

John C. Bartholomew – the last of our cartographic ancestors

John Christopher Bartholomew, the last in the line of Bartholomews to have been cartographic director of the hugely influential and greatly respected Edinburgh map-making firm of John Bartholomew & Son, died on 16 January 2008, just one day after his eighty-fifth birthday. His story, and that of the Bartholomew dynasty as a whole, is an integral part of our heritage and history here in Collins Geo (the cartographic division of HarperCollins). Until his death, John continued to take a great interest in our activities and products, particularly developments relating to [The Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World](#) – a product whose history is inextricably linked with the name Bartholomew. John saw, and thankfully was very impressed by, the recent 12th Edition of this atlas. Our aim with this publication has always been to maintain and develop it as necessary but to never lose sight of the overall standards by which it is judged. John was highly influential, particularly through the 1950s and 1960s in shaping many of the underlying editorial policies and principles which we still follow. Maps in Times atlases still carry copyright notes with the Bartholomew name, and we continue to trade under the brand [Collins Bartholomew](#) for our geographical data and contract mapping business.



Until just over a year ago, John regularly visited us to assist with the judging of the HarperCollins-sponsored British Cartographic Society [John Bartholomew Award for Small-scale Mapping](#). His comments on entries for this award would always be perceptive and honest, even almost scathing if the standards he held dear were not represented. This involvement reflected wider interest in many societies. At various times through his career he was president of the [Royal Scottish Geographical Society](#) (as his father and grandfather before him), the [British Cartographic Society](#) and more recently the Scottish Rights of Way Society ([ScotWays](#)). He was also vice president of the International Cartographic Association.

Another significant event which he was able to witness recently was the award of £220,000 by the John R Murray Charitable Trust to the National Library of Scotland for the conservation and cataloguing of the [Bartholomew Archive](#) – a huge collection of manuscripts, printing records, glass plates, atlases, etc - which was donated (some items were sold) to the library by the company. This award is a significant step in increasing awareness and accessibility of the collection.

We will miss John's eye on our activities, and it was a great privilege to have known him a little. It is also an exciting challenge to play a part in continuing the rich heritage of which he was such a big part.

Bartholomew history in brief

By the late 18th century the city of Edinburgh was well established as the centre of Scotland's flourishing publishing industry. Without doubt, one of the companies responsible for this enviable reputation was John Bartholomew & Son. From humble beginnings the Bartholomew firm became the world's pre-eminent publisher of maps and atlases, carrying for many years the title of Geographers and Cartographers Royal.

It was George Bartholomew (1784-1871), an engraver with Daniel Lizars of Edinburgh, and the first of five generations in the Bartholomew map-making dynasty, who initially set the Bartholomew family on the road to cartographic fame. However, it was his son John Bartholomew (Senior – 1805-1861) who really established the reputation of the Bartholomew firm. Setting up in business as a map engraver in 1826, he soon gained recognition as a skilled cartographer and businessman. Under the subsequent guidance of John (Junior, 1831–1893), John George (1860–1920), John (1890–1962), and John C, the business continued to prosper by introducing new production techniques and by pushing cartographic design to new levels of excellence. Under John C's direction, the firm produced many leading atlases and maps, including the Times Atlas of the World, Bartholomew's Concise Atlas, gazetteers, school atlases and the much-loved Half-Inch Contoured Map of Britain.

In 1980 the business was sold to Reader's Digest and then in 1985 to News International, at which time it was merged with Times Books. In the same year Geographia and its subsidiary Nicholson Publications were acquired. Then in 1989 Bartholomew/Times was merged with Collins Publishers in the UK and Harper & Row in the US to create HarperCollins Publishers. While our company has undergone many changes over the years, some things have remained constant – the never-ending search for cartographic excellence, recognition of the firm's immense cartographic heritage and legacy, and the close relationship with the Bartholomew family.

Mick Ashworth, Editor in Chief, Collins Geo 20/2/08