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“The British Association Bristol Meeting
Excursion Map, 1930”

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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.

The British Association Bristol Meeting Excursion Map, 1930

Chris Higley

Possibly one of the last sheets to be published by the Ordnance Survey under Brigadier Jack's Director-Generalship, the *British Association Topographical Map for the Bristol Meeting 1930* is a composite of parts of Sheets 27, 28, 32 and 33 of the layered edition of the OS half-inch, Large Sheet Series, *figure 1*. Covering 58 miles by 30 miles, an area stretching from Clevedon in the west to Hungerford in the east, and from Glastonbury in the south to Moreton in Marsh in the north, the map presents a panoramic view of a swathe of southern England and Monmouthshire in the inter-war years.

This is one of my favourite maps. I can easily picture British Association members, pipe-smoking chaps and blue-stockinged ladies, climbing aboard their charabanc for a day out. Two things, however, puzzled me: why a small-scale map covering such a large area, and why the generous print run, as deduced from the print code, of 3000 copies? This is at least comparable with contemporary reprints of regular sheets in the half-inch series.

The report of the meeting is available online and makes clear the sheer scale of the event.¹ The meeting took place from 3 - 10 September, 1930 and 2639 tickets were sold. To quote a notice of the arrangements:²

‘The Bristol district is rich in features of historic, archæological, and scientific interest. In fact, owing to the wide choice of material considerable difficulty has been experienced in arranging excursions which do not omit points of special importance; but it is believed that all tastes have been catered for.

One interesting feature of the week will be a series of short tours during the day of historic Bristol and of the Avon Gorge and its vicinity. Also the list of sectional excursions is unusually large.

Like many large cities of to-day, Bristol is not blessed with a surplus of hotel accommodation, but the ancient city of Bath and also Weston-super-Mare are in easy distance of Bristol by car or train, and have special features which may appeal to many for the week of the meeting.’

Attendees were divided into fourteen subject-based sections, each with their own programme of lectures and outings. In total there were over forty visits and excursions scheduled. Some sections arranged morning lectures with trips out most afternoons. For example: Section D, Engineering, went to Portishead Power Station on ‘Thursday 4 September, ‘Tea by invitation of Bristol Corporation Electricity Department’. On the Friday the engineers visited the Bristol Aeroplane Company at Filton and on the following Tuesday, the Westland Aircraft Works, Yeovil.

Longer excursions were arranged for the weekend: on Saturday, 6 September Section M, Agriculture, ventured on a whole-day expedition to the farms of Mr. E. R. Debenham, at Briantspuddle, Dorset, ‘proceeding via Castle Cary, Sparkford, Sherborne and Dorchester, and returning to Bristol via Blandford, Shaftesbury, Warminster and Bath’.³

¹ At <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/30515662>; British Association for the Advancement of Science, *Report of the ninety-eighth meeting*, accessed 26 August 2023.

² ‘The Bristol Meeting of the British Association’, *Nature*, Volume 126, no. 3168, 19 July 1930.

³ Ernest Debenham, of the well-known drapery business, acquired several thousand acres of land around

Not content with the six excursions arranged for Section C during their week in Bristol, twenty-five geologists moved on to Cornwall after the meeting, for separate series of visits arranged by the Camborne School of Mines.

Some of the more serious-minded disciplines did not stray far from the lecture theatre. Section D, Psychology, arranged but a single outing to Stoke Park Colony, for ‘demonstrations in Mental Deficiency and its Recognition’, while Section A, the mathematicians and physicists, did not arrange any outings at all. This does not mean that their week was without its own interest, as *The Mathematical Gazette* reported: ⁴

‘The great sensation was, however, undoubtedly provided by Dr. Dirac, who proposed to explain away the apparently solid and massive proton as merely the absence of an electron from a possible state of negative energy; ... In spite of some quantitative difficulties, Dr. Dirac succeeded in arousing the enthusiasm of a large audience, though many of them seemed to feel that the chief beauty of his theory was its appearance of being utter nonsense.’

Three years later Paul Dirac won the Nobel Prize for Physics.

Although the participants undoubtedly enjoyed their outings, these were treated with proper academic respect. In addition to the map, a series of printed handbooks for the general excursions were provided. Roger Hellyer notes that a street map of Bristol was also included in the package.⁵ The excursion map was certainly of more long-term value than most of the handouts that one picks up at conferences. BA members would have been just the sort of people to store it away safely in a drawer for future use, and this may explain why copies in good condition still come up from time to time on the second-hand market. Much more elusive is the half-inch *British Association topographical map for the Leeds meeting 1927*, only found by Hellyer in private collections although, from the print code, also apparently published in an edition of 3000 copies.⁶

The 1930 map is mounted on cloth with an integral cover showing the arms of the City of Bristol. It is, seemingly, a straight reproduction of segments of the current editions of its component sheets with no additional revision. Names cut through by the neat lines are not made good and the label ‘Welsh Grounds’, which occurs on both Sheets 27 and 32, remains duplicated on the composite sheet.

The two-inch squaring is also reproduced directly from the parent sheets. This has a peculiar effect as half-inch regular sheets were 27 inches wide and thus the squaring required 13 two-inch columns plus a one-inch column, ‘14’, down the eastern edge of each sheet. The excursion map combines this column from Sheets 27 and 32 with the westernmost two-inch column from Sheets 28 and 33 resulting, as shown in *figure 2*, in an anomalous three-inch column down the middle of the sheet!

As a result of new security regulations in 1924, erasures of sensitive information are

Briantspuddle in 1914. He built a model village and experimented in farming by modern scientific methods.

⁴ Patrick Du Val, ‘The British Association meeting, Bristol, 1930’, *The Mathematical Gazette*, **15**, 211, January 1931, p. 292.

⁵ Private communication.

⁶ Roger Hellyer and Richard Oliver, *Ordnance Survey small scale maps*, Charles Close Society, 2023, p. 202.

found on one-inch sheets from 1925 onwards.⁷ There seems to have been no great urgency in applying the policy to the half-inch map. The name 'Battery Point' at Portishead was replaced by the anodyne 'Portishead Point' on one-inch sheets at about the time that the British Association map was published, but here we still have the old, 'sensitive' name. The regular half-inch Sheet 33 shows the military camps on Salisbury Plain in surprising detail for the scale of the map. All are still named on the British Association map, including the anachronistic 'R.F.C. Barracks' at Netheravon, *figure 3*. The Royal Flying Corps had been absorbed into the new RAF some twelve years previously.⁸

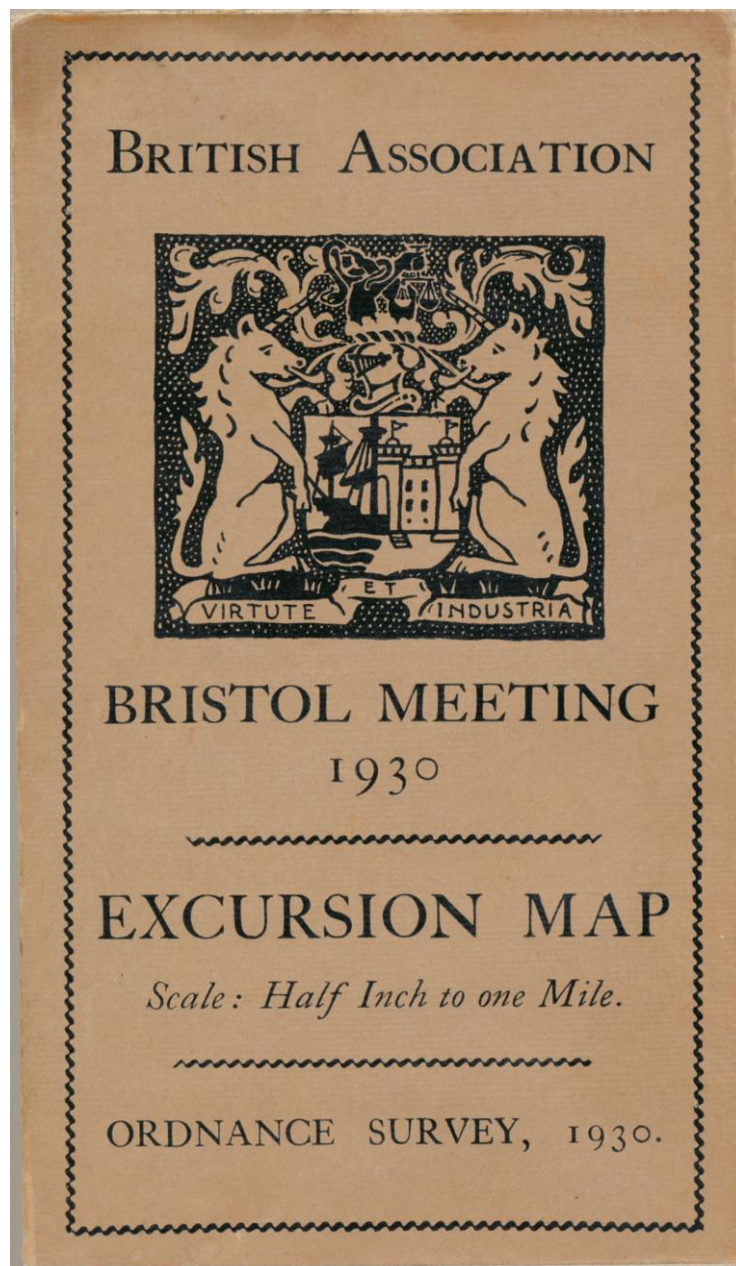


Figure 1 : The cover features the arms of the City of Bristol and a more concise title than that on the map itself.

⁷ Yolande Hodson, *Popular maps*, Charles Close Society, 1999, p. 157.

⁸ The detail of the army camps was retained when Sheet 33 was reprinted a year later in 1931, although some names, including 'R.F.C. Barracks', and 'Experimental Sta.' at Porton Down, were excised.

HICAL MAP FOR THE BRISTOL MEETING 1930.

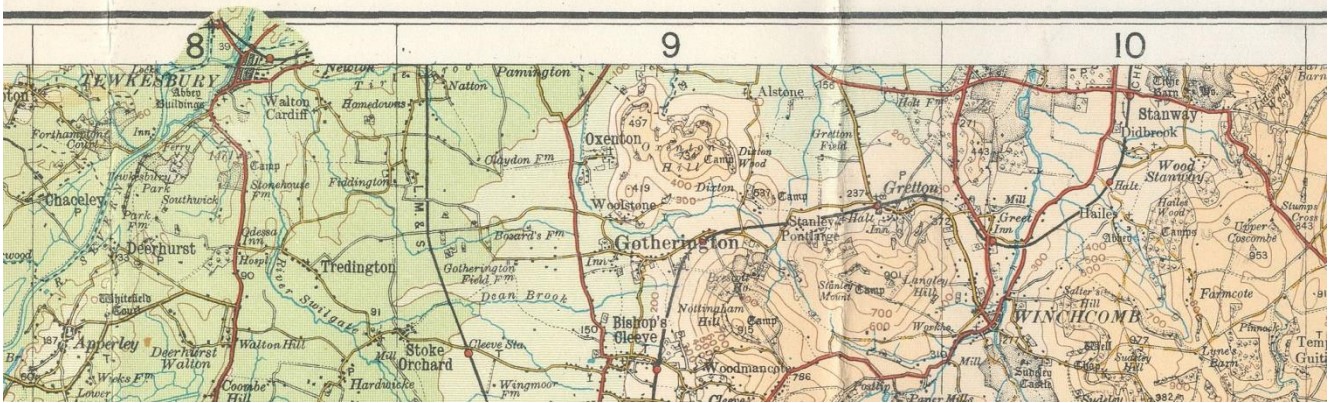


Figure 2 : The inconsistent three-inch column. Tewkesbury alone is accorded a marginal extrusion for no apparent reason.



Figure 3 : Military sites in the Bulford area named and shown in detail.