



# *Sheetlines*

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

“Kerry musings”

*David Archer*

*Sheetlines*, 111 (April 2018), pp55-57

Stable URL: <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/sheetlines-articles/Issue111page55.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](http://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***

I am certainly not the best person to give advice on collecting, but if asked, I would suggest that any collector, novice or established, should not be too limited in their collecting field. For Ordnance Survey maps, anyone who restricts their collecting interests too narrowly, to the exclusion of all else will quickly regret it, and a pleasant hobby will fail to give enjoyment, leading to frustration, and in the most severe cases an obsession. I am not sure whether there is such a thing as a mild obsession, a fixation maybe? But anyway, a lot of people seem to become fixated by a group of maps, or a single map series. The best documented obsessionists favour the one-inch *Popular Edition of England and Wales, the Seventh Series*, and map covers. I am tempted to say that some collectors become fascinated by these maps, then fixated and eventually obsessed. Meaning that the maps take over their lives as an addiction does, except that for many addictions it is easy to obtain the necessary to satisfy the craving, but with old OS maps, supplies are erratic at the best of times. Not that the obsessed want just any old map, they strive for the whole lot. Completeness, including the ultra-rare and abominable-snowman-only-rumoured-to-exist-and-never-seen examples.

When an OS map collector decides to collect only a single series, warning bells should ring, followed by a speedy visit from Map Collectors Anonymous. Even with unlimited time and money, for long periods what is sought will not be available to buy. No matter how much one looks, nothing will be found, and this cannot but be disappointing at the very least. Such disappointment, depending on one's emotional make-up, will sometimes lead to depression, but more often to a constant obsessive seeking or in some cases, to giving up and starting collecting yoghurt cartons. Always yoghurt cartons. I cannot say why some people become intensely interested in a particular group of maps, but it happens. In the initial stages, all goes well, and maps are added to the collection fairly often. A list of sheets wanted or held is then carried around, initially of sheet numbers and then of states identified by print codes. A nice relaxing hobby. Eventually, it is realised that little is being found, so a big push is undertaken, with all possible sources being checked several times within a couple of months. And still little appears. This is the critical moment, when they should realise that *there is absolutely nothing one can do to hurry along more maps*. This is the real killer. Not only the waiting, but the inability to do anything that might bring in more maps. If this is ignored and the collecting urge continues, the seeds of an obsession are sown.

With a low find rate, the maps are studied beyond belief, seeking anything that might make a valid addition to the collection. It is soon noticed that the same state of some maps can exist in different formats, dissected, cloth or paper within standard OS covers. Clutching at straws, one wonders whether these should all be collected? No, not exciting enough for a hot-blooded OS map collector. But wait, some covers have different prices, and surely these are worthy of further investigation, especially as the prices have different styles of lettering? Aha! We are on to something here, with many of these maps being readily available, and so purchases and the wants list increase. Then there are variant area names on the covers for some series, with the Populars and others having paper stickers for different names. Oh, yes, here we go, better start all over again. If you cannot get one of every state, the next best thing is to go for quantity, and have every map slightly different in some way, enabling one to *keep buying*, no matter

how trivial the differences. How dare I use that word in this context?

The obsessionists always buy at least two or three copies of any sheet held, with the hope that something will be found to be different in some way or other, giving their spirits a boost and expanding the collection. In such dire times, one never relaxes and is always searching, listening and reading, in the hope that unknown maps appear. There is always a thrill in finding something unthought of, along with an unease that it might be the tip of an unknown iceberg, resulting in hours of speculation and years of frustration. So, a few years go by, with multiple copies of the same map being bought for slightly different map margins or covers. Don't worry, it is part of trying to understand the history of the Ordnance Survey, which is what we are all trying to do by assembling a research collection. Never thought of it that way before? Sort of privately held Ordnance Survey Record Map Library for this series. No sniggering, please. I once bought a vast collection of *Seventh Series* maps, where the object had been to collect a set in each of the four cover styles, in both paper and cloth formats where issued, and each print code in every possible cover. A real feat, which looked magnificent, even if prices and index diagram differences had not been sought.

An example of an extreme case might help. Someone finds a few and decides to collect something like the quarter-inch civil aviation maps in the blue and cream covers, which are not that common, and are quite attractive. Meaning that any put on display in a shop might well be snapped up by someone other than a map collector, just because they appeal. Assume our collector decides to collect a set each for Scotland and England and Wales. Frustration sets in almost at once as so few appear. Anywhere. But, being a true collector, they feel they must add to their collection. So, when a second copy of Sheet 8 appears, but this time in the longer cover, they buy it and now have two copies, in two styles of cover, a long cover and the smaller chunky one. Excellent. If they try to build sets in each cover style there are now twice as many things to look for, or more importantly, fewer maps to refuse. Wonderful. Wonderful my foot. With the same paltry number of maps appearing, they have decided to double what they are looking for. In no way will this increase purchases. Well, will it? They will now have four rather than two incomplete sets, and might be uncertain as to whether all sheets were issued in both styles of cover. A fine mess.

As boredom gathers momentum, they cannot resist buying yet another copy of Sheet 8 and notice that the cover price has changed. Must keep this. Why? Because it is *different*. And so price variations are collected when found. The next purchase has purple rather than brown layers. Must keep this, and look for others. And so on and so on until, being slightly-not-all-there, they start collecting only copies of Sheet 8 in all its variations. At which point no further copies of Sheet 8 appear on the market. Eventually, they get the chance to buy the large collection of a rival who has decided to take up the more sensible hobby of body building rather than collect OS maps. The new maps are raided for known wants, then the better condition maps are swapped over, leaving hours of scrutinising in order to winkle out something, anything that can justify keeping the remaining items. All right, it is a good tactic to have something to swap, but one must realise this means parting with a treasure. Even to receive one that is needed.

Collecting continues at a snail's pace for a few more years, seeking every conceivable difference found on maps and covers, until things dry up again, with many still needed. Frustration really sets in and a teeny-weeny hint of the word obsession is heard. The overwhelming desire has been to obtain pleasure from the collection by

adding to it. And when this is not possible one tries another approach: spin. Everything is listed, and the list edited in various ways in endless attempts to give the utmost pleasure to the collector. Statistics are worked and re-worked in order to present the current situation in the most pleasing light. One tries to squeeze as much pleasure out of the lists as possible. (When I write one, I mean our fictional collector, not myself of course. Oh, no.)

Right, so how does one/he/she get pleasure from the lists? Obviously, it all depends on how one looks at it, a glass half-full or half-empty. Our collector decides on the size of glass by drawing up a list of all items necessary for a complete collection, known and assumed. The whole lot; what one might be lucky enough to assemble in a couple of life-times. And then plays with it; endlessly. The first task is to tick all maps held, ignoring condition, so that the full extent of the situation is seen, even if listing does not deliver the goods. Percentages for maps held and wanted are then calculated. Maps held: 37.4% of all possibles, too upsetting, all those wanted maps are out there and unloved, gathering dust, with the full list being far too long. As maps held are stubbornly refusing to increase, one has to work on those not held in order to improve the figure for those held. So, items that might just exist are jettisoned, followed by maps reported by others, but not held by them. Having cleared out the speculation and assumed, things look a little better. A realistic collector might then identify those maps which he knows others are lacking and reluctantly accept they will never come his/her way, so they are crossed off, giving maps held, after statistical spin: 51.9%, better, but not wonderful. Whilst daydreaming, maps needed but owned by others are added to the holdings list in pencil, just to see what happens. Excellent, and for a short while this pleases, until it is accepted that working on your own, you will never approach the combined collections of others.

No, lists as surrogate maps do not really work. You still lack maps and just cannot find them. Finding the missing maps is the goal, and that far more are needed than are held is unimportant whilst acquisitions continue. Warning: a double disappointment awaits anyone who asks friends whether they might wish to contribute to the wonderful work in progress by swapping. Not only will they say "No", but will continue "did you know of this, this and this, that I came across the other day?" Blast and damnation, another three items to add to your list. And after studying your notes, another nine can be added as possibles. All the time our collector is looking over his or her shoulder, as they do not exist in a vacuum, where only they seek their chosen subject. They know they are competing. The maps do not appear on the market and wait for our collector to come along. Other wicked CCS members will pounce given the chance, as will people who do not collect maps, having absolutely no right to buy them, and should be locked up for such anti-social behaviour. With eBay, items can be missed, especially if a budget is held to. It is little consolation to have details of less common items that are missed, as by their very nature it will be a long while before they appear again. Such maps probably went to someone who only wanted an example. Why could they not buy a common sheet? Such as? Well, maybe something could be found, our collector grudgingly acknowledges. Yes, the copy of Sheet 8 with the thick black line through the cover price, which has been kept because the price might not be recorded, except that nobody can tell as the ink is impenetrable. No, that must be retained. For the moment.