

Ordnance Survey Maps

Background

The Ordnance Survey began life in the 1790s during the revolutionary wars with France. Faced with the threat of invasion from Europe, the Government needed an accurate map of the south coast to plan their defences. The Board of Ordnance (the Ministry of Defence of that time) was ordered to conduct a survey, which gave rise to the name Ordnance Survey.

After 1801, the Board of Ordnance surveyed one third of England and Wales and produced a one inch to the mile map. There was a map of Gloucestershire produced at this scale in 1830.

It went on to map Ireland (again for military reasons) but the mapping of Great Britain remained patchy. Parliament passed the Ordnance Survey Act in 1841, and the county series of England, Wales and Scotland was started. The first edition was completed in the 1890s. The Gloucestershire maps date from around 1879-1885. The main series were on the scale 1:2500, (otherwise known as 25-inch maps as there were roughly 25 inches to a mile).

A second edition was begun in 1891 and finished in 1914 (c.1902 for Gloucestershire), and a third after 1907. This was not completed in some areas (c.1920 for Gloucestershire).

There are also 6-inch maps, which are a much smaller scale but give a better overview of the area. There are three editions of these maps too, which date from around the same period as the 25-inch series. The first three editions of the 2½" and 6" OS maps are sometimes referred to as the "historic" editions. There are also "modern" (i.e. post World War 2) OS maps.

What information do they contain?

Ordnance Survey maps are comprehensive and detailed. They show roads, lanes, footpaths, fields, parish, parliamentary and county boundaries, buildings, historic sites, railways, churches, letterboxes, public houses and much more. Plots of land usually have two numbers on them. The smaller number is the acreage. The larger relates to a parcel number. You will need to contact the Ordnance Survey to find out more about these numbers.

<https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/contact-us>

How to find and access OS maps

The best way to view OS maps for Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire is online, via the Know Your Place West of England website. The Know Your Place digital mapping project covers Bristol, South Gloucestershire (accessible at: <https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/know-your-place/>), Gloucestershire (accessible at: <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/kyp/?edition=glos>) and Wiltshire. It has digitised a complete set of the "historic" OS maps (the 1st, 2nd and 3rd editions) and has worked with national institutions to ensure full coverage. KYP also includes other historic maps such as tithe and inclosure maps (see our research guides for more information). The site lets you compare all maps with a modern (2019) OS base map. You can also view OS maps online via the National Library of Scotland. <http://maps.nls.uk/os/>

Gloucestershire Archives holds various editions of OS maps, but we do not have complete set of any series. To find out more about our holdings, search the online catalogue on our website. Search for OS (or Ordnance Survey) to bring up the OS collection (1880s-1990s) which will detail what we hold here on site.

Mini Research Guide: Ordnance Survey Maps

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