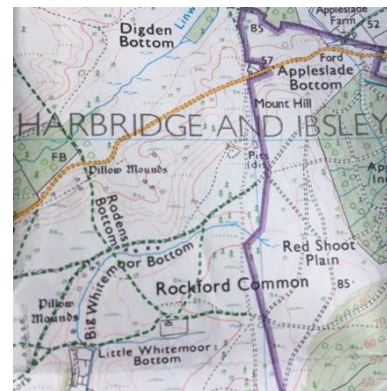


Report on Archaeology and the Ordnance Survey by Roger Leech March 2020

This was an impressive lecture in which Roger Leech paid tribute to two of the Ordnance Survey archaeologists of the 20th century, one of whom preceded him as Head of the Royal Commission on Ancient & Historic Monuments in England.

The Ordnance Survey (OS) had been established in 1791, following detailed mapping surveys to facilitate military control of the Scottish Highlands after the 1745 Rebellion. The same process was then extended to cover England. In 1841 the OS was based at the Tower of London, but after a fire in 1891 they moved to London Road, Southampton. During the 1970s the office moved out to Maybush, Southampton, and early this century to a new site at Nursling, Adanac Park beside the M271.

The earliest maps published were 2 miles to the inch, and then 1 mile to the inch, giving greater detail. Archaeological sites are known as “antiquities” and names are printed on the maps in Antique font. Antiquities could include hill forts, Roman villas, *tumuli*, roads, tracks and others, such as ‘Pillow Mounds’ or medieval rabbit warrens: as shown at Rockford Common in the New Forest (right), from **OS Explorer OL22** map 1:25000. In the 1880s larger scale maps were introduced which showed much more detail such as gardens and rooms in villas etc.



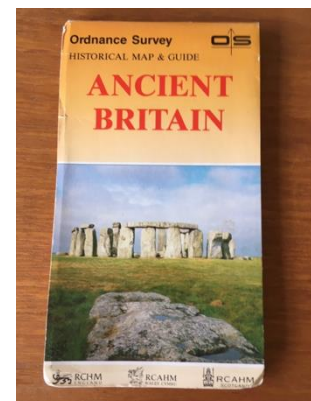
When trying to establish the antiquities in each area, OS surveyors would often turn to local vicars who were considered to be well educated and knowledgeable about the topology of the area, sometimes with unexpected results. The early maps are still used extensively when undertaking archaeological research, for military purposes - and just because they are interesting. All the names on OS maps can be found in **OS Original Names** books 1853-76, but many of the books were destroyed by WW2 bombing.

After WWI two distinguished archaeologists worked at the Ordnance Survey, firstly O G S Crawford who came to work there in the 1920s. Born in Bombay in 1886, he was at school in Marlborough, Wiltshire and went on to Keble College, Oxford where he gained a Diploma in Geography, but he was always more interested in archaeology. Crawford had served in France with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and transferred to the Survey section taking aerial photographs. He later published a book **Air Photographs for Archaeologists**. He would send out maps to people in different areas to mark up, to be followed up by surveyors going out to fully record the information. In 1924 Crawford produced the first **Map of Roman Britain** followed by maps of **Neolithic Wessex, 17th Century England (Civil War), The Forth, Clyde & Tay in the Roman Period** and **The Chilterns** as well as a number of town maps. During WW2 he was transferred to National Buildings Records to record major structures in local towns which might be destroyed by bombing.

Crawford retired in 1947, to be succeeded by Charles Phillips who was already well-known for his work on the 1939 excavation of Sutton Hoo. He had worked for the Air Photography Unit at Medenham during WW2, interpreting photographs with the use of stereoscopes, which was skilled work as they were difficult to use (a very effective technique but one never used by the Nazis). The results were stored on a card index system, which Phillips later introduced for the OS, with a unique card to record each archaeological excavation or antiquity. They started with sites shown on Crawford's maps, and also searched through archaeological journals. The cards would include a map reference, date, description and survey information, with over half a million records being accumulated. Surveys would be carried out in the field and then transferred onto large scale maps, and the map reference entered on the index card. Where information on the maps was not adequate, surveyors would go out to record antiquities on site.

This system ended in the 1980s after a review of the Ordnance Survey (1979), as it was felt archaeological work was inappropriate for the national mapping agency and should be done by a heritage body. Despite protests in the press, this element was transferred to the Royal Commissions on Ancient & Historic Monuments for England, Scotland and Wales. The card index information was transferred to computer, but the work was carried out by an outside firm and many mistakes were made. The information is available online on the **Pastscape** site (pastscape.org.uk) under Historic England, though it is no longer being up-dated. The Report of the Royal Commission: **Unlocking the Past for the New Millennium** (English Heritage) does not acknowledge the meticulous work of the OS in recording antiquities.

After WW2, the period maps were continued by Phillips according to Crawford's practice, with new maps including a **Map of Ancient Britain** (pictured right). The area of Dartmoor for instance shows extensive archaeology such as huts, out-buildings, animal pens, field, and trackways.



Roger Leech took over after Charles Phillips went into retirement in 1984. He died in 1985, and his autobiography published posthumously records Phillips' feelings about these changes. The OS continued to produce period and town maps and to record antiquities as before, but in 1999 the Royal Commission merged with English Heritage (now Historic England). Aerial photography is more extensively used to pinpoint potential archaeological sites, and the information given on maps is less detailed than on earlier OS maps. The original card index system is stored at Swindon, and national records on the **Heritage Gateway** site (heritagegateway.org.uk), a useful resource which also contains all the county archaeological records or Heritage Environment Records (HER).

A complete record of all Ordnance Survey maps is held by the National Library of Scotland, (maps.nls.uk) which is freely available for viewing online, an essential resource for archaeological research.

Sarah Hanna (with thanks to Mandy Kesby)