

# Boundary maps

Maps provide an essential tool for reflecting the boundaries of physical features on the ground, and for indicating the line between areas of jurisdiction.

Some maps focus specifically on boundaries, including county and district, parliamentary constituency, ward and parish, or census enumeration boundaries.

## General maps

By their very nature most maps show the boundaries between features or areas, whether between neighbouring parcels of land, or between neighbouring parishes and districts.

You can particularly rely on [Ordnance Survey maps](#) to show you the accurate contemporary boundary line between administrative areas, and the OS has been systematically recording public boundaries since 1841. The six-inch / 1:10,000 and 1:2500 large scale maps are the best source of such boundary information.

Digitised historic Ordnance Survey maps (1876-1996), showing parish and district boundaries (1:10,000 up to 1:1250 scale) can be freely consulted on our [Heritage Search mapping platform](#).

Richard Oliver's book, *Ordnance Survey maps: a concise guide for historians* (2005), pages 68-71 [ref: OV 942/(OLI)], has more information on the depiction of public boundaries on Ordnance Survey maps. The National Library of Scotland provides a guide to [colours and symbols](#) on OS maps, including boundaries.

With boundary reform legislation from the 1840s to 1880s, most Ordnance Survey maps were too late to record the boundaries of 'historic' or 'ancient' parishes.

## Historic parish boundaries

- Andrew Bryant's [Map of Oxfordshire](#), surveyed in 1823-4 [ref: CH/XXIV/1], and Christopher and John Greenwood's [Map of the County of Berks](#), surveyed in 1822-3 [ref: MP1162], are both useful for indicating ancient parish boundaries.
- With Ordnance Survey maps largely coming too late, there has been no nationwide published resource to indicate historic parish boundaries, but this is rectified by Roger Kain and Richard Oliver in their [Historic parishes of England and Wales: an electronic map of boundaries before 1850](#) (2001) [ref: MR11: 352/(KAI)].
  - This three CD-ROM based collection of digital maps in PDF format attempts to capture the line of all pre-1850 parishes.
  - Based predominantly on evidence from c. 1840 tithe maps and late 18th century inclosure maps, the parish or township boundaries are indicated in red on a grey tone one-inch Ordnance Survey base map.
  - Reference numbers on the maps link places to the gazetteer and metadata in the accompanying printed index and handbook, [Historic parishes of](#)



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[\*England and Wales: an electronic map of boundaries before 1850\*](#) (2001) [ref: OV 352/(KAI)].

- A description of the data created by the Kain and Oliver project is available [online](#), and the [Institute of Historical Research](#) has more information about the electronic map resource.
- The full map boundary data is available online to subscribers only, via the [History Data Service](#) (UK Data Archive).
- The CD version can be viewed at Oxfordshire History Centre, including sheets [144](#), [145](#), [157](#), [158](#) and [159](#) which cover Oxfordshire.
- Digitised by the National Library of Scotland, [Ordnance Survey one-inch maps with coloured parishes](#) were compiled from evidence gathered 1892-6, and showing underlying topography from a base map revision of 1894-1904. The NLS guide has [further information](#) on this series.

## Tithe and enclosure maps

- 19th century **manuscript maps** can give information about the boundaries of parishes and individual properties within them. These sources often represent the first detailed survey of land use and ownership in a particular area.
- **Tithe maps** of parishes were drawn up for over 40% of the historic county of Oxfordshire between 1838 and 1854, following the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836.
  - These maps, and their accompanying written apportionments, show each building and piece of land within a parish, its extent and value, and the boundaries between properties. They also indicate roads, paths and watercourses.
  - Access zoomable digital images of Oxfordshire tithe maps and see our full guide to tithe records [here](#), or access the digital images via the ‘feature layers’ panel of the Heritage Search [mapping platform](#).
- **Enclosure maps** are similar to tithe maps, in that they were created for individual parishes, mainly between about 1800 and 1870, and covered over 50% of the county.
  - Their purpose was to show who was being allotted each plot of land or building as a result of the parish being enclosed by Act of Parliament.
  - The maps and written awards also confirmed rights of way and highlighted other paths and watercourses. These documents still hold legal status in determining boundaries and the status of paths and roads.
  - See our [full guide](#) to enclosure records and [fact sheet](#).
  - Enclosure maps and awards for Oxfordshire have not generally been digitised, but limited quality digital images of a small selection of maps can be seen on [Picture Oxon](#). You can access original enclosure maps by [visiting](#) Oxfordshire History Centre.



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## Administrative Area Diagrams

- In addition to showing administrative boundaries on its regular topographical maps, the Ordnance Survey also published special maps in a series of county Administrative Area Diagrams, until the 1990s.
- At a 1:100,000 or 1:126,720 scale, these maps indicate administrative boundaries for borough, urban and rural district and civil parish; some also show parliamentary constituency and petty sessional division boundaries.
- At this small scale the maps do not allow for detailed depiction of boundaries, but they are an invaluable guide to the administrative status of various areas.
- Local sheets held by Oxfordshire History Centre [ref: A:MC20, A:MC3 6.1A 352 or A:MC3 13.1 352] include:
  - Oxfordshire - 1917, 1933, 1973, 1974, 1975
  - Berkshire - 1934, 1967, 1974
  - Berks, Bucks and Oxon - 1984, 1989, 1992
  - South East England - 1996
- [Vision of Britain](#) has an extensive collection of historic boundary maps for England and Wales, including Oxfordshire and Berkshire:
  - Sanitary districts with civil parishes
    - [Oxon 1888](#), [Berks 1888](#)
  - Administrative Area Diagrams
    - [Oxon 1900](#), [Berks 1900](#)
    - [Oxon 1928](#), [Berks 1928](#)
    - [Oxon 1941](#), [Berks 1940](#)
    - [Oxon 1966](#), [Berks 1967](#)
  - Boundary Commission maps
    - [Oxon 1832](#), [Berks 1832](#)
    - [Banbury 1868](#), [Oxford 1868](#), [Woodstock 1868](#), [Wallingford 1868](#)
    - [Oxon 1885](#), [Berks 1885](#)
    - [Oxon 1917](#), [Berks 1917](#)
- The fullest collection of published small scale Administrative Area Diagrams (1888-1979) is held by [The National Archives](#).

## Current boundaries

- Born-digital [Landline](#) Ordnance Survey maps record the boundaries of physical features, but do not provide administrative or electoral boundary information. [Landline](#) mapping is available to view at Oxfordshire History Centre or in Oxfordshire libraries.



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- You can view current ward, parish, district and electoral boundaries through the Ordnance Survey's [Election Maps](#) website.
- [Open Street Map](#) offers a right-click *Query features* function which reveals boundary lines and names for your current map position.

## Census and electoral boundaries (historic)

- Boundary maps for Oxfordshire census enumeration districts (the smallest unit of census geography), as used in the 1971, 1981 and 1991 national censuses, are available at a scale of 6" to 1 mile (1:10,560) or 1:10,000.
- The census boundary maps are an essential companion to the detailed small area statistical data published after each census. Our holdings are as follows:
  - 1971 maps [ref: A:MC3 7.1-7.4] ; data [ref: MR8]
  - 1981 maps [ref: A:MC3 7.5-7.7] ; data on microfiche [ref: MR8]
  - 1991 maps [ref: A:MC3 7.8] ; data on CD-ROM [ref: MR11: 312/(1991)].
- 1961 and 1981-2021 detailed census data is available to download via bespoke query from the Office for National Statistics [Nomis](#) website, which allows the creation of local area reports to district, parish, ward, and smallest output area level.
- A range of downloadable current or recent census, electoral and other boundary maps and data is available from the Office for National Statistics [Open Geography Portal](#).

## Postcodes

- Maps showing the boundaries of postal geography were published by the Royal Mail in conjunction with Bartholomew Ltd.
- Postcode boundary maps indicate on a 1:100,000 scale grey tone base the boundaries of postcode areas and sectors - for example, sector "OX29 5" covering the Stanton Harcourt area of Oxfordshire.
- Oxfordshire History Centre holds historic postcode sector maps for 1993, 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2007 [ref: A:MC3 13.1 383]
- For known postcodes, [MapItUK](#) will display the names of current containing jurisdictions (e.g. districts, wards, electoral divisions).
- [OpenStreetMap](#) will display the street address and postcode for a given point on the map.

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