

## 1. County and Shire. The Origin of Renfrewshire.

The modern county is a political unit. It is the division of a kingdom administered by a sheriff, and this system dates back at least as far as the reign of David I (1124–1153). All such divisions may be called *counties*, but it is only to some of them that the name *shire* can be applied. Caithness and Sutherland, for example, are counties, but not shires, while Renfrew may be called either shire or county. An explanation of the names makes this distinction clear. The word *shire* is said to be allied to *share* and *shear*, and consequently to the Anglo-Saxon *sceran*—to cut. It would therefore mean a piece cut off. Professor Skeat, however, now derives *shire* from Anglo-Saxon *scirian*—to distribute, appoint. The shires were portions of a kingdom which were originally governed by the great earls of the country, who in many cases took their titles from the districts they ruled. Renfrewshire was a part of the old kingdom of Strathclyde. When William I had conquered England, many of the English earls were dispossessed of their lands, which were given to William's companions or *comites*. Each district was

therefore called a *comitatus*, or, in its French form, *comté*, from which we get the word *county*. The counties of Caithness and Sutherland were in the hands of the Scandinavian Earls of Orkney (whence the name Southern Land), until the very end of the twelfth century, when they were subdued by William the Lion. When they became attached to the kingdom of Scotland the Norman terms were already in use, and therefore the Anglo-Saxon name does not apply to them.

Although the counties are divisions administered by the sheriffs of a king, their evolution has been a complex process. They are the final results of a long series of adjustments between different forces. The king, the church, the nobles, and in modern times the burghs, were centres of segregation that tended to group the community in different ways. Thus it happens that there is still a considerable amount of overlapping and confusion in the administrative divisions, not only of Renfrewshire, but of all the counties of Scotland. Yet working through all these discordant forces, the geographical factor is visible. The physical characteristics of a district have directed the other forces, and moulded the political divisions in harmony with natural regions. Of this fact Renfrewshire is a good example. It is hardly so complete a geographical unit as Lanarkshire, which comprises simply the upper and middle Clyde basin, but its boundaries have a well-defined geographical basis. The point at which a large river becomes too wide to be bridged is of prime importance. The stream of traffic down the valley divides here, and the up-river trade

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coalesces at this point. Hence a large town often grows up at such a place, and, at this place also, counties often terminate. Such is the case with the Clyde. Lanarkshire ends just where the river becomes too wide to be bridged conveniently. Above this point the banks of the river are embraced by one county. Below it, the river forms the boundary between Renfrew and Dumbarton.

The southern boundary is also in the main a natural one. A broad ridge of flat-topped, volcanic hills runs from south-east to north-west, separating Lanarkshire from Ayrshire. A continuation of the same ridge separates the latter county from Renfrewshire. The ridge is broken through by the Loch Libo valley and by the Lochwinnoch valley, but it keeps on its course and reaches its highest point in Hill of Stake on the borders of Renfrew and Ayr. The eastern boundary is a compromise between Lanark and Renfrew, in other words, a line approximately separating the middle from the lower basin of the Clyde.

Originally there was no such separation. Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire were one. William Hamilton of Wishaw, writing about 1710, tells us that "The shyre of Lanark was anciently of greater extent than now it is; for there was comprehended in it the whole sheriffdom of Ranfrew, lying laigher upon Clyde...untill it was disjoyned therefra by King Robert the Third, in anno 1402." Since then the changes in the boundaries of Renfrewshire have been geographically of little moment. Twenty years ago the Boundary Commissioners transferred certain areas from one parish to another, in some instances from one county to another, in order to rectify anomalies of

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administration, but these changes were not of great importance save from the administrative point of view. The name Renfrew is said to be derived from *rhyn*—a point of land, and *frew*—the flowing of water; there are, however, other explanations of the word. The district was formerly called Strathgryfe from the name of one of its most important rivers.

## 2. General Characteristics — Position and Relations.

Of all the counties of the west of Scotland, there is only one that is entirely within the Lowlands, and this one is Renfrew. By this it is not meant that the whole shire is low-lying. Far from it. A large proportion of the total area is hilly, but the hills are of the “Lowland” type. This paradox requires further explanation.

There are in Scotland three well-marked natural divisions, the Highlands, the Central Lowlands, and the Southern Uplands; and these three districts differ strongly in physical aspect, in rocks, in scenery, in vegetation, and in industries. The Central Lowlands are separated from the Highlands by a line running from north-east to south-west, between Stonehaven and Helensburgh; they are separated from the Southern Uplands by an almost parallel line, running from St Abb’s Head to Girvan. Dumbarton, Lanark, Ayr, Bute, all are crossed by one or other of these two lines; Renfrew alone falls entirely between them. These lines mark the course of two great faults or cracks,

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which traverse the whole country, and between which the land has gradually sunk for thousands of feet. This sinking of the central part of Scotland took place many ages before man appeared on the earth ; yet it may be considered the most important stage in the evolution of Scotland, for it preserved the all-important coalfields of



Types of Hills: Highland Type (Loch Long and Loch Goil)

the Lowlands, on which the prosperity of the country largely depends. The Central Lowlands of Scotland are not only the most fertile part of the country, but by far the greatest proportion of the mining and the manufactures is carried on there. It has thus become a district unique in Great Britain, for it possesses the characteristics of at least three separate parts of England—the south-eastern

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plain devoted to agriculture, the “Black Country” with its coal and iron industries, and Lancashire with its cotton manufactures.

The hills of the Central Lowlands—Sidlaws, Ochils, Pentlands, Campsies, Kilpatricks, Kilbarchans—are all of a similar kind (the “Lowland” type above referred to), and differ markedly both from those of the Highlands,



Types of Hills: Southern Upland Type (the Lowthers)

and from those of the Southern Uplands. As will be shown more fully in the section on Geology, this difference is due to the nature of the rocks. From an elevated spot within the Highlands there is revealed on all sides a bewildering chaos of mountain and valley. As a rule this tumbled sea of peaks rises into bare rock, sometimes rugged, splintered, and pinnacled, sometimes upheaving a huge,

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rounded shoulder of rock terminating in an abrupt precipice. In the Southern Uplands the wildness, ruggedness, and grandeur of the Highlands as a rule are absent, for the outlines of the hills are generally smooth and rounded; yet there is a pure and softly flowing sweep of contour, and a charm of delicate colour about these green and treeless summits, found nowhere else in Scotland. The



**Types of Hills: Lowland Type (looking across  
Castle Semple Loch)**

Lowland hills consist of large, irregular masses of volcanic rocks. They are table-lands, something less than 2000 feet above sea-level, with undulating surfaces, rising into no prominent peaks, and thus differing from both the other types. As a rule the sides of these hills rise very steeply from the low ground, but once the top is gained,

one can walk for many miles over bare moorland, the surface rising or falling within the limits of a hundred feet or so. All the hills of Renfrewshire are of this kind.

The position of Renfrewshire on the western slope of Scotland was at first a disadvantage. For a long time the eastern coastal plain was by far the most important part of the country. The commerce of Europe to a large extent was carried on in the districts bordering the North Sea. The face of the county was thus turned away from the chief commercial centres; but the progress of civilisation in its westward march, particularly the development of American trade, has shifted the centre of gravity of commerce to the shores of the Atlantic, and thus the geographical position of Renfrewshire at the present time is one of its most important advantages.

Although the mineral wealth of Renfrew is not of great value, the county shared in the phenomenal growth of Scottish industrial centres during the last century and a half. It is near enough the rich coalfields of Lanarkshire to participate in the prosperity that came with their development. The banks of the Clyde with their easy access to the sea, and their proximity to valuable coal and iron fields, formed an ideal home for the ship-building industry, and in this branch of trade Renfrewshire is an easy first, claiming yearly about half the total tonnage of the river. Yet it must not be forgotten that of itself the county could not have attained this industrial eminence. It must obtain its supplies of coal, iron, and steel elsewhere, but this consideration only serves to throw into



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stronger relief the energy, the skill, and the enterprise that brought the county to the front in spite of the disadvantages it laboured under in its lack of mineral wealth.

But Renfrew is by no means purely a manufacturing county. Its pursuits are numerous and well-balanced. Agriculture and shipping complete the trinity of its most important interests. The county falls naturally into two main divisions, hilly and low-lying, and the former is of no industrial importance. The low ground may be subdivided again into three parts, a broad flat area in the east, submerged below the waters of the Clyde in comparatively recent times; a narrow coastal strip bordering the hills on the north and west (an old sea beach in fact), and lastly the open valleys of the interior. It makes for clearness to think of the first of these districts as the home of manufactures, the second of the shipping trade, the third of agriculture. Of course in nature, divisions are never absolutely sharp; and thus manufactures and agriculture are found to some extent over all the lowlands of the shire.

### **3. Size of County. Boundaries.**

Although in many respects Renfrewshire can more than hold its own among the counties of Scotland, in size it takes a very humble place. It ranks twenty-seventh among the thirty-three counties of Scotland. The largest shire, Inverness, is more than seventeen times the size of

Renfrew; and yet it is a striking fact that Inverness contains only about one-third the population of the smaller county. Renfrewshire is an irregular oblong, the longer axis of which lies roughly north-west and south-east. From Cloch Point to the south-east extremity of the county between Carse Hill and Laird's Seat the length is a little over 30 miles, while the greatest breadth from Kilbirnie Loch to Erskine Ferry is over 13 miles. The total area, including foreshore and inland water, is about 250 square miles.

In the main the boundaries are simple and formed by important geographical features. Roughly speaking, the northern boundary is the Clyde, the eastern is the White Cart, the southern is the watershed of the volcanic hills that run from south-east to north-west, and the western boundary is the Firth of Clyde. We shall next trace the boundary in some detail beginning at Greenock. From that town to Yoker Burn the boundary is the natural and obvious one formed by the broad waters of the Clyde. Then strange to say the boundary runs up the Yoker Burn *north* of the Clyde, passes east to Temple, turns south through Anniesland and along Crow Road to Jordanhill Station, then south-west to the Clyde again at the old Marline Ford. This little, detached part of the county, left stranded on the north side of the Clyde, will later be discussed in more detail. Crossing to the south side of the Clyde the boundary strikes west along an old channel of the river. On reaching the outskirts of Renfrew the line doubles back sharply, and runs south-east, passing just to the south of Craigton Cemetery.