1. County and Shire. The word *Rutland*: its Origin and Meaning.

Our land, as we all know, is divided up into counties and shires. Nowadays these terms mean much the same thing, but this was not so at one time, and indeed is not so now, accurately speaking. In order to understand the terms we must first turn to their origin and meaning.

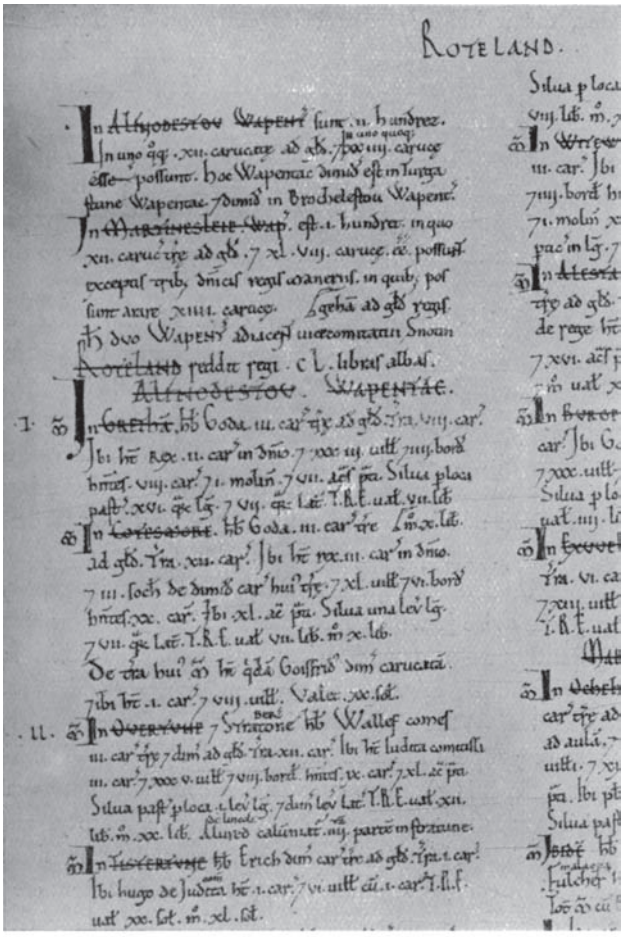
The shire as a division of land has been in existence from very early times. It is often stated that King Alfred (A.D. 871–901) made England into shires, but this is hardly correct, for some are spoken of as such in the early chronicles long before his date, while the county of London, on the other hand, which is essentially a shire, only came into being in 1888. The shire is really the *share* or part *shorn* off (for the words have a similar derivation from the Anglo-Saxon *scir*, *sciran*, to divide, to cut) from some previously-existing state. Thus the great mid-England kingdom of Mercia was parted into many shires in ancient days. Other kingdoms, however, from geographical or other reasons, have altered but little, and have retained the same boundaries and almost the same names for more than a thousand years, as we see

in the case of Essex, Kent, and Sussex—the kingdoms of the East Saxons, the Cantii, and the South Saxons respectively.

Let us turn to the word county. This is of much later origin, for it dates only from the time when William the Conqueror parted the land for administrative purposes among the great nobles who came over with him. The county (Lat. *comitatus*) was the area assigned to the Count (Lat. *comes*, French *comte*), the companion, in other words, of the King, and though the title of Count has failed to establish itself in the place of that of Earl, we still retain "Countess" and "county" as English words.

The early chroniclers—the Saxon Chronicle, Simeon of Durham, Florence of Worcester, and William of Malmesbury—while referring to its surrounding neighbours, make no mention of Rutland; and, although the name appears in Domesday Book, it has quite a modern history as a shire compared with Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Northamptonshire, and appears to have been carved out of one or more of these counties.

But how and when Rutland became a shire is a question of which the solution is by no means easy, although much attention has been given to it by students of Domesday Survey. This much, however, is certain, that the name of Roteland (Rutland) is earlier than the Norman Conquest, and the portion of land known by that name was not a shire at the Domesday Survey. Probably the name, as well as the district, is far older than the division of Mercia into shires by Edward the



Portion of Domesday Book relating to Rutland

Elder, for it belongs to a class common to the North and Midlands like Holland (the fen-land area of Lincolnshire), Cleveland (the North Riding district), Westmorland, and Cumberland, representing the old native division of the soil prior to the Danish Conquest. Not one of these was a shire at the time of Domesday; but Westmorland, Cumberland, and Rutland became so later, while Cleveland and Holland remain mere popular names to the present day.

No one in Rutland, of course, would ever speak of "Rutlandshire," any more than people would speak of "Cumberlandshire" and Westmorlandshire" in those counties. Everything indeed seems to show that the district, as a popular division, goes back to a far earlier time than the artificial arrangement which made it into a recognised administrative unit. One mark of its real origin may, perhaps, be seen in the fact that, alone among Mercian shires, it is not named after its county town, otherwise it would have been called Oakhamshire. Apparently, as a recent writer has said, it remains a solitary example of an old Mercian division which has outlived the West Saxon redistribution of the country into shires, rudely mapped out around the chief Danish burghs. In this connection it is interesting to note that Danish local names are unknown in the county, and that the subdivisions of the soil, though sometimes described by their Scandinavian appellation of wapentakes, are far oftener designated in the true old English style of hundreds.

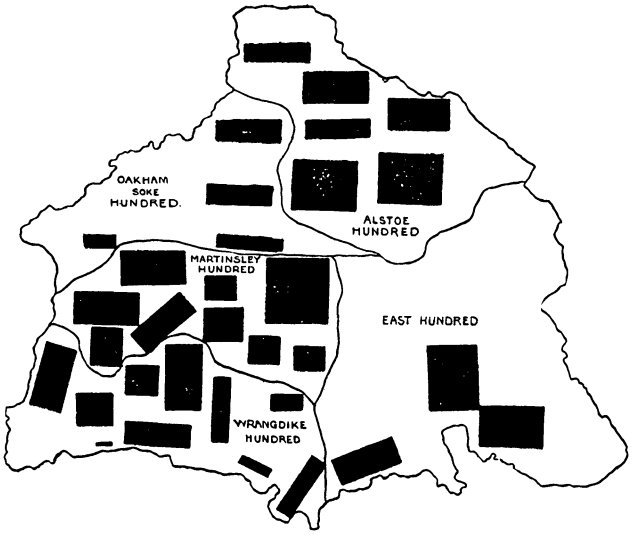
According to one early authority Rutland was given

by Ethelred to Emma, his Norman Queen, on his marriage in 1002. This was the beginning of that connexion of Rutland with the queens and the favourites of the kings of England which forms the main interest of its story. Most probably, on the reorganisation of the Mercian shires after their reconquest from the Danes, the whole of the district formed part of Northamptonshire, and it was the giving of Rutland to successive queens, as a dower, that caused it ultimately to be formed into a separate county.

Edward the Confessor followed the example of his father by granting Rutland to his queen, Edith, whose name still lingers to the present day in the village of Edith Weston. He afterwards granted it to Westminster Abbey, reserving a life interest to the Queen, but William the Conqueror refused to confirm the grant, and on the death of Edith in 1075, took it into his own hands. For several centuries the barony of Oakham with the county or shrievalty of Rutland remained to the Crown as a valuable possession with which to endow members of the Royal house or to secure or reward the services of its supporters.

The origin of the name Rutland has puzzled many topographical writers. We may dismiss at once the fable that a certain Mercian king—whose name, by the way, is not mentioned—having a favourite named Rut or Roet, gave him "as much land in this part of his kingdom as he could ride round in a day, and he, riding about the land now made into a county within the time appointed, had it therefore given him, and he imposed

upon it the name of Rut's land, now for brevity's sake called Rutland." The above, however, is not more astonishing than the theory that Rutland was so called from its circular shape, *quasi Rotundalandia*, as if our ancestors usually spoke bad medieval Latin; or from



Map showing proportion of red land in Rutland

roet, the old Romance word for a wheel, as if they spoke Norman French in the days of Alfred and Athelstan.

The old county historians who gave us Rut and Rotundalandia as the origin of the name discarded Rud or Redland (from the ruddy complexion of the soil), because, said one, from observation there was only one

small part of the county where red land predominated. This point has, however, been settled by the present writer, for it is a fact that no less than 24,178 acres out of 97,073 acres, or about one-fourth of the soil of the county, is known as red land, and it is scattered about in as many as 32 out of the 57 parishes which the county contains.

In the map here shown the dark portions denote the number of acres of red land in the respective parishes. A glance will show how this is distributed, and it will be noted that the larger portion, estimated at 15,332 acres, in the Martinsley, Oakham Soke, and Alstoe hundreds, is situated in that part of the county which is recognised by all authorities as the district termed Roteland, before the additions were made which come within the present shire boundary. There is ample evidence therefore, that this colour would be a predominating feature of the landscape.

2. General Characteristics.

Situated nearly in the heart of England, among the lowlands which slope downward to the fen country, lies the little agricultural county of Rutland—a pigmy among the giants—for it is encircled by shires whose areas run to five, six, and even eighteen times its acreage.

In many a part of the three kingdoms there may be found grander views and bolder scenery, but in none can there be seen more beautiful landscapes of softly blended

wood, water, and pastoral country than are to be found in our county. The frequent alternations of hard and soft beds of rock has given rise to a considerable variety of scenery. This, and the gentle and regular dip of the beds have been productive of the numerous flat-topped hills which are very characteristic of this part of England.

There is no river of any importance in Rutland, but the Welland, Gwash or Wash, and the Chater, each running through richly-cultivated and densely-wooded districts, afford some delightful miniature river scenery.

The wide and extensive views to be obtained from Manton, Brooke, Barnsdale, Market Overton, Wardley, Preston, Whissendine, Ranksborough, Stoke Dry, and other points of vantage, make it an ideal country for the lover of fox-hunting. Hills clothed from base to summit with majestic trees and luxuriant evergreens, sunny dells and silvery streams, fertile vales and swelling uplands, add a charm to Rutland, notwithstanding its small size, which did not escape the eye of the poet Michael Drayton, who was probably staying at Ridlington when he wrote his description of this part of the county. In the *Polyolbion*, a poetical description of England, published in 1613–22, the following lines appear:—

"Love not thyself the less, although the least thou art,
What thou in greatness want'st, wise nature doth impart
In goodness of thy soil; and more delicious mould,
Surveying all this isle, the sun did ne'er behold.
Bring forth that British vale, and be it ne'er so rare,
But *Catmus* with that vale for richness may compare.

What forest nymph is found, how brave soe'er she be;
But *Lyfield* shews herself as brave a nymph as she.
What river ever rose from bank or swelling hill,
Than Rutland's wandering Wash, a delicater rill?
Small shire that can'st produce to thy proportion good,
One vale of special name, one forest, and one flood!
Oh! *Catmus* thou fair vale, come on in grass and corn!
That *Beaver*[1] ne'er be said thy sisterhood to scorn,
And let thy *Ockham* boast to have no little grace,
That her the pleased Fates did in thy bosom place!
And *Lyfield*, as thou are a forest, live so free,
That every forest nymph may praise the sports in thee;
And down the *Welland's* course, Oh! *Wash*, run ever clear.
To honour, and to be much honoured by this Shire."

The south-western part of the county was formerly entirely occupied by the Forest of Leighfield—one of the royal forests of England—part of which still remains, including Beaumont Chase, and Burley, Exton, and Normanton Parks; the two latter, still dotted by herds of deer, occupy no inconsiderable fraction of its area.

A magnificent landscape spreads before us as we pass through the rich and beautiful Vale of Catmose, which, running from Ranksborough Hill on the western boundary to the centre of the county, includes within its limits the county town of Oakham.

On the north-eastern side of the Vale, the elevated ground, beginning at Burley-on-the-Hill, forms a level tableland and stretches all over the northern part of the county, overlooking the fertile and well-wooded plains of Leicestershire and Lincolnshire.

[1] Belvoir Vale, Notts.

On the breezy tableland which overlooks the Eye and the Welland, and forms part of the long sloping wolds which roll away through the neighbouring shires, stands the only other town in Rutland—Uppingham—famous for its School, the buildings of which cover no small portion of the town which Leland, writing in 1545,

The Vale of Catmose

rather contemptuously described as consisting of "but one meane strete and but a very meane church."

Rutland is essentially an agricultural county. No belching smoke-stacks poison the air, and we need not walk far before the silence is broken only by the hum of the insect world, which reminds us that we are far removed