



Sheetlines

The journal of
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps

“British Library visit”

John Henry

Sheetlines, 98 (December 2013), pp.50-51

Stable URL:

<http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue98page50.pdf>

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Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
www.CharlesCloseSociety.org

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.

British Library visit

A dozen CCSers gathered in the vast foyer of the British Library on 11 September to visit the map library and in particular to view maps from the George III collection, known in the BL as 'K-top'. Tom Harper, Curator of Antiquarian Mapping, and map specialist Magdalena Peszko were our hosts. Tom met and guided us past an innocuous 'staff only' door from the atrium, up one of the BL's 28 lifts, and through a maze of corridors to a meeting room. Tom, in his welcoming remarks, was very complementary about *Sheetlines*, which is a frequent reference for his staff. Tom, in consultation with Peter Barber who could not attend, had laid out a selection of maps for our inspection. The maps were either by surveyors of the Board of Ordnance, made prior to the founding of the OS, or maps by OS surveyors in preparation for the engraver.

It is easy to forget that maps, plans and sections were vital to the Board of Ordnance for the planning and maintenance of fortifications for centuries before the Ordnance Trigonometrical Survey was formally established. These documents are included in the BL's OS collection.

The earliest maps were bound in a thick volume, *'The present state of Guernsey, with a short account of Jersey and forts belonging to the said islands, by Col George Legge, Lieutenant Generall [sic] of his Majesties [sic] Ordnance, anno Domini 1680'*. It combined details of fortifications in section and plan, 'birds-eye' views of harbours and estuaries, and various elevations (in the architectural sense), all immaculately coloured in water colours. By chance, years ago, I had used this volume when researching various piers that required remedial work in Jersey; the plans I found in this volume were accurate and I was able to tie them in with later conventional OS plans. The volume also included contemporary accounts of material costs and labour.

Nearer in time, other Channel Island maps included a *'Copy of a Survey of the Island of Jersey, taken by order of his Grace the Duke of Richmond, Master-General of the Ordnance (1783-1795)'* and *'An Accurate Survey and Measurement of the Island of ... Guernsey. Surveyed by W.Gardner. J.Warner Sculpsit, 1787'* both at six inches to the mile. These were rigorous triangulated surveys which resemble the OS maps we are more familiar with.

On the mainland, a folio *'Collection of plans and profiles, and accompanying report, for fortifications on the south coast, Board of Ordnance Drawing Office, 1750-53'* included several in the vicinity of Portsmouth and one fort of which none of us had heard. Dear reader, if you know of Sandford Fort, please reply. Another fascinating folio of Plymouth included several large-scale plans that portrayed at close intervals the growth of Plymouth from 1725 to 1756.

Moving north, *'A very coloured military survey of the kingdom of Scotland undertaken by order of William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland'* (by) William Roy, Paul Sandby 1747-1755, sheet 7 covered Edinburgh and environs in great detail. At a scale of one inch to 1000 yards (1:36,000) it was exceptionally detailed. Never coordinated with latitude and longitude, Roy wrote that it was rather a 'magnificent military sketch, than a very accurate map of the country' in which

‘no geometrical exactness is to be expected, the sole object in view being, to shew remarkable things, or such as constitute the great outlines of the Country’.¹

The other category of maps displayed for us, were maps used to prepare for published maps. These included a surveyor’s diary, survey compilation maps, revision maps, fair drawn maps and contour/hill-form sheets.

A truly unique item was a notebook executed between 1812 and 1813 by surveyor Edmund Crocker whose meticulous daily entries incorporated clear sketch maps along lanes and traverses of surveyed lines and angles. All in neat italic script in sepia, free from blots, errors and revisions. Another Crocker item from 1808 was a two inch to the mile manuscript survey map of the area around Frome, again immaculate.

Similar but later was a set of two inch revision maps of Old Series sheets 7 to 34, dated 1826.

There were fair drawn and printed forms of Old Series sheet 19, published in 1817. The fair drawn map was prepared for the engraver to copy and so neat that it was difficult to imagine that it was a manuscript.

Tom had brought out boxes of, as yet, uncatalogued six inch maps with manuscript additions of hill forms drawn as contours and intervening form lines. We were examining the ‘Y-W’ box with maps of Yorkshire, Westmorland and Wiltshire. An interesting feature was that each manuscript was signed by the draftsman including the start and end dates and the number of days taken – usually 19 or 20 – to add the hill forms.

These maps and other uncatalogued maps have been discovered as part of a major new programme to recatalogue and digitise the BL’s maps. Some four million maps are involved with an estimated cost of £1,500,000 for digitisation. Many of the maps will be difficult to digitise due to their large size, fragility and, in some cases, faintness of pencilled detail. We all agreed that there was nothing like examination of an original manuscript to appreciate a map. The two inch fair drawn and revision maps of the Old Series have already been scanned with intention of registering them on Google Earth.

The two hours passed quickly. We thank Tom and Magdalena for fascinating insights into pre-OS Ordnance maps and the compilation maps leading to the published Old Series maps.



John Henry
photos by Rob Jayne

¹ W Roy, ‘An Account of the Measurement of a Base on Hounslow Heath’ in Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, volume 75 (1785), page 387.