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John Bartholomew

Cartographer; Born January 15, 1923; Died January 16, 2008.

John Bartholomew, who has died aged 85, was one of three brothers who were the last of five generations to run the Edinburgh cartographic business of John Bartholomew & Son. With Peter and Robert, John maintained the firm among leading map publishers of the world until their retirements in 1980 following a buy-out by Reader's Digest.

John Bartholomew & Son supplied maps and atlases to a global market. When eldest brother John took over as cartographic director, the responsibilities inherited from his father (also John) included editing the Times World Atlas and a company output that included productions whose popularity never hid their scholarliness - Reader's Digest Atlas, Bartholomews' Concise Atlas, gazetteers and many school atlases.

After graduating in geography from Edinburgh University in 1951, his father insisted his son have experience in maps, so he served a cartographic apprenticeship before taking on full responsibility for maps in 1959.

Under Bartholomew's direction, the firm maintained and expanded a huge team of volunteer local "map revision officers" - cyclists and walkers who ranged across their patches submitting changes and alterations for the renowned Revised Half-Inch Contoured Map.

For nearly a century, "Bart's Half-Inch" retained such a reputation for accuracy and detail that no touring cyclist would venture out without one. For years, it bore the insignia of the Cyclists' Touring Club. Royal patronage was welcomed, and as late as 1963, half-inch sheets carried: By appointment to His Majesty King George V.

John Christopher Bartholomew was born in Edinburgh. His parents included Christopher as his middle name to remember Columbus, and the young Bartholomew grew up both an academic and explorer. He was a contemporary of Prince Philip at Gordonstoun.

On one occasion, the future Duke of Edinburgh came down from Gordonstoun to join John for a weekend at the family home at Inveresk near Musselburgh.

Bartholomew cut an imposing if slightly ascetic figure. He held a fascination for natural sciences that lasted throughout his life. Astronomy, geology, meteorology and oceanography formed the wider bounds of his geography. Modest, he loved to converse, and ranged easily across social scales. As president of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, like his father and grandfather before him, he shared the company of such as astronaut Neil Armstrong and Sir David Attenborough.

His personal exploration cut across lands, libraries and faith. He travelled widely, his final expedition being a rugged camping trek at the age of 68 to Patagonia in 1991. He failed only, in lifelong ambitions, to reach Antarctica.

Commissioned into the Royal Engineers at the outbreak of war, Bartholomew served in Palestine and Africa, mapping and surveying. On one occasion, driving his colonel, he unceremoniously halted, and to the astonishment of his companions, had the temerity to order his commanding officer out of the vehicle and some paces ahead. Warily, the officer moved out. "You are now standing, sir, exactly on the equator," said Bartholomew.

His huge collection of books - mostly non-fiction and covering travel, earth and space sciences - was a source of constant reference. He would sit on the balcony of his home in Edinburgh, referring to a book while scanning the night sky.

His faith meant much. A spiritual man of the Kirk, he was knowledgeable of Christian science and for a period was active in Moral Re-Armament before, in 1954, being accepted into Roman Catholicism. All his life, he remained motivated by matters ecumenical.

He took active roles in a great many societies and organisations, and he retained interest in the John Bartholomew Award for Small-Scale Mapping. Now sponsored by Collins' Bartholomew, he played an active role in the judging almost to the end of his life.

He lectured and gave talks throughout his life, and was in demand on cartography issues.

He leaves behind a wealth of newspaper cuttings, pamphlets, photocopies, handwritten notes and hand-drawn maps. His papers include details of one of his first projects: a map of Edinburgh Zoo that became part of the official guide to the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland. He also produced countless maps for private interest groups and organisations.

He bequeathed three physical legacies: an indicator for the summit of North Berwick's 612ft Berwick Law; with retired solicitor George Russell, the initiation of a 360-degree hill indicator for the Braids, a two-ton piece of local basalt topped by a full-colour guide; and a sundial in Hermitage of Braid, next door to his home below the Pentlands.

Bartholomew died in Edinburgh the day after his 85th birthday, and is survived by his wife Ginette (née Achard-James); sons John Eric, Philip, Christopher, Patrick and Ivon; and 11 grandchildren.

By **GORDON CASELY**