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“Kerry musings”

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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

The range of maps produced by John Bartholomew is staggering, and the quality extremely high, yet most people only associate the name with half-inch maps in blue covers, which is grossly unfair. Especially as map collectors then ignore them. These blue covered maps are good and compare favourably with those of the Ordnance Survey. When published, they were clear, of a high cartographic standard, well made and up to date. They used the same progression of covers as did the Ordnance Survey, waxy book type covers, paste on covers and eventually one-piece benderfold style offerings. Paper, cloth and dissected formats were all offered. Price was no problem, they were popular, especially amongst cyclists and sold in large numbers. So why do so few people call themselves a 'Bartholomew map collector'? Why is the Ordnance Survey the preferred publisher for the map collecting masses?

When considering the despised half-inch, I would suggest several reasons for the adjective, the most obvious of which is the problem of the covers. Problems, actually. Where does one start? Typical rant: 'Barts covers are boring. They all look the same, you cannot read what is printed on them, you cannot see which series they are, and bits of the sheet labels are often missing. The only thing going for them is that the blue covers are instantly recognisable making them easy to pass over.' To all seven statements one can say 'Not true' or 'True, up to a point'. So let us agree on 'Well,' and consider only half-inch maps in blue covers, ignoring paper maps in brown covers, green covered Irish maps and a host of other Bartholomew productions. We all know what is meant by the blue Barts half-inch, so no quibbling, please.

I think that it all comes down to a major marketing blunder. Very similar, nondescript blue covers were retained for far too long, from the late 1880s into the 1960s, and are now wrongly seen as an entity, despite being several map series in different covers. The map series and styles changed, but the covers only changed dramatically after a major re-design in the mid-1960s, after which they were still overwhelmingly blue. Until then, they were dark and difficult to read, resulting in Bartholomew maps now being shunned by most collectors. The black lettering and design on a deep blue background is impossible to read at a glance, especially as the front cover is so cluttered, having far too much on it. No punch, as in 'More is less'. Nothing stands out, different sized lettering has no effect and the cheapskate choice of a black stick-on label with dark red writing for the sheet details attracts 'Nul points'. Even the early short-lived labels with blue lettering give the impression they are stuck over something interesting, and cause the eye to skip about, constantly distracted and taking nothing in. Ordnance Survey Popular Edition maps have smaller red lettering on a buff background, which attracts the eye and tells you instantly what area is depicted inside. The gothic vampire red on black labels used by Bartholomew fail completely. However, no blue covered map comes anywhere near the

dreadfully dull, brown covers of the Ordnance Survey 1946 *Ten Mile Road map*. Dead, and totally lacking in appeal.

True, the blue got lighter and the red lettering brightened as the last century progressed, but to no avail, still a fussy cover. It might have been a good marketing ploy for Kit-Kat to keep the same packaging for decades, but collectors demand an attractive subject and seek variety. They want variations to be pretty obvious, so a vast expanse of blue is fine for the sea, but not for over seventy years of map covers. The front covers are overwhelmed by irrelevant text or are considered advertising hoardings. Why the publisher's full address appears, goodness knows, whilst it would be better mentioned elsewhere that the King and late King favoured this product, leaving much needed blank space. That the maps were for cyclists, motorists, and tourists should not have appeared either. A greatly slimmed text would be thought far more attractive today.

Most members have probably never considered the different map series within the blue covers. Yet, if each series was in a strikingly different coloured cover, I am certain far more would be collected, even with the cluttered design, which would be much easier to read on a pale background for example. People use covers to help identify different series, so there needs to be diversity to appeal. Towards the end, Bartholomew did introduce different covers, which stand in contrast to what went before, but for a different scale: the metric half-inch. The red and black covers of the 1:100,000 *National Map Series* and the bright yellow of the little known 1:100,000 *Leisure Map* series are so different to anything previously issued. Alas, too late.

Another disaster is that Bartholomew used long and very similar cover titles:

Bartholomew's Reduced Ordnance Survey for Tourists & Cyclists

Bartholomew's New Reduced Survey for Tourists & Cyclists

Bartholomew's Revised Half-Inch to Mile for Motorists & Cyclists

Like those for their map series, they are impossible to take in at a glance:

Bartholomew's "Half-inch to mile" map of England and Wales

Bartholomew's Revised Half-Inch Map

What are we to call them? Sometimes the long map title differs from the long cover title. Is it possible to shorten them? Nobody ever attempts to. Has anyone ever referred to the 'Reduced' or the 'New Reduced'? Meaningless. No, the shortest we ever hear is 'Bart's half-inch', with no attempt to identify a particular series. The titles were and still are too long and too similar, with the result that map enthusiasts get confused. Very confused, but more often just do not bother. If you sit down and work it all out to your own satisfaction, as I have done *several* times, ending by saying 'Right, I think I know my way around the different series now', should you fail to look at them for three months, all or most will be forgotten. Barts are certainly difficult. By contrast, the early Ordnance Survey covers are so clear, even the darkish red covers are saved by the clean and uncluttered design, which can only be called powerful on the white covers. Not a long edition title anywhere, yet perfectly informative.

With the publication of the one-inch Third Edition, the OS began using snappy edition titles, usually a number, short name or both. Thus we get the Coloured or Third Edition, Popular Edition, Fifth Edition. Even with fifty per cent of the title repeated they are strikingly different. Thirds, Pops and Fifths. Just asking to be sought, studied and collected.

So, the covers all look the same, and the lengthy titles are similar and confusing. If the situation had been saved by attractive and desirable covers, what do we find inside? A very nice cartographic product, the famous Barts half-inch layered map, one basic style that changed little over many decades, essentially the same from the 1880s to the 1970s, again continuing for far too long, and considered uninspiring today. During this time the OS one-inch had at least seven incarnations, ever changing. With OS maps, even the general public can suggest that one map is older than another, but with Bartholomew maps, a CCS member is hard put to do the same, especially with full dates of printing not appearing on maps until 1946. Another problem, so why bother?

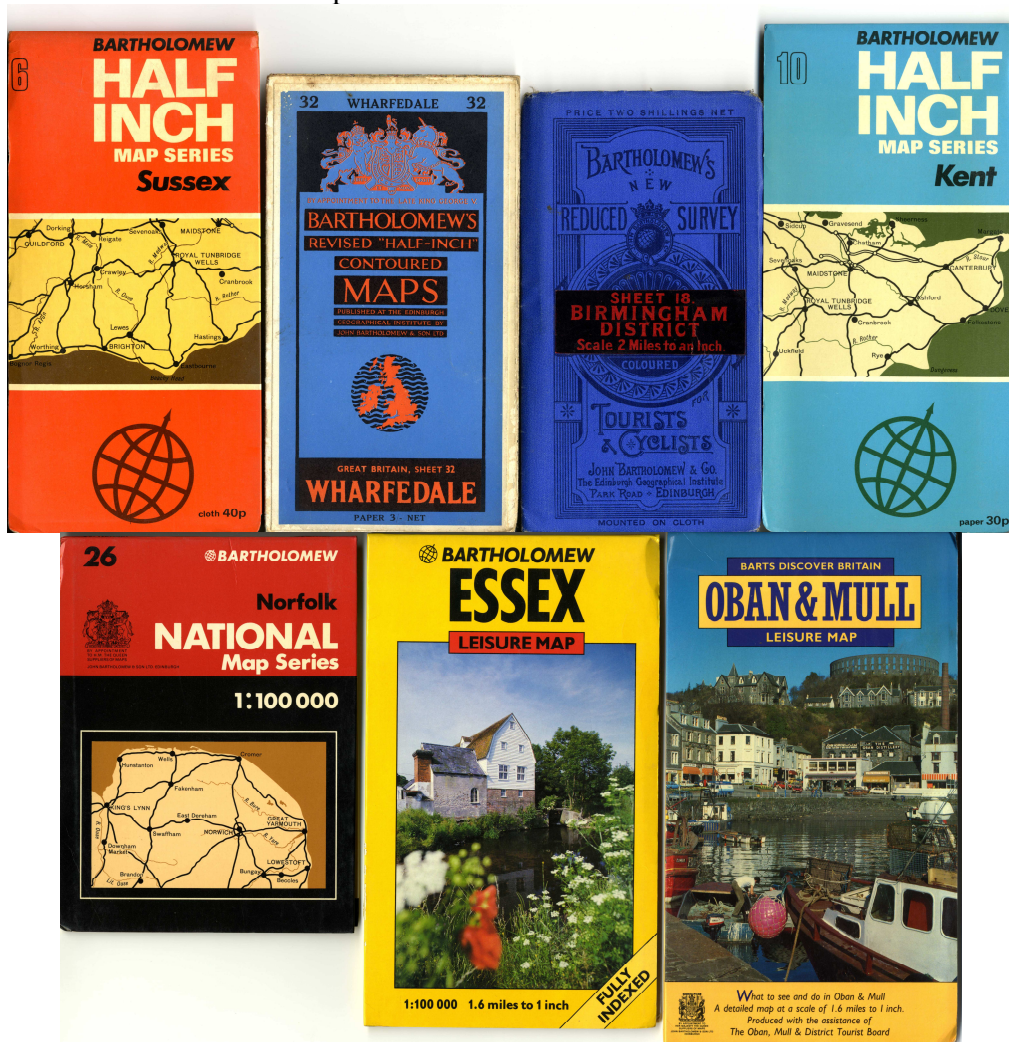
The Ordnance Survey also published half-inch maps, but with a mix that attracts collectors. Small and large sheet series, three distinct styles plus outline versions, and a choice of cover styles. Plenty of interest here. Had Bartholomew issued a wide range of half-inch tourist and district maps, interest would have been added for collectors. Certainly if one has a stall at an event, maps with picture covers are the big attraction for the general public. Try to imagine the Ordnance Survey pre-war range without tourist maps. Far duller. Most who collect Ordnance Survey series maps also collect tourist and district maps. They add colour and variety to a collection. Variety being very important to collectors.

Might it have been different? Maybe, but not very. We should not compare Bartholomew's lack of appeal with the whole of the Ordnance Survey's output, just their half-inch maps. Fact: Ordnance Survey half-inch maps are collected far less than the one-inch. For almost all collectors, the half-inch are a secondary interest. They are collected because they are OS maps, not because half-inch maps are interesting. If the scale is unattractive, any fragile enthusiasm will be easily dampened. However, there are a lot of advantages to collecting Bartholomew's blue covered maps, and for those lucky few who can focus on them, things are very promising. Collecting a less popular publisher means that prices are lower, things sit around longer and are not snapped up, little is known about them and scarce maps are priced as any other. I have heard people say that they have never paid any attention to Bartholomew maps as there is virtually nothing written about them to help the novice collector. A feeble excuse, as very little had been written about OS maps when our society was formed, yet extremely large private collections existed and many people had been collecting for years.

Most Bartholomew maps are not found in blue covers. Far more exist than is commonly realised; a truly vast and varied output, with wonderful things to be found. One can build as fine a collection of Bartholomew maps as OS maps,

including supporting catalogues and ephemera. They certainly merit consideration, especially by our society, not least because the Ordnance Survey has never operated in isolation, and in so many areas comparisons with what was happening elsewhere will be considered. Bartholomew will be seen as the longest lived and strongest of the commercial cartographers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a superb company archive, which those researching OS matters can only envy.

As they say, 'Don't get me wrong', I like Barts half-inch maps, and think them well worth making the effort to understand, despite the above. Having said so many negative things, I really should note that I have only been considering Barts as a collectors' map. In my experience, most who seek Barts half-inch maps want to use them. To take them outside and cycle with them, or sometimes to motor using them. Currency is not really a problem for finding your way around minor roads, using a layered map that shows what you are up against far better than any OS production. Yes, even today, these maps are as much loved by cyclists as they were at any time. Barts are the cyclists' map, and one hopes that with the increase in cycling, will come a similar increase of interest in Bartholomew's maps. Of all sorts.



'Most Bartholomew maps are not found in blue covers'