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John Bartholomew: Scion of a map-making dynasty

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Only those who have experienced it themselves can appreciate what it means to be born into a dynasty. Six generations of the Bartholomew family, culminating in John Bartholomew (John Christopher Bartholomew, or "JCB") and his younger brothers Peter and Robert, built the map-making dynasty of John Bartholomew and Sons.

Opinions vary as to the impact of his background on JCB. Schooling at Edinburgh Academy and Gordonstoun might have prompted him to break the mould, as might Second World War service in the Royal Engineers, in East Africa and the Middle East. However, he returned home to study Geography at Edinburgh University, while at the same time undertaking a cartographic apprenticeship at Bartholomew's.

In 1960 he became Cartographic Director, taking over, inter alia, supervision, until his retirement in 1984, of the numerous succeeding editions of the Times World Atlas. Changes in the world of commerce ultimately led to the sale of the company to Reader's Digest in 1980, so, although the name of Bartholomew would continue, the dynastic succession would not.

Cartography is extremely demanding, if the location and nature of places is to be accurately represented, as required by the intended user. Training, temperament and time produced in Bartholomew a man who, magnifying glass in hand, could identify any wrong mark on a printing plate, or any typographical error. He trod the earth, in the footsteps of his illustrious forebears, carefully and lightly, never being rushed to judgement. His peers recognised qualities which resulted in his being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1970, President of the British Cartographic Society, 1970-71, and Vice-President of the International Cartographic Association, 1972-80.

Consciousness of their international significance and their conservation needs led John Bartholomew to play a major part in bringing about the depositing in

the National Library of Scotland (NLS) of two important cartographic collections. These are the Bartholomew Archive and the John Bartholomew Collection. The former came to the NLS in instalments, particularly from 1985 when control passed to HarperCollins. Consisting of a number of albums, the main series of which begins in 1877 and continues up to the 1960s/70s, it is in process of being conserved. The John Bartholomew Collection, of antiquarian atlases dating from 1525 to 1865, was donated in 1995 by the family in memory of John Bartholomew ("JB", 1890-1962).

In 1884, John George Bartholomew ("JGB") had played a pivotal role in the creation of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and served as Honorary Secretary. He was succeeded by "JB", to be followed from 1960 until 1988 by "JCB", thus constituting 104 years of continuous service. JCB's presidency (1987-93) saw major changes for the society, among them relocation of its headquarters from Edinburgh to Glasgow in 1993. JCB was not convinced of the wisdom of locating the headquarters outside Edinburgh; however, his example in accepting change, his unfailing courtesy, his calm and measured approach, contributed greatly to general acceptance.

John Bartholomew enjoyed properly researched travel and had experience of all the continents except Antarctica. He was a valued contributor to the work of the Scottish Rights of Way Society. His membership of the Scottish Arts Club reflected his other interests. His religious faith, never worn on his sleeve, was vital to him. Brought up in the Church of Scotland, after mature consideration he approached and was accepted into the Roman Catholic Church.

He bequeaths to posterity a substantial personal library and archive which will prove rewarding of study. This is far from being his only valuable legacy, for he enriched the lives of many who came to know him and most valuable of all, with the loving help and guidance of his wife, Ginette, and their five sons, he has bequeathed his talented grandchildren. John Bartholomew always enjoyed being confronted by a new map or a new landscape, but was never happier than when amidst his family.

Alistair B. Cruickshank

John Christopher Bartholomew, cartographer: born Edinburgh 15 January 1923; Cartographic Director, John Bartholomew and Sons 1960-84; married 1956 Ginette Achard-James (five sons); died Edinburgh 16 January 2008.