

## ***Oxbridge ramblings***

***Chris Higley***

### ***Mapping the paths***

Recreational walking flourished in the 1930s. Hikers claimed the right to roam over open moorland while other city dwellers rambled along lowland field paths. However, before the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949, there were no definitive maps of footpaths and it was difficult to be sure where wandering off the road was legal.

If you were a gritty Northerner you asserted your rights by joining the mass trespass on Kinder Scout and beating up a few gamekeepers. If you were an effete Southern intellectual, you formed a footpath preservation society and drew up a footpath map. Nowhere do you find as many effete intellectuals as in Oxford and Cambridge, and footpath maps were published in both cities, but in very contrasting styles.

The essential problem was that Ordnance Survey did not produce a base map at the right scale for the accurate depiction of footpaths. The one-inch map was at too small a scale to show field boundaries, while each six-inch County Series map covered too small an area, complete coverage of Oxfordshire requiring over 170 (quarter) sheets.

The Oxford and District Footpaths, Bridlepaths and Commons Preservation Society published at least two editions of their map: pre- and post-war. The illustration is taken from the later edition, printed by in 1945 by Geographia Ltd and mounted on cloth in, to judge from the print code, an edition of 2000 copies. The monochrome base map consists of 24 Oxfordshire six-inch County Series quarter sheets, photographically reduced in scale to two inches to the mile. This base is overprinted with yellow roads and other rights of way as described in the margin:

*Green lanes, open spaces, etc., generally accessible to the public, are marked green.*

*A footpath believed to be public is shown as a single continuous red line, a public bridlepath is shown in a red or green pecked line.*

*A Path, for which there is permissive use, is shown thus xxxxxxxxxx*

Despite the note inside the front cover, 'Owing to post-war difficulties the Society regrets that it has not been possible to enlarge the type of many place names in this reprint as was done in the case of the pre-war edition', the result is a very clear and serviceable footpath map covering an area of twelve miles square, from north of Kidlington to south of Abingdon, and from Stanton Harcourt in the west to Wheatley in the east. An unusual, and slightly puzzling, feature of the map is that large Roman numerals are attached to the principal routes out of Oxford, clockwise from the Woodstock Road. These routes are identified in a marginal key.

Publication of the map would have been due to, or certainly aided by, the dynamism of the Society's honorary secretary, W P d'Arcy Dalton, MA. Col. d'Arcy Dalton, a splendid character, was still chairman of the Society in the late

1960s. About two years ago, a small collection of his WW1 trench maps, together with some army issue condoms of a similar vintage, came up as a lot on one of the many TV auction programmes. The television ‘expert’ seriously undervalued the maps; I am not qualified to express an opinion as to the value put on the condoms.

The *Cambridge and District Footpaths Map* was published by the Cambridge Preservation Society and printed in 1936 by Ordnance Survey, Southampton, in an edition of 2050 copies (again with cloth backing). The inside cover notes:

*The Society first took up the question of footpaths in the neighbourhood of Cambridge in connection with the Town and Country Planning Act, 1932, and it seemed worth while to reproduce its investigations in a map available to the General Public. This map, therefore, is issued in the hope that it may be useful to those who work or find their recreation in the Cambridgeshire country-side.*

The full-colour map was specially drawn at two inches to the mile by E Wrottesley<sup>1</sup>. It covers 17 miles east-west and 13½ miles north-south, with two small additional areas inset. The first shows the continuation of a popular walk to Caxton, the second covers Wicken Fen. Although three miles from the northern boundary of the map, the fen, a nature reserve in National Trust ownership since 1899, was, and is, popular for expeditions from the city and had long been associated with university research projects.

The map looks to be based on enlarged One-inch Popular Edition mapping, with field boundaries and additional detail taken from the six-inch County Series. ‘A’ road numbers are added in red. Relief, such as it is in Cambridgeshire, is indicated by contours and layering. No expense was spared, the sheet is printed in six colours and the cover comes with a Latin dedication, *Deo qui vias et semitas commentus est*, ‘To the god who devised roads and pathways’, apparently taken from a Roman altar at Catterick. The two-mile grid has as origin Great St. Mary’s Church, the traditional centre of the City of Cambridge.

‘University College Sports Grounds etc.’ are numbered. These include private college grounds as well as Parker’s Piece (27), with full public access, and the University Botanic Gardens (28), with timed opening. The ambiguity extends to rights of way: footpaths and bridle roads (marked B.R.) are shown with a clear black dashed line, but footpaths enclosed on both sides are shown as ‘white roads’, hard to distinguish from private tracks. The map cautiously adds the standard notice, ‘The representation on this map of a Road, Track, or Footpath, is not conclusive evidence of the existence of a right of way’ but, scenting the danger that their own map could be used as evidence against them, the Society has also added in red, ‘The omission from this map of a road, track or footpath is not conclusive evidence of non-existence of any right of way’. Altogether more academic and less direct than the Oxford map, but giving

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<sup>1</sup> Is anything known about this cartographer?





The map published by the Oxford and District Footpaths  
Bridlepaths and Commons Preservation Society in 1945





The 1936 'Cambridge and District Footpaths Map' published by the Cambridge Preservation Society



a tempting glimpse of what 1930s Ordnance Survey mapping for walkers, on a similar scale, might have looked like.

The Oxford and Cambridge maps were no longer on sale when I was exploring the local footpaths some forty years ago. We relied on OS One-inch Seventh Series maps, by then covered in a web of red paths, many more evident on the map than on the ground. We still had to guess whether the path was to the left or the right of the hedge: 1:25,000 First Series maps showed the field boundaries but not public rights of way, and the small sheet size made them unaffordable. And, of course, all footpaths apparently stopped at the Oxford city boundary – under the 1949 Act, county borough councils had no duty to prepare definitive maps of rights of way. Not until the 1:25,000 Second Series, or Pathfinders, did OS itself produce maps to satisfy E Wrottesley and Col. d'Arcy Dalton.

### ***The elephant in the room***

Anyone who has lived in either Oxford or Cambridge will have met American tourists asking for directions to 'the university'. A collegiate university spread city-wide and with no main building or central campus also provides a challenge to the cartographer.

Cambridge University is not identified on Quarter-inch Second Edition, sheet 7, 1914. But, surprisingly, it does name Girton College, a women's college sited at what was then thought a safe distance northwest of the city. The one-inch Third and Popular Editions also name Girton, but mark no other college except, to the south, Homerton, a teacher training college for women, is shown just as 'College'. We have 'Boat Houses' and 'Observatory' on both maps, and 'University Field Laboratories' appears on Popular Edition sheet 85, but neither sheet has any indication of the University itself.<sup>2</sup>



*Quarter-inch, Second Edition*

On New Popular sheet 135 we lose the boathouses (though they still exist on the ground) and gain 'Liby', the recently completed University Library, but still no 'University' as such. On the Seventh Series, is there a brave attempt to depict the buildings in more detail: black infill and a liberal sprinkling of 'Colls'. Interestingly, the only college actually named, apart from Girton, is Hughes Hall – a graduate women's college.

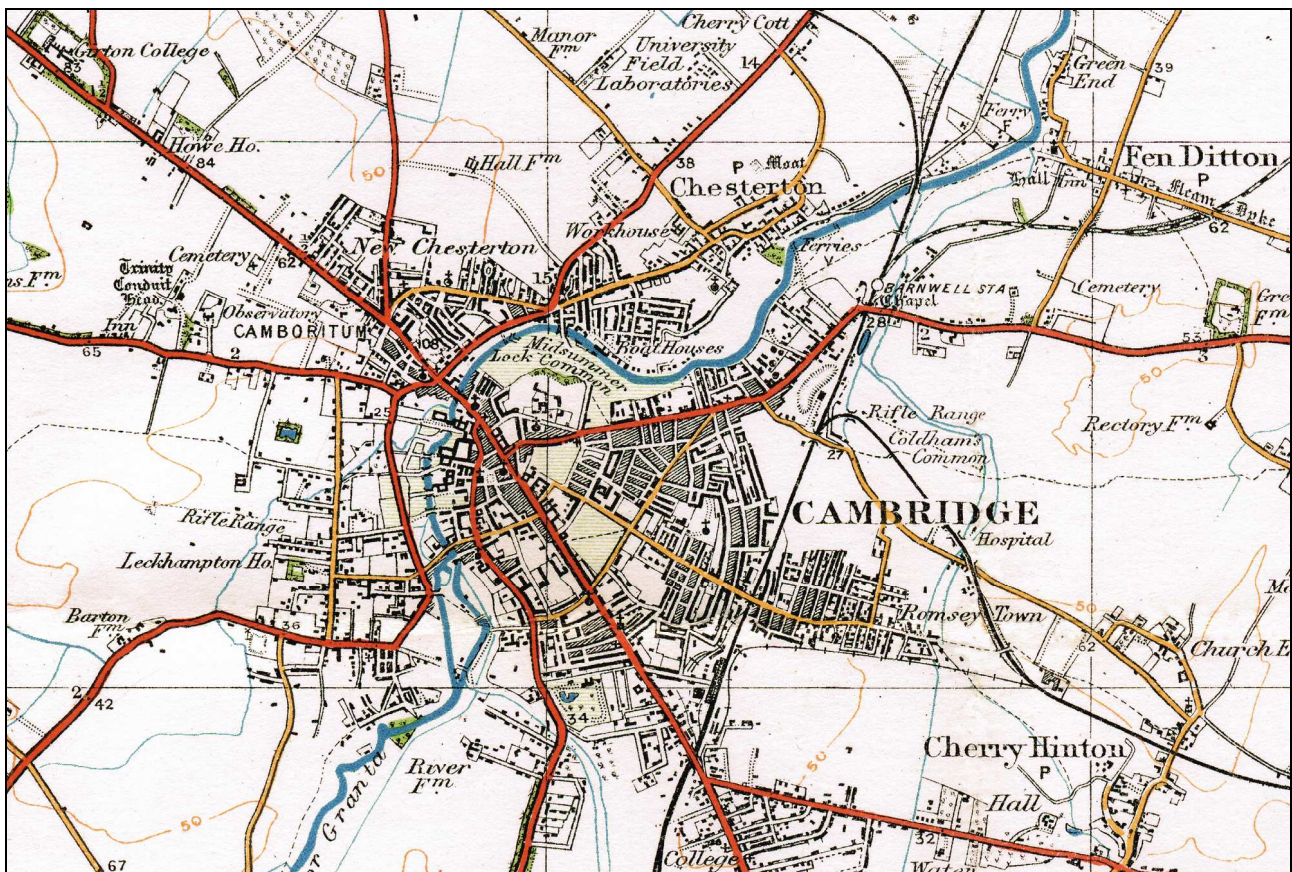
By the C edition of *Landranger* 154 in 1997, we do actually have two buildings marked 'Univ' among all the 'Colls' – Girton College and the Veterinary School on the, then new, West Cambridge site. The latest *Landranger* mapping corrects Girton back to 'College', so any tourists following the current map to the one building marked 'Univ' will find themselves at the Vet. School, on the outskirts of the city, half way to Cotton.

<sup>2</sup> The two-inch Cambridge footpaths map follows the Popular Edition sheet in this respect.

Slightly alarmed by the focus on women's colleges, I turned to the equivalent maps of Oxford. On the One-inch Third, Popular and Fifth Editions, we have 'University Parks' but no other mention of a university. Only a single college is marked and named; this time a men's college, Magdalen. Assuming that Sir Charles Close or his predecessors had no connection with the college, we deduce the useful lesson that what is shown on a map can depend at least as much on available space as on relative importance – hence 'Warneford Asylum', but not 'Bodleian Library'.

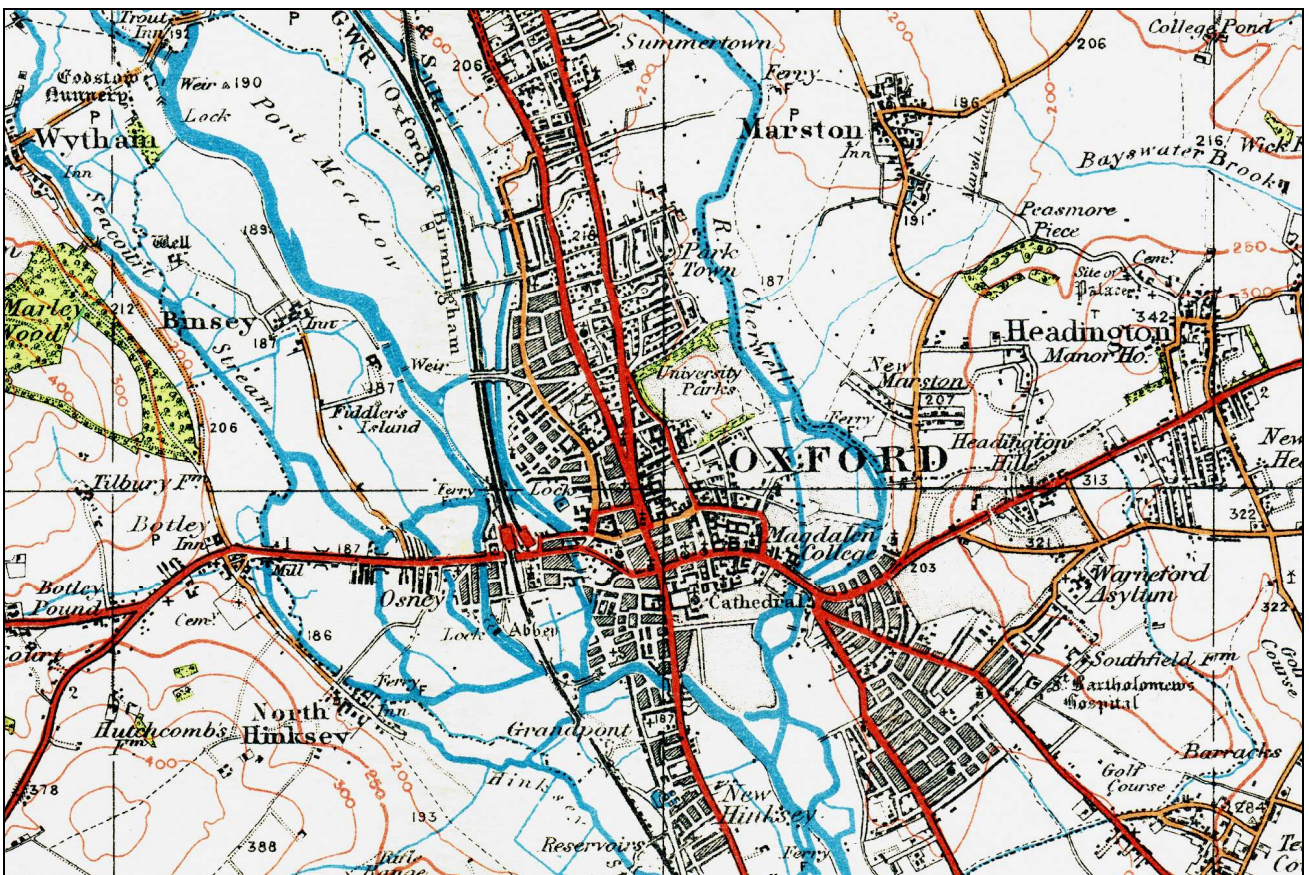
The Seventh Series still does not identify the University, but its buildings again get black infill. The generic term 'Colleges' replaces 'Magdalen College' and two other 'Coll.'s appear, St Hughes, then still a women's college, and what was presumably intended to be Somerville, another women's college, although the infill actually shows the unmistakable form of war-time government buildings, the Radcliffe Infirmary.

On current *Landranger* mapping even the University Parks have disappeared. The Radcliffe is now shown as ‘Hospl’, despite currently being redeveloped into new university buildings: a central site that, at long last, could,



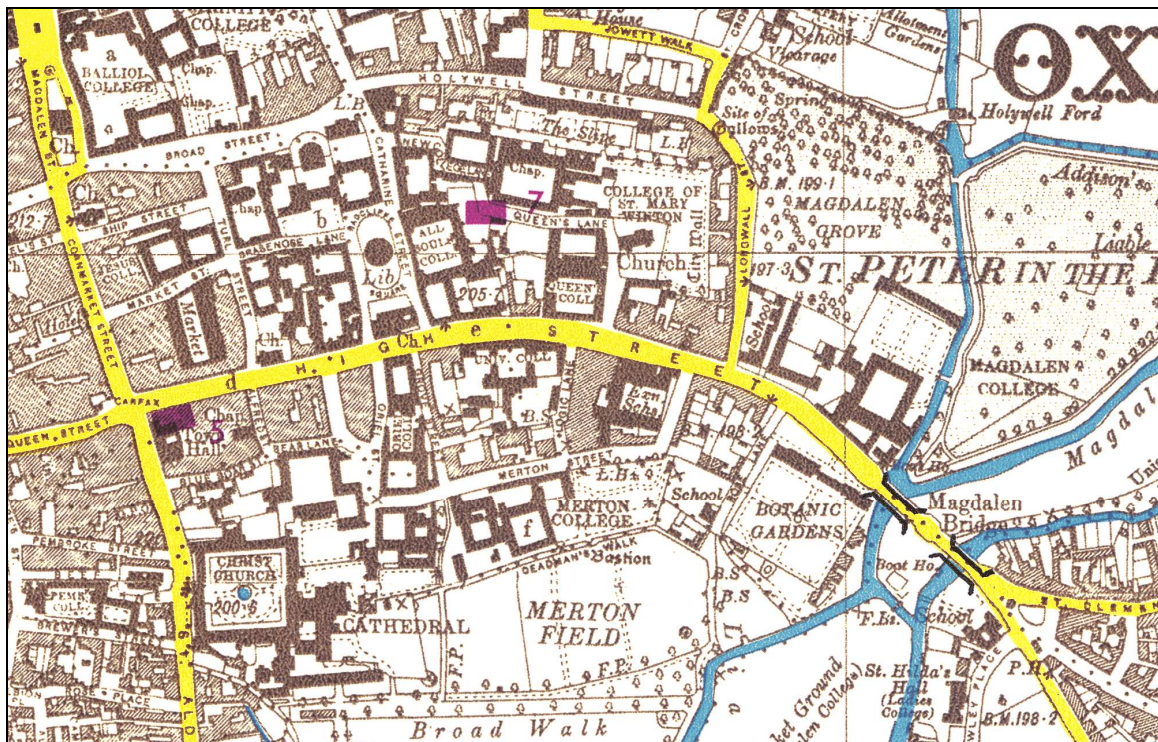
*Where's the University?*  
*One-inch Popular edition sheet 85 (above) and sheet 105 (opposite, top)*





legitimately, be labelled 'Univ'. Finally, Oxford Brookes University is merely annotated 'Coll.' on this map, but then in Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University is not marked at all!

### ***Confusion to our enemies***





Foreign mapmakers have been no more successful in their depiction of Oxford University. Rob Wheeler has described how, during the Second World War, the German General Staff produced a series of folders containing maps identifying objectives of potential importance.<sup>3</sup> The 1:10,000 *Stadtplan von Oxford* of 1941 (p.23, lower) is based, like the footpaths map, on a nicely coloured reprint of OS six-inch County Series mapping. Targeting town and gown, two civilian objectives are marked with magenta rectangles in the centre of the city: numbers 5, *Rathaus* (Town Hall), and 7, *Universität*. Any Panzer commander taking this location at face value would have found his tanks inextricably wedged in the tight turns of New College Lane while coming under attack from whatever Archimedean siege engines could be mounted by the fellows of All Souls on the high surrounding walls.

But then, as John Davies points out, the 1973 Soviet 1:10,000 map of Oxford did find a single building to be marked in magenta as the objective and, confused by Oxford nomenclature, has picked out University College to stand for the University as a whole.

*The author is an ex-president of the Oxford University Rambling Club and sometime member of the Cambridge University Rambling Club.*

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### ***Open data and mashups***

An interesting website<sup>4</sup> recently appeared which demonstrates the benefits that flow when a large organisation opens up and releases previously private data which developers can combine with other data sources (so-called mashups) to provide new insights or new ways of looking at information. In this example, Transport for London has made available its real-time data on the movement of tube trains. This has been combined with Google maps to display a live map of the current location and destination of all trains in the network.

### ***Sheetlines 89***

Contributions are invited for the next issue of *Sheetlines*, to be published in December. We do recommend that prospective authors contact the editors (*see inside front cover*) to discuss their proposal at an early stage. We also welcome comments and suggestions not for publication, regarding all aspects of the design and content of the journal.

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<sup>3</sup> *Sheetlines* 68, 28.

<sup>4</sup> <http://traintimes.org.uk:81/map/tube/>. Annoyingly, as we close for press a technical problem at TfL is preventing live data feeds, but this should be resolved when you read this.