

County Maps

From Christopher Saxton's Atlas of England and Wales (1574-9) until the coming of the Ordnance Survey in the early 19th century, the county was the basic unit of regional mapping.



County maps are depicted at a very small scale and you need to beware of inaccuracies, but they can be useful for topics like place-names, woodland or the developing road network.

Best examples of county maps

The best and most detailed local examples of county maps were produced from the mid-18th century onwards. In chronological order, these are:

Date	Cartographer	County	Scale	Working copy reference	Original reference
1715	Philip Overton	Oxon	1.25" : 2 miles	none	B:MC4 - MP1154
1761	John Rocque	Berks	2" : 1 mile	Searchroom: Desk	D40:B10 - SF 952.33
1766-7	Thomas Jefferys	Oxon	1" : 1 mile	A:MC3.A0.3 - MPC149	B:MC4 - MP149
1793-4	Richard Davis	Oxon	2" : 1 mile	Searchroom: Desk	D40:B8 - SF 942.33
1822-3	Charles and John Greenwood	Berks	1" : 1 mile	A:MC3.A0.1 - MPC459	B:MC4 - MP1152
1823-4	Andrew Bryant	Oxon	1.5" : 1 mile	A:MC3.A0.4 - MPC150	B:MC4 - MP150

Features of the principal county maps

Christopher Saxton 1574-9

- Oxon combined in one sheet (ref: MPC 364) with Berks and Bucks. Surveyed 1574 and published in 1579 in Saxton's *An atlas of England and Wales*.
- Hand-coloured detail shows location of villages, medieval parks and windmills; but there is no attempt to depict roads. Saxton uses molehill symbols as a rough indication of relief!
- Saxton was used as the basis for many later county maps. Oxon was republished in 1607 as part of William Camden's *Britannia, a topographical and historical survey of all of Great Britain and Ireland*.

John Speed 1605-11

- Oxon sheet (ref: MPC 369) was surveyed in 1605, and both Berks (ref: MPC 443) and Oxon were published in 1611 in Speed's *The theatre of the empire of Great Britaine*.
- Based on Saxton's map but with clearer definition; place-name spellings are also different.
- Additionally Speed adds the Hundreds (ancient administrative boundaries).

Johan Blaeu 1648

- Oxon sheet (ref: MPC 377) published in 1648 as part of Blaeu's *Atlas Novus*. Coloured detail includes town and village symbols, parks and rivers; no roads are marked. Hundred boundaries are shown.

- Through the 17th century county maps became increasingly decorative (e.g. Blaeu), but there was very little new surveying.

Robert Plot 1677

- Oxon sheet (ref: MPC 386) by Michael Burghers (1675), engraver to the University of Oxford. Published to accompany Plot's *Natural history of Oxfordshire* (1677).
- Depicts towns, villages and parks with symbols. Rivers are shown but only ancient roads or tracks.

Robert Morden 1695

- Colour-washed. Depicts towns in blocked layout and villages by symbol. It also shows parks, major roads and hundred boundaries. The clear depiction of roads marks an advance in county mapping of the time.
- Berks sheet (ref: MPC 126)
- Oxon sheet (ref: MPC 496)

Philip Overton 1715

- Oxon. Colour-washed map published in two half-sheets, with highly decorative borders and inset engraved illustrations.
- Map is informative and very clearly engraved, with prominently marked towns and villages



John Rocque 1761

- First ever large scale survey of Berks, compiled 1752-61, and using triangulation.
- Increase in scale allows for individual depiction of houses, barns, mills and bridleways.
- Engraved hatching allows for more accurate depiction of hills, distinction of arable, common or pasture.
- Closed or open fields are shown. The map gives the impression that all fields have been individually surveyed, but this is not so: the enclosed fields are too large for this map scale. The extent of open fields is faithfully portrayed, though.
- Industrial buildings such as mills are frequently ignored.

Thomas Jefferys 1766-7

- Jefferys' map was compiled in response to the Royal Society of Arts 1759 competition for the best original 1 inch to 1 mile county survey.
- Includes detail of towns, parishes, farms, cottages, hills, commons and parks.
- Roads are shown, including whether turnpike, open or enclosed.

Richard Davis 1793-4

- Earning a premium of 50 guineas from the Royal Society of Arts, Davis's map was the first ever large scale (2" : 1 mile) survey of Oxfordshire.



- Davis took full advantage of the larger scale to depict almost every house and farm in villages and rural areas; even the blocked layout of towns is correct.
- By 1793-4 some enclosure had taken place and is captured on the map - for example, Adderbury is shown with enclosed field boundaries (1768), but not neighbouring Bloxham (enclosed 1802).
- The road system is extensively shown, right down to minor routes, bridleways and milestones.
- Inset is a detailed map of the City of Oxford.

Andrew Bryant 1823-4

- Bryant's map was surveyed at 1½ inches to 1 mile and engraved on four sheets.
- It depicts county, hundred and - crucially - parish boundaries, and at the time was ahead of the Ordnance Survey in providing that level of detail.
- The road system is carefully depicted to distinguish between turnpike, main, cross and driving roads, lanes and bridleways.
- Bryant was among the last generation of private county surveyors, his business later withering in the face of the Ordnance Survey's growth.

Christopher and John Greenwood 1822-3 / 1831

- With the Ordnance Survey progressing so very slowly, there was still a market for Greenwood's large scale county maps which he began in 1817. These provide us with a great deal of information on early 19th century England.
- Berkshire (1822-3) survey was one of those counties achieved at the 1 inch to 1 mile scale.
- Wind and watermills are detailed on the Berkshire map; also brick kilns, archaeological remains, private estates and parks.
- Roads are shown, with mileages from relevant towns such as Abingdon or Wallingford. The Wilts and Berks Canal is clearly shown cutting through the Vale of White Horse.
- Parish boundaries were included by the Greenwoods but were often disputed, and may be a sign of cost-cutting in the survey work.
- Competition from the Ordnance Survey led to Bryant abandoning the series of county maps in 1831, by which time 35 of the intended 41 were published.
- Oxfordshire (1831) did not benefit from Greenwood's large scale survey work, but was later included in his reduced scale 1834 *Atlas of the counties of England*.

How do I know which County Maps you hold?

In addition to the suggestions listed above, you can consult the full paper catalogue of Printed Historic Maps in a series of binders in the Catalogues area of the Searchroom at Oxfordshire History Centre, giving access to over 500 historic printed maps by cartographer, publisher or other given name, by title, by subject and by date.

An electronic version of the Printed Historic Maps catalogue is available on [Picture Oxon](#), by selecting the COLLECTION name "Historic Maps" from the drop-down list of available collections.

And how do I go about viewing them?

About 40% of Printed Historic Maps have been digitised and can be viewed on [Picture Oxon](#), by selecting the COLLECTION name "Historic Maps" from the drop-down list of available collections. Bear in mind that these are low resolution copies for indicative purposes only; visitors to Oxfordshire History Centre can consult detailed high resolution versions.

We have made working copies (either on paper or in digital format) of most County Maps for regular consultation in the Searchroom and, for conservation reasons, we will ask you to use these unless you have a special need to examine the original. Maps can be ordered up on a document request slip, citing the MP or MPC number from the paper catalogue or [Picture Oxon](#) catalogue.

Other sources of information

Printed reference tools

- Chubb, Thomas. *The printed maps in the atlases of Great Britain and Ireland: a bibliography, 1579-1870* (1927)
- Burden, Eugene. *Printed maps of Berkshire, 1574-1900*. 4 volumes. (1998)

Websites

- [Bodleian Library Map Room](#) (Oxford University) guide to map collections and online catalogue. Searches can be limited to cartographer, format, scale, date, etc.
- [British Library map collections](#)
- [British Library online catalogue](#)

[Contacting and visiting Oxfordshire History Centre](#)

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