

Old Maps of Chalford by members of the Chalford Parish Local History Group: Camilla Boon, Roger Carnt, Heather Collins, Jim Bocock, John Dawson, Peter Drover, Angela Salliss.

Pub. Chalford Parish Local History Group, 2025, 72 pp, many illustrations, b/w or colour according to originals. Paperback, £10, available at The Chalford Parish Centre; Eastcombe

Stores; Chalford Village Shop; and at Gloucestershire Family History Society at [The Heritage Hub](#)

Maps are a prime source for any historian, both in terms of the geographical background to political events, and of the ways in which local people have lived in the landscape. This book looks closely at the Chalford section of the Frome Valley east of Stroud in Gloucestershire. There are few accurate maps earlier than the eighteenth century, but those available are well reproduced and analysed. All the maps used are fully referenced and acknowledged at the end of the book. The presentation is attractive, and the A4 format allows the pages to lie almost flat when open. There is good, researched text throughout, about why and how the maps were made, their accuracy and their local connections.

After setting the scene with early county maps by Saxton, Speed and Blaeu, none of which give much local detail, a set of more detailed sketch maps from 1603 are examined. These each concern small locations owned by Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and draw attention to the importance of the cloth industry in the valley, combined with agriculture. The earliest detailed area maps by Isaac Taylor, first and second editions 1777 and 1800, give a better overall view. Isaac Taylor is the first to indicate the contours of the land, which shaped communications. Plans relating to the arrival of the canal 1783 – 1789 demonstrate its relationship to the village and the old valley road, with all the implications for the local economy and social life. A series from the first Ordnance Survey drawing of 1811, through the Bryant and Greenwood maps of Gloucestershire of 1824, to the first published Ordnance Survey map of 1828, shows in more detail the steepness of the valley side up through Chalford village, accessed locally with donkeys, and how communication was improved by the new valley turnpike road (now the A419), opened in 1815.

Chalford was a chapelry within in the large parish of Bisley until it became a full church parish in 1841, but it was described on the Bisley tithe map of 1842. This, with other maps of similar date, gives a comprehensive picture of settlements shaped by the cloth industry but suffering as it declined, extending out from Chalford to Chalford Lynch, France Lynch and Bussage. A plan of Bliss Mills in the 1860s illustrates the change from cloth to other uses, in this case stick making. The map of the Bisley Common parliamentary enclosure (here called inclosure) of 1869 and consequent changes in the local road layout leads to consideration of the local campaign against enclosure and its consequences for the agricultural population. Enclosure was much resented despite proposed compensation in the form of allotments and burial grounds, which came to be accepted only gradually, and mainly after the Chalford civil parish was established in 1894. Further information arises from the survey of the Bisley civil parish boundary by the Boundary Commission, reviewing parliamentary constituencies in the 1880s, and especially from the so-called Lloyd George Domesday Survey, opened in 1909 and carried out in 1910-15. Examples are shown of how individual buildings are described in detail. The collection ends with a 1914 plan of Chalford Flour and Grist Mill, corn milling having survived when cloth did not.

The reader unfamiliar with Chalford may not immediately understand the relationships between the maps, especially the smaller ones. An overall location key at the beginning, for both maps and important buildings, would have been helpful. The smaller maps are presumed to have north at the top, unless otherwise stated in the text, and scales have to be estimated. Only a few of the photographs, a mixture of old and recent, are dated. However, the maps demand that time be spent looking closely at them, which brings familiarity, and the reward is a rich landscape and social history. This is a book to consider carefully, before translating maps to walks and going out to explore them.

Janet Hudson 14 December 2025