

# How to Find Old Maps of the Town and Area, Including on-line Resources

## The earliest detailed map of Devon

The earliest detailed map of Devon was published in 1765 by Benjamin Donn. It can most easily be accessed via his Wikipedia entry.

## The earliest detailed map of Axminster

Over the period 1776/78 a large-scale map was produced for the Petre Estate of its landholdings in Axminster parish. This was done in preparation for the eventual sale of the land, by a surveyor called James Haywood of Eaton Street, Pimlico. The original map, which measures roughly 6 feet square, and is both reasonably well preserved and surprisingly detailed (e.g. many fields are named, and for those that did not belong to the Petre Estate the owner's name is sometimes given), is held at the Devon Heritage Centre<sup>1</sup>. It only covers the Petre landholdings and small blocks of land which were closely inter-mingled with them, not the whole parish.

In due course it is hoped that a copy of the town section of the map will be accessible via Axminster Heritage Centre, but this is not yet the case.

## The main 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century maps

There is a remarkable range of 19<sup>th</sup> century mapping freely available on-line, and the purpose of this note is to pull together in one place information on where and how to find it. The Ordnance Survey (OS) First Series map which, in the case of Devon, was published in 1809, was based on a survey made in 1808/09. This was followed by Greenwood's map of 1827 and the individual parish maps produced as part of the Tithe Apportionment process (which in Axminster happened in 1838).

After a considerable gap we then have the 1891 OS map of Devon, based on a survey made in 1888, and the revised and more detailed 1905 OS map, based on updates to the earlier survey, those updates having been made in 1903.

To access the 1809 map, go to the home page of [visonofbritain.org.uk](http://visonofbritain.org.uk) and click on 'historical maps' and then 'topographical maps' The map that covers Axminster is Sheet 21.

For Greenwood's 1827 map go to [devon.gov.uk/devonmaps](http://devon.gov.uk/devonmaps) and the section called 'early maps'. Click anywhere on the map of Devon and you will be taken to the relevant segment of Greenwood's map. Unfortunately Axminster is at the corner of four segments. Nevertheless it is relatively easy to navigate around.

The on-line version of the 1838 map produced as part of the tithe apportionment process in Axminster is detailed, but not complete. This is partly because it excludes land which was exempt from tithes, which accounted for a substantial proportion of Axminster parish, but

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<sup>1</sup> DHC ref 4377M/E2. Although at the time of writing the DHC on-line catalogue does not include it, this reference number does produce the map itself. The accompanying schedule, which provides details of all of the tenants, cross-referenced to the map in the case of numbered fields and plots, carries the DHC ref 49/26/5/22.

also because the map itself which has been scanned had suffered some pre-scanning damage. That scan is accessible via the [eastdevonaonb.org.uk](http://eastdevonaonb.org.uk) website (search for 'tithe': the map is in the 'conservation' section of the website, under the 'Parishscapes' project). Maps for adjacent Devon parishes can be found via the same website. Detailed field-by-field records can also be found via the same website.

Axminster Heritage Centre holds a different copy of the 1838 tithe apportionment map, but although it covers all of the town, it does not cover all of the parish. The image below comes from that map. The only road that was continuously settled beyond the edge of this image was Lyme Road.



**Extract from the 1838 Tithe Map, showing Axminster**

The 1891 OS map (the first to be produced after the arrival of the railway) was published at two scales. For the smaller-scale map, the quickest way to find the sheet(s) covering any location is to use the [british-history.ac.uk](http://british-history.ac.uk) website, and then to put either the modern postcode or the place name into the website's main search box. If you put a place name the list of results that is then offered is not restricted to maps, whereas if you put 'EX13' (or any

other modern postcode of interest) you will simply be offered a list of maps from which to choose. Beware: the descriptions (e.g. the villages named in association with specific map sheets) can be a bit arbitrary.

If you know which map sheet you want, you can simply put (for example) '072/NW' into the search box, and then select the map sheet from Devon. Each numbered sheet comes in four quarters: NW, NE, SW and SE. Most of Axminster parish can be found on Devon sheets 072/NW and 072/SW, though the area to the east of the town is also well covered by Dorset sheet 027/SE.

Having found the right map sheet, click first on 'View result' and then on the square symbol below the + and – controls (when your mouse is in the right place the words 'View full screen' will be seen). Click on the + symbol at least once to focus on the place of interest to you.

Both the 1891 OS map and the 1905 OS map can also be accessed at a scale of 25 inches-to-the-mile (easily large enough to see the shape of individual buildings) via the National Library of Scotland's website (nls.uk). This is not so easy to use at first, but is well worth the effort. To get to the right place go through the following sequence from the nls.uk home page.

- Hover your cursor over 'Digital resources' and select 'Map images' from the list of options offered
- Click on 'Ordnance Survey maps'
- Scroll down and click on 'Ordnance Survey 25 inch England & Wales, 1841-1952'
- Click on 'Seamless zoomable layer (1890s to 1920s) side-by-side'

By clicking and dragging on either of the maps or satellite images that you can now see you can navigate yourself to Axminster. The left-hand map should be the 1905 OS map. Check by looking at the station. If the branch line is shown heading off towards Lyme Regis, then this is indeed the 1905 map.

To change either of the two images (left or right) to the 1891 25 inch OS map:

- Click on the drop-down box next to the text saying 'Select a category', and choose 'England and Wales'
- Click on the drop-down box next to the text saying 'Select a map series', and choose 'SW England OS 25 inch 1873-1888'.

N.B.: If at any time you cannot find the 1891 OS map on the drop-down menu it is almost certainly because you are looking at the selection for Great Britain rather than England and Wales.

Finally, there are five aerial photographs of the town from 1928. These provide limited coverage of the town, but what there is is very helpful. They can be accessed via the [britainfromabove.org.uk](http://britainfromabove.org.uk) website. Simply put 'Axminster' into their search box to find all five images.

### **Geological maps**

The 1808/09 survey also provided the base mapping for an 1844 geological map, which is also worth viewing because of the extra information which it provides. It can be found via the British Geological Survey website, by selecting 'Geological Survey of England & Wales 1:63,360 geological map series [Old Series]' and then Sheet 21 for Axminster. Sheet 22 covers the coast, from Sidmouth to Lyme Regis. The same website also offers the

'Geological Survey of England & Wales 1:63,360 [New Series]' published in 1906, based on a different series of base maps, but again offering helpful information. Axminster is covered by 'Sheet 326, 340 (Sidmouth)'.

### **More modern mapping**

The nls.uk website also has a selection of more modern mapping, but the dates of the surveys are not very clearly stated. The visionofbritain.org.uk website also offers access to OS mapping from 1945-48, which is actually based on a survey from 1930 with later corrections. The map showing Axminster is Sheet 177.

Current mapping is available via Sheet 116 of the 1:25,000 OS map in their 'Explorer Map' series, or on-line via the East Devon DC website. From their home page click on 'View planning applications' and then on the 'Map' tab, and then zoom in to the place of interest.

The simplest way to see current parish boundaries superimposed onto modern OS base mapping is to use the neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk website. From their home page select the map viewer, put 'Axminster' into the search box, and choose 'Axminster, East Devon' from the options then offered. Now click on 'Parishes 2011' in the list of boundaries offered, and finally click on 'Update map' to see the map itself.

Less easy-to-use mapping is also available on the devon.gov.uk website (put 'footpaths' into their search box, choose the option called 'Public Rights of Way' and then click on 'interactive map'): this provides definitive guidance on the routes of footpaths and bridleways.

Finally, there is good base mapping on the geograph.org.uk website, which also includes a large number of photographs. It is not the easiest website to navigate, but if you put 'SY2998' in the home page search box, and then click on 'Open Interactive OS Map Overlay' (where it appears just beneath the thumbnail map image), you will have access to a map and all of the images taken around Axminster.