



Sheetlines

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“Kerry musings”

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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.

Kerry musings

David Archer

Some time ago, I came across a couple of things on the internet that set me thinking. The first was about a group of doctors in the Derby area who read all the James Bond books, noting the number of days during which the action occurred and how much he drank, concluding that his love of the bottle would leave him impotent and at death's door. Matthew Davis set himself the challenge of reading all the Charles Dickens novels in 2012, and someone else decided to watch every available Dr Who episode. When much younger, I knew an old gentleman who read the bible, cover to cover twice a year. Thus, the scene is set. Would I be interested in doing something like that? Not really, I hate anything repetitive, day after day sort of things and am not sure I could force myself. However, for the benefit of our members, I will press on and suggest that we all set ourselves to study every one of our maps. Individually. Open them up. Yes, *study* each one, which is very different from looking at them. I assume this would be a first amongst CCS members, given that most of us have never actually studied every map we own, even when first acquired, flush with the thrill of finding them. So often, we arrive home, pleased to have got something, tick the list, leave it on the table for a week or so, gloat over it, and then file it away, never to be inspected again, if indeed it was inspected on arrival. Go on, admit it.

Right, on to the practicalities. Firstly, in which order should one look at the maps? This might seem a silly question, but really does need consideration. Looking through endless maps will certainly/might possibly/could in time become boring. Even our own hand-picked treasures. "Come on, I would never buy a boring map" you say. But if you have a few dozen *Seventh Series*, and study them as intended, it will be become boring. After all, in a general way all maps look the same. Otherwise, seeing one from thirty yards, we would not be able to say "Oh, look, there is a map over there". And if they all look the same, it will be boring to work your way through them. So, how might one relieve the boredom?

Study randomly? Luckily, this is possible for me. A good chunk of my personal accumulation, is in small boxes of various sorts, the best boxes being those from the greengrocer, having previously contained cooked beetroot. A better size and stronger than shoe boxes. All the boxes have been moved countless times, so they are not in any order, with no obvious place to start looking, except at the top of the nearest pile. Probably as near to random as one will get with minimum effort. The first box contains half-inch layered and hill shaded, with modern six-inch town maps in the box below. Sounds promising. But having looked through forty boxes, one might then have to slog through a near set of Thirds or Populars, which would not be much fun. For those who disagree, I say "Try it".

Any order in which sets of maps occur, will almost certainly be unwelcome. This is bad news for those lucky members who have their own map room. In such a haven, the owners always have sets, arranged on shelves around the walls and within plan chests, suggesting the obvious, that one starts nearest the door

and proceeds around the room, following the order on the shelves, one inch, half-inch, quarter-inch, But for those who do not have their own well-ordered map room, there is still the problem of deciding whether to go for sets or near sets, followed by individual maps without a series number, or to study flat sheets before folded examples, and within the above, by area, Wales, Ireland, Scotland and England. Maybe all maps of Wales first, whatever the scale and format? Already it seems complicated.

With both the organised and random approaches, sets are a drawback, so maybe we should consider a chronological attack. Chronologically, by date published, or purchased? Looking at maps by the date of publication has attractions, especially once the Ordnance Survey got into their stride with a lot of different scales being issued, rather than just the one-inch and large scales. Added to which, the OS have tended to issue individual maps when ready, rather than take the earliest *Popular Edition* or *1:50,000 First Series* approach and issue blocks or even sets of maps. Once we get going, we would study a couple of one-inch, then a quarter-inch, three half-inch, another one-inch and so on. Of course, we would need to know beforehand what the order would be. This would be easy if one had a complete set of the OS publication reports, giving details of which maps were issued in any given month. One could then work from a marked-up set of reports, or failing that, throw everything on the floor and re-shelve the collection in publication order. A retirement job in itself.

A number of people would find it easier to use the order in which maps were purchased, given that they have a note of where and when they bought each gem, and the price paid. These lucky few could just work through their notes, a ready-made and ordered list. A big advantage of studying maps in the order they were brought home, is that most people seldom buy sets, thereby lowering the boredom possibility considerably.

For many, I am sure that such an exercise might prove rather emotional. Specific maps bring back memories. All of us can look at items in our collection and remember the circumstances in which they were acquired, a holiday or the book shop one always visited on certain business trips. We might remember the joy of finding a specific sheet, followed by sorrow as a whole bunch of others had been bought by the previous customer, most of which we have never seen again. I defy anyone who looks back through their map collection, not to get a little nostalgic. Proceeding chronologically will be similar to a cartographic autobiography, allowing one to re-live the excitement of finding the first map in a green cover, the first white cover or *Middle Thames*. Many will then remember the slight smugness of later years when they realised that they were more knowledgeable than many who sold maps. And then the barren years, with the frustration of finding so little that actually appealed.

Right, assuming we have decided on an order of study, made preparations for keeping track of our progress and set a start date to begin studying, we must now decide how long is needed to study a map. I would suggest an evening per map, 7.30 to 10.00. However, a year to read Dickens was fine, but who has a mere 365 maps? Even an evening might be insufficient if each map is to be studied,

properly, with no skimping. Why? Because like many of us, I find that if I study an area, I want to know what the situation was before and after the scene in front of me, so I get out another map or two to see the changes. Even of an area one is unfamiliar with it would frequently be impossible to stick rigidly to a single map per evening, as most of us are so easily diverted. Do maps on different scales need different times, with an automatic requirement of two evenings for large scale town plans? Surely an 1890s six-inch of London needs far more time than a 1:50,000 of Norfolk? Or am I being unfair to Norfolk, even ignorant of Norfolk? And what about sheets that are mostly sea? Less time surely?

So, let us agree that one or two evenings per map should be sufficient, and prepare to start at 7.30 prompt. This is the point at which I would probably give up. I find it very hard to look at maps cold, so to speak, and usually need an introduction or a reason for looking. If I open a map to trace the line of a canal, or find a building, I am then drawn into it. Otherwise, a good written or oral introduction is needed to spur me on. Over the years, I have seen various displays, where someone has set out a number of very special maps for inspection. Others bend over and study, bowing before the great paper god, giving homage, in an uncontrollable automatic and natural reaction. I wander round, thinking that many maps do indeed look really interesting, but do not study them. Why? Because I like to be introduced to a map, to be told why it has been taken out and what is special about it, just as we should record for others, details of anything unusual concerning our own maps before we vanish beneath the contours. With maps, I like the guide book approach that I detest with so many other things in life. If a dozen world-class maps lacking captions or a spoken introduction have no interest for me, what chance do I have of working my way through so many far less interesting items? Certainly, the best thing with a map of an unknown area is to be shown around it, to be guided through its features, and here, the Alan Godfrey maps reign supreme, with the CCS map reprints and Brian Harley's introductions to the David & Charles *Old Series* a short way behind.

Having suggested it, I believe the whole exercise would be totally pointless, especially if to catch up on maps ignored when purchased. I see no reason why anyone should do more than just glance at a new acquisition before putting it away. How many people read every book they purchase before buying another? No, one should set some unstudied maps aside for a rainy day, reserving something to fit your mood when you fancy sitting down to relax with a map. One would be far better making a list of favourite and outstanding maps to revisit. Either that or read every issue of *Sheetlines* again. Now, that would be a pleasant challenge.

.. and don't forget, every issue of *Sheetlines* can be found at
www.CharlesCloseSociety.org/SheetlinesArchive

Previous Kerry musings are at www.CharlesCloseSociety.org/Kerry