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1. County and Shire.

The study of the geography of a county is not completed by a knowledge of the general character of its rocks and soils, nor even of its chief physical features. Man, during his long struggle with the forces of nature, has not only altered the surface by clearing forests, draining marshes, etc., but has turned large tracts of heath and moorland into rich cornlands and upland pastures. He is still actively engaged in mining rocks below the surface and demolishing hills above it, in order to obtain the motive power for the many factories which he has raised where forest trees once grew, or to procure material for miles of carefully constructed main roads and railway banks, over which to carry produce to distant parts. The whole country side has been altered by man. Great cities have sprung into being where there was once waste land. It is therefore necessary to learn something of the history of a county before we can understand its geography.

English counties often present great irregularity of outline, and Warwickshire is no exception. This irregularity is due to many causes, partly natural, partly

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artificial, but principally to the fact that our counties were not formed simultaneously, nor for similar reasons. Had they been thought out and laid down by rule, it is probable that natural boundaries would have been more uniformly made use of; or, as in the case of the United States, that the counties would have been delimited in rectangles by the surveyor's rod. Even when their bounds had once been decided, they were not free from alterations; indeed such alterations are still taking place whenever new conditions render them necessary. Certain English counties, such as Essex, Kent, or Norfolk, are complete in themselves, the relics of ancient Saxon kingdoms; but others, such as Warwickshire, are but a part of what was originally a far larger tract of country. In the case of our own county this tract was known as the kingdom of Mercia, and owed its origin to the conquests of a leader named Cridda, who became its first king.

The word county (*comté*, the land of a *Comte* or count) is French, and was brought over by the Normans. It was a useful word to express a tract of country treated as a unit for the purposes of administration. This word county to a certain extent displaced the older native word shire, still pronounced by the peasantry shear, a word (from the Anglo-Saxon *sciran*) which meant a portion of land shorn or cut off from a larger whole, as Warwickshire was cut off from Mercia. The word county is used in a geographical sense in such expressions as County Council, County Court, County town, while shire is retained when we have occasion to speak of the Shire Hall or the Sheriff (Shire Reeve). It is therefore quite

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correct to speak of the County of Warwick, or of Warwickshire, but not correct to say the County of Warwickshire.

This idea of cutting up England into counties is said to have been planned by Alfred the Great as a military protection against the Danes. There was to be a county town near the centre of each shire, with a garrison always in readiness to resist a sudden raid, furnished in relays by every town and village in the county. This was called *Burh-bot*. The town chosen often became the capital of the county, and gave its name to it, as in the case of Warwick, Worcester, Gloucester, or Northampton.

The name Warwick was in existence as far back as A.D. 701; but there is no mention of the county before the year 1016, so that it is not at all likely that our county was formed by Alfred. It is more probably the work of Edward the Elder, and resulted from his victory over the Danes. The meaning of Warwick (Waerinc Wicum) is village of the Waerings.

2. General Characteristics.

Warwickshire lies a little west of the centre of England, and is therefore entirely an inland district. It possesses at the present day no navigable river, though at one time, not very remote, barges from the Severn were able to unload at Stratford-on-Avon.

The county is enclosed by low hills along its western

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and south-western borders, and a series of raised uplands of varied character cover the greater part of its northern area. To much of this the term plateau has been applied, but it is in no sense a tableland. On the east the valley of the Avon widens into a broad plain, which is nearly a

Typical Warwickshire Scenery

(*Arlscote—the north-eastern corner of the Edge Hills*)

uniform level, watered by numerous small streams; and on the extreme south-eastern border the Edge Hills divide the county from Oxfordshire.

The greater part of the northern half is richly wooded, and it possesses beautiful parks and wide stretches of pasture land. The wooded character of this portion led

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the older writers to describe it under the name of the Forest of Arden, although there was no legal or technical forest in the county except such portions of the Forest of Feckenham as strayed over from Worcestershire to the banks of the Arrow. It was also known as the Weldon, in contradistinction to the portion south of the Avon called the Feldon, which was less well wooded. In the far north Sutton Park or Chace still retains the wild character which its latter name suggests.

The forest-like character of the landscape is found wherever the Keuper marl forms the subsoil, and in these districts the oak and ash, our noblest native trees, flourish. In other districts they are replaced by the introduced elm, a beautiful tree in early summer, but assuming later a sombre hue which gives a somewhat gloomy look to the country-side.

In the past the county formed part of a second line of defence, designed as a protection from Welsh marauders; the first line depending upon the moral and religious influence of the great monasteries of Gloucestershire and Worcestershire more than upon force of arms. But behind the chain of religious houses ran another chain of strong military posts, of which our Warwickshire Castles, Tamworth, Kenilworth, and Warwick, are the most important, probably all of them dating from the foundation of the Mercian Kingdom, and thrown up as outposts of Mercia in the struggle with the Danes.

The central position of the county made it the Belgium of medieval England. Troops passed and re-passed through it from the wars of Stephen and Maud to

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the northern march of the Duke of Cumberland, but it was never called upon to resist any invasion from Wales. In its earliest days a chain of camps ran along its hill-tops, or defended important posts by the principal fords; and possibly on the north the primeval forest offered an even stronger defence until the Romans penetrated it, and cut roadways through it.

The greater portion of its surface is now farmed as pasture, and agricultural pursuits occupy the time and energy of its people, save only in the north of the county, where the presence of valuable coal-seams and other minerals have caused the vast industrial development of the cities of Birmingham and Coventry and the towns of Atherstone and Nuneaton, while Rugby in the east forms a detached centre of commercial activity.

Much of the county is marked by the red soil of the Keuper, and this, when newly ploughed, glows in the spring sunshine as vividly as vermilion and lends a rich warmth to the landscape. The homes of the people are also warm in colour. The older houses are constructed largely of timber, wherever that material was plentiful, but in the south they gradually assume the Cotswold character, being built of yellow lias and oolite which becomes richly toned with lichen, while the thatched roofs of the north are replaced by stone tiles.

The industrial portion is becoming more and more a land of villas wherein the wealthier traders of the great cities dwell. These are usually brick-built with roofs of machine-made tiles and are not as yet objects of beauty, though they evince no inconsiderable sign of prosperity.

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Cottage at Upton-in-Haselor
(*a half-timbered house*)

The Falcon Inn, Bidford
(*a stone-built house*)

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3. Size. Shape. Boundaries.

The county lies between 51° 57′ 30″ and 52° 42′ north latitude and between 1° 7′ 30″ and 1° 56′ 40″ west longitude. It has a total length of some 52 miles from Newton Regis in the north to Long Compton in the south, and from the outskirts of Redditch on the west to Hillmorton on the east it is about 33 miles in width. The very irregular boundaries cover a length of about 200 miles, exclusive of a small separated portion of the county lying on the south-west which is eight miles in length by three in width. The Geographical County has an area of 902 square miles, or 577,462 acres. It is therefore larger than Cambridgeshire, but smaller than Dorsetshire, the counties nearest to it in size.

In shape Warwickshire somewhat resembles a pear with its broad end to the north. Its outline, however, is broken on its western side by two deep indentations formed by portions of Worcestershire; one of these runs in a north-easterly direction towards Coleshill; the other, which is much narrower, in a south-easterly direction towards Henley-in-Arden. Two portions are outlying parts of Gloucestershire parishes—Bickmarsh, a hamlet of Welford-upon-Avon, and Milcote, a hamlet of Weston-upon-Avon. The former is separated from its mother parish by some miles. In 1842 two detached parishes, also belonging to Gloucestershire, were added to Warwickshire, namely Little Compton, and the island of Sutton-under-Brailes, which anciently belonged to Westminster

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Abbey and was reckoned with its other properties outside the county. In the same year Tutnal and Cobley, Warwickshire hamlets, were transferred to Worcestershire, and other insignificant changes have since taken place.

The county is bounded on the north-east by Leicestershire, on the east by Northamptonshire, on the south-east by Oxfordshire, on the south-west by Gloucestershire, on the west by Worcestershire, and on the north-west by the county of Stafford. The boundary line follows at times natural features, at others the course of an early road, but more often its course is very irregular, and to appearance without definite plan.

Starting from No Man's Heath at the north it follows an irregular course to the river Anker, with which it coincides from near Grendon to Mancetter. Thence to its most easterly point, save for a little space near Nuneaton, the Watling Street serves to bound it for a distance of 21 miles. It then follows one of the tributaries of the Leam to the neighbourhood of Willoughby, and, crossing the Oxford Canal a little beyond, rises on to the high ground in the neighbourhood of Shuckburgh. It retains this elevated position to the extreme southern end of the county, except at one or two places, averaging a height of between 400 and 700 feet, and pursuing a general S.S.W. direction. In its course it passes the Three Shire Stones near Wormleighton, includes the *massif* of the Edge Hills and the beautiful seat of Compton Wynyates, crosses at Pitch Hill the road from Banbury to Shipston-upon-Stour, and takes a straight and almost southerly course for some five miles towards Great

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Rollright village. This, however, together with the remarkable Neolithic circle known as Rollright Stones, it just avoids, leaving them in Oxfordshire, and a mile or two beyond reaches its most southerly point, which is on the road connecting Banbury with Stow-on-the-Wold, about five miles from the latter town. The boundary now turns northwards, and we approach Moreton-in-the-Marsh, at about a mile to the east of which is the Four Shire Stone, where Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, and part of Worcestershire meet. From this landmark the boundary is again irregular to Nethercot Brook, which it follows until it joins its waters to the Stour at Burmington. The line then lies along the Stour to Ettington, when it turns inland to give place to Worcestershire. This county in turn gives way for a brief space to a Gloucestershire parish (Preston) when Warwickshire for a time takes possession of both banks of the river, to be ousted by the Gloucestershire parish of Clifford, which later gives way to Stratford-on-Avon.

When Worcestershire passes the Stour, Warwickshire crosses over to form a considerable island, embracing the parishes of Ilmington, Whitchurch, and Stretton-on-the-Fosse.

The right bank of the Avon mainly forms the boundary from Stratford to Salford Priors: thence to Weethley Cross no natural feature delimits it, but at that point it touches the Ridgeway and follows the road nearly to Redditch, after which it is again irregular until it meets the river Cole at Coleshill. It then bends round

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