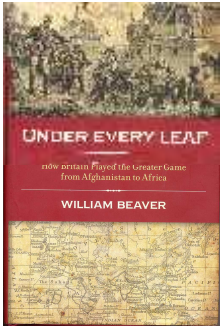


William Beaver, *Under every leaf; how Britain played the greater game from Afghanistan to Africa*, London: Biteback Publishing, 2012, 342 pages, ISBN 978-1-84954-219-7, hardback £20.



This is a history of IDWO (the Intelligence Department or Division of the War Office) from its origin in the Crimean War as the Topographical and Statistical Department until its assimilation into the new General Staff at the beginning of the twentieth century. IDWO will be well known to many readers of *Sheetlines* as a prolific producer of maps of overseas territories. It also had a highly influential role in providing not only topographical intelligence, but also a very wide range of other information about overseas territories, to the great offices of state. Indeed a central contention of this book is that the volume of intelligence supplied to the Foreign Office, Colonial Office, India Office and indeed the Prime Minister became far greater, more important, and more influential than the more limited information provided to the War Office or to the Commander-in-Chief of the army. There has hitherto been no historical account of IDWO available, and so the present work is essential reading for anyone interested in the development of Britain's military and colonial mapping, and should be equally essential to anyone studying the growth of Britain's foreign, colonial and imperial policies during the late-nineteenth century. Furthermore the source material for the book has been assembled from a very large number of sources scattered through public records, private papers and contemporary publications. These include a substantial number of reports printed at the time by IDWO for very limited circulation within government and the armed forces.

All of this makes for a very good start indeed. However the resulting book is problematic in several ways. Although the author (himself a former intelligence officer) emphasises that the provision of intelligence requires not only the gathering of raw information, but also the evaluation and contextualisation of that information before it can be used effectively, the contextualisation of the information in the book is often suspect or frankly weak. This is very clearly reflected in the footnotes and bibliography. These are filled with primary source citations, but there is a striking absence of any acknowledgement that many historians during the subsequent century or more have examined aspects of the political, military and colonial history of the period. As a result the author's understanding of the shifting political currents in London often seems oversimplistic and limited by the content of his archival material. His understanding of events and opinions in the wider world seems even more simplistic and often frankly wrong. For example, although he recognises that many contemporary British and Indian opinions about what the Russians were up to in the Great Game were ill-informed and thus dangerous, he seems not to appreciate that the understanding achieved by IDWO at the time was, while better-informed, itself capable of improvement. In particular the conflicting views, opinions and actions both of individuals working in St. Petersburg and of Russian explorers and

military commanders active in Central Asia can now be recognised much more clearly than at the time. Very similar criticisms could be made of his account of the events leading up to the Fashoda incident and other landmark events in the scramble for Africa.

A major focus of the author is to identify IDWO as an embryonic General Staff in Britain at a time when the continental powers were developing their General Staff organisations in the light of the experience of the Franco-Prussian war. His argument seems plausible, but might have been greatly assisted by some reference to the existing literature on developments in other countries. In particular Arden Bucholz's categorisation of the war-planning functions of the German Great General Staff, as being organisational, representational, educational and analytical, could have provided a useful yardstick with which to evaluate the activities of IDWO.¹ David Alan Rich has shown that in Russia, as in Britain, there was continuing resistance at senior levels to the idea that military officers should have technical and scientific training and expertise. Such very close similarities between the Russian Main Staff and IDWO could usefully have been emphasised, particularly in the context of the Great Game.²

To anyone wanting to know about the maps produced by IDWO the book will be a disappointment. Despite noting that maps were the most widely known product of the department, and also that the need for maps of the Crimea had led to the foundation of the department, the author largely ignores them. There is no citation of the published catalogues of the maps, and no attempt to describe or evaluate them.³ A condescending comment on page 164 about 'sweating jobbers in the basement' also suggests to me an ignorance of the skills required for high-quality cartographic lithography. And while the union of what was then the Topographical and Statistical Department with the Ordnance Survey after Jervis's death is mentioned, as occasionally are individual postings of officers to duties with the OS, there is no attempt to describe or understand how the two bodies interacted, either before or after their parting in 1870. Indeed there are no citations of the substantial existing literature on the history of the Ordnance Survey in this period, although in fairness it must also be said that Seymour's *History of the Ordnance Survey* hardly mentions the Topographical Department of the War Office and does not index it.⁴

Surprisingly, the book itself contains no maps to illustrate the complex play across the globe of the events described. This makes the text difficult to follow at times, particularly since the place-names mentioned are those current in London in the nineteenth century, not those appearing on present-day maps. The Oxus is relatively easy to identify as the Amu Darya, but I remain uncertain where

¹ Arden Bucholz, *Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian war planning*, Oxford: Berg, 1991, 13.

² David Alan Rich, *The Tsar's colonels; Professionalism, strategy, and subversion in late Imperial Russia*, London: Harvard UP, 1998.

³ A Crispin Jewitt, *Maps for empire: the first 2000 numbered War Office maps 1881-1905*, London: British Library, 1992. A Crispin Jewitt, *Intelligence revealed: maps, plans and views at Horse Guards and the War office 1800-1880*, London: British Library, 2011.

⁴ WA Seymour (ed), *A history of the Ordnance Survey*, Folkestone; Dawson, 1980.

‘Penjdeh’ was (see pages 170-71). Might it now be the Panjshir valley, so notorious in Soviet times? My disorientation was further exacerbated by rapid shifts of the narrative between Anatolia, Persia and Afghanistan.

Nevertheless the great value of this book is its identification of so many primary sources. Accordingly, the comment in the introduction that many of these ‘remained in the Ministry of Defence Library (Central and Army) until the mid-1970s’ brought me out in a cold sweat. Much of the source material used by Thomas Pakenham for his well-known book on the Boer War was subsequently ‘weeded’ and so destroyed.⁵ I sense that the research for the present work may well have been carried out some time ago and that some important sources he identified may likewise have subsequently been destroyed or dispersed without trace. I hope my fears are unfounded but, if the original sources are now lost, the analytical weaknesses noted above become the more regrettable while the book itself becomes the more valuable. It is certainly well worth reading.

John I Cruickshank

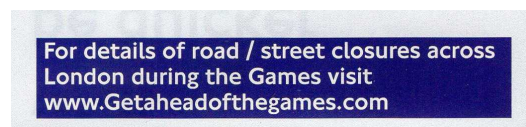
John Davies gives an interesting account of the special maps produced by for the 2012 Olympics⁶ (all of which were dated April 2012). However, an earlier map, dated December 2011 in much the same format as the *Why not walk it?* series may be regarded as a prototype for these. It is entitled *Continuing your journey in the Olympia area* and was issued to assist those inconvenienced by the withdrawal of regular weekday Underground services to Kensington Olympia, which took place on 11 December 2011. Because of this rather limited purpose the quantity produced is likely to have been far smaller than for the Olympics maps.



There are some presentational differences. The cover does not depict the trouserless individual featured on the other maps, but is a simple extract from the map itself, with the TfL logo but not the National Rail or Network Rail logos. The map itself appears to be on the same scale and in the same style as the *Why not walk it?* series, but covers a smaller area (one vertical fold less).

This map does include the OS and TfL Copyright statement mentioned by John, but intriguingly, my versions of the Victoria, Charing Cross and Liverpool Street maps omit this. Presumably, the maps were reprinted at some point, but whether the Copyright statement was added or removed in the reprint is impossible to say. All are dated April 2012.

Graham Bird



Extracts of two editions of the Victoria map, with and without Copyright statement

⁵ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979.

⁶ John Davies, *London 2012: Why not walk it?*, Sheetlines 95, 16