



Sheetlines

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“Kerry musings”

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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

Another nice thing about Ordnance Survey maps is their variety, which can be beneficial when one's circumstances change. It could be argued that one's youth is the best time to collect maps. The quick thinking hunter, exploring all avenues in search of a trophy. Find a map, briefly look at it, and on to the next. No time to sit back and study it or to spend hours comparing it with others. That can wait until a more comprehensive collection exists and greater leisure time allows. The thrill of the chase dominates. I am not mocking or criticising those who collect maps without studying them. I speak from experience. I did it.

Note the past tense, as I have now joined those who still look for maps when passing a bookshop, but otherwise play little part in the hunt. And with the decline in looking for maps, one increasingly does study them, which was the assumption when younger. The only problem is that so often, one has left it too late. Most maps collected have been small scales, folded in covers, and with age, looking for minute detail changes whilst wearing glasses and using a magnifying glass is rather frustrating. With a glass, it is impossible to flick from place to place easily, let alone sheet to sheet, with anywhere near the ease of good eyesight, so eventually, many give up. I know several people who have disposed of their map collections due to age-related difficulties. They were frustrated at not being able to get out as easily as previously, and when they did, the places where maps were often found no longer existed, meaning little was bought or added to their collections, whilst concurrently, failing eyesight and failing fingers made it harder to look at what they had.

But hold on, give up your maps because they are no longer fun? No, I say; OS maps provide something for everyone, whatever their capabilities. One just has to have the foresight to plan and be willing to adapt. We are always being told to plan for our old age, and to do it whilst one can, but few undertake the task as seriously as required, and many get caught out. The saddest part is when someone decides to give up maps completely, and forfeits the most enjoyable of hobbies through not planning for the future.

We have neighbours who were keen gardeners, with flowers in bloom most of the year and hours and hours spent tending them. They had no intention of losing their hobby due to age, and had the future planned. In good time, they reduced the floral beds and built raised island beds, which they could reach with less bending and eventually worked sitting on a small stool. When this started to become a problem, they got rid of some raised beds and planted low maintenance flowering shrubs and small decorative trees, so that when the last of the raised beds went, they were left with a maturing garden that they could enjoy from the house.

What does this have to do with Ordnance Survey maps? I suggest that well before you become disenchanted with folded maps, you explore the possibilities of the larger scales, 1:2500 and better still, even larger scales, which in many respects are ideal for the older person, and offer all the fun that most of us enjoyed from the small scales. The fun of discovering the different series, what is shown on them and all the oddities can be the cartographic equivalent of large print books. In later life, a lot of people mention the ease with which 1:25,000 maps can be read compared to one-inch or 1:50,000 sheets, yet fail to extend this to the larger scales, which are even easier to read. Why? Probably because many are unfamiliar with them, having seen few for sale and by

not having used public collections to any extent. So, if left too late, pursuing a new interest in large scale maps would be a very uphill struggle, just at the time when love of the chase is declining, and where one has to begin from scratch with little prospect of building a good collection.

Doubting Thomas now asks to be given the sales pitch on large scale maps. The biggest and most obvious advantage is that, well, the detail shown is large, big, making them nice and easy to read. No contours or colours get in the way, just nice crisp black on white detail, with an abundance of names, for buildings, streets and objects. They are well laid out on regular sheet lines, unlike the plate of spaghetti called the Explorer index, and for those with minor memory or reasoning problems such regularity means it is very easy to navigate between sheets, especially as adjacent sheet numbers appear in the map margins. Their content is ideally suited to the interests of older people. With retirement, many have the time to take up family or local history, for which the detail on large scale maps is excellent. And even if they only wish to bring back memories of the past, a detailed map of where one grew up is a fine starting point, far in advance of a one-inch map, with an added bonus that commentaries on the area studied are usually available in the form of local histories.

What else is in their favour? Well, most examples are encountered as flat sheets, making them easier to handle without endless unfolding and refolding, and as only certain areas will be of interest, there will be no pressure to collect sets just for the sake of it. Large scales somehow seem more relaxed, and more fitting for those with increased leisure time. With such advantages, I wonder why more people have never migrated to the larger scales later in life?

Having decided that large scales are the new direction in which one wishes to travel, the main problem is that they appear for sale far less often than do small scale maps, with a rough correlation between increased detail and scarcity. Meaning, that one would be hard put to build a good collection of local maps, especially with all the problems of later life. Yes, I agree that whilst there are still free transport passes, one could visit the local archives or local history library armed with spectacles, magnifying glass, note pads, pencils and lots of 10p pieces for photocopies, looking like a latter-day Crackerjack contestant without the cabbages, though even here, if allowed, it is difficult to position the centre of a 1:1056 scale map for copying. Perhaps one should use a camera instead, and take as many photographs as are needed? A better bet? Maybe. Maybe, because once the images are transferred to the computer at home, one has to keep jumping between them in a most annoying way, unless one is very capable and can join them together on screen. But as far as I am concerned, life is too short to start learning such complicated tricks, and anyway, when you visit a collection to take photographs, someone else will be using what you want or it cannot be found. Increased leisure time often means increased hassle and disappointment.

If, having read the above words of wisdom, you decide that large scales are for you, do not even consider looking for maps to buy; save your money, time and effort and power up your computer. Having done so, head for the National Library of Scotland website : maps.nls.uk/os. Nearly all that you will ever want is here, to be enjoyed in the comfort of your own home, with your slippers on and a cup of tea beside you, offering facilities far in advance of any hard copy map collection. Yes, the joy of holding a paper map of considerable age cannot be equalled, but having them on-line has so many benefits. As long as they are available on-line, which they increasingly are.

Regardless of where you live, you have no need to build a personal collection of

large scale maps when the National Library of Scotland website exists. Why? Look at the site and you will see. The map series offered are numerous, with excellent coverage at 1:2500, offering 120,000 sheets as I write; plus nearly 6,000 sheets of town plans for 100 towns, 1840s-1890s, and the five feet plans for London. More than enough to keep anyone going for while, surely?

Having decided on a series, maps are offered as either single sheets with full margins, including survey and publication dates, or as a seamless map, where the margins have been cropped and the mapping is 'pasted' together. Both have their advantages, with single sheets having the feel of originals, whereas with the seamless map, one is not inconvenienced by having to dig out an adjacent sheet if following a road or railway.

Things really hot up once you begin looking at maps, as the zoom facility makes a magnifying glass seem almost Stone Age. Spot a feature and instantly enlarge it without having to place the glass and then search around for what you were looking at. Zoom out and you continue with your work. For example, following a road looking for milestones, spot something, zoom in, get the details, and zoom out to continue along the road. One is also able to print extracts from these on-line maps, at the original scale or enlarged. I find it very convenient to print the same extract from two different editions and then compare them side by side without being distracted by the rest of the map. Not everyone likes to sit at a screen for long periods, so printing a map section is most useful, and far cheaper if printed at home, with the added advantage of being able to take them 'into the field'. And if you wish to discuss a map with a friend, you can both see the same thing on screen, where previously one of you might have lacked the sheet under discussion.

Now the clever part; if one is organised, it is easy to bookmark items of interest, thus building your own large scale collection, courtesy of the NLS, on your computer, with maps displayed in an instant, and never in use by someone else. All the other irritating problems of using a public collection vanish, such as getting there in the rain and finding all the tables occupied, curling maps needing to be weighed down, or maps encased in shiny material making photography a challenge. Access to on-line maps means there is no need to leave the house, and one can study any time of day or night, free from ever more limited opening hours of libraries and archive offices. One is not disturbed by other readers; uncomfortable conditions such as too hot or cold and poor lighting are not encountered and there are no travelling costs or time involved. Nothing is spent on buying the maps sought, and usually, all are available, saving endless searching for missing maps, and no pacemaker-stopping moments at auctions, or fear that another collector might get to a book fair before you. Too good to be true. And if your research interests change, the maps to support your new interest are all at hand, and you don't feel guilty at having spent money on discarded maps. Not that anyone has ever felt guilty about having bought a map.

If you do plan a move to the larger scales, well, surely it was your youthful intention to study maps eventually? Which is why you built a small scales collection, and having moved up the scales, why dispose of your collection just because you do not add to it nor look at it? Keep it and live in hope of filling a gap at an AGM. Be comforted by seeing it on the shelves, showing what you achieved. But plan to move on in good time, so allowing continuing enjoyment from maps without the need to build another collection from scratch. Sounds good to me.