



Sheetlines

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“Bodleian Library, University of Oxford”
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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.

Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

11 July, 2008

John Henry



Gerry Jarvis

Nick Millea (on left) shows a few examples from the Bodleian's huge collection

The CCS visitors were fortunate to visit the Map Section of the Bodleian Library prior to its transfer to temporary quarters while its 1930s home undergoes a multi-million pound refurbishment to meet current fire regulations. Map Librarian, Nick Millea greeted the twenty CCS members to welcome us and to outline the excellent programme that he and his staff had organised, beginning with coffee and cake in the staff canteen, Duke Hungry's. We divided into two groups to visit four areas of the library. Your writer was in group one and experienced the tour in the following order.

Nick Millea introduced us to the Reading Room, on the first floor, with a brief history of the Bodleian and a display of a few of the library's treasures. Thomas Bodley in 1602 introduced the concept of Legal Deposit, a forerunner of Copyright, and was influential in legislating the requirement that one copy of every publication be deposited in the library of the University of Oxford. This was before the establishment of the British Library and its subsequent inclusion together with Cambridge, Edinburgh and Dublin in copyright legislation. From this early start, the influx of all published material now amounts to a thousand books and two thousand magazines weekly!

Due to its early start, prior to OS, the Bodleian, along with the British Library, has a comprehensive set of OS maps and it continues to receive maps for all of the UK, unlike the regional collections of the other copyright libraries. In addition to its complete collection of OS paper maps, it receives annually a digital copy of all OS digital maps. OS digital mapping may be viewed in the library and single A4 extracts may be printed for private research at a nominal charge.

The map library is gradually putting the index to its map collection online, some 1,250,000 items, but currently only 10% of the collection can be discovered on its website, www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/guides/maps. Nick then showed us a reproduction of the Gough Map of Great Britain which is the oldest surviving road map of Great Britain, dating from around 1360; a reproduction of the surviving remnant of a 1590s tapestry map of Gloucestershire; the 1797 Davis Atlas of Oxfordshire at 2 inches to the mile; and post World War Two OS photomosaic maps on sheet lines of the six-inch National Grid series.

The latter series has an interesting twist at the Bodleian. After the initial limited issue, it was decided that it compromised national security and was withdrawn. The photomosaic maps were re-issued with artificial clouds or field patterns covering various sites. However, the Bodleian was never asked for and so retains the initial issue. Therefore, it is possible to locate and view the sensitive sites by comparison with the re-issued censored version.¹

Stage two of our visit was a tour of the ‘stacks’ where the maps are stored and from where they are fetched by library staff for visitors. We descended to the second level of the three-storey basement with Stuart Ackland. Here are kept all OS maps, WW1 trench maps, WW2 German invasion plans of UK, and all GSGS maps. It was temptation alley for our group; there was so much to look at. The maps are delivered by trolleys via the lift to the reading room.

The environment is cool and pest free. Unfortunately it is not free of risk from the spread of fire; recent inspection has discovered that the closely spaced steel columns (supporting the heavy floor loading) permit air to circulate between floors. We saw the narrow gaps that pose the previously unrecognised risk. To seal the gaps, the building has to be vacated to permit remedial work. This will affect the entire book and map storage area.

From the map stacks, we descended to the third basement level to view the conveyor system that delivers books to readers in the main reading rooms, across Broad Street, and returns them. The clever mechanical engineering that transports books to different parts of the library and returns them to different parts of the stacks was marvelled at. Equally marvellous was the pneumatic tube system that jetted requests posted in little cylinders from the reading rooms to the various stations in the stacks. It has



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Far below the Library, the intrepid expedition heads into the unknown following the conveyor under Broad Street

¹ See also the example in the article by Chris Board, *Sheetlines* 71,24 – CJH.

not been used for ten years since it was superseded by computers, but, like steam engines, it had its admirers. The pneumatic and conveyor systems enabled books to be delivered to the reader within two hours of the request.

We then ascended by a gentle ramp from the third basement and under Broad Street to the old Bodleian Library. From there we climbed a further two floors to see the original Duke Humphrey's Library which the Duke began in 1489. It is a half-timbered structure built over an earlier masonry lecture hall. In it scholars studied manuscripts in large volumes chained to the shelves over narrow sloping desks. The Duke's Library had a chequered career but has operated continuously since Thomas Bodley's time. In fact, the Deposit Library expanded so rapidly that it was extended at each end and upward such that the weight of books caused masonry walls below to bulge. The architect Christopher Wren designed the buttresses which sustain the structure to this day.

After a fascinating morning and the rigours of a five-storey descent and rise, we were ready for lunch. The majority of the visitors gravitated across Park Street to the Kings Arms.

After lunch, Nigel James demonstrated Digimap in the computer room off the Map Library reading room. Digimap is available to all higher educational institutions, but, at the library, individuals may register as non-commercial users. Through Digimap, Ordnance Survey maps at scales ranging from 1:1250 up to 1:250,000 are available online or for download. There are scanned raster maps of OS paper maps as well as vector maps of the more recent digital maps, at a range of scales, including *MasterMap*[®]. Among its many attributes, Digimap enables the easy comparison of many dates of historic OS maps to detect change.

Continuing the digital theme, we again descended to the basement, third level, where Rod Adkins of Digidata Technologies explained how his company is scanning all the out of copyright large-scale OS maps held by the Bodleian. Digidata is a digitisation and data management company specialising in archive and legacy data (see www.digidata.co.uk). The scans are at a high resolution of 300 to 400 dpi, in colour, and they include marginalia, unlike a popular competing product. The scanned maps will be georectified in mosaics to a very high standard and the metadata (the marginalia) for each component map of the digital mosaic will be accessible by a click of the mouse.

Keeping Rod supplied with maps for scanning, the Bodleian's Alex Zambellas showed how he uses David Archer's Indexes to the six-inch and 25 inch scale maps to log the progress of the map digitisation. In the course of locating the maps, Alex has had a map anorak's dream opportunity to check and read the several thousand maps being scanned. He could write a column or puzzle corner for *Sheetlines*. He showed us the emptiest map, the rudest map, cartographical oddities – the mapped location of mammoth remains, an unusual early experiment combining hill shading and hachuring – and a unique 1:2500 map of 1864 centred on Crystal Palace.

Although off-tour, a traditional typesetting and letter press shop occupied the other end of map digitising room. The typesetting and press, like the pneumatic tubes, provided an interesting comparison and contrast of past and current technologies. Actually seeing how things work greatly adds to the interest of past technologies.

The maps and the library structures were fascinating. The staff members whom we met are clearly enthusiastic about their jobs (and very fit, with all the stairs). CCS members agreed that we had enjoyed an interesting and varied tour of the Bodleian Library and thanked Nick Millea and his team for an excellent tour.