Tithe Maps

Tithes were a form of tax payable by the landowners of a parish to tithe holders - sometimes the local clergyman but more often an absentee landlord or organisation such as a university college - traditionally one tenth of all crops and new livestock as well as profits on activities such as milling and fishing.

Many parishes had worked out a system for payments in money rather than produce, a process known as commutation of tithes, which was often incorporated into enclosure agreements. In the early 19th century a number of private Acts of Parliament (sponsored by specific parishes) were passed to speed up the process of commutation (over 2,000 by the 1830s), resulting in a general Act. Under the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836, the country was divided into approximately 12,000 tithe districts (usually parishes). Within each district the overall tithe value to be paid was assessed and then apportioned amongst the existing landowners, according to quantity and quality of their land. This required the appointment of an army of assistant commissioners (a national Tithe Commission was established in London) and a detailed survey of landownership throughout the country; the commissioners had to go to every district to meet landowners and commission local surveys.

Ultimately about two-thirds of England and Wales was surveyed (excluding areas where commutation had already taken place). In each area a Tithe Award or Apportionment was produced consisting of the Schedule with names of landowners and occupiers linked to a map showing their land-holdings.

The maps were usually created by local surveyors and there was no uniformity of scale or detail (they tend to range between 13-26 inches to the mile). In some parishes, altered apportionments and maps reflecting changes were made at a later date. The maps often represent the first detailed large-scale survey of some parishes and were extensively used by the Ordnance Survey when preparing its boundary mapping.

44% of the land area of historic Oxfordshire was covered by tithe maps produced under the 1836 Act.

Tithes were finally extinguished in 1977 although have a lingering significance in relation to Chancel Repair Liability.
Where are these records?

The original apportionments (including maps) were retained by the Tithe Commission (and are now available along with supporting papers at The National Archives). OHC has microfilm copies of the TNA’s Oxfordshire and Berkshire apportionments and maps.

Two copies of each apportionment were produced - one each for the Diocese and parish - and most of these are held at OHC.

The diocesan and parish copies of former north Berkshire (Vale of White Horse) apportionments are at the Berkshire Record Office. OHC has copies of some of these.

The Oxfordshire tithe maps (but not the apportionments) have been scanned and digital copies can be viewed on public computers at OHC and copies taken.

Where is the catalogue?

A detailed list of all holdings (original and copies) of tithe maps and apportionments is available in the Searchroom at OHC and can also be consulted here (pdf format, 640Kb).

What do I do now?

Find out how to visit Oxfordshire History Centre to see the Tithe Maps (for conservation reasons, visitors are encouraged to use the digitised images). Contact Oxfordshire History Centre to make an enquiry about the Tithe Maps.

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