



# *Sheetlines*

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

“Kerry musings”

*David Archer*

*Sheetlines*, 112 (August 2018), pp57-59

Stable URL: <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/sheetlines-articles/Issue112page57.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***

With a postal business selling used Ordnance Survey maps, I always tried to describe items as accurately as possible, first by post and in more recent years by email. A clear description of what was in front of me was usually sufficient. But thinking about it now, I can see that certain terms I used quite freely could be argued to have been misleading. But nobody ever complained that something was wrongly described.

Most of our customers were not map collectors, so one had to explain things clearly. At the most basic level, maps were described as either flat or folded in covers. If in covers, one could go on to describe the cover or if necessary, refer to an image in *Map cover art*, which would usually suffice. Flat maps were described as such, or sometimes as ‘paper flat’, ‘paper folded without covers’, ‘previously folded but now kept flat’ or ‘flat map previously folded’, ‘flat with a single vertical fold’ and so on. The description ‘rolled maps’ or ‘paper rolled’ never came into it, yet everyone was still happy. If a map was wanted and I knew a copy was in a roll, I would take it out, and probably describe it as a flat sheet in good condition, despite looking at it on the surface all curled up from having been in a roll for several years. If a sale was agreed, it would be popped into a tube and posted, only to immediately curl up when taken out at the other end. Nobody complained. Ever. Even if I sent a flat map which had never been folded, it would still come out of the tube after a couple of days with a slight curl. Flat? Not really if one were in a court of law. But who is going to offer a flat sheet and tell the customer that it will acquire a slight curl during delivery? It never occurred to me to do so, and every customer seems to have accepted that flat sheets would be rolled sheets on receipt and any curl would quickly relax back into shape. Only twice was I asked to send flat sheets flat and not in a tube, and luckily, both orders were for six-inch quarter sheets. Had it been for a flat Seventh Series or 1:50,000 map, I would have said forget it.

A rolled flat map, whether on its own or rolled with others is usually bad news.<sup>1</sup> Why? Because people seldom look at maps kept in a roll, the most hostile form of map storage. A map folded in covers can be opened at once; a flat map in a plan chest can be located and slid out, but a single rolled map is difficult to find, as only the end is showing, and it might be squashed by adjacent rolls, if not crushed. Once taken out, it needs weights at each corner to keep it open, and even placing the weights can be tricky as the tendency is for constant curling. No, a map rolled is a map lost in many respects, even more so, if like me, one just pops another rolled map into the open end of a roll. Being positive, this does mean that maps in rolls might be re-discovered, giving pleasure a second time. But it is a very big might.

Major problems arise if one wants a map from the centre of a long-time-stored

---

<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with fake news, such as advertising Bartholomew’s maps as Ordnance Survey maps.

roll as just to open the roll one needs heavy weights, always heavier than one thinks, on all four corners to keep the contents anywhere near flat. Increasingly heavier weights are needed the fatter the roll and the longer stored. Then, having peeped at the corners of the weighted pile and found the required sheet, always towards the middle, it cannot be pulled out as from a plan chest drawer, since it is weighted down. So you lift the weight in the top left corner, and replace it on the wanted sheet, leaving the released corner to curl towards the centre, and repeat for the lower left corner. The released left half of the pile then shoots off to the right, curling over the other two weights, if you are unlucky. If lucky, the top half of the pile moves with such force that it and the right-hand weights land on the floor, relieving pressure on the bottom right side of the pile which now shoots off to the left and curls around the recently moved weights before falling on the floor on the left of your working surface. So far, so good. At least the wanted map is now on the floor, on top of a now smaller roll which you pick up and place on the surface in order to repeat the whole exercise by first placing the two right hand weights on top of the pile, but putting the two weights on the left *under* the wanted top map, which, being very light, will roll itself around the two weights on the right and be free from the others. Easy peasy.

All right, let us assume, wrongly, that I am not very good at handling rolled maps. What other problems might be encountered? Well, if one has a list of what is in the roll, one might peep at the weighted sheet corners looking for the ninth sheet down, Sheet 124, and it is not there. So one checks the map corners against the list and all are there except the wanted sheet. How can this be? The list was only compiled a year ago and you are positive nothing has been taken out. An hour later, you find the fugitive. Between the eighth and tenth map. Right in the centre of the pile and a far smaller sheet than all the others; invisible to anyone peeping in at the edge of the pile. Even if a careful handler places such small sheets at the corners of a pile, they always wriggle into the middle.

Which leads on to the question of maps of different sizes. If a pile of maps is to be kept rolled, is it better to build the pile as a pyramid, with the smaller maps forming the tip, so that they will be within the roll, or inverted, with the tip underneath, so that the smaller maps are on the outside of the roll? Advantages and disadvantages. Either way, instinct says that the smaller maps need the protection of the wider maps, which will take any knock and will buckle at the edges, thus protecting smaller sheets. But why do we feel small sheets need protecting, and are quite happy that larger sheets get damaged, regardless of importance? Are we able to say that yes, broadly speaking, considering the whole output of the Ordnance Survey since 1791 or 1805, that smaller maps are the most valuable, or most interesting or the more uncommon sheets, and thus need protecting? Old Series quarter sheets, New Series, Revised New Series, Third Edition small sheet series, six-inch quarter sheets, all versus the larger New Populars, Seventh Series and 1:50,000 maps? I suppose that it is not really a case of looking to protect smaller sheets if rolled with larger sheets, they cannot help but be protected, whether they are on the outside, inside or inter-filed.

I still have not found a satisfactory way of searching a tight roll for a specific

map. The quickest way is indeed to open it out by using weights and then search, with searching being easier if the smaller maps are on the inside and thus on top when open. And if anyone complains that this will mean maps being out of order within a roll, well, in my experience most rolls are of maps in random order, even if they were in order originally. Rolls have a will of their own and given half a chance will curl up in an instant with the formerly top map buried deep within the pile, leaving only the edges along one side showing. And if you slide your fingers beneath the lowest sheet edge, if you can decide on one, and again unroll the maps, I guarantee that no longer will the original top map be uppermost. Which is why I try, when rolling maps, to put a piece of newspaper just sticking out from the edge of the top map, so that I know where the top sheet is.

In the early days of our business, if I had to send 1:2500 County Series maps by post, I would visit the local carpet shop and get some very thick cardboard tubes that the carpets came wrapped around and saw them to length. As I have mentioned elsewhere, the weight did not really come into it, as one could send more than I was happy to lift for a pittance. And if an order had more than would fit in one tube, I just taped several together as one parcel. No objections from Royal Mail in those days, but things have changed dramatically. As I write, March 2018, a tube under 900mm/35" in length, weighing under 2 kg will cost £5.00 Second Class, but 2.01 kg will jump to £13.75, compared to £6.49 with a carrier. Be careful when using Royal Mail.<sup>2</sup>

I was never happy with sending a large order in multiple tubes, and eventually realised that over a certain number, rolled flat sheets were self-supporting and did not need a tube. A heavy tight roll could be padded at both ends with crumpled newspaper, and then the whole wrapped in bin bags secured by rings of brown tape, and again, sent cheaply.

I cannot remember ever sending anything other than 1:2500 sheets as a self-supporting roll, so if other series were found to be too many to go into a tube, it was easier to roll them *around* the tube. I have always been aware that whatever I put into a tube, someone will have to get out at the other end, which means that although one can roll maps into an exceedingly tight roll and pop them into a tube, it will be almost impossible to get them out. Thus, I always try to see that whatever is in a tube allows an index finger to be inserted and pushed against the innermost map in the direction of its edge to relieve the pressure and allow the roll to be eased out. But what if one cannot reach the maps in a tube? From either end? Saw one end off? No. I once saw Dave Watt with such a tube and he simply held it vertically, repeatedly patted the open top end with the palm of one hand to make a popping sound, and the maps smoothly rose to the tube end. Really neat. I have used this technique ever since.

---

<sup>2</sup> If the customer insists on Royal Mail and I split the order, it would be £10 postage, but the volume in the mail will be double, two large tubes, rather than what Royal Mail might be hoping for: two smaller packets which are easier to handle.