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“Book review”

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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.

J H Andrews, *Maps in those days: cartographic methods before 1850*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-84682-188-2, pp xviii, 549, B5, hardback, € 65.00, £ 55.00

Professor John Andrews is best known as the first significant historian of the mapping of Ireland, but he has also published several articles of much wider import. His previous three monographs have been concerned with Ireland, starting with *A paper landscape: the Ordnance Survey in nineteenth century Ireland* (1975), but now he complements the wider vision of his map-philosophical articles with a whole book, as insightful as its predecessors, and decidedly heavier.¹

For some of us, anything by John Andrews is practically self-recommending, but there are three reasons why *Maps in those days* deserves consideration in these pages. One is that there has been nothing like it before; the second is that it puts earlier Ordnance Survey methods into a much wider context; and the third is that it suggests that there ought to be something corresponding for obsolete Ordnance Survey methods, which really means anything pre-digital.

The scope of the book is neatly encapsulated in the title: here you will find methods of surveying, drawing, engraving and much else neatly summarized. Technical descriptions as such are relatively few, and could be compressed into a much smaller compass, but they are set in a much wider context of examples of practical use and practical justification. Indeed, throughout Andrews is concerned with showing map-making as a *practical* activity; his view is that a map is a practical object of itself, rather than an elaborate social ‘construct’. The notes show a formidable level of erudition: in criticizing J B Harley’s approach, Andrews remarked that Harley ‘gives the impression of having spent a lifetime in a library where every book ever published can be seen on open access, and where an army of research assistants stands at the service of every reader’.² The reaction to *Maps in those days* must be much the same: the references seem exhaustive. Chapters cover ‘Map history miniaturised’, the growing preponderance of facts over theories, sketch-maps, strict measurement, the shape of the earth, measured survey by various methods, plotting of surveys, projections, types of map, marine charting, relief representation, names, copying (including engraving and lithography), map compilation, map publication, symbols, decoration and ‘Maps and society’, which pithily summarises the ‘Andrews view’.

There is no lack of references to the Ordnance Survey, and there are one or two unusual illustrations, such as a page from a contour-surveyors notebook on page 301. Some of the themes, such as sketch-mapping, are at best marginal to OS considerations, but others are fundamental, such as survey methods. Whereas often writers have tended to treat the national survey in a progressive manner, as deserving a chapter to itself at the end, here OS references and examples swim in

¹ The others are *Plantation acres* (1985), a study of land surveying, and *Shapes of Ireland* (1997), effectively a book-length history of Irish mapping. *A paper landscape* was reissued by Four Courts in 2002, but the other two are, alas, out of print.

² J H Andrews, *Meaning, knowledge and power in the map philosophy of J B Harley* (Trinity Papers in Geography, no.6), Dublin: Trinity College, 1994, 1.

and out. In a wider context, the Ordnance Survey furnishes examples, but it was not necessarily a universe of its own.

This brings me to the third point: the need for something similar devoted wholly to the methods of the Ordnance Surveys in these islands. The motivation for this is not to redress an imbalance; rather it is the need to record more recent processes before they are forgotten. The relatively transitory nature of many of these makes such a project timely, and probably urgent. Whereas engraving on copper was a standard technique employed from the late fifteenth century to the early twentieth century, scribing on first glass and then plastic – a means of preparing a ‘drawing’ that obviated both ink and the need for a camera in subsequent photographic processes – seems to have appeared no earlier than the 1930s, was adopted by the OS of Great Britain around 1955 (and rather later in Ireland) and was rendered completely obsolete by the late 1990s.³ Much the same might be said of the use of butt-jointed plates in surveying. The rise, use and fall of these methods need a monograph of their own.

Maps in those days can be warmly recommended. It is well produced and profusely illustrated; I suspect that digital processing has been used to enhance the clarity of many of the originals, and whilst the result occasionally appears a little ‘hard’, at least it is legible, no peering into half-tone gloom. Hitherto Andrews has fought shy of sub-headings within chapters, preferring a synopsis in the contents; now there are sub-headings, but the contents only has the chapter-headings, so that the book is not always as convenient for quick reference as some readers might like. But this is hardly a fatal flaw, and one that is easily forgiven in the sheer fluency of the writing. It reads easily, which means a lot of very hard work has gone into it.

Richard Oliver



Beck meets Wainwright

Inspired by Harry Beck's iconic tube map and Alfred Wainwright's definitive set of guides to the Lake District fells, cartographer Peter Burgess has produced *Tubular Fells*, an A2 size poster map of Lakeland. Priced at £8.99, the map is on sale in various shops in Cumbria and from www.TubularFells.com

³ As the late David Woodward pointed out a long time ago, scribing is really a version of ‘photo-writing’, which was a well-established technique by the 1880s: see D. Woodward, ‘A note on the history of scribing’, *Cartographic Journal* 3(2) (1966), 58.