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“An unusual collection”
John Cole

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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.
An unusual collection

John Cole

Although I did not originally consider it as such, I have it on the very best authority (Richard Oliver) that mine is indeed a map collection.

In effect it is a 1:1250 National Grid map collection, albeit the majority is reduced for economical reasons to 1:2500. Its commencement can be traced to my investigations ten years ago into the bypassed 1:2500 map.\(^1\) I had discovered that the easiest and cheapest way to identify these was to examine the earliest 1:10,560 survey diagrams when these sheets were compiled from mainly post-1945 1:2500 map revision. So far so good, but when I examined that for the Hants/Dorset sheet SZ09NE I was rather taken aback to find a 1:2500 map dated 1944 and another (to its immediate south) 1945. I did indeed obtain a copy of the 1944 sheet, a description of which appeared in Sheetlines 64.

Next came an investigation into revision point density on chain surveyed 1:1250 maps. An economic way of pursuing this was to obtain A4 quadrants of 1:2500 sheets which, if carefully copied, would give the relevant 1:1250 quadrant plus about a third of that adjoining. The only ‘losses’ were house numbers and some pavements in narrow streets if an early re-draw – or just house numbers if an early photographic reduction. If out of copyright, the full map could often be obtained and, in A3 sections, the four 1:1250 quadrants.

The vast majority were thus obtained from collections in public libraries. Others came from record offices,\(^2\) university map libraries and even a museum and a history centre. There were remarkable variations in charges, from free (but not on a second application when my name was recalled!) to expensive, which led in some half a dozen cases to my deciding not to bother or to try another source. Occasionally there was friction, and this was after I had framed a more or less standard application which usually worked well. One library declined to fold their maps to obtain the sectors I was after, whilst another claimed all theirs to be in a folder and impossible to extract.

If the maps were, as in the majority of cases, still in copyright, OS rules permitted that a single A4 copy from a single map could be supplied provided it was for private study purposes. Thus my application stated it was for such study into old city or town centres, railways, canals, industry etc., and into OS procedures of the time (which included revision point density). A rather complicated point arising from this is that an offshoot of my private study was an article for Sheetlines. Reproduction of copyright material in Sheetlines is covered by an Ordnance Survey Copyright Licence and since my twenty-five inch (Sheetlines 64) and fifty inch (Sheetlines 67) articles were to be viewable in the OS Library I was not exactly being secretive about my map sources.

Again, if the maps were inside copyright, a declaration had usually to be signed. Even if outside, some libraries still require such a declaration. The result is usually a rubber stamp – generally lightly done and not obscuring anything important, but occasionally the reverse! On odd occasions my specification of ‘as near to grid lines as possible i.e. maximum map; minimum margins’ was not adhered to. There is also further word of warning that these are purely copies and the map itself may not be pristine or at worst a photocopy anyway. If the result was particularly bad, charges were often waived – or waived as a result of protest!

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\(^1\) ‘Passing by’, Sheetlines 50 and 58.
\(^2\) Only a few as they tend to be expensive.
After a time I began to find these copies highly addictive. Moreover in some important instances where Alan Godfrey has yet to come up with a map, e.g. Cardiff, Swansea, Kings Lynn etc., I was able to ‘jump the gun’ as it were. But worried as I was about this addiction, I felt it was time to think about calling a halt, having exceeded the equivalent of 1,300 1:1250 maps and unlikely to add the remaining 55,000 or so to complete the collection. To this end I rounded things off by obtaining the actual 1:1250s in A3 form (or in odd cases A1s) for those city centres I had previously been unable to capture at 1:2500 – some only just out of copyright.

In addition to the A1s, A3s and (mainly) A4s, I have some fifty year old chart paper maps, both 1:1250 and 1:2500, most completed by myself; a small collection of similar in $1 \times 1$ km (or quarter km$^2$) format out of date mapping re-cycled to act as butt joint plate containers. These could be opened out into their original state minus four triangular cut-outs. And finally there are the plastic interim documents for two 1:1250 mapped towns surveyed by private contract in the 1980s that I salvaged at the end of their usage.

A small proportion of the copies are basic 1:2500 areas, a few of which were subsequently upgraded to 1:1250, some of these being listed in Sheetlines 64. Three complete 1:2500 maps (in A3 form) for West Lothian, a small batch of 1:2500 A4s for Leicestershire and a single one for Staffordshire were obtained during the investigations into the bypassed maps.

A few final notes: the number of 1:1250 A4 reductions sought averaged four or more depending on the size of the built up area, and how much of the city or town centre could be captured on one copy. As for larger areas: over eighty for London.

A map collector’s lament from ‘Kerry Musings’ in Sheetlines 65: ‘I’m not finding anything these days.’ ‘So why don’t you look for something else?’ ‘I would if I could think of something.’ Just in case the odd reader of my article (who is not already wholeheartedly in the Alan Godfrey large scale camp) thinks it might be a good idea to form a similar collection, if only for his own home town, a few added comments: reduction of the 1:1250 map to 1:2500 unfortunately ceased in 1973, though by this time about four fifths of the 1:1250 total had been published. Post and packing have gone up since I stopped, and there is also the occasional service charge. Specification, as mentioned, is important and most of all the grid reference which some librarians still have difficulty with. Some elderly and much handled maps have been mounted in sections. And some which are themselves copies were virtually impossible to copy with any degree of clarity.

What do other members collect and why? I should be delighted to publish some more letters or short articles on the subject in future issues of Sheetlines. – CJH

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3 For description see Sheetlines 65, 60.