



# *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*

Do I have a favourite Ordnance Survey map? No. End of *Kerry musings* for this week.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I thought that it would be fairly straightforward: propose the question and answer it as a musing, giving a gushing endorsement for a cartographic rectangle, which might or might not be familiar to most readers. But even I would fail to fill a couple of pages writing about a non-existent map. So, I repeat, no musing this week. Sorry.

How did I ever think of such a silly idea? Well, I am sure that you all know how it goes; you start doing something and end up thinking of maps. Check the spare wheel on the car, MOT maps; drive from town into the country, Land Utilisation maps; watch an aeroplane pass over, aviation maps; water the tomatoes in the greenhouse, Irish quarter-inch 1905. And so it was that we were talking about the word 'favourite', and whether we could apply it to anything in our lives. Something that would be chosen above all else, every time. Favourite colour, no; favourite restaurant, no, favourite song, no. The nearest I could get was to say that when eating out, if available, I would always choose the hors d'oeuvres as a starter, and if away from home for a night, would always have a full cooked breakfast in the morning. Because I really like them. But I could not decide whether the word favourite came into it. Favourite in that situation probably. And during the conversation, knowing I had to fill a couple of pages, favourite map came to mind, a subject I have merely skirted previously. Do I have a favourite map? A question that is easier to read than to answer. Do *you* have a favourite map? See what I mean? No, I do not have a favourite map, otherwise I would be musing.

I might not have a favourite map, in the sense that Atkinson Grimshaw's *Liverpool quay by moonlight* was my favourite painting long ago, but I am more fond of certain maps than others. For example, England and Wales Half-inch sheet 15, Barmouth, in the layered and hills shaded version. This sheet fascinates me. I consider it the prime reason why the series should never have been issued. If you thought the dense dark hachuring on some northern sheets of the Old Series made them illegible, just look at this sheet, which looks as if a jug of melted chocolate has been poured over it. The only names that can be read easily are those for the two lakes, Bala and Vyrnwy. Terrible map. Lovely map. A favourite of mine, but not the favourite. In *Sheetlines* 63 I spoke highly of Seventh Series sheet 154 Cardiff, of which I am still exceedingly fond, as I am of the striking red, white and blue crest covers in some Fifth Relief maps, not to mention the modern glossy covers on the society's own map reprints. I am more than fond of all of these, yet none can claim to be my favourite.

If I lack a favourite map, I most certainly have a favourite map symbol : the small green lolly-pop style trees found on the early large sheet half-inch maps. The green has a wonderful lightness of tone and colour, whilst the symbols are so delicate, and a lovely shape, especially in groups, as on the half-inch sheet 15 mentioned above. Brown hachures also give my spine a tingle whenever I see any on an Ordnance

Survey map. As many will have noted, I am particularly fond of certain colours on maps, green tree symbols, brown hachures, certain reds and the blue for motorways are all special in my book. And when they are on flat sheets in bright crisp condition, nothing can beat them. The only folded maps that enter into the running are those lovely soft dissected maps in the white covers with the labels pasted on to the outside surfaces. A most satisfactory item to hold; but do not even consider the word favourite.

It would be too complicated and boring to go into the finer etymology of favourite and preference, but if forced to, I could come up with examples of maps that I prefer to others. We all could. At a very basic level, most members appear to prefer Ordnance Survey maps to those issued by John Bartholomew. The maps in Bartholomew atlases are exquisite, so finely engraved, bettered by the OS only with early six-inch engraved sheets, yet the name Bartholomew almost always brings to mind only their very useful, and popular with cyclists, half-inch series. Which is a great shame. Should I have to indicate preferences, I would probably say that I shy away from series maps with a lot of sheets such as the Seventh Series with 190 sheets, and prefer the half-inch series with far fewer sheets. I also prefer series having several specifications, again the England and Wales half-inch with a hills shaded series, a layered series and a layered and hills shaded series. The half-inch also attract me because they are far less collected than one-inch maps, and because they are not snapped up as quickly they usually cost less.

Maybe I began with the wrong question, do I have a favourite map? A better, and possibly more revealing way of looking at things would be to ask what would be my last remaining map, should I get rid of everything. Which is not quite as simple as it sounds, as we still have a lot of stock remaining from our business, sometimes making it hard to distinguish 'my maps' from 'ex-business maps'. So, let us assume that an exceedingly large transit van with strengthened axles takes away all the 'ex-business maps', leaving me with a small box of folded maps and a plan chest of flat sheets. They, shall we say, are my personal map holdings. I will not consider a filing cabinet drawer, and two drawers in the plan chest of local maps, as these are held for a different purpose, and will never be disposed of.

So, a small box of folded maps, and a plan chest of flat sheets. What would go first and what last? Having just spent a couple of hours looking at the aforesaid material, I honestly do not think that I could decide what would go, map by map, so the maps would be jettisoned *en bloc*. Leaving me with only local maps. Sad? Not really, as my interest in the Ordnance Survey has never focused solely on their map output. Again, as I have mentioned elsewhere, I am not unlike many members, who get a tingle just from seeing the words 'Ordnance Survey', no matter what they appear on. And if I was without any OS maps, I would still have my collection of OS related books and ephemera, which are certainly more attractive to me than the maps that would have gone first.

Only if you feel the same way, will any reader understand how seeing those two words on a scrap of paper can excite. And they always have, right from the beginning of my relationship with OS maps. An early example was when I was looking through the box of maps in a Dartford bookshop, and found a cloth backed scrap of paper, obviously roughly cut from a full sheet, with some blue sea and a

corner of land plus the words 'Ordnance Survey' printed in the margin. It was obvious the French coast was shown, but in those early days I had no idea that the Ordnance Survey dealt in any foreign mapping. Intriguing. Books produced by the Ordnance Survey have always caught my attention, beginning with OS catalogues, which were a major source of information before the flow of books from our Society. Indeed, early catalogues are still of great use, especially the lists of miscellaneous maps available at the time. Annual reports from the nineteenth century are not that easily found, but again offer a wealth of information, and are quite exciting to find and satisfying to collect. I admit that one cannot as easily go out and find OS related books as one can the maps, but when they do appear, the thrill is totally different : *The Ordnance Survey and the war 1914-1919*, 40 copies printed, or *Instructions to field examiners on the orthography of Welsh names, with rules for compounding, initialing, (sic) and accenting under various conditions*, June 1883. Even having praised them, these would be next in line to go, after the maps.

But not all books, as I would keep all the cartobibliographies and Roger Hellyer's *Ordnance Survey small scale maps : indexes 1801-1998*. Why? Because I just love lists, especially lists of maps and map series. If you have a good cartobibliography, you have all the details you need for any map, except of course the map itself. Like reading a holiday brochure, you can dream. For anything I am interested in, I like to be able to see the whole picture, and cartobibliographies are a great help. Just as when visiting somewhere, most of us buy the local map, as we want to know whether it might be worthwhile going in one direction rather than another.

And then there is ephemera, usually printed paperwork only intended to be of use for a short time, and certainly not thought worthy enough to be kept, let alone collected years later. I suppose that monthly updates to OS catalogues are a good example, in that when the next full catalogue appears, they will have become redundant. OS ephemera of some sort exists in most members' collections. They cannot help it; they come across an old leaflet and keep it, even if they only admit to collecting maps. Many years ago, I went to the National Library of Wales to look through their collection of early twentieth century Ordnance Survey catalogues. I must have been the only person to have done so, as about a dozen prize OS leaflets fell out during my visit. Things I had never seen before. I told Robert Davies, the then Map Librarian, who said that they would keep them together in a more secure place. Only last week I looked through some old Alan Godfrey catalogues and found a leaflet advertising the formation of the Charles Close Society. Tucked away for the future.

For me, the best examples of ephemera are the pre-1940 leaflets with a splash of red writing on them. My addiction to colour, I suppose. These most certainly will be the last things I ever give up. I could probably put together a list of my favourite pieces of OS ephemera, and as I typed, each one would be my all time favourite. So, maybe I should start again : Do I have a favourite piece of Ordnance Survey ephemera? No. I am incapable of choosing one from the many. There goes next week's piece as well.