

Maps and plans

Historical maps and plans are held in many archives and record offices. They may appear within many different kinds of archival collection, including landed family and estate collections, business and company archives, papers of associations and societies, political and diplomatic papers, and so on. They are also held in the National Archives, within the records of particular government departments.

Because they are such a specialist medium, maps and plans can sometimes be a challenge to use, and it is not always immediately obvious just what can be learned from them. The information provided within this skills unit, then, aims to assist researchers in their understanding and interpretation of historical maps and plans.

What Are Maps and Plans?

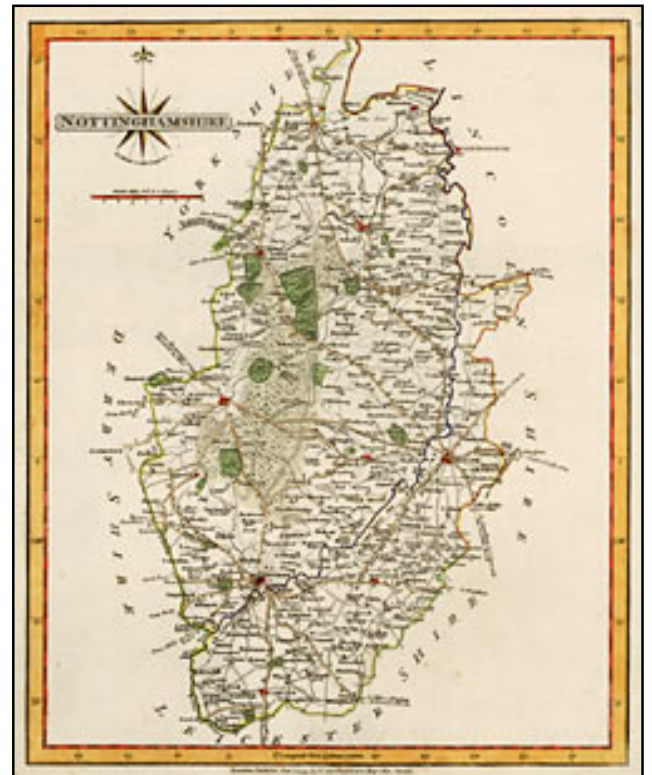
This may seem to be an incredibly simple question, but in fact, the answer is much more difficult than it may at first appear. In essence, all maps and plans are historical documents - however modern they may be - because they are representations of a particular place at a particular point in time.

They are one of the oldest forms of human communication, and in some early societies they pre-dated literacy. Fundamentally, maps and plans are graphic symbols, with a set of governing conventions, which communicate a sense of 'place'. As a result, they allow the user to gain varied insights about that particular place and aspects of its history.

Throughout the unit, illustrative images are taken from the collections held by Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham.

This unit was written in August 2006.

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Bre 20 - County map of Nottinghamshire

Types of Maps and Plans

As might be expected, there are numerous different types of maps and plans. The main types to be found within manuscript and archive collections are:

Ordnance Survey Maps: the Ordnance Survey was the first comprehensive mapping project undertaken in Britain. The resulting printed maps were published by the Crown and are in four main groups - the one inch; the six inch; the 'town scales'; and the 1:2500 maps. The earliest one inch map was published in 1801, and the six inch series appeared during the mid-nineteenth century.

Tithe Maps: these show the plots of lands which were liable to pay tithes to ecclesiastical parishes. After the 1836 Tithe Act, tithes were commuted by the government into a simple tithe rentcharge. Tithe apportionments (listing landowners, tenants, properties, acreages and amount of tithe payable), with accompanying maps were created for 75 percent of the parishes in England and Wales.

Enclosure Maps: these were produced in association with enclosure awards, by which open fields or wastes or commons were converted to individual, private plots of land. Before 1845 enclosure was managed at a local level; after that time it was overseen by a central government department. Enclosure maps usually show the different areas of land owned or leased by individuals after an enclosure award was made.

This example is a map of North Muskham in Nottinghamshire, created two years after enclosure and showing the new fields and their owners.

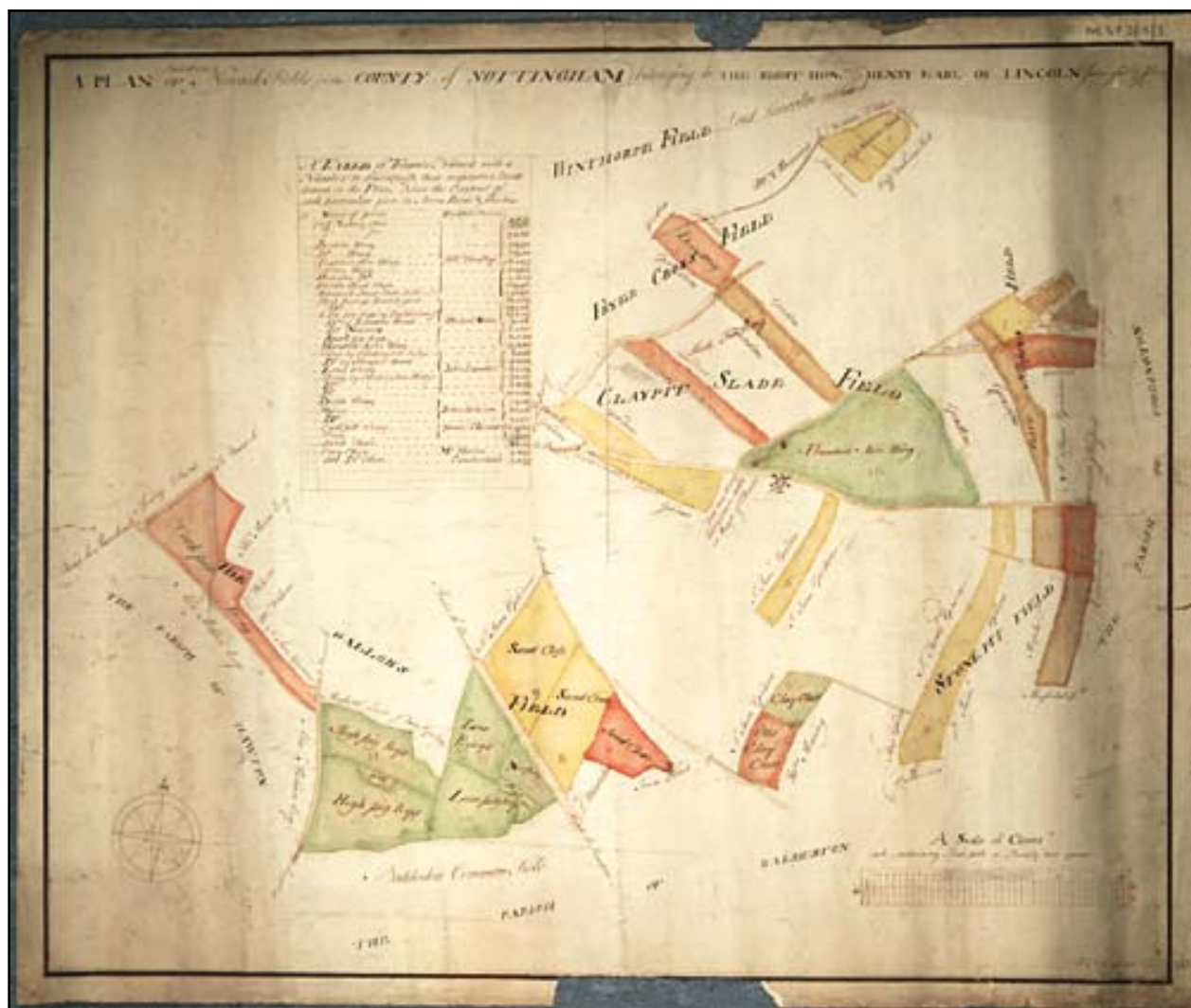


Ne 6 P 3/25/1 - Map of the townships of North Muskham, Holme and Bathley, Nottinghamshire; 1773

Manorial Maps and Plans: these were created from the sixteenth century onwards, at the instigation of manorial lords who employed surveyors and cartographers to make maps of their lands, with particular emphasis on the bounds of the manor.

Estate Maps and Plans: these illustrate estates owned by prominent local landowners - both private and institutional. Some maps may show all of a particular landowner's holdings; others may show all their property in a specific town or village. There may also be site plans of particular estate streets or buildings - or parts thereof. Estate maps may sometimes be accompanied by terriers - a written survey or list of lands and property belonging to an estate.

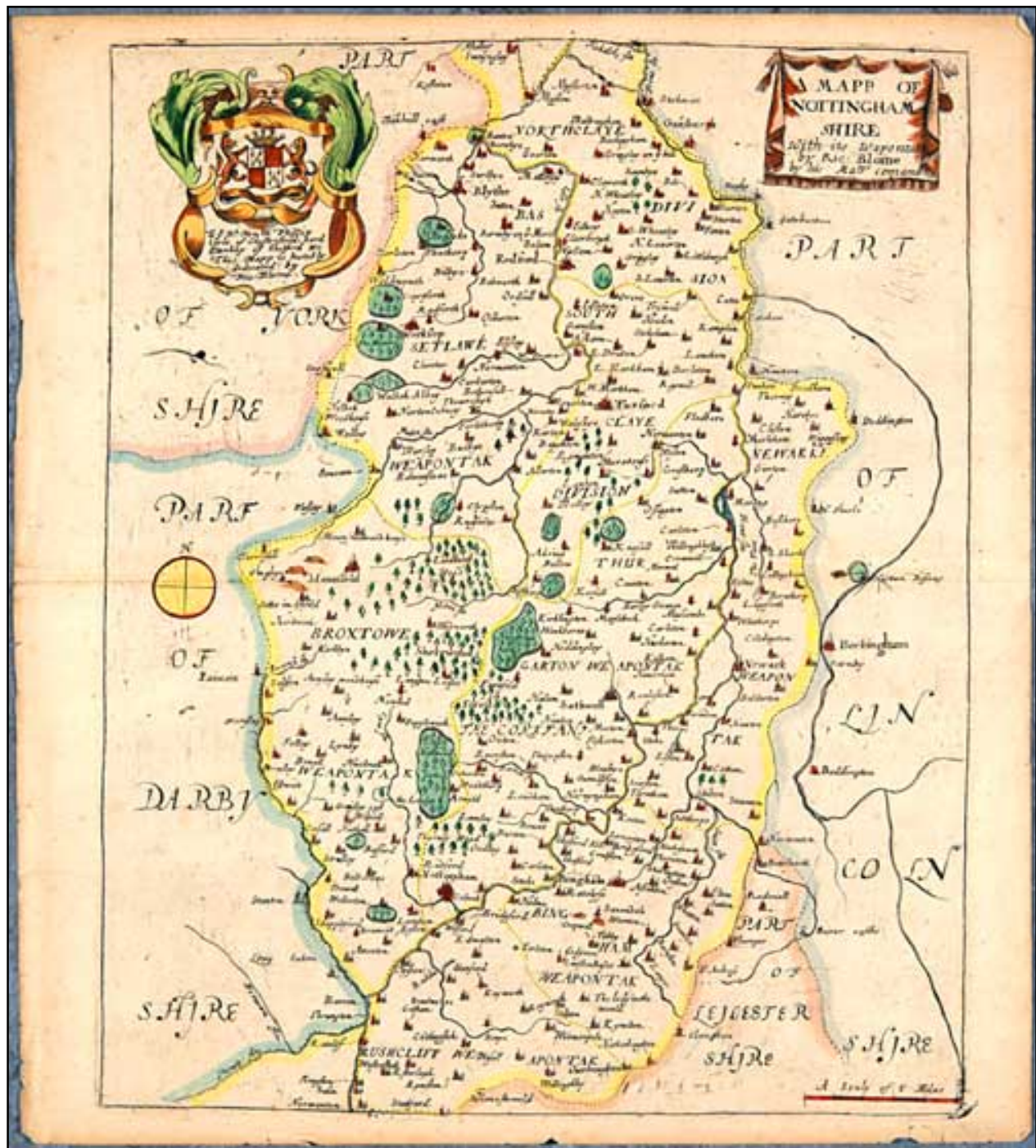
Here is a plan (pre-1768) showing land in Newark Fields, Nottinghamshire, belonging to the Earl of Lincoln.



Ne 6 P 3/15/3 - Plan of fields in Newark, Nottinghamshire, as surveyed by J Crow c.1768

Town and County Maps: these began to be produced in great numbers after the introduction of printing. They were much in demand at times of rapid development and were often produced in series by cartographers such as Christopher Saxton, John Norden, William Smith and John Speed.

This County map of Nottinghamshire was a reprint of one drawn by Richard Blome (d 1605)



Bre 5 - County Map of Nottinghamshire by Richard Blome (d 1605), published in 'Britannia: or, a Geographical Description of ... London' (1673)

Canal and Railway Plans: with the wave of canal and railway building which swept across Britain, numerous maps and plans were produced. They may have been made as part of feasibility surveys for determining the most suitable route of the canal or railway, to help facilitate working once building schemes were underway, to accompany compulsory purchase orders, or to aid construction and maintenance.

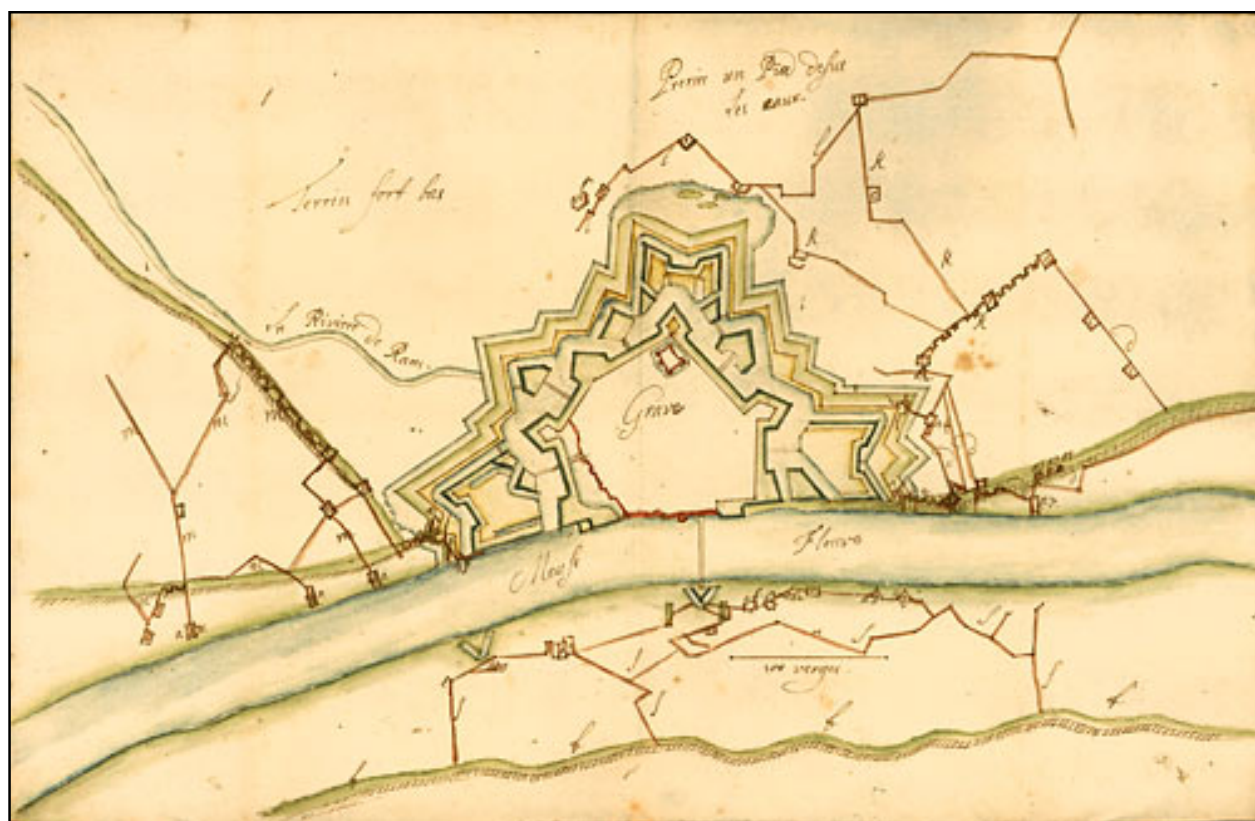
This is a plan of the intended canal from Cromford to Langley Bridge in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, produced in 1789.



PI E12/11/16/1 - Plan of the intended canal from Cromford to Langley Bridge, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire

Military/Naval Maps and Plans: these may have been of particular geographical locations, or of particular military and naval formations; they provided the information required to enable troop/ship movement and subsistence, or to illustrate points of strategy in particular campaigns.

Here we have a plan of Trèves [Trier], made during the conflict there in 1675.

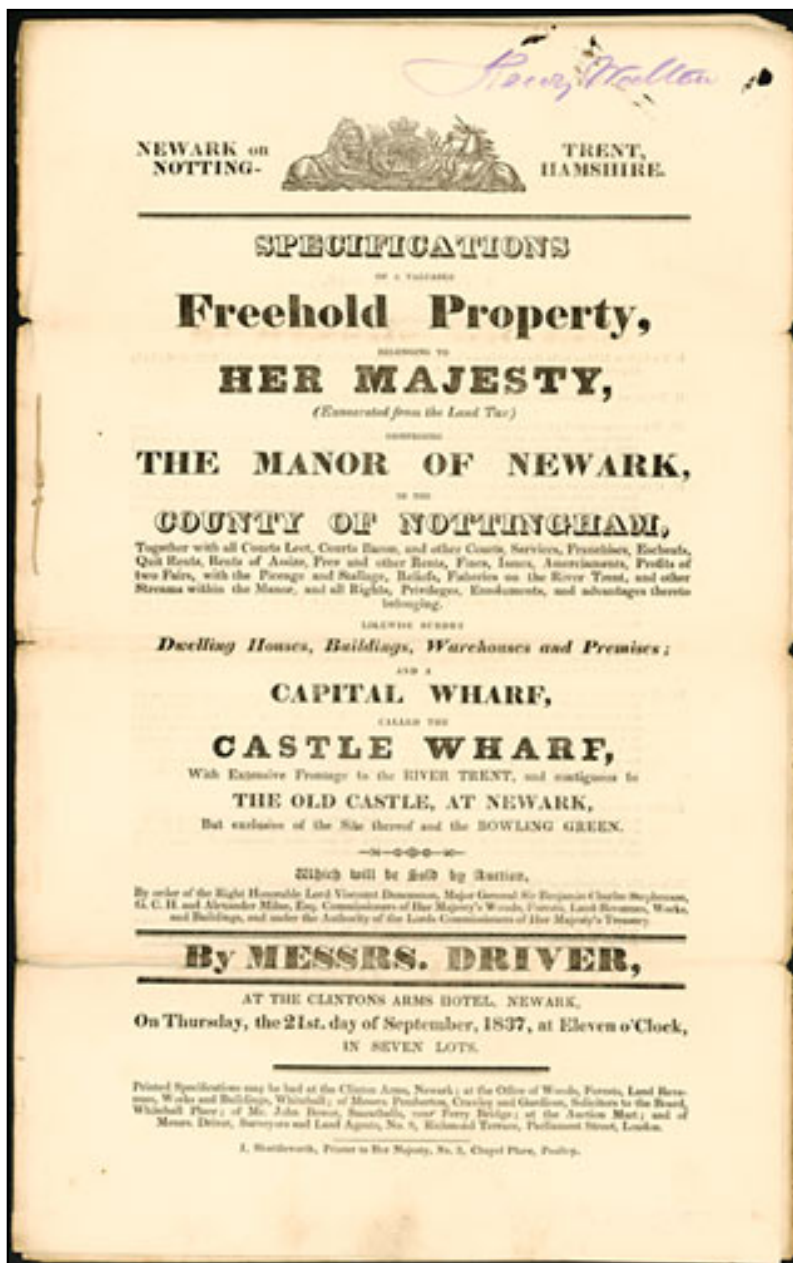


Pw A 2058 - Plan [of Trèves]; n.d. [c. 1675], with letters indicating the position of French troops

Maps and plans also survive as part of other types of archival document. Within deeds, for example, it is very common to

find a map or plan - perhaps drawn into the margin, on the reverse, or attached in one corner. These may indicate the bounds of a property, the whereabouts of geographical or topographical features mentioned in the deed, or may show the elevations of a particular building.

Sale catalogues, like this one relating to the Manor of Newark, are also likely to have detailed maps and plans accompanying them, as are fire insurance documents.



Ne 6 M 1/3/2/3/3 - Plan from sale catalogue

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Skills required to interpret maps and plans

Maps and plans represent a specialised medium, often created by specialists, and so users will sometimes need particular skills in order to gain the most out of them. However, the key features to look out for are:

Title: If a map or a plan includes a title, this makes life a great deal easier for the user. It will hopefully tell the user 'what', 'where' and 'when'. Where a title is present, caution should still be applied, however - it may be obscure, relating to the particular purpose for which the map or plan was created, the context of which has now been lost; or the map or plan may be a copy from an earlier document, meaning that the date included is not representative of the date it was first constructed.



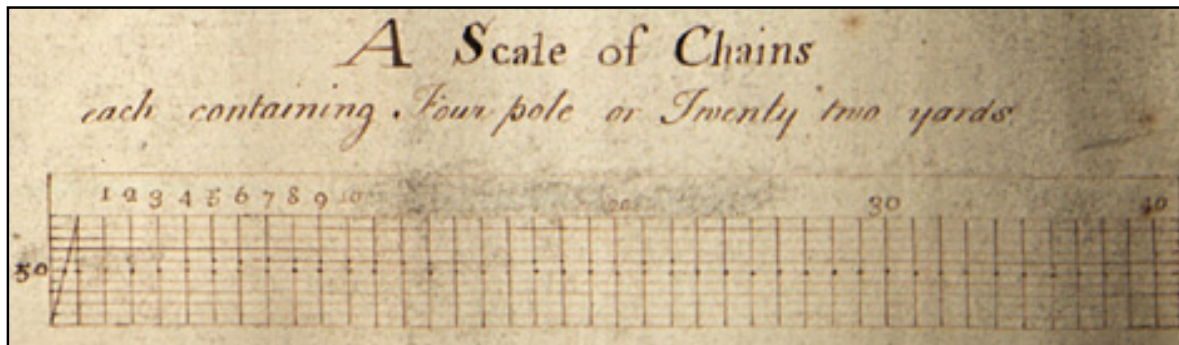
Detail from Ne 6 P 3/15/3 - Plan showing land in Newark Fields, Nottinghamshire, belonging to Henry [F.C. Pelham-Clinton, 9th] Earl of Lincoln; n.d. [pre-1768]

Orientation: Many maps and plans are constructed with north at the top. Users are advised, however, to look for a compass rose or other symbol which may show an alternative orientation. If one is present, it might be helpful to rotate the map or plan (if space allows) so that the compass is pointing north.



Detail from Ne 6 P 3/15/3, showing the compass and part of the map

Scale: Most maps and plans will include some sort of a scale to assist the users in making judgements about sizes and distances. Some of these will be easy to interpret - six inches to a mile, for example. Others, involving measurements such as roods and chains, will prove more challenging. Yet others may be represented graphically, using a calibrated bar. The sources available in the bibliography contain information about scales, and users are also advised to consult glossaries/dictionaries of old weights and measures.



Detail from Ne 6 P 3/15/3, showing the scale

Legend or key: Some maps and plans will include a legend, or key, which explains the symbols and colours used in the document. Users should always look for this, as it will greatly assist in their interpretation if it is present. Particular boundaries may be marked in one colour, for example, land on which corn is grown may be marked in another, land belonging to one particular person might be marked in another way. There may also be symbols to represent particular features such as windmills, river crossings, telegraph poles, pylons etc. Where a legend or key is not present, standard works may again prove to be a source of information.

A TABLE of Tenants Names with a Number to distinguish their respective lands drawn in the Plan. Also the Content of each particular piece in Acres Roods & Perches

<i>N^o</i>	<i>Names of pieces</i>	<i>Tenants Names</i>	<i>A R P</i>
	Cliff Looking Close	}	4.2.28
	D ^o D ^o		3.2.28
	Brickkn Wong	} Will ^m Handley	5.3.34
	D ^o Wong		7.3.00
	Eighteen Acre Wong		18.1.35
	Crooktree Wong		6.3.22
	Hanging D ^o		4.0.20
	Middle Sand Close		16.3.36
	Windmill Sand Close Smith's Mill		19.0.36
	High pigleys Barn & yard	}	21.0.03
	D ^o		14.3.14
	Low pig leys by Balderlens	} Michael Neble	12.0.23
	D ^o by London Road		9.1.18
	D ^o Nursery		4.1.20
	Small pig leys	}	2.0.00
	Hundred Acre Wong		45.2.00
	Wong by Coddingtons hedge	}	8.0.28
	D ^o by Sleasford Road		4.0.32
	Long Wong	} John Lambert	8.2.04
	Wong by Coddingtons Hedge		3.0.07
	D ^o		2.2.32
	D ^o	}	10.0.12
	Dean Wong		7.3.12
	Wong	} John Wilson	6.0.18
	D ^o		5.1.17
	Cockpitt Wong	} James Hancer	21.3.24
	Wong		7.0.35
	Sand Close	} M ^r Heron	8.2.14
	Clay Close		5.0.39
	Old D ^o Close		Cumberland 7.0.35

Detail from Ne 6 P 3/15/3, showing the key that associates a number with the name of a particular tenant

Name of cartographer: Or of surveyor, architect or engineer. This may be a useful detail to have. If something about the map or plan is unclear, for example, it may be helpful to compare it with other maps and plans by the same person.



Detail from Ne 6 P 3/15/3

Other names: The map or plan may include names of financing, sponsoring, controlling or commissioning agencies. Where this is the case it may help to provide an indication of why and it was produced or the context in which it was later used.

Other points to bear in mind:

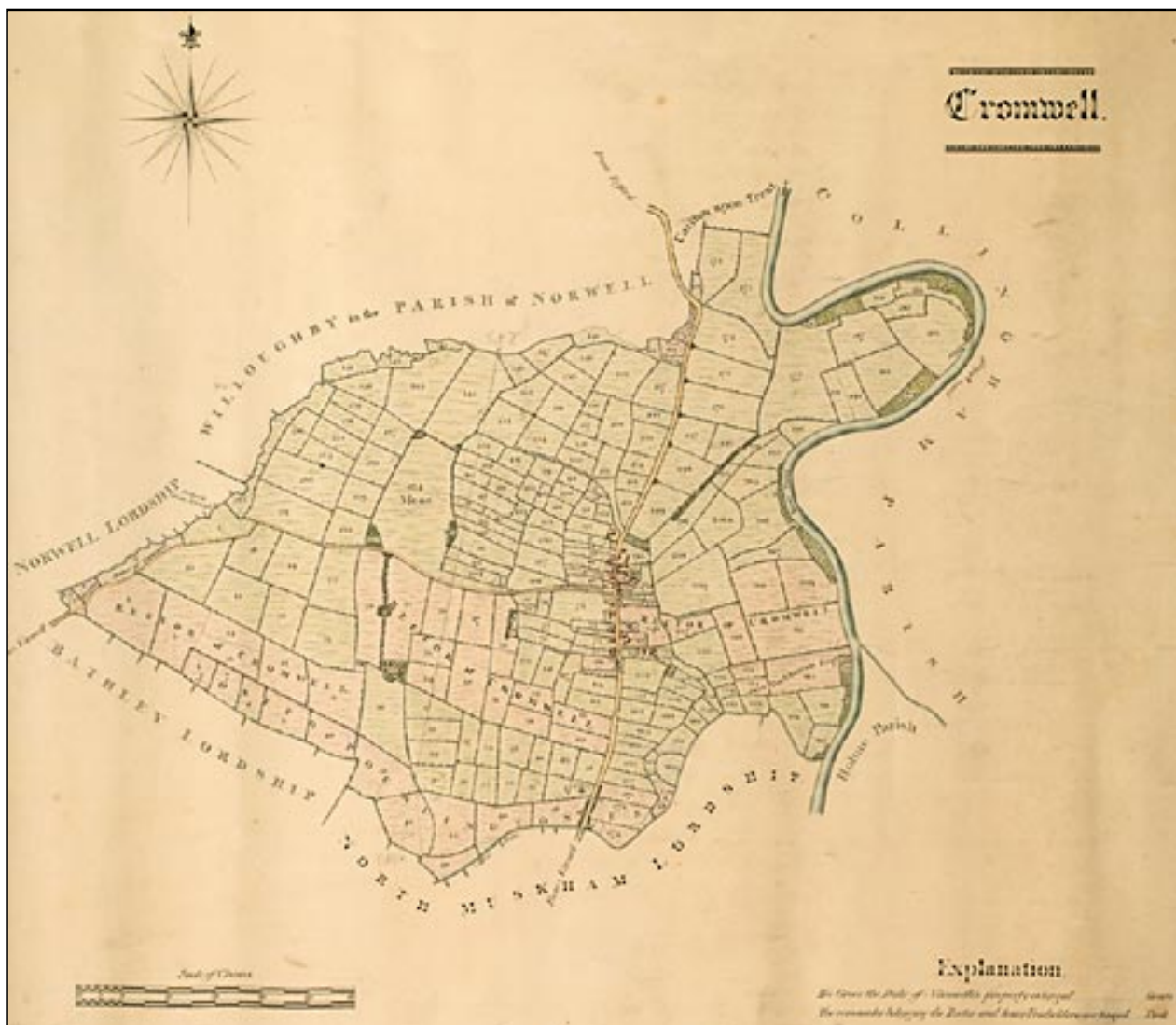
- When assessing the value of a map or plan and the information contained within it, users should always bear in mind the purpose for which it was originally created. The mapmaker may have had a vested interest in ensuring it was perceived in a certain way. It is possible that the plan could have been created entirely for propaganda purposes, or even to provide false information for espionage. The map or plan may have omitted details because they were not relevant to the purpose in hand. The omission of particular features, however, does not necessarily mean they were not there. It is important always to consider what is not shown and why. Users should always try to bear in mind the context in which a map or plan was created, and the fact that they may be giving it an entirely new purpose as a result of their research.
- Another point for users to bear in mind is whether the map or plan they are using may have been based on, or copied from, an earlier document.
- Using maps and plans may present a physical challenge to the researcher. Some are extremely large in size and very cumbersome to handle and consult. If stored in a roll, they may need to be weighted down - something which may obscure a full view of the map. If large in size it is highly unlikely that maps and plans can be copied for future reference. Users may, however, be able to make tracings from the map under specially managed conditions. If so, they will need to consider the equipment needed for this purpose.
- Users of maps and plans should always look at the cartouches and vignettes for any additional information which may be of relevance. Where these are present, it is worth bearing in mind that they provide a stylised image rather than a faithful depiction.
- Finally, users of maps and plans are advised always to look beyond the obvious - for example, if you are interested in the history of a particular property, it is always worth looking at a map or a plan of a neighbouring property for any details which might be included!

Next page: [What Can We Learn From Maps and Plans?](#)

What Can We Learn From Maps and Plans?

Maps and plans are an invaluable historical source, largely because they act as repositories of information about a particular place or location at the time at which they were compiled. They can serve a variety of purposes, both contemporary and subsequent. They are notable because, in interpreting them, we may learn about the lives of ordinary people - not just the upper, landed classes.

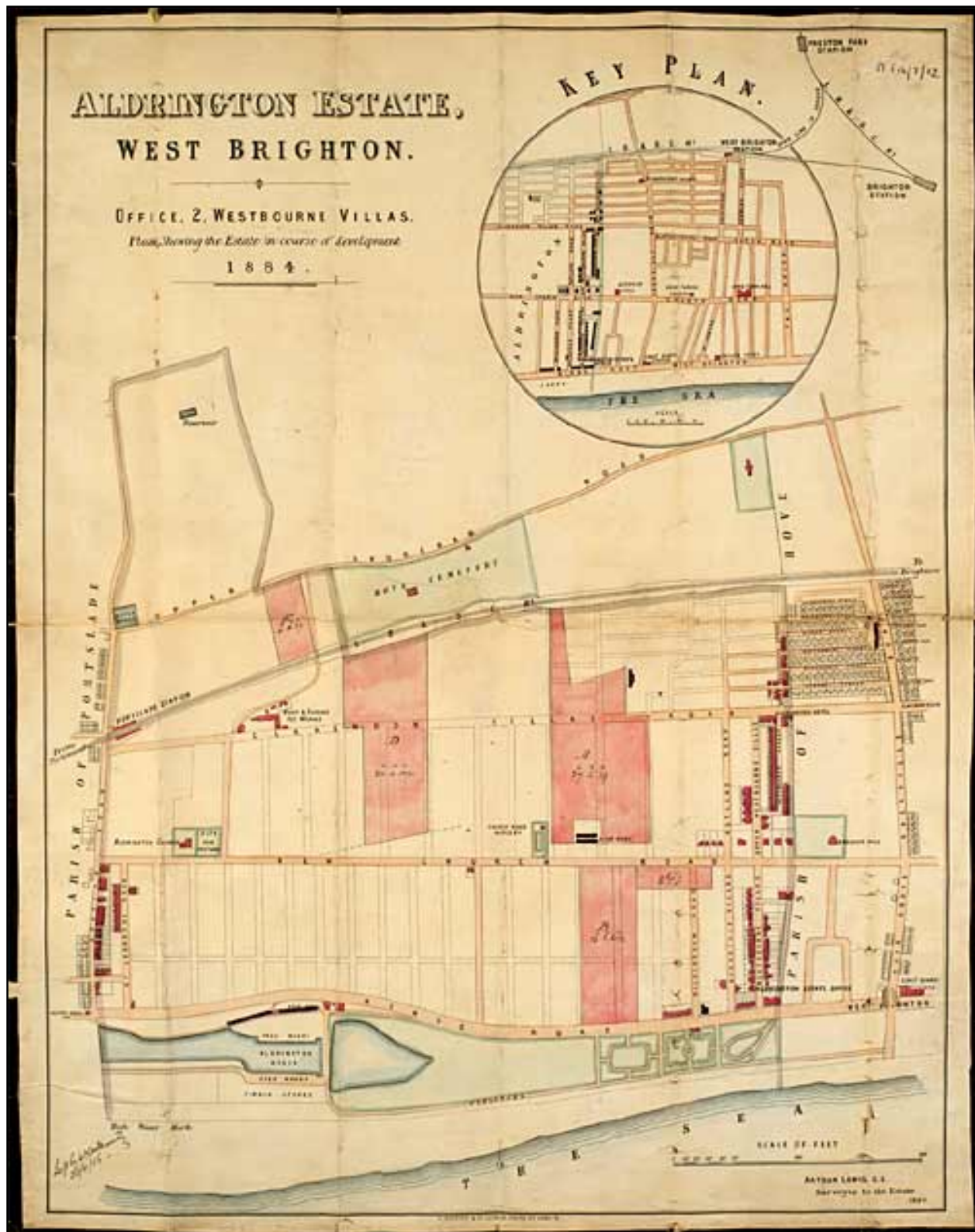
As well as the obvious **geographical and topographical information** contained in maps and plans, such as the whereabouts of roads, rivers, railway lines, buildings, woodlands and so on, they may also reveal information including: the names of landowners; the names of occupiers; the acreage of land held or owned; descriptions of particular properties; records of the state of cultivation of particular parcels of land; details of the rental value of a property, and so on. This undated map of the parish of Cromwell [c.1807-1821] gives a wealth of information about the parish and its landowners.



Ne 5 P 8 - Map of the parish of Cromwell, Nottinghamshire; n.d. [c.1807-1821]

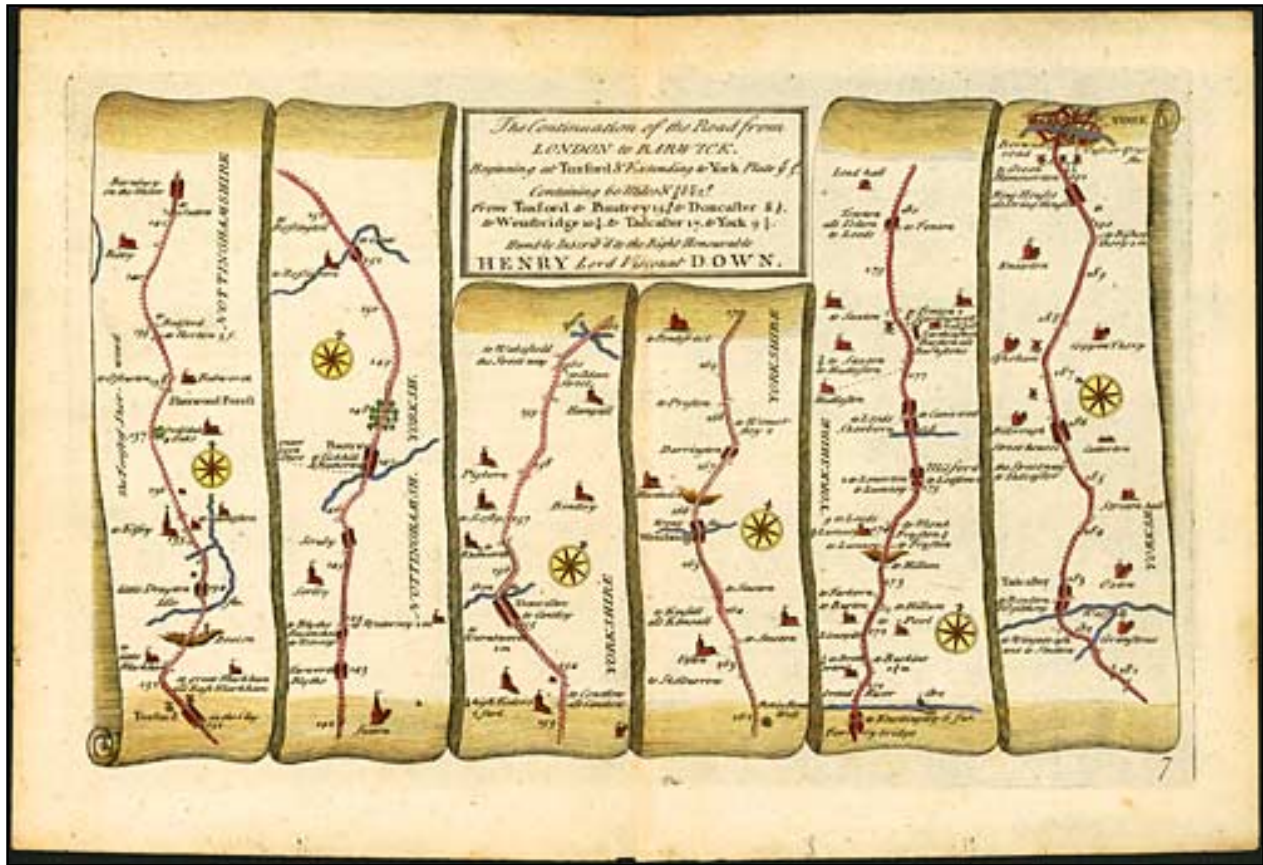
Maps and plans can also reveal details of **how a particular location developed**. For example, comparison of two maps of a

town or city from different dates may show how it has grown to incorporate a rising population, how people's dwellings have changed (the introduction of tenements, terraces, flats, etc), how the population has moved out to developing suburbs, how (and possibly why) particular industries have centred on an area, how utilities such as gas and electricity have been introduced, how sanitation has been improved, and so on. The Duke of Portland developed the Aldrington estate at Hove, Sussex, in the 1880s, as shown in this plan.



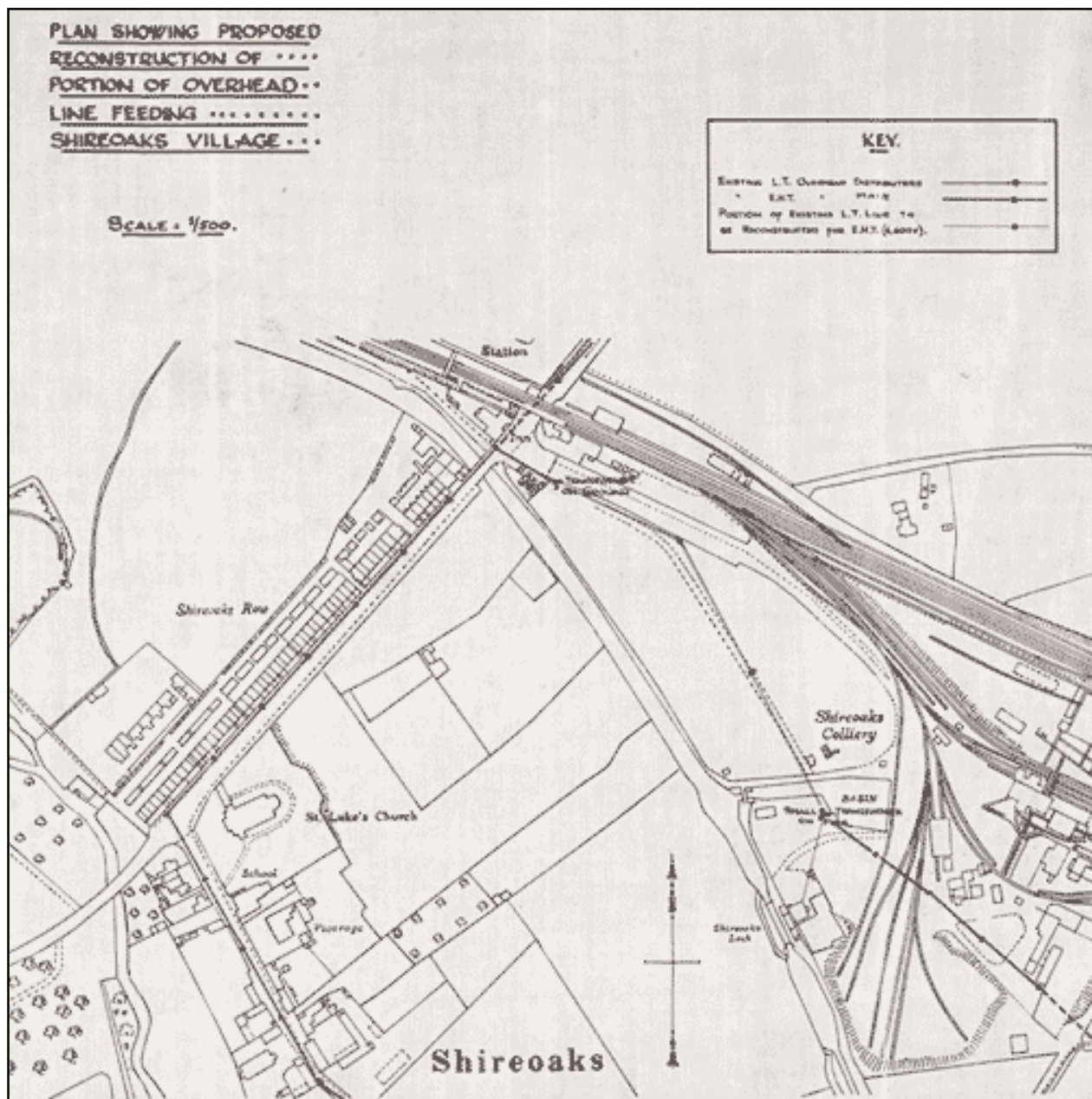
PI E14/7/12 - Plan of the Aldrington estate, West Brighton, Sussex; 1884

Maps can provide information about the **history of travel** - routes which were particularly frequently used, distances between key locations, usual stopping points for breaking journeys, the exploration and discovery of previously uncharted lands and waters, or the introduction of different forms of transport. They can also inform about the history of migration and settlement. This example shows the route of the Great North Road between Tuxford and York in 1719.



Bre 8 - Map of the continuation of the Road from London to Barwick, beginning at Tuxford and extending to York, by John Senex (d. 1740), printed 1719

From maps it is possible to learn about when and how **natural resources** began to be exploited - coal, tin, oil, sand, gravel - and the impact this had on the landscape and on communities. Also, developments in farming and land management techniques can be identified because maps and plans may show where particular crops were being used, whether land was being rotated, where land was being left fallow, where land was planted with trees, where rivers had been diverted, where land had been drained and the like. Plans like this early-twentieth century plan of proposed electricity lines at Shireoaks in Nottinghamshire show the impact of power stations and the development of public utilities.



Ne 6 P 3/21/12 - Plan of proposed overhead [electricity] lines
for Shireoaks village, Nottinghamshire; n.d. [1900-1950]

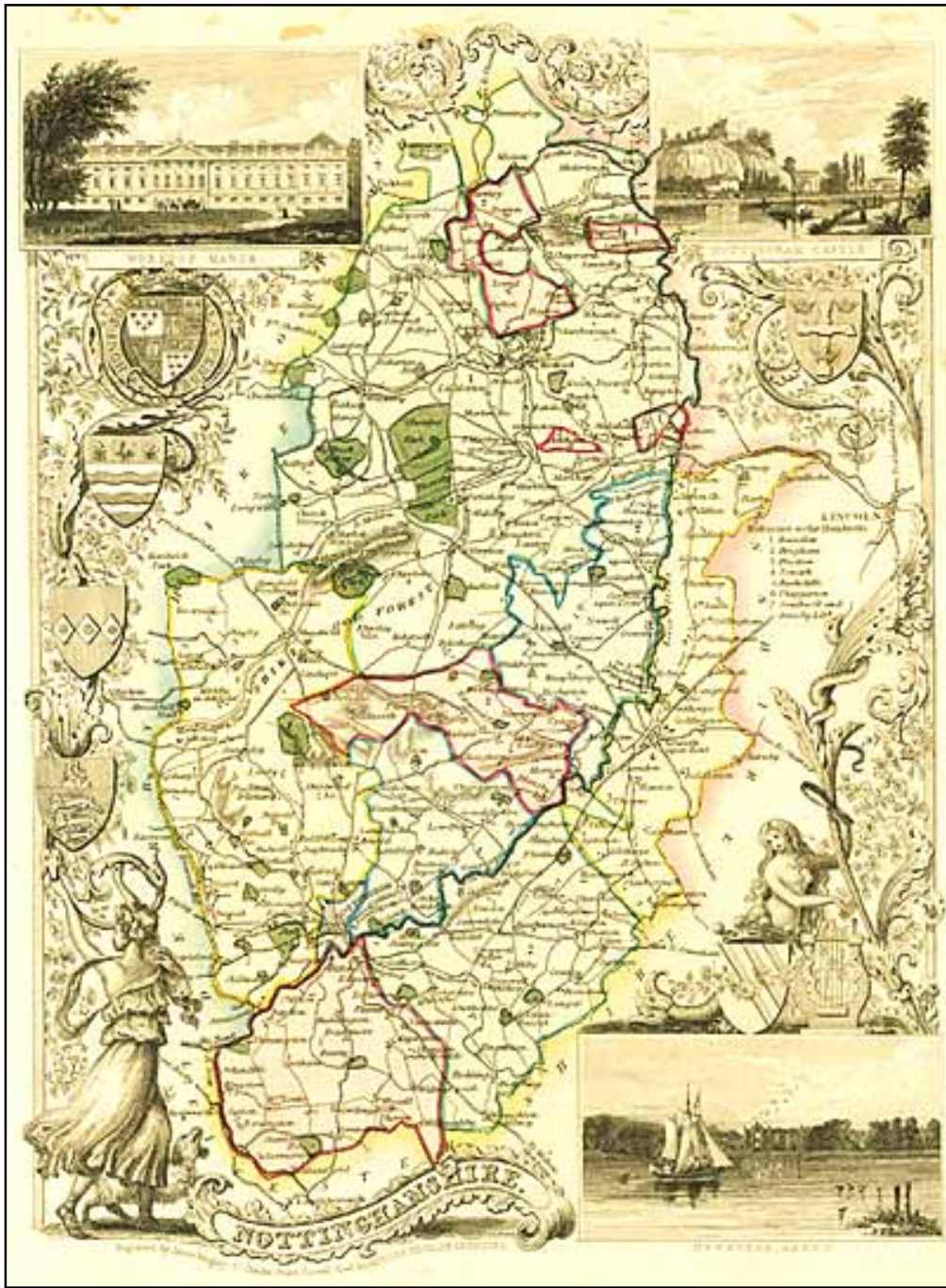
Plans can provide the user with a great deal of information about the developing requirements of **buildings**, the introduction of new construction techniques, changing fashions in architecture, emerging leisure activities - even the introduction of new technologies.

Military and naval maps and plans may tell us a great deal about numbers involved, troop movements, strategies employed, logistical difficulties encountered and overcome, the introduction of new weapons and equipment or the structure of fortifications. This is a map showing the 'Position of the Combined Armies before Sevastopol' in October 1854.



Ne C 9889/2 - Map showing the 'Position of the Combined Armies before Sevastopol' by Captain E.B. Wetherally[?]; 16 Oct. 1854

There is also a great deal to be learned from the **decorations** which appear around the edges of maps and plans, such as cartouches, vignettes, charts and tables. Cartouches, for example, may sometimes portray images of economic and cultural life within rural or industrial scenes. Vignettes might include images of particular buildings, showing what they looked like from the outside - especially useful if a building has since been demolished. In the example below, Worksoop Manor house in Nottinghamshire is shown in a vignette as part of a county map published in 1837. Charts and tables might include lists of names of tenants and landholders, measurements of particular areas of land or details of the distance between places. Decorations might also show details of particularly notable gardens or parks. The list really is long and varied.



Bre 29 - County Map of Nottinghamshire by Thomas Moule (1785-1851), engraved by James Bingley for Moule's 'The English Counties Delineated'

Next page: [Who Might Find Maps and Plans Useful?](#)

Who Might Find Maps and Plans Useful?

In keeping with their widely differing formats, maps and plans will be relevant to a wide variety of users in their research. The most obvious amongst these are, of course, geographers, cartographers, topographers and place name researchers. Others, however, will also discover a wealth of relevant information, such as:

Genealogists and family historians, who may find the names of their ancestors on maps, sometimes accompanied by details of the property they held or the rent they paid.

Buildings historians may discover all sorts of information about the original purpose for which a building was constructed, and about how and when it has been changed. Like family history, house history is an increasingly popular pastime.

Local historians, who may discover all sorts of snippets of information about life and events in the history of their local area.

Social historians, who may be able to use the information in maps and plans to build up a fuller picture of day-to-day life in the past - whether in terms of changing housing, industrial and agricultural developments, population growth and other demographic changes, and so on.

Military and naval historians, who may discover a rich vein of information about particular battles and campaigns, the development of certain fortifications or the introduction of new strategies and equipment.

In addition, there may be resources relevant to:

- Agricultural historians
- Architectural historians
- Industrial historians
- Transport historians
- Landscape and garden historians
- Political historians

Next page: [Glossary](#)

Glossary

Aerial	From the air
Anmorphic	Distorted
Axonometric	Pictorial representation
Bird's eye view	View from overhead
Block plan	Plan showing the outlines of buildings
Blueprint	Photographic print, composed of white lines on a blue background; used for making copies of plans
Cartographer	Person who draws maps
Cartography	The drawing of maps or charts
Cartouche	A scroll-shaped design or ornament, often appearing in the corner of a map or plan
Compass	A symbol inserted in a map or plan to indicated the direction of due north
Cross-section	See section
Elevation	A drawing or diagram made by projection on a vertical plane

Enclosure	Process by which open fields were converted into private ownership
Ground plan	Plan of the floor of a building; sometimes ground plans would be produced for each storey
Key	Text explaining colours, symbols or abbreviations used on a map or plan
Landscaping plan	Plan of parkland or gardens, used to plot changes to a planting scheme
Legend	A written explanation accompanying a map
Map	A visual representation of part of the earth's surface, showing physical, geographical or political features
Ordnance Survey	Government agency responsible for mapping the United Kingdom
Orientation	The position of a map or plan relative to the points on a compass
Plan	A drawing or diagram made by projection on a horizontal plane
Profile	A plan representing the outline of something; or a sectional drawing of a building
Relief	A map or plan indicating the variation in the elevation of a particular area or geographical feature
Scale	The size ratio between a map or plan and the area represented
Section	Representation of a geographical feature or building as it would appear if cut across a vertical or horizontal plane

Sketch	A rough drawing of a map or plan, often hand-drawn, providing minimal detail
Terrier	A written survey or list of lands and property which accompanies a map
Tithe	The payment of one tenth of produce or earnings towards the support of the church or clergy
Topography	The surface features of a place or region
Vignette	A small decorative design or illustration found on some maps and plans
Worm's eye view	View from underneath

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