

## **I. The South-Eastern Peninsula. County and Shire. The Word *Sussex*. Its Origin and Meaning.**

The three counties of Kent, Surrey, and Sussex form a compact peninsula in the south-east of England, having the Thames on the north, and the sea on the east and south, while the boundary on the west is formed by Berkshire and Hampshire. This south-eastern peninsula has always been of the greatest importance in our history, for the chief lines of communication between the Continent and London pass through one or other of the three counties. The Thames is the waterway to London ; the roads from Dover, Hastings, Brighton, and Portsmouth are the highways through this peninsula to the metropolis ; and the railways from the chief seaports of the south-east carry passengers and goods to the great city.

It will thus be readily understood that each of these three south-eastern counties is of considerable importance on account of the proximity of London ; and it is both interesting and instructive to have a definite knowledge of the past and present condition of all of them. In this

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book we are concerned only with Sussex, one of the “home counties” as it is called ; and it will be well at the outset to discover what is meant by a county, and then find out how Sussex came by its name.

If we look at a map of England we notice that some of the counties are large and some are small ; and we also find that some of the names end in *-shire*. Why is there this difference in size and name ? It is said in some books that King Alfred divided England into counties. This, of course, is quite wrong, for although that great King did many things in his eventful reign, he certainly did not bring about the division of England into counties. We know that while some of the counties existed before his time, others were not formed till long after his death.

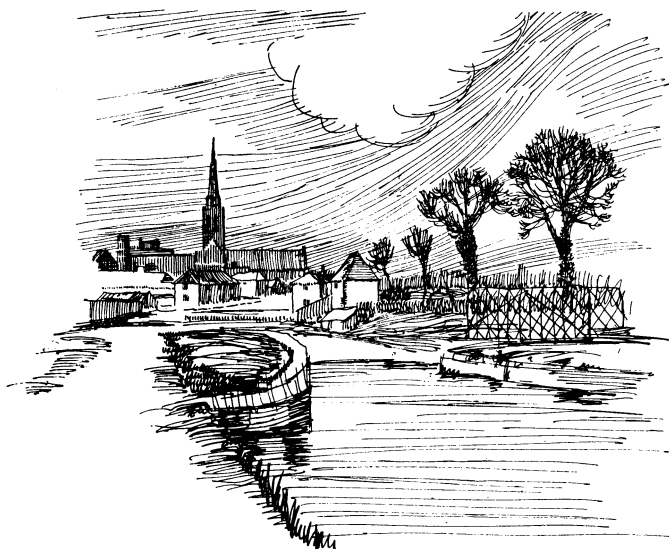
The fact is that some of our present counties, such as Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, are survivals of the old English kingdoms, which have kept their former names and extent. Others of our counties are *shires*, or shares of former large kingdoms, such as Mercia, or Wessex, or Northumbria. Thus Staffordshire was once a part of Mercia, Yorkshire of Northumbria, and Hampshire of Wessex. It may be said quite correctly that our English counties have grown, and it is this gradual growth that makes their history so interesting.

When we investigate the boundaries and extent of the counties we find that they often represent the districts of tribes or kingdoms. Thus Kent was first the possession of a British tribe, the Cantii, which was afterwards conquered by the Jutes ; and Sussex was a kingdom formed by the Saxons in the fifth century. The present county

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## THE SOUTH-EASTERN PENINSULA 3

of Sussex corresponds more or less to that ancient kingdom, though it may at one time have extended further to the west. The story of the colonisation of Sussex is given in the *English Chronicle*, and we shall make further reference to this fact in another chapter. Here we may notice in



Chichester from the Canal

passing that Aelle is generally recognised as the founder and first king of Sussex, and that he landed near the present city of Chichester in 477 and did not complete his work of conquest till 491. For a period of upwards of fourteen centuries Sussex has ranked as one of the

I—2

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English kingdoms, or counties, and of all the English counties it is the most typical, and, perhaps, the most natural.

This is a very remarkable fact, and one of the deepest interest to us in our study of the geography and history of Sussex. We shall understand these much better if we grasp this fact clearly, that many of our counties are the same, or nearly the same, as the first English kingdoms, which were never less than seven in number, and often far more numerous. If we look at the map of England it will be seen that the physical features of Sussex mark it out at once as a distinct and separate region; and its history shows it as always an independent kingdom, or a well-defined county, keeping the same essential boundaries throughout its entire existence. Even when Wessex conquered Sussex, the kingdom of the South Saxons continued to have its own under-kings. When Sussex gradually dropped from the rank of a kingdom to that of a county, it came to be amalgamated with the rest of England.

There is thus no difficulty in tracing the origin of its name, which it obtained from the Saxon conqueror. Essex the land of the East Saxons, Wessex the land of the West Saxons, and Sussex the land of the South Saxons are all quite obvious in their origin. The Saxons were a Teutonic people who first began to trouble the British coasts before the Romans went away. They came from the districts we now call Holstein, Westphalia, Hanover, and Brunswick; and wherever they settled they called the land after their own name. This is no doubt the reason

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## THE SOUTH-EASTERN PENINSULA 5

why the Keltic people in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland call all Englishmen *Saxons* to this day; but we English people must remember that *Saxon* by itself always meant the people of those parts only where the Saxons settled.

It is now quite clear why Sussex is a separate county, and why its boundaries should be what they are. We may look upon Sussex as a typical instance of an old English kingdom becoming a county and retaining a certain local independence of its own to the present day.

### **2. General Characteristics. Position and Natural Conditions. Scenery.**

In the previous chapter we have seen that Sussex is perhaps the most typical, and the most natural, of all the English counties. Its physical features mark it out as a distinct and separate whole, and its history shows that it has always been either a well-defined kingdom or county, preserving the same boundaries and extent throughout its existence. If we study a good map of the county, we find a long spur of chalk, forming the South Downs, runs through it like a backbone till it terminates at Beachy Head.

Between the South Downs and the coast there is a narrow belt of lowland, and this belt, small as it is, really comprises the whole of historical Sussex. On their northern side, the Downs descend by a steep escarpment into the wide valley of the Weald, of which a broad view is gained from the summit of the Devil's Dyke, near Brighton. The country between the North and South

## 6

## SUSSEX

Downs was once covered by chalk, but this has been worn away, and the district is now occupied by the soft, muddy Weald clay, and the harder beds of Hastings Sand. It will be seen that this wide tract extends along the northern border of the county from the Downs to the boundaries of Kent and Surrey, and from Petersfield in Hampshire to Pevensey, Hastings, and the Romney Marshes.

The Sussex Weald was for many ages untilled and uncleared, and formed a great stretch of forest known to the Romans as *Silva Anderida*, and to the English as the *Andredesweald*. The cold clay of the Weald can support little more than trees, and even in our own days it is only scantily cultivated. In early times, this belt of forest was dense and trackless, forming a barrier to intercourse with other parts of the country; and it is this isolation of Sussex by the Weald and the Marshes which makes the history of Sussex so peculiar and so typical.

It will be seen in a later chapter that Sussex is essentially an agricultural county, and as such enjoys many advantages, owing largely to its position and climate. It has a long sea coast fronting the English Channel from the borders of Hampshire to some distance beyond Rye; and its climate, bracing and healthy in the higher parts, is genial and salubrious near the sea. From Bognor in the west to Hastings in the east there is a succession of delightful watering-places—holiday and health resorts which are thronged in the season by thousands of people from our great crowded cities. The influx of these seekers after pleasure and health makes Sussex familiar to all

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## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

7

sorts and conditions of men, and brings some amount of prosperity to a county that has suffered from agricultural depression and the fall in prices. The number of large towns in Sussex is restricted, and the greater part of the population is gathered in the towns on the coast. The district of the Weald has only two small



**The Causeway, Horsham**

towns, Horsham and Midhurst; and its villages support a scanty population by agriculture, hop-picking, dairying, and cattle-rearing.

Sussex will always be associated with the chief event in our nation's story, for it was at Pevensey, in 1066, that William the Norman landed, and having defeated his

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## 8

## SUSSEX

enemy at Hastings, proceeded to make himself the master of our country. The battle of Hastings is the great turning-point that marks the close of one epoch, and the beginning of a new era. There are some who assert that Julius Caesar landed in Sussex, but there is far more evidence that the Romans entered England by Kent.



**The Downs near Wannock**

The landing of William at Pevensey was probably a far greater event than the coming of Julius Caesar, and Sussex people may well be content to remember that it was one of the first English kingdoms to be formed by Aelle, one of the first to be Christianised by Wilfrid, and the scene of the contest that made England the kingdom of William the Conqueror.



## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS 9

The scenery of Sussex does not vie with that of Wales, or Derby, or the Lake district, but it has a type of natural beauty that gives it a peculiar charm. It has neither rivers of striking beauty, nor mountains of any great height. It has no lakes, and its sea-coast scenery is not so fine as that of Yorkshire or Devonshire. Yet the scenery of the South Downs and the Forest Ridge is exceeded in beauty and interest by few parts of England. It has been well said that “the crown of the county’s scenery is the Downs, and the most fascinating districts are those which the Downs dominate.”

Perhaps no modern writer has done more to extol Sussex than Rudyard Kipling, who is a resident in the county. Here is a stanza from one of his Sussex poems :

“God gave all men all earth to love,  
 But since man’s heart is small,  
 Ordains for each one spot shall prove  
 Beloved over all.  
 Each to his choice, and I rejoice  
 The lot has fallen to me  
 In a fair ground—in a fair ground—  
 Yea, Sussex by the sea !”

### 3. Size. Shape. Boundaries.

In the two previous chapters we have learnt how Sussex, once a Saxon kingdom, came to be a county, and we have read about its characteristics. We are now, with the aid of the map, going to study its size, shape, and boundaries.

First with regard to the size of the county, we may say that the present county has varied little since it was first formed more than a thousand years ago. Perhaps it then extended a little more to the west, but on the whole we shall be tolerably safe in saying that its area has been much the same in the whole course of its history. We are of course speaking of the ancient county, for there is also another way in which some of the counties are named since the passing of the County Councils Act in 1888. It was then arranged that a few of our English counties should be subdivided for purposes of administration, and under this Act the ancient county of Sussex was divided into the administrative counties of West Sussex and East Sussex. This will make it quite clear that whenever we refer to the larger Sussex we shall speak of it as the Ancient County, and when we refer to the two divisions we shall speak of them as the Administrative County of East Sussex, and the Administrative County of West Sussex.

Sussex is a maritime county in the south-east of England, lying along the English Channel. It has an area of 933,887 acres, or about 1459 square miles. It is thus somewhat smaller than Kent, nearly twice as large as Surrey, and occupies about one thirty-fourth of the entire area of England and Wales. Of the two divisions, the Administrative County of East Sussex is the larger, having an area of 528,807 acres, while West Sussex has an extent of 403,602 acres. A small portion of Sussex is included in the adjacent counties of Kent, Surrey, and Hampshire for local government purposes.