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“A moorland mystery”
Andrew Darling
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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.
A moorland mystery

Andrew Darling

In 1813 the Ordnance Survey produced Sheet 30 of its first one-inch map of England (the ‘Old Series’). Entitled Camelford on indexes, the map covered part of north-eastern Cornwall, including a large area of the wild and sparsely populated highland district which forms part of the granite ‘spine’ of the peninsula, a spine which in neighbouring Devonshire surfaces as Dartmoor, named for the river which rises among its tors. The third significant expanse of moorland in the two most westerly counties is also named after its river – Exmoor.

The equivalent Cornish moorland was from ancient times similarly identified by reference to its principal watercourse – the Fowey, which rises in the heart of the uplands. A document of 1185 refers to Fawimore, and one of 1347 to Fowymor.

In Saxon times, a great Manor grew up on the south side of the Moor in the parish of St Neot, and this became known as Fawy-ton. Throughout the medieval period and into the sixteenth century, the name Foweymore was in common use. In 1538, John Leland wrote: “The River of Fawey risith in Fawey More … in a very wagmire in the side of an hill.” A lease of 1625 in the county records office refers to pasture on Fowey Moor in St Clether parish.¹

In 1813, however, on Sheet 30, the OS dispensed with this historic name. In its place, it substituted ‘Bodmin Moor’. “The name was apparently invented by the Ordnance Survey, and it has unfortunately supplanted the ancient name,” wrote the eminent Cornish scholar Dr Oliver Padel in 1988.² The two-inches-to-the-mile OS drawing on which Sheet 30 was based was produced eight years earlier, in 1805. It, too, refers to ‘Bodmin Moor’ (figure 1). Today, a little over two hundred years after the map’s publication, Bodmin Moor has become established as the name for the place (notwithstanding the fact that the town of Bodmin is not in fact located on the moor), and there seems no prospect of the old name being resurrected. Did the OS take a conscious decision to ignore the centuries preceding its one-inch survey? Richard Oliver ³ believes this is unlikely.

“In default of other evidence, it must be assumed that the name ‘Bodmin Moor’ was supplied by the surveyor on the evidence of local usage: presumably he asked local people in a position to know: ‘What’s this area called?’ Someone said ‘Bodmin Moor’. I can see no reason at all for the OS naming it Bodmin Moor off its own bat, particularly as Bodmin isn’t actually on it. It could equally well be Camelford Moor, Launceston Moor or Liskeard Moor, but Fowey Moor would be better than all of them. The ‘culprit’ for Bodmin Moor is far more likely to be a local worthy or savant than some Board of Ordnance bureaucrat. I very much

¹Kresen Kernow CF/1/986
 doubt that this was a ‘centrally imposed’ decision: a local (mis-)informer seems more likely.”

**Figure 1: Ordnance Survey Drawing 11 (two-inches-to-the-mile), produced 1805, and forming the basis for part of Sheet 30 of the ‘Old Series’, 1813. (British Library OSD11).**

**Figure 2: detail of OS ‘Old Series’ sheet 30 (National Library of Australia, accessed via Sheetfinder on CCS website)**

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The OS was not the first map-maker to dispense with the old name (although it is perhaps unfortunate that by virtue of the popularity of its products, its rechristening will have the greater and longer-lasting impact). The John Speed map of 1610 refers to the area simply as ‘The Moares’, while cartographers and engravers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries prefer Temple Moor, as evidenced by Joel Gascoyne in 1699, Robert Morden in 1708, and Thomas Osborne in 1748 (among others).

![Image: An Improved Map of Cornwall](image)

**Figure 3: Cowley’s ‘Improved Map of Cornwall’, 1744, showing Temple Moor.**

The name Temple Moor at least has the virtue of logic. Although now little more than a handful of homes and a small church in a cleft of the moor, it was a place of consequence for a considerable period. Founded by the Knights Templar in the twelfth century, and owned by the Knights Hospitallers for many years after the suppression of the Templars in 1314, the church was a welcome refuge for travellers caught in unfavourable weather or other disagreeable circumstances while crossing the bleak uplands. Being exempt from the jurisdiction of the Bishop at Exeter, it gained repute for other, less wholesome, reasons. “The place seems to have been a regular Gretna Green, where all sorts of irregularities were carried out with impunity,” wrote the historian Charles Henderson ⁵ - a view shared in 1602 by Sir Richard Carew: “The little parish called Temple, skirteenth this

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Hundred [Trigg], on the waste side thereof: a place, exempted from the Bishops iurisdiction, as once appertayning to the Templers, but not so from disorder; for if common report communicate with truth, many a bad mariage bargaine is there yerely slubbred vp.”

Place-names, of course, are constantly evolving and changing, but usually with some discernible reason. Why Fowey Moor should have been discarded by the OS is a mystery which does not appear to have any rational explanation.

**Acknowledgments and Endnote**

My grateful thanks to Richard Oliver and Oliver Padel for their help in the preparation of this article, and to Oliver Padel for the following note:

Whether the name Foymore actually referred to the whole of what we now call Bodmin Moor, or only to part of it in Altarnun and adjoining parishes, the area around where the River Fowey actually rises, has been a matter for conjecture. At least one local historian has suggested the latter, and it is true that the majority of references to Foymore do seem to refer to that area. However, I have found one reference in 1271 to ‘as much hay on Fauwemore as belongs to 1 acre in Kardynam’, which probably does not refer to that area, so the name may have denoted the whole of ‘Bodmin Moor’. I have also noticed a very late instance of Foy Moor (so spelt), in an advert of land for sale in the West Briton, 1844 (cited by RM Barton, Cornwall in the Mid Nineteenth Century (1971), p 111). I think that is the latest instance of it that I know -- probably (in this case) taken from an older document about the manorial rights of the land in question.

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6 Carew, Survey of Cornwall, 1602.