



Sheetlines

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

“AGM address: Cassini Publishing”

Brian Quinn

Sheetlines, 82 (August 2008), pp.22-24

Stable URL: <http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/AGM.pdf>

*This article is provided for personal, non-commercial use only.
Please contact the Society regarding any other use of this work.*

Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
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.

The 2008 AGM at Kingston

It must be the sign of a healthy Society that so many members come to our annual meetings – surely they are not all coming just for the map market, are they? This year we looked for a venue near London, and John King, Senior Assistant Head, kindly offered us accommodation at Tiffin School, Kingston upon Thames, and also roped in his family to help on the day.

Once again the Football Association had decided to hold the Cup Final on the same day and Waterloo Station was thronged with Portsmouth fans while, coming from Wales, I had to evade the thousands from Cardiff. We really should ask the FA to be more considerate.

Proceedings opened with a self-deprecating address by Brian Quinn (see below). Despite his tone, what came through was the tremendous productivity that can be achieved by a few really good people, unburdened with a corporate bureaucracy and using modern technology. We have had the same message from several other small organisations we have visited recently and, having once needed approval by eleven separate university committees for one two-page document, I can only applaud.

The formal business meeting was conducted briskly and the minutes will be found in the accompanying *Almanack*. Matters concluded with the well-deserved election of Ian O'Brien to honorary membership and the presentation of the Hodson Award to John Cruickshank. In the absence of other photographers, the editor, sitting too far back, tried to record the ceremonies with his pocket camera and apologises for the suboptimal images on page 25.

Lunch followed and Rodney Leary, organising the day's events with his usual efficiency, had collaborated with John King in bringing in caterers who not only provided homemade food but also understood how to serve it rapidly to large numbers of hungry people.

After this, John Davies led a presentation of his ideas for the Society's website, while Chris Board acted as gatekeeper, ensuring no entry to the four classrooms holding the map market until the magic hour.

Chris Higley

Presentations at the Annual General Meeting

John Cruickshank (on the left) receives the Hodson Award from the Chairman, Dr Christopher Board, 'for outstanding scholarship in piecing together an account of German cartography ... and a series of Sheetlines articles of great authority and clarity'.



Ian O'Brien is made an honorary member in recognition of 'his years of distinguished service in the Directorate of Overseas Surveys and his many contributions to the work of the Society, particularly in the safeguarding of historic material for CCS Archives'.

AGM address: Cassini Publishing Ltd

Brian Quinn

After I was kindly invited by Dr Christopher Board to address the CCS AGM in May, I realised that at all cost I had to avoid talking about the history of one-inch Ordnance Survey mapping between 1805 and 1946. Over the last couple of years I've picked up enough information to be able to give talks and write articles on the subject aimed at laymen, but this would never to be good enough when addressing real experts.

Instead, I decided to concentrate on something I would know more about than anyone else in the room: Cassini Publishing Ltd. As several CCS members had given us excellent advice (which we had not always heeded), and as many others had bought our maps, I also hoped that my remarks would be of interest.

Cassini Maps was founded three years ago (originally as Timeline Maps, of which more later). What we set out to do, and have achieved, was to scan, combine, enlarge and re-project the major one-inch OS maps of England & Wales and re-publish them to match *Landranger*. It was a formidable undertaking, and one that many said could not be done. For several reasons – mainly Adobe Photoshop and the skill and hard work of one of my partners, James Anderson – we did it.

This moment of self-congratulation was about the last one I allowed myself at the AGM. As with so many enterprises, success (if it happens) is often achieved despite truly awesome blunders; and it was on the theme of blunders that I continued my talk. Blunders are often more instructive than triumphs, and usually far more entertaining to listen to.

Our first blunder was what we called the maps. The first forty we produced, of the Old Series covering Southern England, we named 'Historical Maps'. We must have thought this was a good idea, but I can't now recall why. We knew we were going to be doing other series that would need to be differentiated, and a perfectly good title, 'Old Series', already existed. Not a great start.

That wasn't all. To save money, and in defiance of the publisher's axiom that you judge a book by its cover, we used the same cover image on all forty maps. I bought the photo from eBay for £6. It was of a venerable, bearded old man with a terrified looking child on his knee. The more maps we printed, the worse it looked.

By then we were confronted with another problem. We, like OS's surveyors, had started in the south, where there were no railways, and moved north, where there were suddenly rather a lot of them. We were too busy publishing maps to work out how we would solve the problem of railways chugging along quite happily on one sheet and then vanishing as this joined an adjoining one from an earlier, pre-railway, date. We had been warned that the Old Series had never been designed to be joined up, and were starting to see why.

At about the same time, people began to point out that the dates on some maps appeared wrong, as they showed features that didn't then exist. We saw then something we should have seen before, that the Old Series sheets were often re-published with new features, such as railways, over-engraved but no change to the marginalia to reflect the reprint date. On the covers, we'd given only the dates of the entire Old Series (1805-74); another error and one which added to the confusion.

There seemed three ways to solve this. One was to rescan the sheets being sure to use only originals. The second was to embark on what threatened to be months of research to

establish reprint dates of every sheet we had used. The third was to add a general note to every map covering this issue. Expediency triumphed, as expediency so often does, and we chose the third option. Anything else would have caused massive delays and been likely to drive Timeline Maps out of existence.

As it happened we need not have worried, for we did not own the name anyway. Despite our checks when we started, we discovered by chance in April 2006 that another company had registered the 'Timeline Maps' trademark and intended to use it.

It was an ugly moment. We'd done what seemed the hard part, combining and re-projecting the Old Series, and had about forty titles, perhaps 35,000 maps, in stock as a result. On every one of these the series title was unspecific, the cover image unsuitable, the dates ambiguous and the maps inconsistent, while the company name actually belonged to someone else.

Although it didn't seem so then, it was the best thing that could have happened to us. Most of these blunders individually, or even collectively, would not have made us stop; a car with one headlight, a smashed window and a cardboard number plate is still driveable, although neither elegant nor likely to engender confidence in its owner. The company-name issue, however, was like having all the wheels fall off or, more accurately, discovering on being stopped by the police that it isn't your car after all. We were forced to pause, re-think and start again. The results are, we believe, a vast improvement.

Don't think that was the end of our blunders. To give just one example, Richard Oliver clearly told us why using the black-hills New Series for our Past & Presents would be a disaster. We didn't realise how right he was until sixteen titles had been published.

In our defence, I would say that we could not have made these mistakes theoretically. No amount of consultation or consideration could have prevented them all. Humans have a great capacity to decide what they are going to do and then ignore or trivialise all evidence that suggests why it won't work. Only a warehouse full of 35,000 flawed maps brought it home to us. But we're still here. We've made plenty of blunders so far and there are plenty more we can make in the future. Please don't hesitate to tell us when you spot the next one ...