



# *Sheetlines*

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“Kerry musings”  
*David Archer*

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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.

## *Kerry musings*

*David Archer*

Until recently, I told people that I used to collect maps before I started selling them, and that my map collection formed the basis of my opening stock. I now realise that this was true only in part. I did not own a map collection. What I had was an accumulation of maps, not a collection of maps, and not a map collection. Three very different things, which it has taken me years to see the significance of.

I know a lot of people who, although they are not members of our society, are very knowledgeable about Ordnance Survey maps. All have a super collection of maps, but not a map collection. Most, if asked, would say that they do not collect OS maps. If they do not collect OS maps, how do they come to have a so many of the things? Because the maps have been bought to help pursue a hobby or other activity. Transport history, industrial archaeology and local history are probably the main fields of interest. For any serious study of these subjects, one needs OS maps, and so maps are bought with very definite aims in mind, to support the subject, so they do not usually collect sets, just those that show the lines of a particular railway company or canal system. A local history library will have a collection of maps for the area, all scales, all series and all dates, similar to a geological section, but through the whole of the OS output. Seldom is anything for the neighbouring area held, no sets of OS one-inch maps and nothing on the history of the Ordnance Survey. Individuals with collections of maps are very focused, acquiring only those suitable for their particular purpose. But these people really study each item bought, noting differences between series, and states of each sheet within series, so that if you want to know about the strengths or failings of a given series, ask a transport historian rather than a map collector. To know about the accuracy of minor points of railway depiction, ask a railway historian, not an OS enthusiast. Of course, frequently it happens that these people become so fascinated by the maps that they become map collectors. And most then join our society.

A map collector collects maps which form a map collection. They will buy a second copy because it is slightly different from one already held. The two maps are different. A transport enthusiast will buy a second copy of the same map because the information shown is different. True, the map collector might buy the transport enthusiast's map because of the same difference, but it would be referred to as having different detail, not different information. As a *very* rough generalisation, the information shown on maps is of minimal importance to a map collector. Map collectors will buy a map for itself, not for the information shown, and the joy of the collection is that the maps are all different in some way. No more justification is needed. The collection is seen as a living and expanding entity. That the maps are different is the important thing. That the difference is in the information shown, such as a new railway junction, is of minimal importance. A map collection, I would argue, is something that has been put together with clear objectives in mind. Maps are *selected* for purchase in order to build the collection. A map collector needs to know what is held and what is needed, seeking out specific wants and different, unknown states, aided by a wants list. A collector will know about their maps and where they fit within the OS story, otherwise it just becomes a ticking exercise.

In the 1970s, when I first became really interested in Ordnance Survey maps, I would buy every one that I came across. Despite having very little money, this was easy as one came across so few maps, and prices were low. My sole objective in buying was to get as

many maps as possible, in the hope of making sense of those I already owned. Not that I ever thought it through, even to that extent, I just bought maps and put them into a cardboard box, occasionally spreading them on the floor to look at, gloat over or admire them.

I bought one from this series and a couple from that series as they were found. Some Scottish, but mostly England and Wales. All very bitty, and they just accumulated. No particular series attracted me above any other, and I could usually remember which sheets I owned. Not once did I come across a quantity so large that I could not take all of them. Even a pile of Fifth Edition maps lurking on a shelf in one of the pricier Charing Cross Road antiquarian shops were so cheap that I could buy them all. (These were the days of bookshops with the 25p folded map. Any map.)

Why do I now call these an accumulation? There was no method in buying, other than finding them. They were not part of a planned acquisition policy, say to collect a set of something. Neither were they required to support a specific project or hobby. I simply found and bought, and was pleased with anything that came my way. The maps just built up. Which is very different from saying that I built them up into something. I was not actively looking for any particular map, just any map that I did not have. An analysis of the maps would show that they reflected the frequency with which the various series appeared for sale in used condition. Indeed, these maps formed the basis of my first catalogue, and the split between Seventh Series, New Populars, Pops and Thirds has remained fairly consistent over the years.

Just as one can have a basic or a super map collection, so there are variations in accumulations of maps, and applying the term should not reflect on the maps or the owner. My accumulation had some goodies, but consisted mostly of very common easily found maps. The lower end of the scale to be sure. At the other end of the scale, are the accumulations owned by some of our more knowledgeable and enquiring members. Very active in the society but without the collecting gene (everything is in the genes these days). A map attracts their attention and they buy it, study it and buy a few more to follow up lines of research into the original purchase. An article in *Sheetlines* might result. Later, the same thing happens and over the years they build up a sizeable group of maps. The maps accumulate, and are not sets of maps, nor do they support any particular activity other than an interest in maps. A very different accumulation from mine. Something quite superior, with each section within it being of note.

As with most things, the reality is never clear cut, and the three 'categories' are seldom pure. Most owners of map collections get tempted and have a small selection of purely local maps, interesting maps they could not resist, or maps given to them and which they are not allowed to dispose of. One might say that a local history library has a collection of maps, yet frequently one finds they contain a set of one-inch maps given as a donation. Each copyright library most definitely has a map collection, plus numerous donations they would prefer to be without, whilst a secondhand bookshop has an accumulation, sometimes adulterated by receiving a collection into stock.

My style of mapselling is just an extension of buying for an accumulation: if it comes along at the right price, I buy it. I do not have a balanced stock (whatever that might be), nor concentrate on maps of a particular period or scale. I often wonder what my own maps would consist of had I stuck to a proper job. A vast accumulation almost certainly. I have never really been one to collect sets, and prefer to look for those things which are not yet fully documented, so that one can discover the previously unknown. All my personal interests change so quickly, and the nicest maps are always those in my hand, which does not help enforce a disciplined purchasing policy.