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John Bartholomew



Cartographer whose family company made a host of innovative maps, notably the Times atlases

John Bartholomew was the last family member to be appointed cartographic director of the Edinburgh company John Bartholomew & Son, a distinguished and prolific publisher of maps for a wide variety of purposes - academic, commercial and travel - for more than 175 years.

It was one of the first British firms to shake the supremacy of the Germans as masters in the field, and played an outstanding role in developing the science of cartography, introducing new methods of projection, printing and colour layering as well as new varieties of durable paper.

John Bartholomew (the fifth John Bartholomew in the cartographic tradition) shared his ancestors' fascination with the natural sciences, their meticulous standards and spirit of enterprise, and oversaw the publication of some of the most detailed and popular maps of the last century, including *The Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World* (1967).

John Christopher Bartholomew was born in Edinburgh in 1923 and went to St Trinnean's and Edinburgh Academy. On the outbreak of war he was commissioned into the Royal Engineers and he served as a cartographic surveyor in Palestine and Africa. After reading geography at Edinburgh University he served an intensive cartographic apprenticeship (one of his projects being a map of an Edinburgh zoo) and became the family firm's

cartographic director in 1953. Early in his career he edited, among other volumes, *The Edinburgh World Atlas* (1954) and *The Reader's Digest Great World Atlas* (1961), which was published in some 12 languages. His brother, Robert, who was trained in printing, soon became the production director, and his other brother, Peter, who was trained in accountancy, executive chairman.

Bartholomew & Son had been founded in about 1826 by John Bartholomew (b 1805), whose father was an engraver for Daniel Lizars of Edinburgh, and its early work included *Black's General Atlas* of 1846. The third Bartholomew in line, John George Bartholomew (b 1860) - who was a founding member of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and appointed Cartographer to King George V - strengthened the company's reputation, bringing about the publication of its own maps, rather than just those of other firms, and initiating layer colouring to indicate relief on medium-scaled maps.

Under the tenure of John Ian Bartholomew (b 1890) the company completed its most ambitious projects yet. The magisterial *Times Survey Atlas of the World* (1922, begun by John G. Bartholomew) took 15 years to prepare and was unrivalled in detail; and the *Times Mid-Century Edition* (issued in five volumes between 1955 and 1960) contained 122 new maps and a gazetteer of almost 120,000 place names. "The obvious novelty of the new *Times Atlas*", wrote a *Times* journalist in 1955, "may be in the delineation of the new political boundaries created by recent history. But these things, as the 20th century is painfully aware, are the sport of circumstance; the permanent advance is the imparting of knowledge concerning the abiding conformation of land and sea; and it is believed that these maps contain legibility with fullness of information not hitherto approached."

Indeed, by the time the fifth John Bartholomew and his brothers took over, technology had progressed rapidly, with a more elaborate use of photography and the development of new lithographic techniques allowing for faster and less expensive production. In the late 1960s the Bartholomews brought in a new managing director and a marketing director and a retail sales force of six to cover England, Scotland and Wales, and opened a new warehouse to enable the use of handling machinery such as fork-lift trucks. Map-folding machines were introduced in 1970.

Like his predecessors Bartholomew worked hard to assimilate new information as it became available, and *The Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World* (1967), a reworking of previous *Times* maps into a single volume, reflected the rapid growth of cities during that period (the rate was 5 to 10 per

cent a year) and, for the first time, included maps showing world resources and - two years before the first Apollo Moon landing - sections on space exploration, satellites and "extraterrestrial affairs". Such was the pace of change at the time, and the popularity of the work, that a new edition was produced the following year. German, Dutch and French editions were also produced. A reduced format, the Times Concise Atlas of the World, appeared in 1972.

Bartholomew also oversaw the evolution of the half-inch to one mile map of Great Britain, which from 1961 to 1974 appeared as Bartholomew's Half-Inch Contoured Great Britain ("Bart's Half-Inch"), and was particularly popular among cyclists. In 1975 Bartholomew enlarged the scale slightly, to 1:100,000, and renamed it the National Series, but with the rise of the car the maps' popularity waned, and they were eventually discontinued.

Among the other volumes Bartholomew edited were The Times Atlas of the Moon (1969), The Bartholomew/Warne Atlas of Europe (1975), a Road Atlas of Europe (1970), The Times Atlas of China (1974) and The Observer's World Atlas (1981). The company also continued to produce maps for scholarly and commercial purposes.

Bartholomew's style of leadership was modest, and he took a kindly interest in his employees. The family ran the business until 1980, when it was bought by Reader's Digest. It was acquired by News Corporation in 1985, and in 1989 the firm merged with Collins (as part of HarperCollins). Towards the end of Bartholomew's career a revolution was beginning, with the development of computer technology to digitise all map data, to be stored in a series of databases organised by region and scale.

Bartholomew was the president of the British Cartographical Society in 1970-71 and to the end of his life judged its John Bartholomew Award for Small-Scale Mapping (now sponsored by Collins Bartholomew). He was also the vice-president of the International Cartographic Association, 1972-80, and from 1987 to 1993 he was president of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, whose travellers and explorers gave him useful leads in the constant effort of updating. He was also active on the committee of the Scottish Rights of Way Society (now ScotWays), was made its honorary president and edited Scottish Hill Tracks. Bartholomew gave lectures throughout his career and travelled on six continents, his final trip being a camping trek to Patagonia at the age of 68.

He was accepted into the Roman Catholic Church in 1954.

Bartholomew is survived by his wife, Ginette, and five sons.

John Bartholomew, cartographer, was born on January 15, 1923. He died on January 16, 2008, aged 85