

Kerry musings

David Archer

A question. Was there ever a Golden Age for Ordnance Survey maps? A Golden Age being when nearly everything is portrayed as having been not only far better than at any other time, but also, unlikely to be seen again. A period of outstanding excellence that is no more, and might not have been for a good while.

As so often when considering OS matters, one must think in terms of large scale and small scale maps. For large scale maps, resoundingly there was a Golden Age. It came at the very beginning and has been long gone. A fact : the early, full sheet six-inch engraved maps were the finest work the Ordnance Survey has ever produced, at any scale. Never again would both engraving and printing receive full marks from a panel of judges.

Engraved Irish maps from 1833, followed by English, Welsh and Scottish examples, were all superb. By comparison, most one-inch Old Series are crude beyond belief. Look at any early six-inch sheet and the quality of the engraving is the first thing to hit you. The detail is so clear, orchards, towns, lettering, all are finely shown. Fine lines, fine engraving, fine printing. A Golden Age.

But has it been continuously downhill since? Have there been any high points? Although the detail is less fine, I believe that the hand-coloured 1:2500 First Edition maps must be mentioned. Gold plated rather than solid gold? Certainly precious. Had the six-inch not existed, I am sure that these would have been nominated as a Golden Age product. Why? Because the hand-colouring adds a special element to these maps. Uncoloured, one is not impressed. Colouring brings forth praise. But they lack the quality of line work, of clearness in printing and are only mentioned because of the appealing colouring. I would add to the 'Highly commended' section, the re-drawn National Grid large scale maps. These are particularly clear and easy to read, very modern, especially the metric 1:10,000 National Grid Series.

A Golden Age for Ordnance Survey small scale maps? Four things instantly spring to mind: the coloured one-inch Revised New Series, Close's brief 'experimental period' up to the end of 1914, the 1920s and 30s, and the Seventh Series. The Revised New Series was the first series to be offered in colour. One specification with warm light reddish-brown hachures, fine pale red contours plus light yellow roads, is particularly striking, especially when set off by black and white railways. I have a weakness for soft brown hachures, especially, as in this case, when woods are not coloured green, just brown, red and yellow colouring. But such maps are seldom found, as the road colour kept changing, usually getting darker along with darker hachures, and eventually green woods appeared, essentially the Third Edition style. Not so good. A single series, striking in parts, is not what we are looking for. In 1912, Sir Charles Close initiated a programme of experiments focusing on the representation of relief, which produced the celebrated 1913 map of *Killarney District*, using layers, hachures, contours and hill shading, with a clutch of similar experiments following in 1914. Although very

attractive and technically ambitious, they are just a handful of maps, little known by the public and cannot claim to be a Golden Age. So, thank you very much but not this time.

At this point, I would argue that a Golden Age must surely contain an outstanding one-inch map, the series that was seen by the general public as being synonymous with the Ordnance Survey itself. The Popular Edition was popular with the public, and still is with today's collectors, but is not a fine map; nice, but look closely, could do better. Glancing at Chapter 2 and the Afterword of *Popular Maps*,¹ the general picture emerges : unequally worn copper plates from the old one-inch Third Edition small sheet series were cut up and riveted together ... further damaging the detail deterioration of the image with subsequent loss of clarity by the mid 1930s so worn out impossible to correct them any further a map which, when printed in colour, was distorted it could not be regarded as a 'complete and authoritative record of the country' Although the production of the map spanned the entire inter-war period, it had come to the end of its useful life even before the completion of its first publication in 1926. was therefore in most respects a map behind the times So again, not this time. Yes, but what about the Fifth Relief, which continued the striving for excellence in relief depiction, with only a few sheets being issued? Admirable, but nothing to stake a claim on. Is this just clutching at straws?

Three down, one to go. Consider the Seventh Series and associated maps. I say associated as since the adoption of the National Grid, all maps have been bound together by the grid. A map reference, SO 155891, is meaningful at any scale. The soft ten-colour printings of the Seventh Series were truly superb, and the cold six colour versions still exceedingly clear. A totally fresh specification, a newly drawn map covering the whole of Great Britain, and so clear. The newly drawn quarter-inch and tourist maps, also sparkle. The modern approach to marketing saw the adoption of a house style for map covers and associated ephemera, which helped to consolidate the whole operation. For the first time in OS history, we find all maps, large and small scales being nice and clear, presented in a uniform and attractive way. Across the board, the best yet. But Golden? No.

This isn't getting anywhere. Something is not quite right. On paper (no pun intended), it looks like the Seventh Series to the end of the 1960s comes out best, but try as I might, I just cannot see this as a magical period; a fine series of maps, but not a Golden Age. Well, not just yet. I assume that someone has written to the effect that one can be too close to history to be truly objective, so the real test will come in 2212, when the 1890s, 1920s and 1950s will all seem equally long ago. Come this time, the Seventh and co. will be very well placed. Just you wait and see. With hindsight, it is obvious there could never have been a Golden Age for small scale maps in the nineteenth century. To appeal to the mass market, they need to be 'a product', be put in covers, and marketed, with the resulting

¹ Yolande Hodson, *Popular maps: the Ordnance Survey Popular Edition one-inch map of England and Wales 1919-1926*, London: Charles Close Society, 1999.

accumulation of ephemera and so on. And in such circumstances, the whole product must be considered, map quality and quality of cover, allowing a slightly lower standard for one to be outweighed by the other. For large scale maps, the situation has been entirely different, in that plans have virtually always been issued as flat sheets, and must be considered in this context.

So, I will now state the blindingly obvious (as Robert Peston would say) and lay claim to 1913 up to the mid-1930s as being the Golden Age of Ordnance Survey small scale maps. Yes, I know what you have just read about the Pops, but that was to get your attention and keep you reading. And even if it was true, which it is, it only puts a stick in the spokes because I suggested a Golden Age must have an exemplary one-inch series. Without this stipulation we can really get down to noting all the wonderful things the OS produced in the twenty odd years after 1913. And here, one must include non-map items, as they were and are so closely linked to the maps. The same tingly feeling that one gets from the map is also received from the ephemera, the advertising material and OS paperwork such as the Professional Papers.

So, we start in 1913 with *Killarney District*, then *Dorking and Leith Hill*, and the *Aldershots*, all available alongside the one-inch Third Edition, a nice tidy competent map, with white or decorative covers, accompanied by Scotland in the same style. Also, the fairly new half-inch large sheet series, in three styles, again in smart white covers. A flying start, certainly popular with collectors in my day. The First World War stopped the experiments but allowed the OS to rise to the occasion and produce a vast number of excellent trench maps, plus the mysterious and little known *Air Packets* in the white cases.

Enter Ellis Martin and Arthur Palmer to provide colour and excitement for both the Golden Age and today's collectors. In 1920, *Snowdon District* was the first tourist map issued in attractive pictorial covers. And once it was seen that these 'worked', then everything received this treatment, tourist, district, aviation, ten mile and town maps. But perhaps the finest series maps produced during this period were the newly drawn Scottish Populars, an undeservedly neglected and exceedingly beautiful map. Probably the only one-inch map series that I would call beautiful, with a capital B, *the* most attractive one-inch map ever, if you want it laid on thick. Not forgetting the six-inch town maps found in the card envelope covers. So why were all of these not mentioned earlier? Because I needed them in this bit.

Many exceedingly fine maps and cover designs resulted from O.G.S. Crawford's appointment as Archaeology Officer for the Ordnance Survey in 1920. After a point, everything snowballed with ephemera, booklets, leaflets and Professional Papers, all appearing with inspiring artwork or being fine works in themselves. Then at the very end, the Fifth Relief Edition closes the Golden Age, allowing the reader to supply the terminal date, 1933 or 1939.

And still I have not mentioned the much loved Popular Edition, and they are loved, the maps that really lured me into all this. People liked them at the time; they were bought as never before, and our members cannot resist collecting them. Indeed, it is the only map series which attracts fanatics. Why worry if it

would not win a cartographic competition? Go for the total number of points scored, it's a team effort for this era thing. A team that wins gold: experimental maps, Half-inch, Thirds, Pops, Scottish Pops, Fifth Relief, tourist and district maps, archaeological maps, ephemera, booklets and Professional Papers. Not to mention aviation maps, town plans, air packets, trench maps, and a secret map of London.

All produced within about twenty years. Beat that.

David Archer adds: John Henry is to be congratulated as the winner of the 2011 Christmas competition (*Sheetlines* 92, page 2). A prize of Sheet 114 in both the *Fifth Relief Edition*, and matching *Fifth Relief Edition*, *Physical Features alone* will give even more hours of fun than the competition.

After *Sheetlines* was distributed, Mike Cottrell predicted that readers would find 'references' that I had not noticed, and so it was. In case anyone has not finished, and to avoid confusion, there were six named Director Generals and two Superintendents. At least.

Ordnance Survey press release of 14 February 2012

Avoid a 'life on the edge' with new custom-made maps from Ordnance Survey

Map owners no longer face a 'life on the edge' thanks to a new range of customisable paper maps from Ordnance Survey.

The much loved OS Explorer Map and OS Landranger Map series of maps have now been extended further with the introduction of a new customisable version.

The new OS Explorer Map – Custom Made and OS Landranger Map – Custom Made allow anyone to customise their own map, choose their own title and select an individual cover image from a wide selection photographs.

Matching the existing look and feel of the OS Explorer Map at 1:25,000 and OS Landranger Map at 1:50,000 scales, which are recognised as the definitive maps for outdoor activities, the custom-made version will be the same quality and detail which customers have come to love.

The new maps allow anyone to go online and select their own special location to centre the map on. Helping to avoid a 'life on the edge', the customer decides what goes in the centre of the map. It could be any location that is important – someone's home, their town or favourite walk. The maps are specially printed to order, including the customers' own personal title, like 'Our Family Holiday', for example, as well as a wide choice of selected cover photographs.

A new production process means that Ordnance Survey custom-made maps are now printed on the same paper as standard 'off-the-shelf' Ordnance Survey maps. This makes them thinner, tougher, easier to fold and a practical option for outdoor enthusiasts as well as a fantastic gift for the person who has everything.

The customer can choose to have the map delivered folded or flat and with or without a cover so that it can be easily used outdoors or framed for the perfect print in the home. The maps are available in two scales of detail – 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 – making them perfect for planning an outdoors adventure or getting active.

Richard Oliver comments:

What would be more useful than cover pictures would be the ability to (1) filter out certain information, and (2) to adjust the colour-scheme!