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“Book review – Mapping the roads”

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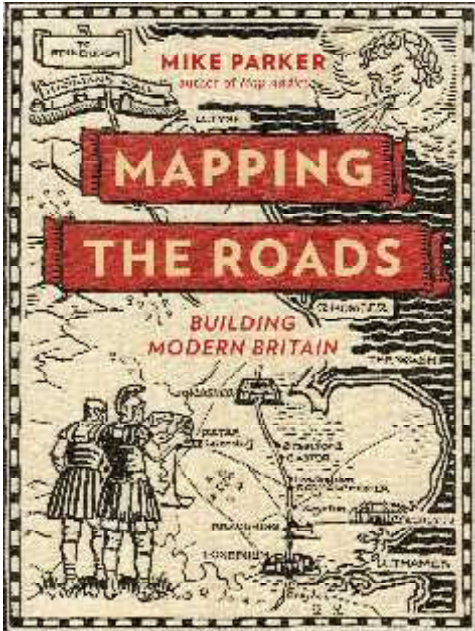
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The Charles Close Society was founded in 1980 to bring together all those with an interest in the maps and history of the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and its counterparts in the island of Ireland. The Society takes its name from Colonel Sir Charles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

**Mike Parker, Mapping the roads, AA Publishing, 2013,
ISBN 978-0-7495-7435-2, £25**



Hold the Christmas list! Add this title even if you have to knock out two others! Subtitled *Building modern Britain*, this lavishly-illustrated volume traces the story of road maps from the fourteenth-century Gough map to 21st-century satnavs and Google Street View.

At first, the 256 large-format glossy pages and embossed cover may give the impression of a coffee table book, more for casual browsing than reading. And being published by the AA may suggest a song of praise to the all-pervasive motor car. But no, this is a true Mike Parker book. The maps take pride of place and the story is well researched and excellently told.

And being a Mike Parker book, once we reach the twentieth century, the expected personal stories of bad behaviour make an appearance ('Leeds to London in well under two hours', anyone?). In other words, as with his earlier books, we get entertainment to go with the erudition.

Of particular delight is the choice of illustrations (many of them full page or double spread). Not just map extracts and map covers (all fully captioned) but contemporary cartoons, photographs and copious planners' and architects' designs for future developments, not all of them fulfilled.

Parker's commentary sparkles. He notes with amusement, for example, Nikolaus Pevsner's enchantment with the recently-opened M1 in his 1961 Northamptonshire guide and adds wryly 'Thirteen years later, Pevsner felt obliged to apologise for his earlier over-enthusiasm'.

On the subject of the M1, one illustration that will be familiar to *Sheetlines* readers is the OS map extract showing the mislabelling of A45/M45.¹ A similar problem occurs on a 1922 Bartholomew map, on which the A698 is labelled A7.

As a Woodfordian, this reviewer has just one quibble: on page 201, Parker tells us that 'in Woodford there's a strange intersection of A406 and M11 ... with abandoned slip roads set in acres of wasteland'. Strange the junction may be, but of slip roads there are just the required number and of wasteland there is none (but there is a pretty cycle track down the Roding valley, below all that concrete). Check it on Google Street View!

John Davies

¹ Not the M1, *Sheetlines* 95, 18-19