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“A, B, C and M: road numbers revealed
[book review]”
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.

Andrew Emmerson and Peter Bancroft, A, B, C and M: road numbers revealed, Harrow: Capital History, 2007. Paperback, 94 pages, £7.95. ISBN 978 185414 307 5

The Ordnance Survey has published several map series primarily concerned with official road numbering, notably at the half-inch scale (1923-36) and the ten-mile and 1:625,000 scales (1932 onwards). These are reasonably well known, at any rate by repute: all have been concerned exclusively with numbers issued by the Ministry of Transport and its successors. Maps of C and lesser roads, numbered by local authorities, are more elusive. It is perhaps a sign of the relative paucity of published information on highway classification that the bibliography of eleven hard-copy items in *A, B, C and M* includes a brief article which I wrote for *Sheetlines* in 2000 when the question of C-road numbers was under discussion, and two more published under the auspices of the Railway and Canal Historical Society.⁴ (It is a sign of the times, as much as of any obscurity of the subject, that the bibliography also lists sixteen websites.)

The work was begun by Peter Bancroft and completed after his premature death by Andrew Emmerson. There are eight chapters: 'Early times' (mostly road names); 'The turnpike era' (still no numbers); 'The twentieth century' (this occupies a third of the book and contains much of the 'meat'); 'The Motorway era' (where you will learn about the M16: and no, it didn't run through Lincolnshire); 'Capital highways' (London and its oddities); 'Numbers that don't add up' (including 'ghost' motorway junctions and spurs); 'Britain's other numbered roads' (including Euroroutes: I wonder how many people want to go from Hull to Ennis); and 'Islands and Ireland' (and yes, the reclassification from T and L to N and R is discussed). There are several references to OS and other mapping, though they are not complete: for example, there is no reference to the quarter-inch map produced by the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland from 1926 onwards, which performed the same function as the half-inch in Britain in much more compact form. (Was there ever an equivalent in Eire?) Indeed, though this is an extremely useful foray into a relatively uncultivated field, one is left wishing for more. In particular, I hope that it might inspire someone to seek out the shadowy maps produced for internal purposes by local authorities, which, as I pointed out in my article, are often not to be found in county record offices, and to explore further the C, D, E, F, G and U numbers, and the probably inevitable changes of system with local government reorganisations.

I learnt of this book by way of a review by David Archer in the Milestone Society's newsletter: his main criticism, with which I agree, is the lack of precise references to sources. I'm afraid that you will find more references to the all-important files in The National Archives (Public Record Office) in my little article than in this book: a double pity, for Peter Bancroft was the author of *London Transport records at the Public Record Office* and there is plenty of evidence that at least some of the files have been read, and there are two blank pages at the end which could be used. Against this, the book is very nicely produced, and more than adequately illustrated. I hope that one day we shall have a book of twice the length that penetrates more deeply into the local authority classifications: meanwhile, those who like to have handbooks to supplement maps should not hesitate to purchase.

Richard Oliver

⁴ J C Mann, *British road numbering*, Railway & Canal Historical Society (Road Transport Group), Occasional Paper, Second Series, no.21 (March 1993); Graham Bird, *British road numbering: some further thoughts*, Railway & Canal Historical Society (Road Transport Group), Occasional Paper, Second Series, no. 45 (September 1994); Richard Oliver, 'C-roads on signposts and maps', *Sheetlines* 59 (2000), 40-43.