



Sheetlines

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

“Kerry musings”

David Archer

Sheetlines, 98 (December 2013), pp.60-62

Stable URL:

<http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue98page60.pdf>

*This article is provided for personal, non-commercial use only.
Please contact the Society regarding any other use of this work.*

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.

Kerry musings

David Archer

If you could meet someone from the past, who would you choose, and why? Shakespeare perhaps, to hear his strong brummy accent? Nelson, to be certain of his last words? Or a man with a white hard-hat who was a senior project manager during the construction of Stonehenge, and has so many questions to answer? Me? I would choose the person who supervised the numbering of the Ordnance Survey six-inch maps; he would certainly have some serious questions heading his way.

So what's wrong with the numbering? Nothing really, it works, the sheets have the same numbers as the index diagrams, some diagrams, and that is all that matters. The only problem, no not a problem, a bewildering curiosity, is the question of all the sheets at the edges of counties which have a suffix, usually 'A'. The only consistent thing about them is that one cannot predict, I cannot predict, where they will occur or the number allocated to them. The six-inch maps for England and Wales continued the young tradition of inconsistent numbering followed by the Ordnance Survey in Ireland at this scale and for the mainland *Old Series*. Here, sheet 68 sits along the north coast of Norfolk, and to the right of it, floating in the sea are sheets 68 East part 1 and 68 East part 2. Which, I assume were considered preferable to 68 East North and 68 East South. On the Welsh coast, we have sheets 77 NE and 77 SE, with 76 N and 76 S beneath them. No uniformity is achieved by using Part 1, N and NE.

But I digress. Numbering of six-inch sheets. Draw a county boundary on a piece of paper, any county. Across the county, draw a grid of rectangles representing maps measuring 6 by 4 miles within the neat lines. Rub out any rectangle that does not have some part of the county on it, leaving a grid of irregular shape, often with edge sheets having only a small area of the county on them. Number the sheets from left to right, top to bottom, 1 to whatever. Neat. Mission accomplished. Except that it was not so. What I want the man from the past to explain, is why the numbering is from left to right, top to bottom, from sheet 1 to whatever, but with a lot of edge sheets given the same number as another sheet with the addition of a suffix, rather than their own number. Why sheet 198A rather than 199, and why was this sheet chosen to have a suffix in the first place? Put it another way. If one has just one six-inch sheet plotted anywhere on a county outline, one can predict with certainty where the other sheets will fall simply by extending the sheet lines to form a grid. What cannot be predicted is which sheets the Ordnance Survey would have chosen to have a suffix and which sheet number would have been used. I might be wrong and have missed something terribly simple by relying on a visual inspection of index diagrams, but I can see no consistency in the numbering of the six-inch maps. A search of the literature has proven fruitless. Yes, if one had a blank grid, one could make a good guess to identify sheets with a suffix, and what the number will be, but so often one would be wrong. Totally. The big question is why the Ordnance Survey adopted such an inconsistent approach in this matter?

The first 'A' sheets that I came across contained a very small bit of land, weeny, the size of a garden jutting out onto an adjoining sheet. A classic case of something missed at the planning stage, and only discovered by a draughtsman who went to his boss and said he thought they needed another sheet. Better call it 198A and press on. No time to go back and re-number everything. So when another was needed, it seemed acceptable to give it an 'A' number as well. Maybe the 'A' sheets remedy a significant minor error?

At least two things count against this suggestion. Firstly, they are found on maps and index diagrams spanning the whole era of six-inch production, a good chunk of the nineteenth century, in England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland. When a problem was found on the first counties to be mapped, surely they would have initiated extra care and checks in the future and would not have continued as they did? Secondly, numbers with a suffix are given to maps with quite large areas of land, where such sheets could easily have had their own non-suffix number, and would never have been missed at the planning stage. Land within the county boundary occupies seventy five per cent of Northumberland 106A, as much as is shown on the adjoining sheet 106. Thus, one might predict an 'A' where a smidgen of land creeps on to a sheet, but would never suggest having one where a sizeable area of land is shown.

Assuming one could predict a sheet bearing a suffix, there is still the problem of predicting what number to put before it. And here things are weird and wonderful, obvious, not so obvious, utterly bewildering and downright confusing. Hold on to your hats. Numbering. We might imagine that the easiest, indeed the only numbers we are able to predict are where the 'A' sheet is attached to the grid on one side only, taking the number of the sheet it is attached to. So, if the eastern border of the county is covered by a column of sheets 120, 130, 140 and 150, the sheet jutting out from 130, will be 130A. Similarly on the west, north and south of the county. Here, one might suggest that 'A' means additional, annex, appendix, also, and.

But no, even this simplest of assumptions does not work. Consider Northumberland six-inch sheet 8. This shows some mud flats and the northern tip of Holy Island on the north-east coast of England, and has three sheets of solid land to its west and south, with only the deepest blue ocean beyond the other two sides. If there were a sheet 8A, one would expect it to be holding hands with sheet 8, but it isn't. Look carefully and we find it *on the other side of the county*, attached to sheet 9, four inches westwards on the quarter-inch index diagram and 16 road miles away from its parent number. Why on earth is it not 9A, acknowledging its neighbour and the bit of land that protrudes onto it from sheet 9? Northumberland sheet 12 is another coastal sheet, with 12A to the right, mapping the Farne Islands, and sheet 12B, again *on the other side of the county* snuggling against sheet 13. Again why not call it 13A?

When there are more than two suffixes it does appear that they are kept together. Good. But if there is a gap anywhere, it might or might not be acknowledged in the numbering. Consider the beautiful Pembrokeshire coast, and sheet 31. To the west of this sheet we have 31A with Grassholme Island (OS

six-inch index spelling), and then a space the exact size of a six-inch sheet, and to the left of this space is sheet 31C with the Smalls. The gap is given the silent number 31B, which does not appear on an index of course. Not so for sheet 9 of County Galway, where 9A sits above sheet 9, and has 9B to its left. Then a map sized space, and below it sheet 9C. No silent suffix this time. To the right of 9C is 9D, and then home to sheet 9 where we started. Consistency my foot. Could anyone predict either of these? At least the Irish numbering is anti-clockwise, which should keep the witches away.

The majority of suffix sheets are attached to the main grid by two adjacent sides, with the possibility of receiving the number of a sheet in line with it either vertically or horizontally. After a quick look through the indexes, it appears that sheets for England and Wales always received their number from a sheet to one side, rather than from above or below, with a similar picture for Scotland, which is what I would have expected, but Ireland was content to take the middle way and took numbers from either side or above and below in about the same quantity.

Space is running out and the boredom factor rising, so I think brevity is needed for further comments on numbering. Why does Yorkshire 164 suddenly have 164W to the west of it? This being only the second occurrence of a 'W' suffix that I am aware of, whilst County Donegal is not alone in having a sheet bearing two numbers, 32A and 40A in this case.

There are also numbers missing, Northumberland sheet 2 and Galway sheet 3, for example. Non-sequential numbering is rife, assuming we read left to right and down the grid. What 'should' have been Galway sheet 3 is numbered 15A, giving the first few sheets as 1, 2, 9B, 9A, 10A, 15A, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9C, 9D, 9, 10, Why were numbers missed?

Did I say that I wanted just five minutes with the man from the past? Five days might be more profitable. Indexes for Tyrone, Roscommon and Westmeath show the county boundary extending beyond the sheet lines, with no adjacent sheet. Did the detail appear as an extrusion on a standard sheet? Or was the Galway example followed, where miracle upon miracle, we find an index showing what appear to be extended sheet lines to accommodate islands, but I might be wrong. None of the nonsense of putting them on an adjacent sheet with an A suffix, just have a larger piece of paper. When one considers paper size, one remembers that a lot of the very small detail shown to fall on an adjoining sheet can easily be shown on the 'parent' standard size sheet by breaking the neat line with an extrusion; indeed many sheets were combined in this way on issue or re-issue. Having suggested it, I do not like different sized sheets. Anyone who regularly handles sets of flat sheets knows the problems.

It was Richard Oliver who guided me to the most puzzling feature of the six-inch numbering, when he suggested that I look to the west of Kingston upon Hull. Wait for it. The sheets concerned, all inland, well within the county border, part of the core sequence, are in a line, side by side, one next to the other, and numbered 236, 237, 238, 238A, 239, 240, 241. Really. But I found County Mayo 115, 116, 116A, 117 and 118 by myself. Whyyyyy? When I pass through the pearly gates, as surely I will, who do you think I will seek out first? No, not him. The question and answer session would take until eternity, leaving no time to hear Shakespeare.