

Russian Mapping of Britain – Recent Discoveries

Further investigations into Soviet mapping and the extent to which it is, or is not, derived from OS material (see Sheetlines 72, 73, 74) have turned up some surprising findings.

The most astonishing discovery is a 1:25,000 town plan of Falmouth, published in 1997. This is five years after the collapse of USSR, whereas previous research seemed to indicate that the global mapping initiative ceased at that point. The Falmouth sheet carries a considerable amount of information not found on OS maps (as do all the Russian maps) and bears the legend 'Created from material dated 1989'. This therefore tantalisingly leaves unanswered the question of whether the data-gathering exercise ceased with the Soviet Union, but map production continued or whether Russian agents are still to be found trudging British streets diligently measuring bridge heights and collecting details of industrial plants.

Other previously unrecorded town plans which have come to light are Derby (1991) and Dundee (1992), both 1:10,000 (and produced long after the end of the Cold War) and 1:5,000 plan of Milford Haven dated 1950.

Another interesting discovery is a 1:2,500,000 World Map of the 1960s in about 250 sheets, printed in English and Russian. Sheet 35, covering the British Isles, was produced in Berlin in 1965. Other sheets were produced in other Warsaw pact countries to the same standards and specification. Place names are in local language in Roman script so, for example, all Irish places are named solely with their Irish name. Seas are named in the languages of adjoining countries; for example, Irish Sea – Muir Meann. Initial investigation suggests that British names are derived from pre-first world war Bartholomew maps.

As previously noted, 1:100,000 sheets of Britain and Ireland were produced in 1960s and again in 1980s. The entire set of about 430 sheets of the 1980s series is now to hand and initial examination has revealed many instances of military installations appearing here which are omitted from the contemporary OS 1:50,000 First Series. However this comparison is very much 'work in progress' and results will be published in due course.