

The collection of antiquarian information for the early Ordnance Survey maps of Scotland

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SUMMARY

This paper pays tribute to a little recognized body of amateur archaeologists who in the 19th century compiled a nation-wide Record of archaeological and historical sites in the British Isles. Scotland is fortunate that this Record still exists, as the English and Welsh Name Books were destroyed during an air raid on Ordnance Survey Headquarters at Southampton in 1940. The appearance of antiquities on the 1st-edition Ordnance Survey maps has been taken for granted by researchers for decades, but the background account of why and how antiquities were recorded is probably little appreciated. This paper explains the role of the Ordnance Survey in Scotland during the last century in forming this Record, the involvement of this Society, the reasons why antiquities were published on the maps and described in the Name Books, the controversies some descriptions inadvertently raised, and the format of the Books themselves.

It is not widely known that the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland was instrumental in ensuring that archaeological and historical information was to become as much a requirement for Ordnance Survey maps as normal topographical detail. In 1855 the Society formally asked the War Department to consider that:

‘all remains, such as barrows, pillars, circles and ecclesiastical and other ruins should be noted on the Ordnance Survey of Scotland’

with a view to recording for posterity sites which would probably disappear in time due to improvements. Even then, 130 years ago, the concern for conservation of ancient monuments was paramount, as the Ancient Monuments Protection Act was not introduced until 1882.

On 11 June 1855,

‘The Secretary mentioned that he had received communications through the President of the Society, and from Colonel James [actually Sir Henry James then Director-General of the Ordnance Survey], which gave every hope that the Ordnance Survey of Scotland would include indications of all Archaeological remains’ (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 2 (1854–7), 102);

and again on 30 November the Secretary had issued a letter to the Clerks of all the Counties in Scotland through General Register House, to the effect that:

‘The Society having had its attention recently directed to the fact that many of the primitive monuments of our national history, partly from the progress of agricultural improvements, and in part from neglect and spoilation, were in the course of being removed, was of opinion, that it would

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be of great consequence to have all such historical monuments laid down on the Ordnance Survey of Scotland in the course of preparation. With this view, the Society presented an application to Government, through its President, The Marquess of Breadalbane, and received through him the following gratifying answer' [ie from Lord Panmure at the War Department]: '... I have much pleasure in complying with their [Council and Fellows] wishes in this matter, so far as may be practicable, and that instructions will be immediately given to the Engineer Department in accordance with your Lordship's request; but I must rely upon the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland endeavouring, on their part, to assist the Surveyors with local information through the co-operation of the resident gentry, ministers, schoolmasters, and others. . . .'

The Secretary in reply to the President stated that the request for co-operation by the Clerks of the Counties had been received well, and a majority of them had recommended that proprietors, tenants and others be impressed of the importance of preserving archaeological remains. He ended his address by hoping that the:

'efforts of this Society in attempting thus to create a healthy appreciation of our National Antiquities will not be in vain; and it is trusted the Members themselves will not be wanting in doing what is in their power as individuals to foster and increase this feeling' (*ibid*, 129–31).

The first indications of this happening are recorded on 14 January 1856, when the Secretary reported that:

'Mr Charles Stewart, factor for Mr Hope Johnstone of Annandale had fully followed out the wishes expressed in the circular recently issued by the Society, by communicating to the officer of the Ordnance [*sic*] Survey in his district a notice of the various objects of antiquity worthy of being preserved in the new survey; and expressed a hope that other gentlemen in different districts would follow Mr Stewart's example' (*ibid*, 153).

However, as early as 1849, and in a place as remote as Orkney, George Petrie, the noted Orcadian antiquarian, was already aware of the necessity of recording monuments which were disappearing owing to despoliation. In a letter to Daniel Wilson he refers to the parish of Sandwick where:

'a few years ago about a hundred [tumuli] were to be seen, but these interesting memorials of the past are everywhere fast disappearing before the agricultural improvements of the present age which appropriate and swallow up the materials of which these old sepulchral monuments are constructed, and what is more provoking still without any attention being given to preserve a record of their construction and contents.' (Davidson & Henshall forthcoming).

In May 1856, it seemed as though, despite its good intentions, the Society received a rebuff from the Treasury, when a request for copies of the Ordnance Survey maps of Scotland for the Society's Library was turned down, despite the fact that copies of the Survey of Ireland had been distributed among universities, libraries and other establishments up to 1850 (*Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 2 (1854–7), 237). Towards the end of the century, David Murray, also expounding the need for conservation, was to note that the results of the Society's efforts had not been entirely satisfactory. Archaeological information had been collected

'without method or system, and to have been subjected to no criticism. It is consequently of varying quality; sometimes it is accurate; at other times it is erroneous or misleading.'

but the positions of anything that was surveyed could be relied upon. (Murray 1896, 24). The Irish Survey had employed professionals to ensure the best authority for its work, but none was appointed in the United Kingdom until after the First World War (Seymour 1980, 175).

In later years the Ordnance Survey was to co-operate closely with Scottish projects, in particular carrying out an intensive survey of the Antonine Wall for the Glasgow Archaeological Society in 1893 (GAS 1899), and again on the Wall in 1931 with a past-President of the Society, Sir George

Macdonald, for his definitive work *The Roman Wall in Scotland* (Macdonald 1934) [copies of the relevant 25-inch maps are in the National Monuments Record (6 Coates Place, Edinburgh)]. At the end of the First World War the late Angus Graham, influenced by the appeal of the Ordnance Survey and the local authority, undertook himself to compile an inventory of ancient monuments in the district around his native Skipness in Argyll, one of the first intensive surveys of an area (Graham 1919, 76–118).

Although the Survey under the command of General William Roy in the mid 18th century is considered to have produced the first Ordnance Survey maps with names of topographical features, place-names, and some antiquities (reflecting his own personal and avid interest in Roman monuments), it was not until much later, about 1824, that Major-General Thomas Colby, Director of the Survey in Ireland, set the Ordnance Survey on the course of collecting names, including those of antiquities. He gave his officers detailed instructions on what to record and the sort of people to seek for the supply of accurate information. The 6-inch Survey of Scotland was started in 1843 in Wigtownshire, and Colby's instructions for collecting names were by then well-established.

The Ordnance Survey has always assumed responsibility for what place-names are to appear on its maps and how they should be spelt. The names of features and places have been recorded in *Object Name Books* (ONB) since these early days (appendix). The 'objects' were both natural and man-made such as hills, rivers, woods, buildings, roads, canals and railways. The Books are complementary to the surveying of features to appear on large scale maps, the names being collected by the surveyors who consulted various types of people to confirm the spelling and accuracy of the description. Because of the varying standing of the authorities consulted it is not surprising that sometimes biased and erroneous information found its way on to the early maps; examples of this predominated in the collection of archaeological and historical information. In those days the mapping of antiquities was the responsibility of sappers of the Royal Engineers. They received no training in the identification and classification of antiquities and relied for much of their information on local landowners, factors, schoolmasters, ministers and any other local worthy available to offer advice, just as requested by the Society. This led to errors and spurious antiquities appearing on the maps, and Sir Mortimer Wheeler once rather unkindly referred to it as the period of 'the corporal and the curate.' Nonetheless, a great deal of research and thinking went into the collection of such information, and the surveyors were instructed to make themselves acquainted with the local history and objects of the districts so that they were properly shown on the maps and fully described in the Name Books. A typical example of erroneous information can be found in the ONB for *Ancrum* parish, Roxburghshire (ONBb, 30). A letter from a Mr Joseph Hall, dated 14 January 1865, states that the Roman name TRIMONTIUM belonged to the vicinity of the three peaks of the Eildon Hills, supported by Roy's Survey almost a century before; but an examiner at Headquarters in Southampton argued at great length that the name would be more appropriately attributed to Burnswark in Dumfriesshire on the evidence of the forged 'Richard of Cirencester Itinerary'. This erroneous view was apparently upheld by high-ranking officers, and meant that an important township never appeared in its correct position on OS maps for many years.

A case of eccentricity with regard to another antiquity is demonstrated in the following extract from the *Tweedsmuir* parish Name Book (ONBa, 29–31):

'A small knowe called the "Giant's Grave" is said to have been the burial place of one of the heroes of romance who lived by plunder and robbery, spreading terror amongst the inhabitants, but who being too pressing in his contributions is supposed to have been shot by a "Little John" from behind a large stone standing on the opposite side of the Tweed. It is said in the locality that bones were found in it but the time no person can tell. . . There stood a cairn on the top of this grave. . . ' [This account refers in fact to a prehistoric cairn and standing stone.]

It occasionally happens that the description of an antiquity or the discovery of an object is the only account of the 'find', and a resulting bonus is its location shown on the original large scale maps. Sometimes objects would be sketched, this being the only means of giving the archaeologist an idea of what the object looked like, thus perhaps contributing to its period in antiquity. Aberdeenshire seems to have been well-provided with such sketches, a good example being an inscribed stone seen in a garden at Aldie, and now apparently lost (ONBc, 5). Nomenclature on these early maps may be antiquated by today's vocabulary, eg *Picts' House*, *Erde House*, *Brough* and *Camp*, for Chambered Cairn, Souterrain, Broch and Fort respectively; but at least these surveyors put an antiquity in the right spot for posterity and gave an account of its condition as it was then.

Probably the most controversial aspect of the Name Books lies in the treatment of Gaelic Names. Today there is still a legacy of erroneous spellings, or, to some degree, argument by various scholars of the language as to which version is correct. A great deal of the trouble stemmed from the fact that the 19th-century surveyors were not Gaelic speakers, and many of the people they spoke to were either illiterate or unable to communicate their version of the language to the English-speaking sappers. At the turn of this century the Royal Scottish Geographical Society appointed a place-names committee to assist the Ordnance Survey, and later in the 1920s, one of their Fellows, John Mathieson (the ex-OS surveyor who was seconded to help Sir George Macdonald survey the Antonine Wall), undertook the job himself. It was not until 1920, when O G S Crawford was appointed as the first Archaeological Officer, that the misleading descriptive names on the maps began to be eliminated. It was he who instigated the useful publication *Field Archaeology - Some Notes for Beginners*, and it was he who introduced the system of Correspondents throughout the country who informed the Ordnance Survey of any new or altered antiquities.

The 2000 or so Name Books are in the form of bound pages (OS21 forms) each relating to a parish, and numbered consecutively throughout each county (as they were designated before Regionalization). They range from mainly one Book to as many as 47 for a parish. Each Book opens with an Index to the place-names in alphabetical order, giving the number of the pages on which the

2000c. 11-58 *Burgh of the Commons* No. 21. *Sheet 24 of 44 Lane 1*

List of Names to be corrected if necessary	Orthography, as recommended to be used in the new Plans	Other modes of Spelling the same Name	Authority for these other modes of Spelling when known	Situation	Descriptive Remarks, or other General Observations which may be considered of Interest
<i>Broul Linn</i>	<i>Broul Linn</i>	<i>Broul Linn</i>	<i>John Peacock of ... John Peacock Highland</i> <i>W. H. Murray Capt. W.S. 31 Jan 1857</i>	<i>Abundant in the Highlands of Ross & Cromarty</i>	<i>Discovered in sheet 24 of 44 Sheet 24 of 44 Lane 1 No. 4 (Campylopus) C. 1857 30th Nov. 1857</i>

ILLUS 1 Example of an Ordnance Survey *Object Name Book* 'signing off' page

descriptions are to be found. The descriptive pages are divided into five columns. The first column gives the place-name recommended to be used on the maps. The second is for other modes of spelling. The names of authorities are given in the third column; the fourth is for a brief description of the location, and the fifth is for other remarks. Many pages are 'signed-off' by a sapper or clerk, and the last page usually has the signature of the commanding officer responsible for the district surveyed (illus 1) (Prevost 1980). The method of obtaining the information has not changed much over a span of some 160 years, except that since the Second World War the old Name Books were superseded by new Books compiled on the National Grid 1 km map sheet format in place of parishes, but the information contained in them is intentionally not as detailed.

It has to be stated that many present-day archaeologists, in expounding the numerous discoveries of the last few decades, forget that without the diligent observations of these early surveyors, they would not have had the foundations of thousands of mapped 'known' antiquities on which to base and extend their own fieldwork, and this includes the work of the Ordnance Survey's own post-War Archaeology Branch, now disbanded.

Researchers from all walks of life consult these Books for some source of information – perhaps a search for extinct farms in a particular part of the country; a clue to some industrial activity long since gone; a 19th-century link with someone's ancestors; an account of an archaeological or historical site; or just plain browsing through the copperplate writing of a bygone era.

Most of the Original Name Books dating from the first Survey were destroyed during a blitz on Southampton in 1940, but fortunately almost all the Scottish Books survived the destruction. These have now been deposited in the Scottish Record Office in Edinburgh, where microfilm extracts of the thousands of pages may be viewed, as well as at the National Monuments Record of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

APPENDIX

DATES OF ORDNANCE SURVEY COUNTY SURVEYS

Aberdeenshire	1865–71	Lanarkshire	1858–61
Angus (Forfarshire)	1857–61	Midlothian (Edinburghshire)	1851–53
Argyllshire (mainland)	1868–78	Morayshire (Elginshire)	1868–70
Argyllshire (insular)	1868–78	Nairn	1869–71
Ayrshire	1855–57	Orkney	1877–78
Banffshire	1866–70	Peeblesshire	1855–58
Berwickshire	1856–58	Perthshire	1859–64
Buteshire	1856	Renfrewshire	1856–57
Caithness	1871–73	Ross & Cromarty (mainland)	1871–76
Clackmannanshire	1861–62	Ross & Cromarty (insular)	1848–52
Dumfriesshire	1848–58	Roxburghshire	1858–60
Dunbartonshire	1859–60	Selkirkshire	1856–60
East Lothian (Haddingtonshire)	1853	Shetland (Zetland)	1878
Fife & Kinross	1853–56	Stirlingshire	1858–61
Inverness-shire (mainland)	1868–73	Sutherland	1871–74
Inverness-shire (insular)	1876–78	West Lothian (Linlithgowshire)	1855–56 & 59
Kincardineshire	1863–65	Wigtownshire	1843–49
Kirkcudbrightshire	1848–51		

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- ONBc 1868 Ordnance Survey *Object Name Book*, Aberdeenshire; No 22, Cruden parish.
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