

Meeting of Malvern Civic Society on Friday, 11 May 2018

'A history of maps' - a talk by Tony Atkinson

Tony Atkinson has been enthusiastic about maps since the age of four, when his father brought home a map of Germany and laid it on the floor for Tony to see. Part of the fascination for him is the enormous amount of information shown on maps. In 1975, he set up The Map Shop in Upton-upon-Severn: it is now regarded as one of the leading map shops in the UK.

The first evidence of map making is a land survey on a Babylonian clay tablet, dated to 2200 BC, and shows a plot of land belonging to a landowner. One of the themes of the talk was the advance in ways to improve the accuracy of maps. Fundamental for this was the development of latitude and longitude by the Ancient Greeks who had mapped most of the Eastern Mediterranean by 300 BC. Printing increased the availability of maps in the 16th century. In the 20th century, aerial photography was another major development. This meant that maps could be produced much more quickly. This is especially useful in warfare where up to date information of enemy positions is essential. As an example, Tony displayed a WW1 map of battle fields showing the layout of trenches in Northern France. Since then, the digital revolution has made map making even quicker.

Another theme was the application of maps for different uses. Maps are not only important to property owners. The Mappa Mundi (dated 1292) in Hereford Cathedral represents the Christian view of the world at that time - Jerusalem is located at the centre of the map, literally the centre of the world.

Maps have always been important in warfare. The Ordnance Survey was established in 1745, to map the Scottish Highlands for military purposes. In the 20th century, the demand for maps for walking and cycling increased. In the last 50 years, the 2.5 inch: 1 mile has replaced the 1 inch: 1 mile to become the popular recreational map scale.

Afterwards, there was an opportunity to see a display of Tony's own collection of maps. The meeting was well supported with an audience of over 120 members and guests.

The next meeting is on Friday 8th June starting at 7.30pm in the Eden Centre, Grovewood Road, WR14 1GD when there is a talk entitled 'The History and Development of Prefabs': admission £2 to include refreshments, non-members welcome.