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“OS motoring atlas of GB”

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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 Ordnance Survey motoring atlas of Great Britain

John L Cruickshank



It seems rather curious that what must (by a very wide margin) have been the most commercially successful and frequently reprinted OS map product has received remarkably little mention in *Sheetlines*.¹ Its demise in particular seems to have been completely unnoticed. Yet its story provides some telling illustrations of the shifting social, commercial and political fashions affecting the OS. It is worth tracing the rise and fall of this remarkable publication.

Does anyone else remember the road atlases of the 1950s and 1960s? Ours was a hard-back volume, purchased by my father when he was furnishing the marital home. It was shelved with the two volumes of the Shorter Oxford Dictionary, the many volumes of the Everyman Encyclopaedia, the Oxford Book of Quotations, Cruden's Concordance (for crossword purposes much more useful than the Bible itself), and various other works of reference. It would be taken off the shelf perhaps two or three times a year to prepare an itinerary, which would carefully be written out in pencil on the back of an envelope. The atlas would then be put back on the shelf, while the envelope would go on the actual journey. Should a diversion from the planned route become necessary, it either had to be based on guesswork and road-signs, or on the map-diagrams in the yellow AA Handbook which was always in the glove compartment along with the key for the AA phone-boxes.

The atlas had been expensive, but was expected to retain its value for quite as long as the other reference works in the family library. Accordingly it had to be protected from damage. It was certainly not felt appropriate to expose it to the dangers of a modern motor journey.

The opening of the Preston by-pass did not initially disturb this mind-set. A single new road could be memorised. But the Lancaster by-pass followed, and then was connected to the Preston one, and through that was connected to further new motorways ramifying across the country. My father became increasingly irritated that his expensive investment in an atlas had been devalued by Ernest Marples and his successors. Nevertheless the existing volume was retained, on the basis that the expense of a replacement would only be

¹ Just four contributions have been identified. An anonymous, but insightful, reviewer (Q 6312) analysed the 1985 edition in *Sheetlines* 12 (1985), 12. This is still worth reading particularly for its analysis of the renovation of the underlying 1:250,000 mapping that preceded its publication. Chris Board wrote a detailed analysis of the further changes to the mapping introduced in the 1991 edition (*Sheetlines* 29 (1991), 33-35). This article too has continuing value. A brief précis of an article by John Paddy Browne from *OS News* in which he compares the 1993 *OS Motoring Atlas* with another soft-back publication, the 1993 *Rand McNally Road Atlas, North America*, appeared in *Sheetlines* 37 (1993), 37-38. Finally a short note by Lionel Hooper about an error of detail in the 1995 edition (and giving its price when it was remaindered) appeared in *Sheetlines* 45 (1996), 27.

worthwhile once the motorway system was complete and new roads stopped being built.

The M62 was built just in time for us to use it to get me to medical school in Leeds in 1974. By now the old atlas was hopelessly behind the times but a variety of extraneous stop-gap maps and diagrams were tucked inside to supplement it.

Of course updated editions of the many road atlases of the country had intermittently been issued in the intervening years, but such atlases remained expensive substantial hard-back volumes sold by city-centre bookshops. They were still expected to retain their validity for extended periods, and their date of compilation was generally obscured so that any obsolescence was not obvious and old stock did not need to be remaindered. In 1983 the OS itself produced such an atlas, the 'Ordnance Survey Road Atlas of Great Britain', a hard-back A4 volume of 1:250,000 mapping.²

But in the same year the OS also blew this model apart. The Ordnance Survey Motoring Atlas of Great Britain was co-published in 1983 by Ordnance Survey and Temple Press, an imprint of Newnes Books, itself a division of the Hamlyn Publishing Group.³ Its large format (almost A3), soft cover and simple stapled binding were utterly unlike anything else on the market. The mapping it contained was an enlargement of the OS

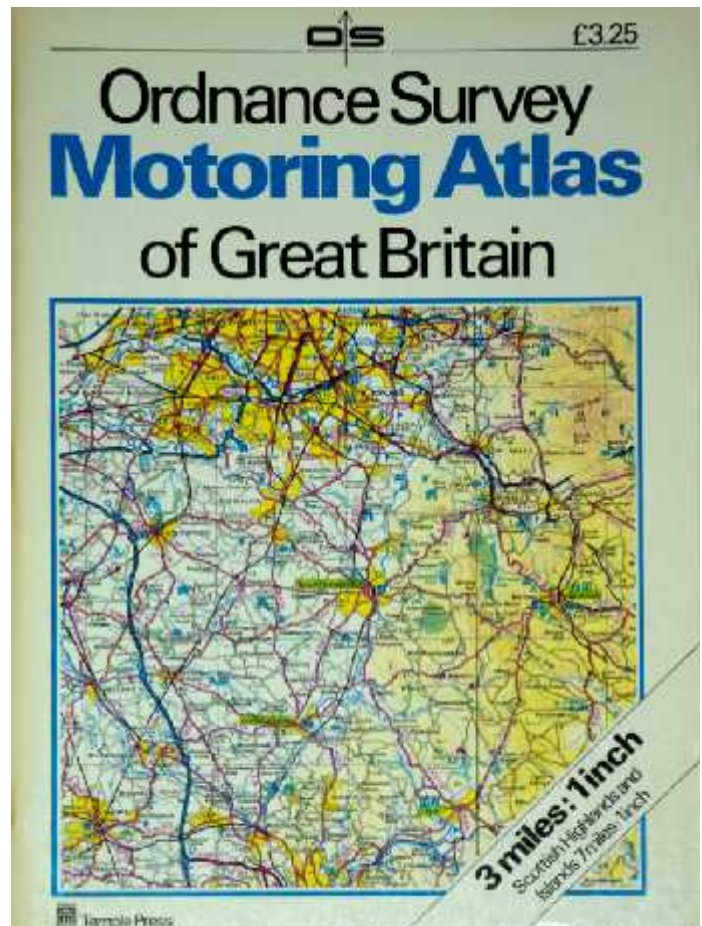


Figure 1. Front cover of the first edition of *The Ordnance Survey Motoring Atlas of Great Britain* (1983)

² This atlas was, like the *OS Motoring Atlas*, a co-publication with Temple Press. It was reissued the same year in an edition for Book Club Associates which itself went through at least three impressions by 1984.

³ See below for further details of the successive changes in the private-sector co-publisher of the *Atlas*. Hamlyn had previously published in 1976 (as a conventional hard-back volume) *The Hamlyn Road Atlas of Great Britain* which was printed by Bartholomew and entirely composed of Bartholomew-copyright material. However in 1982 the OS co-published the *Ordnance Survey Atlas of Great Britain* with Country Life Books (another imprint of Newnes Books). Although much of this atlas consists of geographical thematic mapping not produced by Ordnance Survey it did contain OS 1:250,000 mapping giving full coverage of England, Wales and Scotland, the OS Index (gazetteer) to that series, and a 'Short History of the Ordnance Survey' along with some other OS material. Although quite different in purpose, it can thus be seen as a forerunner to the OS Motoring Atlas.

1:250,000 series mapping to 1:190,080 (three inches to the mile) for most of the country, and for the Highlands and Islands an enlargement of the 1:625,000 Routeplanner series to 1:443,520 (seven inches to the mile).⁴ The book opened with 'Route Planning Maps' which were two full-page diagrams of the motorway and trunk-road network accompanied not only by a table of distances in miles and kilometres, but also by individual diagrams of each of the limited-interchange motorway junctions in the country. At the back there was a full index of place-names (giving grid-references), a diagram of London Through Routes (the M25 was not yet open), a large coloured 1:10,000 map of central London and small monochrome 1:10,000 plans of thirty-six other town and city centres, together with some pictures of road-signs and other miscellaneous motoring information. Cheaply produced, it was priced at only £3.25, and thus undercut anything else on the market including the OS's own 1:250,000 hard-back atlas and sheet maps. It was marketed through petrol stations and motorway service stations as well as through traditional bookshops. It was an immediate runaway success and had to be reprinted repeatedly. I was slightly slow to buy a copy, and thus mine is from the sixth impression, but is still from 1983.⁵

The atlas was manifestly not for the library. The binding was fragile, and the whole thing was too big and too floppy to stand upright on a library bookshelf. But in a vehicle on the road the flexible booklet was light and easy to use, and it was cheap enough that it did not matter if it got dog-eared or if the centre pages came adrift from the staples, or even if it acquired muddy footprints after falling onto the floor of a car or van. It could be treated (and was treated) as an ephemeral item.

This ephemeral nature became the key to its continuing success. In 1985 a second edition was produced incorporating some significant changes. The mapping of the Highlands and Islands was given at 1:316,800 (five miles to the inch) and was now a reduction from the same 1:250,000 series of which the remainder of the atlas was an enlargement. In this way the disparity in scales was reduced and the degree of detail presented for all parts of the country was equalised, while retaining some compression of the printed space devoted to thinly populated areas. Most other elements of the content followed the pattern of the first edition, although the road maps had been re-lettered, colours were added onto all the town plans and a page with a map showing National Parks, Forest Parks and Long Distance Footpaths that advertised OS Landranger and Outdoor Leisure Maps was omitted. A diagram of Routes into London (showing the sections of the M25 by then open) replaced the previous Through Routes diagram.⁶ Perfect binding also replaced the original staples, which made it slightly more robust than the original edition. The most significant innovation was however on the cover. Here the year '1985' was presented in large red numerals

⁴ Note that these imperial scales were only introduced after the OS had become otherwise fully metricated.

⁵ According to 'Q 6312' (*Sheetlines* 12, 12) there were eventually eight printings.

⁶ See 'Q 6132' (*op. cit.*) for a more detailed analysis of changes to the road maps.

immediately above the title of the atlas. The implications of this were profound. Not only was this a positive statement about the date of compilation, it was also a clear pointer to when the contents might be considered obsolete. It thus strongly reinforced the perception of the publication as an ephemeral document. And from 1985 onwards the OS Motoring Atlas became a regular annual publication with the clear implication that a new edition should be bought every year and the old one discarded. Continual change was inherent in the whole idea; not only would the maps be revised, but the other content could also be updated annually. And the public bought both the idea and the atlases.

The OS Motoring Atlas of Great Britain thus represented a radically new idea in British map publishing which created an enormous demand for a product that the publishers of traditional road atlases could not initially match. The cover of the 1986 edition accordingly carried in large letters obliquely across the bottom right-hand corner a claim to be 'Britain's best selling atlas'.

The content of the 1986 edition was essentially the same, although I have not tried to analyse how well the maps themselves had been updated. In 1987 the diagram of the M25 and the Routes into London was enlarged and showed the M25 as complete; it also advertised the area covered by the ABC London Street Atlas, itself a co-publication by the OS and Newnes. Other minor changes were that the mileage diagram was moved to the inside back cover and the map legend to page 5, while the title page now simply stated that Temple Press was part of Hamlyn Publishing.

The editorial changes in the 1987 edition were modest, but there was one fundamental change that became one of the persisting and indeed characteristic features of the series. This was the first edition to be published and copyrighted in the previous year. From this edition onwards publication of each new edition would take place in about September of the year before the date given on the cover. Thus, during the first half of the calendar year printed on the cover the approaching obsolescence of the edition was obscured. The old edition would then be remaindered in the middle of the year, allowing publication of the following year's edition in September. The annual cycle was sufficiently dependable that I routinely delayed buying my copy of the atlas until it was remaindered in the summer. Unfortunately for the completeness of my collection, I was to spend the whole of 1990 in the USA, and having not thought to buy a copy of the 1990 edition at full price before leaving, the gap in my set remains.

Several significant changes were introduced for the 1988 edition. The page-numbering was changed, so that the introductory pages were given Roman numerals and the Arabic numbers began with the first map page. New larger and more brightly coloured town plans replaced the old ones, but they only included Central London and just eight major cities. A 'new easy-to-use index' abandoned the use of grid references and instead gave alpha-numeric references. Accordingly the numbering of the National Grid lines on the maps was now given in inconspicuous small blue figures and separate alphanumeric reference systems were given for each pair of pages. A choice of bindings was also offered from 1988 with the introduction of a spiral bound version of the atlas. The content of

the 1989 edition (in both versions) then remained almost the same, although there was a small but important change in the imprint on the title page: Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited was now a division of Octopus Publishing Group plc of Michelin House, Fulham Road, SW3. The space occupied by the index was reduced by reducing the height of the upper and lower margins. The resultant reduction in the number of pages led to the mileage diagram and radio-station information being moved from the back page to the inside front cover. The continuing success of the series was also trumpeted on the 1989 front cover in a banner immediately below the title declaring it to be 'Great Britain's No1 Bestseller'. Sales were indeed sufficient that a second impression was required.

The 1991 edition incorporated further substantial changes.⁷ Temple Press had disappeared from the imprint and the co-publisher was given as Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, still a division of Octopus Publishing Group. Although the layout of the cover remained broadly similar to that used previously, and still incorporated a 'Great Britain's No1 Best Seller' banner, an entirely new series of fonts and type-sizes was used (and of course the 'OS 200 Years 1991' logo was present). The cover also declared that the atlas contained 'brand new mapping'. This was true in two different ways, Firstly the underlying 1:250,000 OS mapping had been redesigned with different fonts, more prominent layer colouring to balance the removal of the previous hill-shading, and the addition of a prominent yellow band along coasts to indicate sandy beaches. Secondly the number of town plans was once more increased, but in addition to the sixteen OS plans (four more than in the 1989 edition) there were another twenty eight based on George Philip cartography. These last have a very different appearance to the OS ones. This apparently innocuous introduction of non-OS mapping into the atlas can in retrospect be seen to be of immense future significance.

Despite the success of the Motoring Atlas there still remained a continuing market for traditional hard-back road atlases. In 1987 OS and Hamlyn had thus co-published (at £15) the 'Ordnance Survey Touring Atlas of Great Britain', the core of which was a repackaging of the contents of the Motoring Atlas into an A4 format with hard covers.⁸ The 'Bicentenary Edition' (i.e. fourth edition) of this Touring Atlas was produced in 1990. It was impressively cased in padded boards covered with dark-blue embossed fake-leather with gold and silver lettering and the OS Tower-of-London logo. This was the atlas that my father finally decided to buy to replace his thirty-year-old original one. He bought it in September 1991 as a birthday present for my mother, without realising that it was already a year out of date.

Returning to the Motoring Atlas, for the 1992 edition the Philip's town plans were discarded and an expanded set of OS town plans was incorporated, forty-

⁷ See Chris Board, (*Sheetlines* 29, 33-35), for a much more detailed analysis of the changes to the mapping.

⁸ The OS Touring Atlas did however include several pages of motorway strip-maps and also diagrams of the road approaches to fifteen ferry ports plus detailed plans of the road layouts and car-parks at twelve airports. These interesting and potentially quite useful diagrams were never included in the OS Motoring Atlas.

four in total in addition to the Central London plan and the diagram of the 'M25 and Routes into London'. In 1993 the title of the atlas was slightly shortened to the 'Ordnance Survey Motoring Atlas'. A further innovation for the 1993 edition was the inclusion of 'Urban Area Mapping', full-page detailed through-route diagrams (at an unspecified scale) of areas centred on Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham (across two pages) and London (across four). This list was expanded in the 1994 edition to include the Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds and Bradford, and Newcastle areas. There was also a page with diagrams of the UK and French Channel Tunnel Terminals that were to open during the year. This incorporated an extract from the Michelin Motoring Atlas of France showing the approaches to Calais.

The content of the 1995 edition was largely unchanged. What was significant was that the cover ceased to claim that the atlas was 'Britain's No1 Best-Seller'. Now it simply declared that it was 'from Britain's No1 map publisher'. The market was clearly getting tighter; the AA in particular had been progressively developing their own soft-back annual atlas and had become a very serious competitor. From 1992 they had also become co-publishers with the *Institut Géographique National* of a copycat publication, the 'AA Big Road Atlas of France Belgium and Luxembourg'. The concept for this atlas was almost identical with that of the OS Motoring Atlas, in that it packaged official French (and Belgian) 1:250,000 mapping, together with a large number of town plans, in a cheap, soft-back volume with the same large format. This atlas too has become an annual publication (although it should be noted that Belgium and Luxembourg were dropped in 2001 and the edition-numbering was then reset). Other very similar atlases were appearing elsewhere. The '1993 Rand McNally Atlas, North America' was discussed by John Paddy Browne,⁹ but a series of large-format soft-back atlases of individual US states (giving 1:150,000 topographic mapping) was being published by the DeLorme Mapping Company from 1989 onwards. In 1996 a large-format, soft-back, spiral-bound 'Illustrated Atlas of South, Central, East Africa' was published by MapStudio of Wynberg and Cape Town, South Africa. Many other more-or-less similar publications from around the world could be cited, including even a large-format, soft-back street-atlas of Moscow.

The title of the 1996 edition was slightly re-expanded to 'Ordnance Survey Motoring Atlas Britain'. It included for the first time an 'Events Diary' produced for the year by the British Tourist Authority. While I myself never found these pages useful, someone must have, because they subsequently became an enduring element of the atlas. A crass error however appeared in large figures on the cover: the scale was given as 1:200,000 and then as 3 miles to 1 inch. It takes little knowledge of either mathematics or map-reading to know that these are not the same. The actual scale of the atlas maps was 1:190,080, as previously, and (as previously) the legend stated that this was 'about' 3 miles to one inch. My calculation suggests that this representative fraction is exactly equivalent to three

⁹ Précis in *Sheetlines* 37 (1993), 37-38.

miles to the inch, and while no map projection can avoid some distortion, the word 'about' seems both unnecessary and misleading. The cover was quite simply a mistake that made clear that the graphic design team had very little knowledge of, or respect for, the product for which they were designing a cover. Ellis Martin would surely not have been impressed!

By the 1998 edition the Events Diary had been joined by further pages giving directories of National Trust and National Trust for Scotland properties, plus those of English Heritage and Historic Scotland, but not those of Cadw (their Welsh equivalent). On this basis the front cover claimed that it had 'more tourist information than any other atlas'. The previous error in the scale given on the cover was partially corrected, to 1:190,000 and 3 miles to 1 inch. What the point of this unnecessary rounding might have been completely baffles me. To pedants it was insulting, and to everybody else it was irrelevant, if it was seen at all. By now the cover was so cluttered with various coloured banners with different house-styles and logos that little was likely to be read by any purchaser.¹⁰ One of these banners proclaimed 'New-look, ultra-clear maps from Britain's National Mapping Agency', but this clarity was not apparent on the cover. The maps themselves had had a fairly subtle face-lift in that the fonts used for place-names had been altered, the green lines representing trunk roads were broader and their associated road-numbers were made more prominent. The page on the Channel Tunnel terminals had gone, and a new page of 'Boundary Information; National & Forest Parks; Long Distance Paths' had appeared, but there was little other change in the content.

The 2000 edition added several further minor changes but one very important one. At the end of the tourist-information pages was now an additional page with details of gardens open to Royal Horticultural Society members and a list of 'Historic Royal Palaces' open to the public. A corner of this page was used for a tiny advertisement for the Council for British Archaeology. A set of diagrams giving boundary information now appeared on the inside-back cover (with advertisements for OS Street Atlases). A new separate map titled 'Scenic areas, cycling walking' presented the newly-existing, almost-existing, and hoped-for National Cycle Network routes in prominent colours and the better-known long-distance footpaths in almost invisible pecked lines. The important change was in the copyright statement on the title page. Previously the whole volume had been Crown Copyright. Now, while the three-inch and five-inch mapping, the route-planning map, the M25 and Routes into Central London map and the Central London map remained simply Crown Copyright, the other maps were listed as jointly copyright with George Philip Ltd. Furthermore Philip's (as part of Octopus Publishing Group) were also specified as the co-publisher with Ordnance Survey. Philip's were of course a very long-established publisher of maps. Until now, with the exception of the provision of the town plans printed in the 1991 edition, they

¹⁰ Nevertheless while the National Trust and English Heritage were advertised on the cover neither the National Trust for Scotland nor Historic Scotland were mentioned there. Colonialist and English-supremacist attitudes die hard!

had not been involved in the publication of the OS Motoring Atlas. The new copyright statement and the change in co-publisher make clear that the balance of power in the co-publication arrangement had now shifted. Furthermore this represented only the first stage of what was to be a very profound change indeed.

There was however a version of the atlas published that remained fully Crown Copyright. 'The Ordnance Survey Road Atlas 2000 Britain' was a staple-bound large-format soft-back pamphlet (not unlike the first edition of the OS Motoring Atlas from 1983). It contained only those elements of the Motoring Atlas that were purely Crown Copyright and was co-published with 'Bounty', another imprint of Octopus Publishing Group. Its cover price was £6.99 (a pound less than the Motoring Atlas), however I never saw it on sale at the cover price, but only at a much reduced price (£2.99) in remainder bookshops. An exactly similar OS Road Atlas 2001 was also co-published with the same cover price. I bought my copy (already remaindered to £2.99) as early as September 2000!

Although the 2001 Motoring Atlas of Britain had Ordnance Survey in big letters twice on its cover (which closely resembled that of previous years and thus also included a large OS logo), it was not published by Ordnance Survey! The attributions of copyright were as for the 2000 edition, but the publication was attributed to Philip's alone. The content was almost the same, the removal of the small advertisement for the Council for British Archaeology being the only obvious change. However a tiny but significant point was that the advertisement for the Ordnance Survey Street Atlases inside the back cover no longer gave both the OS web address and that of Philip's side by side; only the Philip's address was now there.

So at this point we are left considering the definition of the words 'Ordnance Survey map'. The 2001 atlas called itself an Ordnance Survey atlas on its front cover and title page, which seems clear enough, yet it was published by someone else. In subsequent years the ambiguity only increases. The 2002 edition had very much the same cover design, but a Philips' logo now appeared in the lower part of the front and at the bottom of the title page. Furthermore the mapping was now 'licensed from Ordnance Survey'. The advertisement for the Street Atlases at the back is now headed with the Philip's logo alongside the OS one, and the volumes pictured all have the Philip's name along with Ordnance Survey on their front covers.¹¹ The 2003 edition continued what had become a progressive transformation. Although at first sight it appeared much the same as the previous one, the Philip's logo was moved from the bottom to the top of both the front cover and the title page. And, by my definition, this edition was the last one to count as an OS atlas.

¹¹ A further novelty was the inclusion of a voucher for a £50 discount on a city-break holiday. John Paddy Browne in his article (*Sheetlines* 37, 37-38) had regarded such vouchers as an Americanism that the OS should not copy. Philip's clearly felt otherwise!

For 2004 a new atlas was published at the usual time, in the usual format, with a cover very similar to that of previous editions, but it no longer called itself an Ordnance Survey atlas. Beside the large Philip's logo on the cover was a smaller logo reading 'Mapping sourced from the Ordnance Survey'. On the title page the only OS logo was a tiny one in amongst the small print of the copyright information beside the phrase 'This product includes mapping data licensed from Ordnance Survey'. And the OS mapping had been changed. Firstly the standard scale had been reduced to 1:200,000 (even though the cover still described this as '3 miles to 1 inch'). And secondly the OS mapping had been modified. Most noticeable to me was the introduction of the Gaelic versions of the names for the Isle of Lewis and others of the Western Isles, but there are a host of other changes, innovations and introductions. Perhaps not unreasonably, Philip's chose to reset the edition numbering at this point. And so it seems clear to me that this atlas is not an OS atlas. However equally clearly there is complete continuity between this atlas, which still uses OS mapping as its foundation, and the OS atlases of the 1980s. And this therefore leaves us with a continuing ambiguity about the definition of the words 'Ordnance Survey map'.

But of course there was still the Ordnance Survey Road Atlas 200x Britain, which had contained just the mapping for which the OS retained sole copyright. Except there wasn't, because this too was republished

(still by 'Bounty Books') as the 'Philip's Motorist's Atlas 2004 Britain' with both 'cartography by Philip's' and 'mapping sourced from Ordnance Survey'. In this atlas too the scale was reduced to 1:200,000 (although the cover continued the confusion by still stating that it was 1:190,000).

Thus by late 2003 the transfer of the OS's biggest-selling product to the private sector was complete. Instead of developing and exploiting its resources itself, as it had for the previous 200 years, the OS now merely licensed others to use and modify OS mapping. One hopes that the licence fees were, and are, substantial, and also that they are based not simply on a current-cost valuation but also on a capital valuation, because by transferring the principal product based on the OS

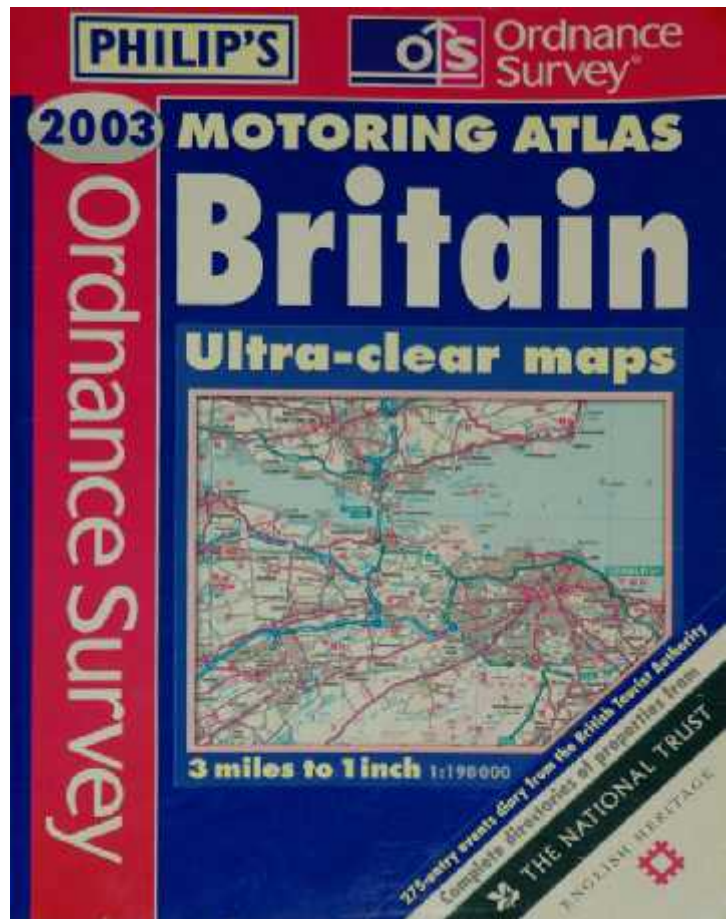


Figure 2. Front cover of the last (2003) edition of the Ordnance Survey Motoring Atlas of Britain showing the prominent Philip's logo

1:250,000 mapping to the private sector the OS sharply reduced its own ability to exploit this mapping and thus diminished the residual value of its intellectual property. The recent abandonment by the OS of its own publication of any 1:250,000 paper mapping makes this quite clear.¹² In return for their license fee Philip's now effectively have a sole-user right to what was once one of the OS's flagship products. The current edition of what is now called the 'Philip's Road Atlas' remains a market leader, and because of the quality of its mapping it successfully sells for a significantly higher price than its principal competitor, an AA atlas. This price differential is a measure of the value of the OS mapping now controlled by Philip's. Philip's have clearly benefited from the acquisition of this mapping. It is less clear whether OS has also benefited.

I do not know what the licensing fee for this sole-user right currently is or has been. This is no doubt regarded as commercially sensitive information that is not for publication. However as members of the public we are the ultimate owners of the OS as a commercial enterprise. If any company listed on a stock market had sold sole-user rights to one of its flagship products to another firm in the same sector the deal would certainly have affected the share price, the direction of change being the outcome of the market's view on whether the price gained for the sale of the asset was good or bad. The stock market rules would therefore have required disclosure of the terms of the deal. For a chief executive to survive in office he would have had to persuade not just his board but also his shareholders that the sale was to their advantage and did not diminish the value of the company. The terms of the deal would not only have been published but would have been widely debated by interested parties. Yet although the OS is public property I am not aware that there has been any public debate about the terms of the deal with Philip's (which covers much more mapping than just the 1:250,000 series) or what its effects on the present or future sale value of the OS might be.

Of course the then Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer (subsequently the Prime Minister) claimed great economic competence and prudence. He was also well known for exerting detailed financial control over all government organisations. Nevertheless it is not a conventional socialist policy to divert a person or organisation away from the direct exploitation of its own resources by its own labour into the role of a *rentier*, dependant on 'unearned' income. Furthermore Gordon Brown's subsequent announcement in the run-up to the 2010 General Election that the OS copyrights, on which this *rentier* income depend, were to be abolished suggests confusion and memory-loss rather than competence and prudence.

¹² See Ed Fielden, 'OS efficiency review: two-dozen Travel Map sheets discontinued', *Sheetlines* 87 (2010), 50. There still remain however a few grossly over-enlarged derivatives of the series (covering tourist areas) within the OS Travel Map - Tour series. These should perhaps be considered as a large-print edition for the visually impaired.

Tracking exactly who owned and controlled the successive private-sector co-publishers of the *OS Motoring Atlas* is less than straightforward because the imprints on the title pages only give part of the story.¹³ Beginning in 1947, Paul Hamlyn made his name and fortune publishing and selling cheaply-printed colourful books through non-traditional outlets to a mass-market. As such he was a controversial figure who upset many establishment figures in traditional publishing. The publication of the *OS Motoring Atlas of Great Britain* was thus a typical Paul Hamlyn enterprise. However Paul Hamlyn bought and sold his own companies without hesitation. Thus he sold the publishing company bearing his name to IPC Books in 1964, becoming chairman of IPC as part of the deal. He lost this chairmanship however in 1970 when IPC merged with Albert E Reed to form Reed International. In 1971 he founded a new company, Octopus Books, which rapidly expanded to become a major publisher both in its own right and by taking over many long-established British publishing names, including that of George Philip. The *OS Motoring Atlas of Great Britain* was thus first launched at a time when Hamlyn Publishing was part of Reed International, but had no connection with Paul Hamlyn himself. However Paul Hamlyn's vehicle Octopus Books then bought Hamlyn Publishing from Reed International in 1986. Paul Hamlyn became chairman of both of the Octopus Publishing Group and its subsidiary the Hamlyn Publishing Group. With Terence Conran he had also bought the old Michelin Building in London and this became the headquarters of all his companies. He retained the chairmanship of both Octopus and Hamlyn the following year when he sold all his publishing interests once more to Reed International in a deal that made him by far the largest shareholder in that company. Furthermore he continued to be chairman of both Octopus and

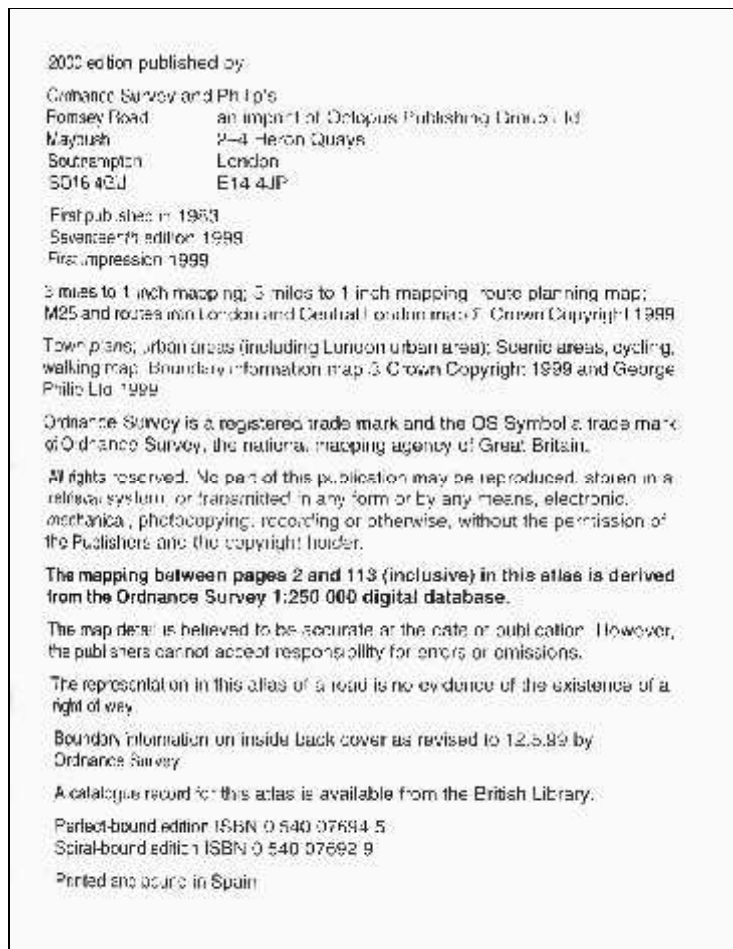


Figure 3. Imprint of the 2000 edition

¹³ Much of this and the next paragraph is derived from obituaries of Hamlyn published in *The Telegraph* (4 September 2001) and *The Independent* (4 September 2001). These are available on-line from the websites of those newspapers.

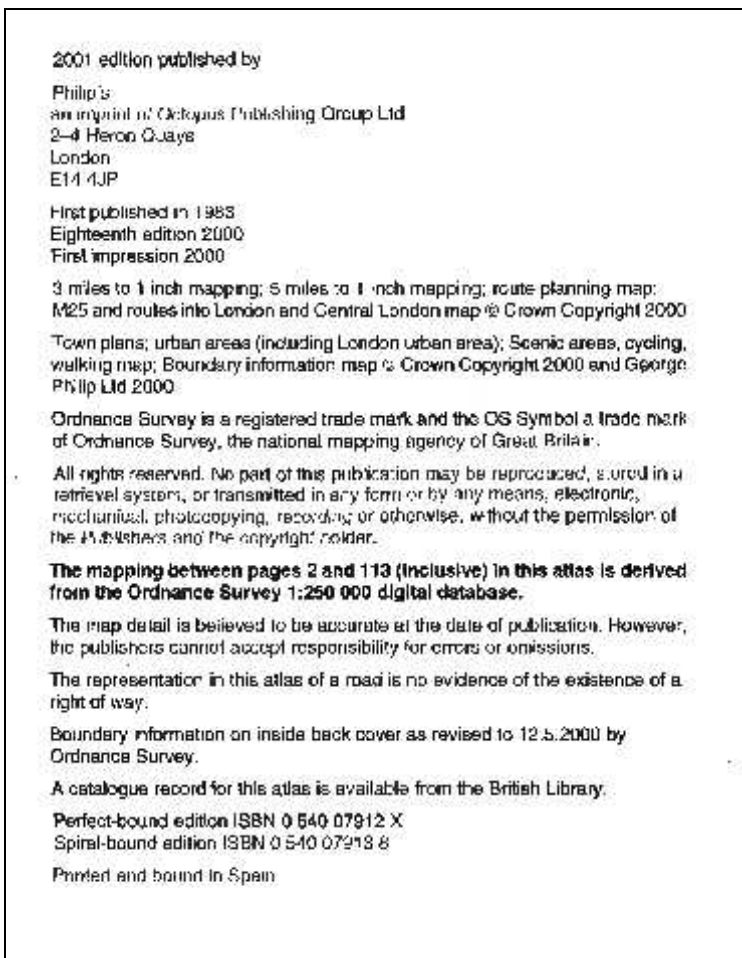


Figure 4. Imprint of the 2001 edition

Labour victory that year he was ennobled in 1998 as Baron Hamlyn of Edgeworth (officially in recognition of his substantial charitable donations). Hamlyn continued to be a major donor to the Labour Party and in January 2001 was revealed to have donated two million pounds anonymously shortly before such anonymous donations were outlawed. That Hamlyn was bank-rolling the governing party at the time when he was also negotiating the transfer of a major asset from the Ordnance Survey to a private-sector company controlled by himself is of course not in itself an indication of any improper behaviour. It is however disturbing that there has been so little transparency about the deal and its financial terms. One would have thought that the public officials involved would, for their own protection, have wished for greater openness.

Paul Hamlyn's death in August 2001 led to major changes in Reed Elsevier. In particular Octopus Publishing, with all its subsidiaries including both Hamlyn Publishing and Philip's, was sold before the end of 2001 to the French publishing house Hachette Livre. Hachette is itself owned by Lagardère, a quoted French media company.¹⁴ It should be noted that the process of conversion of the OS Motoring Atlas from a co-publication to a private publication was still, on the face

Hamlyn after the merger of Reed International with the Dutch firm Elsevier to form Reed Elsevier in 1993. Only in 1997 as his health was failing did he give up the chairmanship of Octopus Publishing, and he retained the chairmanship of Hamlyn Publishing until his death in 2001. Thus while Paul Hamlyn was not involved in the birth of the *OS Motoring Atlas*, he was most certainly involved in its subsequent development, and in its eventual conversion from a co-publication into a fully private publication.

From 1990 onwards Paul Hamlyn had become a frequent major donor to Labour Party campaign funds. In 1997 his donation of £500,000 covered more than half of the launch costs of the Labour election manifesto. Following the

¹⁴ See www.lagardere.com/group-274.html

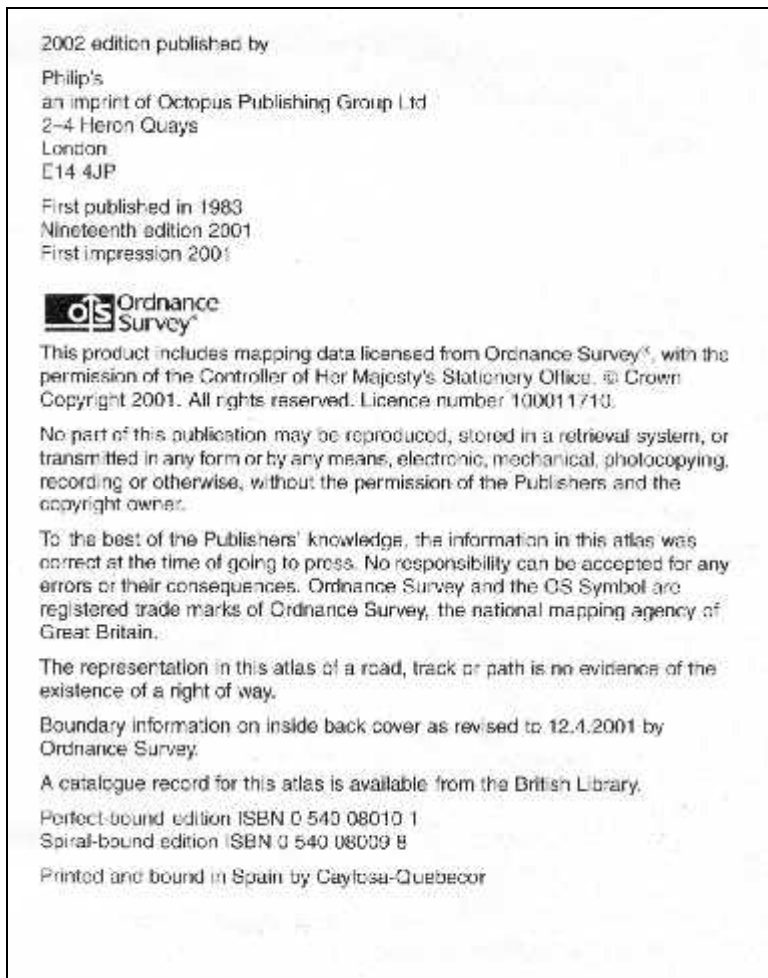


Figure 5. Imprint of the 2002 edition

are accustomed to the idea that reproduction material, especially copper plates, would routinely be sold from publisher to publisher and new impressions would be made with greater or lesser change, sometimes centuries after the original publication date. Until now this has never been part of the OS story. However it now seems probable that Hachette and their successors will continue to publish what used to be the OS 1:250,000 map (now at the customary French scale of 1:200,000) for the indefinite future. And the companies and their reproduction material may yet be sold on again, and again.

Is this a bad thing? Well that depends on your view of what the OS and other public services are, and are for. The sale of this map may well ensure its continued publication for a very long time indeed. The private sector will not readily abandon such an asset in the way that the OS has hitherto routinely done when a new map-series has been launched. Our grand-children and great-grand-children may well come to see the OS / Philip's / Hachette road-atlases as an enduring monument to the late-twentieth-century Ordnance Survey.

Nevertheless, that it is a French company that currently has the sole use-right to one of the principal British official maps does seem rather strange. And while at present the military and strategic aims of Britain and France are closely aligned, it has not always been so. William Roy and many of his successors would certainly

of it, incomplete at the time of this sale. The publication of the atlas had however already been transferred to Philip's and their then owners during 2000. Octopus Publishing Group continues to publish books using nine different imprints (including Philip's, Hamlyn, and Bounty Books), but is now just one of several divisions of Hachette Livre active as publishers in the UK.

Ten years later there seems little likelihood that the OS could ever recover the use-right to this mapping from Hachette. At some point OS will have to concede this and negotiate a final sale. For all I know it may already have done so. At that point a further category is created in the range of possible definitions of an 'Ordnance Survey map'. Those studying antique maps

have regarded the sale of such reproduction material to the French as treasonous.

I hope that this sometimes dry description of the evolution of the OS Motoring Atlas shows that the series is not without interest and deserves greater attention. This article is certainly not a definitive account. Wholly missing are most of the personalities involved. Who was it who had the original idea, who persuaded the (seldom entrepreneurial) OS to adopt it, and who drove the idea to completion? We lack the personal memoirs of senior staff of the OS from the last quarter-century that might reveal these things (and indeed much else). More importantly, we also lack concrete information about the costings of the atlas, its sales at full price and at remaindered prices, and the income generated. How profitable the atlas truly was could only be judged by establishing the proportion of the overall costs of maintaining the OS 1:250,000 map that should have been attributed to it. These figures are not trivial issues of remote financial history. They remain the benchmarks by which we the public and our elected representatives should be judging whether the current licensing arrangements are appropriate. The present lack of transparency about them should be a matter of significant public concern.

And finally a more personal comment. I fear that those of us who are map collectors are guilty of a degree of snobbery. We collect and trade all sorts of obscure OS products and ephemera. But how often do you see old copies of the OS Motoring Atlas for sale on the second-hand market? Would you buy one? Is your set complete? Mine certainly isn't, even though I tried to be systematic in purchasing copies each year. And despite the huge numbers printed and sold, destruction has been equally huge. I suspect that some editions of the Motoring Atlas may in the long run prove to be amongst the rarest of OS publications in both library and private collections. Those copies that do still survive should now be cherished, even if their bindings have come adrift, their corners are dog-eared and torn, and their pages have indecipherable biro annotations from long-forgotten journeys. As with trench maps, the very essence of the OS Motoring Atlas is that a pristine copy can never have seen active service.

New colour palette at OS

OS report that they have developed a new colour palette to improve colour differentiation by those suffering colour vision deficiency (CVD), 'colour blindness'. They hope the new palette will improve legibility for all types of CVD, and are considering its use on future map products.

<http://blog.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/2011/05/maps-for-the-colour-blind-now-a-reality>



Old

&

New

*with thanks to
James Mackay*