

Inclosure/Enclosure Maps (1750-1850)

Background

Inclosure changed the landscape for ever and created the patchwork of hedgerows and fields that exist now. It set out roads, footpaths and rights of way that still survive today.

Until the early 17th century, agriculture was a community-based activity with a few large fields in each village for growing crops and common or waste land which was used for grazing animals. Each of the open fields was divided into strips which were worked by individual owners or tenants. This system meant that the land worked by an individual was spread over a wide area so it was difficult to introduce any changes and improvements.

The solution was to divide up the landscape in a different way so that all the land owned by an individual was in one block. This process started in the 15th century with informal agreements between individual landowners but by the mid-18th century it was normal for the main landowners in a village to obtain either a private or public Act of Parliament. This made it easier to overrule any local opposition since the changes tended to favour the better-off while the poor lost some of their rights to use the common land.

Although most inclosures took place between 1750 and 1850, the process continued into the 20th century. Elmstone Hardwicke wasn't inclosed until 1918.

What records were made?

Commissioners appointed under the terms of an Inclosure Act conducted a thorough survey of land ownership and rights in the common fields in the parish. They drew up:

- A map to show the existing system - open fields divided into individual strips.
- A map to show the new arrangements.
- An award describing the individual allotments and other important features like new roads.

The maps and awards are legal documents which set out how common land was to be allocated to individual landowners and then inclosed by fences or hedges. An official copy of each award and map was given to the Clerk of the Peace, so it forms part of the Quarter Sessions archive. Other copies were made for local land owners and the parish church.

What information do they contain?

Since the inclosure records pre-date both the tithe apportionment and the Ordnance Survey sheets they are a valuable resource for researchers. The maps are often one of the earliest available for an individual parish.

The maps show:

- How the new, inclosed, fields were laid out, and who owned them.
- Details of roads and footpaths, waterways, quarries and major buildings. The amount of detail can vary and sometimes the maps don't cover the whole parish, only the areas which were inclosed, sometimes the commons or waste.

The awards include information about:

- Owners and tenants.
- The position and size of each allotment.
- Physical features, roads, hedges, walls, wells, quarries.

How to find and access them

The inclosure maps (but not the awards) have been digitised by the Know Your Place West of England digital mapping project. They can be viewed via the KYP Gloucestershire (<https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=glos>) and South Gloucestershire (<https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=southglos>) webpages, where they can be compared with other historic maps for the same area.

The inclosure maps and awards are both held digitally at Gloucestershire Archives. They can be viewed on a double monitor computer in the Searchroom, so they can be seen together. You can find full details of the inclosure maps and awards by searching our online catalogue <https://catalogue.gloucestershire.gov.uk/>. Enter the reference **Q/RI** into the search box. Or you can refine your search using Q/RI and the parish name.

If you are interested in a parish in another county, you can also check the index of Enclosure Maps of England and Wales. This index was created in 2004 and has since been archived. However, it is still available to access and search through this link here: <http://enclosuremaps.data-archive.ac.uk/first.html>