
The only true and right way of learning geography (which in its widest sense comprehends almost everything connected with the earth) is to become acquainted with the geography—or, strictly speaking, the topography—and history of the district in which we live. Modern England is split up into a number of main divisions known as counties, and in some instances also as shires; the word shire, when it is used, being added at the end of the county name. Thus we have the county of Essex or the county of Hertford; but whereas in the former case the word shire is never added, it may be in the case of the latter. We then have either the county of Hertford, or Hertfordshire, as the full designation of the territorial unit in which we dwell. In official documents our area is always mentioned under the title of the “County of Hertford”; but imperfectly educated persons when filling in such documents frequently write the “County of Hertfordshire.” This is wrong and superfluous; shire being equivalent to county.

L. H.
2 HERTFORDSHIRE

The word county signifies an area of which a count or earl is the titular head. Here it may be incidentally mentioned that the title "Earl" is of Saxon origin, which it was attempted to replace after the Conquest by the Norman-French "Count"; the attempt being successful only in the case of an Earl's consort, who is still known as "Countess." It also obtained in the case of "County," which is thus practically equivalent to "Earldom."

It now remains to enquire why some counties are also known as shires, while others are not thus designated. In Anglo-Saxon times England, in place of being one great kingdom, was split up into a number of petty kingdoms, each ruled by a separate sovereign. Essex was then a kingdom by itself, situated in the east of the country; while Wessex was a western kingdom, and Mercia a sovereignty more in the heart of the country. Essex and Sussex, being small kingdoms, were constituted counties by themselves when the country came under a single dominion, and their names have consequently remained without addition or alteration from Anglo-Saxon times to our own day. The larger kingdoms, such as Wessex and Mercia, were, on the other hand, split up into shires, or shire—i.e. that which is shorn or cut off—and their names have disappeared except as items in history. Hertfordshire, then, is in great part a shire of the ancient kingdom of Mercia, of which, indeed, it seems to have formed a centre, as the Mercian kings spent at least a portion of their time at Berghampstedt (Berkhamstead). It is however only the larger western portion of the county that belonged to Mercia, a smaller area on
COUNTY AND SHIRE

the eastern side originally being included in the kingdom of Essex.

As to the meaning of the name Hertford, there has been some difference of opinion among archaeologists. In that extremely ancient chronicle, "Domesday Book," the name, it appears, is spelt Herudsford, which is interpreted as meaning "the red ford." The more general and obvious interpretation is, however, that of "hart's-ford," from the Anglo-Saxon beort, a hart, or stag; and this explanation is supported by the occurrence in other parts of the country of such names as Oxford, Horseford, Gatford (= goat's-ford), Fairford (= sheep's-ford), and Swinford. Writing on this subject in a paper on Hertfordshire place-names published in 1859, the Rev. Henry Hall, after alluding to the custom of naming fords after animals, concluded as follows:—"At all events, the custom is so prevalent, and the word hart so common for Anglo-Saxon localities, as Hart's-bath, Hartlepool (the Hart's pool), Hartly—that though several other derivations have been given for the capital of the county, none seems so simple, or so satisfactory, as that which interprets it to mean the hart's ford."

This interpretation has been adopted by that division of His Majesty's local forces formerly known as the Hertfordshire Militia. Possibly it is supported by the title of a neighbouring village, Hertingfordbury, that is to say, the stronghold near Hertingford,—the ford at the hart's meadow. Whether or not it has anything to do with the matter, it may be worthy of mention that red-deer antlers occur in considerable abundance buried in the peat of Walthamstow, lower down the Lea valley, in Essex.
2. General Characteristics of the County.

Hertford is an inland county, situated in the south-eastern portion of England, and cut off from the nearest sea by the whole width of Essex, which forms the greater portion of its eastern border. Neither has it any great river of its own communicating with the ocean; although the Lea, which is navigable below Hertford, and falls into
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

the Thames at Barking in Essex, affords the means of transporting malt (the great output of Ware) and other products to London and elsewhere by water. As to canal communication, this will be discussed in a later section.

Originally Hertford was essentially an agricultural county, as it is to a great extent at the present day; its

Ancient Hertfordshire: Thatched Cottages, Harpenden

northern three-quarters being noted for its production of corn. The southern portion, on the other hand, was partly a hay-growing and grazing country. Nowadays, however, more especially on the great lines of railway, conditions have materially altered; and large areas have become
residential districts, which in the more southern part are little more than suburbs of the metropolis. Printing-establishments and factories—moved from London for the sake of cheapness—have likewise been set up on the outskirts of many of the larger towns, such as St Albans and Watford, or even in some of the villages. On the other hand, the old-fashioned timbered and tiled or thatched cottages formerly so characteristic of the county are rapidly vanishing and giving place to the modern abominations in brick and slate. Gone, too, is the old-fashioned and picturesque smock-frock of the labourer and the shepherd, which was still much in evidence some five and forty years ago, or even later; its disappearance being accompanied by the loss of many characteristic local words and phrases, to some of which reference will be made in a later section. The gangs of Irish mowers and reapers which used to perambulate the county at hay and harvest time are likewise a feature of the past.

The scenery of the southern portion of the county differs—owing to its different geological formation—very markedly from that of the northern two-thirds; the latter area representing what may be called typical Hertfordshire. Although there is nothing grand or striking in the scenery of this part, for quiet and picturesque beauty—whether of the village with its ancient church nestling in the shelter of the well-wooded valley, or the winding and tall-hedged lanes (where they have been suffered to remain)—it would be hard to beat; and in many instances is fully equal in charm to the much-vaunted Devonshire scenery, although, it is true, the hedge-banks lack the abundant growth of
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

ferns characteristic of those of the latter county. Very characteristic of this part of the county are its open gorse or heath commons, like those of Harpenden, Gustard Wood, Bower’s Heath, and Berkhamstead. From the higher chalk downs on the northern marches of the county extensive views may be obtained over the flats of

An Old Farm-House near Wheathampstead

Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire; while in like manner the southern range of chalk hills in the neighbourhood of Elstree presents a panoramic view over the low-lying clay plains of the southern portion of the county and Middlesex.

In former days, it may be mentioned in this place,
8 HERTFORDSHIRE

the inhabitants of most, if not all, of the English counties had nicknames applied to them by their neighbours; “Hertfordshire Hedgehogs” being the designation applied to natives of this county, while their neighbours to the eastward were dubbed “Essex Calves.”


The maximum length of Hertfordshire, along a line running in a south-westerly and north-easterly direction, is about twenty-eight miles; while its greatest breadth, along a line passing near its centre from the neighbourhood of Tring to that of Bishop’s Stortford, is very nearly the same. Owing to its extremely irregular outline, the county has, for its size, a very large circumference, measuring approximately 130 miles. Here it should be stated that the ancient area of the county differs somewhat from that of what is now known as the administrative county. According to the census of 1901, the area of the ancient, or geographical county, included 406,157 acres, whereas that of the administrative county is only 404,518 acres, or about 630 square miles. The difference in these numbers is due to the fact that certain portions of the old county, such as that part of the parish of Caddington originally included in Hertfordshire, have been transferred to adjacent counties. The figures relating

1 In the Report of the Board of Agriculture published in 1905 the number of acres is given as 402,856; and this is taken as the basis of calculation in section 10 and in the diagrams.
SHAPE SIZE BOUNDARIES 9

to population, etc. given in the sequel refer to the administrative county.

In size Hertford may be reckoned a medium county, its acreage being rather less than that of Surrey, and about half that of Essex.

To describe the shape of Hertfordshire is almost an impossibility, on account of its extremely irregular contour; but as its two maximum diameters are approximately equal, it may be said to lie in a square, of which the four angles have been cut away to a greater or less extent in a curiously irregular manner. The reason of this irregular outline, seeing that only the eastern border is formed to any great extent by a river-valley, is very difficult to guess. Where its south-eastern boundary leaves the Lea valley in the neighbourhood of Waltham Abbey, Middlesex gives off from Enfield Chase a kind of peninsula running in a north-westerly direction into Hertfordshire; while, in its turn, Hertfordshire, a short distance to the south, sends a better-marked and irregular peninsula (in which stands Chipping Barnet) jutting far into Middlesex. In consequence of this interlocking arrangement, a portion of Hertfordshire actually lies to the south of a part of Middlesex, although, as a whole, the former county is due north of the latter. Another, but narrower, projection runs from the south-western corner of the county in the neighbourhood of Rickmansworth so as to cut off the north-western corner of Middlesex from Buckinghamshire; while a third prominence, in which Tring is situated, is wedged into Buckinghamshire from the western side of the county. Other minor projections
occur on the north-western and northern border, of which the most pronounced is the one north of Baldock, jutting in between Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

As regards boundaries, Hertfordshire is bordered on the east by Essex, by Middlesex on the south, by Buckinghamshire on the south-west, by Bedfordshire on the north-west, and, to a small extent, by Cambridgeshire on the north. From a short distance below the Rye House to Waltham Abbey the boundary between Hertfordshire and Essex is a natural one, formed by the rivers Stort and Lea; but the other boundaries of our county are, for the most part at any rate, purely artificial.

It should be added that these boundaries at the present day do not everywhere accord with those of half a century ago. The parish of Caddington was, for instance, in former days partly in Hertfordshire and partly in Bedfordshire, but under the provisions of the Local Government Act of 1888, confirmed in 1897, the whole of it was included in the latter county. Certain other alterations were made about the same time in the boundary.

4. Surface and General Features.

The contours of a district depend almost entirely upon the nature of its geological formations, and the action of rain, rivers, and frost upon the rocks of which they are composed. These formations in the case of this county are briefly described in a later section. Here it must suffice to state that hard slaty rocks form jagged mountain ranges, while soft limestones like our Hertfordshire chalk