
It has been well said that our national history is made up of local history, and that our knowledge of the history of England as a whole will be all the better if we learn something of the way in which the English kingdoms were formed. This will help us to understand the relation which our modern divisions bear to the ancient ones. These modern divisions are named counties and shires, and we call one Kent and another Staffordshire. In the latter instance, we note the affix shire, while in the former there is not this special ending. Let us endeavour to find out the reason for this difference, and we shall then be in a better position to understand the origin of the county of Kent in the early days of our history.

Look carefully at a map of England and make a list of the divisions that end in shire. It may at once be said that these are portions or shares of a larger division. Thus Staffordshire was once a part of Mercia, one of the great kingdoms in early English days. Again Berkshire and Gloucestershire were formerly parts of Wessex,

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KENT

another English kingdom. Now look at the map and pick out the divisions that do not end in shire. Of these it may generally be said that they are the survivals of the old English kingdoms, which have kept their former extent and in some cases their original names.

Perhaps we could not take two better counties than Sussex and Kent to illustrate this fact. Both these counties were originally kingdoms and have retained their boundaries and names from the earliest times when the Saxons and Jutes came to settle in England.

The history of England tells us that our English forefathers divided our land into several kingdoms, of which Kent and Sussex were two; so that, for fourteen hundred years, these two counties have kept the names that they now bear. That is a very remarkable fact, and one of the deepest interest for us who are going to read about the geography of Kent. History and geography have a very close connexion at times, and here the one subject helps to illustrate the other.

The very word Kent has a history that carries us back to a period before the invasion of Julius Caesar. While most of our present English counties have English names, Kent stands almost alone in bearing one of Keltic origin. This fact bears witness to its antiquity, and leads us to understand that there is much in a name. Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Sussex and Middlesex are all good English words whose meaning is evident at a glance. But with Kent the case is entirely different, and one has to learn a good deal of history to know how it got its name and why it has kept its name.
COUNTY AND SHIRE

Pytheas, who lived about 350 B.C., was one of the earliest explorers who visited our land, and he mentions Cantion as one of the places he visited. Ptolemy, who flourished about 150 A.D., and was one of the greatest of ancient geographers speaks of Cantium, which may be said, roughly, to be represented by the modern Kent. In those early times we may safely say that the Kelts were living in England, and so it comes about that Kent is derived from Caint, a Keltic word meaning the open country, and was given to the long slip of land lying along the sea-shore and the Thames.

In the English Chronicle, Caint becomes Cantwara land and Cent, and in the Domesday Book it is written Chenth. In later histories it takes the form Kent, as you see it on the map of England at the present time. There is one other fact of interest that may be mentioned. Kent has two cathedral cities—Canterbury and Rochester—and this probably arose because, in early English times, it was subdivided into two kingdoms—East and West Kent. Canterbury was the capital of East Kent, and its name Cant-wara-byrig means “the town of the men of Kent.” The Archbishop of Canterbury signs his name Cantuarius, which is simply a contraction of Cantuariensis the Latinised title of the See.

It is generally admitted that Kent is one of the most interesting of our English counties, and there are many reasons why this county should be the first to be noticed in studying the geography of England.

Kent has been the scene of some of the most noteworthy events in our history, about which we shall read in later chapters. Here it may be mentioned that it was the first English landing-place of Julius Caesar and his Roman army; Hengest and Horsa, the leaders of the Jutes, first conquered Kent and settled in it; and, at a later date, Augustine first set foot in Kent to Christianise it.

Again, Kent is the land first seen by the majority of visitors from the Continent, and they travel through the “Royal” county to reach the metropolis. Kent may be regarded as the corner-stone of the kingdom, guarding it with chalk cliffs, “the white walls of old England.”

The broad estuary of the Thames, washing its northern shore, is covered with vessels that carry to London the riches of all parts of the world, while Kent itself has numerous ports that have a large and increasing trade. Thus we see that Kent has the first claim on our attention, because of its importance in our national history, and also owing to its favourable situation for trade and commerce.

Kent is a maritime county in the south-east of England. It is nearer to France than any other portion of England,
and the Strait of Dover is only about 20 miles across at its narrowest part. The extent of the Kentish coast-line is considerable, and measuring both the open sea-board and the estuary of the Thames and Medway, there is a total length of water-line of about 140 miles.

Kent is one of our agricultural counties, and has always been famous for its corn and hops, apples and cherries, sheep and deer. It has been well named the “Garden” county, and a French visitor to England, more than 200 years ago, remarked that the grass seemed to be finer and of a better colour than elsewhere. After a long and glowing account of Kent, he thus concludes, “The eye cannot but be much delighted with the natural and even neglected beauty of the country, and the English have reason to value it.”

In every way Kent has great advantages as an agricultural county. Its soil is fertile; its climate is equable; and there are special facilities, both by land and water, for carrying its produce to suitable markets.

The north-western portion of Kent is now part of the county of London, and in this small area is a large industrial population, who either work in the metropolis or gain their livelihood in the boroughs of Deptford, Greenwich, Woolwich, or Lewisham.

We know how the position of Great Britain as the centre of the land hemisphere has affected its history, and made it the greatest maritime nation. In a similar way, we may attribute the wealth and prosperity of Kent to its fine position, its nearness to the Continent, its length of coast, and its fertility of soil. Kent may be con-
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sidered as one of the windows through which England looks into the great world.

The scenery of Kent is very varied, and shows a pleasing succession of hill and dale. There are many interesting points of view in the county, and fine prospects will charm the spectator who stands on Dover cliffs, on Shooter’s Hill, near London, or on the hill behind the little church of St Martin’s, Canterbury.

Shakespeare Cliff, Dover

Kent, which occupies the south-eastern extremity of England, may be considered a peninsula with two promontories. The northern promontory is formed by Foreness and the North Foreland, while the southern promontory is Dungeness.

The length of the county is 64 miles, if measured from London to the North Foreland, and the breadth, measured from the North Foreland to Dungeness, is 38 miles. The circumference of the county is about 170 miles, and this encloses an area of 995,014 acres or 1554 sq. miles.

In point of size, Kent is the ninth English county, and embraces an area about one thirty-third of the whole of England. It is interesting to note that Kent is a little larger than Essex, rather smaller than Somerset, and more than twice as large as any other county in the Thames basin.

If we compare the shape of Kent with that of other English counties, we shall find that it is more compact, and is roughly the shape of a quadrilateral.

The boundaries of Kent on the north are the estuary of the Thames and the North Sea, while on the east and south-east the county is bounded by the North Sea, Strait of Dover, and the English Channel. On the west, Kent is bordered by Surrey, and on the south-west by Sussex and the river Rother. It will thus be seen that on the
SIZE SHAPE BOUNDARIES

west and south-west the boundaries are mainly artificial, while on the other sides they are natural.

There is one peculiarity connected with Kent that may be noticed in this chapter. A part of Kent is situated in Essex, and is known as North Woolwich. There are other counties where the same thing occurs, but it is very difficult to get a satisfactory explanation of this fact. Why a portion of Kent should be in Essex has given rise to many theories, none of which is entirely acceptable. Perhaps this isolated portion of Kent in Essex dates from the time when Essex and Kent formed one kingdom. When the separation came about, it was probably arranged, for some reason or other, that Kent should resume its former territory plus this district in Essex. One of our historians gives what is probably the best reason for part of Kent being in Essex. He says that Count Haimo, Sheriff of Kent in William the Conqueror’s reign, had land on both sides of the river at Woolwich, and in this way the property on the north bank in Essex became included in the county of Kent.

There are also some parishes that have outlying portions in other parishes. It is given as an explanation that as some of these isolated spots are in the centres of forests, or in places where there were forests in ancient times, the inhabitants of the lowland, or open land, had parts of forests given them for purposes of fuel; and that when the trees were cut down, and the place left bare in the middle of the forest, they claimed that land as part of their own parish.

It has now been settled, by Act of Parliament, that
these outlying portions may be joined with the district in which they are situated, if both parties interested in the locality are agreed to the amalgamation.

4. Surface and General Features.

We shall understand the succeeding chapters in the geography of Kent all the better if we first get a good idea of the chief features of its surface. The surface of Kent is quite English in character, for, although there are no mountains or hills of any height, there is considerable variety in its physical features. There are marshlands along the Thames and also in the south;