

JAMES KENNETH ATHERTON, FRGS, HonFBCartS

Ken was born in 1945 in Blackpool, Lancashire, and spent his formative years selling postcards, buckets and spades, beach balls and Blackpool rock to unsuspecting holiday makers.

On leaving Arnold School, in 1963 he joined the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO), then based in Cricklewood, north-west London, as a Cartographic Draughtsman. This was a wonderful opportunity to combine his interest in geography and art with his love of maps and the sea.

Over the years he has worked in a wide variety of geographical areas within the UKHO, as a compiler of Admiralty Charts, a Drawing Office manager and Head of two Chart Branches. In addition to the time spent working directly on Admiralty Charts he also held an appointment in the "Immediate Requirements" unit in Whitehall, London, and spent a total of 15 years in the Aerial Photography Section developing air survey techniques for hydrographic charting. (Working with the RAF, RN Wasp and Lynx helicopter flights and BAS Twin Otter aircraft crews.)

He was appointed Curator of Original Documents in 1991, and it was in this post that he developed his interest in the history of the UKHO and in maritime cartography in general. He was responsible for the management and supervision of the Hydrographic Data Centre and UKHO Archives, ensuring that all incoming graphic, digital and textual material was catalogued and distributed throughout the Office within set timescales, and for providing a professional research service and the Public Relations function.

In July 1996 he became Head of Chart Branch 7, covering South-East Asia, from Myanmar (Burma) to the Philippines and including Indonesia. In this geographical region we find the busiest port in the world (Singapore), arguably the busiest waterway in the world (the Malacca Strait) and home to some of the nastiest pirates!

In July 1999 he transferred as Head of Chart Branch 5 with responsibility for maintaining British Admiralty chart cover of the coasts of Africa from Morocco to Kenya, and Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and the off-lying islands of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The nastiest pirates followed him!

In March 2001, after 38 years with the UKHO, Ken took early retirement and soon after took up the post of Administrator to The British Cartographic Society, a post he held until December 2009 when he retired for the second time.

In what could be called "real retirement" he now gives talks and presentations, originally all linked to historical maritime cartography and exploration, but now covering a wide variety of subjects. He has written a number of professional papers and appeared in and given professional advice to a variety of radio and television programmes, including *"Time Team"*, Simon Scharma's *"The History of Britain"*, *"The Antiques Roadshow"* and Nicholas Crane's *"The Map Man"*. He occasionally takes commissions requiring historical map and maritime chart research.

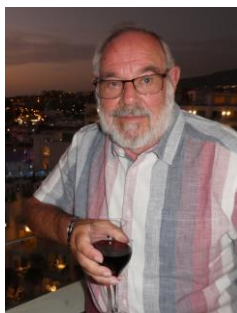
He is an active member of the Rotary Club of Wellington, Wellington Monument Probus Club and Wellington 41 Club. Ken also collects old postcards and ephemera related to Blackpool (his hometown) and is tracing his family tree.

He is a past Vice President of The British Cartographic Society, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, an Honorary Fellow of the British Cartographic Society, a member of the Society for Nautical Research, a member of the Defence Surveyors Association and a member of the South-West Maritime History Society. He is a Past President of the Rotary Clubs of Wellington and Wiveliscombe & District and an Honorary Life Member of the Wellington Arts Association. Honoured to be accepted as a member of the Exeter Flotilla in October 2024.

Ken is married to Sue and they have one son, Simon, and three grown-up grandchildren. He has lived in Wellington since moving to Somerset with the UKHO in 1968.



Sue and Ken Atherton, 2019



Ken Atherton 2024