“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

Regular readers will know that when it comes to finding Ordnance Survey maps I have always had more pleasure from the chase than owning the maps found. Especially when the chase involved more than tepidly trailing round book shops or fairs and just looking at what was on offer. For example, I might be told of some unusual OS maps in an obscure public collection; that a shop had paid the OS to produce a map publicising their business; or a government department had commissioned a special OS production. On hearing a snippet of promising information excitement kicked in, and the hunt was on.

A similar thing dogged me as a student: I would be reading a journal article and just had to follow up interesting footnotes. Half-way through an article, I would note a reference and head off to the journals section to look it up. And so often this would also have a seemingly must-read reference or two. If the original piece referred to a monograph, I would hot-foot it to the card catalogue in the library, and whilst flicking through would come across a totally unconnected but interesting sounding title, not even my subject, and was off again. My educational reading was very much like watching a pin-ball machine being played.

These days, on-line library catalogues, especially university catalogues, are increasingly showing thumbnail pictures of a book cover beside the item. And sometimes an image of a map. Some have arrows either side, so that one can move backwards or forwards through the sequence. A great time-waster if ever I saw one. But brilliant.

Catalogues, bibliographies, cartobibliographies, lists, they all demand my attention and usually give pleasure. Why? Because almost any good list will contain something, interesting, unusual or rare. And just seeing such an item listed, confirmation of its existence, can have a tingle factor, whether one decides to seek out the item or not.

So, what tingle factor items am I talking about?

A very short while before the society came into existence, I received a few catalogues from Alan Godfrey. In those days Alan sold used OS maps and had not started his reprints. For a novice collector, these really were gripping reading, with listings of unknown map series and generally exciting stuff. The most memorable was an illustration of the Old Sarum cover. Truly wonderful times.

And then came the Ordnance Survey catalogues issued by John Coombes, peaking with the 94-page Catalogue 84. I can remember it arriving a few days before an AGM at Birkbeck, and the person sitting next to me mentioned that he had only worked his way through half of it so far. We then has a discussion on catalogue tactics. Do you ring up once you have marked a few items you want, and risk letting someone find something a little further on whilst you are telephoning, or do you go through the whole lot and make one call, leaving the line free for competitors in the meantime? My tactic was always to phone as soon as I saw something essential, and was prepared to make more calls if necessary. But I digress.
After we started selling maps, I became more acquainted with auction catalogues. Before moving to Wales, I received catalogues of old woodworking tools from Christies, South Kensington. These were my main interest, rather than OS maps, even though I could not afford to buy anything from Christies. A great advantage was that one could go and not only see the things at a viewing, but also handle and discuss them with others viewing the lots. Just like CCS members, the woodworking tool fraternity were very open in sharing information. Similarly, with book and map auctions, one can usually handle the lots offered; a tremendous advantage, and recommended to anyone learning about a subject.

To find the overlooked wonders, one has to study any list carefully, and in 1995 one lot at Y Gelli Auctions in Hay-on-Wye, caught my eye:

23 **White (Capt. T.P.)** AN ALBUM OF ORIGINAL DRAWINGS. Ca 1866-1876. Topographical/Archaeological drawings in pen & ink, pen & wash and pencil. Initialled with White’s monogram. One or two removed from album – possibly for publication. Orig. morocco gt. Rubbed & sl. scuffed. A.e.g. 4to.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SKETCHES IN SCOTLAND. KINTYRE/KNAPDALE. 1873;1875.

2 vols. Fo. Litho plts, maps & ills. White’s copies, the first signed on t.p. Cont. half-calf gt a little stained at head of spine; Orig. cloth gt. (3) …. £150-250.

Nothing in the description to suggest any OS connection, but the name sounded familiar, and a quick check brought to hand a 1975 reprint of his 1886 work *The Ordnance Survey of the United Kingdom*. So, off we went to the viewing. My memory is that the book was indeed a sketch book, but that the sketches were ‘slight’ and not full bodied. Skeletal might be the word to describe them. Not a must have item in itself. I cannot recall anything that associated the sketches with the Ordnance Survey apart from the artist, and could not challenge the final bid of £270 plus commission.

Only later, did I come across: Henry James' *Notes on the parallel roads of Lochaber, with illustrative maps and sketches from the Ordnance Survey of Scotland*, 1874 with sketches by T. P. White. Indeed, White’s work is praised in the text: “The appearance of these beaches in the landscape will be illustrated by the sketches, principally from the master hand of Captain White, R.E., who had charge of the “hill-sketching” branch of the survey of this part of Scotland.” Were the missing sketches used in the above volumes?

Although auction catalogues were fun, the internet is now offering lists of all sorts. Indeed, I see websites as just a list of pages, sometimes harbouring great things. And for those who have not investigated the Charles Close Society website, perhaps I can give you a flavour?

Ordnance Survey catalogues are fascinating and essential for anyone compiling an OS related list. But how many were there and where can one consult them? *Catalogue of the maps and plans and other publications of the Ordnance Survey of England and Wales, to 31st December 1862*. Colonel Sir Henry James, RE, FRS, Director. Southampton. This is the first entry in Roger
Hellyer’s 53-page list of such things on the society website. Sounds good, but the line above is the one that causes the tingle: Catalogues published in octavo format, with red paper covers. I have never seen any of the twenty that are listed with red covers; only the dull buff covers introduced in November 1882. Surely, to own a red covered catalogue is worth at least an arm or leg? A couple of fingers just to see one?

Or again, we are all familiar with the small booklets known as OS Descriptions, but who else fancies a copy of O.S. 404. Character of writing for Ordnance Survey plans, November, 1881, which appears to be the start of this series? All are listed on the society's website.

Given the chance to own anything listed on the CCS website, it would be the books and paperwork that would be at the top of my list. Having said that, it will not appear strange when I say that perhaps the site’s finest section is the ‘Digital image collection’. After all, maps are our main concern.

If so many rare maps were assembled in one place for viewing one’s concentration would rapidly decline, leaving most unappreciated. But at home, we can work through them a few at a time. Just click on the green heading and the scan will open up. Hold down the cursor, drag the area viewed about, and zoom in to see more detail, but do not start looking at this if you have to go out in ten minutes.

Many images are the only ones recorded, which hopefully will encourage someone to look for others. Importantly, and most usefully, each map has a description of why it is in the collection. A few extracts from such descriptions:

Image 15 – War Revision sheet 74 is thus recorded in this unique copy.
Image 21 – two copies in private collections are the only ones so far recorded.
Image 39 – Possibly the earliest attempt of the Ordnance Survey to publish a one-inch map in colour, …. Two copies of each sheet only are recorded.

Consider Image 24, a one-inch map headed Plymouth from 1914, in a scruffy condition, having been previously folded and unfolded many times, with light stains and darkness along the folds. Typical of many maps offered for sale at the rear of folded maps in a battered old cardboard box. And so often, such maps are not inspected by map collectors. Surely, anyone looking at this map will, at the very least, think it unusual. A sheet numbered 144, implying part of a standard series, contoured, but with the addition of hachures and hill shading. Even to those who are aware of the Aldershot sheets in the same style, hachures and hill shading on a sheet 144 will seem strange. Forty years ago, the 1913 'Killarney District' in the same style, was the holy grail amongst collectors, but I am sure that there are other sheets in this style yet to be discovered, just as this sheet was previously unrecorded. Similarly image 87.

The Ordnance Survey, when experimenting with new styles, has often sent

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1 https://www.charlesclosesociety.org/Ordnance Survey/Bibliographies and catalogues/Catalogues.
3 https://www.charlesclosesociety.org/Online resources/Maps/Rare maps.
copies of its current thinking out for consultation. Print codes 4001 and 4002 in the Seventh Series are always on a wants list, yet only exist as flat sheets, which were circulated mostly to individuals, institutions and official bodies for comment. Similarly, when the same series was to be replaced, four maps showing suggested alternatives were distributed in minimalist glossy white covers. All are out there to be found, and anyone who studies the maps, and more particularly, the descriptions in this CCS collection, must soon develop a feeling for what might be an unusual map, and if they open saddish folded maps, could well find a gem, if not a whole treasure.

And when you have worked you way through the 'Digital image collection', just click on the link for the Charles Close Society Archives, where hours can be spent, with something for everyone. I already have a list of things to look at when I next visit Cambridge.

However, the most intriguing reference I know from any list is from the Catalogue of the Royal Engineers Corps Library, at the Horse Guards, Whitehall, London. 1913. On page 293, under the subject heading ‘Surveying’ is the following entry: MILITARY SURVEY OF ENGLAND. Major-Gen. W. Roy. Original MS. N.D. Sounds interesting?

One-inch (1:63,360) map of England and Wales, sheet 144 Plymouth, 1914