

A Late Sixteenth Century Map of St. Clement's, Oxford

By C. M. WOOLGAR

In the archives of Magdalen College, Oxford, there is a late sixteenth century sketch map of the parish of St. Clement's, Oxford.¹ The map was listed by Rev. W.D. Macray when he worked on this part of the archive in 1877-8, but its existence has not been noted in works on the topography of Oxford. The document forms part of a collection of papers and deeds, many relating to properties that were not possessions of Magdalen, which seems to have been placed aside when the muniments of the College were catalogued c. 1611. The map appears in a list of archives in a chest in the President's Lodgings in May 1630, where it is described as a 'confused plott of St. Clements meadowes'.²

The plan is drawn in ink, with writing in a rough italic hand, on a single sheet of paper measuring 441 mm. × 579 mm. The paper has a watermark — a bunch of grapes surmounted by the letters A and G, inverted.³ The handwriting has not been identified. One side of the document depicts the general area of East Oxford, bounded by the Cherwell, running from Bolleshipon Farm, past Magdalen Bridge, Milham Mead and Christ Church Walks, on three sides, with parts of Cowley and Headington on the fourth. On the back there are several sketches, apparently drafts of sections of the plan. There is another endorsement in a secretary hand, probably of early seventeenth century date, which reads 'A draught or plott of St. Clements, East Bridg, the meadowes etc.'.

The document bears no date, but one may be assigned to it as it records Nicholas Gibbard as the tenant of Magdalen College Mead. The registers of leases at Magdalen show that the College demised the land outside the East Gate and on the south side of the High Street, known, in part, as Magdalen College Mead, to Gibbard, a physician and Fellow of the College, from 1582 until his death in 1594.⁴ No surveyor or scale are noted on the map. The four cardinal points are named, south being at the top. The map was not based on a measured ground survey and the representation of certain areas, most notably at the southern and northern edges, has been distorted to fit the shape of the paper. Although it cannot match the workmanship of its near contemporary, Agas' plan

¹ Magdalen College, Oxford, Miscellaneous Deeds 348. I am grateful to the President and Fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford, for permission to publish this document and to Professor P.D.A. Harvey for reading a draft of this note.

² Magdalen College, Oxford, Estate Paper 148/4.

³ The design corresponds closely to that of C.M. Briquet, *Les filigranes*, (new edition, Amsterdam, 1968) number 13163, the sole difference being that the letters A and G are more finely drawn in the present example. The device is known from Autun, 1580, and Narbonne, 1583-9, a variant of a design that was widely used in central and southern France at this date.

⁴ H.E. Salter, *A cartulary of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist*, i (O.H.S. lxvi), 64-5; W.D. Macray, *Register of the members of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford*, new series ii (1897), 160-2.

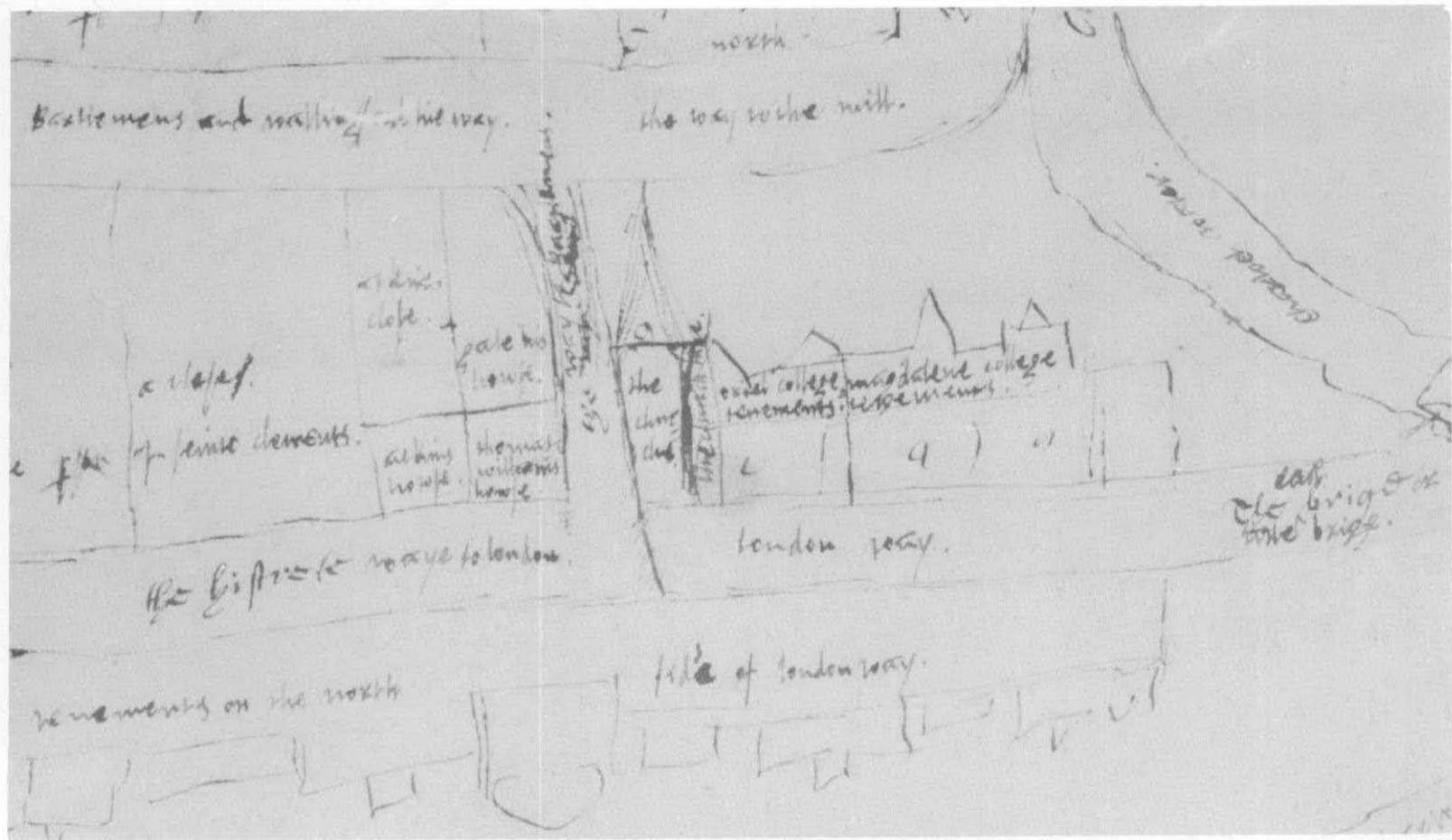


Plate 1 St. Clement's High Street, from Magdalen College, Oxford, Miscellaneous Deed 348. Actual Size. Photo: D.W. Coombs

of Oxford, 1578–88,⁵ with which it overlaps at its western end, it provides a lively portrait of the eastern suburbs of the city.

The plan shows St. Clement's from Magdalen Bridge, with the High Street passing through towards London by way of Bolleshippton Farm. Tenements are illustrated on both sides of the road. The tower of St. Clement's church seems to be capped by a spire but, more probably, a gabled roof is intended. Agas provided the church with a crenellated tower. Later drawings of the church proffer a tower with a gabled roof: Loggan's map of 1675, with its prospect of Oxford from the east, shows this feature as does Robert Whittlesey's 1728 engraving of Agas' map. Neither Loggan nor Whittlesey gives any hint of crenellation.⁶ On the south side of the road the tenements are recorded as belonging to Magdalen and Oriel Colleges. Other occupiers are noted (see Plate 1, Figure 1 and key). A number of roads are shown — Church Lane, the way to Bartholomew's Way, the way to the mill, Bartholomew's Way and Wallingford Way. Some of the surrounding fields and meadows are identified by name. The map gives an interesting picture of the state of inclosure in the parish, clearly marking out the closes and the common field. There is some schematic representation of arable strips. Trees are shown along the southern edge of The Close and along the eastern edge of The Close and Petie Pound. There are indications of hedges at the eastern edges of the three most easterly closes between Bartholomew's Way and London Way. Milham Mill, not illustrated on the Agas map, is represented by a triangle. Two merestones and the cross stone on Headington Hill, noted by Wood as standing on the boundary of St. Clement's,⁷ are given prominence, as is the hedge that marks the boundary of Marshall's Close. There are gravel pits in the Campus Fields.

A map of parts of Cowley, prepared in November 1605 by Thomas Langdon for the President and Scholars of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, surveys some of the same topographical detail but with superior skill and perspective.⁸ Langdon denotes a slightly different pattern of closes between the London Way and Bartholomew's Way and these roads diverge markedly on his plan. Bolleshippton Farm is illustrated. The meadows beside the Cherwell from Magdalen Bridge towards Cowley are also recorded.

Unlike Langdon's work, the Magdalen map is not a detailed estate survey. Although it depicts the property of Magdalen College, the College holding in St. Clement's was small — two tenements and their appurtenances. The delineation of the tenements lacks clarity and it is difficult to imagine what interest the College would have had in preparing a plan of the whole area. There are no documents in its archives connected with the map and nothing to show that its tenements in St. Clement's were the subject of an altercation, the only reason for which plans of Magdalen lands seem to have been drawn at this date.⁹ The map is concerned to show particular features with undue emphasis and this must provide a clue to its purpose. Bartholomew's Way cross stone, Marshall's Close hedge, the two merestones and the boundary with the Campus Fields running to the mill, mark out the boundary that divided the parish of St. Clement's from the parishes of Cowley

⁵ Reproduced in portfolio: *Old Plans of Oxford* (O.H.S. xxxviii); accompanying H. Hurst, *Oxford topography: an essay* (O.H.S. xxxix).

⁶ Both maps are reproduced in O.H.S. xxxviii.

⁷ *Wood's City of Oxford*, ed. A. Clark (O.H.S. xv), 286.

⁸ One of two maps of Cowley by Langdon for Corpus Christi College, reproduced as numbers 6 and 7 in J.L.G. Mowat, *Sixteen old maps of properties in Oxfordshire (with one in Berkshire) in the possession of some of the colleges in the University of Oxford illustrating the open field system* (Oxford, 1888).

⁹ As, for example, the plan of Chalgrove, c. 1592, which was drawn in connection with an action of *ejectio firmæ*: Magdalen College, Oxford, Estate Paper 97/20. The estates of Magdalen were first mapped in the second decade of the seventeenth century.

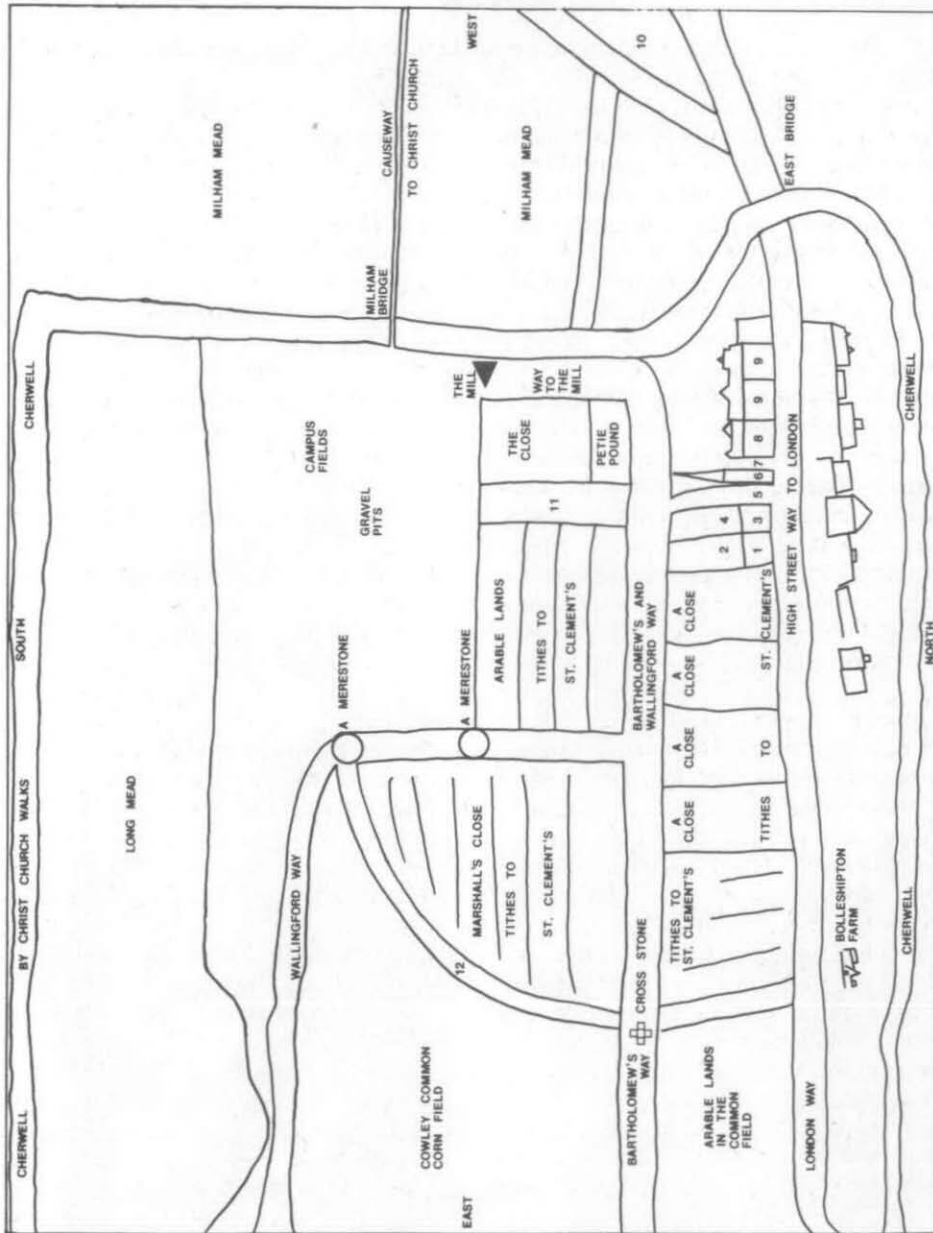


Fig. 1 A Late Sixteenth Century Map of St. Clement's, a redrawing *c.* 1/3 size of the original

Key to Figure 1

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|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Atkins' house. | 7. Church Lane. |
| 2. Atkins' close. | 8. Oriel College tenements. |
| 3. Thomas Williams' house. | 9. Magdalen College tenements. |
| 4. Gale's house. | 10. Magdalen College Mead which Nicholas Gibbard holds. |
| 5. The way to Bartholomew's Way. | 11. The parson's acre. |
| 6. The church. | 12. Marshall's Close hedge. |

and Headington. Within this area, there are a number of notes on the map which state that the tithes belong to the parson of St. Clement's. No other tithe owners are named and the map is therefore unlikely to be the fruit of a controversy over tithes. The parson's glebe is also shown. The map offers a guide to the property in the parish belonging to the parsonage of St. Clement's, a living in the gift of the Crown.¹⁰ Outside the bounds of the parish the topography has been distorted.

In the absence of other records the precise function of the map cannot be ascertained, but it may be relevant to note that Nicholas Bond, a chaplain in ordinary to Queen Elizabeth, was elected President of Magdalen in 1589 at Elizabeth's behest.¹¹ It is just possible that he was required to keep a watchful eye on the adjacent living and its revenues. But the link between the College and the map is tenuous. Its provenance can only underscore the lack of connection.

There are few surviving local maps of the Elizabethan period and this map is the earliest record of its kind for much of the area it covers. In Figure 1 the inscriptions have been modernised. The phrase 'tithes to St. Clement's' represents the original 'the tithes (or tithing) belong to the parson of St. Clement's'.

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¹⁰ *V.C.H. Oxon.* v. 264. The parson may have been one William Edwards, who was instituted on 28 January 1566/7: Bodl. MS. Oxf. Dioc. Papers d. 105, p.238. As the register lacks all institutions for 1569-97 he may not have been incumbent at the time when the map was prepared. Little can be discovered concerning Edwards.

¹¹ Macray, *Register*, new series ii. 171-82.