1. County and Shire. Meaning and Origin of the name Carnarvonshire.

*Shire* is an Old English word which has long been used to denote a large division of the country, *sborn off* or separated by boundaries from the rest of the land. It is a *share*, to use another related word, of a wider area. From it is derived the Welsh word *str*, for which the equivalent *swydd* is sometimes found, denoting first, office, and then, the sphere within which an office is exercised.

Previous to the Norman Conquest of England, shire was the English term regularly used. The Normans, however, brought with them the name *county*, signifying the district ruled over by a count, and applied this to the shire, which they took to be a very similar institution. Hence it is that we speak indifferently of Carnarvonshire or the County of Carnarvon, of the Shire Hall and of the County Council. The two terms now have precisely the same meaning.

Carnarvonshire is the county which has its centre in the town of Carnarvon on the Menai Straits. The town has a much longer history than the shire, for there was a fort here, near Llanbeblig church, in Roman times, and it

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CARNARVONSHIRE

is this which the name commemorates. Carnarvon is properly “Y Gaer yn Arfon,” the fort in Arvon, i.e. in the region fronting Anglesey.

All the shires of Wales are of much later origin than those of England. In the days of Welsh independence, the country was divided into cantrefs and commotes, each of much smaller extent than the English shire. The turning of Wales into “shire ground” was a part of the process of conquest. Carnarvonshire belongs to the earlier of the two sets of Welsh counties, namely, those constituted by Edward I after his defeat of Llywelyn, the last native Prince of Wales. It came into existence in March 1284, as the result of the Statute of Rhuddlan, sometimes known as the Statute of Wales. By this act three Welsh cantrefs and two commotes were grouped together under the Sheriff of Carnarvon and a new county was created.

2. General Characteristics. Position and Natural Conditions.

Mountains and the sea have made Carnarvonshire what it is, and have given it a character of its own that is hardly matched by any other county in Southern Britain. It has the longest coast-line of any Welsh county with the exception of Pembroke, and its mountains reach a height not attained elsewhere south of the Tweed. These are the natural features which made it in the Middle Ages the “strength of Venedotia” (cadernid Gwynedd), a sure retreat in time of invasion, and, with
the adjacent isle of Anglesey, which it protected from attack, the chief seat of the power of the princes of North Wales. An expedition into Snowdon, as the English then styled the whole district, was a hazardous affair and, until Edward I used his fleet to second the efforts of his army, usually had little result.

The county shares the mild and humid climate of the western coast of Great Britain and this, with the great extent of upland which it contains, has from the earliest times made it a region of pastoral rather than agricultural pursuits. The pastures of Eryri, or Snowdonia, were of wide renown in the time of Giraldaus Cambrensis, who says that they were reputed sufficient to feed all the
4  

CARNARVONSHIRE

flocks and herds of Wales. While the district has its craggy heights and desolate moors, it has also rich valley bottoms like Nant Ffrancon and the Vale of Nantlle, affording the best of herbage. It still, notwithstanding the changes effected by modern agriculture, preserves its character as a stock-raising country, and such crops as are grown are chiefly subsidiary to this end. The annual yield of wheat is very small, but a fair quantity of barley and turnips is raised for feeding purposes, while the crop of oats is considerable. Little more than one seventh of the surface of the county is under any kind of cultivation, the rest being grass land, moor, rock, marsh, scrub, and woodland.

Carnarvonshire is, in respect of situation, an essentially maritime county, but it has never been remarkable for its seaboard industries. Neither its seaports nor its fisheries have ever been important elements in the development of the district, though the rise of slate quarrying has of late led to the opening of new ports and somewhat helped the growth of the old. History shows, in fact, that the Welshman has not, as a rule, taken kindly to the sea. In spite of its persistent beating at his gates, he has always regarded it as a strange and mysterious thing, best left to itself, and he has never cared to reap from it the harvest of food which it yields to the adventurous mariner. No doubt the want of good natural harbours has been a further handicap in Carnarvonshire, for much of the coast is rocky and inhospitable, but this will not entirely explain the comparative lack of sea-faring enterprise, which has its origin in deep-seated racial habits.
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The mountain, on the other hand, is the natural home of the Welshman and, while he has always roamed over it freely in the character of shepherd, he has of late come to still closer quarters with it as quarryman and miner. The mineral wealth of Carnarvonshire is very great, and during the nineteenth century the slate and granite quarries of the county have placed it in a new position as one of the leading industrial areas of Great Britain. Bethesda, Llanberis, and Nantlle annually produce great quantities of roofing slates; quarried, split, and dressed by a race of workmen whose skill is hereditary, and who have an honourable reputation throughout Wales for industry, thrift, intelligence, and love of learning. The quarry district extends across the county boundary to Festiniog in Merionethshire, with an outlier at Corris at the other end of that county. It is, industrially, the salient feature of North-west Wales and its influence is felt in every movement affecting the Welsh-speaking community, whether it be religious, literary, or educational.

Since the romantic movement at the end of the eighteenth century awoke men to an appreciation of the wilder beauties of nature, North Wales, and in particular Carnarvonshire, has been recognised as one of the most beautiful and attractive regions in the British Isles. It is not the mere height of its mountains, considerable as these are, which has drawn the sightseer to this region, but the rich variety of natural forms, the contrast of wood, rock, and water, picturesquely thrown together, as seen for instance in Nant Gwynant and at Bettws y Coed.
6 CARNARVONSHIRE

Tourists at first came on foot or by coach; and since the opening of the Chester and Holyhead railway the locomotive has brought them in ever-increasing numbers, until the August invasion of visitors, doubling for the time being the population of the coast towns, has now become a feature of the first importance in the life of the district.

Bettws y Coed

In Carnarvonshire the new towns of Llandudno, Penmaenmawr, and Llanfairfechan have been created by this passion for mountaineering and sea-bathing, while many of the remote hamlets of Lleyn are beginning to find their profit in the letting of summer lodgings, as the lover of solitary landscape is driven further and further afield by the bustle of the more frequented resorts.
SIZE SHAPe BOUNDARIES


Carnarvonshire forms so striking a feature of the map of Wales that one is hardly prepared to find that it is one of the smallest of Welsh counties. Its area, including lakes and streams, but excluding tidal estuaries and land between low and high water mark, is 365,930 acres—a figure which makes it the ninth Welsh county in respect of size, surpassing only Anglesey and Flintshire in the north and Radnorshire in the south. It is most nearly approached in dimensions by Pembrokeshire, which, like it, sends out arms into the western seas and so gives an impression of extent not warranted by actual measurement.
CARNARVONSHIRE

Among English counties, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire are nearest to it in area; it exceeds Middlesex, Rutland, and Huntingdonshire. Its greatest length is from the headland of Braich y Pwll in Lleyn to Penrhyn Bay near Llandrillo, a distance of about 55 miles; lines running north and south are much shorter, the longest being that from the Great Orme’s Head to Migneint mountain, which is 25 miles, and that from Bangor to Portmadoc, amounting to 20.

The county is of well-marked shape, projecting for some 25 miles from the north-west corner of the Welsh mainland in a south-westerly direction and ending with a kind of snout at Braich y Pwll, off which lies the isle of Bardsey, the westernmost point of North Wales. Its long and tapering lines suggest the head of a greyhound, with ears at Llandudno, eyes near Carnarvon, and nostrils at Aberdaron. The river Conway makes a silver collar and the Hiraethog region a sturdy neck.

Formed out of ancient Welsh tribal divisions, Carnarvonshire has, for the most part, natural boundaries clearly marking it off from the neighbouring counties. North, west, and south, it is hemmed in by the sea, its lengthy coast-line stretching from the mouth of the Conway to that of the Glaslyn. The channel known as the Menai Straits, which for twelve miles winds between it and Anglesey, is narrow, and in places less than a quarter of a mile across, but the salt water sweeps it from end to end at all states of the tide. On the eastern side the main body of the county is separated from Denbighshire by the river Conway, a noble river flowing through a
SIZE SHAPE BOUNDARIES

well-defined strath into a wide estuary. It is only in the south-east corner, where the county abuts upon Merionethshire, that the boundary needs more careful definition, and even here it follows natural features. Running up the Glaslyn to Cerrig y Rhwydwr it then keeps the course of the Dylif to the cliffs of Yr Arddu. From this point its line is that of the watershed, passing over the tops of Cynicht, Moel Druman, Moel Farlwyd, Moel Penamnen, and Y Gamallt to the meeting place on the moorland of Migneint of the three shires of Carnarvon, Denbigh, and Merioneth.

1 The district between the Dylif and Llyn Dinas, being the hamlet of Namnor in the parish of Beddgelert, was transferred from the county of Merioneth to that of Carnarvon in 1888.
CARNARVONSHIRE

Three small portions of the county lie east of the Conway and, were it a mere question of simplicity of grouping, would be more suitably assigned to Denbighshire. All three were, in fact, included in the ancient cantref of Rhos, one of the main constituents of that county, but for various reasons have come to be associated with Carnarvonshire. The largest of the three was once the commote of Creuddyn, divided from the rest of Rhos by the marshy flat which extends from Llandudno Junction to Llandrillo. Popular tradition avers that in olden time it was along this level tract that the Conway found its way to the sea, and thus explains the connection of the peninsula with the county of Carnarvon. History has a much less startling tale to tell. Until the overthrow of Llywelyn by Edward I, Creuddyn was always reckoned a member of Rhos, and it was that monarch who, in constituting Carnarvonshire by the statute of Rhuddlan in 1284, modified the old arrangements by uniting the commote to the new county west of the Conway. His reason for doing so is not recorded, but it is to be remembered that at that time, and for long afterwards, Denbighshire had no existence, but was represented along the Conway by the marcher lordship of Denbigh, over which Edward had no direct authority. One may, therefore, presume that for military reasons he wished to keep full control of the mouth of the Conway and of the site of the ancient castle of Degannwy. If this was the case, Carnarvonshire owes to the military exigencies of the thirteenth century its power to draw to-day as a rating authority upon the valuable revenues of Llandudno.