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“Expedition to Riga”
Alexander Kent and others

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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.

Expedition to Riga

20 - 24 June 2006

Alexander Kent

A trip to a Baltic capital is perhaps rather an odd place to start for a new member of the CCS, but the possibility of finding out more about the illusive origins of Uncle Joe's legacy of mapping and a chance to gain a unique insight into this former Soviet republic were simply too good to miss. Ten other CCS members agreed and, sometime during 20 June 2006, had assembled in the modern Hotel Valdemars (with or without luggage) to begin our Baltic cartoventure.

A busy schedule lay ahead for the next three days, with visits planned to the Latvian National Library, the commercial map publishers and distributors Jāņa sēta (wherein lay the opportunity to browse through a huge variety of Soviet maps), the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA), and the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, combined with trips to the conifer-lined beaches of Jūrmala (once favoured by Soviet officers) for a dip in the Baltic Sea, a walk through a forested valley to the castle in Sigulda, and to top it all, the chance to participate in the national midsummer festival of Līgo.

The stroll in the morning sun through the old city of Riga felt like a walk through the heart of any Central European city: Gothic spires, colourful neoclassical facades, trams, and cobbled streets, but accompanied by many old timber buildings suggesting the geographical and historical links with Scandinavia. Visual clues to its past as a former Soviet republic were still present but fleeting; the obliteration of Cyrillic letters on some of the street signs being a subtle example. As two teenagers serenaded us while we sipped our coffee laced with the local favourite, balsam, in a nearby café, it was soon time to discover the story of Latvia in maps awaiting us in the National Library.

Visit to the National Library of Latvia in central Riga

Anne Taylor

On our arrival at the National Library of Latvia on Jēkaba Str., near the main square in Old Riga, we climbed the stairs to the Cartographic Reading Room and were introduced to Anda Zālīte, Map Librarian, and her colleague Laura Putniņa.

The map collection is the largest publicly-available collection in Latvia and houses ca 32,000 map sheets plus books on cartography, tourist guides, etc. (In addition, some 700 older maps are housed in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, in the same building.) The Department of Cartographic Materials collects maps of all parts of the world, but naturally their great strength lies in maps of Latvia and the Baltic countries.

This was amply demonstrated by the selection of maps on display for us in the Reading Room where the tables were smothered. In addition to Soviet mapping,

we were also able to look at maps of the area now known as Latvia from different periods, perfectly complementing the short talk that Anda had given on the cartographic history of Latvia. Of particular interest to many of us were the maps from an earlier period of national cartography – the first map of Latvia in Latvian was published in 1859; the first atlas in Latvian in 1861. National cartography has further developed since Latvia gained independence in 1990 – a topic we were to learn more about the next day.

Having spent some time looking at the maps, Anda invited us for a tour behind the scenes. Faced with ranks of neatly labelled plan chests full of Soviet mapping, it was not long before members of the group were asking if they could open drawers, and not much longer before maps were out on any convenient flat surface and the digital cameras in action! Complete coverage of Latvia had been achieved at 1:10,000, 1:25,000, 1:50,000 and 1:100,000 (and smaller) scales – all secret. It transpired that following independence, the National Library had acquired copies of the 1:10,000 Soviet maps (some of them scans since there had only been one copy) from the archive of the State Land Service and that some of the other mapping had been rescued before it was destroyed in the early 1990s.

We eventually decided that we must tear ourselves away and leave Anda and her colleagues in peace! We thanked them wholeheartedly for making our visit so thoroughly enjoyable and interesting and for making us feel so very welcome. Further information about the National Library and the Map Collection can be found via the Department of Cartography web pages at http://www.lnb.lv/eng/gen_inf/structure/cartography.htm. And if you would like to look at maps of Latvia produced between 1500 and 1800, look at the excellent images at http://data.lnb.lv/nba05/kartes/frame_anglu.htm.

On the way home, at the airport, some of us noted that unwanted currency donated by travellers was to be used to help fund a new building for the National Library – a fitting end to our journey.

Visit to Jāņa sēta map shop and publishing house in central Riga

David Watt

The hot and steamy afternoon was given over to a two-centre visit to the Jāņa sēta map shop and publishing house in central Riga. Jāņa sēta ('John's place') began in 1992 as a development of an art gallery by a small group (most of whom still work for the company), led by Janis Turlajs, now Editor-in-Chief. Their first product was an A4-sized map of Latvia which they exhibited at the 1992 Frankfurt Book Fair and then at the 1993 International Cartographic Congress. There has been sustained development since 1992, initially based on their sales of Soviet mapping but now almost entirely maintained by their sales of in-house cartography and digital data covering the Baltic states, including town plans of cities in surrounding countries.

The visit began at their map shop at 83/85 Elizabetes iela korp 2: a beautiful, wooden, colonnaded building that has been painstakingly externally restored to its

original late nineteenth century condition. The shop had been closed specially for us so there was plenty of room as we were welcomed by Mr Turlajs, Mr Aivars Beldavs and Mrs Janina Bluma, who were all founders of the company. Also in the welcoming party were Mr Aleksandr Lesment, who had travelled especially from Estonia and Mr Aivars Ratkevics, both of whom were keen to offer their first-hand knowledge of 'the Soviet time'. Mr Lesment presented John Davies with a copy of the two-volume Soviet Officers' *Atlas Mira* with its gazetteer. Was I jealous!

The shop is roughly the size of one floor of Stanford's London store and has the usual array of maps and guidebooks, but with an exceptional selection of mapping over the Baltics and Russia. However, it also contains Soviet topographic maps and city plans and some original historical mapping of the Baltic states. If you are ever in Riga, go!

Although exceptional refreshments were on offer (including food associated with the Līgo festival), the lure of maps was far too great and what followed was an international version of the CCS AGM map market. Assistants rushed in and out of a rather chaotic stockroom with armfuls of Soviet city plans of the UK and other exotic fare, and soon there were bags of stuff all over and the till was ringing. As stamina flagged, we piled into the company minibus for 'Part Two'.

The 'cartography house' is situated at 119 Stabu iela. This fully air-conditioned, five-storey facility was purpose built in 2002 and replaced the cramped and stiflingly humid workshops above the shop in Elizabetes iela, which have now been rented out. We were initially briefed (and offered juice and cake!) in the cool basement 'communal room' where the entire staff (40 in total, 25 of whom are cartographers) meet twice daily to discuss work and the world. Then the visit moved up the house through the warehouse (the floor area being rather miscalculated as it is only a third the size actually required!), sales (they 'badge' their mapping for many European map sellers, including PPWK in Poland), databases (they have created their own database of Latvian place names, independent of the work done at LGIA), map compilation (they have created their own database for the Baltic states but used, and significantly updated, HarperCollins databases elsewhere), field checking (around 40,000 km of roads, footpaths and even forest tracks are checked per month) and finally, proof reading (by one eagle-eyed lady!). The printing is done at the state cartographic agency, which houses the only large format colour printing facility in the country, as is the case in many other former Soviet republics. Lastly we moved to the company archive, the 'Holy of Holies', next to Mr Turlajs' office. All the while the offices were decorated with modern art, alluding to the origins of the company. It soon became apparent that there was a great camaraderie among the staff, the next communal event being Līgo in a couple of days.

All too soon the visit was complete, but it was a great professional and personal pleasure to be able to visit people so dedicated to their company and a

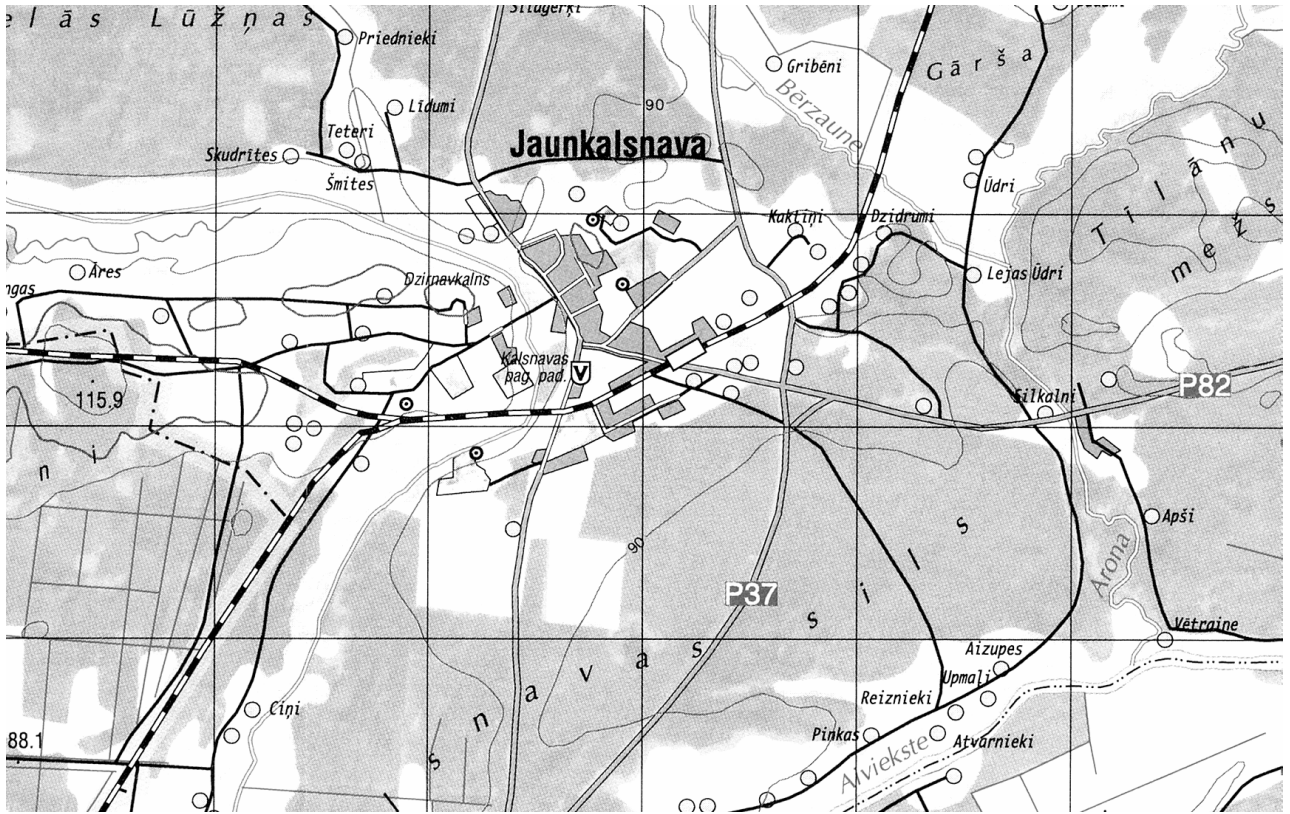
place which I had heard of for so many years, but which I had never had the opportunity to visit.

Visit to the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA)
Gerry Zierler

On the hot morning before the national midsummer holiday of Līgo, the CCS Riga tourists went to visit the Latvian Geospatial Information Agency (LGIA), a tram ride away from the old city in a leafy suburb of Riga. We were greeted by Mr Arnis Krišjānis, Councillor of the Deputy Director, who gave us the background to this relatively new organisation, formed only in January 2006 from part of the old State Land Service (VZD).

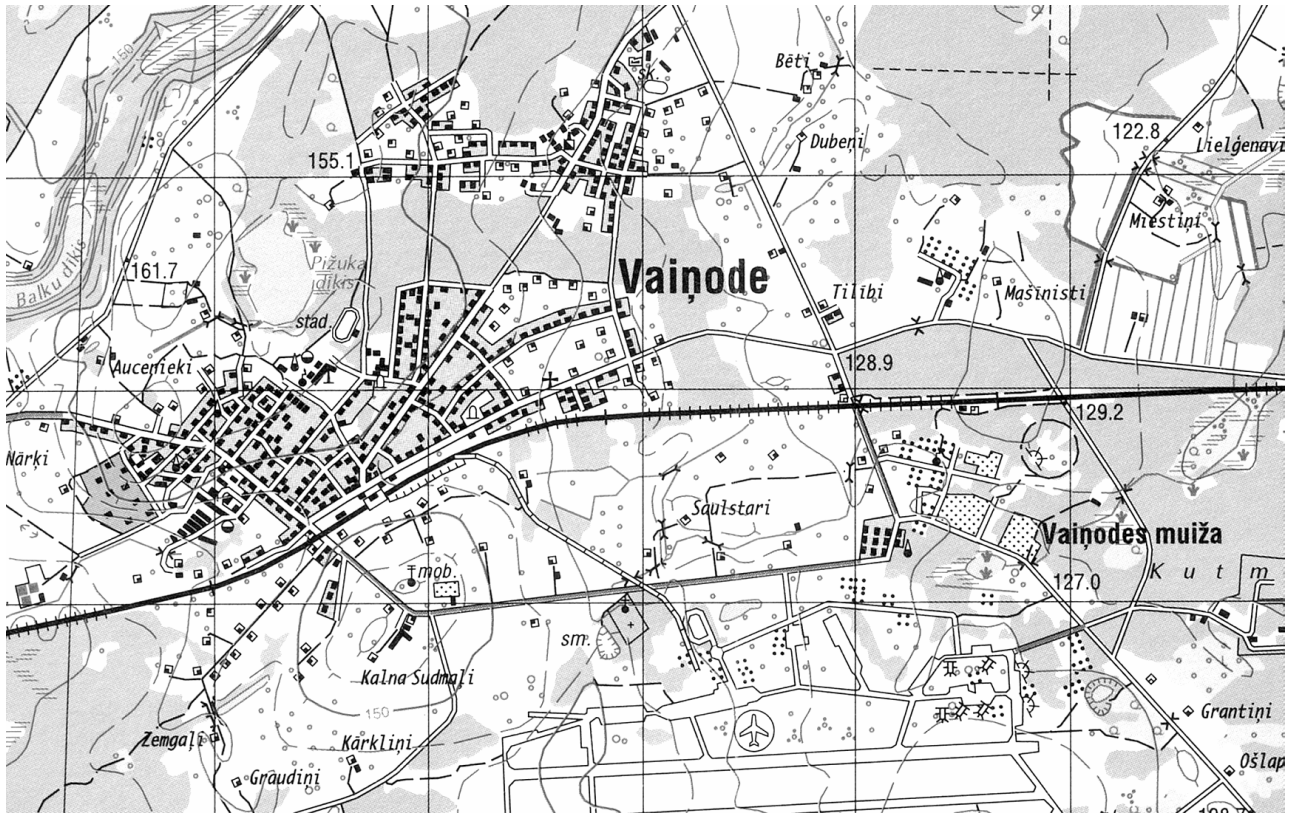
The LGIA has three divisions: Geodesy, Cartography, and Large-Scale Mapping, employing 347 staff, with eight regional offices. It includes a photogrammetry section, providing orthorectification at 1:10,000 and for sixteen cities at 1:2000. The CCS Soviet military map aficionados present were delighted to find out that the nineteenth century buildings had once been the home of Nivea Creme, and even more delighted that it had later become the USSR's Map Factory No 5. Here, the Soviet General Board of Geodesy and Cartography had been responsible for producing secret maps of other parts of the world, including Britain, at various scales ranging from 1:1M to 1:1000.

For five years after 1994, with help from Sweden, Latvia had been mapped anew at 1:50,000 using SPOT imagery and a second series, conforming to NATO standards with US technical support, is well underway. A new series at 1:10,000 has also been started, but even calling on the previous work done by the USSR, this was proving a big job. The visitors were delighted to be presented with a sample of each of these three series.



Latvian 1:50,000 mapping

Sheet 3433 Pļaviņas (above) shows the generalised nature of the first series produced after independence, which used satellite imagery. Isolated homesteads are marked by circles. Sheet 3141 Priekule (below), from the new series, is much more detailed, even depicting bunkers on the ?disused? airfield. © VZD 1999 & 2002. [A German WW1 Zeppelin hanger sited here was re-erected in Riga as a market hall, still very much in use.]



Our tour started with a visit to the Toponymy section, hosted by their manager, Vita, in delightful Latvian national costume, ready for the LGIA's own Līgo celebrations that afternoon. Fifteen staff (including field workers) interview officials and locals around the country to compile data on names in Latvian and in dialects such as Latgalean, which in future might appear in some maps as a second name. As well as an interesting range of gazetteers and other naming guides, examples of the inter-war 1:75,000 series were seen, and even Soviet "secret" maps that were used as a basis for notation.

Next, Aivars Liicis and his colleague Liene gave a dramatic demonstration of photogrammetry, complete with electronic goggles for viewing stereopairs and the land surface model. Here, Russian Microstation software is being used for the production of orthophotos. Heady stuff this, and even the experts regularly take a break from watching the countryside leaping upwards!

Deputy director of the Department of Cartography, Valdis Bērziņš, was next to describe his operations, and we saw work taking place on the military 1:50,000 M756 Series 2, now made compatible with NATO specifications. An interesting conversation took place on the legacy of Latvian mapping, with influences apparently felt from Russian, German and even Dutch mapping style over the centuries. One CCS member had his memory 'JOGged' at being shown the Latvian Joint Operations Graphics sheets, which bore the statement 'from the best available source materials'. Having had a hand in acquiring those 'best available materials', he was pleased to see the result of the Latvian updates, which were deemed to be excellent. This department was now also responsible for preparing aeronautical and special low-flying charts. We were presented with samples of the intriguing booklet *Specifications for topographic map in scale 1:50,000 second edition* published by the State Land Service in 2000, which came in later for detailed study and not a little unjustified mirth at an impromptu cartographic quiz à la OS flashcards. The wealth of symbology for wooded areas is fascinating and no doubt totally justified in a country whose timber is a major resource.

Our tour finished with a brief visit to plate preparation and to see the printing presses, where a modern Heidelberg was accompanied by two older East German Planeta Polygraph machines from USSR days, still going strong, producing not only the LGIA products but commercial maps as well.

Our thanks to Arnis Krišjānis and his LGIA colleagues seemed somehow inadequate after such a fascinating and welcoming tour, all given in excellent English. As we left, preparations for their own Līgo celebrations were in full swing in the hot sunshine, and we headed off, fully sated, for a train ride to the coastal resort of Jūrmala and a cooling dip in the Baltic!

Upon returning to Riga, we visited the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. Here we learned about the various episodes of foreign control, the short-lived period of independence from 1918-1940, and life during the rule of the Soviet Union before the current state of independence began in 1991. The many stories of survival

from the Gulags (where exhibits included letters made from tree bark and a violin made by inmates) and maps depicting the mass deportations, bore sombre testimony to the country's struggle through hardship and persecution.

The following morning, we boarded a train to the town of Sigulda (a few miles east of Riga) for a cable car ride over a surprisingly steep valley and a similarly steep walk that led to a castle dating from the early thirteenth century (where restoration work came complete with wooden scaffolding). In the town, floral wreaths were being made up and sold as preparations were well underway for the evening's festivities.

The Latvia trip was timed perfectly to coincide with the midsummer festival of Līgo, and to our delight we were able to join in with the celebrations at a party arranged for us by Inta Baranovska and friends. The evening was always going to be one to remember, with cheerful Latvian women wearing floral wreaths offering wild-boar sausages and other delicious food, and with dancing all the while to Latvian folk music. The evening went on until the early hours, with singing around the village and back at the bonfire, where our hosts' beautiful and poignant folk songs were in turn contrasted by our strains of 'On Ilkley Moor baht 'at' and other ditties. While us CCS folk may not have been able to agree on the subtleties of pitch, all agreed that it had been a most entertaining and memorable evening.

Thanks to John Davies for arranging such an enjoyable and richly fascinating trip and for organising it all so superbly, and to all our hosts in Latvia for their most generous hospitality.