Our Counties

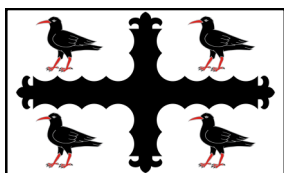*The Association of British Counties Annual 2015*

Flag and County News

Several new flags have been introduced since the last annual. Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, Norfolk and Surrey were all registered in September 2014, with Merioneth, Cambridgeshire and Flintshire following in early 2015.

Cambridgeshire

Norfolk

Flintshire

Merioneth

County flags are now seen everywhere! A Durham businessman took that county's flag all the way to the Solomon Islands. The flag of Dorset was also recently seen at the UK Open Darts in Minehead.

ABC member Brady Els designed the winning Northamptonshire flag which depicts the Tudor Rose on a cross of gold with a claret field. Hopefully this flag will be seen flying across Peterborough as well as the rest of the county.

This year marks the 750th anniversary of the Montfort Parliament, where elected representatives of the shires and boroughs came together for the first time. To mark the occasion, the 2015 Flag Project invited primary school children aged 7-11 across the UK to design a flag to represent their constituency.

In an exciting development of the project, a selection of the flags have been chosen to represent the historic counties of the UK. These flags will be

Front cover photo: Shap Summit, Westmorland 320km above sea level-highest point on M6

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sewn to fly at a special event in Parliament Square in the spring, with support from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

The flags will also be flown at the Magna Carta Foundation of Liberty, a special event to be held at Runnymede, Surrey on 15 June 2015, to celebrate 800 years since the sealing of the Magna Carta. The event is to be managed by the National Trust and Surrey County Council.

It is terrific to see the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the National Trust taking such positive steps to celebrate and promote our historic counties, especially as it involved school children designing the flags for them.

To see the other flags, visit:

http://flags.parliament.uk/galleries/flags.

The Friends of Bedfordshire Society

ABC was proud to welcome a new member organisation to our family in 2014- the Friends of Bedfordshire Society (*www.friendsofbedfordshire.co.uk*). The society aims to promote and celebrate all things Bedfordshire, taking pride in everything from the major towns to its smallest villages, the countryside, its traditions and its people. They hope to instil passion and pride in the people of Bedfordshire for their beautiful county. The society has already been successful at having a Bedfordshire flag registered with the Flag Institute (see photo below) and has more recently been conducting a public vote on a date for a county day. The winning date is 28 November, the anniversary of the birth of John Bunyan, preacher and author from Bedfordshire.

The newly registered Bedfordshire flag flying at the stand of the Royal British Legion Riders Branch

Groups like these are the lifeblood of our movement at a county level. So much can be achieved by local enthusiasts as nationally ABC simply does not have the time for individual counties. Setting up a group, developing a flag and nominating a county day are tried and trusted ways to raise the profile of your county. If your county currently has no such group and you would like to set one up then get in touch with ABC Chairman Peter Boyce (*peterboyce@ntlworld.com*) for some advice on how to get started.

Ordnance Survey to Produce Historic County Border Data

On 10 March 2015, Lord Ahmad of the Department of Communities and Local Government announced that:

♦ "from May, a dataset of the traditional, historic counties based on 19th century boundaries will be available on the OS OpenData portal. These datasets are compatible with the OS Boundary-Line product which is available to all, free of charge. Ordnance Survey is also going to provide a viewing map window on their website showing both the historic and ceremonial county boundaries on top of a base map.

♦ Later in the year Ordnance Survey is hoping to publish a paper map of the Historic Counties of England, Scotland and Wales (as defined in the Local Government Act 1888 for England and Wales and the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1889), which will be available to the general public to purchase and proudly display."

Both of these developments are warmly welcomed by ABC. ABC already supplies digital boundary data of the historic counties from our website. However, having the Government's National Mapping Agency also producing such data cannot help but be seen as giving the historic counties a further mark of endorsement by the Government. Having some kind of official point of reference to borders will be useful in placing border signs, in postal addressing, etc. It will also be much easier to persuade publishers of guide books and the like to use the historic counties if there is "official" OS data giving their borders.

Whilst we may end up with the odd quibble over borders, in general this announcement is something to be enthusiastically welcomed.

Redcar and Cleveland Council shows its Yorkshire pride

Redcar and Cleveland Council have voted through two measures which show its pride in being part of Yorkshire. On 11 March 2015 a direction went out to all parts of the council to include the word 'Yorkshire' in their postal address. The boundary signs around the council's boundary are to be replaced shortly, the new signs bearing the words 'Redcar and Cleveland on the Yorkshire Coast'.

Why the Historic Counties were never abolished

This is the title of a new piece on County-Wise in which we try to present, in as short and lucid a form as possible, an answer to the usual "Weren't the historic counties abolished back in…" sort of question. Our intention was to give a quick answer to such questions, especially from the media. ABC members and member organisations may find this a useful format to follow or even a place to which they can refer these questions.

The piece presents this concise answer: "The simple answer is that local government areas were created in 1888 and, although initially based on the historic counties, they were always understood to be separate from them. Hence, subsequent changes to local government areas have not affected the historic counties, something the Government has consistently re-affirmed."

It also provides a 'reasonably short answer' with more on the relationship between local government, ceremonial counties and the historic counties without overcomplicating the issue and causing any further confusion.

ABC press packs now available

We have recently developed two new press packs, the aim of which is to make it easier for the media to find out about ABC and our work. *An Introduction to the Association of British Counties* does exactly what it says on the tin! It describes who we are and what we do.

A Guide to the Historic Counties for the Press and Media explains what the counties are, what they are not, and their relevance and importance to our culture, history and geography. It provides some useful county facts and county quotes and also an FAQ section.

Both press packs are available as PDFs from *http://abcounties.com/press-and-media/press-packs/*. When dealing with the media as members of ABC or our member organisations, you may find it useful to point them in the direction of these press packs.

The Historic Counties Convention 2014

A review by ABC Chairman, Peter Boyce

The Historic Counties Convention 2014 was held on Saturday 24 October at the town hall in Lutterworth, Leicestershire. Those attending were treated to a packed programme. We were especially pleased to welcome three guest speakers to this gathering.

Starting us off was guest speaker Peter Aylmer, walker, Essex enthusiast and author of *Walking in Essex* (Cicerone, 2013), 25 day walks across the whole of the historic county. Peter gave a well-delivered talk entitled 'Influx and Uprising: the Other Side of Essex'. This looked at a broad sweep of 1500 years of the county's history and told the stories of some of the many groups who have moved in, made Essex their home and made their mark on the county. Peter's talk led to many questions which he answered artfully and a general debate about the state of Essex's identity in the metropolitan part of the county.

Following on from Peter, Michael Garber, ABC's Communications Officer, gave an update on the latest developments on the ABC website, such as the new 'Press and Media' page. Our social media pages have continued to grow and we are now on Facebook, Twitter and Google+. Michael also offered a glimpse into our upcoming project to revamp County-Wise, bringing in new features and consolidating our county place-name, mapping and border data offerings. The first phase of this project saw the launch of the County-Wise Activities Zone with the interactive "UK County Map Quiz" as its first activity. You can test your county knowledge

at *http://activities.county-wise.org.uk* and have some fun in the process.

Peter Boyce then gave a review of some of the main achievements of ABC during the previous 12 months. Highlights included the incorporation of specific provision for historic county border signs within the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions revised draft, the registration of seven more county flags and the formation of the Friends of Bedfordshire Society.

It was then a great pleasure to welcome our second guest speaker: veteran journalist, author and former Wisden's editor Matthew Engel. Matthew described the background to his new book *Engel's England* (Profile Books Ltd, 2014) which tells of his three-year journey through, as he puts it, 'deepest England'. He travelled to each of the 39 counties, searching for the nation's soul. The book is partly an elegy for a lost land, but also a celebration of what remains. The book has a chapter on each county as well as an additional chapter on London. Matthew read extracts from his book with the audience suggesting some counties. The extracts, like the whole book, were often perceptive, sometimes poignant, and frequently very funny.

We all enjoyed a free buffet lunch which provided time for chat and to view the exhibits brought along by members and member organisations. Matthew also sold and signed copies of his book over the lunch break and seemed very happy with his sales for the day!

After lunch we all took part in the Great County Quiz 2014 where prizes were given for first and second place. Many thanks to Mari Foster for setting the questions and acting as quiz master. ABC Vice-chairman Rupert Barnes triumphed, possessing an apparently encyclopaedic knowledge of all thing county related.

We were then pleased to welcome back to ABC Graham Bartram, Chief Vexillologist of the Flag Institute. Graham last gave a presentation to ABC at our 21st birthday celebration in 2010. His 2014 subject was the same but of course there has been massive progress in the development of flags since he last spoke. In 2010 only 15 county flags had been registered with the Flag Institute for inclusion in the UK Flag Registry, but by October 2014 this number had grown to 35. Graham reviewed all the county flags registered and discussed some ongoing ideas and campaigns for further county flags (including those in Cambridgeshire, Merioneth, Flintshire and Norfolk which have subsequently been registered.) There followed a wide-ranging discussion about how to encourage further flags to be developed and how to encourage the flying and other usage of registered flags.

Finally, Edward Keene of the Oxfordshire Association gave an interesting talk on 'The Counties and Diocesan Boundaries'. In many areas the dioceses' boundaries still follow the historic borders whilst local government boundaries are now very different. Several attempts have been made in recent years to amend diocesan boundaries to match local government. Such proposals are voted on by the diocese itself and most have been resisted.

The meeting concluded with a further period for tea, coffee and chat.

The Historic Counties Convention 2015 will be held from 11-4 on Saturday, 24 October in the Denham Room in the Priory Street Centre in York. We are hoping that a venue in a major tourist destination, close to public transport and park-and-ride facilities will encourage a good attendance. The event is free for anyone to attend.

There would be no perception these days that Yorkshire people are any more dishonest than anyone else. But wilful, canny heading towards tight, and combative? All of these, and more, are part not just of their image but of their self-image. Boastful too.

"What's the biggest county in England?" one of my favourite Yorkshiremen asked over dinner.

"Yorkshire," I replied.

"What's the second biggest?"

I began to get suspicious. "We are talking traditional counties?"

"Of course."

"Well, Lincolnshire, then."

"Wrong! The West Riding!" he announced triumphantly. (True, I now think, but only just.)

Excerpt from *Engel's England,* Yorkshire chapter

Discovering the True Historic County Tops

Gerry Bowes

On 5 November 2014, whilst others were celebrating the fact that Parliament and James I were not blown sky high, I was celebrating reaching my final historic county top. Stood on Merrick, the county top of Kirkcudbrightshire, it was hard to imagine a more fitting place to finish my quest to stand on the high point of each of the 92 historic counties of the UK. On a beautifully calm and cloudless autumn afternoon, I was able to look out over the Firth of Clyde and view the unmistakeable shape of Ailsa Craig which lies within Ayrshire, Goatfell on Arran, which lies within Buteshire and the Mull of Kintyre which lies within Argyllshire. Beyond the Mull of Kintyre, the Antrim coast was also visible, albeit rather hazy. Turning to the south east, it was possible to make out the Cumberland coast of England. Therefore of the four countries of the UK only Wales remained out of my sight. Apparently, the 144 mile view between Merrick and Snowdon is the longest line of sight in the British Isles. Needless to say, I didn't get a sighting-a shame really as Snowdon was my first historic county top, climbed back in April 1976.

Stood on the summit of Snowdon almost 40 years ago, the thought of completing the historic county tops never entered my head; I was just interested in getting to the top of as many high mountains as possible. It wasn't until the summer of 2012 that my interest in historic county tops was aroused. I got hold of a copy of Jonny Muir's book, *The UK's County Tops* which contains detailed descriptions and maps of how to reach the top of 91 historic counties. When looking down the list of tops, it was evident that I has already climbed all the county tops above 3000ft and most of the county tops in England and Wales above 2000ft. Of the 91 historic counties listed, I could put ticks against 25 of them (over a quarter of the way there) with 25 of the most demanding county tops already visited. The challenge was on!

Given this interest in the traditional counties, it wasn't long before I came across the ABC website, paid my subscription and attended the 2012 AGM. At the AGM I had the opportunity to meet Andy Strangeway who had recently become the first person to spend a night on each of the 52 county tops of England and Wales. He pointed out a number of errors in Muir's book, namely those relating to Berkshire, Hampshire, Cambridgeshire and Warwickshire in England, and Selkirkshire in Scotland. Andy also informed the that Ross-shire and Cromartyshire were two separate counties, giving a total of 92 not the 91 listed in Muir's book. Finally, it was recommended that I use the Wikishire list of historic county tops as my source of reference.
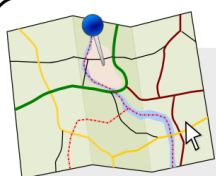

**My final county top:
Merrick, Kircudbrightshire**

Fortunately, at the time of the AGM I hadn't visited the county tops of the aforementioned counties of England. Before doing so, I felt the need to do some research to explain the discrepancies between the Wikishire list and the other historic county top lists. It soon became clear that whilst the Wikishire list relates to the counties as they have existed since well before the introduction of administrative areas in 1888, the other lists related to the administrative areas as they existed immediately prior to the local government reorganisation in 1974. Using a range of internet sources, most especially the Historic County Borders Project, parish records on GENUKI and six-inch maps available on the National Library of Scotland website, it was fascinating to discover how and when the divergence between the historic county boundaries/county tops and the administrative county boundaries/county tops (pre-1874) took place.

Following the Local Government Act of 1894, administrative counties were encouraged to

'tidy up' their boundaries and this resulted in the exchange of parishes between neighbouring counties. It was the transfer of Combe from Hampshire to Berkshire and Great Chishill from Essex to Cambridgeshire that accounts for the discrepancy in the listed county tops of Berkshire, Hampshire and Cambridgeshire. Both these transfers took place in 1895. With regard to Warwickshire, it was the 1895 transfer of Admington from Gloucestershire to Warwickshire that has led to the discrepancy in the listed county top of Warwickshire. In Scotland, most lists name Broad Law as the historic county top of both Peeblesshire and Selkirkshire, even though it is located 6 or 7 miles west of Selkirkshire. The reason for the difference between these lists and the WikiShire list is again due to a parish transfer. In 1891 Megget, part of the parish of Lyne, was transferred from Peeblesshire to Selkirkshire. Finally, the historic county of Cromartyshire dates back to medieval times. However, in 1890 the administrative area of Ross and Cromarty was created and all lists, apart from the WikiShire list, fail to recognise Ross-shire and Cromartyshire as two separate historic counties, each with its own county top.

Although I gained pleasure from visiting all of the UK's 92 historic county tops, there was something special about setting foot on the true historic county tops of Berkshire, Hampshire, Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire and Selkirkshire. Had I not joined ABC and met Andy Strangeway, I would have remained unaware that despite all the changes to the administrative 'county' boundaries, the historic county boundaries have remained unchanged. As a consequence, I would have been stood in Hampshire believing I was in Berkshire, stood in Gloucestershire believing I was in Warwickshire, stood in Essex believing I was in Cambridgeshire, and stood in Peeblesshire believing I was on the boundary with Selkirkshire. Given the excellent promotional work that is being carried out by bodies such as ABC and the Historic Counties Trust, I am optimistic that increasing numbers of walkers will choose to use the Wikishire list and visit the true historic county tops rather than use lists that include administrative tops masquerading as historic tops.

Notes on Northern Ireland

Rupert Barnes

Our family holiday last summer took us to Northern Ireland, which we found to be one of the loveliest corners of this land, both familiar and unfamiliar, and where it is unfamiliar it is generally to excel.

Those who grew up with grim tales about the place should put that aside for it is a delight. The place has visibly changed a lot since my first visit there and all for the better. It is a distinctly divided society, but one which now accepts its division. Each side marks its territory openly, but even in the solidly Protestant heartland there are Roman Catholic churches and within the nationalist villages near the border there are Presbyterian churches and Orange Order halls. Overall there is more to unite than to divide for this is a quite distinctive place. One thing on which all agree: there are six counties, and everyone knows where they are.

While there we visited three of the nine counties of Ulster: Antrim, Down and Armagh. It was a holiday, not a hunting expedition, so I only bagged a couple of county tops and I have had to supplement my knowledge with the help of a local expert.

The first thing to observe is how rural these counties are. Outside Belfast, there are no big towns, and stepping a little beyond the city the countryside is just that; it not slathered in suburban townscapes as the equivalent land would be near the cities of Great Britain. The growth of towns is therefore not obliterating ancient boundaries.

Administrative change in Northern Ireland followed much the same pattern as elsewhere in 1972. All county councils were replaced by a single regional authority (the local parliament) and 26 "local government districts". Interestingly, the 1972 Act did not talk of the abolition of any counties, even the "administrative counties" that had been created by the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898. instead, it declared that "every county and every county borough shall cease to be an administrative area for local government purposes". The Ordnance Survey maps changed, but there is no sense in public perception that the six counties of Northern Ireland have vanished or changed.

The counties are not signposted, their bounds are obscured on maps, but we have not seen the loss of the counties in the public mind. It helps that the 1972 districts bear no similarity to the counties (with the exception of Fermanagh) and they do not pretend to be counties nor successors. Perhaps it helps also that the district councils have far less power. Another factor may be the very identity of Northern Ireland as a region formed of six counties; six of the nice counties of the province of Ulster.

Edenagarry, County Down

The counties are accepted, but finding their boundaries is not so straightforward. The ordinary *Discoverer* series of Ordnance Survey maps do show county boundaries but the tiny dotted lines are hard to discern. The boundaries shown are those of administrative counties as in 1972, so they have the county boroughs of Belfast and Londonderry, and the Antrim/Down boundary creeps south of the Lagan in Lisburn. The boundary in Newry is completely obscured as the line is lost in the townscape-there is a fascinating boundary point here though as the old town hall stands on a bridge in order that it should show no favouritism between County Armagh on the western bank and County Down on the eastern; this must surely be a unique solution.

The most recent *Discoverer* maps also show townlands on the reverse side. This needs a little explaining. Each county is divided into baronies (as some English counties are divided into hundreds) and is further divided into townlands. A townland is a traditional division of land, purely

geographical, typically between 200 and 400 acres (though the smallest, McCricket in County Down is just 4 acres). It might contain a village or a hamlet, or it might not. They are more visible on the ground than they once were; for example, some street signs give the name of the townland. Some in the Mourne Mountains have inscribed stones with their name and etymology. The townlands appear to predate the Plantation of Ulster and in Northern Ireland some 90% have names that derive from the Gaelic. The townlands are part of local culture, irrespective of community identity and their re-emergence is supported by all parties.

I saw not a single county boundary sign anywhere on my travels. I am assured that there are some (if you know where to look) but all I could see were local authority signs, welcoming me to such places as 'Newry and Mourne'. Nor are there any signs welcoming one back into Northern Ireland from the south either. (Apparently there were, but they kept disappearing in the night.)

Notwithstanding the invisibility of boundaries, there is no problem with county identity in Northern Ireland. No one is in any doubt about which county they stand in. All will appreciate the Glens of Antrim, the orchards of Armagh, the Mournes of Down, the lakes of Fermanagh, the walls of Londonderry or the Sperrins of Tyrone.

When I returned home I called the Department of the Environment and had a good yarn with the chief traffic signs engineer. He informed me that his department does not erect signs for county boundaries as these are not considered traffic signs and are not within the Regulations. Any county signs would come under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment as a tourism matter. Northern Ireland's traffic sign regulations mirror those in Great Britain, but there are no plans to emulate the latest changes to the Traffic Signs Regulations, which would allow the historic counties to be marked there.

Were the Association of British Counties to lobby for such signs it would be as a tourism issue. The DETI seems not to have considered it a priority, but can we change their minds?

I cannot forebear to refer to county flags, since they have come to prominence in the last few years. No Northern Irish county has its own flag nor are they likely to have them soon. Flags are badges of identity and are a burning political issue: in 2012 there were days of rioting in Belfast when the Union Flag was not flown from City Hall, and protests continue still. There is no shortage of flags in Ulster and the art of marking territory is played out with them so that in mainly Unionist areas the lamp posts are festooned with Union Flags, the Ulster banner, the Orange Order flag and others. In Nationalist

Armagh's GAA flag

areas the main flag is the GAA county flag. Kerbstones and bridges are painted red, white and blue or the county GAA colour, depending on social leaning.

The county flags of the Gaelic Athletics Association are commonplace in border areas but they are used exclusively by one community; the GAA was, from the beginning, an organisation bound up with Irish national identity and anathema to Protestants. Any new, neutral flag will be greeted with suspicion and if it becomes associated with one side then it will be rejected by the other. Given that there is no difficulty with county identity in Ulster, I do not think we need to force the issue.

In every sphere of life the traditional counties of Northern Ireland are predominate. No place will be described but by reference to its county. Though abolished administratively, the counties appear on every map and remain the essential division of the land accepted by all. Local government districts might erect signs on their boundaries, but they gain no traction as identities.

The Association of British Counties has hitherto not spent much time or effort on the six counties of Northern Ireland, simply because there is no problem with them. Our main focus on those counties therefore should continue to be to look to their example and to replicate it across the United Kingdom.

County Fact

More than a third of County Fermanagh lies under water.

Leap-frogging with the National Trust

ABC President Michael Bradford

Public use of counties in postal addresses can make you squirm nowadays-or smile. It's many years since I last amused myself with the National Trust Members' Handbook but I've just had a look at this year's. How are the counties faring in 2015? Well, some of the old favourites are there, 'helpful' addresses like *Warwick, Warwickshire; Derby, Derbyshire; Stafford, Staffordshire,* etc. Some old 'leap-froggers' are there too, where the property jumps a town to impose its own county on the address. This has startling results like *Maidenhead, Buckinghamshire; Banbury, Warwickshire; Newbury, Hampshire* and *Sheffield...Derbyshire!* Wolverhampton, where there are two properties, switches from *Staffordshire* to *'West Midlands'* in only 10 pages. Elsewhere there is consolation in old postal counties like *Barking, Essex; Richmond, Surrey* and *Bexleyheath, Kent.* The Assembly Rooms are placed in *Bath, Somerset,* perhaps reflecting tradition or possibly the local lieutenancy. Maybe they would have liked to use the local authority's name as they did with nearby Clevedon which is placed in *'North Somerset'* but Bath's local authority *'Bath and North East Somerset'* was perhaps too much of a mouthful.

Nearer home for me is York, and here the Trust's Regional Headquarters 'Goddards', the home of the Terry chocolate family, finds itself in *York, 'North Yorkshire'* -a clear use of the lieutenancy. But the gem of this year's collection is in north-eastern Yorkshire where a fine stately home called Ormesby Hall is given the address *Ormesby, near Middlesbrough, 'Redcar and Cleveland'!* Here the claims of the lieutenancy (*'North Yorkshire'*) are ignored. Instead we have leap-frogging and this time the property, having jumped over *Middlesbrough* ends up in that odd administrative concoction *Redcar and Cleveland.* Middlesbrough is a large town of which the handbook's compilers may have just heard. So Ormesby is said to be near it.

The hall is not, however, actually in Middlesbrough but in *'Redcar and Cleveland'.* A natural reading of the address given here would suggest that that is where Middlesbrough is too (whereas it is in another local authority all together, one called *'Middlesbrough'*). Welcome to the world of Lewis Carroll…

I'm reminded (with a sigh) of the time nearly 25 years ago when members of the infant ABC were naïve enough to hope that an organisation devoted to preserving landscape and buildings might see the point of preserving their geographical settings. A coupe of us turned up at the NT's annual assembly held in Llandudno on 2 November 1990 to speak to the motion: *'That this meeting instructs the Council of the National Trust to ensure that traditional county names are used by the National Trust in all its literature, correspondence and audio-visual presentations and at all other times except when referring to local government.'* On a re-reading many years later maybe words like 'instruct' and 'ensure' sounded a bit cheeky to such an august body as the Trust. We were too little aware of its ethos of deference and conformity. It's true that members-well over 2 million of them even then-vote on matters referred to them but they do so only after receiving 'advice' from the Council. And the advice in this case was to vote "no" (no rocking the boat, please) and given the respectful stance of NT members towards its Council perhaps we did well to get 43,000 postal votes for with 90,000 against. At the meeting itself the vote was lost by 375 to 400.

To be fair, the National Trust had then, and still has, far higher priorities than this one-tasks like getting people to its properties and here (sadly) maps and addresses are no longer needed. Satnav with postcodes is what people use-and the NT Handbook ensures that they have the codes.

In my judgement this is not a matter to be raised with the Trust again.

County Quote

"Neither in Wales nor in England, but simply in Radnorshire"

George Borrow (1803-81), English travel writer

All Is Not Lost

Mari Foster

I have lived in Lancashire for 12 years now and consider myself a Lancastrian although I was not born in this county nor indeed even in this country. However, my loyalty remains unwavering.

I am an easily annoyed person, I'll admit, but the rising of my temper at the constant use of administrative areas is certainly justified. The words 'Greater Manchester' or 'Merseyside' or any other made-up place name uttered on the television cause me to reach angrily for the remote control. I've done this during the news, quiz programmes, you name it. *University Challenge* is particularly frustrating because, really...they ought to know better. There is a real lack of understanding by the general population which is fuelled by misinformation in the media.

Upon seeing an administrative area being used as a county when reading online news, one's first instinct is to write in the comments section below it to correct the error. But often, when the article describes a criminal act or loss of life, further reflection leads one to think that perhaps now is not the time to make that correction as it might be considered petty. Certainly it would be ill-advised to make the point in that forum.

However, there are still some glimmers of hope. Evidence of county pride is still around us. An example local to me: despite my village being dumped in the administrative 'Cheshire' the neighbouring village is having a 'Lancashire Evening' soon so why bother if we are not really in Lancashire? Somebody must still think that we are.

I have seen and heard other instances where I have thought that we still have some hope. Reading a link to a letters page in the Telegraph online I noticed that one of the correspondents listed his hometown as 'Peterborough, Northamptonshire'. Imagine my surprise-and delight! If only that city's council felt the same way we might get them to fly the Northamptonshire flag one day.

Other instances of county loyalty come to mind. On a recent coach holiday a couple introduced themselves as coming from Hartlepool in County Durham and were proud to say they hailed from that county. Another fellow traveller regaled us with facts and stories from Northamptonshire; he made that county sound more interesting than it had ever seemed before. I also made the acquaintance of a lady in her 70s after I loaned her a few Czech koruna for the toilets. She later told me a story about how she was on a holiday once and came across a lady who lived in the same village as she did. (Unfortunately, I forget which village she named.) However, whilst my companion told people that she came from Essex, the other woman told them that she came from London. When this discrepancy was pointed out, the woman said that she did not want people to think that she was from Essex! When telling this anecdote my travel companion remarked that she was proud to come from Essex and would never dream of telling people otherwise.

Sport also occasionally holds onto its county links. Lisa Ashton, a champion ladies darts player from Bolton, styles herself as 'the Lancashire Rose'. Somehow the 'Greater Manchester Rose' just doesn't have the same ring to it. And it is always satisfying to hear a football fixture of say, Bolton v Wigan labelled as a Lancashire derby. Now if we could just hear the same thing said about Manchester United v Liverpool!

And of course my passion, cricket, still maintains its strong county links and rivalries. Any talk of a 20/20 franchise system is quickly shot down by true fans of the game. People from Manchester and Liverpool will happily support Lancashire together but call a team Manchester Maidens and see how many supporters from Liverpool you get in attendance. (Okay, perhaps 'Maidens' isn't the best nickname, but you can see where I'm going with this.)

So, I would say, do not despair. For every 'South Devon', 'Dumfries & Galloway' or 'Powys' to set the teeth grinding there are plenty of instances to make you smile and think that all is not lost.

County Fact

Mystery writer Edith Pargeter (also known as Ellis Peters) never lived more than three miles from where she was born in Horsehay, Shropshire in 1913.

Wikishire's New Horizons

Rupert Barnes

Wikishire has passed a significant milestone: in February 2015 it reached 10,000 articles. From a catalogue of information on British counties it has swollen into an encyclopaedia of all the places of Britain, Ireland and their overseas territories, and it is unique in that it uses traditional counties and only traditional counties. Wikishire is now a substantial resource, but there is plenty of room to grow even beyond this.

If you have not had a look at the Wikishire website for a while, do so and see how it has come up in the world. The expanded number of articles has meant better coverage overall and fewer inchoate red links. The aesthetics have been improved too: we now have a daily featured article on the front page not just a weekly one with an overall better look and feel. It has a Twitter feed now too, thanks to Owain Vaughan.

If Wikishire began as a website on counties and their main towns, it has expanded immeasurably beyond that original, timid beginning. It has an article on every county of the British Isles and each overseas territory, and also on every city and town, and an increasing number of village articles. It has enlarged its concerns too to islands, castles, hills, rivers, waterfalls, lochs, caves, dales, long-distance footpaths, country houses, canals, flags, and many more. The articles on mountains and hills are keenly compiled, given the interests of some of ABC's members. All are categorised by county as well as by range. The National Trust supplied a list of their properties to the Historic Counties Trust, and these and National Trust for Scotland properties are gradually being added.

It is uneven coverage, inevitably. The towns and villages of Berkshire and Hertfordshire currently have 333 and 283 articles respectively, while Leicestershire has just 22. This needs work.

There is much more too, behind the articles. It has its own zoomable map, now linked to each article. On *http://wikishire.co.uk/lookup* is a wide rang of resources compiled by Owain. Here is a gazetteer, not just of villages but of all sorts of geographical features. Here too are boundary line datasets for mapping as well as population figures. There are SVG county outlines to be found too, and variants with towns and other details. All of these are resources provided free for anyone to use.

Wikishire and you

In the meantime, Wikishire has endless room for growth. If there are subjects Wikishire does not yet tackle, let me know and we can expand in that direction. I have long thought that we ought to have some historical articles for example.

This is your canvas. If you have a field of interest, be it castles, abbeys, history, railways, culture or anything else, maybe things we have never thought of, the site is open for you to write what you will.
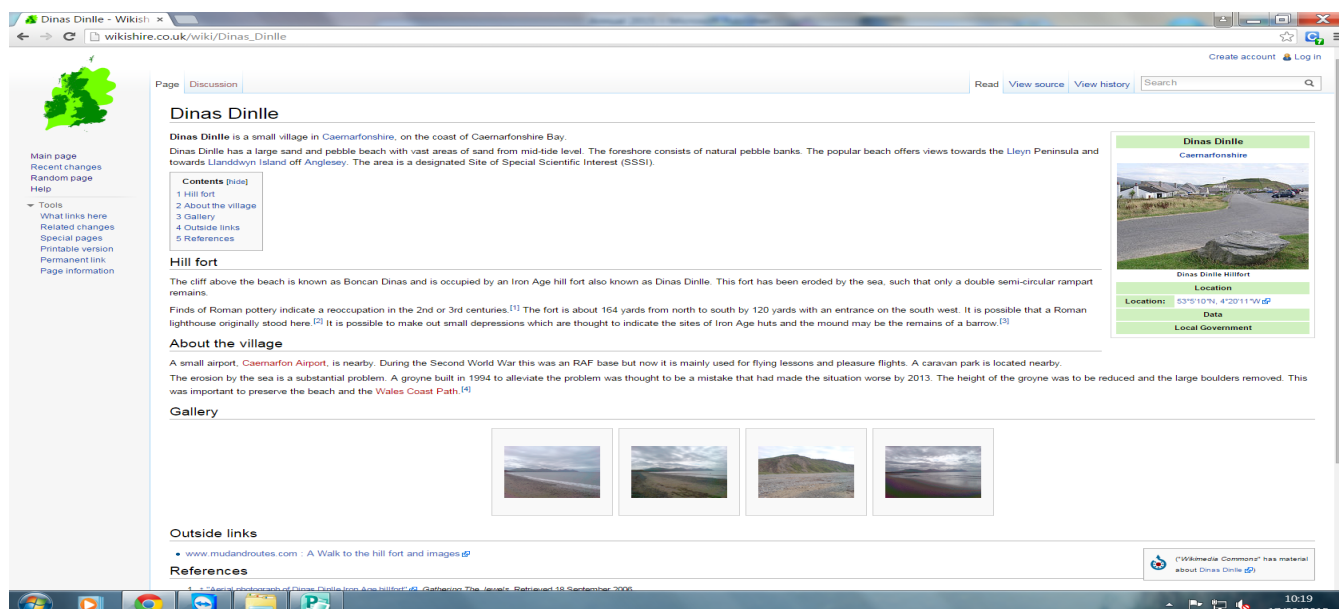
One of Wikishire's 10,000+ entries

All are welcome to contribute, and please do, as manpower is in short supply. You might correct or improve existing articles, or add new ones (there is no need to ask first, just click and type). Putting an article together looks daunting on the screen but the 'wiki' system makes it simple: log on, click "Edit" and type. Pre-programmed templates make it easier, and practically self-categorising. There are guidance pages on the site about formatting and inserting pictures, but text is the main thing. Imperfections can be sorted out later but material is required now to help reach the site's potential.

Wikishire is open: come and see if you can make it better.

Legendary Creatures of Argyllshire's Folklore

Mari Foster

I admit, I'm a born sceptic-I'll thoroughly question anything that cannot be backed up by science. However, there is still something compelling about mythology and folklore. How do the individual stories come about? Are they based on actual events which have been corrupted by the many voices that have related them through the ages like a game of Chinese Whispers? Is there really anything tangible about them? To this end I would like to examine the folklore of Argyllshire: from the isles of the Hebrides which line it to the lochs and castles which occupy it.

A figure which runs through much of the lore of the county and indeed Scotland, is the *glaistig*. A mournful figure: half-woman, half-goat, it was said to be a very bad thing indeed to criticise or dismiss her in any way. These creatures were more likely to be attached to a household rather than to a particular person or family. Such was the one at Auchindarroch who looked after the cows of a farmhouse, keeping the calves from their mothers at night so that milk was available for human consumption in the mornings. As a sort of sacrifice, some of the milk was poured out for her each evening on the Glaistig Stone. When this was not done the calves were found in with the cows on the next morning and the milk supply was absent. This particular glaistig was said to be a former dairymaid, which accounts for her care of the cattle but not much more is known about how she became a glaistig in the first place.

Another female presence in Scottish folklore are fairies, often known to kidnap new mothers who were then used to provide nourishment for ill fairy babies. In Argyllshire the women were often taken to Beinnn Iadain, entering into the mountain through what was known as the 'Black Door'. Magic could be used as protection against these creatures who were especially repelled by dirk grass (*Bruchorcan*) or the knots in the wood of the Rowan tree. Foul language was also another way in which they could be resisted.

Brownies were often, unlike glaistig, attached to a family rather than a particular house and were very rarely female. But one such was the Brownie of Cariskey on the Mull of Kintyre who served the MacNeill family and in particular was a good luck charm for Lt-Colonel Malcolm O'Neill, saving his life during a battle in Jersey (which may or may not have actually occurred). This particular entity had both the traits of a glaistig and a brownie but is generally referred to as the latter.

A less salubrious creature, seen around the shores of Loch Creran, was the *Sac Bàn* (White Sack), which killed men by wrapping itself around their feet to bring them to ground where it would then proceed to murder them. These beings had a piece of sack-like clothing known as a *luman* without which, it was powerless to cause harm.

Humans being transformed into animals either by themselves or others is a central theme in Scottish

folklore. Witches could apparently turn themselves into hares and if injured while in this guise, the wound was seen to appear on the same place on the witch's person. A notable example happened on the isle of Lismore which lies in Loch Linnhe. A lad was out hunting and upon shooting his gun at a hare heard a harrowing scream. It then occurred to him that there were no hares on the island and so he fled in terror. Later he was told that a local witch was laid up with a broken leg. This witch made the boy's life a misery thereafter and he was said to have become a wastrel because of it.

   People, most likely women, being turned into swans occurs often in the folklore of the county although often lacking a specific location in the tale. This results in the likely event that the tale will not survive the passing of time. However, one such of these surviving tales was said to occur at the Iron Age hill fort of Dun Ghallain which sits on the shore of Loch Sunart. This was the location of a sad but romantic tale (depending on your outlook). Here a girl, the object of a laird's affection, was turned into a swan by the fellow's jealous mother. While out hunting one day he killed a swan which, upon its death, reverted back to the form of the woman. In his grief the laird took his own life and the remains of the two are said to lie together amongst the walls of Dun Ghallain. The precise location of this tale has led to its preservation and retelling.

   There are so many more tales associated with the county of Argyll, too many to possibly relay here. From the Maiden of Inverawe, one of the most famous glaistig tales, to the adventures of *Fionn mac Cumhaill,* the creatures of Argyllshire are indeed legendary.

Reference: Westwood, Jennifer & Kingshill, Sophia, *The Lore of Scotland: A Guide to Scottish Legends* (Arrow Books, 2011)

County Days Currently Observed in Great Britain

Flag	County	Date
	Cornwall	5 March
	Durham	20 March
	Orkney	16 April
	Huntingdonshire	25 April
	Middlesex	16 May
	Dorset	1 June
	Devon	4 June
	Sussex	16 June
	Shetland	21 June
	Yorkshire	1 August
	Lincolnshire	1 October
	Oxfordshire	19 October
	Lancashire	27 November
	Bedfordshire	28 November

County Quiz

The first letter of each answer (surnames only) will make up a quote by writer Charles Lamb (1775-1834).

___ Which Pembrokeshire town sits on the River Cleddau and was the birthplace of the artist Gwen John?

___ Which Morayshire town is the ancient capital of Moray and has a cathedral which is known as "The Lantern of the North"?

___ Which county boasts the towns of Arbroath, Brechin, Montrose and the Carnoustie golf club?

___ Which county, known in Welsh as *Sir Faesyfed*, is the home of Knighton, the only town which stands right on Offa's Dyke?

___ Built by Thomas Tresham in 1597, what shape is the lodge in the grounds of Rushton Hall in Northamptonshire?

___ Which Somerset town near to the border with Dorset is named for the river upon which it lies?

___ The village of Tarbert is the main settlement on which Inverness-shire island?

___ Which island county gets its name from the Norse for "whale island"?

___ Which Derbyshire town was the home of Victorian Prime Minister William Lamb, who gave his name to a city in Australia?

___ Which 20th century Prime Minister was born in County Durham in 1897 and died in Wiltshire in 1977?

___ Alice Liddell, the inspiration for *Alice in Wonderland*, spent her summer holidays in which Caernarfonshire town, where a statue of the White Rabbit was unveiled in 1933?

___ Which colour makes up the background of the flag or Somerset, setting off the red dragon in the centre?

___ Which Carmarthenshire village is the final resting place of the poet Dylan Thomas?

___ The planned Lanarkshire town of New Lanark, established by David Dale in the late 18th century, was run by which Welshman, Dale's son-in-law?

___ Which abbey, founded in Denbighshire in 1201, was the last Cistercian abbey to be built in Wales ?

___ Pre-dating the Romans and one of the four highways of the Middle Ages, which ancient trackway runs from Berkshire to Suffolk?

___ Which Nottinghamshire home, founded by Henry the II in the early 13th century, was later inherited by George Gordon, Lord Byron?

___ The poet William Wordsworth wrote much of his best work there and is buried in the churchyard of which Westmorland village?

___ Which team won the Division 2 cricket County Championship in 2014?

___ What is an alternative name sometimes used for the county of Midlothian?

___ Which area, part of Aberdeenshire, was given its name because it was the summer home of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert?

___ The Red Hand of Ulster appears on the badge of which county's Gaelic Football team?

___ How many counties in England begin with the letter H?

___ Which author (1903-1950) took his pen name from a river in Suffolk?

___ Which island off the coast of Ballycastle, County Antrim was disputed between Ireland and Scotland until the 17th century?

___ Down House in Kent, built between 1730 and 1740, was home and workplace of which man, 4th on the list of Greatest Britons?

___ The word "wych" or "wich", seen as a suffix in many Cheshire town names, relates to which mineral, mined since Roman times?

___ Which small Warwickshire town, now a suburb of Birmingham, was the home of Matthew Boulton, James Watt and William Murdock, leaders in the Industrial Revolution?

___ The 1746 battle at Culloden, the last pitched battle on British soil, was fought in which Scottish county?

___ Uppingham School, which has the largest playing field of any school in England, can be found in which county?

___ Born near Crickhowell, Breconshire in 1790, which Surveyor-General of India has a mountain peak named for him?

Submissions Needed for Future Editions

Submissions for the 2016 Association of British Counties Annual

are urgently needed. Contributions from members are the lifeblood

of this magazine and it cannot be sustained without them. Please submit

personal recollections, travelogues, history, poems or whatever you would like.

Any submissions are to be sent to the editor at the address on page 2.

They can be either by email or hand/typewritten and photos are always welcome.

Quiz Answers

Haverfordwest	**L**augharne	**R**athlin
Elgin	**O**wen	**D**arwin
Angus	**V**ale Crucis	**S**alt
Radnorshire	**I**cknield Way	**H**andsworth
Triangular	**N**ewstead Abbey	**I**nverness-shire
Yeovil	**G**rasmere	**R**utland
Harris	**H**ampshire	**E**verest
Orkney	**E**dinburghshire	
Melbourne	**R**oyal Deeside	
Eden	**T**yrone	
Llandudno	**F**our	
Yellow	**O**rwell	