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“Review: Map of a nation”

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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.

Reviews

Rachel Hewitt, *Map of a nation: a biography of the Ordnance Survey*, London: Granta, 2010, ISBN 978-1-84708-098-1, hardback, £25.00

The late J Brian Harley observed somewhere, in the late 1980s, that at that time the best work in North America on the history of cartography was being undertaken in university departments of English. What he was referring to was the treating of the map as a ‘text’ that could be ‘read’, with all that that implied in the way of theoretical baggage. In Rachel Hewitt’s *Map of a nation* we have little of reading maps in that sense – for which, I suspect, many readers will be heartily glad – but we do have the first full-length book on the Ordnance Survey to emerge from an English department. Even before it reached the bookshops it was winning praise, including the Jerwood Award for Non-Fiction. Curiosity is stimulated: expectations are high.

Readers who know nothing of the history of the Ordnance Survey, and are apt to be vague about its output – which seems to include the four specimens of ‘advance praise’ on the back of the dust wrapper – will no doubt lap it up eagerly. It is for those of us who have spent a good many years researching and writing about aspects of the Survey, past, present, and future, to say whether it is *really* ‘a biography’, and whether it deserves its accolades.

Before going further, it is necessary to say something of the scheme of the book. It derives from a University of London doctoral thesis of 2007 ‘Dreaming o’er the map of things: the Ordnance Survey and the literature of the British Isles 1747-1842’, which I confess to not having read, so I don’t know how much of it is reproduced or paraphrased in *Map of a nation*. The central assumption seems to be that the backbone of the Ordnance Survey was the creating of what is now known as the Old Series one-inch map of England and Wales, and that it was completed in 1870, at which point this ‘biography’ ends. As the parent thesis ended in 1842 and a single chapter (12, ‘A great national survey’) in the book continues the narrative to 1870, there is a certain tension apparent. Should you happen to light upon Chapter 12 first, then you may form a very unfavourable, and very unfair, impression of the work as a whole.¹ But of that more later.

Whilst the broad outlines of the story will contain nothing new for many readers, at any rate of *Sheetlines*, ‘the devil is in the detail’ and a considerable quantity of diverse material, some published, some not, is drawn together here for the first time: the bibliography runs to 32 pages. There are some eccentric inclusions and omissions: amongst the former may be instanced works on the 1:25,000 First Series and twentieth century one-inch military maps, and amongst the latter of ‘Boud’ and ‘Delano-Smith-&-Kain’.² Thirty two pages notwith-

¹ This will perhaps be testified to by members of the Society’s Committee present at the meeting in Harmston on 9 October 2010.

² R C Boud, The Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland and the Ordnance Survey of Scotland, 1837-75, *Cartographic Journal* 23 (1986), 3-26; Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger J P Kain, *English maps: a history*, London: British Library, 1999; Roger Hellyer, *A guide to*

standing, it is unfortunate that there is no summary listing of the references to the Ordnance Survey (by whatever name) in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century newspapers that are cited in the notes: anyone who has undertaken newspaper-trawling will know that there is hard graft implied, far beyond leafing through Palmer's indexes to *The Times*. The notes, by the way, are of a sort that has become fashionable in recent years: after the last chapter, and not numbered, but rather cued by repetition of the start of a quotation. Whilst there are those who argue that for many readers even note numbers are distracting, and footnotes are frankly off-putting, for the serious reader the method used here is thoroughly irritating: the old excuse for endnotes of economy in typesetting has long ceased to apply. Now, this may well be the fault of the publishers rather than of the author, but the end-result is that more paper is consumed: Mudge's letter to Colby of 1 October 1811, quoted from in several places on page 214 and referenced on pages 360-1, is a case in point: nearly half a page of references could have been compressed into two or three footnotes. A 'green' generation should think of these things.³

The story starts with a 'prologue', centring around the Battle of Culloden in 1746, and immediately displays the quality of the writing. One might perhaps quibble with some of the subsidiary information: for example, whilst it is certainly true that there were those who acquired Saxton's maps as symbols (page xx), there is clear evidence that his was a 'state survey' for utilitarian purposes, for which one need look no further than William Cecil, Lord Burghley, acquiring proof copies as soon as they were available for purposes of statecraft, including the surveillance of Catholics, and the grant of an estate to Saxton by Queen Elizabeth. Reference to 'Delano-Smith-&-Kain' would have revealed this, and a more careful reading of this and of Brian Harley's introductory chapter in 'Seymour' would have shown that Saxton and Ogilby represent strands in a story of state map-making that began long before the 'Ordnance Survey' was ever thought of.⁴ But it's a good read, and I liked both the citation and illustration of Wenceslaus Hollar's 'The scale's but small, Expect not truth in all' on a late seventeenth century map of London. All the same, there is scope for disagreement here: Hollar is interpreted as warning against the defects in contemporary surveying instruments, whereas surely he was cautioning against cartographic generalisation.⁵ Actually, the scale is not *that*

the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 First Series, London: Charles Close Society, 2003; Roger Hellyer and Richard Oliver, *Military maps: the one-inch series of Great Britain and Ireland*, London: Charles Close Society, 2004.

³ Admittedly, I do not have a particularly high opinion of publishers' editors and copy-editors: for the present it can be left to others to 'deconstruct' why this might be so.

⁴ J B Harley in W A Seymour (ed.), *A history of the Ordnance Survey*, Folkestone: Dawson, 1980, 2-4, 9-10.

⁵ 'A new mapp of the cities of London and Westminster with the borough of Southwark & all the suburbs shewing the severall streets, lanes, alleys, and most of the throwgh-faires,

small (1:7040, much larger than many later ‘handy’ London maps), and the rhyme might well replace the verbiage that users of contemporary OS maps are subjected to. As it’s out of copyright, no time need be spent tracing the representatives of author or publisher.⁶

Chapter 1, ‘A magnificent military sketch’, describes more than the Military Survey of Scotland of 1747-55: it also draws together material on David Watson and William Roy as never before. Immediately the book’s ‘biography’ subtitle is shown to be justified, and the pages are eagerly turned. The climax comes on the last two pages: whereas ‘the nobility of Enlightenment Scotland’ wanted the country to be mapped, “‘barbarian’ Highlanders... had no choice *but to be mapped*’. This expression of disunity between highland and lowland Scotland is quickly driven home by a quotation from Robert Louis Stevenson: ‘Scotland has no unity *except on the map*’. (Quotes on page 42: italics in originals.) Yet there are occasional drawbacks: there seems to be a confusion of surveying compass and theodolite on pages 21-2. Had Roy and his colleagues been able to use a theodolite, they might have been able to provide a trigonometrical framework, and the result would have been much more than just a ‘sketch’. We do desperately need clear expositions of these technical points, but it would be useful if passages such as this could be checked by an ‘expert’.

Chapter 2, ‘The propriety of making a general military map of England’ describes the background to Roy’s proposal of 1766 for a national survey to complement that of Scotland. This involves a detailed description of Roy’s likely circle at the Royal Society and elsewhere. Many of us will be grateful that the necessary discursion into contemporary geodesy enables Charles Hutton’s contour map of Schiehallion of 1777 to be illustrated, at long last. It is interesting that only Roy’s proposal of 1766 is described: it is unclear from the literature whether there was a separate proposal in 1763 which has not survived (which has tended to be my assumption hitherto), or whether he had the idea in 1763 but only actually submitted it in 1766. Either way, it does seem clear from the 1766 proposal that he envisaged a national map that would at least partly be compiled from contemporary ‘commercial’ one-inch county surveys, and this is far more in the line of development of public-private collaboration exemplified by Saxton and Ogilby. Yes, Roy was a visionary, but it took time for the vision to develop.

being a ready guide for all strangers to find any place therein. Drawne by W. Hollar, the like never done before. Sold by Robert Greene at the Rose and Crowne in Budge Row London, where you may have all sorts of mapps’: copy in Cambridge University Library, Maps aa.17.G.62 [Darlington & Howgego’s no.35; University of Exeter pre-1900 town-map project 22296], where likewise you may have all manner of maps: even, now, a large number of OS 1:2500 County Series – to say nothing of the Charles Close Society Archive.

⁶ ‘Whilst we have endeavoured to ensure that the information in this product is accurate, we cannot guarantee that it is free...’ – and that’s by no means the half of it. Future historians of cartography will no doubt comment on the influence of the OS’s *six* in-house lawyers.

Chapter 3, ‘The French connection’, describes the London-Paris triangulation of the 1780s. The opening of the chapter is a nice combination of a few facts, good imagination, and understated contemporary relevance (an Icelandic volcanic ash-cloud). Much of what follows quotes from and paraphrases Roy’s own account in *Philosophical Transactions*, but is likely to reach a much wider audience, and enhances it with glosses and new insights such as ‘The supposedly supreme accuracy of Roy’s triangulation also became a patriotic weapon... Rather than celebrate the enterprise for the amicability between the French and British surveying parties, most people in Britain, including Roy himself, seem to have been more interested in the project for its national merits.’ (page 91).

Chapter 4, ‘The aristocrat and the revolution’, concentrates on Charles Lennox, Third Duke of Richmond, and the group of episodes around 1791 that are usually taken as the ‘foundation’ of the Ordnance Survey. However, it has very properly been pointed out on page xxv that there are other dates: 1783, or 1766, or even 1746. The paradox is that whilst the Ordnance Survey can be seen as a good exemplar of the ‘Age of Reason’ or ‘Age of Enlightenment’ (the latter term is used throughout the book, and is the current academically favoured one, but the former is more likely to be recognised by older readers), with its precise quantification of distance, measured to a new standard of accuracy, yet trying to pin down its institutional origins takes us into an imprecise shadow-world. The officially-favoured ‘1791’ is really an accountancy device, which perhaps explains its current appeal in a world of number-fixing and the triumph of the letter over the spirit. Much more OS history hinges around accountancy than historians have properly acknowledged so far.

Chapter 5, ‘Theodolites and triangles’, is remarkable for its exploration of the OS’s first official head, Edward Williams, ‘one of those people whose names one instinctively forgets’ (we could never forget *yours*, could we, Winterbo?).⁷ Whilst even Rachel Hewitt cannot rehabilitate Williams, nonetheless he emerges as something more than the half-dimensional figure that he has hitherto been chronicled as. Whilst there is nothing new in knowledge of the connection between Joshua Reynolds and the Mudge family, it receives here a detailed, readable exposition. The chapter includes an account of the completion of work on what was published as the Gream-Faden map of Sussex in 1795, for which there is a retrospective case for classification as ‘the first Ordnance Survey map’, though it is duly acknowledged that at this time there was no national *mapping* scheme. A problem with the early history of the Ordnance Survey, as with the military survey of Scotland, Ogilby, Saxton and other episodes, is that it was an *occasion*, an answer to an immediate problem, rather than an *institution*: it is possible that the OS only became completely an institution as late as the early twentieth century.⁸

⁷ H StJ L Winterbotham, *A key to maps*, second edition, London & Glasgow: Blackie, 1939, 68.

⁸ This point will be explored further in Richard Oliver, *The Ordnance Survey in the nineteenth century: maps, money and growth of government*, for publication by the Charles

Chapter 6, ‘The first map’, includes an account of the Mudge-Faden map of Kent, published in 1801. It is unfortunate that such a ground-breaking exploration of connections between the Survey and contemporary literature and thought should perpetuate the old idea that this map was published on 1 January: Donald Hodson demonstrated in these pages back in 1997 that the real date was mid-February or later.⁹ It is also unfortunate that there is not a more detailed exploration of the background to Faden’s undertaking the work: he wasn’t just any old map publisher. But throughout the chapter Rachel Hewitt demonstrates that she can *write*, and subtly: there is no overt mention of New Labour or Google Earth on pages 157-8, but the implications of contemporary quotations criticising William Pitt’s *de facto* surveillance state are clear enough. Once settled at Adanac Park, the present OS management might care to consider the use of ‘hover over the kingdom in an Ordnance balloon’ in their current publicity. A few pages later (164), an interesting parallel is drawn between ‘cartography’ and ‘cartoon’.

Chapter 7, ‘A wild and most arduous service’, takes its title from words of the younger Robert Dawson, who joined the survey after the period of this chapter, which is largely concerned with Thomas Colby and the increasing difficulties faced by William Mudge in discharging his growing responsibilities. It is a pleasure to have on page 178 the Brockledon portrait of Colby of 1837, which I think has only been reproduced once before, in preference to the much more often seen one used by Close in *Early years*, the original of which (is it a daguerreotype?) must date from a decade later, but it does draw attention to deficiencies in portraiture: what did Colby look like in 1827 (the early and difficult years of Irish survey), 1817 (in the Shetlands), or 1807? It would help flesh out a fine word-portrait, which must make us thankful that shell-suits had not been invented in the early nineteenth century (read the book to work out why this should be), but is unfortunately spoilt by a misreading of Portlock’s *Memoir of Colby* on page 180: it was Colby proffering steak, not a friend.¹⁰ Readers without ready access to the cornucopia of sources exploited in *Map of a nation* will hope that such mistakes are rare.

Close Society: this is a development of Richard Oliver, *The Ordnance Survey in Great Britain, 1835-1870*, unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 1985.

⁹ Donald Hodson, ‘On 1st January 1801 the first Ordnance Survey map was published...’, *Sheetlines* 48 (1997), 3.

¹⁰ ‘Friends remembered bumping into him as he jogged his way to the Tower, yelling after him to “come back, my boy, and take a beefsteak with me”: Hewitt, 180. ‘... all who served under him... will remember to have, on some occasion, met him running rather than walking (for such was his custom) along the street... and to have been greeted by the hearty invitation, “Come back, my boy, and take a beefsteak with me” (which steak often expanded into excellent fish and a good fat turkey)...’: J E Portlock, *Memoir of the life of Major-General Colby*, London: Seeley, etc, 1869, 5.

Chapter 8, ‘Mapping the imagination’, is the one least about the Ordnance Survey as I suspect that many of us understand it and, with the exception of Chapter 12, may be found to be the least satisfactory. *May*: a note on page 357 refers to ‘fictional and poetic descriptions’, and reactions to the more imaginative passages are likely to be highly personal. Having been good-naturedly described by Brian Harley himself as ‘too b****y empirical’, I am more impressed with the examples of mapping as illustration and metaphor in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature, which includes a substantial section on Samuel Taylor Coleridge having to make his own map of part of the Lake District in 1802.¹¹ Indeed, if the author is looking for a new project, she could do worse than carry the connection of mapping and literature forward into the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries: she has form.

Chapter 9 is ‘The French disconnection’ and is centred round geodesy and in particular the unsatisfactory joint Anglo-French operations in Shetland in 1817. Again, on the face of it there is nothing new, but the account has a highly personal – in more than one sense – point to it.

Chapter 10, ‘Ensign of Empire’, is the first of two concerned mainly with the survey of Ireland. A writer here needs to proceed with care: there is really nothing of substance to add to John Andrews’s magisterial account of the general development, and recently there has been a flurry of interest in various more detailed aspects from Irish scholars. It is here that the book begins to fall off, and there are unfortunate misstatements or misreadings, not least on the conception of the Irish survey (pages 240-2). It is clear from Andrews that the original concept was a six-inch survey, a scale adopted only in order that the townland boundaries could be shown adequately, which would remain in manuscript and would form the basis of publication at the one-inch scale. Further, whilst the Ordnance probably had one-inch mapping of Ireland in view as a long-term project, before early 1824 they had shown no disposition whatever to make a start. Their reaction, when pushed into it, was to say, in effect, ‘Well, *there’s* a thing, we were just about to start it, do you know!’ It is true that by 1827 Colby had arranged to engrave the six-inch and, to be charitable, was dilatory about starting the one-inch, but the fact remains that what was completed in 1846 was rather different from what had been visualised in 1824. Against this, there is a much more detailed treatment of William Rowan Hamilton’s dealings with the Survey in Ireland than is offered by Andrews. This chapter includes a photograph (page 261) of one of the more remarkable personalities associated with the Survey, Thomas Aiskew Larcom: it is relatively late (1865), and leaves one wondering at Larcom’s appearance thirty years earlier, when he probably had more hair on top and less at the side.

The second Irish chapter, 11, ‘All the rhymes and rags of history’, is concerned with the memoir project and the other ‘non-geometric’ aspects of the Irish Ordnance Survey. This inevitably brings in John O’Donovan, but also a number of other personalities probably much less known on the British side of

¹¹ Brian Harley to author, probably on licensed premises, certainly later 1980s.

the water, including James Clarence Mangan, poet, eccentric and opium-addict. Mangan is treated by Gillian Doherty in her study of cultural aspects of the Irish survey, but there is more of him here, including a likeness that appears to have been drawn shortly after he died (page 279).¹² For the more conventionally-minded who may have wondered about these things in the past, there are a few specimens of the ‘scurrility’ and ‘ribaldry’ in O’Donovan’s letters of which Larcom complained so much. An acknowledgement of a quotation from Brian Friel’s notorious *Translations* on the title page verso raises fears of the worst in political correctness and false history, but all is well: indeed, there are some interesting quotations from Mr Friel on pages 280-1. Thank goodness that we have one writer, at least, who does not take this Donegal drama at face value. By the way, you may be surprised to learn the identity of one of the purchasers of the Templemore memoir, published in 1837.

The final main chapter, ‘A great national survey’, is by far the least successful. There is no falling-off in the quality of the writing, but there is of the source-materials, and this leads to unfortunate errors. For example, on page 291 the move of the Survey to Southampton is described as occurring on 31 December 1841, and as due to the fire at the Tower two months earlier. This is based on a newspaper reminiscence of fifty years later quoted in ‘Seymour’, and whilst it may well be that the first party to turn up did indeed have difficulty in gaining admission, there is evidence that this episode would have taken place at least a fortnight, even a month, earlier. In any case, the move to Southampton was less sudden than it is presented here: by July 1841 the Survey urgently needed more accommodation and the vacant barracks at Southampton had been selected a fortnight *before* the fire at the Tower on 30 October, which enforced the move.¹³ Also deriving from Seymour is a seriously mistaken view of the first Ordnance five-foot-scale survey of London, of 1848-52, on page 298.¹⁴ It did *not* cost £104,000 and it was *certainly not* ‘the most minute... survey of London then in existence’: that honour was taken by the later survey of 1862-71, several sheets of which have been reissued by Alan Godfrey. Colby’s estimate of £104,000 was for survey and publication in the style of the Dublin Castle five-foot sheet, completed in 1841, and of an elaboration of finish and content that would never be quite equalled: the survey of 1848-52 was a ‘skeleton’ survey, of streets and levels only, and cost £24,212 15s 9d. A third mistake, here and elsewhere (pages 246, 299), is the belief that the Irish survey distracted effort from the one-inch mapping of England and Wales, and that the latter was desperately needed. Yet in 1986, if not before, Brian Harley exposed the truth: progress with the one-inch in England and Wales was hampered by Colby’s insistence on revising all the unpublished work before new survey was

¹² Gillian Doherty, *The Irish Ordnance Survey: history, culture and memory*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004.

¹³ E J S Parsons in Seymour (ed.), *A history ...*, 111; Richard Oliver, ‘The transfer of the Ordnance Survey to Southampton in 1841’, *Sheetlines* 33 (1992), 35-8.

¹⁴ See Seymour (ed.), *A history*, 120.

resumed around 1835, and Andrews made it equally clear that a wholly separate, new, force was raised for Ireland. It is equally misleading – no, *ridiculous* is a better word – to suggest that the completion of the one-inch of northern England in the later 1860s was held up by the surveys of Jerusalem and Sinai (pages 302-5). I find it odd that my doctoral thesis, which ‘sets the record straight’ on all these points, has apparently not been consulted, though it is listed in the bibliography.¹⁵ The description of the completion of the one-inch of England and Wales conjured up in this writer’s mind something of the climax of an Ealing comedy: ‘One can imagine the maps being delicately carried from the printing room at Southampton by military engineers flushed with excitement... we can imagine the crowds clustering around this historic artefact as shopkeepers proudly positioned them in their windows.’ (page 305) Yes, I can just see Sid James, perhaps, at the head of the queue... Victorian Ordnance Survey maps *just didn’t sell like that*. I’m not sure that they have done so more recently, either, even before satnav started eating at the paper map market.

The narrative is rounded off by an epilogue, ‘Maps of freedom’, which is epitomised by ‘one of the reasons I find Ordnance Survey maps so seductive is the promise they seem to offer of the unfettered freedom to wander across the British landscape’ (pages 309-10).

This is a remarkable book, and is as much a landmark in publishing about the Ordnance Survey as was Mike Parker’s rather different *Map addict* in 2009: reservations about details tend to be swept away by the radical approach. Indeed, 2010 has proved to be something of an *annus mirabilis* in publishing about mapping, in the broader sense, with two television series, at least one radio series, a major exhibition at the British Library, and several books. It is just a pity that certain points and Chapter 12, in particular, detract from an approach to perfection: but if the advance publicity and stocking by the likes of Waterstones has done its work, there ought to be a paperback edition sooner rather than later, and that would give an opportunity to rectify the deficiencies.¹⁶ By the way, there is an excellent section of colour plates.

There remain two points: first, how far a claim to ‘biography’ is actually justified; and second, whether creating a coherent one-inch map of England and Wales really was fundamental to the Ordnance Survey.

At one level, the ‘biography’ element succeeds admirably; everyone appears in sharper focus than we have known them before, and there is a sense of interaction both with the immediate organisation and with the wider world outside. At another level, though, these are largely people who are accessible in

¹⁵ Oliver, ‘The Ordnance Survey in Great Britain, 1835-1870’, cited by Hewitt, 402.

¹⁶ These include some eccentric citations in the notes and bibliography, e.g. the Margary facsimiles being ‘edited’ by J B Harley and others (except, oddly, vols 4 and 5, which are attributed to Harley alone) (page 393), and the frequent citation of The National Archives at Kew as ‘NA’ whereas elsewhere ‘TNA’ has established itself (or ‘TNA [PRO]’ if you want to enter a protest). I am also puzzled by the date 2006 for the Four Courts Press edition of J H Andrews, *A paper landscape*: should it not be 2002?

print or secondary literature: if it is true that ‘history is written by the winners’, then it is also largely the case that it is written by the bosses and, if not by them, at any rate about them. A high proportion of those brought to life here are, if not ‘bosses’, at any rate ‘middle management’: the shop floor’s voice is largely absent. Whilst it is true that sources are relatively exiguous before the late nineteenth century, they are not wholly absent, and both the Ordnance Survey letter-book of *circa* 1817-22 and the so-called De la Beche papers of a decade later contain useful snippets. For Ireland and for the early six-inch in Britain there is some material, referred to by Andrews, for John Tyndall, who admittedly was exceptional in starting as a civil assistant and, developing instead as a physicist, rose to be a Fellow of the Royal Society; and there is George Parker Bidder, the ‘calculating boy’, who was briefly on the Survey’s staff in 1824-5.¹⁷ The range of material may be relatively limited compared with the ‘bosses’, but it is not wholly lacking.

The ‘one-inch map’ presents several problems. In the first place, there are references to the contemporary OS 1:25,000 *Explorer* series at several points in the text, and it is unclear how we pass from the one-inch to the larger scale. In the second, the one-inch *symbolises* the Ordnance Survey and is, or was, its ‘public face’, for most of the population in Britain, but it is a very misleading symbol. From the start in Ireland in 1824, and in Great Britain from 1841, the primary scale of survey was the six-inch, and from 1853-4 it was the 1:2500. Whilst it was central to the case for the 1:2500 that its cost was considerably less than 25.344 times (the lineal increase), never mind 642.32 times (the increase in area) that of the one-inch, and the sales per acre were admittedly rather less, nonetheless the increase in both survey effort and paper output was vastly greater. Thus, the essence of the Ordnance Survey for most of its history (taking its institutional origins as in 1783 or 1791) has been something much greater than the sideshow of the one-inch map. The rundown of paper mapping since the 1980s means that the only obvious evidence of large-scale survey in the shops at present is the depiction of field boundaries on the *Explorer* map, and even that connection is not advertised: the introduction of these maps from 1994 coincided with the omission of the note that the 1:25,000s were compiled from larger-scale surveys. Seemingly, to much of the public the *Explorers* and the 1:50,000 *Landrangers* are the full extent of the Ordnance Survey, particularly with the recent withdrawal of most of the smaller-scale paper mapping. The great LandLine database, with its 440 million TOIDs, is publicly invisible, yet it is the real meaning of the Ordnance Survey, and is the real background to the ‘free our data’ movement.

There are two more fundamental problems with the treatment of the one-inch here. There is no mention of Scotland or Ireland, yet the pressure for the adoption of the six-inch in Britain came mainly from Scotland, and the ‘Battle of

¹⁷ J H Andrews, *A paper landscape: the Ordnance Survey in nineteenth century Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, 92, 181; E F Clark, *George Parker Bidder the calculating boy*, Bedford: KSL Publications, 1983, 18-22.

the Scales' in 1851-8 was sparked off at least partly by the Scots' desire for a one-inch as well. Though the one-inch of England and Wales may have dragged its weary way to completion in 1870, that of Scotland, started in 1853, was still very incomplete: the outline-with-contours version (a form that Mudge, for one, would perhaps not have recognised) was completed in 1887 and the hachured version, which made it comparable with the Old Series of England and Wales, not until 1895. (The hachured one-inch of Ireland was also completed in 1895.) Though sheet 108 is described, correctly, as the last sheet to be completed for England, it was very far from the last sheet for Britain, and it is unclear exactly what was the intention for publishing up to the 1820s: more and more evidence is emerging that at least three groups of sheets – Essex (published 1805), Devon (1809) and the Isle of Wight (*nominally* 1810) – were originally conceived as independent entities, and that a national sheet line scheme may only have been devised in 1809-10, and then designed to cover Britain rather than England and Wales.¹⁸

And this leads to the final point: throughout, the original one-inch map of England and Wales, which is generally known as the Old Series, is called 'the First Series'. Where did this come from? Now it is true that, around the 1980s, the Ordnance Survey themselves were wont to use this term, but protests were made, and the fruits of them can be seen in the Owen and Pilbeam history (which, by the way, ought to be updated for recent developments and reissued), which gave scholarship something of an official *imprimatur*.¹⁹ At the risk of repeating what many will know already, Brian Harley, the first specialist in Ordnance Survey history, fought 'tooth and nail' to get David and Charles to call their series of reissues 'Old Series' rather than 'First Edition', and failure there was followed by success first with Harry Margary and then (by proxy of associates) with Ordnance Survey itself. So far as I know, the OS has only ever issued two 'First Series': the civil 1:25,000 – renamed thus halfway through its career, having started as a 'Provisional Edition' – and the 1:50,000, for the three-quarters or so of sheets that were issued in what earlier would have been called what it was, a 'Provisional Edition'.

There is a fundamental matter here: calling something a 'First Series' implies at least a Second Series, and at any rate something more than an *occasion*. No-one calls the military survey of Scotland a 'first series', partly perhaps because no other national mapping has been prepared at 1:36,000, but primarily because of its 'occasional' nature. Likewise the six-inch Townland survey of Ireland was an 'occasion'; Colby had to fight hard to stop the residual organisation being completely shut down in the mid 1840s. To the Victorians, what we know as the Old Series was simply 'the Ordnance map'; even F W Maitland, writing

¹⁸ Richard Oliver, 'The sheet sizes and Delamere sheet lines of the one-inch Old Series', *Sheetlines* 77 (2006), 27-51; I am indebted to Roger Hellyer for recent work on Essex, Devon and the Isle of Wight.

¹⁹ Tim Owen and Elaine Pilbeam, *Ordnance Survey, map makers to Britain since 1791*, London: HMSO, and Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 1992, esp.180.

around 1896 when it was on the point of being completely superseded, referred to it as ‘the original one-inch ordnance map’.²⁰ Whilst there were a great many indications that by 1870 the Ordnance Survey was here to stay, for many its output seemed essential static: ‘the Ordnance map’, ‘the townland survey’, ‘the cadastral survey’, the great triangulation: the moment, *the occasion*, the passing phenomenon, the supreme authority.

These reservations apart, this is a book that deserves to be read. I hope that we have not heard the last of Rachel Hewitt in a cartographic history context.

Richard Oliver

²⁰ References in Victorian fiction are admittedly not common: see [R S Surtees], *Handley Cross* [1854: London: Methuen, 1911 [1950]], [p.641], Chapter LXIII (where it is unclear whether a fictional or real newspaper report is being cited), and Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Redux* [1874: Oxford University Press [The Worlds Classics series], 1983], [p.139], Chapter XVI. There seem to be no references in Dickens and Thackeray, but then, unlike Surtees and Trollope, they were not hunting men. F W Maitland’s famous reference is in *Domesday Book and beyond* [originally published Cambridge University Press, 1897], [London:] Collins/Fontana, 1960, 39. [This Collins/Fontana edition, by the way, is a minor ‘collector’s piece’, in that whereas the original edition of 1897 duly used reproductions from the Old Series, it uses the first edition of the New Series for the Berks-Oxon border extract (fp 32) and, *mirabile dictu*, the *Advanced Edition published by Photozincography* for the Devon-Somerset border extract (fp 33). Either Old or New Series make Maitland’s point, though the Old Series rather than the New Series would be essential were one to illustrate Maitland’s point further down page 39 on open fields in Cambridgeshire.] There are three references by Conan Doyle in Sherlock Holmes stories to OS maps (‘The engineer’s thumb’ (written 1891-2), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-2) and ‘The Adventure of the Priory School’ (1903-4), but they are not what might be termed *technically reliable*.