

Date

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Title of session

Plenary: Update on the Ordnance Survey International Collection

Name of presenter/chair

Presenter: Eunice Gill, Cartographic Client Manager, The National Archives, UK

Rapporteurs

Colin Henderson, Ordnance Survey and Selena Patton, Defence Geographic Centre

At the last Cambridge Conference it was announced that the Ordnance Survey International Library would be closed. This library was originally that of the Directorate of Overseas Surveys (DOS) which had been housed in the Ordnance Survey's head office in Southampton since 1984 when the two organisations merged.

In 2003 Ordnance Survey issued a statement indicating that the collection would not disappear. Instead the National Archives would be working with Ordnance Survey to ensure that the collection continued to be made available to the many specialist users as well as being made available for the general public. This presentation provided an update on the progress being made towards this stated aim.

Ordnance Survey has a statutory duty to ensure that records of national importance are deposited for permanent preservation. The first stage in permanent preservation is to select those records to be preserved. This was accomplished with the assistance of an expert panel drawn from the surveying community and included a number of former DOS employees. However, it was recognised early on that much of the contents of the library would have value to the wider community and as such the impacts on the decisions to dispose must be considered.

The library itself contains around 50,000 maps, 1.5 million aerial photographs and associated survey data relating to 60 different countries. Such a large amount of material required an organised programme of appraisal and disposal. This was managed by a specialist board within Ordnance Survey; the National Archives were invited to sit on this board.

It soon became apparent that the library contained specialist record collections that would need to be cared for by specialist institutions. The decision was made to split the library contents between several repositories. Appropriate institutions have been found to house the records for permanent preservation.

Approximately 30,000 published maps have been added to the Royal Geographical Society's collections in London. This includes all series produced by Ordnance Survey International and its predecessors between 1946 and 1999. One and a half million aerial photographs are deposited at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol. Three cine films have been preserved at

the British Film Institute in London. The earliest, made in 1954, is entitled 'Nachingwea Base' illustrating the effort and care taken in the accurate measurement of one of the last triangulation base lines to be measured in the British Commonwealth. Shortly the University of Portsmouth will receive parts of the book and pamphlet collection as a contribution to the 'History of Cartography' project.

There is a special 'twist' in the story of the Ordnance Survey International Library and its disposal. A second set of aerial photographs that were presented to two separate institutions for research purposes some years ago. In 2004 this set was reunited and placed in the care of the Rhodes House Library, part of the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. Researchers there believe that these records have great potential to advance our understanding of global environmental change. Although they are some 25-30 years older than the oldest LANDSAT images, the detail they provide of vegetation cover is far better. They offer the potential to add another generation's worth of understanding to earth surface dynamics. The surveyors who first commissioned and used the imagery several decades ago could not have foreseen such a use for these records.

Completion of the transfers from Southampton are expected mid 2008. At that point the goal of improved access for both the public and the specialist will have been achieved. This very important and vast collection will have been preserved for the enjoyment of surveyors, geographers, historians, environmentalists, the general public and in particular our school children world-wide.

Questions	Answers