



Sheetlines

The journal of
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps

“Visit to Ordnance Survey”

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Sheetlines, 78 (April 2007), pp.5-7

Stable URL: <http://www.charlesclosesociety.org/files/OSVisit.pdf>

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Published by
THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY
for the Study of Ordnance Survey Maps
www.CharlesCloseSociety.org

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.

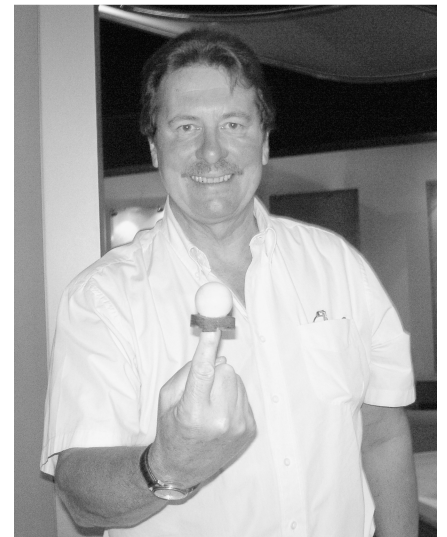
Visit to Ordnance Survey

John Seeley and Mike Cottrell

A select group of the Society (Gerry Jarvis, John Brennan, Frank Prest, Aidan and Ruth de la Mare, Mike Cottrell, Rod Sladen, John and Val Seeley) visited Ordnance Survey on 10 August 2006, perhaps for nearly the last occasion in its present building. Our group had travelled variously from as far as Manchester, deepest East Anglia and even overseas (well, the Isle of Wight), overcoming bomb alerts at airports and other difficulties. Faye Hutton of the OS hospitality staff met us at 10.30 with a full programme, hot coffee and a dazzling smile, and then shepherded us immaculately through a long day, during which not less than twelve OS staff members gave us their undivided attention for a period.

OS headquarters receives its guests in a conference suite with reception area, exhibition - buffet area and a lecture room all luxuriously appointed and available for the entire day. After refreshments, which included the usual excellent pastries, Jon Sims, archive relocation leader, introduced Richard Short. Richard talked to us about the theodolite being the workhorse of OS, and the retriangulation that had taken place from 1936 onwards. We were shown a mock up of a trig. pillar made not from stone and concrete but wood and plaster. The serial number on the plate was 10695; this was never issued for an actual location. There are still about 1,000 trig. pillars in use today forming part of the GPS national network. Jon then showed us around the antiques and curios exhibition. Amongst the many items on display, we saw a sharpened brass gramophone needle used as a scribing tool before the advent of factory cut sapphires. He explained how each scriber would take several days to complete a litho plate. Finally, we saw a Begg's ball, a high-tech ping-pong ball hollowed out to take a 12-volt bulb. These were used for night work on trig. pillars.

Jon had also brought heaps of six-inch maps from the County Series edition of 1894-96, reproduced on thick cartridge paper for the bicentenary, full and quarter-sheets both, for us to browse and then take home: which we did! The programme proper then began, with sit-down presentation lectures, three tours, shopping opportunity and interspersed with buffet luncheon provided by the hosts. Our lecturers were John Cartledge (Licensed Partner Sales Manager) on 'Ordnance Survey year in brief' and Chris Parker (Research Manager) on 'Research and innovation'. Robert Gower, programme manager, was also ready to speak on the Derived Data Programme but, unfortunately, as we were overrunning our time this presentation had to be cut.



GERRY JARVIS

This picture of Mike Cottrell with a Begg's ball featured as a 'puzzle corner' on page 55 of our last issue.



GJ

Andy Gilbert – the image of a modern surveyor

Our tour guides were Andy Gilbert (OS Specific Training Manager) for a surveying demonstration, Dave Kaye (Print and Distribution Manager) and colleagues for a tour of the print floor and Pete Clark, the archive supervisor, for the visit to the Historical Mapping Archives.

John Cartledge explained how OS worked with their partners and the panel that had been set up to make decisions and policies relating to local government bodies. He also described the progress that had been made in handling pan-European matters. In closing he indicated that the planned move to purpose-built offices at Adanac Park, about one mile away, would be

completed by late 2008 or early 2009. The print and warehouse facilities would be rehoused on an industrial site within the Southampton area.

At the end of John's presentation, we went outside to the front of the main building where we were introduced to Andy Gilbert, who gave us a surveying demonstration. He was wearing a backpack with two camcorder batteries inside: good for several hours electrically but weighing heavy on the surveyor. The attached aerial was capable of receiving signals from five satellites. The kit displayed a map of the area on the laptop screen, which was fastened around his body by straps to keep it in a horizontal position. Andy then proceeded, by taking about five readings, to plot a short piece of kerb around the edge of the car park. By manipulating the data via the keyboard or Leica kit he was able to display the results on the screen. Andy is responsible for the training of new surveyor recruits and this takes between six to nine months. The latest intakes of recruits were all graduates. How times have changed!

For most of us this was the day's most enjoyable moment, especially for him (her!) who held the surveying pole whilst Andy plotted the point on his computer: the pole of course carrying an elegant sat-nav conical aerial at the top and an earth

connection at the bottom. He showed us several ingenious features, such as how to survey close up to a tall building. His fluorescent jacket, barber-striped pole and tin-man aerial were a glorious sight.

From the lectures we learnt many new slants as to how OS will be packaging their data on paper, electronically, and on-line, handheld or whatever. Progress continues breakneck. Not all of the newer data presentation is palatable: a handheld street map, which shows who we all are, where we all live and most other things about us, grated rather. However it is certain that the mapping and other spatial data unique to OS will be increasingly put before the public with better access than ever, and the younger citizenry like it very much.

We later returned to current, and even historical topics. The print tour (Dave Kaye and the other two Daves) was as enjoyable as ever, and since neither massive printing machine was running we could hear every golden tidbit. Because of removal to the new site this was the last time the Charles Close Society will have the privilege of enjoying the present print room, with a full description of offset photolitho. Indeed although there will only be one machine after removals, this will still give formidable capacity for foreseeable requirements. Many of the various Government agency requirements additional to those of OS were in view on the day (some of our group would dearly love to spend a week in the room getting over-age 'work experience' in the mysteries).

Last of all there was the Historical Archives tour (Clark and colleagues). This was a first for CCS, and is reached high up in the older building after a long walk. Because of the destruction of much material by enemy action in WW2, as we know, the archives are inevitably incomplete but nevertheless with fascinating treasures not in other depositories. The ambition is to hold complete sets of all published six-inch and 1:10,000 series maps and to catalogue these: they are well on the way to this. In its remotest corner we stumbled on CCS stalwart Roger Hellyer, who was beavering away, as he often must do, on archive search. It would be difficult to guess whether Roger or our visiting group were the more surprised. This archive tour was most welcome to us as further insight into OS activity not previously seen. We wish it well and any publication it may do.

Then a final visit to the map shop: opened especially for us with a mouth-watering discount to which we paid full justice. After that, a concluding tea and coffee session, and away. Thank you very much, Ordnance Survey and its tireless staff, as exemplified by the marvellous Faye Hutton: a day to remember.



GJ

Roger Hellyer discovered in the Historical Mapping Archives