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“The haven of rest and Imperial
Geographical Service”

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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.

The haven of rest and the Imperial Geographical Service

Mike Nolan

In 1906 the organisation of the Royal Engineers was the subject of a special committee. One of its many duties was to consider the provision of sufficient maps of the theatre of war, and of the organisation and training of a staff for this purpose. In its report, it introduced this subject by stating that:

‘It is unnecessary to dwell upon the importance of this subject, if the dissatisfaction expressed by the Houses of Parliament, and by the public, at the preventable loss of life, caused by insufficient and faulty maps in the Boer and previous wars (due to insufficiency of funds, although the necessity was urged by the Director of Military Intelligence), be recalled.’

Before commencing its work, it considered a ‘Memorandum on the Employment of Royal Engineer Officers on the Ordnance Survey’ submitted by Col G Barker, CB, RE Inspector of Royal Engineers. In this memorandum Col Barker considered (1) The Headquarters of the Ordnance Survey and (2) The Ordnance Survey Divisions, at that time eleven in number at Carlisle, Clifton, Derby, Edinburgh, Redhill, Shrewsbury, York, in Great Britain and Belfast, Cork, Dublin and Ennis, in Ireland.

‘The work of an Ordnance Survey Division consists almost entirely in producing, or revising, large scale plans. The system has been carefully elaborated, and, as a result, an Officer finds himself in charge of a machine which almost works by itself. There is very little scope for initiative, but a certain amount of business capacity is required. The technical knowledge gained is of no value for military or geographical purposes. From 6 to 10 days a month are spent in inspecting the men in the field, and in examining plans. The office work takes, perhaps, 6 days a month. There is hardly enough work for an energetic young Officer.

Officers on such employment are very much out of touch with the Army, and tend to lose sight of the fact that they are soldiers, and are only employed on the Survey for the ultimate (supposed) benefit of the Service.

Of course some Officers manage to keep up their military knowledge, but these are the exceptions *, in fact, an Ordnance Survey Division is a haven of rest much sought after by young married men.

* It should be mentioned that eight Officers were sent to the South African war from the Ordnance Survey, and that some of these, e.g., Colonel H M Jackson, Major Brooker, Major Hedley, and Captain Crookshank, did conspicuously good work in command of various units, or on the Staff.’

The headquarters work of the Ordnance Survey consisted of administration, trigonometrical work, instructions and training of Field Survey Sections, map reproduction, revision of the one-inch and small scale maps and the technical superintendence of the surveys and explorations of the protectorates and colonies in tropical Africa. All this work was useful to the service and good for the officers employed on it, whom he considered should be officers on the active list, such work being in their hands in nearly all the civilised states.

For the tropical protectorates in Africa, it had been arranged between the War Office and the Colonial Office, with the concurrence of the Board of Agriculture, that the OS should be the technical headquarters of these surveys. It was intended to employ officers in charge of these surveys, such work being invaluable since it tended to cultivate and expand those qualities most required by a soldier and to keep him in vigour both in mind and body and gave him experience in the organisation and conduct of expeditions. Officers while so employed would not be on the strength of the OS but a free exchange of officers between HQ and overseas duties would be beneficial.

In considering the NCOs and men he stated that the great advantage of the present organisation was that good topographers could be found for the Field Survey Sections, the Colonial Survey Section and for special expeditions by rigorous selection from the pool of surveyors.

However, he considered that the Field Survey Companies, which were available as general service units in time of war, were inadequately trained for such duties. They should be put through annual fieldworks and musketry courses.

‘The intelligence of the men is high, but as artisans and tradesmen they are necessarily inferior to men who are constantly employed at their trades.’

He recommended that the companies be reduced to three in number and that half the regimental and the whole of the Survey pay should be borne by civil votes. Three Field Survey Sections should be kept trained, as also should a reserve of topographers for expeditions.

Considering that the word *Ordnance* now had no meaning, he recommended that the Ordnance Survey should be re-named The Imperial Geographical Service, and be divided into two branches, the Headquarters and Geographical branch and the Cadastral branch.

The officer strength should remain at 22, eleven in each branch. The eleven officers in the Cadastral branch should be retired officers in charge of the eleven Divisions. Retired officers might be offered £300 a year in addition to their retired pay, this representing a saving to the Treasury of £1600 per annum. This proposal would free eleven officers for other corps duties.

The eleven officers in the Headquarters and Geographical branch, of whom five should be field officers, should be on the active list. No officer should be posted to it who has not had geographical experience, and appointments should be made with the concurrence of the Director of Military Operations.

The committee first addressed the reasons why the OS was retained as a military department. It noted that although the Board of Agriculture had consented to defray the pay of those officers not posted to Survey Companies, and were in favour of extending the principle to the remaining military staff, the pensions of both officers and men were borne by army votes. It had to consider if the four main advantages of retaining the OS as a semi-military department outweighed the cost to army votes.

It recognised that in the Field Survey Sections, four of which had been employed in the Boer War, there was a skilled body of topographical surveyors chosen by selection and resulting in a high degree of efficiency. Were they not

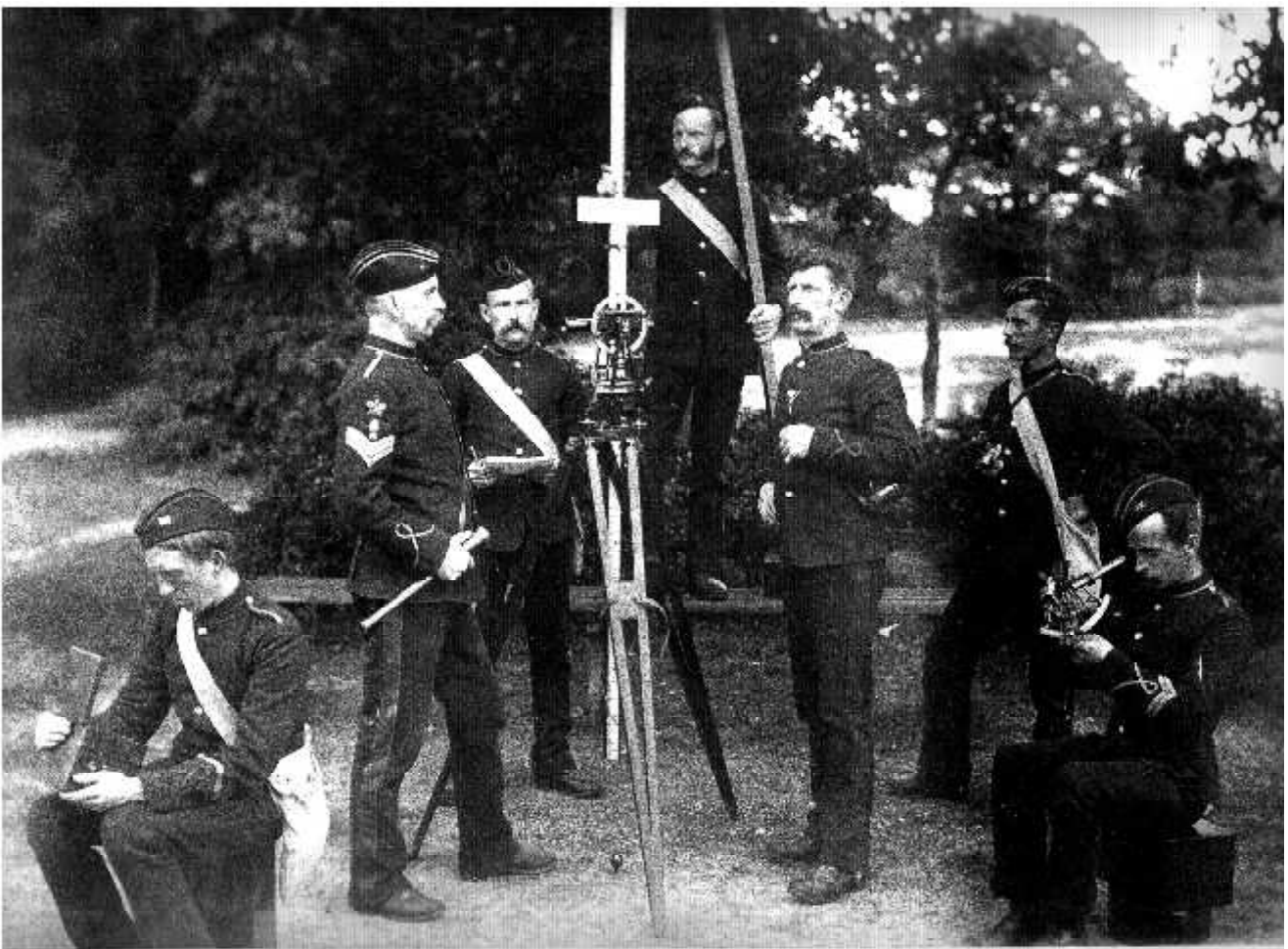
available from the Survey Companies they would have to be found from depot recruits with a deterioration in efficiency.

It recognised that precedence was given to War Office work and that it was provided with maps, a large number specially produced for the Directorate of Military operations, amounting to between £9000 and £10,000 per annum. Also, in the event of a great war, the War Office had no adequate establishment or plant but ten machine presses were available for this work at the OS To rely on a purely civil department for such work could not be justified

Under the present situation military maps of the UK were kept up to date.

In an emergency the whole of the Survey Companies were available for general service in the Field Army.

They concluded that the advantages to the War Office obtained by the semi-military organisation of the OS were great and the present organisation should be retained, but that efficiency could be obtained with the loss of one company. The three companies should each consist of three officers and 90 NCOs and men. It considered it just that at least half the regimental pay of the military staff should be defrayed by the Board of Agriculture since the pension costs were wholly borne by the War Office.



1st Field Survey Section 1890, by kind permission of OS Library

Beyond the OS, seven to nine officers were employed in the Topographical Section, General Staff, and two officers and four NCOs were employed in the Colonial Survey Section, the cost of which was normally borne equally by the War Office and colony concerned. In considering the preparation of maps for war, the committee considered that in view of the experiences of the Boer War, at least three Colonial Survey Sections should be established, each section should be increased to two officers and eight NCOs, and the costs should be borne by army votes.

The committee additionally considered surveys of tropical colonies, noting that a scheme was being arranged for qualified officers to be lent by the War Office to the Colonial Office for colonial surveys. On average, six officers were being placed each year at the disposal of the FO and CO for International Boundary Commissions, the costs being borne by the office concerned. The committee supported such employment.

The committee tabulated the recommended officer organisation:

	Paid entirely by army votes	Paid half by army votes	Paid entirely by other votes	Peace total	Required in war
Topographical Section General Staff	9			9*	9
Ordnance Survey		9	13	22**	11
Boundary Commissions			6	6	
Instructors at SME				4	4
Colonial Office requirements			15	15	
Egyptian Government (Sudan)			2	2	
Colonial Survey Section	2			2	2
Ditto, proposed additional	4			4	4
Totals	19	9	36	64	30

* maximum.

** eleven to be retired officers.

The committee considered separately lithographic and printing sections. These being very small specialist units, the committee considered that their peace strength, excluding drivers, should be the same as their war strength, and that they should be concentrated at the SME, units being formed as necessary for manoeuvres, for field training and practice of the staff in their employment. They recommended four lithographic sections each of three sappers and four printing sections, each of two sappers.