

CCS visit to Dublin

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The Dublin trip in July 2011 was a great success cartographically and socially. Rodney Leary organised an excellent programme and our Irish hosts made us very welcome and were informative, interested and enthusiastic about their collections and their part of the story of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland.



Petra Coffey (right) with one of Du Noyer's watercolour panoramas [photo Gerry Zierler]

The first morning, Thursday, we visited the Geological Survey of Ireland, in its remarkable fortress location in Beggars Bush. At the GSI, retired archivist, Petra Coffey, and Padraig Cannaughton and set out a fascinating display of one-inch and six-inch geological maps engraved and hand coloured on the OSI base-maps. The geologist George Victor Du Noyer was a remarkable artist, whose paintings and drawings of landscapes and rock exposures are well known in Ireland and were exhibited in the National Gallery several years ago.¹ Some are drawn in the sea areas of his field maps. The GSI archive has several folios and albums of his work and remarkable wood-cut blocks of his work that appeared in geological reports. Petra's collection added a third dimension to the GSI's maps.

Ordnance Survey; in Ireland in the interminable debates with Treasury about the scale of published maps, the GS was instrumental in having the one inch scale adopted; in Britain, the GS was instrumental in the adoption of the six inch scale nationally based on its experience of its utility in Ireland.²

The Geological Survey (GS) was originally part of the

¹ See page 41. See also the article about Du Noyer by Petra Coffey which appeared in *Sheetlines* 35 and is now available at www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/Issue35page14.pdf.

² See my review at www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1109

That afternoon we visited the National Archives of Ireland. Hazel Menton had set out a fascinating display using three localities to show field survey books, fair plans and proof sheets demonstrating the historic survey processes. In particular, the orthographic notes recorded the many variations in Gaelic and English of the place names the surveyors had to record and to get right. Many of the OS maps had come to the NAI from the various government departments marked for their particular use. The incredibly minute lettering and fine detail of the central Dublin map proofs were masterpieces of cartographic art.

After dinner Ann Marshall, an expatriate Dubliner and thespian, gave a lucid account of the play *Translations* which we would see the next evening.³

On Friday morning we visited Phoenix Park, the home of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland since 1824. Phoenix Park is one the largest landscaped urban parks in Europe at 707 hectares (1752 acres) and the OSI is at the far end from Dublin's centre. Never having moved, the OSI has retained pieces of equipment that would have been lost or discarded in other organisations. Their museum, in the O'Donovan Room included a compensation bar invented by Colby and Drummond of the OSI and used for the precise measurement of the Loch Foyle base line. As well as various early theodolites, chains and other survey kit, there was a small collection of original water colours, inks and pens in the original packaging of the early 1900s. True ephemera.

Welcomed by Secretary to the OSI, Greg Whelan, we were then ably introduced by Maurice Kavanaugh and his staff, Paul Kane, Valerie O'Neil and Aoife Shinnors. They made very clear and well illustrated presentations respectively covering: aerial survey – photogrammetry to balancing digital colour images; 'lidar'⁴ – 'point-clouds' and 'laser-world'; and marketing OSI data – GIS and government applications. Next door there was a very good and much appreciated map shop.

That afternoon we visited the Royal Irish Academy. Head Librarian Siobhan Fitzpatrick explained that many of the senior staff of the Ordnance and Geological Surveys had been members of the academy and therefore the RIA had unique sets of correspondence amongst them as well as a complete first edition of the six-inch map of Ireland. This documentation is a valuable resource for historians. The RIA, as an antiquarian society, had always had a great interest and fascination with the Gaelic language. It has the great library of Charles O'Connor, an Irish prince, which includes 1400 manuscripts in Old Irish and in a unique script. This library demonstrates the well developed capacity of Old Irish to record and discuss difficult topics in law, natural history, poetry and science. The RIA was a much used resource by the early OSI 'topographic department' which was very concerned with the veracity and accuracy of place names recorded on OS maps.

Jennifer Moore showed us many examples of a current and long-running RIA project, the Irish historic towns atlases. Using the resources of the RIA, the OSI,

³ See page 42.

⁴ See page 49.

and the NAI, they have produced well illustrated affordable atlases of, so far, 23 Irish towns with many more in the works. The atlases use manuscript illustrations and maps, including OSI maps to produce very informative histories of the physical development of Irish towns. This is a European Union project, enthusiastically embraced by the antiquarian and mapping establishments of Ireland. Is there anything like this going on in UK?

Tearing ourselves away from the RIA, we took an early supper, and moved on to the Abbey Theatre for a performance of Brian Friel's *Translations*. The play explores the role of the Ordnance Survey in surveying and mapping Ireland in the 1830s as part of the occupation of Ireland. The OS was a much more intrusive organisation in Ireland than in Britain. Its initial brief was to prepare accurate maps for land evaluation and taxation. In carrying out its brief it was necessarily concerned with the productivity and potential resources of the land and soon found itself recording soil, geology, crops, natural fauna, and customs of the people. The native language was treated dismissively, with place names being mangled by English pronunciation or simply translated into an English equivalent. The play is included in the school curriculum and is well known and widely (but wrongly) believed as fact. The acting was vigorous and entertaining and, while entirely in English, it created the illusion very well of being bilingual. The inestimable value of the first edition OSI six-inch map is that it records a largely Gaelic Ireland before the great famine and the depopulation from eight to four million through starvation and emigration. *Translations* records the cultural loss emotively, but the maps record a lost landscape.

On Saturday morning we visited The Trinity College Library Dublin to see the Glucksman Map Library. There, Paul Ferguson and Paul Mulligan – the two Pauls who had accompanied us on many of our visits, the play and some dinners – had mounted a tour-de-force display of Irish mapping from the precursors of the OSI, through all states and scales of its output and supporting documentation in the form of valuation reports. Paul Ferguson talked us through the historical sequence of maps, manuscripts and influential individuals and concluded very aptly with a map signed by Charles Close.

The visit had one final pleasure. After our last meal together, retired OSI director Richard Kirwan reminisced about the first map that hooked him at six and his early experiences as a surveyor in the 1970s. He spoke about the changes in surveying and map-making that he has witnessed in his long career. These were the nuggets from his autobiography *If maps could speak*⁵ in which he also explores the main characters and history of the Survey. This was a good and very fitting conclusion to a most successful visit.

Thanks to organiser Rodney Leary, our several hosts, hostesses and speakers, and our many Irish CCS members who made this visit for a wonderful learning experience and exchange.

⁵ Richard Kirwan, *If maps could speak*, Dublin: Londubh Books, ISBN 978-1-907535-09-3, paperback, 192 pages, €14.99