AGM was at Ludlow in 2009.

Mention of Oman prompts mention of possibly John's most remarkable map: certainly the most controversial. Around 1963 he was posted to Salālah as part of a small medical team attending a British base there. There was an agreement with the Sultan that there would be no mapping, but John managed to compile a 1:100,000 of the district around Salālah from various sources. It was practically desert, and much of the map was pretty empty, but nonetheless the British authorities weren't happy, and Aircraftsman Beer gained what might be termed a certain limited notoriety, not least at what was then Survey Production Centre, RE, which added a copy of the map to its collection. (One wonders if it is still there.)

In losing John we have lost a good friend.

Richard Oliver