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“The Concise guide – a concise history”

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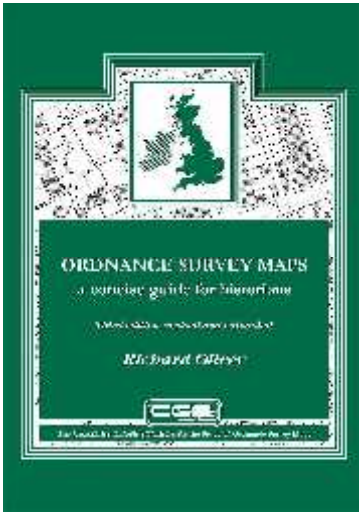
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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles 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 Concise guide - a concise history

Richard Oliver



All being well, a third edition of my *Ordnance Survey maps: a concise guide for historians* will be issued around the beginning of October. Like the OS itself, the *Concise guide* has grown up in a rather fragmented way. It was originally conceived in about March 1991 as simply a drawing-together of some existing data on the 1:10,560 and larger-scale surveys and revisions of towns and counties, plus some brief notes on the development of each scale, and a list of abbreviations. At that time there was reason to expect that in the next few years J Brian Harley would produce a complement to his *Ordnance Survey maps: a descriptive manual* of 1975. In December 1991 Harley died suddenly, and the ‘descriptive historical manual’ went with him. It was only in the autumn of 1992, after I had begun serious work on the *Concise guide* – mostly a matter of refining the survey and revision date information for certain places – that I decided to add what was Chapter 3 in the first edition, and chapter 5 in its successors, ‘Notes on the depiction of detail’. This was based on various photocopies and notes, including of much of the material that had been used or collected for the *Descriptive manual*, and seems to be the most highly-regarded part of the book.

My original concept was a 160-page paperback of A5 size, to sell at £8.95, but I was persuaded by David Archer and others to change this to 192 pages, B5 and £12.95. Time has proved their judgement sounder than mine. We printed just over 1000 copies in May 1993, and another 2200 less than a year later; by the time the second edition was issued in March 2005 we had fewer than the odd 200 copies left. That second edition, now 256 pages and printed-paper-case, was exhausted in March 2013, and leftovers of the first edition are being offered at a reduced price as a makeshift. We intend to print 1000 copies of the third edition, of 320 pages, and hope that the stock will be exhausted within ten years.

How do the three editions differ? Given the growing length it is perhaps as well that the title decided on originally, in consultation with others, was *Concise guide* rather than *Compact guide*: compactness belonged to the 160-page concept, but a relic of it in the first edition was the scattering of the explanations of conventional signs as page-fillers in the ‘counties’ chapter. This was not popular, and the signs were duly grouped together in the second edition. One convention not explained by the OS was the herringbone-and-bushes depiction of gardens and, following queries from users, an example of this was duly included in the second edition.

There were three groups of additions to the second edition. A chapter on OS maps as historical sources sought to disentangle survey, revision and compilation, the concepts of ‘basic’ and ‘derived’ mapping, and sources of ‘error’, not least paper distortion. Some OS definitions, such as of ‘series’ and ‘edition’, ‘house

units' and 'ornament' that had appeared as 'depiction of detail' were given a chapter of their own, and the 'detail' chapter was greatly expanded by a more thorough exploration of surviving OS instructions to field and drawing staff. The bibliography was also expanded.

In the third edition the 'depiction of detail' chapter has been further expanded, with some contributions from the OS website on recent practice; 'recent' it may be, but one often senses a profound continuity. What was Chapter 4 in the first edition and is Chapter 6 in its successors, on the mapping of towns, sought to include all towns mapped at 1:1250 or larger, plus a selection of others. The selection was perhaps a rather personal one, but does not seem to have been remarked on as it might. For the third edition the list of towns has been expanded to include practically everywhere that might reasonably be regarded as a 'town' at some time between 1500 and the 1950s, on the basis of either administrative or market status. Also included are post-1950 'new towns', including Cranbrook, east of Exeter, which is still being built and is not yet to be found on OS small-scale mapping.¹ The list now also indicates towns revised for land valuation purposes in 1911-12 and not fully revised again shortly afterwards, and those recently 'enhanced' from 1:2500 to 1:1250 standard.

Chapter 7, the mapping of counties, has also been expanded, to incorporate the data on air photo mosaics formerly in the two-page Chapter 8 (now 'abolished'), much more detailed information on fragmentary publication of 1:2500 first edition mapping, and lists of 1:10,560 Special Emergency Edition sheets prepared in 1938-9. This has necessitated abandoning the principle of having each county's entry on a single page or opening, but it does greatly facilitate laying out.

The *Concise guide* is essentially a work of compilation and of, to be honest, short cuts. With perhaps 150,000 or more County Series sheets and perhaps 500,000 National Grid ones it could not be otherwise. One 'short cut' is the very brief treatment of OS surveying and reproduction methods. These need either a book, or a substantial section of the CCS website, and recent developments suggest that this will happen sooner rather than later.² A more fundamental 'short cut' is in assembling the data for town surveys and revisions in Chapter 6. An important source for revisions of the 1920s to the 1940s, and for some National Grid remapping of the 1960s and 1970s, is the group of revision progress diagrams in the CCS archives.³ These supplied data both for the original list, compiled in 1991-3, and for the augmented version twenty years later. Other data has been taken from 1:10,560 and 1:10,000 mapping that happened to be readily to hand: the open-access county sets at the British Library and the regional cover available in Exeter have been particularly valuable for this.

¹ The name seems to be an amalgam of Crannaford (SY 011962) and Southbrook (SY 022963). Why could it not have been 'Crannbrook', to distinguish it from the well-established (eleventh century or earlier) town in Kent?

² See Rob Wheeler, 'Towards a virtual museum of the geographic production process', *Sheetlines* 96,3 [this issue].

³ CCS-OS archive, at Cambridge University: OS.l.15.1, l.16.1, L.18.1, L.19.1, L.21.1, L.22.1.

The remaining dating for National Grid mapping has been taken from the 1:2 million scale annual progress diagram included in OS annual reports from 1954-5 to 1982-3. The changing format of this diagram over the years deserves an extended essay in itself, but all but the earliest versions record publication rather than survey dates; my assumption is that, say, publication in 1966-7 suggests a 1965 survey date. Sample-checking indicates that this is reliable within a year or so. At 1:2M a one kilometre area measures 0.5 mm square, and so the date-extraction operation is a delicate one. The method used is in principle as follows. First the extent of the relevant built-up areas are ascertained from recent 1:50,000 mapping, and plotted on millimetre-squared paper: this gives a diagram at 1:1M (*figure 1*). This diagram is then reduced to half-size by photocopying, and the areas of interest traced off: because of changing formats, both 100 km National Grid squares and the coastline are on the tracing (*figure 2*). The tracing is then overlaid on the progress diagrams in the annual reports, and as the colours change on the diagrams, so the desired dates are obtained (*figure 3*).

These ‘short cuts’ may disillusion some who had assumed that I have looked at every OS large-scale sheet. The challenge to critics is to provide an alternative, given that the libraries with the largest holdings at the same time restrict daily issues to a relatively modest number of sheets: a serious problem even for those with ready access to the repositories in question. Several people have suggested a ‘sheet finder’, whereby passing a cursor over a National Grid square on a screen would enable all relevant dates, of both County Series and National Grid mapping – which latterly means digital data – to pop up. The technology is certainly there: as yet the data is not. Until then, you will need the *Concise guide*.

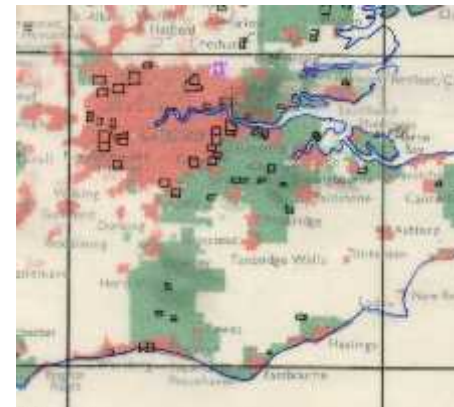
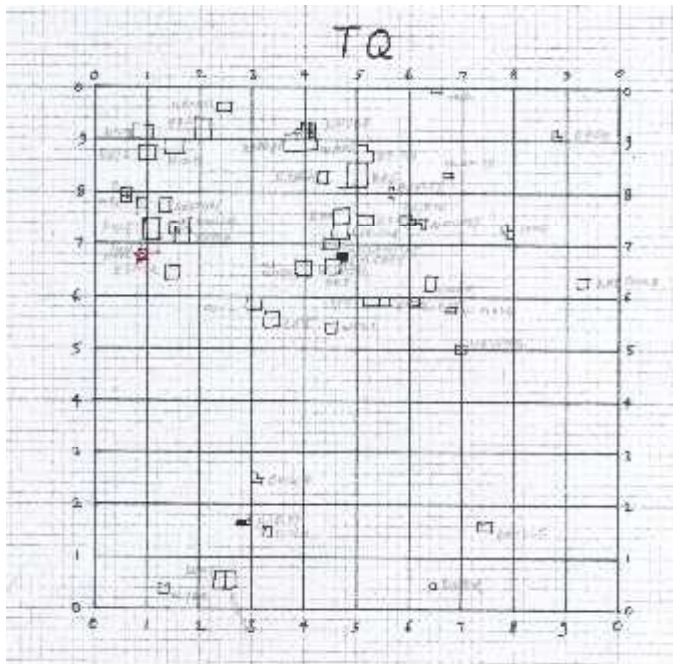


Figure 1 (left) National Grid square TQ, with urban areas needing survey dates plotted on 1 cm paper. Note the faint pencil indications of names

Figure 2 (centre) Extract from trace at 1:2M, with urban areas traced from half-scale reduction from Figure 1. Note both 100 km National Grid squares and coastline

Figure 3 (right) The 1:2M trace overlaid on Plate I of the OS report for 1966-7. Red denotes areas mapped at 1:1250; green indicates areas mapped at 1:2500.