

Publishing News Archive: 22 February 2008

The last of the line

Mike Ashworth remembers map-maker John C Bartholomew

THE REPUTATION, AUTHORITY and market-leading position of Times and Collins world atlases, published by HarperCollins, owe a lot to the heritage of the publisher's cartographic division. A large part of this heritage, in particular that relating to The Times Atlas of the World, lies in the history of John Bartholomew & Son, the celebrated Edinburgh map business. Five generations of the Bartholomew family were involved in establishing the company, and their Edinburgh Geographical Institute, as the pre-eminent creators of maps throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

HarperCollins is mourning the loss of the last of the Bartholomew line with a direct involvement, and continuing interest in the company. John Christopher Bartholomew died just a day after his eighty-fifth birthday. Up until his death, he maintained an active interest in the mapping activities of HarperCollins. Until very recently, he continued to visit the offices in Bishopbriggs, when his health allowed, to assist in the judging of the HarperCollins-sponsored British Cartographic Society John Bartholomew Award for Small-Scale Mapping.

In 1826, John Bartholomew (Senior, 1805-1861) set up business as a map engraver in Edinburgh, following the profession of his father, George (1784-1871). John soon gained recognition as a skilled cartographer and businessman and, by the 1840s, with the company's reputation going from strength to strength, the order books were full. 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. He worked as director of the firm until his retirement in 1980. Mr John, as he was known, knew all of the staff personally, and showed a

keen interest in them their families. The employees were proud of the Bartholomew name and showed a strong commitment to their work. He took an active role in many societies and organisations such as the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (of which his grandfather was a founder member), the Scottish Rights of Way Society (now ScotWays) the British Cartographic Society (as President), and the International Cartographic Association (as Vice-President).

In 1980, the Bartholomew company was bought by Reader's Digest, ending the direct involvement of the Bartholomew family. Following its purchase by News International in 1985 it became part of HarperCollins Publishers in 1989, along with Collins Publishers (UK) and Harper & Row (US). Today, the business continues as the award winning Collins Geo, part of HarperCollins, upholding the authority and quality for which Bartholomew was known. HarperCollins still trades under the name Collins Bartholomew for some aspects of its business. John is survived by his wife Ginette and five sons.

John C Bartholomew, 15 January 1923 - 16 January 2008

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