



Sheetlines

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“Kerry musing”

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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

I find it a real pleasure to be able to open an Ordnance Survey map and know that I will not be bombarded with advertisements when looking at it. Unlike so many other things in life these days, the OS has not succumbed to degrading its maps by letting out the blank map margins to Tom Dick and Harry. Even when under great pressure to bring in money, map margins were sacrosanct from advertisers of walking boots, vacuum cleaners and mohair cardigans, all favoured by map users I understand. And long may this continue. Yes, I admit that the *Hardings' guide maps* of the early twentieth century now have an appeal with coloured adverts all around the very wide margins, but these were the products of advertising companies where the maps were secondary to the adverts, not the other way around.

Adverts on OS maps? You are on Cadair Idris, watching a distant farmer with three dogs gather in a couple of hundred mealy bugs and you remember that the cat's insurance has expired. Not to worry, somewhere in the margin of your map is an advert with a telephone number for renewals. With adverts in map margins you would never again be on the hills and away from it all. Ordnance Survey maps have always been kept free from advertising. Today, I assume the idea of advertising in the margins would be seen as being too far away from the target, say a pub. A marker and name on the map at the exact location and nothing less would be sought. Just like those on Google and elsewhere. Enough people complain of all the tourist symbols on maps, so what would mini-adverts do to the cherished product?

Companies and organisations have always had access to the public through their products; indeed, the OS has a long history of using map margins as direct lines of communication with map users. Here, I am not thinking of marginal clutter such as diagrams of adjacent sheets, price details, the copyright statement and *For official use only*, which if absent would not hinder anyone using a map.¹ My interest this week is messages from the OS, little notes, usually explanations which enhance the use of a map, that help one get the most out of a purchase. On small scale civil aviation maps: *Air information correct to 1-6-34* must have been a bonus for giving a date to the information shown, whilst the RAF air maps went further, telling where updates would appear: *Subsequent corrections will be issued in Air Ministry Notices to Airmen & A.M.O.*. If a map user was curious about Welsh names on Populars, a discreet note: *A glossary of the most common Welsh words used on the Ordnance Survey maps can be purchased* should have been useful.

The best known note appears on all scales: *The representation on this map of a road, track or footpath is no evidence of the existence of a right of way*, the wording seemingly little changed for over a hundred years. As with price details

¹ Nor am I thinking of error corrections, such as the slips pasted on Ordnance Survey Eclipse maps.

in the lower margin, it does nothing to help one use the map, but is a friendly bit of advice from the OS, a warning not to go waving the map about and quoting it when you are in the wrong by being in the wrong place. Why is this semi-legal note about ways shown on maps of all scales? Might its addition have been in response to a widely held belief to the contrary? Was the OS constantly bombarded with enquiries on the subject, and thought it easiest to put the answer where everyone could see it? Why is this the only note of its kind? Why do we not see *The representation of a river or canal is no evidence of the existence of a right to swim?* Or *The word park on this map does not necessarily mean a right to have picnics and play football.*

Notes on large scale maps are fascinating. Well, to me they are, though sometimes it is difficult to know why the OS provided what it thought was a helpful note: *The parish of Bishop's Hatfield has been re-numbered on this edition on a 1:2500 sheet is fair enough, but consider: The following parcel numbers do not appear on this edition: – Parish of Southampton, 285, 287.* Nor do a lot of others one might add; did the OS receive numerous reports of people having wasted many hours seeking missing numbers? Looking at the sheet, one can see parcel 286 squeezed in between two blocks of buildings, so maybe one of them was 285 or 287? If true, why did the OS point out the absence of two parcel numbers, when they might also have noted that five cottages were also now absent, as they were demolished to make way for the building on 287?

Other friendly little notes aim to prevent confusion by providing clarification. After 1884, parcel numbers and areas appeared on maps rather than in Books of Reference, with a short-lived note in the top left margin:

Every parcel is numbered, thus 27

Its area is given underneath, thus 4.370

Where a parcel was split between more than one sheet 27 4.370 would appear on all sheets, without stating that parcel areas included portions shown on other sheets. This is exactly what surveyors wanted, the acreage of a single parcel as in the books.

But after 1922, in response to pressure on costs and speed of output, areas were henceforth only calculated to plan edges, eliminating the necessity for the OS to work on adjacent sheets. So another useful note appeared *Areas to plan edge only*, and was most certainly needed after being otherwise for so long. A helpful note, maybe, but also an annoying reminder for surveyors who now had to consult several sheets for a field acreage. Nobody ever needs to know the part acreage figure shown on maps.²

My favourite missive from the OS also appears on 1:2500 scale maps and should have been written in an Old English script similar to that used for the Ordnance Survey Domesday books:

² Post 1922 reprints of pre-1922 sheets often/usually have acreage figures only to plan edges. Another example of changes within the neat line accompanied by unchanged dates without.

To convert Decimal parts of an Acre into Roods and Perches, multiply by 4, this will give Roods and Decimals of a Rood, multiply this Decimal by 40 thus obtaining Perches and Decimals of a Perch.

Example: $\cdot 357 = 1 \text{ Rood } 17 \cdot 120 \text{ Perches}$

$$\begin{array}{r} \underline{4} \\ \text{Roods } 1 \cdot 428 \\ \underline{40} \\ \text{Perches } 17 \cdot 120 \end{array}$$

Every time I see this note, I am reminded of 6d exercise books bought from Woolworths which had rear covers with multiplication and other tables, including length. I am sure many will remember rod, pole and perch but have absolutely no idea of where they fit in the general scheme of things. A good deal of searching has left me slightly more informed but with questions.

If County series parcel numbers are in acres to three decimal points, 4.370, my first question was why was an imperial measure given to three decimal points, rather than an all imperial figure?³ I have not found an answer,⁴ but Brian Harley suggests parcels were numbered and measured in response to public demand, as noted in the *Report from the Registration and Conveyancing Commission*, British Parliamentary Paper, 1850.⁵ If this was true, it seems that the public used acres, roods and perches in preference to decimalised acres, hence the note on maps as an *aide memoir*. They were certainly still well used in 1919 when the big estate around us was sold. The sale catalogue offers Drefor Farm as 327a 2r 14p, whilst the individual field figures, taken from the local 1903 1:2500 map total 327.591 acres. Spot on. Try the calculation yourself.

Why was this note felt necessary? Were the imperial measures falling into disuse by 1899, the earliest dated note I have found? Surely those who used the maps daily knew the simple arithmetic, and from experience a vast number of 1:2500 sheets have possession stamps of surveyors or estate agents who would not need the note. So, was the note provided for the lay public, in which case, why did they want the area figures and why in imperial units?

I have not found any information on when imperial measures of area began to decline in favour of metric acres. When did roods and perches fall out of favour with the general public? No answer has been forthcoming, but I suspect the decline was similar to decimalisation, when in 1985, over ten years later, one would be told in the builders' 'merchants' that a length of wood had been measured in metric feet. Today, everything is metric with no mention of feet by builders. There must be CCS members who were brought up using one-inch maps and acres, and some who have only known the 1:50,000 map and hectares. Whilst having a preliminary skirmish with this problem, I noted the scale bar of a

³ 4.370 acres converts to 4 acres 1 rood 19 and a bit perches, or 19.2 perches which brings in the decimals again, unless you calculate the 0.2 perches in square yards feet and inches. Life is too short.

⁴ Nor why Roman and Arabic numbers were mixed to give 1:2500 County series sheet numbers.

⁵ JB Harley, *Ordnance Survey maps: a descriptive manual*, Ordnance Survey, 1975, 58.

six-inch quarter-sheet gave a mile in furlongs, chains, feet and perches. Perches were an area on the 1:2500 maps, but now a length on a six-inch map. Oh, for the nice and simple millimetres, metres and kilometres.⁶ It appears that language was to blame. A perch is a measure of length, and when squared should be called a square perch, or a square rod, with 40 of them to a rood and four roods to an acre. Not that we should lose any sleep over it as in England the perch was officially discouraged in favour of the rod as early as the 15th century, with the rod phased out as a legal unit of measurement only in 1965 as part of the metrication process. The advantages of decimals were appreciated in the 1850s as in 4.370 acres, so why were mediaeval lengths fossilised on exercise books until the 1960s?

I scoured all the technical books held but could find nothing to say how the OS arrived at the decimal acres shown on maps. I had a vague memory that one divided an area into easily measured areas such as rectangles and triangles, and summed the individual areas.

The nearest to an official reference was on page 304 of Seymour,⁷ where we are told that in the 1950s the *Measurement of parcel areas on the 1:2500 plans [is] by the time-honoured scale and trace method* with a footnote: *The scale and trace method, invented by a sapper before 1850 uses a sort of slide rule which totals the number of squares printed on a sheet of tracing paper. The tracing paper is laid over the map, covering the parcel being measured.* More questions, such as how large are the squares and what about the fiddly incomplete squares at the edges?

One could spend a lifetime investigating the curiosities lurking in the margins of maps, especially large scales. Now, how many chains in a furlong, or is it furlongs in a chain? Anyone under sixty-five can move on to the next question.

Campbell Kennedy

It was Campbell Kennedy who told me of the founding of the Charles Close Society by sending a leaflet distributed in June 1981 by Alan Godfrey. I had just made contact with Campbell through an advertisement one of us had placed seeking Ordnance Survey maps, and to have made contact was quite exciting, as he was the first person I knew who was also interested in OS maps. It was obvious that Campbell was already very knowledgeable on the subject, and had even got to the stage of having both a wants list and a list of items for sale. We exchanged maybe half a dozen letters, until he diplomatically suggested that once in its stride, the society might provide the answers to my endless list of questions. His kindness to a novice will never be forgotten.

The society's first meeting was held at the National Library of Scotland in November 1981, and advertised as 'Starting at 11.00 am and probably going into the afternoon...'. Two of the twelve pages of *Sheetlines 2* contained Campbell's meeting report, whilst page 10 hosted his suggestion for a regular 'For

⁶ I do not use centimetres.

⁷ WA Seymour (ed.), *A history of the Ordnance Survey*, Dawson, 1980, 304.

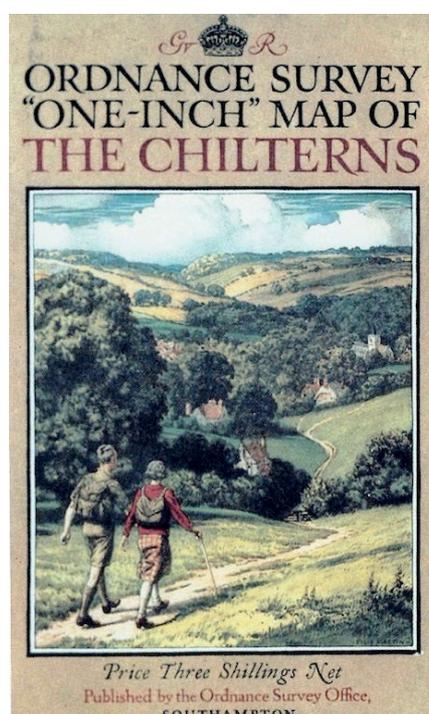
sale/Wanted/Swap section' in *Sheetlines*, along with a note of his own wants of the moment.

I think it fair to say that Campbell alerted the second-hand book trade in general to the potential of Ordnance Survey maps, when he penned an article *Ordnance Survey maps : an introduction to this growing specialist field* for an early issue of the very popular *Book and Magazine Collector*.⁸ His list of suggested values resulted in prices rising significantly overnight,⁹ resulting in more maps becoming available as booksellers, having been invited to a viewing, no longer left maps to be re-cycled along with unwanted books. And with more maps in bookshops, so the number of scarce maps offered to the public increased.

From Campbell's collection, the society's archives have received a most generous donation of the original artwork for three map covers: *The Chilterns* by Ellis Martin, together with *Bristol District*, and the unused *New Forest* drawing by Arthur Palmer,¹⁰ together with a collection of 23 OS leaflets (1924-63), and other items. Cambridge University Library's Map library was similarly remembered.

Sadly, the name Campbell Kennedy will not ring a bell with most members; I only met Campbell once, at one of the Nuneaton AGMs, 1997 I think, and found him just as charming and enthusiastic as his letters of earlier years.

Campbell was obviously a very experienced collector long before most of us had discovered Ordnance Survey maps, and did a lot to consolidate the early work of the society, for which we are all extremely grateful.



⁸ *Book and Magazine Collector*, 1984, number 8, 27-33.

⁹ And after a couple of years they slowly drifted down again.

¹⁰ Illustrated in John Paddy Browne, *Map Cover Art : Bristol District H63 and The Chilterns H66* page 131, *New Forest H35* page 127.