

MY FAVOURITE MAP ~ J. Brian Harley



THEN, finally, there is the personal biography that lies hidden in the map. Sheet CIX, SE triggers for its present owner the memory of events lived in that place. Personal experience and cumulative associations give to its letters lines and measured alphabets yet another set of unique meanings. Even its white spaces are crowded with thoughts as I whimsically reflect on its silence. Here is a room of novels, poetry and music, the map ceases to be solely a document of social relevance or the utilitarian product of government policy; it is there to be read as a personal history, an affirmation that I still belong. To reach these English roots through my map, I have no need of resources to characterize streets, to mathematical grids and gradients or representative functions, nor do I require an upturner to repair the pathway across the hill. Sheet CIX, SE is now transformed into a subjective symbol of place, assessed without the artifice of geometry, measured by eye without questioning its accuracy, and understood without awareness of its technical progress. The map is interpreted through the private code of memory.

LIVING FOR SO LONG in such a small town allowed me to walk over much of the space shown on the map. Every square inch of its paper landscape remains so familiar that it can be read at random, and almost sensed in sleep. Its place-names are not just a roll call of neighbourlands, but of people, some now dead, others still crossing and recrossing the town's pavements and squares and the fields of the countryside. In such a way, the map has become a graphic autobiography; it restores time to memory and it recreates for the inner eye the fabric and texture of a former life.

Map Collector 41 (right) on.

