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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

An Englishman's home is his castle, and in my book castles are places people like to look around. Why are we fascinated by other people's houses? And seem always to have been? A glance at Paterson's *Roads* (fifteenth edition 1811) or Cary's *New itinerary* (fifth edition 1812) shows that amongst the information given to travellers, are details of which large houses one passed on a road: 'Hales Owen. Before, on l, the Leasowes, – Hamilton, Esq. Leasowes was the seat of the Poet Shenstone, in the decoration of which his whole fortune was spent'. Why would one want or need to know this? Why not just say a large house, or a large red house? Whilst most houseowners would almost certainly be pleased to be singled out as living in a house worthy of mention, those passing might be envious or look down their noses at what they saw. I always chuckle when I hear someone very snobbishly refer to something as second-hand, as by implication it would be nothing they would ever dream of having. And then they return to their second-hand home full of second-hand furniture, but called a manor house with antiques. Indeed, the more times certain properties have changed hands, the more 'desirable' they become in some people's eyes. Have you ever heard anyone say they have bought a second-hand house, but only until they can afford a new one? Look at almost any Ordnance Survey map and most of the houses shown will not be occupied by first time buyers; if you go back through the map series, the same properties will keep appearing.

Yes, owners of older houses have always been pleased to have them pointed out, and to invite others to view them. In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Bleak House* (1853) it is accepted that one can call at a large house and be shown around by the servants if the family are away. It was a popular pastime, and still one that many people like, which is why the National Trust thrives. When visiting friends for the first time, one is so often invited to see around the house. We just seem to like a good nose and to show off our properties, however humble.

The Ordnance Survey has always appreciated this and likes to plaster maps with house and building names, but why not just show the building without the name? Ignoring the fact that maps would then look pretty empty, echoing the problem with early Irish maps. Is it a hangover from when the first OS maps appeared and it was thought that the gentry would be good customers; more so if their properties were not only shown, but named as well? I cannot find anything written on the subject, but for named houses on Old Series maps, my money is on there having been few large signs at the gates saying : Opulent House, residence of Sir Swiggly Diggly. So it cannot be argued that showing such piles was an aid to navigation by map. Although there are more signs today, few areas compare with south-west Scotland, where almost every farm has its name on a sign at the road end. Much less so these days, but a tremendous help before Sat-Nav appeared. If owners of large properties were pleased to see their houses named on the new one-inch Ordnance Survey map, they might also have been more than a little peeved. Yes, their house was shown and named, but so also was the very small farm just down the road, quite possibly one of their farms. Why should an impoverished tenant farmer have the same status on an OS map as themselves? The same small black rectangle for a building, with the same size and style of lettering for the name.

Of course it is often quite useful to have a house or other building both named and easily identifiable on a map. When I worked in London and announced that I was moving to Wales, a colleague darted off and returned with Seventh Series sheet 128, wanting to see exactly where we were moving to. Although our house was not named, the hamlet was, and our new home was recognisable as a dot within the hamlet. My colleague was delighted to see something so specific, even if so small. A few years ago, a leaflet was received from our local fire brigade with a brief description of the National Grid and a request to have a grid reference kept by the telephone to give in an emergency. Very sensible and useful in a rural setting. Even if the grid reference is not very accurate they should be in the correct area, and anyway, flames will help draw them in the dark. Yes, a National Grid reference is an excellent idea, but how many of our members have the confidence to use it? To give it as the only extra aid in getting to a location along with the address? We have always had our grid reference on our notepaper, but if someone is coming, even 'map people', I always send them detailed instructions on how to find us if coming by road from any direction. I can never bring myself just to give : white house by the bridge, SO 155 891.

Until I started this piece, I had never considered how much house names add to a map; they give a flavour not only of the landscape, but also indicate who might have lived in the houses named and can help identify them as Welsh or English. The house names of Yorkshire are totally different from Kent or Wales. In the very English Yorkshire dales we find High Hollins and Low Hollins, but around English/Welsh Painscastle the equivalent are Upper Llandewi and Lower Llandewi, with Nantcyll-uchaf and Nantcyll isaf in very Welsh north Wales. But more than this, names describe the landscape. Another Welsh example comes from west of Erwood, where one can follow the course of a stream, Nant Gwenddwr, without seeing its very thin blue line on a map. In the very upper reaches we have Blaen Gwenddwr, then Cwm Gwenddwr, the village of Gwenddwr and finally Abergwenddwr. If this stream ceased to flow, the names would show conclusively that it had existed and its course. The two place names Erwood and Gwenddwr in close proximity are indicative of the Welsh/English history of the area.

The whole subject of which names appear on OS maps is fascinating, and certainly reflects changing urban and rural landscapes over time, just as much as new transport routes or urban expansion does. Names come and go, reflecting changes in society, and changes in Ordnance Survey practice, as shown on the maps and internal instruction documents. Who now would be able to say exactly what was meant by Assembly Rooms, Beer Houses, Institutes, Meeting Houses, Mission Halls, Poor Law Institutions, Salmon Catches, Timber Ponds? Most might give the flavour of them, but nothing approaching an exact definition.

If I owned a larger country mansion, I am pretty sure that I would not want to see it named on an OS map, certainly not in full, especially if it was identified as such by, Hall, House, Palace, Towers and so on. I would seek anonymity. Why? Well, as Mr Trump, would say, "There are some bad men about". Bad men who steal things, and who might have been quite good in geography lessons and learnt the usefulness of OS maps. Studying Ordnance Survey maps helps identify which

properties it might just be worth visiting with a jemmy, torch and striped jumper. They also show possible access and escape routes, hiding places and all sorts of things that the uninitiated would not think of. I wonder whether one can ask the OS not to include a house name? If they will not, could one copyright it and forbid them to? Which leads on to what is not shown on maps, but that can wait until another time.

As with Old Series maps, the bad men would not get much to help identify interesting properties from the 1:50,000 maps, but the larger scales are a very good source of information, and always have been. I have just been looking at some Cheshire 1:2500 First Edition maps with the lovely hand colouring, and these show a lot of detail. Plenty of promising names such as Wadesgreen Hall, Eardwick Hall, Elton Hall and Twemlow Hall, but with small and dull looking grounds. Grandeur in name only. The size of lettering does vary on these maps, so that Cranage Hall is larger than Cotton Hall, and as befits a larger name, it has Cranage Lodge and Manor farm across the road, and might be worth a visit. Flicking through a few sheets further on, Brereton Hall, north of St Oswald's Church caught my eye as it had extensive grounds and was written in Gothic lettering. To the west of it and quite large is Dairyhouse Farm, with The Rectory south of it. Nothing unusual except the script, but when I looked on Google maps only the church was named, with the road from the village being protected by having to pass under an arched lodge; all roads to these properties were private, with street view unavailable. Someone values their privacy.

Having significant buildings named on easily accessible small scale maps is good for governments in times of social unrest, as they can be identified quickly and 'steps taken'. This also applies to foreign governments. In preparation for Operation Sea Lion, the planned invasion of Britain, the Germans assembled a vast amount of information, including OS maps. Ordnance Survey six-inch maps for over 140 towns were enlarged to 1:10,000, modified, printed in soft brown rather than black, and overprinted with coloured symbols identifying sites of military significance such as airports, railway workshops, docks, bridges, and so on. Anyone looking at them can see that if the invasion had occurred, these maps would have helped considerably, and control would have been taken swiftly. Similar material was prepared by the Soviet Union in the late twentieth century, though I have never seen such extensive coverage of other countries compiled by the British military.

Although I would not wish the full name of my grand house to be splashed across an OS map, there are times when I would appreciate more than an abbreviated building name, something the Ordnance Survey has been prepared to use. In the 1908 *Instructions to draftsmen & plan examiners*, we read that they would allow the word 'lunatic' to be omitted from COUNTY LUNATIC ASYLUM if the authorities objected to its use. Walking past a large building marked only as COUNTY ASYLUM on my OS map, I for one would appreciate being alerted to the background of anyone seen climbing over a wall and running towards me.