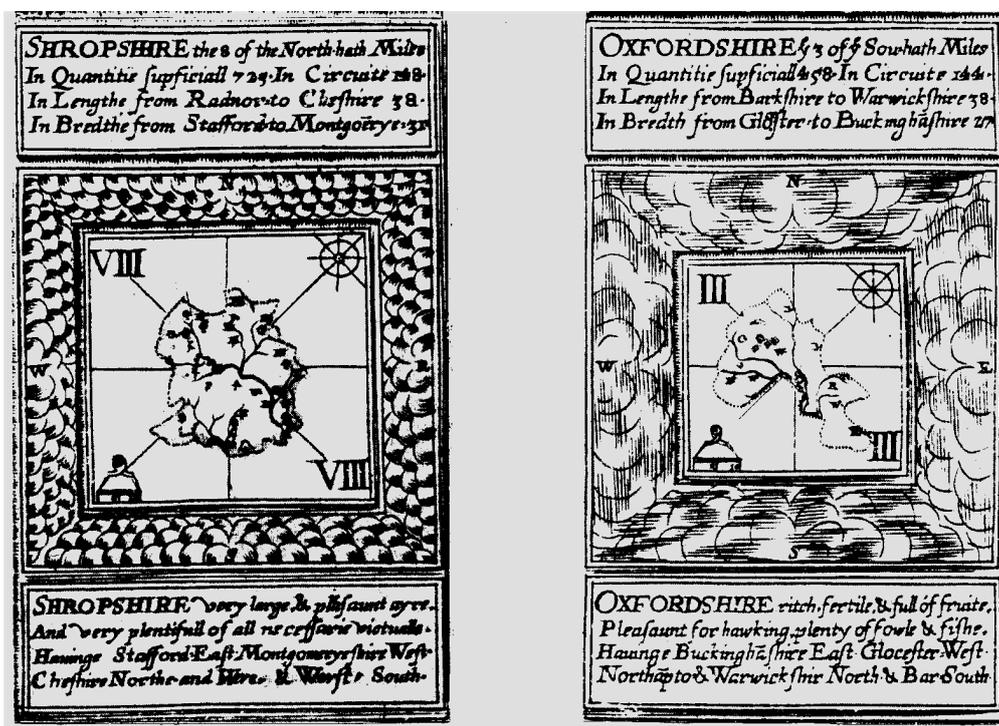


The earliest of the packs of playing cards to feature the fifty-two counties of England and Wales was produced in 1590 by William Bowes. This was also the first geographical pack and the earliest to bear maps of any kind. The sixty cards were engraved on four plates: fifteen to a plate. They are fully described by R.A. Skelton in *County atlases of the British Isles, 1579 - 1703*, London, Carta Press, 1970. The cards measure about 58 x 96 mm. and there are eight extra ones including a plan of London and a dated title-card with initials. There is also a map of England and Wales, which appears to have the abbreviated signature of Augustine Ryther as engraver, on the scale.



The British Museum

The tiny maps are uniform in scale and copied from the general map of England and Wales in Christopher Saxton's famous atlas. The suits are named after the cardinal points of the compass, north, south, east and west, with the cards numbered I-XIII:

*Westorelade; Leicester; Nottingham; Darbyshire; Dvresme; Cheshire; Stafford S; Shropshire; Cumberland; Lancashire; Northumb; Lincolnshire; Yorkshire.*

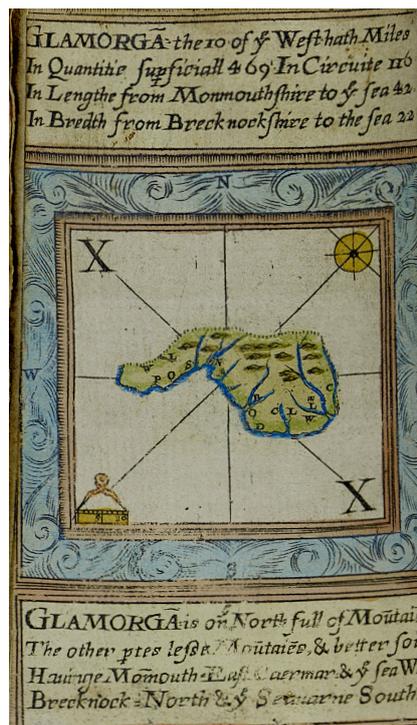
*Barkshire; Worcester; Oxfordshire; Svrrey; Hereford; Dorsetshire; Gloucester; Cornwall; Wiltshire; Sussex; Somerset; Hantshire; Denshire.*

*Rotland S; Middlesex; Hvntingtō; Bedford S; Hartford S; Bvckinghā S; Cambridg S; Northampton S; Warwick S; Suffolke; Kente; Essex; Norfolke.*

*Flinte; Anglesey; Radnor; Monmouth; Denbighe; Carnarvan; Penbroke; Cardigan; Montgomery; Glamorgā; Brecknocke; Merionethe; Carmardé.*

Only a few examples of these cards are known. The Schreiber Collection at the British Museum has a set and the Royal Geographical Society has three of the four plates, lacking the northern counties. A bound set of ten sheets, including these four plates, has a title-page dated 1595 (see below), and is in private ownership.

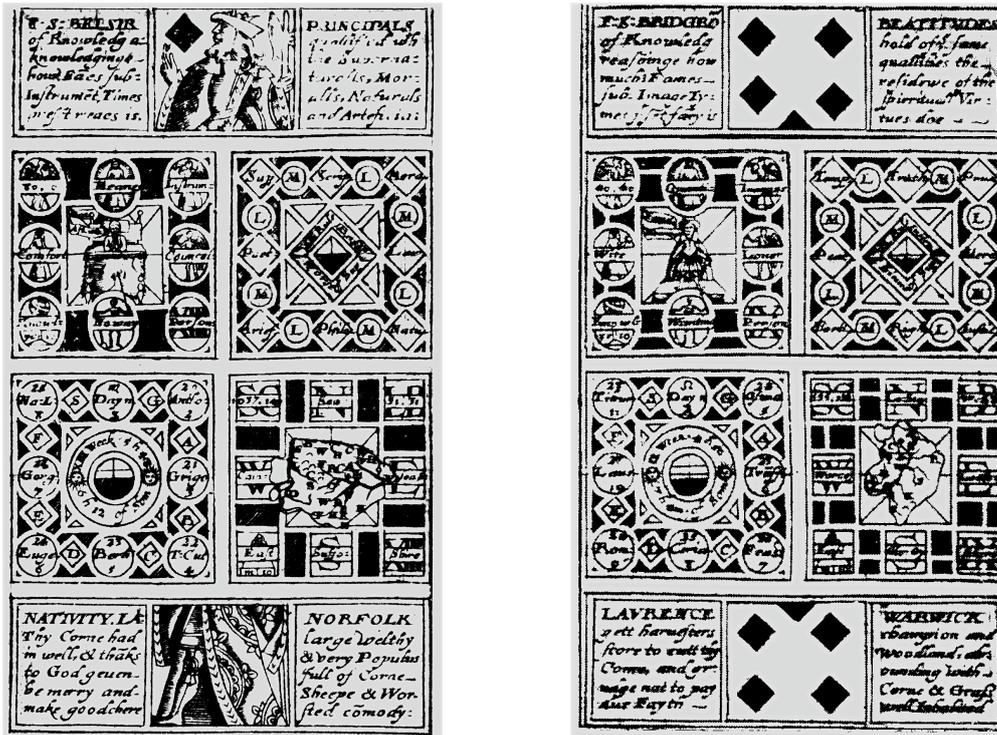
However, a black, leather-bound miniature atlas of the cards (see below) was on sale at the London Map Fair in June 2013 and subsequently acquired by the British Library. The map of England is followed by the counties in suit order: east, south, north and west, and I-XIII. All are in lovely contemporary colour with an inscription inside the front cover: 'Francis Inbroke / A Gift from / his School-fellow / A. Armstrong'.



*Englan: Famous Plac: W. B. inuent.* London, 1590.

*Briefe descriptions shewing the contents of each particuler platt.* London, 1595.

These cards were also described by Sylvia Mann and David Kingsley in *Playing cards depicting maps of the British Isles and of English and Welsh counties* (*Map Collectors' Series*, no: 87, 1972). However, the British Museum Print Room has another rare pack of playing cards by William Bowes, which appears to be a set of proofs on card printer's waste, dating from about 1605.



The British Museum

It is rather doubtful if they were ever published and they are fully described by Sylvia Mann and David Kingsley with thirty-two illustrations. These cards were intended to be educational and contain a vast amount of information, including miniscule county maps. It is likely that they were engraved by William Hole as there are seven extra cards, one with the signature 'W. Hole Sculp'.

