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“OS mapping of SW Scotland circa 1820”
Richard Oliver

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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.
OS mapping of SW Scotland circa 1820

I read with interest Richard Oliver’s article in Sheetlines 78 on ‘Unfinished business: the lost Ordnance Survey two-inch mapping of Scotland, 1819-1828 and 1852’. He mentions that there was lobbying of Wellington by friends in Scotland, but that the Wellington papers do not provide evidence of this.

Recently I was investigating correspondence between William Faden and the Commissioners of Supply for Kirkcudbright relating to a third edition of John Ainslie’s map of Kirkcudbrightshire and, while scanning through several years of the minutes of the Commissioners, I noticed a reference to the cessation of the Ordnance Survey in Scotland.

As the Kirkcudbrightshire Commissioners had been planning a subscription to the revised county map for several years (since at least 1816), they would probably not have been interested in a further subscription for an Ordnance Survey map.

Commissioners of Supply were committees of local landowners, the precursors of county councils in Scotland, who dealt with matters of common interest within a county, such as building roads and bridges, keeping the peace, and collecting and spending local taxes. The records of the meeting of 29 April 1820 indicate that the Kirkcudbrightshire Commissioners had received a communication from the Perthshire Commissioners alerting them to the proposed withdrawal of OS surveyors, and suggesting that the different Commissioners of Supply should lobby Wellington about the pressing need to survey Scotland. Unfortunately I did not transcribe the whole entry, as my interest lay elsewhere, but I did note the following extract:

Mineral and geological survey of Galloway.

… subscribed to the meeting a communication from Doctor MacCulloch dated at Dunkeld the 13th day of October last, and a copy excerpt of the minutes of a general meeting of the County of Perth held on the fifth day of that month, from which it appears that the Mineral Survey, which has for some time been carried on by Doctor MacCulloch in conjunction with the Trigonometrical Survey under the direction of Colonel Mudge, has now attained to such a state as nearly to include the half of Scotland; that the completion of these surveys will be conducive not only to the general improvement of the Landed Property but also to the Commerce of the Kingdom.

That a Geographical Survey for the purpose of a general map has been commenced by the order of Government under the supervision of Colonel Mudge and that the addition of the Mineral Survey will include every thing that can be desired on such a subject; as a knowledge of the subterranean nature of every district and property will thereby be combined with an accurate determination of their forms and boundaries. And that the General Meeting of Perthshire requested the Duke of Atholl, the Lord Lieutenant of the County to correspond with the Duke of Wellington, Master General of the Ordnance on the subject and to urge the continuation of these surveys …

It may be worth pursuing this with the Atholl Estates Archives at Blair Castle, or Perth and Kinross Archives for the records of the Perthshire Commissioners of Supply. It is interesting that the emphasis is on the geological survey, perhaps appealing to the landowners’ desire to exploit minerals under their land, but also indicating MacCulloch’s efforts to generate support for his geological survey work.

A further contemporary reference is in the introduction to John Thomson’s Atlas of Scotland (1832) where he lists his sources. Under Ayrshire (on page iv) he writes:

1 Held in the Ewart Library in Dumfries ref. K1/1/8 1819-1827.
In 1823 and 1824, several attempts were made to get the Government survey completed of Ayrshire, and at one time circumstances promised the completion of this undertaking; but the demand for surveyors to complete the trigonometrical survey of Ireland, which country had attracted the public attention more than any other portion of the kingdom, left the survey of Ayrshire in abeyance.\footnote{See http://www.nls.uk/maps/early/870.html for a scanned image of page iv of the atlas.}

\textit{Richard Oliver remarks:}

Diana Webster’s comments and additions are extremely interesting. It is unclear why the Perthshire Commissioners should be worried about the withdrawal of Ordnance surveyors in 1820, unless this was something to do with the primary triangulation, which was running far in advance of the detailed topographical survey. The reference to an unsuccessful attempt to get the Ayrshire survey completed in 1823-4 is of interest in that it seems that already by 1832 the ‘myth’ was in circulation that the topographical survey of Scotland had been stopped in favour of that of Ireland. It is much more likely that by 1824 the problems of the defective pre-1820 surveys in England and Wales were fully apparent, and there was no point in pressing ahead vigorously in Scotland when there was such a backlog of material awaiting revision and engraving south of the border.

On pages 27 and 28 of my article I discussed briefly whether more work was surveyed on the ground than was eventually drawn on paper. I have since rediscovered some notes on Thomas Colby’s report on the state of survey in Great Britain in January 1834, which gives the following expenditure on the survey of Scotland:\footnote{Colby’s ‘Precis’, in The National Archives (Public Record Office) [TNA (PRO)], WO 44/614, Return no. 10. It is noted there that the Clerk of the Ordnance’s books made the total only £5,095/15/1, but the difference does not affect the general argument.}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ccc}
1819 & £378/16/9 & 1823 & £653/3/8 & 1827 & £299/15/9½ \\
1820 & £735/16/0 & 1824 & £263/3/4 & 1828 & £113/3/8 \\
1821 & £881/3/8 & 1825 & £412/12/3 & & \\
1822 & £946/8/3 & 1826 & £456/14/3½ & Total & £5,140/17/7 \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

This indicates a peak in 1822, by which time about 650 square miles had been surveyed and drawn, i.e. nearly 70 per cent of the 937 square miles reported as mapped by Colby in 1843. However, by the end of 1822 only £2942/4/8, or about 57 per cent of the total, had been spent. The 1834 report also says that 946.25 square miles had been surveyed. This suggests: (a) that there may have been about ten square miles surveyed but not drawn; (b) that the cost per square mile surveyed was rising from 1822 onwards; and (c) that there may have been some unreported activity, possibly in the form of secondary triangulation.

Towards the end of my article I suggested that unpublished one-inch mapping of the Isle of Wight of the 1850s might have been a by-product of the two-inch surveying episode in southern Scotland that year. Once again, I had overlooked what I had long known, that revision of the Isle of Wight was authorised by the Board of Ordnance on 1 September 1852, at a cost of £200. This followed an application by Sir Henry De la Beche, the Director of the Geological Survey.\footnote{TNA (PRO), WO 47/2304, pp 8648-50.} Whilst the suggestion that the Isle of Wight work was in part a training exercise for Scottish two-inch survey therefore seems unlikely, it is still possible that the unpublished mapping represents a style which would have been adopted had the Scottish two-inch work reached publication.\footnote{The most accessible copy at present is that in TNA (PRO) MR 1/1311.}