

NAMES FOR SEA AREAS OF INTERNATIONAL EXTENT ON BRITISH MAPS

Dr David Forrest
Department of Geographical & Earth Sciences
Faculty of Physical Sciences
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ, United Kingdom
david.forrest@ges.gla.ac.uk

Introduction

This study focuses on the names used for some sea areas of international interest in the vicinity of the British Isles as shown on maps and atlases produced, or published in the United Kingdom (UK). Maps and atlases produced for the UK market by non-UK based publishers, such as Michelin and Insight Guides, were not included in the initial study. Similarly, a small number of atlases published by UK based publishers, but consisting of maps produced elsewhere were excluded, such as the AA road atlas of France containing maps by IGN (France) with all map names being French versions. A small number of such non UK publications were later examined to get some idea of how practice varies in other countries.

The main topic reported on here is the naming of three sea areas commonly given different names in English and French: *The English Channel / La Manche*, *Strait of Dover / Pas de Calais* and *Bay of Biscay / Golfe du Gascogne*. The first two areas are both partly British coastal/territorial waters, sharing their other coastline with France. The third has no direct connection with the British coast. A key element of this part of the investigation is gathering evidence of dual naming of features on published maps.

The study involved some basic background research on each of the names, but the major focus is the study of a wide range of maps and atlases published over the last 400 years. In total, over 200 individual maps dating from 1579 to 2008 and 60 atlases dated 1787 to 2007 have been examined, along with numerous illustrated books on the history of maps and charts. A selection of recent navigation and sailing guides to the appropriate areas have also been studied. Much attention was paid to two key periods: approximately 1800 to 1920; and to the last twenty years or so.

To provide further confirmation of policies and practice, discussions took place with representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK Government (FCO) and Harper-Collins Publishers, current producers of Times, Bartholomew and Collins ranges of maps and atlases.

The report starts with an introduction to each of the areas studied and an analysis of the data collected. This is followed by an evaluation of other evidence and then concludes with a review of historical changes in practice and a statement of current practice.

English Channel

The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) in their 'Limits of Oceans and Seas' defines the *English Channel* as:

On the West: From the coast of Brittany Westward along parallel (48 28' N) of the East extreme of Ushant, through this island to the West extreme thereof, thence to Bishop Rock, the Southwest extreme of the Scilly Isles, and on a line passing to the Westward of these Isles as far as the North extreme and thence Eastward to the Longships and on to Lands End.

On the East: The Southwestern limit of the North Sea.

(IHO, 1953; 13)

This definition was later modified taking into account of the addition of the definition of the *Celtic Sea* to:

On the West: A line joining Isle Vierge to Land's End.

On the East: The Southwestern limit of the North Sea.

(IHO, 1953; corrections)

The definition in the fourth, draft edition remains the same as this modified version, although more specific latitudes and longitudes are added as is the alternative name *La Manche*. The area is illustrated by Figure 1.

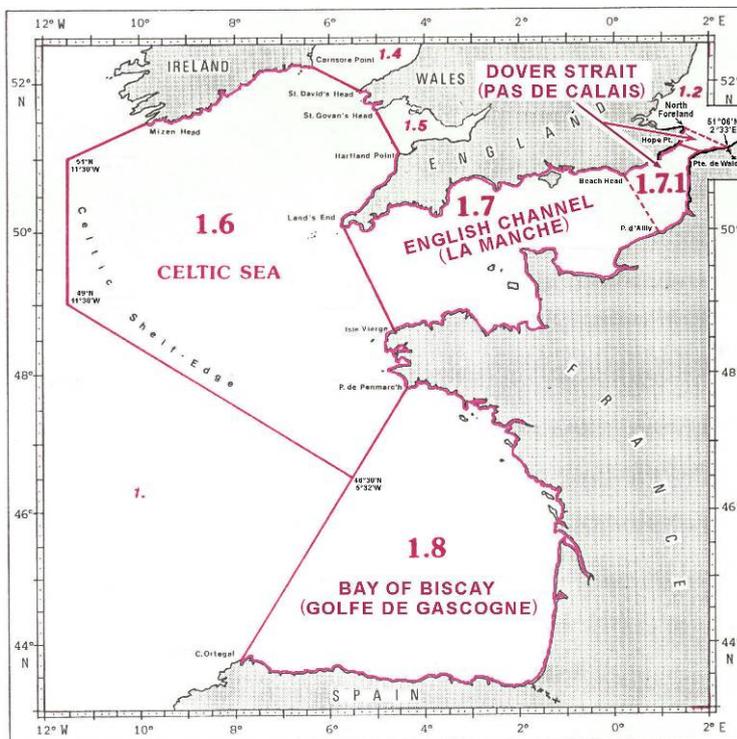


Figure 1 – IHO Illustration of limits of Oceans and Seas (IHO, 2002)

Historically this area is often referred to as the *British Channel* or *British Sea* (Figure 2). However *English Channel* very much dominates since the early 1700s. Some earlier maps use the name in its Latin form, but since the general adoption of the English language version there is very little use of anything other than *English Channel*. A few examples from the Twentieth Century use the sub-nominal *La Manche*, but this is relatively rare. The use of dual names in road atlases and road maps of France or Europe is more common in recent years, but still a minority occurrence.



Figure 2 – Kingdom of Great Britain. Speed, 1611 (Nicholson, 1988)

The first occurrence of *English Channel* discovered is on Morden’s map of 1680 illustrated in Figure 3. (Interestingly, in comparison to Speed’s map (Fig. 2), Morden uses *The British Sea* as the name for what is generally know as the *North Sea*.) Earlier than this all the maps studied used either *British Sea*, *British Ocean*, or their Latin equivalents for the *Channel*. Until recently the latest occurrence of the earlier name is Willdey’s map of Great Britain & Ireland of 1715, so the adoption of the now standard form appears to have happened fairly rapidly, however, the recent discovery a map by Thompson dated 1814 which uses *British Channel* changes this significantly.

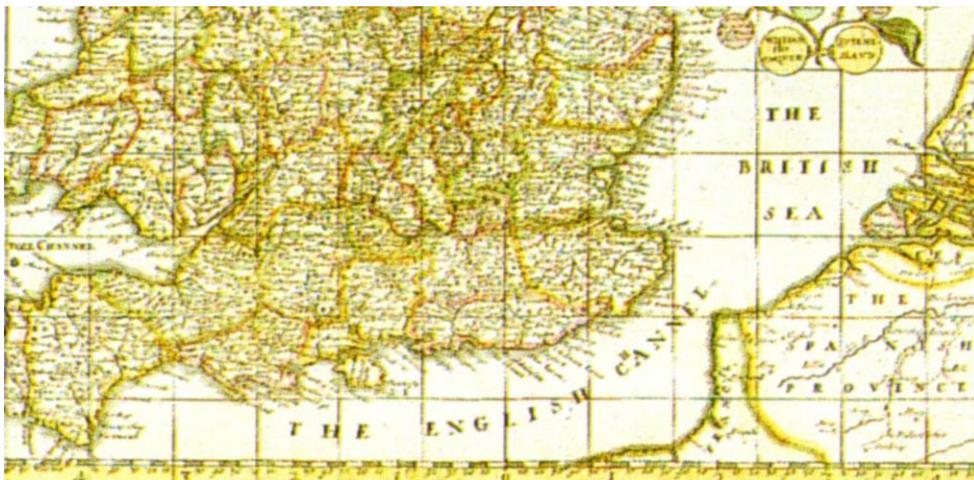


Figure 3 – A New map of England Scotland and Ireland. Morden, 1680 (From Potter, 1988).

A couple of examples exist of the name being preceded by the definite article ‘The’ and one example from 1787 simply uses *The Channel*.

Dual naming using both the English and French names for the area is not common, the earliest example found being from 1915. In the twentieth century dual naming was found on seven maps and in two atlases. Interestingly, the three instances in the early part of the 20th Century are all official mapping, two being produced by the Geographical Section of the General Staff, War Office (GSGS) and one by the Ordnance Survey. The later GSGS map published in 1940 is a fabric escape map of France, so it is logical that it should show local versions of names to assist escaping service personnel communicate with locals.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1938 is a map in the style of the International Map of the World at 1:1 Million scale (Figure 4). As this series was intended for international distribution and

use, again it is understandable that both English and French names were given. There is no evidence of subsequent official use of dual names; later Ordnance Survey maps, including maps of Europe and the World, all only have the English version such as the OS map of 1996 (Figure 5).

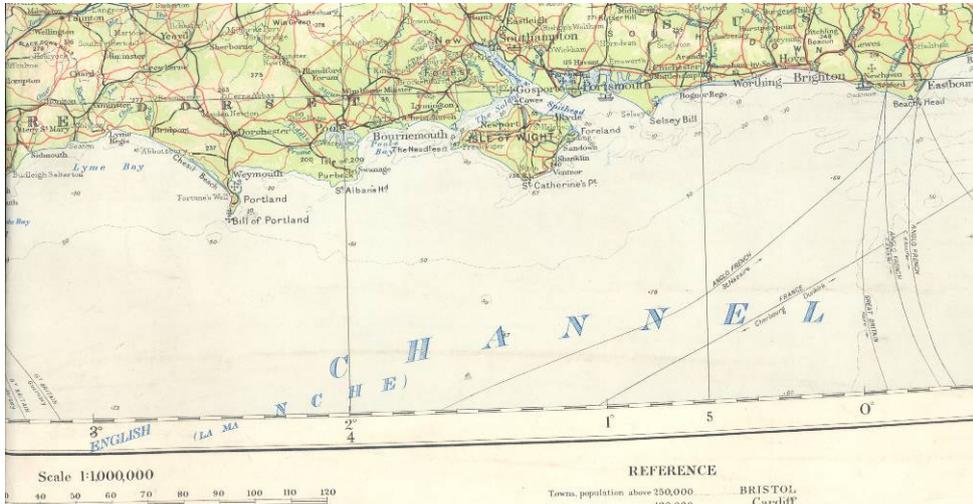


Figure 4 – 1:1M map of Great Britain. Ordnance Survey, 1938.

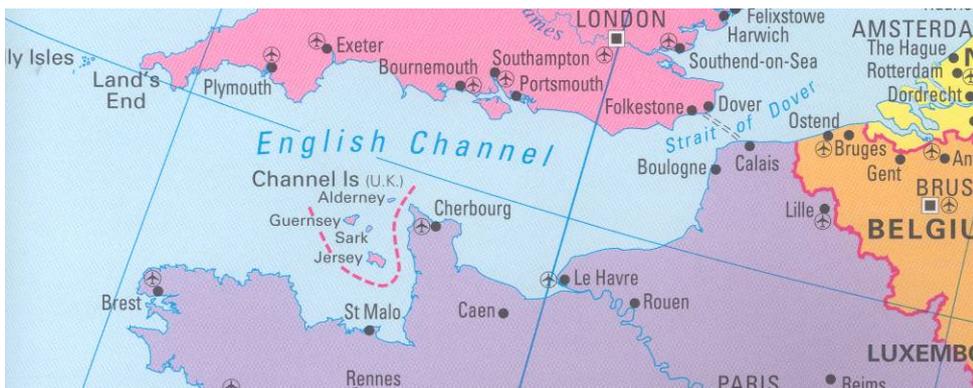


Figure 5 – Europe. Ordnance Survey, 1996

Commercial publishers show little consistency in their approach. A few use dual names in some products, but none appear to use them in all publications, policy seeming to vary from product to product and even edition to edition. Of twenty-three maps and fifteen atlases published in the last ten years, six and four respectively (about 25%) use dual names. All give *English Channel* first with *La Manche* following or below (Figure 6) or more commonly underneath either in brackets and/or in smaller or lighter type (Figure 7).

Despite the IHO designation of *La Manche* as the alternative name for this area, French maps generally call this area of sea *Manche* without the definite article 'La' (Figure 8).

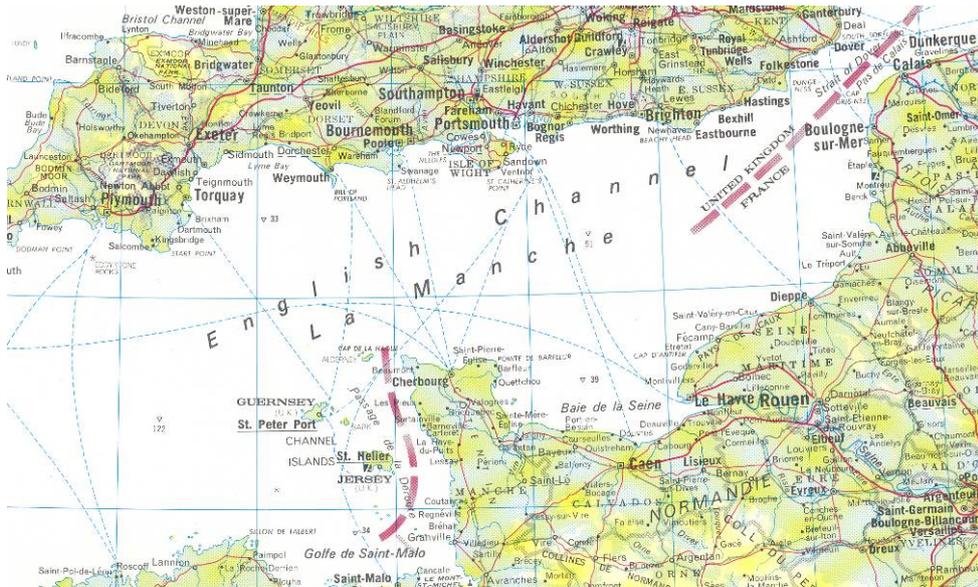


Figure 6 – Reader’s Digest World Atlas, 1989.



Figure 7 – France. The Times Comprehensive World Atlas, 2003.

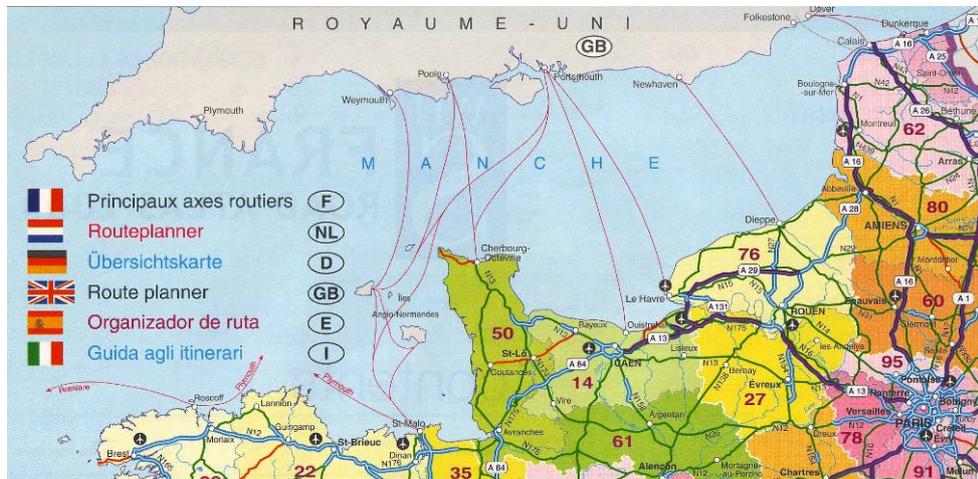


Figure 8 – France Road Atlas. WH Smith/AA, 2003 (Maps by IGN, Paris).

Bay of Biscay

In 1953 the International Hydrographic Organization defined *Bay of Biscay* as:

A line joining Cape Ortegal with the West extreme of Ushant through this island to the East extreme thereof and thence Eastward on the parallel 48 28' N to the coast of Brittany. (IHO, 1953, 13)

This is later modified to:

A line joining Cape Ortegal to Penmarch Point.

(IHO, 1953, corrections)

This modified definition is retained for the fourth, draft edition (see Figure 1), but *Golfe de Gascogne* is added as an alternative name (IHO, 2002).

This area appears on fewer of the maps examined than other areas as it is not immediately adjacent to the United Kingdom coast. Where named it is generally in the standard English form. In some cases, although the area is on the map, it is un-named or named somewhat ambiguously as *Atlantic Ocean* (which technically according to the IHO (1953) it is a part).

In its definition of the Bay of Biscay, Wikipedia (2007) gives several alternative names including *Golfe de Gascogne* (French), *Mar Cantabrico* (Spanish) and other local names.

There is very little evidence to suggest this area is given an alternative name on British maps. A few atlases published in the 1950s with maps by Bartholomew include *Golfe de Gascogne* as a sub-nominal on maps of France (not on other maps), but apart from these only two other examples were found of the use of *Gulf of Gascony* as an alternative name to the large area generally referred to as the *Bay of Biscay*, one from 1816 and the other from 1995. Two maps of Europe produced by Philip in the 1980s and 90s call the area *Golfe de Vizcaya*.

However, *Gulf of Gascony* (or *Golfe de Gascogne*) is often found in the south east corner of *Bay of Biscay*, in many cases along with *Bay of Biscay* for the larger area. The size and positioning of names makes it clear that this is not just an alternative name of the same feature, but the name attributed to a smaller feature (Figures 10 & 11).

The naming of the *Gulf of Gascony* has become more common since the 1980s. Most often in more recent products the French version is used or given priority, although this may be accompanied by other local spellings, such as Spanish and Basque (Figure 12). The English version tends only to be used at smaller scales and several cases exist of different versions or combinations being used on different scale maps within the same atlas as illustrated by Figures 11 and 12.

A few recent examples of Philip's maps and atlases use *Bay of Biscay* as a sub-nominal for *Golfe de Gascogne* although their practice and positioning of names is not consistent at difference scales and on different maps within the same atlas.

The definition and use of *Bay of Biscay* and *Gulf of Gascony* requires further investigation as it is not clear from the map evidence why the IHO propose the dual naming of the larger area so defined.

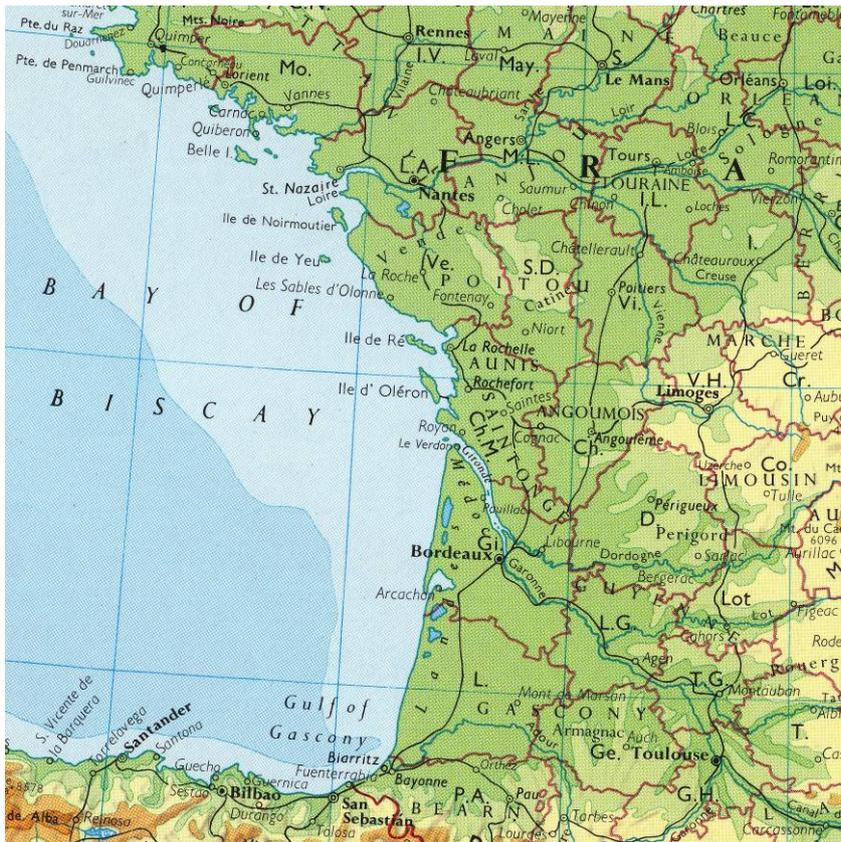


Figure 10 – The University Atlas. Philip, 1972.

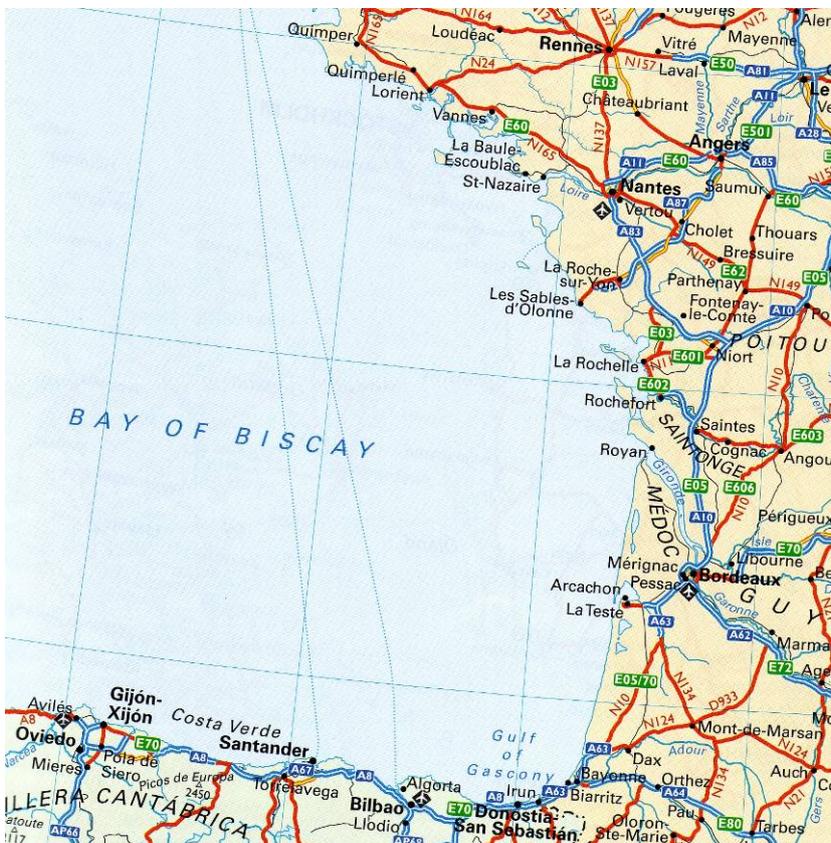


Figure 11 – Collins Road Map Europe. Harper-Collins, 2008.



Figure 12 – Collins Road Map Europe. Harper-Collins, 2008.

Further discussion

In order to discover currently policies with regard to naming areas of international interest discussions were held with several people involved in map making and selection of geographic names for map.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK Government produce a wide range of briefing maps to support the British government and diplomatic service. They do not normally give dual names for areas of international interest. For seas and oceans, they follow the naming conventions set out by the IHO in their ‘Limits of the Oceans and Seas’ (IHO, 1953). In all other matters, they would follow advice given by the UK Permanent Committee on Geographic Names for British Official Use (PCGN). The PCGN are responsible for advising government on names beyond Britain, so technically are not concerned with UK territorial waters.

Harper-Collins, publishers of The Times and Collins series of atlases, tourist and other maps, seek advice from the PCGN on any naming issues they believe may be contentious. Recent world atlases all use the conventional English names with occasional sub-nominal alternative names where the scale (and hence space) permit, but they are not used universally. European road maps and atlases are more likely to included names in multiple languages to assist tourists visiting these areas.

Conclusions

The survey has been interesting and has revealed that there is relatively little variation in name use for these areas in the last hundred years or so on maps published in the UK, but that some anomalies do occur. The first example of a map showing the conventional English names for the sea areas investigated dates from as early as 1683 (Figure 13).

In recent years there as been an increase in the use of dual and multiple names on commercial road and tourist maps of Europe, but this remains a minority occurrence and practice can vary even within the same product. There is also some use of alternative names in recent general atlases, usually with a smaller type face and often in brackets, but this too is relatively rare.



Figure 13. Chart of the European Coast. Morden & Lea, 1693 (From Blake, 2004).

From a UK published map perspective, the dual naming of Bay of Biscay / Golf de Gascogne has little historical support, the latter name generally referring to a small part of the former. The adoption of dual naming by the IHO requires further examination.

Selected Bibliography

- Blake, J (2004) **The Sea Chart**. London: Conway Maritime Press.
- Blake, J. (2005) **Sea Charts of the British Isles**. London: Conway Maritime Press.
- Howse, D., Sanderson, M. (1973) **The Sea Chart**. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- IHO (1953) Limits of Oceans and Seas (Special Publication No.23), 3rd Edition. Monaco: International Hydrographic Organization.
- IHO (2002) Limits of Oceans and Seas (Special Publication No.23), 4th Edition (unpublished draft). Monaco: International Hydrographic Organization.
- Choo, S. (2007) The Case of International Standardization of Sea Names and Their Implications for Justifying the Name East Sea. *Journal of the Korean Geographical Society*. Vol.42, No.5, pp.745-760.
- Nicholson, N. (1988) **The counties of Britain: A Tudor Atlas by John Speed**. London: Pavilion Books.
- Potter, J. (1988) **Antique Maps**. London: Country Life Books.
- Smart, L (2004) **Maps that made history**. Richmond, Surrey: The National Archives.
- Tooley, R.V (1976) **Landmarks of Mapmaking**. Oxford: Phaidon Press.
- Whitfield, P (1996) **The Charting of the Oceans**. London: The British Library.
- Wikipedia (2007) www.wikipedia.com last visited 13/03/2008.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Northeast Asian History Foundation in funding this research.