

Key Stages in the Development of Printed Maps of “Oxfordshire”

By John Leighfield

Preface

Maps have been produced by all civilisations. The Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all took mapping seriously.

The first known depiction of England was by Ptolemy in about AD150. His map was produced in printed form in Bologna in 1477.

The first extant ‘native’ map to show England is the ‘Anglo Saxon Map’ produced at the end of the tenth century. One very significant manuscript map of the British Isles is the ‘Gough’ map, which is remarkably accurate as far as its depiction of England is concerned and which is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

A major contribution to the mapping of England was the development of Estate Maps from about the 1340s. The Oxford Colleges have many good examples of these.

In the last half of the sixteenth century a number of increasingly good woodcut and copper plate printed maps of England and of the British Isles were produced, culminating in the finest of them all produced by Christopher Saxton. This map, ‘Britannia Insularum in Oceano Maxima’, was printed on 21 sheets.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the mapping of individual counties developed, usually as part of a project aimed at producing an atlas containing the maps of the whole of England and Wales or of the British Isles. It is mostly from the large number of such atlases produced from the late sixteenth century through to the late nineteenth century that we can track the mapping of Oxfordshire and Berkshire. The first step in this direction was a remarkable one.

Christopher Saxton

Saxton was a Yorkshireman, born in about 1542. He revolutionised the mapping of England and Wales by publishing in 1579 one of the first regional atlases of any country in the world. Not only was it a pioneering effort, but also very accurate and was the basis of most printed maps of the counties of England and Wales throughout the seventeenth century. The last edition of Saxton’s own atlas was published by Thomas Jeffrey in 1749.

Saxton had as his patron Thomas Seckford, Master of the Court of Appeals and Surveyor of the Court of Wards and Liveries. It was his money together with the authority of Queen Elizabeth the First that made Saxton’s enterprise possible. From the very early 1570s he travelled around England and Wales, surveying and drawing all the counties, empowered by Elizabeth’s authority to climb the highest buildings to help him see the lie of the land. He used one English and three Dutch engravers to produce the 38 very fine and highly decorated maps, which made up the atlas. The first maps (including that of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire) were dated 1574*; the last were dated 1579, the year in which the atlas itself was published. Bearing in mind the means of travel, the fact that no one had mapped most parts of the country before and the sheer quality of the result of Saxton’s work, this was a truly remarkable achievement.

“Saxton” Kip and Hole

Saxton’s maps were reproduced, on a slightly smaller scale to illustrate the 1607 edition of *Britannia* by William Camden. (Camden was an old boy of Magdalen College School, Oxford, and his history of Britain was published initially in Latin and, after 1607, in English, throughout the late sixteenth, the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to accompany a whole succession of county atlases.) Saxton had combined some counties in groups on a single page and the *Britannia* of 1607 was the first time that several counties, including Oxfordshire and Berkshire, appeared on their own. The engravings in *Britannia* were done by John Kip and William Hole and are of very fine quality and are quite charming. William Hole engraved the Oxfordshire and Berkshire maps*. The maps are often described as ‘Saxtons’, even though they are quite different from (and much commoner than) true Saxtons. Camden’s *Britannia* with the Kip and Hole maps was re-issued in 1610 and 1637.

Speed

If there is any early mapmaker of whom the average person will have heard it is John Speed. His maps have always been popular; indeed, Samuel Pepys writes with obvious pride of his own Speed atlas several times.

Speed was born in Farndon in Cheshire in 1552. Although in producing his atlas, the *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain*, he did not revolutionise the mapping of the country, in some ways he is a worthy successor to Saxton. He took the work of others – mainly Saxton – as the source for his maps, but decorated and added to them in a way that makes them uniquely attractive. He was the first to show the hundreds on county maps; he was the first to put on his maps small plans or views of the main towns (providing us with the first printed map of many towns); he added a significant amount of heraldry into the framework of the maps; and from 1616 onwards, he added a certain amount of classical information. The maps were very finely engraved by Jodocus Hondius the elder.

The popularity of Speed's atlas is demonstrated by the very large number of editions it went through. It was first published in 1611*; the last edition was in 1770.

Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*

Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, a series of poems published in 1613, was illustrated with a series of odd maps, showing little more than the most important towns, rivers, woods and hills but with liberal decoration in the form of mythical figures. In the case of Oxfordshire and Berkshire * they are combined with Buckinghamshire on a 'map' engraved by William Hole - as is so with Saxton. The main feature is a scene illustrating the wedding of the Isis and the Thames.

The *Miniature Speed*

Although popularly known as '*Miniature Speeds*', a series of miniature (typically 2 ½" by 4") maps first published in 1610, were actually reductions of Saxton, produced by Van den Keere. In the first edition the map of Oxfordshire and Berkshire are combined with Buckinghamshire, following the Saxton model. In later editions this map has been re-engraved with the three counties shown separately.

Again this was clearly a very popular atlas – perhaps because it contained the accuracy of Saxton with the handiness of a pocket book format. It was republished several times during the seventeenth century. The history of the Oxfordshire map is particularly interesting. The engraving of the River Thames, which runs right across the map, was clearly done quite deeply into the copper plate. Over the different editions in the 1640s and 1650s* a very obvious crack in the plate begins to develop. Clearly the plate eventually broke as for the 1676 edition the plate has been re-engraved (albeit as a very close copy of the original).

The Dutch

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch were the pre-eminent engravers of maps. Two Dutch families of map makers – the Blaeus and the Janssons - produced massive atlases of all the countries in the world, with a volume for Britain. The design and execution of the maps are both very fine but, in the case of Great Britain, the geographic content is a direct copy of Speed (apart from the incorporation of inevitable transcription errors!). The first of the Berkshire and Oxfordshire maps were produced by Jansson in 1644. These were fine, but rather plain maps. In the following year Blaeu produced his versions, heavily decorated with, in the case of Oxfordshire, the incorporation of the arms of the colleges. This obviously gave Blaeu a competitive advantage as in 1646 Jansson fought back by adding to his Oxfordshire map very ornate arms of the colleges and a decorative cartouche. Both produced very attractive maps and they were published throughout the seventeenth century with descriptive text on the back in various European languages.

Ogilby's *Britannia*

Roads are notable by their absence in maps of the first three quarters of the sixteenth century. In 1675 that changed dramatically when John Ogilby produced his *Britannia**. This was a monumental work, containing one hundred plates illustrating in considerable detail the principal roads of England and Wales. His work can be seen as the basis of strip maps that have continued until the present. Once *Britannia* had been published, the road information it contained was added to the plates of the classic earlier atlases such as

Saxton and Speed. *Britannia* itself was copied and produced in reduced format by other map sellers for more than a century.

Dr Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire*

In 1677, Dr Robert Plot published his *Natural History of Oxfordshire*. This is fully illustrated and has as its first illustration a beautifully engraved and highly decorated map of Oxfordshire* by Michael Burghers. This is the largest scale map of Oxfordshire up to that date. Dr Plot had planned to produce a series of such volumes covering all the counties but, sadly, only managed to cover Oxfordshire and Staffordshire before he ran out of money. A second edition was produced in 1705.

Robert Morden

In 1695, another edition of Camden's *Britannia* was published with maps produced by Robert Morden. He made great claims for the innovations in his maps but, in truth, apart from regularising the spelling of place names, he brought little that was new. His maps are very plain, lacking the decoration of Speed and the Dutch and with a comparatively crude style of engraving.

Morden produced a small version of his illustrations for the *Britannia* and a series of playing cards* decorated with small county maps – the first county maps incorporating roads.

The Eighteenth Century

There was little real advance in county mapmaking in the first half of the century – although many similar looking maps, still based on Speed but with varying forms of decoration were produced, mostly in a fairly small format. The number of mapmakers grew dramatically.

One very different set of 'maps' was produced in 1754 by George Bickham to illustrate *The British Monarchy**. The 'maps' are, in effect, three quarter birds' eye views and are accompanied by descriptions of each county in beautiful copperplate (!) script. Bickham was a master calligrapher and produced a masterwork on the subject entitled *The Universal Penman*.

Emmanuel Bowen and Thomas Kitchin were two very prolific makers of maps in mid-century, producing many slightly variant maps to illustrate magazines, histories and guides for travellers. They responded to a general desire for maps at a larger scale and produced two atlases that were out of the ordinary. In 1760 they issued *The Large English Atlas** that was the largest county atlas to date. The scale varied to fit the 27" by 20" size of the pages and, in the case of Oxfordshire and Berkshire, is just under three quarters of an inch to the mile. All the maps are remarkable for the amount of detailed descriptive text they contain and the lush cartouche carrying the county title and rural scenes. This atlas was based on the first comprehensive re-survey since Saxton and set a new standard of cartographic detail and accuracy.

In 1762 Bowen and Kitchin issued *The Royal English Atlas*, similar in concept to *The Large English Atlas* but smaller in format. Again there was copious descriptive text and decoration on the face of the map.

Large Scale Maps

As was said above, in the eighteenth century, there was demand for maps at a larger scale than those produced earlier. In the case of just Oxfordshire, in 1715 Philip Overton produced a map on two sheets at a scale of about three quarters of an inch to the mile decorated with views of Oxford and Blenheim. This map is unusual in having west, rather than north, at the top of the map.

A major leap forward in the mapping of the counties took place when, in 1759 the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (now the Royal Society for Arts) issued an advertisement for a prize of £100 for an original survey of a county at one inch to the mile. Between 1759 and 1802, twenty-three surveyors submitted entries and thirteen were successful. Oxfordshire and Berkshire were surveyed by Thomas Jefferys. These were a very detailed and accurate map; The Oxfordshire map has a decorative title and a detailed plan of Oxford. It was engraved on four copper plates by John Cary (see below).

In 1797 Richard Davis of Lewknor produced perhaps the most remarkable large-scale map of Oxfordshire*. This was the result of a very detailed survey and was produced at a scale of two inches to the mile on sixteen copper plates. Each map was numbered and signed by Davis. It is believed that about 250 copies of the map were produced. The equivalent map of Berkshire was produced by John Rocque 1761.

Another surveyor producing maps at a large scale was Andrew Bryant. He had planned to produce a map at 1½" to the mile but completed only thirteen counties. His map of Oxfordshire and Berkshire were published in 18xx and 18xx respectively but by then he must almost have heard the sound of the Ordnance Survey pounding up behind him! This was really the end of the separate surveying of counties on a large scale under private enterprise.

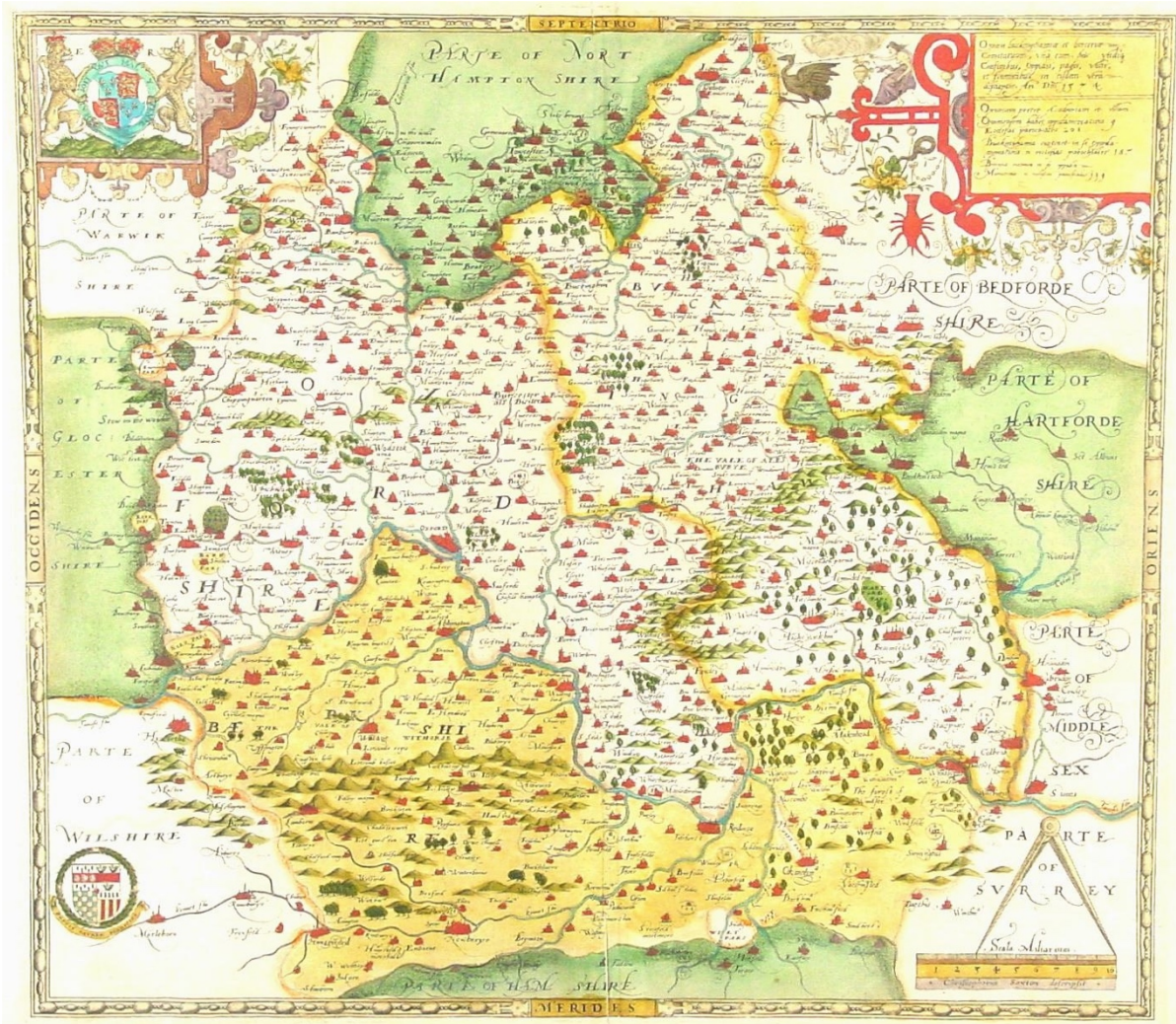
John Cary

As was mentioned above, the Richard Davis map was engraved by John Cary. Cary was described by the eminent cartographic historian, Sir Henry Fordham as ‘..the most representative, able and prolific of English cartographers’. He produced a whole range of county atlases from the smallest to the large, all of very high quality and accuracy. He produced a quarto-sized atlas entitled *the New and Correct English Atlas* in 1787. In 1789 he produced maps at a page size of 16 ¼" by 18 ¼" to illustrate Gough's translation of Camden's *Britannia*. He produced an octavo atlas in 1789 entitled *The Traveller's Companion*. In 1809 he produced his finest maps in his *New English Atlas* with maps measuring 18 ¼" by 20 ¼". His engraving was superb but ‘superfluous’ decoration was almost completely omitted. Cary was the last great figure in the mapping of the counties. As he flourished, the Ordnance Survey was, inexorably, gathering momentum.

Suggested further reading: *Discovering Antique Maps*; Alan G Hodgkiss; Shire Publications
(A superb small guide to the history of maps.)

Maps for Historians; Paul Hindle; Phillimore
(An extremely useful and quite comprehensive and readable book)

This text accompanies John Leighfield's powerpoint presentation: "Printed Maps of Oxfordshire"



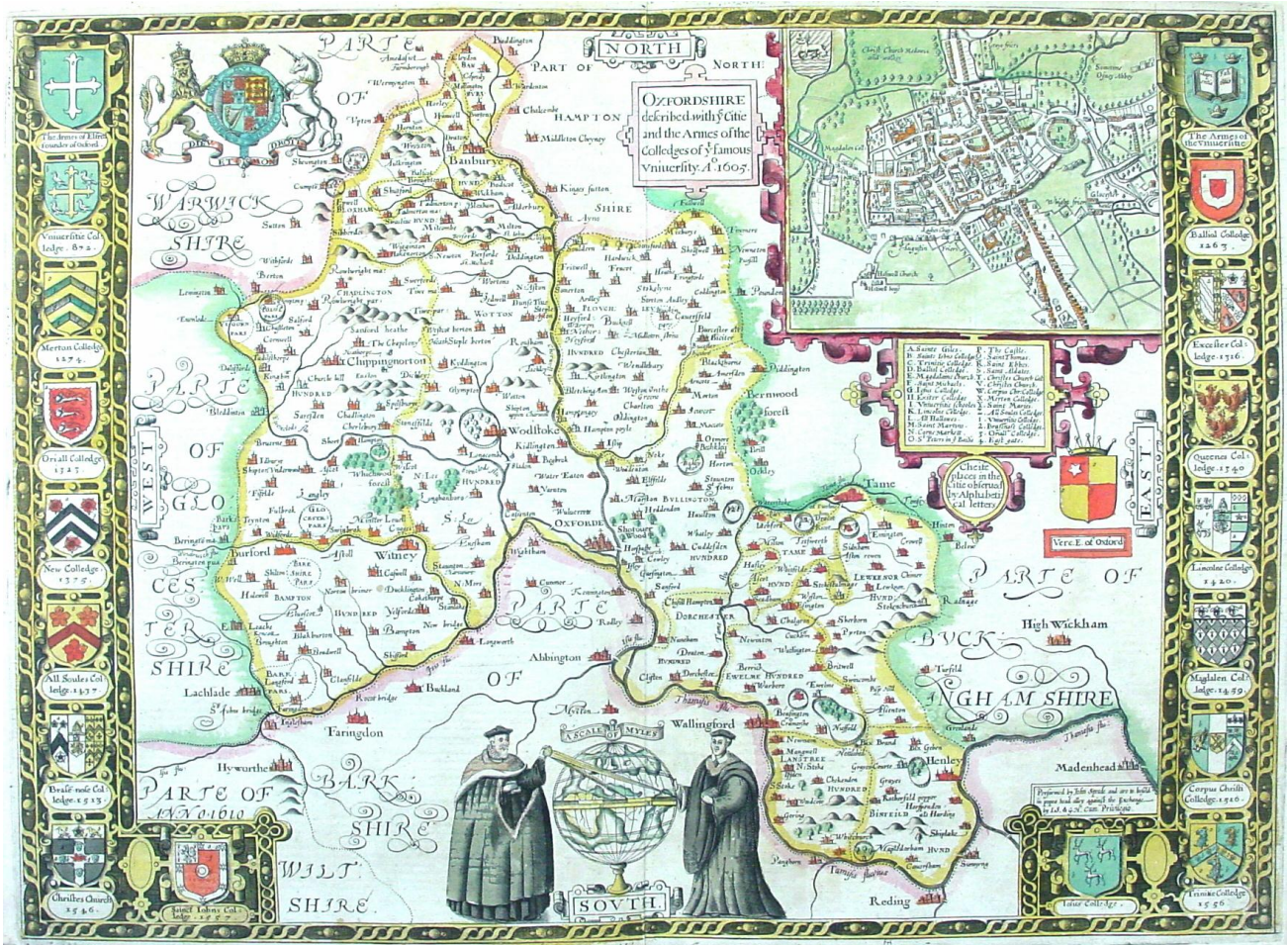
Christopher Saxton – 1574



Saxton/Hole, Oxfordshire – 1607



Saxton/Hole, Berkshire – 1607



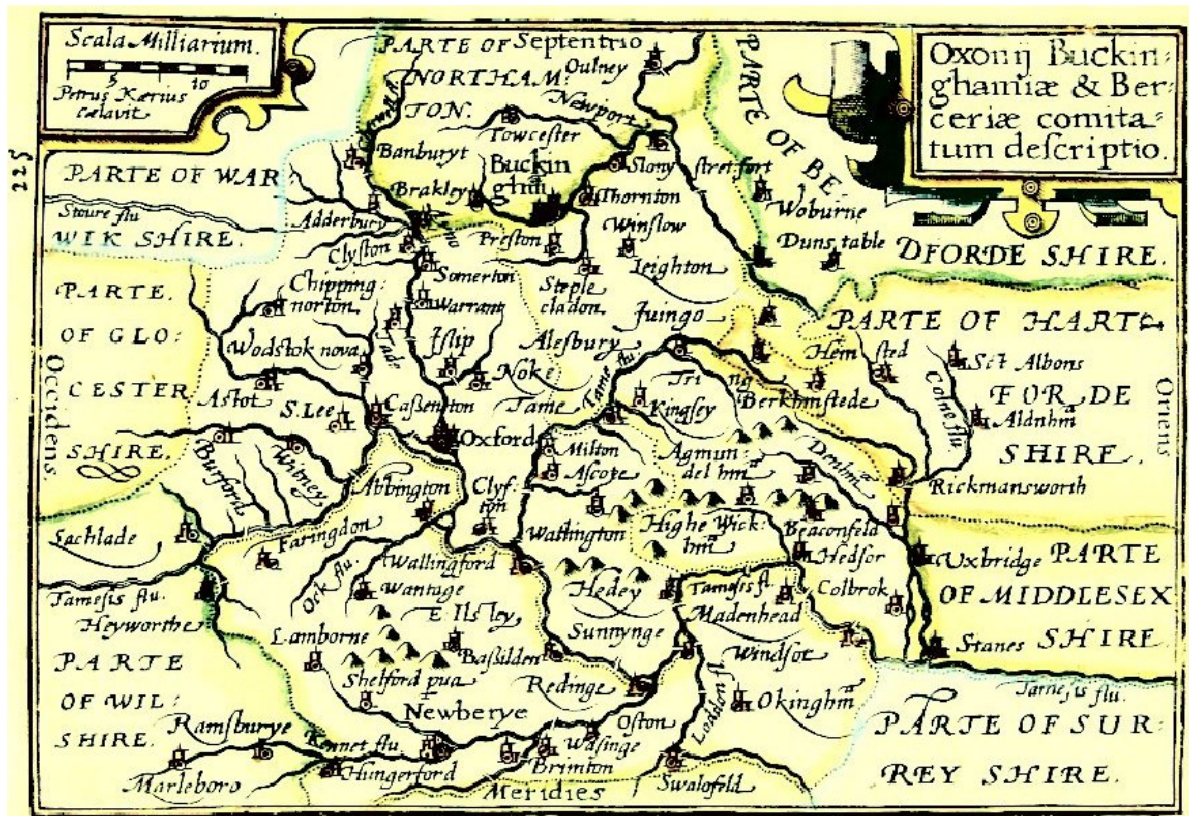
John Speed, Oxfordshire – 1611



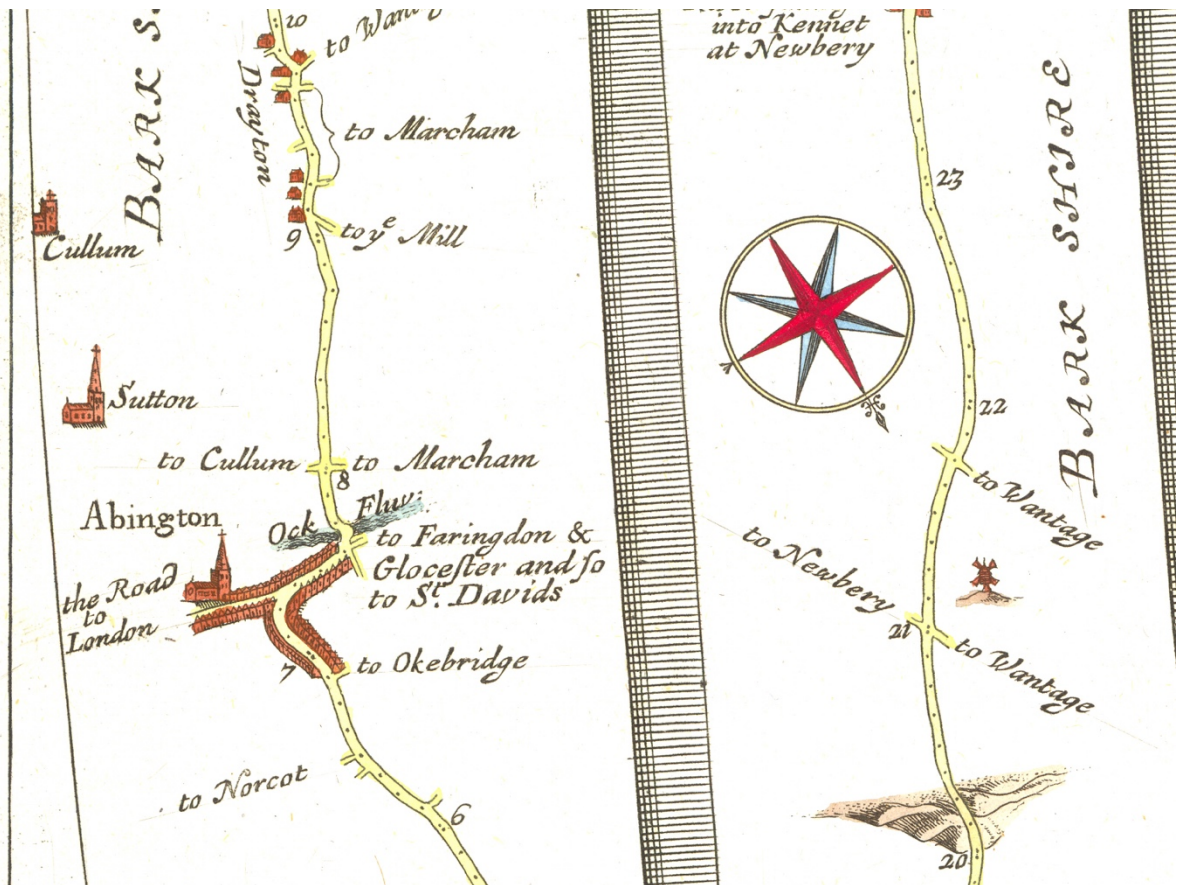
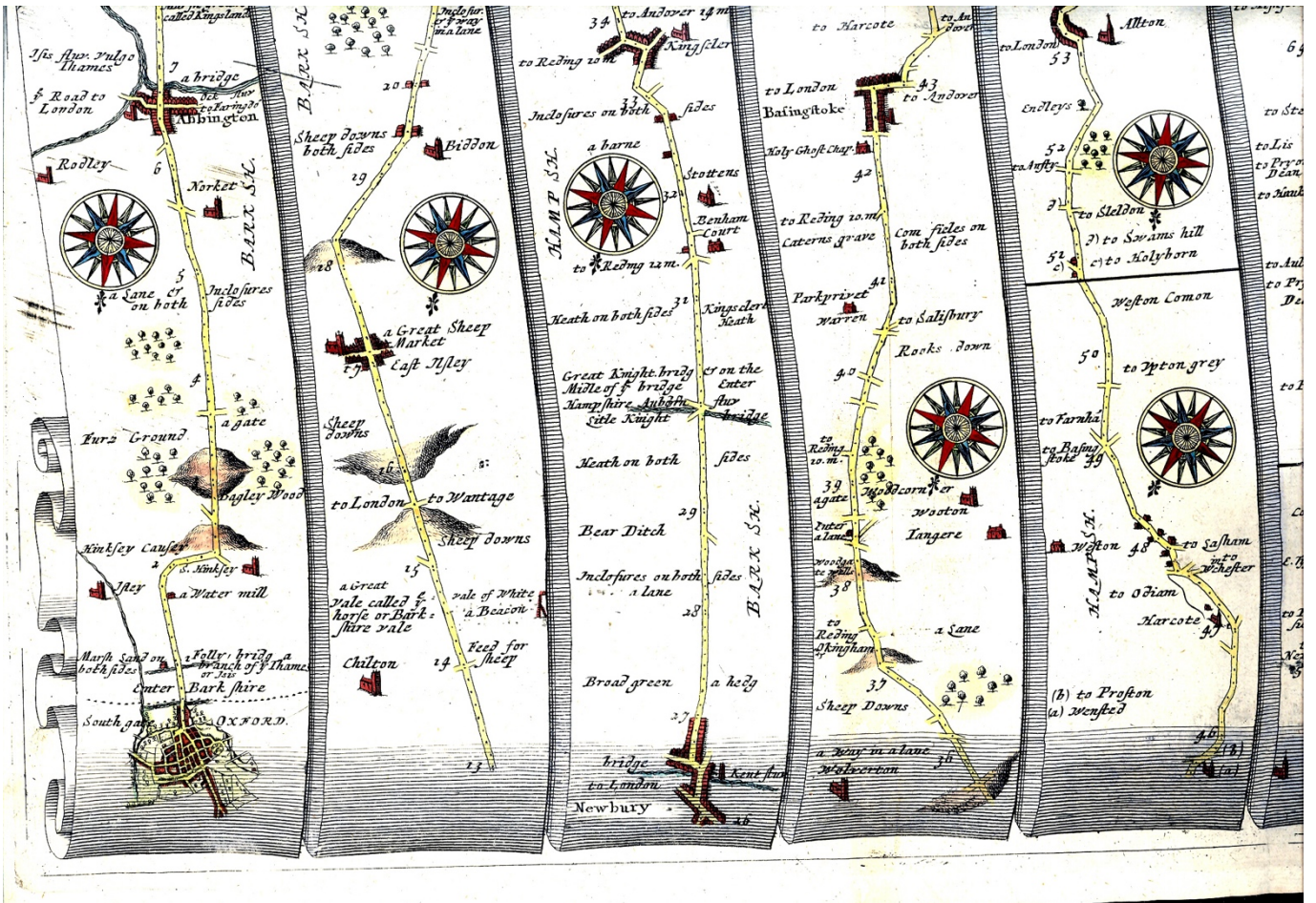
John Speed, Berkshire – 1611



Drayton – Poly Olbion – 1613



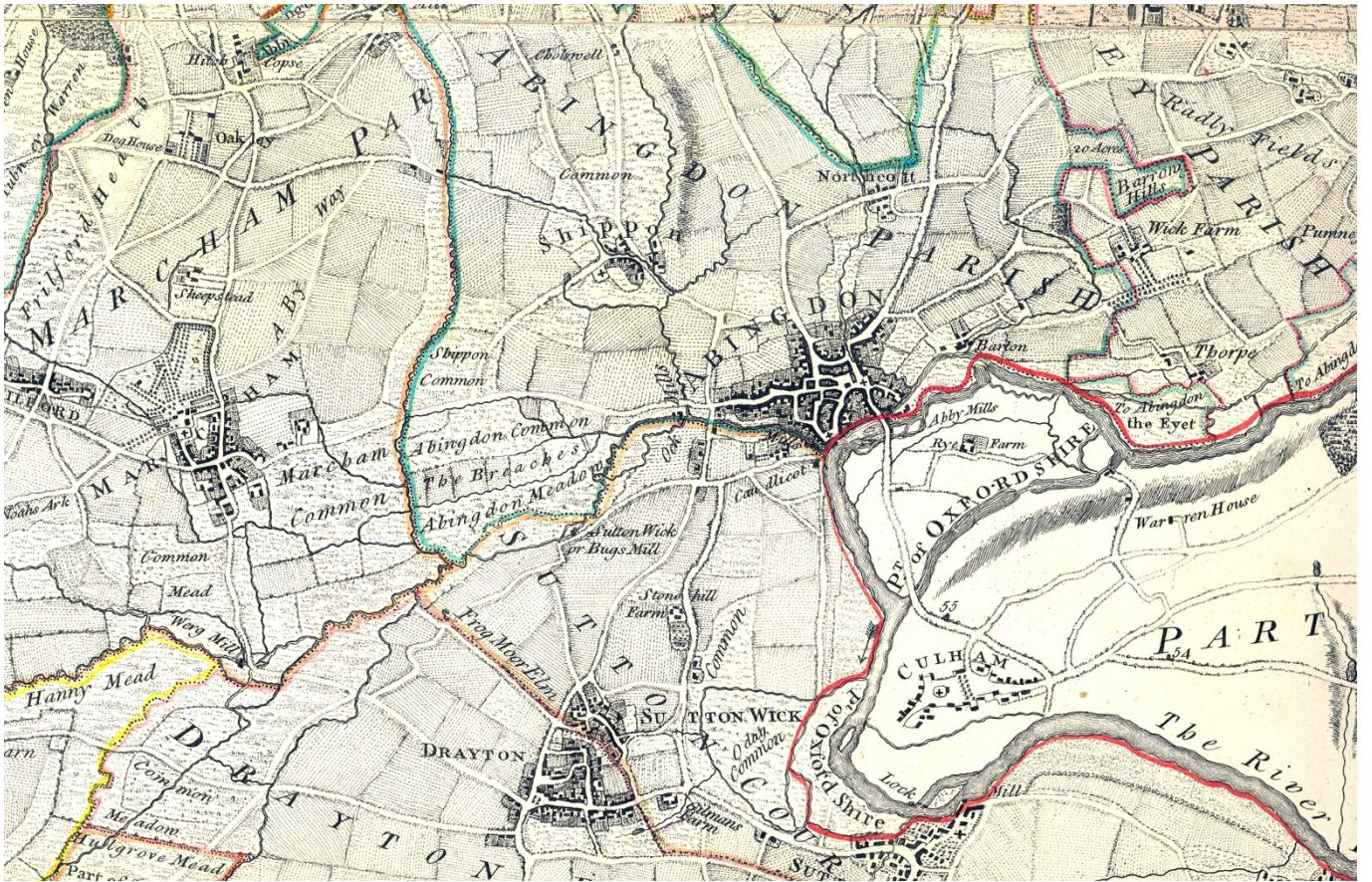
van den Keere – 1616



John Ogilby – 1675



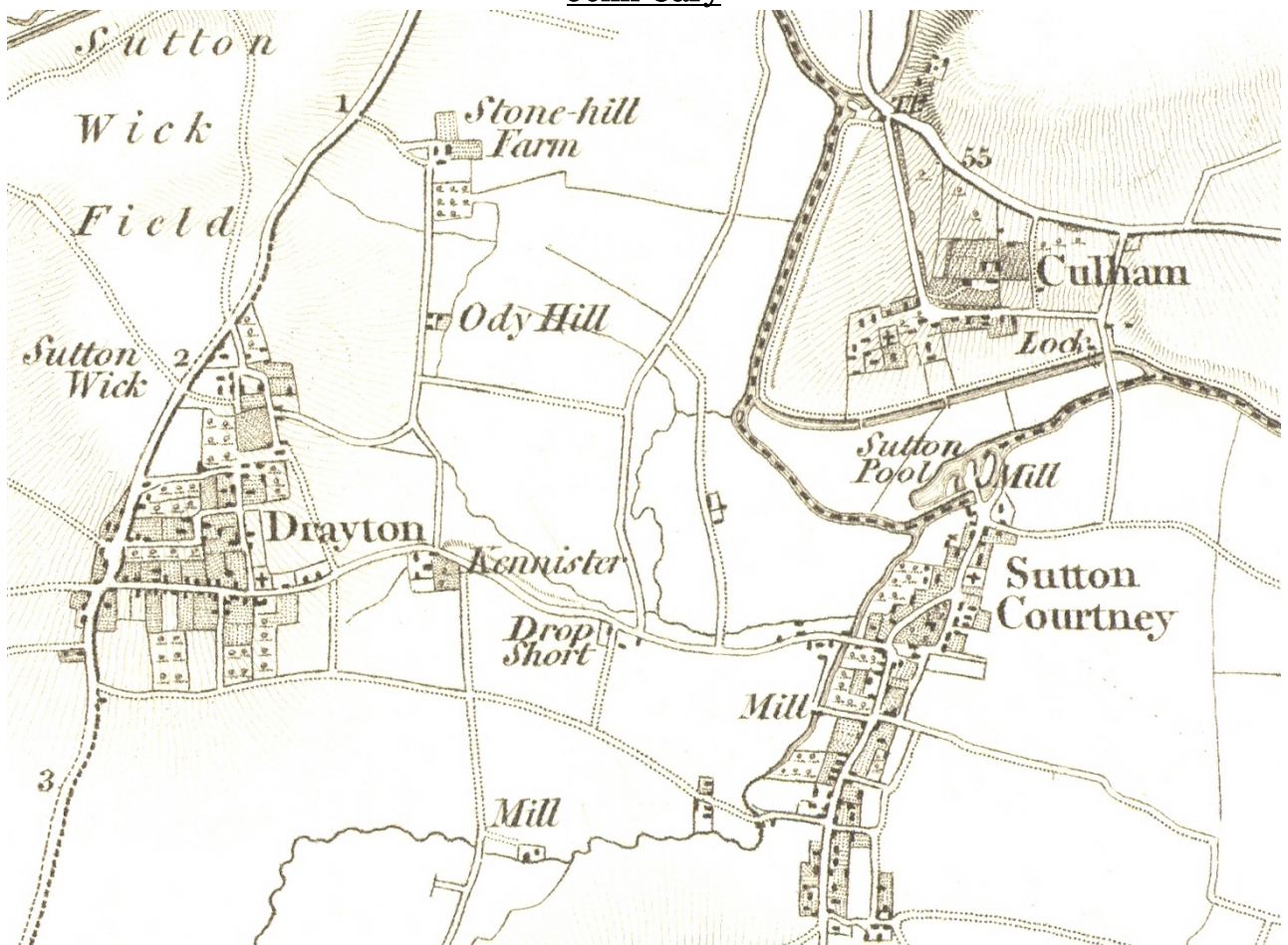
Kitchin – 1750



John Rocque 1761



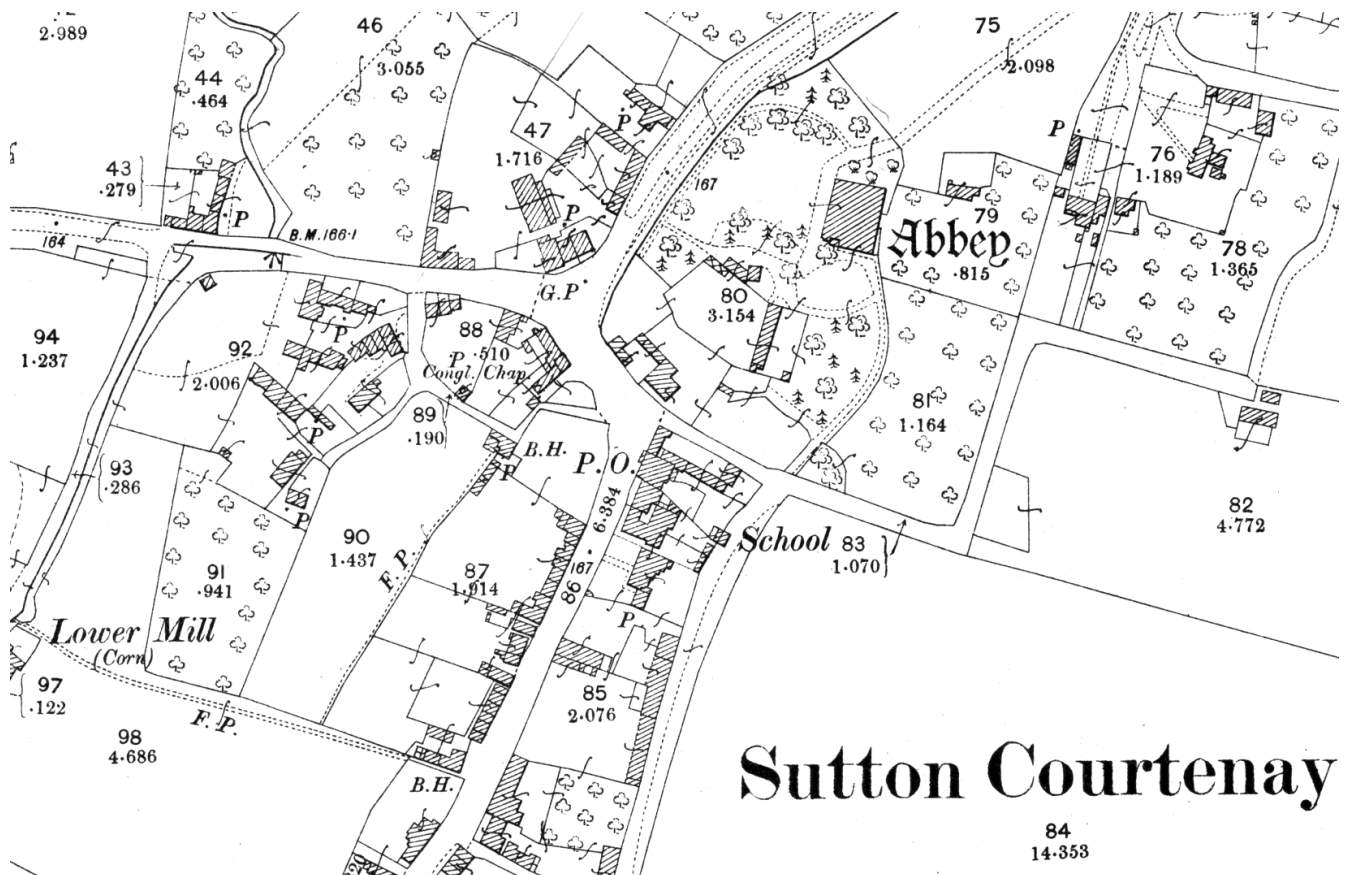
John Cary



Ordnance Survey 1" to mile - 1830



Ordnance Survey 6" to mile – 1881



Sutton Courtenay

Ordnance Survey 25" to mile – 1898