

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. [Online digital images are available via Picture Oxon](#). In chronological order, these are:

| Date | Cartographer | County | Scale | Original reference | Picture Oxon link |
|--------|----------------------------|--------|-----------------------|--------------------|--|
| 1715 | Philip Overton | Oxon | 1.25 inches : 2 miles | MP:1154 | POX0081857 |
| 1761 | John Rocque | Berks | 2 inches : 1 mile | SF 952.33 | Index sheet |
| 1766-7 | Thomas Jefferys | Oxon | 1 inch : 1 mile | MP:149 | POX0081900 |
| 1793-4 | Richard Davis | Oxon | 2 inches : 1 mile | SF 942.33 | Index sheet |
| 1822-3 | Charles and John Greenwood | Berks | 1 inch : 1 mile | MP:1152 | POX0081855 |
| 1823-4 | Andrew Bryant | Oxon | 1.5 inches : 1 mile | CH/XXIV/1 | north POX0250890 south POX0250883 |

Features of the principal county maps

Christopher Saxton 1574-9

- Oxon combined in one sheet (ref: [POX0011941](#)) 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* (ref: [MP:1186](#)).



John Speed 1605-11

- Oxon sheet (ref: [MP:1185](#)) was surveyed in 1605, and both Berks (ref: [MP:215](#)) 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: [MP:3](#)) 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, like this example by Blaeu, but there was very little new surveying.

Robert Plot 1677

- Oxon sheet (ref: [POX0011898](#)) 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: [MP:126](#))
- Oxon sheet (ref: [MP:5](#))

Philip Overton 1715

- Oxon (ref: [MP:1154](#)). 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. (ref: [MP:1177](#))
- 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 (ref: [MP:149](#)) 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 inches : 1 mile) survey of Oxfordshire. (ref: [MP:1175](#))
- 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. (ref: [MP:1175.city](#))

Andrew Bryant 1823-4

- Bryant's map (ref: MP:150 and CH/XXIV/1 - [north sheet](#); [south sheet](#)) 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 of a 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 (ref: [MP:1152](#)) 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) (ref: [MP:60](#)) 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?

Principal county maps

- [Principal county maps are listed here](#), with links to zoomable hi-res images on Picture Oxon.

Full catalogue of printed maps

- You can search the full **catalogue** of printed county maps by selecting the [Historic Maps](#) collection on [Picture Oxon](#).
- The catalogue data contains details of map title, cartographer, publisher, subject, place and date.

And how do I go about viewing them?

Viewing online

- About 50% of our printed historic maps have been digitised and map images (some of them zoomable) can be viewed online by selecting the [Historic Maps](#) collection on [Picture Oxon](#).
- We are working to extend our coverage of high quality digital images of our most important printed historic maps online, but please bear in mind that this is a gradual task, and so only limited resolution copies may be available at this stage.

Visiting Oxfordshire History Centre

- Where high-resolution digital images are not available, visitors to Oxfordshire History Centre may consult the original map, by citing the MP or MPC number from the [Picture Oxon](#) catalogue.
- Where high resolution images are available, original maps will not be produced for personal visitors, for conservation reasons.



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.
- [Bodleian Library Map Room card catalogue](#)
- [British Library map collections](#)
- [British Library online catalogue](#)

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