

New Light on the Abingdon Monks' Map

MANFRED BROD

SUMMARY

The date of the so-called Abingdon Monks' Map has long been debated. Recent detailed examination of the map has shown that it was painted in three stages, with layers of overpainting and reannotation on an original version. Documentary evidence suggests that it was first made by or for Roger Amyce, county surveyor under the Court of Augmentations from 1547, to aid in the disposal of Abingdon Abbey's riverside properties after the dissolution. The repaintings, probably dating to c.1553–6, seem to have been a result of local disputes over milling and fishing on the Thames. The key figure in these disputes, whose interests were served by the amendments, was William Blacknall, an entrepreneurial miller who arrived in the town in 1548.

INTRODUCTION

The artefact known as the Monks' Map, which long hung in an obscure corridor of the Abingdon Guildhall, has recently undergone conservation work and is now on public display in the town's museum. It was the subject of a paper by John Steane published in *Oxonienzia* in 2008.¹ Since then, examination by the conservator Ruth Bubb and her colleagues has revealed features previously unknown, and new documentary evidence has been uncovered. We now understand that the map was produced in stages, and that there were legal conflicts relevant to its production and alteration earlier than the Blacknall–Stonehouse tensions of 1570 highlighted by Steane. This enables us to place the map in the context of the great property transfers that followed the dissolution of the monasteries and of the chantries and guilds, to date it to within a very few years, and to identify its originator with a high degree of confidence.

THE MAP

The map is painted on four sheets of slightly overlapping vellum each about a millimetre in thickness. It is in total approximately 265 cm long and 41 cm broad. It shows the Thames as it flows through Abingdon from near Nuneham Lock upstream on the east almost to Culham in the south-west (Fig. 1). Nuneham Lock itself is not shown, but this may be because the right-hand edge has at some time been lightly trimmed. The left-hand sheet seems to have been more severely shortened. Assuming it was originally much the same length as the other sheets, it may have lost as much as 20 centimetres. Repeating stains on the lower edge, probably the result of damp, show that the map has been rolled up for storage or transport. The right-hand edge may have been damaged because it was on the outside of the roll, and the left edge may have been cut off because the paint flaked where the bending was tightest.

The Monks' Map was given to the Corporation of Abingdon in 1907 by Sir Edmund Verney of Claydon (Bucks.), along with numerous other documents that concerned the town. These

¹ J. Steane, 'The Abingdon Monks' Map', *Oxonienzia*, 73 (2008), pp. 17–32, which includes an illustration of the map as a fold-out between pp. 24 and 25.

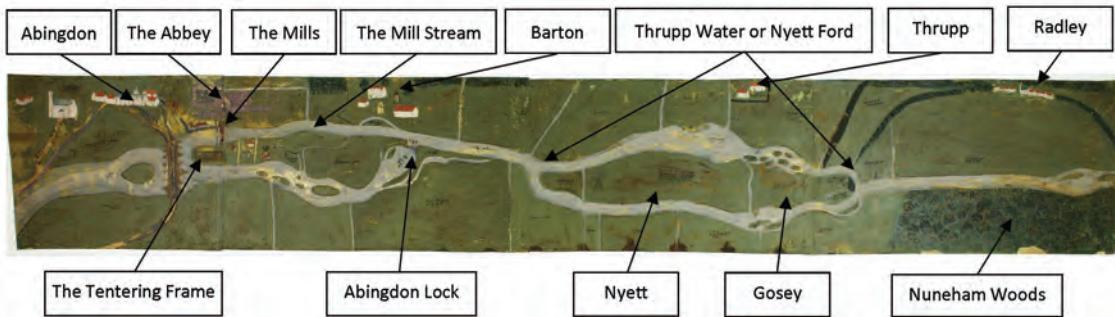


Fig. 1. The Monks' Map in its present state.

had been in the family archives since 1629, when the young Mary Blacknall, an Abingdon orphan possessed of a considerable fortune, was married to Ralph Verney. The name given to the map seems to be connected with Sir Edmund's belief that it was produced in the fifteenth century by the monks of Abingdon Abbey.² However, a quick look is sufficient to show that the abbey is depicted as no more than a heap of debris with a perhaps a single arch left standing (Fig. 2). The dissolution and demolition of Abingdon Abbey took place in 1538 and the map, at least in its present state, cannot be earlier than this.

Comparison with current maps shows that the Monks' Map, though not to scale, is a good guide to spatial relationships. North is at the top. The town of Abingdon is shown near the top left; the buildings of Barton further eastwards, then the hamlet of Thrupp and the village of Radley – actually, from its position, the present-day Lower Radley. Buildings in groups appear to be shown conventionally rather than pictorially, and Lower Radley is given what seems to be a church or chapel which in fact it did not have. Larger isolated buildings seem to be shown in greater detail than others, and these may be pictorial renderings. Settlements and habitations are all on the north bank of the river. The south bank shows the meadow known as the Rye but not the main course of the Swift Ditch, then called Purden's Stream, through which long-distance water traffic bypassed Abingdon. Further to the east, Nuneham Woods appear as a dense plantation of trees. Some place-names and owners' names are written on in ink.

The map also shows the splitting of the Thames near Thrupp, with one branch passing north of two large eyots named Gosey and Nyett and rejoining the main stream further downstream (Figs. 1 and 3). This was Thrupp Water or Nyett Ford, which was a source of local conflict in the later sixteenth century. By the nineteenth century, as shown by the early ordnance survey maps, no more than a vestige of this waterway was left, and the eyots had become incorporated into the north bank of the river.

Examination by Ruth Bubb and her collaborators has shown that the map was painted originally in ink and pigments bound in an aqueous medium,³ which was typical of maps in the sixteenth century. It was then twice overpainted in oils. This will have caused a progressive loss of flexibility and the presumed flaking of the paint that may have led to the trimming at the edges. There seems to have been some labelling in red over the first overpainting, but none of this is now legible. The current annotations in black ink are on top of all the paint layers, and careful examination shows that some personal names have been re-written in a different hand, mostly over erasures. The labelling that we now see was thus applied after all the paint layers were complete, and was itself written in at least two phases.

Most of the buildings shown are of the initial phase of painting, which Bubb refers to as Scheme 1. The ruined abbey, however, is of Scheme 2, and the mill buildings to its south are of

² BRO, D/EP7/90.

³ Personal communication from Ruth Bubb.



Fig. 2. 'The Abby' shown as a ruin.



Fig. 3. Nyett Ford. Graphite marks show the position of causeway and dam about 1570.



Fig. 4. Barton. The degree of detail in the house and outbuildings suggests that they are rendered pictorially rather than conventionally, and that the Barton estate was significant to the purpose of the map.



Fig. 5. Fish (infra-red picture).



Fig. 6. Head of water-fowl (infra-red picture).

Scheme 3. The house and associated buildings at Barton are of the initial phase and are shown in some detail (Fig. 4). The house appears as a timber-framed structure, probably not the stone building built by Thomas Read about 1554.⁴

The first stage of overpainting obscured much of what had been beneath it. It showed the abbey in ruins, and nothing can now be discerned of what may have originally been depicted. The river received a layer of white paint over the original blue, with various illustrations on top of the white. These included fish and waterfowl, some of which are still faintly visible (Figs. 5 and 6). The old abbey mills in Abingdon appear in the form of a hump-backed bridge spanning the mill stream with a building in the centre of it (Fig. 7). The mills are now visible only with infra-red illumination.

These river features were obscured in the second stage of overpainting with a further layer of white. The river was significantly widened downstream of Abingdon, and to a lesser extent around Nyett Ford. Most interesting is a new prominence given to the

⁴ Steane, 'Monks' Map', p. 21.

mills. They now go straight across the mill stream and are emphasized with what may be a tiled roof in bright red paint, a roof that continues to the north of the stream and becomes what appears as a paved roadway into the town itself (Fig. 8). The lock gate was redrawn in ink over the paint, and the associated brickwork or masonry is drawn in a similar fashion to that of the mills (Fig. 8). To the south of the mills, a structure that has been identified as a tentering rack (for drying cloth) was already present in the original version, but was progressively altered in both repaintings (Fig. 8). To all these changes are suggestive for the early history of the map and will be discussed further below.

Three personal names appear in the annotations. They are Mr Read, Mistress Read, and Mr Lyon. The latter two are in a different hand or hands to the former, and are mostly written over erasures (Figs. 9–11). Thomas Read of Barton died in 1556.⁵ The references to Mistress Read must be after her husband's death but, unless the



Fig. 7. Original depiction of the Abbey Mills (infra-red picture).



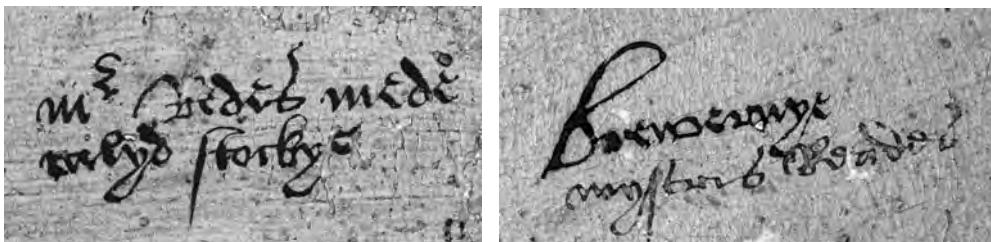
Fig. 8. Abbey Mills and tentering rack as finally depicted. (The vertical line shows the join between two vellum sheets.)



LEFT:
Fig. 9. The lock gate.

BELOW LEFT:
Fig. 10. 'Mr Redes mede calyd Stokye'.

BELOW RIGHT:
Fig. 11. 'Brewernye mystris Reades'.
Note the different handwriting on the
lower line, and the different spelling of
Rede/Reade compared to Fig. 10.



properties so marked formed part of her jointure, most probably before his son and heir, also Thomas, had come of age. We do not know when Thomas junior was born, but he was married by 1568.⁶ A Mr Lyon, alderman of London, had purchased the properties where his name appears in 1547, but by 1554, when he became lord mayor, he was Sir John Lyon.⁷ He died in 1564. Since the sixteenth century was punctilious about titles, the Mr Lyon referred to in the overwriting will have been his nephew and heir Richard Lyon or a later John Lyon.⁸ We may conclude that the earlier writing dates from before Thomas Read's death in 1556, and the erasures and overwriting are later.

ROGER AMYCE

If we can deduce that the map was complete by 1556, apart from a few of the annotations, what can be said about its origin? John Steane was undoubtedly correct in connecting it with a long series of lawsuits that opposed at least two generations of the Blacknall family of Abingdon to the Stonehouses of Radley, even though neither of these names figures on the map itself. It was in the Court of Requests in 1570 that one of William Blacknall's interrogatories – the lists of questions that were to be put to his witnesses – included, rather low down, the following: 'Whether you do know that the said water and Eyotte have been surveyed and a platt drawne thereof by any surveyor sithence the dissolution...'

The water referred to was Nyett Ford, and the question before the court was who had rights over it. The 'platt' can hardly be anything other than the Monks' Map. None of the witnesses, in their answers, said anything about the map. But John Pearce, aged sixty-seven, the Abingdon

⁵ C. Reade, *A Record of the Redes of Barton Court, Berks* (1899), p. 13.

⁶ Reade, *Redes of Barton*, p. 15

⁷ Cal. Pat. 1547–8, pp. 41–2; Bodl. MS Top. Berks. c. 6, p. 93; MS Top. Berks. c. 1, p. 31.

⁸ VCH Berks. 4, p. 419; TNA: PRO, C3/213/20.

serjeant-at-mace, deposed that 'upon suppression of the house, a survey was taken by Mr Amyas and others for this purpose, that it might appear whether the said water called Nyett Ford was parcel of Radley or not; at which time the said Ford was not found parcel of the manor of Radley but belonging to the Monastery'. Two other men of advanced age agreed with him, and one even claimed to have been on the jury that returned that verdict.⁹

It appears, therefore, that the map was made in connection with a survey of the river by 'Mr Amyas'. This was Roger Amyce, who had been 'particular surveyor' for Berkshire under the Court of Augmentations, and a figure of considerable local importance in his time. The administrative problems raised by the enormous transfer of landed property following the dissolutions of the monasteries and of the guilds and chantries had brought forth new institutions and a new class of technically competent career civil servants. Amyce had been trained in the household of Thomas Cromwell, and his first major assignment had been as receiver of funds for the abbeys of Reading and of Glastonbury. In 1547, the Court of Augmentations was reorganized on a county basis and Amyce, working from Windsor Castle, became responsible for listing and valuing the properties in Berkshire newly acquired by the Crown and especially those that were to be sold off.¹⁰ The post was one of responsibility and influence, and his status was recognized by his spells as member of parliament, once for Reading and twice for Windsor, and his election in 1552 as an alderman of Windsor.¹¹

Amyce was no mere bureaucrat. There is good evidence that he was known as a 'commonwealth man', holding the view that it was the duty of educated people like himself to work for the economic good of society as a whole. He was a friend of Sir Thomas Smith, the foremost economic writer of his time, and was a member of a commission set up by the protector, the Duke of Somerset, in a vain attempt to limit the perceived evil of enclosures. Abingdon had a difficult time between the dissolution of the guilds in 1547 and its grant of incorporation nine years later, when there was no constituted authority. It was Amyce who authorised repairs to the bridges which would provide employment for the poor, and he was deeply involved in setting up the charity of Christ's Hospital of which he would be master for several years. In Windsor, he was sufficiently committed to the building of an almshouse to act personally as site manager.¹²

Of all the towns and villages of Berkshire, it was probably Abingdon that gave Amyce his greatest difficulties. The abbey had held the formal lordship of the town, although there had been a variety of tenures and much property had been disposed of since the dissolution. Sorting out the individual tenancies and tenures would have been difficult, and it was not until October 1554 that he was ready to formalise his survey of the town, many months after the last of his other surveys, and when the Court of Augmentations itself had already been abolished.¹³ Until this was done, there could be no progress towards the municipal charter that the town badly needed. Only when the survey was in existence and had been approved by the townsmen could Amyce abstract from it the list of abbey properties still held by the Crown, and negotiations begin on the fee farm rent that the town would pay for them.¹⁴ It took another two years for the charter itself to be granted.¹⁵

In the meantime, Abingdon's economy suffered. Unlike Newbury and Reading, the town

⁹ TNA: PRO, REQ2/89/51.

¹⁰ W.C. Richardson, *History of the Court of Augmentations* (1961), p. 142.

¹¹ M. Brod, *Abingdon in Context* (2010), pp. 169–71; BRO, D/EP7/94; TNA: PRO, E314/18, no. 22; E315/218, f. 59; Bodl. MS Ashmole 1126, f. 36v; S.T. Bindoff (ed.), *The House of Commons 1509–1558*, vol. 1 (1982), p. 319; P.W. Hasler (ed.), *The House of Commons 1558–1603*, vol. 1 (1981), pp. 542–3.

¹² TNA: PRO, PROB11/56, ff. 265–6; J. Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, vol. 2, part 2 (1822), p. 348; A.E. Preston, *Christ's Hospital, Abingdon* (1929), p. 27; BRO, D/EP7/94; R.R. Tighe and J.E. Davis, *Annals of Windsor*, vol. 1 (1858), pp. 606–7.

¹³ TNA: PRO, LR2/187/196–215.

¹⁴ BRO, D/EP7/141.

¹⁵ B. Challenor, *Selections from the Borough Records* (1898) prints a seventeenth-century translation of the charter, but wrongly dates it to 1555. It was actually granted on 24 November 1556.

had no strong manufacturing base. Its financial élite were merchants and traders rather than industrialists. The remarkably low number of assessments for the subsidies of 1523–4 suggests a relatively high proportion of people too poor to be liable for tax. This has been disputed, but it is certain that the abbey had been a major local employer. A few years before the dissolution, it had had a household payroll of thirty-five, of whom thirteen were below the tax threshold. In a population which cannot have been much above a thousand, an addition of such numbers to the charity rolls will have presented a major problem.¹⁶ This can only have been exacerbated when the charities that had provided poor relief were in their turn dissolved.

The problem had been recognised by the Court of Augmentations from the start. There were negotiations with a Burford clothier, John Jones, who offered to provide ample employment in Abingdon if he could get a lease of the abbey's fulling mill and certain other facilities.¹⁷ The negotiations seem to have failed. By the mid 1540s when Jones died, he still owned eight or nine broadlooms in Abingdon, but the fulling mill, which had been working in the 1530s, was allowed to fall into disrepair.¹⁸ The project was revived by William Blacknall, an ambitious miller from Swallowfield (then in Wilts.), who first appeared in Abingdon in 1548.¹⁹

Blacknall took over the abbey's corn mills and the dilapidated fulling mill. It is not clear what influence Amyce exerted, but it was certainly the Court of Augmentations which by the end of the same year brought over a Breton, Francis Owdery, who would work for Blacknall starting up a new industry making sailcloth.²⁰ When Blacknall and his backers appealed to Protector Somerset for a change in the terms of his lease to allow him to rebuild the fulling mill and add a second one on the same site, it is likely that Amyce, already known to the duke, was the intermediary.²¹

Blacknall would have wanted personal control over the waters that would drive his mills. The Crown lease he had taken over had been granted at the dissolution to the courtier John Wellesbourne and covered, in addition to the mills, the total extent of waters shown in the Monks' Map, but the exact nature of the tenure might perhaps be open to question.²² The Abingdon charter, which Amyce was helping to prepare, would give the town properties within its boundaries that had been owned by the abbey, but Wellesbourne's lease extended far outside the town. At a date which is unknown but was before the death of Edward VI, Blacknall with Amyce's support sued Thomas Read in the Court of Augmentations over fishing rights in Nyett Ford, and it would seem, from the absence of further such litigation, that he won.²³ The principle seems to have been accepted that water rights upstream of Abingdon had belonged to the abbey directly and not by virtue of its lordship of the riverside manors. The charter, when it was finally promulgated, made special mention of Blacknall's rights to the Abingdon mills and their waters. But by then, with the abolition of the Court of Augmentations and the incorporation of its remaining functions into the Exchequer, Amyce's authority had waned.²⁴ Whether it was simply careless drafting or the intentional insertion of an ambiguity cannot now be known, but against only one statement granting Blacknall rights to waters 'in Abingdon or elsewhere' there were several more that limited them to within the town's defined boundaries.²⁵ Blacknall exercised

¹⁶ C.A. Jackson, 'Clothmaking and the Economy of 16th-Century Abingdon', *Oxonienzia*, 67 (2002), pp. 59–78; J. Cumber, 'Tudor Abingdon: The Experience of Change and Renewal in a Sixteenth-Century Town', University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis (2010), p. 83.

¹⁷ *L&P Hen. VIII*, vol. 13, part 1, pp. 113, 154; Cumber, 'Tudor Abingdon', pp. 140–1.

¹⁸ *L&P Hen. VIII*, vol. 13, part 1, p. 415; Cumber, 'Tudor Abingdon', p. 141; Challenor, *Selections*, p. 21; TNA: PRO, SP46/2, ff. 200–206.

¹⁹ BRO, D/EP7/87, no. 6.

²⁰ *Cal. Pat. 1549–51*, p. 310; *Acts of the Privy Council of England, 1547–50*, vol. 2, pp. 109, 404.

²¹ TNA: PRO, SP46/2, ff. 200–206. For Amyce's connections with the duke of Somerset, see A.E. Preston, 'The Demolition of Reading Abbey', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, 39 (1935), pp. 107–44; *L&P Hen. VIII*, vol. 12, part 2, item 12 (where the Lady Oughtred referred to was Somerset's sister).

²² BRO, D/EP7/87, no. 5.

²³ TNA: PRO, E321/41/136 and 188.

²⁴ Richardson, *Augmentations*, chapter 13; G.R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (1953), pp. 238–51.

²⁵ Challenor, *Selections*, p. 23.

what he took to be his rights, and these were confirmed by a grant from the Abingdon corporation in 1559.²⁶ But with the uncertainty about whether the corporation was acting within its powers, the conditions had been set for a long-lasting local conflict.

THE MAP AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Why was the map made, and why was it modified several times within a period of a few years? The first overpainting in oils, which shows the abbey as a ruin, must have been in or after 1538, when the abbey was dissolved and demolished, while the original version, in ink and water-based pigments, may in principle have been much earlier. However, a date before Amyce's arrival as local surveyor seems unlikely. Maps were, of course, well known earlier, but the mid century was a time when their use was increasing rapidly.²⁷ In the years around 1540, maps of very high quality were being produced for defence purposes and gradually became prestige items.²⁸ Sir John Mason, Abingdon's patron in the Privy Council, who worked with Amyce on the foundation of Christ's Hospital, presented Queen Mary with a map.²⁹ William Cecil, Elizabeth's minister, would be a great collector of them.³⁰ Amyce will naturally have been aware of these developments. In March 1547, in what was probably his first assignment in the Court of Augmentations, he illustrated his solution of a sensitive problem of land apportionment near Eton with a foolscap-sized map in ink and colour wash to a scale of ten perches to the inch or approximately 1:2000.³¹ This was innovative; there appears to be nothing comparable among maps of its time in the National Archives.

The Monks' Map is, obviously, a much larger and more elaborate document. Its size can only be explained by a requirement for it to be viewed by many people at once, who we must imagine crowding round the map spread on a table in the context of discussion and negotiations concerning water and riverside rights close to Abingdon. Indeed, some of the inscriptions are upside-down, and this may imply that they were made in the course of such discussion. The first version plainly precedes Blacknall's concern with water flow for his mills. It extends to an area downstream of Abingdon which was not relevant to them. Even after the first overpainting, the river has rather charming illustrations which seem to show a predominant interest in fishing and waterfowl. It is this phase, Bubb's Scheme 2, which confirms the demolition of the abbey buildings. Only in the second overpainting, Scheme 3, is additional prominence given to the mills and the millstream, and Nyett Ford also is widened. Furthermore, the ink additions include a remarkably detailed depiction of the Abingdon lock gate, with its rymers and paddles, which controlled the water flow through the millstream (Fig. 12). It was at this stage, presumably, that the map was put to use in the Blacknall–Read case over fishing at Nyett Ford, and perhaps also in other matters of controversy which have left no record.

The need for the map becomes obvious when one considers the complications of landownership in the areas it covers in the late 1540s, and those which at that time might reasonably have been expected. The entire coverage of the map, apart from Nuneham, was of lands that had been owned by Abingdon Abbey and waters over which it had rights. All these lands and rights had now devolved on the Crown. Nuneham had also been in the hands of

²⁶ BRO, D/EP7/87, no. 20.

²⁷ R.A. Skelton and P.D.A. Harvey, *Local Maps and Plans from Medieval England* (1986), esp. pp. 18–19.

²⁸ P. Barber, 'Mapmaking in England', in J.B. Harley and D. Woodward (eds.), *The History of Cartography*, vol. 3, part 2 (2007), pp. 1589–1669; S. Bendall, *Dictionary of Land Surveyors and Local Map-Makers 1530–1850*, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (1997), intro. chapter.

²⁹ D. Buisseret, *Monarchs, Ministers and Maps* (1992), p. 79.

³⁰ R.A. Skelton, *A Description of the Maps and Architectural Drawings in the Collection made by William Cecil, First Baron Burleigh* (1971).

³¹ TNA: PRO, E314/18, no. 22.

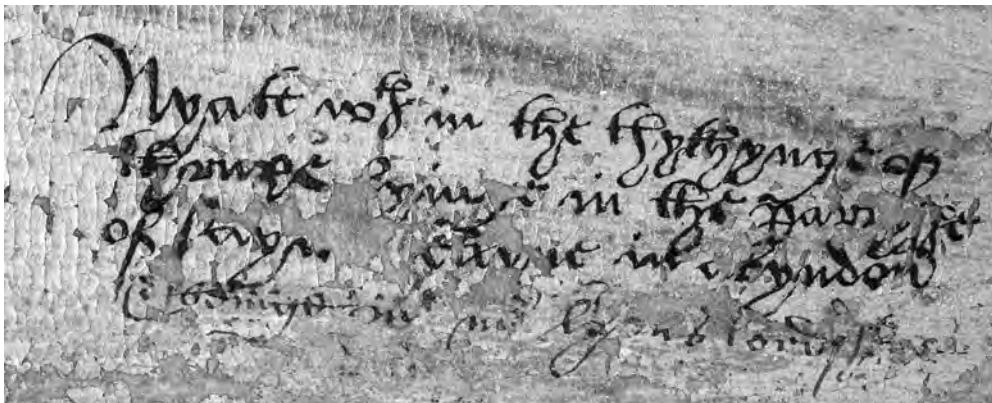


Fig. 12. 'Nyatt wſ in the thythinge of Thrupe lyinge in the parryshe [Elyne?] in Abyndon & beinge in Mr Lyons lordshippe.' The bottom line is in a different hand and is over an erasure. The extent of St Helen's parish was a part of William Blacknall's case in his lawsuits against George Stonehouse c.1570.

the Crown following the attainder of Henry Norris in 1536, but had been sold on and was acquired in 1544 by John Pollard, a lawyer and politician.³² Culham had been granted in 1545 to William Bury, a London merchant. But north of the river the situation was less clear-cut.³³

The manor of Barton had been leased by the abbey to its steward, John Audlet, who died in 1537. His widow Katherine followed him two years later. They had been substantial landowners elsewhere in their own right, and their heir was Thomas Read, a cousin of Katherine's. The manor was granted in 1547 to a large-scale speculator, Sir Richard Lee, from whom Read immediately bought it through an agent. Audlet had also held Radley, and there seems to have been some ambiguity whether the latter manor was in fact an appurtenance of the former, which may account for the prominence given in the first overpainting of the Monks' Map to the boundary between them.³⁴ Radley was granted, also in 1547, to Thomas Seymour, brother of the protector.³⁵ The great complication was the bargain reached with the Court of Augmentations in the same year by another London merchant, John Lyon. The ownership or leasehold of a piece of ground comprised a bundle of rights and entitlements which could be separated, and what Lyon bought was a miscellany taken from the two manors, mainly from Radley: he had Thrupp Green and a couple of eyots in Nyett Ford outright, but elsewhere it was the rentals of certain meadows and closes, the tithes of certain tithings, that would come to him. The tenants concerned would continue to owe manorial services to Radley.³⁶ Such arrangements were remarkably common at the time, and would enrich generations of lawyers. There was certainly litigation between Sir John Lyon (as he had become) and Mistress Read after her husband's death, although the documents are too faded to reveal much detail, and, much later, between Mr John Lyon and the younger Thomas Read over the tenants' rights.³⁷

³² *L&P Hen. VIII*, vol. 19, part 1, p. 277; *VCH Oxon.* 5, p. 241.

³³ *VCH Oxon.* 7, p. 32.

³⁴ *Cal. Pat.* 1547–8, pp. 108, 213; *ibid.* 1548–9, p. 88.

³⁵ *VCH Berks.* 4, pp. 411–12.

³⁶ *Cal. Pat.* 1547–8, pp. 41–2; *VCH Berks.* 4, p. 418.

³⁷ TNA: PRO, C1/1449, nos. 48–50; C3/213/20 (which can be dated from internal evidence to between 1579 and 1587).

THE MONKS' MAP AND THE CONFLICT AT NYETT FORD

We have seen that the Monks' Map probably started as a neutral document intended to help those concerned with the apportionment of lands and entitlements around Abingdon. Quite soon, with overpaintings and annotations, it became one that would support William Blacknall in his desire to control the waters upstream of his mills. While Radley was controlled by absentee manorial lords, Thomas Seymour and after his attainder the princess Elizabeth, the Radley tenants had no choice but to put up with Blacknall's lessee, Richard Tesdale, sending his fishing boats to spread nets across Nyett Ford, and with the constant loss of meadow on the eyots as the waters were penned higher and higher at Abingdon lock to maintain flow to Blacknall's mills. This changed in 1560, when the manor was sold to George Stonehouse, a merchant of the staple and a long-serving financial specialist within the royal household. As a resident landlord, Stonehouse was under pressure to defend the interests of his tenants.³⁸

By 1568, the Radley tenants had built a dam or a causeway at the eastern end of Nyett Ford, to facilitate passage through the increasingly deep waters for men and animals. They then began work on a dam at the western end in the hope of limiting the encroachment of the waters on the eyots. This was a direct challenge to Blacknall, since it would exclude Tesdale's fishermen from his most productive fishing ground. It led to increasingly violent confrontations between the Radley men and Blacknall's and Tesdale's employees, and, by the 1570s, to a series of major court cases in Star Chamber and in the Court of Requests and intense consideration by the Commissioners for Sewers for Oxfordshire and Berkshire.³⁹

The detail of these cases need not concern us here, especially as they seem to have had no effect whatever on the actual situation. But the Monks' Map was probably used in the proceedings, and possibly later as litigation continued. Markings in what has been proved to be graphite show the positions of the causeway and of the dam. These are clearly visible in Fig. 3. Graphite pencils were in common use by the 1570s, after deposits had been found at Borrowdale about 1565.⁴⁰ The markings seem to have been made in haste, perhaps actually during a court session or a meeting with commissioners, since there was a first attempt which was in the wrong place, outside and to the west of the ford, and which was partially erased by scratching out where the marks crossed the river.

The conflict over Nyett Ford was resolved finally in the early seventeenth century, when the Court of Exchequer ruled that the upstream waters had never been validly granted to anyone, and were to be regarded as 'concealed' Crown property. William Blacknall's heirs were able to take a lease on the waters at a reasonable rate.⁴¹ This must be seen in connection with the two charter revisions that Abingdon would be granted in 1610, which admitted to various other 'concealed' properties, and made the control of the upstream waters by the town's corporation unambiguously plain.⁴²

By now, maps were more common and familiar documents than they had been fifty years earlier, and a new map, much smaller and more manageable than the Monks' Map, shows the Blacknall name very prominently along the Thames and in Nyett Ford.⁴³

³⁸ *Cal. Pat. 1558–60*, p. 293.

³⁹ TNA: PRO, STAC5/S76/26, 5/B59/32, 5/B96/5; REQ2/89/51, 2/74/33; LR2/87/51; BRO, D/EP1/T1; Abingdon Town Archives, Verney Deeds 50.

⁴⁰ Anon, *The Arte of Limming* (1573), p. 2; J. Munro, *The Power inside the Pencil: Graphite* (2011), p. 9.

⁴¹ BRO, D/EP7/87, 93.

⁴² Challenor, *Selections*, pp. 42–69. These are, once more, misdated to 1609.

⁴³ Verney Archives, Claydon; Steane, 'Monks' Map', p. 24 and plate 7.

CONCLUSION

The Monks' Map may be dated to the middle years of the sixteenth century and it seems almost certain that it was made by or for Roger Amyce in the course of his duties as county surveyor for Berkshire in the Court of Augmentations. Few dates can be fixed with certainty. We know that the two stages of overpainting must have been complete before the death of Thomas Read in 1556, because he appears in the ink annotations as owner of Stockey Mead (Fig. 11), but what was presumably his name was erased and replaced by that of his widow elsewhere. The labelling was over and therefore later than the painting. If we can accept the depiction of Barton House as realistic rather than conventional, the latest possible date for the earliest state of the map, before any overpainting, is about 1554 when Thomas Read rebuilt the house in stone from the dissolved abbey.

It seems unlikely that any stage of the map predates the arrival of Amyce in 1547. It was only in this year that significant disposals began, and there would have been little incentive earlier for such an elaborate exercise. We know from Blacknall's interrogatory in the Court of Requests in 1570 that Amyce at some time surveyed the river and made a 'platt'. The Monks' Map was certainly well known to Blacknall and probably already in his possession, since the second overpainting was such as to emphasize his case and the graphite markings prove that it was at some time used in connection with the Nyett Ford dispute. It is therefore unlikely that there were two maps and that he was referring to a different one.

The map thus seems to have been made originally because of the legal complications of the disposal of riverside properties, and with an eye to fishing and fowling rights in the rural estates rather than to milling in Abingdon. The overpaintings seem intended as updates, following changes in local preoccupations. Important among these will have been the development of William Blacknall's business plans after 1548. The second overpainting seems particularly designed to support Blacknall's interests, and is likely to be connected to the lawsuit between him, with Amyce's support, and Thomas Reade. The date of this is unrecorded, but it was during the reign of Edward VI who died in July 1553. The map will then have been used intermittently in the long series of further suits concerning Nyett Ford, before eventually being superseded by the later map of the same waterway that remains in the Verney archive at Middle Claydon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Ruth Bubb for discussion of her findings in the examination and restoration of the map; Ruth Bubb and Abingdon Town Council for permission to use their photographs; and Ruth Bubb and Jane Bowen for commenting on this paper in draft. He takes sole responsibility for the interpretations offered here.