

Estate Maps

Estate maps grew out of the progress made in surveying techniques in the 16th century and the growing demand by land owners for plans of their estates. These maps are usually manuscript



and show the land owned by a private individual, the church, crown, etc. Many of these maps are accompanied by surveys, giving details of tenants, field names, land use and acreage; maps can also show physical and topographical details such as buildings and ponds in great detail though not necessarily to scale.

In rural areas estate maps are often the only graphic evidence of its landscape before the 19th century and may show pre-enclosure field patterns, settlement distribution and industrial features such as forges, lime kilns, sand pits, mills and minor roads. Often field names are recorded in great detail. The origins and purposes of these maps must however be kept in mind when weighing up their historical evidence: land owners commissioned surveyors to produce accurate records of their property not the landscape of their district. The sizes of estate maps and plans range from large rolled-up parchment sheets to small drawings attached to title deeds. Towards the end of the 19th century manuscript maps were largely replaced by large-scale OS maps to depict land-holding.

Where are these records?

Oxfordshire History Centre holds a number of privately-deposited estate plans including some fascinating examples:

- Harpsden (1586)
- Little Rollright (c1690)
- Rousham (1721)
- Ditchley (1726)
- Bicester (1754)
- Eynsham (1782)
- South Weston (1853)

A number of maps are still held by estates or institutions such as Blenheim, Oxford University colleges and the Bodleian Library.

Oxfordshire History Centre holds photographic copies of some college estate maps; the photographs are gradually being scanned and images added to [Picture Oxon](#).

Where is the catalogue?

Some estate maps in our Archives collection have been catalogued electronically and can be searched online via [Heritage Search](#); otherwise please visit us to consult our card-based map index for older Archive catalogues.

Catalogue records for our photographic copies of selected college estate maps are listed on [Picture Oxon](#).

What do I do now?

[Contacting and visiting the Oxfordshire History Centre.](#)