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“Visit to Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon”

Gerry Jarvis and Andrew Janes

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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.

Visit to the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon

1 April 2009

Gerry Jarvis and Andrew Janes



John Davies had to withdraw from this visit shortly before it took place, so Gerry Zierler and I volunteered to cover for him. When I was visits organiser I liked to get new names on the write-ups, but with so little time I wasn't very confident. However, on the day I discovered Andrew Janes, one of three attendees from The National Archives, so we have an interesting slant in the second report.

Peter Elliott, the Map Curator at Hendon, opened the visit by saying it was the 91st birthday of the RAF. Unfortunately no birthday cake, nor were there 91 maps to look at, but only because of the limitations of space to display them. Peter had put together a very interesting display from the First World War to the present day, covering many aspects of the relationships between maps and flyers. He commented that the majority of the maps in the collection had not come from corporate sources, but from pilots, who never appeared to throw a map away. What better candidature for membership of the CCS!

I do not intend to produce a list of the maps displayed, but just comment on a couple that particularly appealed to me. The first was a German map from the start of the Second World War showing the South Coast of England, with a normal map across the top of the sheet, but a pilot's eye view of the same area at the bottom. The second was an exhibit about music records sent to POWs. These were actually hollow and contained an escape



Escape maps and money smuggled to POWs inside records

GJ

map on tissue paper. I wonder if the German authorities became suspicious of the number of broken records?

The other pleasure from the visit was the opportunity to wander around the museum, which contains many aeroplanes which I can relate to my childhood. To conclude the visit Gerry Zierler thanked Peter on our behalf for an excellent visit.

Gerry Jarvis

As a map archivist, I was certain to find the RAF Museum's Department of Research and Information Services professionally, as well as personally, interesting. Being still quite new to the archive profession, I have seen relatively few military maps and was not fully aware of the variety of maps that exist relating to airborne attack and defence. I am not sure which I find more impressive: the sophisticated grasp that the military cartographers had of the potential uses and reuses of maps and of the needs of serving airmen, or the skill with which they fulfilled those needs.

An insight into another institution and its collections always offers scope for reflection. The museum is obviously a much smaller repository than my workplace, The National Archives, and whereas the museum has acquired most of its maps through private donations, ours have come from government departments, often hidden within files of documents. Despite these obvious differences, the similarities were more striking than I had expected. In particular, many of the examples that we saw were specially overprinted or annotated in manuscript. As with so much of the material at The National Archives, it is these unique additions – often testifying to the difficult and dangerous circumstances in which they had been used – that really make the maps fascinating as objects and records of past events. The museum also has a strong collection of plans and photographs of RAF sites and buildings, which is useful for me to know as such items are popular with researchers.

My favourite out of the maps on display was a lighthouse recognition chart dating from 1944.¹ This chart shows the locations of lighthouses on the North Sea coasts of Britain, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark and is surrounded by a border consisting of views of each lighthouse. The result is both a practical tool and an extremely visually appealing object. My second favourite, also showing the North Sea during the Second World War, was a map of the Thames Estuary produced for the use of German pilots during air raids. Being specially made for use at night, this had been produced in high-visibility colours, with a bright, almost fluorescent, yellow background! I have seen very few maps that were so memorable.

Peter Elliott's concluding comment that he had enjoyed hosting such appreciative visitors is a sentiment that I very much share. Curators always enjoy showing off 'our' maps and other holdings to a knowledgeable and enthusiastic audience. My colleagues and I look forward to seeing some of you at The National Archives on 29 October.

Andrew Janes

¹ GSGS 4481, sheet 6.