

OBITUARY

Robert Bartholomew

Fifth-generation map publisher with the Edinburgh-based family business that brought the name Antarctica into common use

MAY 30 2017, 12:01AM, THE TIMES



Robert Bartholomew in 2015. He studied printing at Heriot-Watt College and after a year in London joined the family firm

Robbie Bartholomew was a small boy when he was taken to his father's map-printing works, an imposing building with a Palladian façade in the Newington area of Edinburgh. He was allowed to peer into the 400ft well that had been dug from the basement and would supply up to 5,000 gallons of water an hour to the new air-conditioning plant at a constant temperature of 3C.

He returned to Bartholomew's Maps after the war, where regular improvements to printing quality, production procedures and binding continued as the company's output increased from seven million maps a year in 1913 to 100 million by 1975.

In 1955, the year that he was appointed production director, Bartholomew's took possession of its first automatic folding machine, replacing the women who for many decades had folded maps by hand in the mounting room. He later oversaw the early developments in computerisation.

Robbie Bartholomew was from the fifth and last generation to work in the family business. Bartholomew & Son had been founded in about 1826 by John Bartholomew (born 1805), whose father was an engraver for Daniel Lizars of Edinburgh. John George Bartholomew (born 1860), from the third generation, was a founding member of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and cartographer to George V. He strengthened the company's reputation, bringing about the publication of its own maps and initiating layer colouring to indicate relief on medium-scaled maps.

The map-making tradition continued through the generations, notably with *The Times Survey Atlas of the World* in 1922 and *The Times Atlas of the World* (1955-60). Bartholomew's was one of the first companies to shake the supremacy of the Germans as masters in the field, developing the science of

cartography and introducing new methods of projection and printing as well as new varieties of durable paper. It was Bartholomew's that brought the name Antarctica into popular use as an alternative to the "Southern Continent" and adopted pink as the colour for those countries occupied during the era of British Empire.

Robert Gordon Bartholomew was born in 1927, the fourth of six children of John Bartholomew and his wife Marie Antoinette (née Sarolea), who was of Belgian descent. His early years were spent in Duddingston, where he and his siblings attended St Trinnean's School, the inspiration for St Trinian's, which accepted boys as well as girls.

After his grandmother's death in 1936, the family took over the Manor House in Inveresk, near Musselburgh.

On the wall was a huge map of Europe that his father, a Gordon Highlander who had been wounded in the First World War, updated regularly, charting the progress of the Second World War. Robbie did his National Service with the Cameron Highlanders, spending 18 months in Malaya.

The family also built a cottage at West Linton, then in Peeblesshire, where Robbie and his siblings often played golf at a nearby nine-hole course. He recalled being joined in June 1935 by a young Prince Philip of Greece, who was visiting from Gordonstoun for an athletics' meeting in Edinburgh and who was given a golf lesson by one of Robbie's sisters.

He studied printing at Heriot-Watt College and, after a year with Meiklejohn, a publishing company in London set up by his father, he joined the family business in Newington.

John, Robbie's elder brother, served as cartographic director, while another brother, Peter, looked after the business side. Both predeceased him. They ran the business until 1980, when it was sold to Reader's Digest for £2.2 million. It was acquired by News Corporation, parent company of *The Times*, in 1985, and four years later merged with Collins as part of HarperCollins. The name lives on today as Collins Bartholomew, provider of digital map data.

Meanwhile, in 1955 Bartholomew married Jean (née Thin), from a well-known family of Scottish booksellers. They lived in Edinburgh and later, with the family grown, the couple moved to an apartment in nearby Grange Loan, where he served as chairman of the Grange Association for three years from 1985. In 1991 he produced *The Grange: A History in Maps*, spending many happy hours in the map room of the National Library of Scotland where the Bartholomew archive is now housed.

Jean died in 2013 and he is survived by two children: David, who is a Church of Scotland minister in Kirkcudbrightshire, and Elspeth, who lives on a sheep farm in New Zealand. Another daughter, Jane, died in 2008 after a long illness.

Throughout his life, Bartholomew was a devoted member of the kirk, having been ordained as an elder at Inveresk in 1952. Since 1958 he had worshipped at Mayfield Salisbury Church, serving there as an elder, a session clerk and on many other bodies.

"Church is important to me," he told an interviewer last year, adding that he used his mobility scooter to get to services as well as to the shops and museums — but he had long since stopped peering down wells.

Robert Bartholomew, map publisher, was born on January 11, 1927. He died on April 30, 2017, aged 90