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Cartographiti

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MAP CURATORS GROUP

MCG
Workshop
2019



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Map storage at the New Bodleian - see *'From the toilet to Swindon'* by Stuart Ackland

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SUBSCRIPTIONS

Cartographiti is distributed free-of-charge to members of the British Cartographic Society who express an interest in receiving it; this in effect defines the membership of the Map Curators' Group, and it is not necessary to be a professional map curator or map librarian to join the group.

Non-members of BCS may receive *Cartographiti* on payment of a subscription of £10.00 per calendar year. This covers Inland UK and Northern Ireland postage. For International Surface Mail delivery the subscription is £12.00. International Airmail delivery is £15.00.

Please send payment in sterling to the Subscriptions Co-ordinator (address on back cover). Cheques should be payable to British Cartographic Society.

At the Business meeting of the Map Curator's Group (September 2019), it was decided that in future Cartographiti should move online. We are hopeful that this will make it easier to produce, although we're sad to see it disappear from the shelves. It is already available online through the BCS website:

<https://www.cartography.org.uk/producp-category/publications/journals-magazines/>

You will need to be a BCS member and log in to see it – I suggest that everyone checks now to make sure you can! You will receive an email when it is available.

Convener's Corner

This must be about at least the third version of this convener's corner I have written. Each time something happens to make it out of date! I am hoping that this time the situation for everyone is improving and we can get Cartographiti out to you all. You can take it as a sign of things getting back to normal that we are a few months late!

Lockdown will have had a huge effect on you all, whether furloughed or working from home. I am quite pleased with myself that I can now video call in five different applications and have given live online lectures; I know that many of you have too. It has been an opportunity to learn and reflect, but now, as things gear up again, it is also a time for decisiveness and sharing of best practice.

One of the major effects has been the cancellation of our autumn workshop. Along with the others on the BCS conference committee I felt it was best for all our safety and as September grows closer this still seems like the right decision. Look out for some online map talks from the BCS.

workshop 2021 into your diaries. It will be held at British Geological Society, Keyworth, near Nottingham, on Wednesday 8th September 2021. It'll be lovely to see you then!

Stay safe

Paula Williams

(Assistant) Editorial Effusion

Since putting this edition of Cartographiti together, we have been overtaken by the unfolding coronavirus situation. Not surprisingly, all face-to-face events have been cancelled, including this year's BCS symposium, due to take place at the home of the British Geological Survey in Keyworth. The good news is that it has simply been deferred until 2021 when I hope we can get together again.

There is also sad news, with the death of Merle Clark (née Abbot), former Convener of the Map Curator's Group, at the end of April – see the appreciation of Merle in this issue.

This issue of Cartographiti revisits the Map Curator's Group workshop held at the Ordnance Survey as part of the annual BCS symposium last September. I was disappointed not to be able to attend at the last minute, due to a broken wrist and the biggest plaster cast in the world. However, Debbie's summary and David and Stuart's pieces have given me a flavour of what I missed. The topic is one which most map curators are familiar with; it's good to know we're all facing similar problems. Sharing our experiences in this can only be a useful activity.

Judith Fox

Around the Libraries

National Library of Scotland Staff

Rosemary Hall, Map Assistant, left in September to go to a new post cataloguing the Ian Rankin manuscript collection. We have been pleased to welcome Matt Fellion in her place.

Research

This year's Graham Brown Research Fellow is Dr Simon Naylor, a Senior Lecturer in Historical Geography and Head of the Human Geography Research Group at the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow. Simon is using the fellowship to conduct research into the relationship between mountains, mountaineering and science in Scotland, focusing on weather study and the meteorological observatory on Ben Nevis.

Rachel Dishington, an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership PhD student at the University of

Edinburgh, spent three months at the Library from May to August 2019, working on a project to make the Stevenson maps and plans of Scotland more accessible. The Stevenson archive contains material from the firm established by Robert Stevenson, celebrated lighthouse engineer and grandfather of Robert Louis Stevenson, in the early-nineteenth century. Stevenson and his descendants worked on projects all over Scotland, ranging from designing harbours and lighthouses to surveying routes for new railways to remodelling the streets of Edinburgh. Records for over 2000 plans relating to historical engineering in Scotland from the Stevenson archive can now be searched online using our new map-based viewer. The archive can also be searched by keyword, or users can browse a full list of the places, subjects and people featured on the site. View the new Stevenson website at: <https://maps.nls.uk/projects/stevenson/>

Outreach

The Library closed its reading rooms from 29 March, and cancelled public events. In compensation, we have done more online workshops and webinars (for details, see <https://www.nls.uk/events/workshops-and-tours> and <https://gallowayglens.org/online-events-programme-launched-may-2020/>), and have been more active on social media.

NLS Travelling Exhibition – this has visited Falkirk and Girvan in 2019-20. Funding has been secured, so it will continue to travel. See <https://www.nls.uk/exhibitions/touring-displays/you-are-here> for more information.

Scottish Maps Forum seminar, 2020. This event was postponed and it is hoped to hold it in Spring 2021.

Chris Fleet, NLS

National Library of Wales Staff

Eleanor King, our new Trainee Assistant Map Curator joined us at the end of September 2019 from the British Library. She is currently learning the joys of map cataloguing.

Acquisitions

More batches from the large collection of railway plans from a donor in South Wales. We have also collected a donation from the important Welsh architect David Lea of his work, and added to our collection of Humphrey Llwyd maps.

Digitisation

18th century maps of Wales and subscriber lists have now been digitised and are available online.

Outreach

Carto-Cymru - The Wales Map Symposium, 2020: Surveying the Streets . This event was unfortunately cancelled due to the Coronavirus lockdown. It is hoped that a smaller version will be held in the autumn.

*Huw Thomas,
NLW*

Cambridge University Library

Digitisation

The project to create online catalogue records for, and digital images of, some of our manuscript maps (funded by a generous bequest to the Friends of Cambridge University Library) continues. Although, for various reasons, cataloguing and imaging

activities have had to be temporarily put on hold, we have released the first 100 or so images to Cambridge Digital Library (CUDL)
<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collection/maps/1>

The Friends are also being asked to fund the digitisation of our two copies (one coloured, one uncoloured) of Andreas Cellarius' *Harmonia macrocosmica* (1660).

Acquisitions

David Webb collection of road maps and atlases - generous donation of over 250 road books, atlases and maps. The donation includes 3 different states of John Ogilby's ground breaking road atlas published in 1675. In addition, there are meticulously curated sets of the many derivatives and developments of Ogilby's work published in the 18th century by John Senex, John Owen, Emanuel Bowen, Daniel Paterson, to name a few. The most recent items date from the early 20th century and include modern-day versions of the strip road maps as popularised by John Ogilby.

Outreach

Festival of Ideas: Women in Cartography. This topic was chosen to tie in with the Library's main exhibition The Rising Tide: Women at Cambridge

Festival of Ideas: Change of View - Charting Change in Asian Landscapes. This was a joint event with colleagues from the Royal Commonwealth Society Collections. They supplied photographs and panoramas and the Map Department supplied maps.

Cambridge Seminars in the History of Cartography. The last seminar in this series was unfortunately postponed. Michael Bravo (Scott

Polar Research Institute, Cambridge) will talk about 'Polar maps and their histories: reflections on the changing fortunes of cosmograph' at a later date, to be announced.

Anne Taylor, CUL

Bodleian Library, Oxford Sheldon tapestry maps

To celebrate the conclusion of our six-year partnership with the National Trust tapestry restoration team, we held a one-day symposium on 22 October 2019 entitled 'From Weston House to the Weston Library: the Sheldon Tapestry Maps at the Bodleian', at which one of the speakers was Peter Barber.

Staff

The role of Deputy map Librarian and Geospatial Data specialist is again vacant since Heidi Clough resigned in March to return to the GIS industry. Recruitment is currently on hold until normal service is resumed.

Research

Our Leverhulme Trust-funded project 'Understanding the medieval Gough Map through Physics, Chemistry and History' began in May 2019. We have appointed two staff: Damien Bove is the project's research assistant; Kelly Kilpatrick is our place-names person.

We are also participating in a project to commemorate Singapore's bicentenary, partnering with Yale-National University of Singapore, Leiden University Library, and the National Library of Singapore to create an online platform to deliver pre-1900 mapping of Southeast Asia

Outreach

The 'Talking maps' exhibition closed on 8 March 2020, having received about 98,000 visitors.

We have embarked on a partnership with Oxfordshire County Libraries and Archives for monthly visits to public libraries. Sessions have been held or are planned in Oxford, Bicester, Abingdon, Didcot, Henley, Thame and Witney.

Nick Millea, Bodleian

British Library Staff

Jim Caruth retired from the Library in September 2019 after five years.

Following Jim's departure, Nick Dykes was recruited as the Library's curator of modern mapping

Nick Krebs was recruited as map curator of Qatar National Library's Gulf History project partnership

Digitisation

The final phase of digitisation of 'War Office Archive' maps of eastern Africa funded by Indigo Trust was about to be completed before lockdown. However, the last tranche of images will be made available soon, bringing the total to 1,938 images published online.

Nick Dykes employed the Google Vision API to harvest over 300,000 pieces of text from the 'War Office Archive' images. The text includes many place names not found in published gazetteers, topographical descriptions of use to historians of the environment, and notes made for military or administrative purposes. A searchable resource of the text found will be added to the Research Repository shortly.

The 'Locating a National Collection' project will help cultural heritage organisations to use geospatial data - references and representations of location, such as where objects were made and used or the places they depict and describe - to connect diverse collections and engage research and public audiences in new ways. Funded by the AHRC as part of the 'Foundational Collaborative Projects: Towards a National Collection 2019' call, the project is based in Contemporary British Publications at the British Library. For more info on the programme as a whole see: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/fundedthemesandprogrammes/tanc-opening-uk-heritage-to-the-world>

Outreach

The British Library held the first part of a 'Maps mini-season' of public events and talks in spring 2020. This went ahead until closure and we hope to reschedule the remaining events. For more details see here: <https://www.bl.uk/events/maps-season>

Maps from the British Library's collections went on loan to the National Library of Singapore (On Paper: Singapore before 1867, September 2019-January 2020) and Fondazione Ragghianti, Lucca (Bernardo Bellotto, October 2019).

Maps will also be included in Harry Potter: a history of magic, opening Autumn 2020 in Tokyo <https://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2019/october/harry-potter-japan>

Tom Harper, Gethin Rees, BL

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) Annual D.A. Chart Seminar on Maps at PRONI

The first of these seminars, named in honour of David A. Chart, the first Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, took place on 26 June 2019:

Our place on the world map. 1000 to 1600, by Glynn Kelso. This illustrated presentation and discussion introduced essential interpretation skills for the deciphering of historical maps from the medieval and early modern period. Using maps of the world from various collections in England and Italy, themes included the 'edges of the world', and the positioning and orientation of Ireland.

Annaleigh Margey of the Dundalk Institute of Technology was due to deliver the 2020 D.A. Chart Seminar on 'Making sense of Ulster's maps' in May 2020, but this event was cancelled due to the Coronavirus lockdown.

Glynn Kelso, PRONI

The National Archives Access improvements

The large map legacy data project proceeds, describing maps and charts physically held within documents. These range from charts in Captain Cook's logs, to maps of international boundaries in Colonial Office correspondence, as well as maps of Board of Ordnance and of War Office provenance. Work has started on editing descriptions of maps of Africa and places within it, from a card index in the map room, containing thousands of descriptions of maps which were never published.

Research

Rose Mitchell is undertaking preliminary work with one of TNA's conservation scientists on the map element of a funded project on multi-spectral and other types of analysis, in particular on coloured early modern maps.

Outreach

Rose Mitchell gave a talk at an international conference at the French national archives in Paris in October 2019, on 'Large-scale Cartography in Europe in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance'

Rose was also due to give a paper in a colonial map panel at an international conference due June 2020, now postponed to 2022 due to coronavirus (Royal Geographical Society and Royal Anthropological Institute).

MCG News

Map Curators' Group Business Meeting 2019

Chair: Paula Williams.

1. Apologies for absence: Nick Millea (Bodleian), Rose

Mitchell (National Archives), Judith Fox (University of Reading).

2. The notes of the last meeting were approved.
3. **MAGIC.** Paula delivered a report from Marcy Bidney. Marcy is now vice chair of the ICA Commission on Cartographic Heritage, and it's been confirmed that ICA is happy to continue to be an umbrella organisation to host MAGIC for at least 2 more years, and to continue to involve GLAM institutions. Over this time MAGIC will investigate the practicalities of becoming a standalone organisation. The next ICA meeting will be in Spring 2020 in Romania, so Marcy is going to send out a poll to decide if people would like the next MAGIC meeting to be there, or in Milwaukee where Marcy is based. There is also the possibility of a merger with ISCEM (International Society for the Curators of Early Maps).



Map Curators meet at the OS. Photo courtesy of Paula Williams

4. **LIS-maps.** Claire Gordon reported that the email discussion group continues to flourish quietly. It has 313 members (a fall from 334 the previous year) and an average of 13 messages a month. The most popular discussion topics seem to involve historical mapping themes.
5. **Cartographiti.** Judith Fox is happy to continue editing this is Tinho's absence. Congratulations were offered to all those involved in the Ann Sutherland tribute issue. There is a problem with paying for the printing and postage (this was probably covered by the University of Liverpool while Tinho was running it). *[Clarification - the problem was actually that JF was unable to locate a suitable printer at the University of Reading. Production costs are covered by BCS].* Various options were discussed such as reducing it to a page in Maplines, or sending it only in digital format. It was suggested that users could be given the choice of print or digital, but this would probably not reduce cost much and would involve the extra work of identifying who wanted which format. A digital only format was suggested, but this would make it harder for libraries to keep back copies. It was suggested that in future Cartographiti should be emailed to all subscribers as a link. Meanwhile Paula will check which institutional copies were being sent out, and Anne offered to print and send them.
6. **Training.** An attempt to arrange antiquarian map cataloguing event jointly with CILIP Rare Books group had foundered because of communications problems. Francis suggested that it would be useful if potential donors had guidance on cataloguing; Paula suggested an online guide to which people could be referred.
7. Donna suggested a quick guide to online mapping and how to use it would be useful. GIS is now quite complex and can only be done by those who can spend a lot of time keeping up with it.
8. **2020 MCG workshop.** Suggestions for possible themes were invited – Dave W. suggested 'Sources of geospatial data.' The possibility of making it more of a workshop, with talks in the morning and practical / training sessions in the afternoon was discussed. It was agreed that it is much simpler if the MCG workshop is joined to the BCS Symposium, but that BCS no longer plans very far ahead (we don't yet know where they will meet next). Donna had enjoyed the day's sessions and would be happy to see more on similar themes. Paula suggested 'User education,' which could be tied in with geospatial data, and possibly involve Google Maps.



Map Curators at the OS. Photo courtesy of Paula Williams

9. AOB – the change to Bounding Box was discussed briefly. It was agreed that, while not as good as it was, it is still serviceable.

Forum

The Map Curator's Group workshop took place on Wednesday 11 September 2019 at the Ordnance Survey HQ in Southampton. The theme was one which will be relevant to many map collections around the country. What follows is a summary of the day, and the text of some of the talks.

Dispersal, disposal and digital transition: map collection development.

The 2019 MCG workshop was a particularly useful and interesting one, with a range of talks on very different experiences of map collections management. After welcome and introduction from Paula Williams, the MCG convenor, the first speaker was **David Sherren** from the University Library at the University of Portsmouth, who spoke about his experience of looking after the map collection. The university has a modest collection of about 21k sheets. The collection's origins date from the 1950s when it was based in the geography department. There are facilities for both cartography and map consultation. David has

experienced two moves of the collection already, in 1996 and 2007, when buildings were closed. He was originally offered very poor and inadequate spaces in the most recent move, but eventually the library made a good space available. Only maps of the UK and Europe could be retained though because of limited storage space. He is the only person working with the maps collection. The Map Library is now treated as part of Special Collections along with Archives and Rare Books, and they have a dedicated section on the website. There are currently plans to create a Special Collections Hub, with a “rationalised” map collection, which will necessitate another move and the weeding of about half the collection. The disposal plan over the next four years involves offering maps to other departments and libraries, map dealers and charity shops; even interesting and collectible maps take time to sort. David also spoke about digitisation projects, including one of the early large scale OS plans of Portsmouth, managed in cooperation with the NLS so that the images can be made available via their excellent website. The other involves digitising C19 railroad maps in railway company reports. It was interesting to hear how the use and needs of the collection had changed over 25 years.

The session led to a lively discussion on good ways of getting rid of unwanted maps that cannot be transferred to other libraries. These included companies that recycle them into nice envelopes. One person recommended AnyBook.biz, which will take away books (and maps) from libraries, sell them online, and give the library a share of the profits.

Stuart Ackland then spoke about Bodleian map storage through the ages. He began by mentioning the suspicion that maps and their storage are considered by institutions to be a nuisance; research for the talk showed that this is not a recent development. The University of Oxford had its first library in the University Church, from about 1320. The contents were moved to the room still known as Duke Humfrey’s Library in 1488. In 1550 in the reign of Edward the VI any books with a Roman Catholic theme were removed and mostly burnt, though some were sold to glove makers, tailors and bookbinders (AnyBook.biz was not yet established). The library reopened in 1602, financed by Sir Thomas Bodley. Two globes, one celestial and one terrestrial, were acquired early on for £2, but by 1608 Bodley considered the globes to be a nuisance and wanted to sell the pair to buy more books. A letter to Thomas James, Bodley’s first librarian, from Sir Thomas Bodley in 1612 complained about the space they took up which could be better used for books. There is little record of maps in any records or histories of the library until 1800 when a decision was made to increase the purchase of both English and foreign mapping. In ‘A History of the Bodleian Library between 1845 and 1945’, published in 1981, it was said, ‘In default of means to deal with them and of space for their storage, maps, it is to be feared, were regarded as an encumbrance’. By this point library records show that the Bodleian was receiving between 3 and 4000 sheets a year. There was no underground book (or map) storage until 1909. Treasures such as the medieval Gough Map were in frames on the wall until only 25

years ago. After 1887 the maps were moved to a room in the quadrangle (this has since become a toilet); some of the wooden cabinets from here were moved to the New Library after the second world war and were still in use in 2014. The New Bodleian had 3247 drawers for maps, which soon proved inadequate; in November 2010 this was all finally decanted to the new Bodleian Storage Facility in Swindon.

There were questions on the difficulties of physical separation from one's collection; both the practical need for specially made transit boxes and careful packing, and the lack of familiarity with the collections that results.

A different approach was taken by **Ian Byrne**, who spoke about collectors as curators, with reference to his own experience of building up a personal collection of over 9000 road maps. He touched on the psychological motivations of collectors, and spoke amusingly on the stereotypes associated with collecting as a hobby. He explained the slightly irrational distinction between those maps regarded as collectable, and those that are not: maps made by petrol companies are far more popular than those made by automobile clubs, for instance; Michelin maps are popular, but other tyre company maps are not. Some collectors want a "complete" collection and acquire several almost identical maps with tiny variants. Cataloguing tends to be, at best, an Excel spreadsheet. When a collector dies, his collection (it's generally his rather than hers) will probably end up with a map dealer at best, or in a recycling bin.

Jennifer Hillyard then spoke about the opportunities offered by

a £4.7m HLF grant that had enabled the creation of a charity, The Common Room of the Great North. This is now to manage the buildings, staff and the considerable map collection of what was previously the Mining Institute. The map collection of over 30k sheets covers aspects of mining worldwide from 1770 onwards, but has been collected rather indiscriminately. The move of the collection of maps and books out of the building (the latter mainly via a slide down from the mezzanine gallery), and the need to move them back in again, has focused attention on what is really needed and led to the creation of the first CDP for the organisation. Planning where to store maps was difficult as room hire is a crucial source of revenue and ugly plan chests would deter this. Volunteers helped with identifying maps that were out of scope and offered them to other institutions initially (such as the Industrial Railway Society); those that could not be disposed of this way were offered to dealers or to the volunteers. The move will enable the refurbishment of the lovely old building, greatly improving facilities and access. Some members of the organisation were angry about the reduction of the collection, but most understood once the reasons were communicated. The map collection is currently inaccessible while work proceeds, but digitised copies of some maps are available. It is likely that the publicity sparked by the reopening will encourage more donations ...

Craig Statham, now at the NLS, spoke next about his experience of digitising a small map collection while working part time at the Shale Oil Museum, with very limited resources. The museum is part of a larger Heritage Centre

(which makes money). Craig spoke about the painful contrast between the level of equipment, staffing and so on at the NLS and that available at the museum. The museum was dependent on volunteers, but had a rigorous application process, checking that those applying had appropriate skills and were keen to take part. They had different motivations, from enjoying the social aspects of the job, to wanting relevant experience to put on their CV. Care was taken to make the volunteers feel valued. They were given the opportunity, for instance, to put on a small display of items they liked from the museum, and there were days out and events to reward them. Some continued working there for years. They digitised over 18k document pages between them, including hundreds of maps that had to be unrolled, identified and listed first. The small Kiosk Book2Net scanner worked well; documents were scanned at 400 dpi; if necessary they were done in sections and stitched together using Gimp. Larger scans were reduced in size by converting them to PDF using Adobe Acrobat Pro. There wasn't time to georeference the scans, and the project was very dependent on one volunteer in particular for IT support. All the staff were part time and most were volunteers. The resulting website is basic but Craig did his best to improve it by adding, for example, thematic searching. It includes many maps and plans of mines.

After lunch, everyone had the opportunity to talk briefly about their own collection and share highlights. After this **Megan Barford** spoke about a fascinating project on cartography and forced migration at the National Maritime Museum. The cross departmental

project has involved collecting maps made by and for refugees, including both those for practical information and artworks involving maps. To put this in context, Megan explained the history of the NMM, set up in 1934 to tell the story of Britain's maritime greatness (a rather old fashioned idea even then). The nature of resources acquired by an institution determines to some degree what stories can be told. Recent news reports involving refugees travelling by sea are one of the ways in which sea journeys are in the public consciousness now, and the items collected can reflect this. Megan showed examples of some of the maps collected, including a schematic representation (reminiscent perhaps of a very early road map) of the route from Izmir to Germany that was the first born digital map acquired by the NMM. She explained the very different approach that she had to take to acquisition, involving building relationships with individuals and charities over long periods, waiting for material to become available, and negotiating (for instance, with an art gallery protecting the identity of a refugee artist who understandably wished to remain anonymous). The issue of whether donors wanted their work to be held permanently in a state run museum (including for example a satirical map criticising the conditions in state run detention centres) had to be explored carefully, although there are strong arguments for such material being preserved. Those overseeing the project lacked, perhaps inevitably, any personal experience of the issues being presented. Questions focused on the reactions of visitors to the material (surprised, but positive),

the research potential of some of the objects, and the contrast between a proactive approach to seeking gifts and the cautious attitude of many libraries to unwanted offerings.

Finally, **John Peaty** of the BCS Historical Military Mapping Group shared some personal experiences of digitisation projects and the creation of surrogates, based on over 30 years working in government service. He mentioned the changing technologies used and the difficulty of making the right choices on issues such as what media to use, format, resolution, and selection of items for digitisation. 7 years ago, a consultant was employed to look at digitising 600k maps held in DGC prior to the closure of the Feltham site. 95% of the Map Library was to be scanned at 400 dpi and the remainder at 600 dpi; one paper copy would be retained of each map. It is of course difficult to predict where is likely to be the next main area of interest for military maps. Commercial contractors quoted prices of between £470k and £1.87m for the work – in the event there was only one bid, way over budget, and the project was abandoned. The only way forward was weeding the collection, and disposal of maps to other map libraries and archives. This raises the question of whether the maps could be returned if needed – map libraries may have closed, lost the maps etc. and TNA is actually allowed to destroy documents. DGC has a “Right of recall” for purposes of government business but this is rarely used.

Early maps can still be relevant for current military operations – boundary and tribal date in Afghanistan may be better on

early maps. Modern US maps of Afghanistan were sometimes found to be so inaccurate that revisions were made based on old Survey of India maps. Bright spots were found amid the general gloom: John spoke highly of some of the online resources for C20th mapping, including at McMaster and Perry Castaneda universities, and 84k DGC maps were disposed of to the BL before 1994 (whether the BL regards this as a bright spot is debatable). He ended by quoting Bismarck to the effect that although you can learn from your mistakes, it is much better to learn from other people's mistakes. Questions led to some further discussion on the importance of paper maps; the Russians have demonstrated that they have the capability to distort the GPS signal, making hard copies all the more important.

Debbie Hall, Bodleian Library

Map collection development: dispersal, disposal and digital transition at the University of Portsmouth

The University of Portsmouth's collection of about 21,000 maps is based within the University Library and serves a community of about 25,000 students. After being established in the 1950s and 60s it was moved in 1973 to a brand new, purpose-built Department of Geography. In those days, virtually an entire floor was dedicated to cartographic labs, map production and photogrammetry. There was 90m² of map storage and an adjacent room over 130m² in size was designated as a Mapping Room where maps could be consulted. In 1996 Portland Building, the new home for the School of Architecture, was built next to the Department of

Geography and the entire Map Library was incorporated into a facility called the Portland Learning Resources Centre. This was my first map library move and, once finalised architectural drawings were available, there was plenty of time to work out where everything was going to go. Here it remained for ten years but, following a university restructuring, I found myself having to organise my second move in 2007.

Two inappropriate locations were offered to me. The first was not fit for purpose, consisting of multiple small rooms in a building on the edge of our campus. Apparently these rooms couldn't be made larger by removing the dividing walls, because that would mean there was a risk of the building collapsing! Option two was little better, being a poor teaching space buried inside one of the

worst buildings on the University estate. Eventually about 350 metres of shelving was cleared from a 9 x 9 metre square corner of the Library and this is where the collection is housed today.

This second move was far more hurried than the first. There was only space available for about half of the collection, so very quick decisions had to be made about what was to be left behind. I decided to move all of the material covering the British Isles to the Library, together with most of our European mapping. There were significant quantities of African material, acquired through years of military map disposal. So that, plus most of North and South America, was rejected and eventually transferred back to the Department of Geography. The geographers were interested in keeping the maps for their own research purposes, but the speed



Portsmouth University Map Library, early 1990s. Photo courtesy of David Sherren

of the move meant that it was not possible to make a proper record of what they received and what went to the Library. Control of that part of the collection was lost and, following reorganisation and staff retirements within the Department of Geography, most of that mapping has now gone.

The Map Library sits alongside the University Archive and the Rare Books Collection as part of Special Collections, although we are separated on different floors of the building. In August last year a Draft Space Plan was written and this stated that, during the lifetime of the Plan (2018-25)

“we will repurpose the first extension to become a Special Collections hub by removing the existing stock from the open shelves and the reserve stock spaces to allow us to focus on our Archives, Rare Books and to move the rationalised Map Library collections into this space along with such other collections as we determine to be within the Special

Collections remit”.

So, it looks likely that the collection will be moved for a third time. Actually it could be regarded as a fourth move because the Map Library changed floors during its time within Portland Building. There have been no discussions yet about what the Special Collections hub might look like, although my hope is that pooling resources and staff into one large flexible space will bring the opportunity of improved access and maybe improved opening hours.

The Space Plan talks about a rationalised Map Library and I entirely agree that the collection needs to be further reduced in size. My intention is to weed out at least half of our map stock before any move takes place. Use of the collection has changed gradually but relentlessly over the last couple of decades. Students simply aren't asking for paper maps of Belgium, Germany, France or the Netherlands any more. In fact they are hardly



Portsmouth University Map Library, 2019. Photo courtesy of David Sherren

asking for mapping of anywhere outside Great Britain at all. When they do, the chances are that their demands are unrealistic. They want a large scale map of somewhere obscure and they want it now! So there is definitely a case for weeding out stock that is just gathering dust. With my eventual retirement in mind I feel I need to simplify the collection so that it could more easily be managed by any member of Library staff. Reducing the size of the collection to maybe around 10,000 maps and focussing more on local, historical material will help with this.

At least 3,000 maps need to be removed from the collection each year up to the summer of 2023. So, the question now is, how can this be achieved and what will happen to all this surplus mapping?

Material selected for disposal could potentially be dealt with in the following order of priority:

1. Offered to the School of the Environment, Geography and Geosciences
2. Offered to another library or map collection via lis-maps
3. Offered to the School of Art, Design and Performance as material for art projects
4. Offered for purchase by a legitimate map dealer
5. Offered to a charity shop
6. Disposed of in the recycling bin

I am confident that the School will not wish to take on any of our surplus mapping. The second option may be worth a try, although anyone wanting disposal material would be responsible for their own collection arrangements, making it a less attractive option.

I suggested during the presentation that option three was likely to be met with enthusiasm and indeed the first small batch of maps will be heading out of the Library shortly. The School has taken surplus maps before and it is wonderful to see this material being turned into works of art or fashion.

I don't think there is a mechanism to achieve option 4 within our institution. However, through a contact in the Charles Close Society I did manage to give away about three hundred 25" OS maps in January. I believe these have now found a new home at a model railway club in the Salisbury area.

Option 5 is better than option 6, although I imagine the nature and bulk of the mapping (it would be mostly flat sheets) may not be attractive.

I am sure that most of us hate the idea of putting maps in the bin, however option 6 is looking increasingly attractive, particularly as time is limited.

The process of disposal is not being made any easier by the fact that, historically, the Map Library operated for a long time without any known collection policy. So there are lots of odds and ends that just make the disposal process a bit more time consuming. There are some near complete sets, such as the Belgian, Swiss and Dutch 1:50,000 and French 1:100,000. But is anyone really going to want them, or should they just be consigned to the recycling bin? Also, a significant quantity of mapping was donated to us by the Military Survey so, at the very least, DGC might expect to be informed of any disposal.

In the second part of the session I described a couple of very small digitisation projects that we have been working on. One completed project is the digitisation of our collection of 1:500 Town Plans of Portsmouth. This complete set of 53 maps was part of a large acquisition of County Series sheets from the OS in 2009 and I was keen to make them available to everyone who shared an interest in Portsmouth's history. Scans of these sheets have been shared with Chris Fleet at the National Library of Scotland. I hope that, when time and funding permits, these will join the 39 other English towns currently available from their fantastic map images site.

Our other ongoing digitisation project is in collaboration with Professor Richard Healy from our Department of Geography. Richard has an interest in the economic development of the North-East United States during the second half of the 19th century, with particular reference to the railroad, oil, coal mining and iron industries. As part of this, he has gathered a significant collection of 19th century annual railroad reports (over 2,300 at the last count). Many of these contain maps, sometimes in a pocket at the back of the volume, but more usually glued to a page. It is invariably the case that the maps are fragile, printed on the thinnest paper, and have the sharpest of creases after being tightly folded for a hundred years or more. One example was found where the stitching of the book binding had gone through all the layers of the folded map, so it couldn't actually be opened up.

We usually get just a handful of afternoons during the year when we can get together and scan

these maps. Having to physically detach many of the maps from their associated report and repair any tears before scanning means that progress is slow.

I like to think that by 2025 we will have established a new Special Collections service with a fully integrated archive, maps and rare books collection, well-tuned to the needs of our users. And maybe some of that old map storage furniture from the 1960s that has got just a bit more battered with each move will be replaced with something a bit more appropriate to our modern building.

David Sherren, University of Portsmouth

From the toilet to Swindon

The following article is a brief summary of a (not wholly serious) talk given to the Map Curator's Group on map storage at the Bodleian Library.

The attitude to map storage in the Bodleian can be summed up in a number of words, quoted from letters from the founder Sir Thomas Bodley and from official histories of the library. 'An encumbrance', 'as for mappes...our losse would be greater of so much room for bookes', and 'cumbersome and in the way'. It is also noticeable when reading these histories how infrequently maps are mentioned at all, almost as if they are a sideshow to the main event, an inconvenient collection which is too big for normal shelves, too different for normal cataloguing or a minor part of any major donation.

In a book on the history of the Bodleian Library it is said that the map collection didn't really start until the early 1800s, when a concerted effort was made to purchase British and Foreign

mapping. This increase in the purchasing of maps, married with the start of the Ordnance Survey and an important donation of material in 1809 from the collection of Richard Gough, meant that the library soon needed a solution to map storage. Instead of a dedicated room set aside with proper cabinets and drawers the Library commissioned a large table to be made in 1813 for 'maps and charts', which was to live in an already pretty crowded reading room on the first floor of the Old Library. Considering that by the second-half of the 1800s the library was getting between 3 and 4 thousand maps a year how practical this table was has to be questioned. We know that most of the more important maps, the Gough Map of Britain, the Agas of Oxford and the Wright map of the World for example, were

displayed in the second floor picture gallery but the organisation, conservation (if there was any) and finding ability of such a poorly kept collection can easily be imagined.

In 1887 a room on the ground floor of the Bodleian quadrangle was set up with shelving and cabinets for the maps, the first time such provision was made. This allowed for growth with plenty of space, and the collection stayed at this location until the building and fitting out of the New Bodleian site, which opened just after the Second World War. Pre-war planning allowed for plenty of growth space in the amongst the map drawers but the incredible amount of mapping produced during the Second World War, both Allied and Axis, started to arrive in the Bodleian via War



Map storage in the New Bodleian (see also cover). Photo courtesy of Stuart Ackland.

Office and MOD donations from the 1960s onwards as well as increased production of detailed Ordnance Survey mapping on the National Grid printed on good quality thick paper meant that within 40 years of the New Library opening map storage had reached capacity, and by the time I arrived in 1990 maps were stored in drawers, on shelves, in boxes on shelves, in wooden cabinets

dating back to the late 1800s and filling cabinets. This is just the maps catalogued and stamped. There were in addition to this a large amount of donated material still to be sorted in numerous boxes in numerous corners. Books were also past capacity by the time the decision was made to build a new storage facility in Swindon, which was completed in 2011. Despite being 25 miles away



The Bodleian Map Store. Photo courtesy of Stuart Ackland.

regular deliveries of material mean the service we provide hasn't lessened despite the distance between the readers and the material, and while we've lost the close connection with the collection that day to day use brings we have gained safe and controlled storage for our maps.

*Stuart Ackland
Bodleian Map Room*

Obituary

Merle Margaret Aline Clark (née Abbot) 1936-2020

Having read geography at the University of Liverpool, Merle began her working life in a branch of the Foreign Office which dealt with news stories and disseminating British propaganda. Although she wasn't a typist, she did have some shorthand and this was to prove useful in her next

employment as Map Curator in the Geography Department in Birkbeck College, University of London, which she joined in the mid-1960s and remained in post until her retirement at the age of 60 in 1996.

Merle was so much more than her job as map curator demanded. She served during the tenure of two well-known professors, first, Eila Campbell (retired 1984), who was, with Helen Wallis (Deputy Keeper of the British Museum/Library Map Room), a leading figure in the field of the history of cartography. Eila was succeeded by David Rhind who went on, in 1992, to become Chief Executive and Director General of Ordnance Survey. To both these professors, Merle became an

indispensable personal assistant, arranging diaries, travelling schedules and many other aspects of daily life. Professor Rhind remembers her as greatly supportive of him and dedicated to her work as map curator.

The gradual professionalisation of map curatorship in the UK was promoted, from 1964, by the newly-formed British Cartographic Society (BCS) under the auspices of the Society's first special interest group, the Map Curators' Group which was formed soon after the founding of the Society. Merle took over from Dr Helen Wallis as Convenor of the Map Curators' Group in 1972, a post she held until 1979 when she was succeeded by David Ferro. At the same time, in 1972, she became a member of the Council of the British Cartographic Society.



*Merle Abbot. Photo courtesy of
Peter Clark*

The Map Curators' Group was the 'senior special activity Group' of the BCS – always the most active of all the groups in the early years of the Society. Under Merle's convenorship, in about 1976, a separate circular for map curators was instituted which was included with the Society's regular Newsletter. Also under Merle's

leadership, the remit of the Group was extended to include, in 1976, a three-day 'Practical Course in Map Curatorship' in Edinburgh – a joint meeting with the National Library of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh Library.

Merle had great organisational talents and these came to the fore, in connection with the Map Curators' Group, in the able assistance she gave in arranging the BCS's first technical seminar at Dillington House in February 1973 (CJ June 73 p.9 photo). From now on she organised MCG visits to the Guildhall Library and Redford Gallery at Sheffield Park (1973), annual ALSIB (Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux) courses (1973 onwards); visits to many other libraries including the British Library (Chinese and Japanese Maps exhibition 1974), and the Greater London Record Office and Library (1974).

Perhaps her greatest achievement in this role was her dedication to the organisation of the 6th International Conference on the History of Cartography which was held at Greenwich in September 1975, her report of which appears in the *Cartographic Journal* for December 1975 (p.130). Merle was also instrumental in arranging for the Charles Close Society to hold its AGM in the Geography Department, a highlight of the Society's year from the 1980s to 1990s.

Merle was, from her early twenties, an inveterate traveller, choosing what were, at the time, unusual destinations, especially for a young woman journeying alone – beginning with Russia, in 1961 (on the Trans Siberian Railway), followed by many Eastern European countries, crossing from Russia to Japan, as well as Finland,

Brasilia and the usual European states.

Merle is remembered with great affection by her many friends and colleagues. She was, from 1973, the partner of Peter Clark, formerly Chief Map Research Officer, MOD and latterly Keeper of the Map Room, Royal Geographical Society. They shared a love of travelling, marrying in 2011. Peter survives her.

Yolande Hodson 24 July 2020

Not the last Page

Dates for your Diary

2020

Due to the Coronavirus outbreak, most scheduled face-to-face events have been cancelled.

A number of map related events have taken place online – watch out for more – details on lis-maps and maps-l.

2021

8 September 2021. Map Curator's Workshop. British Geological Survey, Keyworth, Nottingham

lis-maps

lis-maps is a forum for discussing news, ideas, issues, policies and practices related to map & spatial data librarianship. Topics can be broad ranging including: acquisition; cataloguing; use; information retrieval; management of metadata; relationship to GIS & RS; collaborative work; conservation. For more information see:

<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/lis-maps.html>

To join lis-maps just send the message: join lis-maps <your name> as the only text in the body of an e-mail addressed to: jiscmail@jiscmail.ac.uk

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