

ISAAC TAYLOR'S MAP OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE, 1777

Isaac Taylor's map appears to be an excellent starting point for many investigations into local history in Gloucestershire in the 18th century; but how accurate and useful a guide is his map? While a complete evaluation would involve a study of the county to a considerable depth, some estimate is possible from a study of large scale manuscript maps available in the County Records Office.

Taylor's map has only to be compared with the map published by Bowen in 1760 for the great advance in his information to be seen. Bowen does not even mark the present A 38 Bristol to Gloucester road even though this was turnpiked in 1726-7. Nevertheless, by modern standards, Taylor's "survey (was) sketchy, lesser roads vague, rivers (1) and streams weak and inaccurate, place-names not always convincing." One important matter needs further investigation: it is said that Taylor's work took five years (1772-7) between the survey and the difficult engraving. But some information on the map appears to predate 1772, so Taylor may have started work earlier.

Taylor's major roads are reliable and accurate. His road out of Gloucester towards Barnwood shows two churches to the south of the road near Wotton turnpike. One of these buildings today is north of the present road, but this is the result of later realignment. (2) At Ampney St. Mary, between Cirencester and Fairford, Isaac Taylor shows the main road passing south of the church, which it did at that time, (3) not north of the church - the line which the main road takes today. These are only two of many examples which could be given where today's map is very different from that of Taylor's because of subsequent alterations. At Williamstrip Park, Coln St. Aldwyns, the alterations were made in the very year that the map was published. (4) Suspected inaccuracies in Taylor's main roads must be carefully checked against subsequent realignments. The likelihood is that Taylor was right.

On lesser roads, Taylor is weak but not altogether to be despised. His villages are in the right place, but roads linking them which passed through open fields sometimes disappear. Some small tracks he may not have explored - or perhaps he marked misleading paths to discourage travellers on them? An extension of Akeman Street towards Coln St. Aldwyns from Cirencester peters out on Taylor's map; but no track is marked on a map of 1750, nor is there any sign on more recent maps. Perhaps Taylor tried to take a short cut which ended at the banks of the river.

Occasionally Taylor appears confused. The estate map of Quenington (c.1775) shows the road running south to Fairford as today, but Taylor's road does not go through: the road which he marks as the through route (by the stream) was not a through route in 1775. At Preston, Taylor's road pattern is very different in detail from that drawn by the local surveyor, Richardson (5), and where Taylor has two roads running either side of the church, Richardson's map of 1770 has a straight road, with a duckpond between the church and the road. But in other places, Taylor's accuracy is amazing; around

Cranham (6) - then far more isolated than today - the roads still twist and turn now as in Taylor's day.

Taylor seems to have spent little time on the streams and rivers. The loops and bends have no real significance, although the bridges and fords on main routes are accurate. An example of Taylor's inaccurate placing of streams can be seen at Stratton (7), where the stream flowed closer to the main road than he indicates. Taylor did however try to mark the important water-mills on his map. He places two mills between Stratton and Baunton: a third, lesser mill is marked on the enclosure map. Taylor's mills can form a minimum basis for a survey: but lesser mills may not be marked.

When did Taylor survey the county? His map of Worcestershire was published in 1772, but in 1769 Taylor was already advertising that his survey of Gloucestershire was imminent. (8) The evidence suggests that he soon got down to work. The estate map of Oxenhall (9), in the west of the county shows that in 1775 the present Newent-Dymock road was complete and open, having been authorised in 1768-9. Taylor could hardly have missed it. But his map does not mark it. In the east of the county the Ampney and Barnsley map shows that the southern of two parallel roads marked by Taylor running to Gallows Corner was blocked by a hedge in 1771. At Preston, Taylor's survey precedes the implementation of the inclosure act of 1772.

Isaac Taylor made a remarkable map considering the brief time in which the county appears to have been surveyed. While it is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the Eighteenth Century, it needs to be checked carefully whenever possible against other contemporary sources.

References

1. A.C. Painter, 'Notes on some old Gloucestershire Maps', Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, Vol. L1.
2. B.J. Roberts and J.F. Bayse, "The Turnpike Roads from Gloucester to Cheltenham and Tewkesbury", Gloucestershire Historical Studies, III (1969)
3. Gloucestershire Records Office, D 1388.
4. Glos. R.O., Photocopy 64H.
5. Glos. R.O., D674B/P2.
6. Glos. R.O., D 1740/P2.
7. Glos. R.O., D 674B/P37, P39, P40.
8. Glos. R.O., D 674A/F4.
9. Glos. R.O., D 603.

M.J. Dennison Light.