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“Agas to OS”

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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.

## ***Agas to OS: Oxford's changing townscape in old maps and new***

***Nick Millea***

Imagine a new map showing the historical layout of a familiar town on a modern cartographic background. Better still, imagine a series of maps showing the urban development of that town on the same modern cartographic background at various different stages over the past thousand years. If you are interested in British towns, then this work may well have been completed for somewhere which is very well known to you.

The Historic Towns Atlas programme was started in 1955 by the *Commission Internationale pour l'Histoire des Villes* (International Commission for the History of Towns (ICHT)) of the *Comité Internationale des Sciences Historiques*. The ICHT aimed to promote the comparative study of the history of towns in Europe.

The *British Atlas of Historic Towns* project was established in 1963, administered by the Historic Towns Trust (HTT) as part of this pan-European project. The atlases are intended to provide maps and text to fill gaps in knowledge and to assist in urban studies. Each atlas aims to produce maps which help in understanding the critical stages of the town's development; they all include a summary map which shows the town just before industrialisation began.

The HTT is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) under the chairmanship of CCS member Professor Keith Lilley (Queen's University Belfast), and is governed by a board of trustees which sets the strategic direction of its operations. The day-to-day running of the charity is undertaken by an executive sub-committee of the main board which oversees the HTT's current projects. Its outputs include historic town atlases; printed historical maps; and scholarly activities, including study days.

### ***Development of Historic Towns Atlases in Britain***

The HTT's current Cartographic Editor, Giles Darkes, joined the project in 2008, and has since provided the Trust with much needed and valued advice and expertise on the compilation and production of HTA maps and mapping. This influence has shaped the recent series of atlases starting with volume IV, Windsor and Eton.

There was a 26-year hiatus between volumes III (published in 1989) and IV (2015). The Trust took advantage of this accumulated experience by gathering sample atlases from the other participating countries and drawing on examples of best practice across the continent, settling for a slipcase model pioneered by the Swiss atlases.

### ***Existing HTT Atlases***

Volume I Banbury / Caernarvon / Glasgow / Gloucester / Hereford / Nottingham / Reading / Salisbury – *published 1969*

Volume II Bristol / Cambridge / Coventry / Norwich - 1975

Volume III The City of London from prehistoric times to c.1520 – 1989

Volume IV Windsor and Eton - 2015

Volume V York - 2015

Volume VI Winchester - 2017

Volume VII Oxford – *in preparation*

### ***The content of Historic Town Atlases in Britain***

The maps in each British volume always include a 'Main Map', based on a redigitising of a mid-nineteenth century large-scale map summarising the growth of the town, and showing the site of its principal medieval and post-medieval buildings and structures.

Usually the Main Map is derived from a 25-inch OS map or a comparable survey. The use of OS maps in this way means that the urban features shown share a common cartographic origin, even if the actual surveys used in the summary maps differ in date.

The Windsor and Eton atlas used OS base maps of 1869-75, York one of 1850, while Oxford will use an OS map base of 1876. The atlas of Winchester used a derived base map of around 1800, created from a synthesis of later OS maps and detailed town surveys by Godson of 1750 and Gale of 1836.

In addition to the Main Map the atlases also contain a series of maps showing the extent of the town at critical periods in its development; maps of parishes and civil wards; maps showing the town in its regional and local context; and a reproduction of an OS one-inch map showing the town's location at the start of the railway age. All maps are printed in full colour. Because the maps are not bound into a volume, they are easy to set side-by-side for viewing purposes. So, the history and development of a town can be seen by comparing maps of the town at different dates.

Cartographic material is always accompanied by a text, the purpose of which is to provide a well-researched but readable summary of the history of the town, incorporating the latest scholarship. The text is designed to be read by the non-specialist but is supported with full references. It includes an introduction and summary of the history of the town from its inception to the mid-nineteenth century. As was the case with the recently-published volumes, the atlases in preparation will be published as high-quality board folders containing around 25 maps, eighty to a hundred illustrations, the text, and a gazetteer of the places named on the maps, along with aerial photographs of the town, reproductions of old maps and topographical views.

### ***Oxford – Volume VII***

The Oxford atlas project currently in progress consists of a team of six: Alan Crossley – Editor, ex-Victoria County History; Anne Dodd – Oxford Archaeology; Malcolm Graham – ex-Oxfordshire Local Studies Librarian; Julian Munby – Oxford Archaeology; supported by HTT Cartographic Editor Giles Darkes, and Nick Millea, representing the trustees who acts as an overall Co-ordinator of the project.



The atlas is focused on the 1:2500 Main Map – a digitised version of the 1876-published 25-inch 1st edition county series maps covering central Oxford.

The project has used cartographic guideposts throughout, with key historical maps of the city including those produced by Ralph Agas in 1578, (alongside the Robert Whittlesey re-engraving of 1728), David Loggan's 1675 masterful depiction of the city, Isaac Taylor's map of 1751, and

Richard Davis' 1794 inset on his map of the county of Oxfordshire.

Historical data is being used to create nine 'Supplementary maps' at a scale of 1:4000, all using a common base map, but with historical information inserted above. These maps will show the spatial arrangement of the city in 1050, 1150, 1279, ca.1400, ca.1500, 1578, the Civil War, 1675 and 1800. Additional new smaller scale maps are to be added within the text of the atlas, these being: River channels, Prehistoric remains, Roman times, Burhs, Medieval halls, Property boundaries, Street markets, Radcliffe Square, Oriel tenements,

and College property. More new maps, already created for the atlas are Turnpikes, Medieval parishes, and Suburban expansion.

Other maps to be included as loose pull-outs, and common to all the atlases from Volume IV onwards are a Regional map at 1:500,000, a Situation map at 1:40,000, a 2017 map at 1:25,000, an OS 1st edition 1-inch map, Bedrock and Superficial geology. There will also be facsimile maps of the city, for example those by Whittlesey, Logan, Taylor, Davis, Hoggar, and Whessell.

A spin-off from the atlas project was the first in a series of folding *Town & Historical Maps* published by the Trust themselves and printed by Dennis Maps. The Oxford map was launched in January 2016, and has been followed by maps of Winchester, Hull, and Tudor London in 1520; with a new York map scheduled for July 2018.

### ***Where next for the British Historical Towns atlases?***

The HTT would like to fill geographical gaps (especially Wales and Scotland), and include a wider range of town types and urban forms. Key to progress is always the availability of local enthusiasm and finance.

### ***Using atlas material***

The HTT is always pleased when researchers use maps from the volumes for research and illustrative purposes.

### ***Supporting the HTA***

As a charity, the HTT relies on donations, legacies and income generated from investments to carry out its work. We receive no government funding but have to generate our own income.

We have ambitious plans for future work and hopes for educational outreach and other activities. We also need funds for specific aspects of projects - for example, to complete a particular map in an atlas. We plan to increase our fundraising efforts sharply in the next few years and to give our work a higher profile.

Study days designed to promote individual atlases have already been run. Firstly a one-day event held in conjunction with the University of Oxford's Department for Continuing Education, took place in March 2015 and focused on the Oxford atlas. A similar event occurred in April 2016 at the University of York in support of the York project. Each day involved a series of papers presented by authors of various sections of the atlas, as well as contributions on the HTA project in general. Plenty of supporting material outlining how the atlases are produced was also on hand so attenders could immerse themselves in the editorial processes involved in creating modern maps compiled from historical research.

### ***Special offer for CCS members***

*10% discount is offered to CCS members by Oxbow Books on the Historic Towns Trust atlases (Windsor and Eton, York, and Winchester).*

*Go to [www.oxbowbooks.com/oxbow](http://www.oxbowbooks.com/oxbow) and use code CCS18 at the checkout. Valid until 31 December 2018.*

### ***Irish Historic Towns Atlas project***

*More Maps and Texts: sources and the Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, Editors HB Clarke and Sarah Gearty, May 2018. Paperback 344pp, illustrated colour, €30/£28/\$50, ISBN 978-1-908997-73-9.

Based on a series of annual seminars run by the IHTA project from 2012 to 2014. Its predecessor *Maps and texts: exploring the Irish Historic Towns Atlas* was published by the Royal Irish Academy in 2013.

Further information can be found at [www.ibta.ie](http://www.ibta.ie) or [www.ria.ie](http://www.ria.ie)

