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Richard Oliver

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The Cassini Old Series and Past and Present issues

Richard Oliver

A specimen of the first instalment of the Cassini issue of the Ordnance Survey 1:63,360 Old Series was reviewed in *Sheetlines* 74.\(^1\) At that time the publisher was called Timeline; now it is called Cassini, and the series is now complete, at any rate for England and Wales.\(^2\) The maps, both the Old Series and the new Past and Present series, seem to be on sale fairly widely, and there should be no great difficulty in obtaining local sheets, at any rate, from chain bookshops.\(^3\)

This is the third complete ‘reproduction’ of the Old Series to appear, at any rate in conventional paper form: the others are in sheet form by David & Charles, published 1969-71, and still available at £4.99 per sheet, and in a series of eight volumes by Harry Margary, published 1975-92, of which only Volume VI (Wales) is still available.\(^4\) Both series were edited by J B Harley, unassisted for David & Charles, and helped by various hands (including this reviewer’s) for Margary. The David & Charles series used a mixed bag of originals from the early 1860s onwards, which meant that, outside parts of northern England, the maps were hybrids, subject to the addition of railways and other partial revision, and thus not always representative of what had originally been published, never mind surveyed. The ‘First Edition’ claims were rendered frankly risible by eight of the sheets being based on fully revised re-engravings of the 1830s and 1840s. The Margary series was based as far as practicable on first or at any rate very early states, and the accompanying cartobibliographies enabled readers to ‘filter out’ the additions. Both David & Charles and Margary had notes which elucidated original field survey and revision dates, which are particularly important for the Old Series. Taken together, one can learn a lot from the editorial matter, but there is no good concise history of the Old Series.\(^5\)

The Cassini offering differs from the previous two in that the mapping has been enlarged by 1.2672 to 1:50,000, the National Grid has been superimposed, and the original sheet lines have been discarded in favour of those of the current 1:50,000 Landranger. The recasting on modern sheet lines ought to help sales, but it has the attendant disadvantage that the component sheets have to be joined. This sometimes results in a grinding discordance. Along the Preston–Hull line on sheet 107, where 1820s and 1850s material have been joined, this may be unavoidable; elsewhere it may reflect variable plate-wear on the individual impressions used as a starting-point, together with deficiencies in edge-matching the originals. There are also difficulties where sheets in different states of revision have been

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\(^1\) Sheet 189, reviewed by Chris Higley in *Sheetlines* 74 (2005), 45-7.
\(^2\) Strictly speaking, it is not *quite* complete, as only sheets 75, 80, 81 and 85-204 have been published, so that some areas adjacent to the Scottish border are not available. The change of name was an enforced one as, some time after an application had been made to register the name Timeline, it was found to have been ‘bagged’ by someone else. It seems extraordinary in this age of instant communication that there is no online register which would enable such a point to be settled within nanoseconds.
\(^3\) In case of difficulty, the company’s website is [www.cassinimaps.com](http://www.cassinimaps.com). My comments here are based on copies of sheets 107, 113, 122, 176-8, 187 and 192 and *Exeter and Exmouth* obtained by purchase, and sheet 110, *Ely, Haddenham & Littleport* and the trial sheet *Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester* supplied by Cassini. I am also indebted to Dan Réem for elucidation on several points.
\(^4\) At least, that is my current understanding: a web search will elucidate current availability and prices.
\(^5\) The nearest approach seems to be Richard Oliver, ‘Ordnance Survey one-inch Old Series sheets: some notes on development and dating’, *Sheetlines* 50 (1997), 11-31.
Figure 1. Old Series sheet 27 (first published 1809: late printing), with grid added, 1996.

Figure 2. Old Series sheet 85 (nominally published 1824, actually published 1825, late printing of geological version), with grid added, 1996.
Figure 3. Old Series sheet 54 S.E. (1831: late printing), with grid added, 1996.

Figure 4. Old Series sheet 48 N.W. (1838: late printing of Index to Tithe Survey version), with grid added, 1996. All figures have been reduced to approximately 70% of true size.
used; thus on sheet 110, at SK 020950, a railway is left ‘hanging’, and on sheet 143 part has
been made up from Index to Tithe Survey material, with the result that parish boundaries stop
dead and link-lines for detached parts shoot off into nothingness. The David & Charles issues
were not free from discontinuity between sheets, but it was mitigated by retaining the
original sheet lines.

The reproduction, at any rate on the sample of sheets examined in detail, is good, and if
anything improves on both David & Charles and Margary; the slightly ‘grey’ effect apparent
under stronger light is perhaps a consequence of enlargement and, if anything, helps
legibility. The drawbacks are the joins and the variable state of revision of the originals. Of
the nine sheets examined in detail, 107, 113, 122, 176-8 and 187 (component originals
published 1805-25) all seem to be based on very early states; 192 (component originals
published 1809-11) uses originals dateable to 1835-44 which have had geological
information (unobjectionable) and other revision (partial and objectionable) added; and 110
(component originals published 1840-44) mostly uses late 1850s and early 1860s states of the
plates, with railways added, incompletely. All I know of 143 is from the extract on the Past
and Present Ely sheet, but the mixture of earlyish pre-railway and later Index to Tithe Survey
(with some railways) material is not inviting. These inconsistencies presumably represent
what was available to Cassini from libraries prepared to co-operate, rather than what would
be ideal, which is the earliest states. Whilst there is a note of the terminal dates of first
publication, there is no hint of either the earlier dates of fieldwork or the later ones of partial
revision. These would not have removed the heavy handicap of using some ‘hybrid’
originals, but they could have mitigated it. Is it too much to hope that, should the venture
prove successful enough for sheets to be reprinted, this information could be added? As it is,
it is difficult to recommend purchase to libraries or anyone else who has either the Margary
volumes or the David and Charles sheets.

The boldest aspect of the venture is the addition of the National Grid. That this is not
entirely successful in planimetric terms is unsurprising: the errors in much of the mapping are
inconsistent, and the only way that the grid could have been in sympathy with this mapping’s
modern successors would have been by ‘warping’ either the grid or the mapping. Figures 1 to
4 show the effect of ‘warping’ the grid to fit the detail; they were originally prepared in 1996
in order to demonstrate the inadvisability of using the Old Series in conjunction with the
National Grid. In these circumstances, differences of 150 to 200 metres between grid
positions on the Cassini mapping and those on the OS Landranger are unsurprising, though it
is fair to add that the differences are much less in the northern part of sheet 107, based on
mapping on the Delamere origin which eventually became part of the New Series and
finished its career as part of the New Popular Edition.

Whereas the David & Charles and Margary OS projects were limited to the Old Series,
Cassini have much wider horizons, as demonstrated by their Past and Present series. A
specimen sheet was produced in the summer of 2006, and circulated for criticism, and the
company have acted on some of the comments. The concept is an interesting one: the same
15 × 15 km area is shown variously in the Old Series (using the same scans as for the

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6 The make-up of sheet 110 seems to be as follows: 81 NW (surveyed 1838, published 21 March 1842), states 1-4,
?state 1 (pre-1856); 81 NE (surveyed 1837, published 30 September 1840), states 2-6, ?state 2 (pre-1858); 82 NW
(surveyed 1837, published 1 June 1840), states 4 or 5 (c.1856-60); 87 NW (surveyed 1838), states 3-6 (c.1852-62); 87
SW (surveyed 1837-8, published 2 August 1841), states 6-8 (c.1857-64); 88 NW (surveyed 1838-9, published 1 March
1844), states 5 or 7 (c.1856-60); 88 NE (surveyed 1838-9, published 20 February 1843), states 6-9 (c.1856-64); 88 SW
(surveyed 1838-9, published 18 September 1843), possibly state 7 (c.1856-8).
Landranger-aping series), the revised New Series with hills in black, the Popular Edition, and the current Landranger. The same size of paper, trimmed to $1000 \times 890$ mm, is used as for the Landranger and the Cassini Old Series issues, and this brings the first disadvantage: the relative expense. I am told that one of the appeals anticipated is to the gift-market where, presumably, novelty and a degree of personalisation or locality outweigh more sober considerations. The expense of the Past and Present series is both relative and absolute. The map area within the neat line of the Landranger and Cassini Old Series is 71.9 % of the total paper area; on the Past and Present series it drops to 40.4 %. Much of the remainder is made up by a title, top centre (pointless on a folded map), legends (desirable), indexes to the sheet lines of the original maps (questionable), and historical notes on the map series and gestures towards social context (very questionable); in short, I could have done with less chat and more map. Had an extract area of $18 \times 18$ km been used, with a minimum of necessary marginal matter, it would have been far more satisfactory. The Old Series sells at the same price as the OS Landranger, i.e. £6.49; the Past and Present series sells for £7:99. One new penny buys 2.46 sq km of Landranger or Old Series, but only 1.13 sq km of Past and Present. A £4.99 offering would be more acceptable.

The layout on the sheet is also open to question: Old Series top left, Revised New Series top right, Popular bottom left, Landranger bottom right. It would have been much more satisfactory had the Popular and Landranger exchanged places; as it is, it is difficult to make Revised New Series to Popular or Old Series to Landranger comparisons.

For the Revised New Series and the Popular Edition the choice of originals was presumably dictated by what could be agreed upon with co-operating libraries rather than by what is ideal. Taken together, the Popular Edition extracts on the pre-publication trial sheet of the Medway towns and the published Ely and Exeter sheets suggest that a set assembled in the mid to late 1920s was used, which means that about half the mapping will be based on reprints with roads and other additions. This may not be as troublesome as with the Old Series issue, but once again there is no indication of the all-important fieldwork dates, never mind of the constituent individual sheets, and the potential value of the enterprise is reduced. It is reduced further by the choice of the revised New Series with hills in black; one would have thought it much easier to assemble originals without the hills, which we are stuck with willy-nilly on the Old Series, but are easily avoided on the New Series, as any collector pursuing the hills format will attest. The ‘noise’ of the hills has the same disruptive effect on the ‘music of antiquity’ as a car stereo thumping away at 350 decibels three octaves below middle C in an otherwise quiet suburban side-street.

Bottom left on the Past and Present sheets a box announces the availability of not only the Old Series, but also the Revised New Series [it is unclear whether the hills are included], the Popular Edition, and the New Popular Edition. The box is perhaps a little optimistic, as at the time of going to press only the Old Series was available, though I gather that it is likely

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7 On Landranger sheets with a Welsh legend on the left-hand size, which are trimmed to $1125 \times 890$ mm, the map-area is 63.9 %. Were a 1 km overlap on the north and east sides to be introduced, as I have long urged, then the mapped area would increase to 75.5 % on the standard $1000 \times 890$ mm sheets. This whole question of the ratio of map area to paper area seems to be one which has been little studied, at any rate in print, though it would not surprise me were it to be the subject of one or more dissertations produced in the days where cartography was taught as a discrete subject in higher education.

8 It buys 2.33 sq km of map in the Godfrey Edition, but the comparison here is complicated by the notes and large-scale mapping printed on the reverse. If these are admitted, then the Godfrey Edition one-inches are by far the best value for money.
that some Popular Edition sheets will be available within a few months: no doubt Cassini’s website will oblige with the details. The reproduction of the Popular Edition material is good, and the only real drawback is the ‘noise’ of the original squaring, which overwhelms the light blue of the modern grid: it would be interesting to see purple tried, as of course it was used for just this purpose on the military printings of this mapping.

In summary: there is much that is commendable here, but there is also considerable scope for improvement. In fairness to Cassini, they are willing to consider comments: a good demonstration is the cover of the Old Series sheets, the original version of which sported a late Victorian photograph which was both hopelessly anachronistic and suggestive of an ancestor-hunting approach which is uncongenial to some of us. No doubt family historians will patronise both the Old Series and the Past and Present maps, but the national series mapping, in particular, ought to enjoy a much larger market. The covers of the later issues use roughly contemporary prints. There are also a good many points of detail on the Past and Present series which were improved following comments on the trial sheet. Of the three series announced but yet to be realised, the Popular Edition would seem to be the most promising, as it will break new ground. The Revised New Series will come into competition with the one-inch sheets offered by Alan Godfrey, and the New Popular Edition is surely only commended by its being both out of copyright and carrying the National Grid: the Welsh and northern sheets are simply another version of the Popular. Far better, surely, to wait a few years and reissue the Seventh Series; but as most of what became the Landranger started out as a photo-enlargement of Seventh Series material, perhaps the less instructed public might have difficulties in distinguishing the various realities on offer.

One might also hope for something from Cassini for Scotland and Ireland. Although the market for both countries is no doubt smaller than for England and Wales, and probably a substantial part of it is better served, particularly in Ireland, by the 1:10,560, at least one series ought to be provided for each. The whole of Scotland was covered in the late 1980s by Caledonian Books, mostly using the de facto second edition published in 1896-8, and shortly afterwards the whole of the Irish first edition with hills was issued by Phoenix Maps. Both series used the original sheet lines, and both still seem to be available, from the publishers if not in bookshops. In addition, first edition mapping is available on a print-on-demand basis. However, something along the lines of what Cassini has done for England and Wales (though ideally without the hachures) would be welcome.

And is this the company to give us something akin to the OS Select service: site-centred historic small-scale mapping?

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9 Monochrome scans of the New Popular Edition were used as bases for the University of Exeter historic boundaries mapping (see Sheetlines 61 (2001), 31), in which I had a hand: the enforced close acquaintance with this mapping did not do much for my respect for some of it.

10 Apparently complete first edition 1:10,560 cover of Ireland is available: see www.pasthomes.com. (I am indebted to Dan Réem for this reference.)

11 The Caledonian Books issue was noted so briefly in Sheetlines 19 (1987), 19 that it escaped indexing: the venture is now known as Caledonian Maps, http://www.caledonianmaps.co.uk. (Incidentally, they have performed a valuable service in issuing most of the town maps by John Wood, published in 1819-27.) Phoenix Maps issues were noted in Sheetlines 26 (1989), 28; Sheetlines 27 (1990), 22 and Sheetlines 28 (1990), 20. Phoenix also issued some larger scale Irish OS mapping and a few pre-OS county surveys: I understand that most of the one-inch maps are still available, and that those interested should contact Leonard Hynes, 26 Ashington Avenue, Navan Road, Dublin 7, Ireland.

12 From PastHomes: see http://www.pasthomes.com/info/samples.php#researchmaps.