



# *Sheetlines*

The journal of  
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY  
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps

“Kerry musings”

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*Sheetlines*, 120 (April 2021), pp56-58

Stable URL: <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/sheetlines-articles/Issue120page56.pdf>

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Published by  
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY  
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps  
[www.CharlesCloseSociety.org](http://www.CharlesCloseSociety.org)

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***

Shame on me some might say, but I have never solved a quiz at the back of *Sheetlines*. More than that, I have never attempted to solve one. All I ever do is look at the small pictures, see whether I can recognise anything, and having done so, never return to that page. It is not my sort of thing at all.

Everyone will remember that the quiz topic in the last issue was castles. Well, as usual, I looked at them and was fascinated at how difficult they appeared this time. Far harder than usual, I thought. Where, oh where, does one begin? And then, for some reason, I turned back and read the previous page, naming the solvers of the previous quiz on bus stations and giving some of their comments. I had never done this before, and was not aware that such a page existed, so thoroughly do I read *Sheetlines*. And as with so much concerning the Ordnance Survey, I found it to be something both unexpected and interesting. A whole new world was revealed; an OS subset that I did not know existed. Needless to say, I then went through previous issues and read about earlier quizzes, and the dedicated band of solvers, so many of them, not that their task is ever easy. The reports convey a warm feeling of bonhomie amongst the group, which is strange, as I would assume they all work independently and any group cohesion is created by the reports and comments from the solvers, who obviously enjoy themselves, and come over as a really jolly crowd.

Reading the comments, one realises that many solvers are bursting to tell about themselves, their knowledge of, and enjoyment of maps. Or am I the last to have discovered this excellent feedback? I now have a vision of several tables of solvers sitting at an AGM lunch, enthusiastically discussing how they identified this or that in a recent quiz. I hesitate to continue, as I might embarrass or inhibit them, and no more notes will be sent in with the correct answers, which would make my newly discovered section of the journal far less interesting.

The first quiz appeared in issue 90, April 2011, with seven islands to be identified, accompanied by the first of the setter's humorous headings. However, the compiler missed out on any direct feedback from members as the answers were shown on the opposite page, which must have spoiled it for some, as 'Answers opposite' is irresistible. And that was it. No more. Until issue 103, August 2015, four years later.

When I decided to look at previous quizzes, I took down a couple of boxes of *Sheetlines*, plunged in and selected issue 102, which fell open at John Cole's piece on principal railway stations, and had a page of the familiar small 1:50,000 extracts, but was not a quiz. I wonder whether John's extracts inspired the compiler of the islands quiz and encouraged another offering, which duly arrived in the following issue.

The current format of twenty map extracts, very carefully prepared to seemingly exclude any hint of a clue, took time to arrive, and although the setter might wish to vary the format, as was done in the early days, the extracts are popular.

Though it might be an open secret, I do not know who sets the quiz, but whoever it is has my admiration, especially for their bravery, knowing they are going into battle with CCS members on their home ground. No, battle is the wrong word as the Puzzlemeister and solvers all seem to thoroughly enjoy the challenge. As the

series has developed, the setter constantly tries to keep one step ahead of the solvers, whilst the solvers cannot resist having a dig at the setter. Even conflict is too strong a word, constant nudging is more like it. Promoted to page 4, in issue 104, we were told that the last quiz was rather easy, as many identifying clues had been left showing, so this time most are missing. Sneaky? Not at all. The bus stations report in issue 119, noted some deliberately mis-leading clues, followed in a few days by 'another bumper bag of correct entries' being received, just as when it was noted that many members found the inclusion of a railway station a great help, and they were promptly omitted from the next batch of extracts .... to no avail. Can nothing stop these solvers solving?

Many solvers get help from the structure of the quiz; being in alphabetical order helps tremendously it seems, as does arranging the extracts from north to south, but wily old setter refuses to be outdone, so for the cathedrals quiz, the extracts were geographically arranged. Meaning? Well, by longitude we were eventually told, not National Grid, which would have had Truro and Bangor preceding St David's and Inverness respectively. Crafty. I gave up, never having started. And they loved it.

I liked the setter's instruction for the early ferries quiz, *Do you believe in ferries*, 'All you have to do is identify them'. All, one little word, put so mildly it sounds simple, but in my book that was as simple as performing brain surgery on yourself. In the end, there were a couple of hundred plus of the floatables identified, and still they kept arriving, *Ferry good effort*.

The solvers are sticklers for accuracy. 'No way Station Road, Luton could be considered a bus station ...', 'The two at Ramsgate were both coach stations ...'. Surely these comments were directed towards the Ordnance Survey, and not their friendly setter, who did take the blame for labelling Lancaster a small town. Returning to issue 115, I had assumed that the twenty extracts showing cathedrals, must require twenty cathedrals to be named, but no, 22 were intended and then another was spotted. Tee, hee, what fun. I think this shows the setter, wearing an adjudicator's hat, in a very favourable light, as I would not have known whether 22 or 23 cathedrals were meant to be identified, having missed the significance of 'Caths' in the title. The adjudicator also allowed both cathedrals and their towns to the question 'Can you identify these geographically arranged Caths?'. Knowing you are up against solvers who are very knowledgeable about both OS maps and their own specialist interests, it would be impossible to get the better of them, so be easy with the rules and let things go, allow them to show their prowess, '.... Elgin, (the most northerly bus station symbol on a printed map in the world?)', '.... more Aston Martins are sold in Wilmslow than anywhere else'. Would you like to argue with those who consider Mastermind too easy?

Similarly, when a perfectly simple quiz was set asking for 20 bridges to be identified, hands shot up at the front of the class to note that far more than twenty were present, and then went on to name all, provoking a retaliation by small towns being chosen as the next topic, and bewilderingly suggesting that perhaps nobody would get them all. Fat chance. Laying down such a challenge subsequently meant over 50 members were listed in the honours gallery of the next issue. And so it goes on.

The lists of solvers have a core of regulars, whose failure to submit solutions are noticed, and what should not be surprising, is that many names have appeared from the start, showing they could spot a good thing when they saw it. Members are attracted to the quiz for many different reasons, least of all the increasingly spectacular prizes. DV sees it as the only way to get his name mentioned in *Sheetlines*<sup>1</sup>, with someone else using it as a good excuse to get his maps out, whilst 'I am one of the *Disused Stations* website team as well as an OS 7th Series fan so it was a matter of honour to identify all of the stations correctly'. The reports have suggested a wide range of aids used to solve the quizzes, including being a member of ASLEF, but in the end surely it all comes down to easy access to the maps shown as extracts. I know that a lot of members own sets of the Seventh Series and 1:50,000, but find it hard to believe that all those who solve 1:50,000 quizzes own sets. In which case, what access do they have to this series? Or do they make it even more difficult by using the Seventh Series sheets alongside 1:50,000 extracts? It would drive me nuts to have to use a computer screen to view even a single sheet of either series, so how is it done without ending up a jibbering mess? Some have reported solving a quiz by going through their maps in numerical order, sheet by sheet, a feat I consider impossible on a small screen.

I had thought to end this piece with my own quiz offering, maybe paths in public parks. Lovely shapes would appear in the extracts, but it might be difficult to build in any clues so that the quest would not be totally impossible, or is that the same as suggesting that perhaps nobody would get them all. I then thought of four small boxes each with a series of hairpin bends, but finally decided to make it very hard with four boxes, each with a yellow minor road running across it, plus a few contours to make it easier. Of course, this would both go counter to the spirit of the thing, and secondly could still be solved with the sheet by sheet approach. I am sure that everyone could offer suggestions for future quizzes, but it is obviously difficult to be fair, whilst allowing multiple approaches, and for those who do not finish a quiz, to give satisfaction without disappointment. All of which are done admirably.

In a couple of issues, the quiz was referred to as 'a challenge', which rather appeals to me as a more apt term than quiz. These days it seems we crave quizzes. A few years ago, our local paper only had a feeble crossword, whilst now it has about eight pages of things to solve, most with Japanese names. Care should be taken that *Sheetlines* is never overwhelmed with such challenges, or it might get to the stage that a separate quiz supplement is called for. Should we arrive at such a point, please, please never ask me to pit my wits against the solvers in *Sheetlines*, as it would be way above me, though now that I am hooked on the quiz reports I will never again unwrap an issue and start flicking through it from the front. No, in future I will turn straight to the back, and read – Kerry musings.

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1 Sincere apologies to David Vaughan for such a cheap trick, but it does allow him the privilege of his own footnote.