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 GB1900 project – from the horse's mouth
Paula Aucott, Chris Fleet, Humphrey Southall

December *Sheetlines* included a short article about our GB1900 project, which ended by describing it as "misconceived".[1] We would like to set the record straight.

GB1900 is a crowd-sourcing project to transcribe all text strings from the second edition six inch to the mile County Series maps published 1888-1914. The project is a collaboration between the National Library of Scotland, the Great Britain Historical GIS team at the University of Portsmouth, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, the National Library of Wales and the People's Collection Wales. The final goal is to create the largest historical place-name gazetteer for Great Britain specifically including co-ordinates. For more about the background to the project see Southall et al (2017).[2]

In an important sense, this is part of the same research agenda as that of the English Place Names Survey (EPNS): "The first requirement in the survey of the place-names of a county is a gazetteer", and more specifically "a record by parish of all the names on the six-inch O.S. map".[3] That survey began in 1923 but has still to start work on several counties; and anyway excludes Wales and Scotland. GB1900 started as a purely Welsh project called Cymru1900, conceived at a meeting in Aberystwyth in 2011 concerned very specifically with creating a Welsh equivalent to EPNS. However, obtaining funding from the Welsh Government depended on having a plan for timely coverage of the whole country. That led to a focus on the initial six-inch gazetteer, and on crowd-sourcing.

What makes sense for an individual researcher working on a small area does not necessarily work in a crowd-sourcing project involving over a thousand volunteers. The *Sheetlines* article complains that we are transcribing not just "place names" but essentially all text strings, but this was a conscious decision, because we could not rely on volunteers making consistent decisions about what constituted a place name. In fact, even if a single individual had attempted the entire task, it is unlikely they could have been entirely consistent from Cornwall to Caithness. Conversely, it will be easy for us to filter out repeating strings such as "F.P." to create a more narrowly-defined place-name gazetteer; but we are already also mapping the c. 300,000 "F.P."s to study the historical development of the footpath network, and working with another researcher interested in the c. 9,000 post offices. This is a fascinating and diverse geographical portrait of late Victorian Britain, easily sub-setted, so why complain?

[1] *Sheetlines* 110, December 2017, pp48-49.

[2] H Southall, P Aucott, C Fleet, T Pert, and M Stoner. 'GB1900: Engaging the Public in Very Large Scale Gazetteer Construction from the Ordnance Survey 'County Series' 1:10,560 Mapping of Great Britain.' *Journal of Map & Geography Libraries,* 13 (1), (2017), pp7–28.

[3] AH Smith, *The Preparation of County Place-Name Surveys,* London: English Place-Name Society, 1954.

Every new transcription began with the creation of a pin which assigns the transcription a co-ordinate, but it is often difficult and sometimes impossible to identify the precise location or feature to which a text string on a map refers. This is perhaps particularly true of these six-inch maps, which have no symbology. Again for consistency, volunteers were therefore instructed to always position their pin in the bottom left corner of the first word of the text string. Inevitably the precision varies, but at this scale the real-world errors are of a few yards: for what use cases does this matter? For most users of a future GB1900 gazetteer of names in web-based map presentation of the six-inch maps, selecting a particular name in the gazetteer will allow the map to be positioned so the name is clearly visible and centred on screen with no pin visible.

The *Sheetlines* article uses the example of Upper Gilwern, Radnorshire, and complains that there are pins both correctly on the name and incorrectly, in our terms, on the building. It fails to note that the latter pin has no associated text, precisely because it is an error, so will be filtered out of all final data sets. Involving large numbers of volunteers inevitably means many initial errors, but the system requires that every transcription be confirmed by a second volunteer typing exactly the same text string in as the first. If the two transcriptions were at all inconsistent another volunteer would need to make an additional transcription which matched one of the existing ones.

Figure 1: GB1900 confirmation interface

Finally, it needs to be understood that the GB1900 gazetteer does not yet exist. When the last issue of *Sheetlines* was published the transcription phase was still in progress and two systems were online: the GB1900 site itself, which was a transcription tool and displayed only the maps and the pins needing confirming, not the transcribed text; and the progress dot map system developed by the National Library of Scotland, which is what the article describes and contains periodic snapshots of the raw data.[4] Transcription has now ended, and GB1900 is no longer accessible. In total, the volunteers located 2,666,341 strings on the maps, and contributed 5,500,339 transcriptions. It is hard to see how this could have been matched by an academic research team.

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[4] *http://geo.nls.uk/maps/gb1900/*

However, we are now just starting a cleaning process, focused particularly on the c. 20,000 strings where all three transcriptions differ. Only when data cleaning has been completed will the GB1900 gazetteer be made available for download, in a number of versions: a complete dump of all the raw data from the site; a cleaned version with just one agreed version of each text string; and a sub-set of that limited to our particular definition of place-names. The project partners will also use the data in their own systems: the Portsmouth team's *A Vision of Britain through Time*, the *List of Historic Place Names* in Wales and the National Library of Scotland's *Map Images* website.

In the meantime there are two ways the raw data can be accessed. Firstly as a large downloadable zipped .csv file which offers a snapshot of the raw transcribed data collected during the first three months of the transcription phase.[5] This was provided as a demonstration dataset to allow interested parties to experiment with incorporating the data collected into their own work. Secondly via the progress dot map noted above. As its title suggests this interface was designed as a tool to help volunteers and the team assess where more needed doing as the project progressed, rather than for use as an actual gazetteer. It presents each pin in the raw data as a dot which can be clicked on to reveal the transcribed text string. This interface also offers three examples of the kind of selective mapping that can be derived from the information held within the data.

While neither option is ideal, they offer an interim solution for an unfunded project. GB1900 has produced a remarkably large dataset and it will take the very small team working on cleaning it some time to finalise and publish the end result. But the result will be of great value to anyone interested in the British landscape of a century ago, and will comprise the first comprehensive listing of names from the OS six-inch to the mile mapping. As these were the most detailed scale which comprehensively covered the whole of England, Scotland, and Wales, we hope the GB1900 gazetteer will be of great practical and academic value, and further the onward use and enjoyment of these maps.

Scottish Maps Forum Seminar - 20 April 2018, Glasgow

The next in the annual series of popular map day seminars features talks from nine speakers who have all been working on new research or projects relating to early maps of Scotland. The day will include papers on canal plans in the National Records of Scotland, the value of maps for researching urban history, the mapping of river boundaries, recent doctoral research on the Bartholomew map-makers, the funding and financing of surveyors and their county maps, Scottish mapmakers who emigrated to the Antipodes, and the latest mapping developments from Historic Environment Scotland. Three of the presenters are active members of the Charles Close Society, and there will be inevitably be many connections with Ordnance Survey mapping too.

The cost is £25 for the day, including morning coffee and a buffet lunch. Please book before 5 April. Further information and booking form at:

https://www.nls.uk/media/1553877/2018-scottish-maps-forum-seminar.pdf

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[5] *http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/data/#tabgb1900*