

I. County and Shire. The Origin of Norfolk.

Before we begin to study the geography of Norfolk, we ought to know why the name of Norfolk has been given to a county situated near the middle of the east coast of England. If we knew nothing at all about the evolution of the English counties, we might naturally imagine that a county called Norfolk would be in the northern part of the country. To help us to understand why an eastern county bears that name, we must know how England became divided into counties and what relation these comparatively modern divisions of the land bear to certain earlier ones.

In the year 55 B.C., when Julius Caesar landed on the coast of Kent, he found different parts of England inhabited by different British tribes. For instance, the south-eastern portion, with which he first became acquainted, belonged to a people called the Cantii; the easternmost portion was occupied by the Cenimagni or Icenii; while between the countries of these two tribes lay that of the Trinobantes.

We cannot now be quite sure of the precise limits of these different divisions of the country; but in the cases

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978-1-107-65877-6 - Cambridge County Geographies: Norfolk

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of some of them it is clear that they had natural boundaries in the shape of rivers, fens, or forests. The country of the Cantii was divided from that of the Regni to the west by a great forest covering the district now called the Weald; while the country of the Iceni was bounded on the north and east by the sea, on the north-west by the fens, and on the west by a large tract of forest.

The Romans were in possession of Britain till about 410 A.D. They then gradually withdrew and left the country practically defenceless; so that when the Saxons and Angles invaded it they had little difficulty in conquering and occupying it.

By the Saxons and Angles England was divided into several kingdoms. The boundaries of some of these new divisions differed from those of the countries occupied by the British tribes, but the Saxon kingdom of Kent had about the same limits as the country of the Cantii, and the Anglian kingdom of East Anglia had nearly the same boundaries as the country of the Iceni.

If we look at a map of England, we notice at once that the country is divided into counties and shires. Of these the divisions with names ending in *shire* are portions or *shares* of the larger divisions that existed in Saxon times. For instance, Staffordshire was once a part of the Saxon kingdom of Mercia, and Berkshire and Gloucestershire were parts of the kingdom of Wessex. As for the counties without the termination *shire*, most of these are old English kingdoms which have kept their original boundaries and in some cases their original names.

The kingdom of East Anglia was founded in 575 A.D.

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Its name implies that its inhabitants at that time were chiefly Angles. As we have said, we cannot be quite sure of its precise limits; but it was bounded on the west and north-west by the kingdom of Mercia and on the south by the kingdom of East Saxony, which included Essex. For many years it had its own kings, and it was



A River Scene in the Broadlands

often at war, not only with the Danes who invaded its coasts, but also with other Saxon kingdoms.

Now if we look at the map again, we shall see that the kingdom of East Anglia was naturally divided into two portions by the Little Ouse and Waveney rivers. In course of time, its inhabitants came to describe themselves

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as North-folk or South-folk, the former being those who dwelt on the north and the latter those who dwelt on the south of the two rivers.

So the county of Norfolk is really the country of the North-folk, while the county of Suffolk is the country of the South-folk of East Anglia.

2. General Characteristics. Position and Natural Conditions.

Although on a map of England Norfolk appears to extend quite as far eastward as the adjoining county of Suffolk, it is not really our easternmost county ; for a small piece of Suffolk, which looks as if it should belong to Norfolk, extends northward from the town of Lowestoft, separating part of Norfolk from the sea, and having in Lowestoft Ness the most easterly point of England.

Norfolk is distinctly a maritime county. It is bounded on the north and on the east by the North Sea, and it has about 90 miles of coast-line. On the north-west a large estuary called the Wash, into which flow the rivers of the great flat fen district, forms its boundary. This estuary is shallow ; but it has always been navigable, and in Saxon times the Danes used to land on its shores when they were bent on ravaging the country and forming settlements in this part of England. Owing to its easterly position, Norfolk was much exposed to the attacks of the Danes, who in 1004 were able to sail quite up to Norwich ; and in later times, whenever it was feared that England

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would be invaded by an enemy, the coast of Norfolk had to be carefully watched and guarded. Guarding was especially needed along the coast westward of Cromer, where there was deep water in a small bay known as Weybourn Hoop. An old rhyme says that

“He who would old England win
Must at Weybourn Hoop begin.”

But, since the Danes ravaged the county, no foreign foe has succeeded in landing on the Norfolk coast.

Although the county has a long coast-line, it has only two important sea-ports; for no river of any size enters the sea between the mouth of the Yare and that of the Ouse. Formerly some maritime trade was carried on by two or three little towns on the north coast, but the silting-up of their harbours caused their trade to decay. King's Lynn was once one of the chief wine-importing ports of the kingdom, and by means of an extensive system of canals and rivers it carried on a considerable trade with several inland towns, but when those towns became connected with London and other places by railways the maritime trade of King's Lynn became gradually reduced. Yarmouth ships, too, in the days before railways, sent away a large share of the goods manufactured at Norwich; but now Yarmouth is chiefly noted for its great fishing industry.

Norfolk is one of our principal agricultural counties, more than three quarters of its surface being cultivated. Wheat, barley, oats, and green crops are largely and successfully grown, even along the most exposed parts of

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the coast. Of the large tracts of heath or waste land which once existed here, only about 12,000 acres still remain unreclaimed. There is, however, plenty of permanent pasture, including large tracts of marshland; and these help to keep up the high reputation of the county for cattle and sheep rearing. The prominent position of



King's Lynn

Norfolk as an agricultural county is the more creditable to its farmers because the soil, in its natural state, is for the most part of poor quality, but by mixing and in other ways improving it the farmers have made it wonderfully productive.

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The city of Norwich, the chief town of the county, is the principal industrial centre, several of its important industries being directly connected with and dependent upon local agriculture. Yarmouth, Cromer, Sheringham and Hunstanton are popular seaside towns, and all along the coast there are fishing villages whose inhabitants are largely dependent upon summer visitors. But, from the point of view of the holiday-maker, Norfolk is chiefly famous for its delightful Broads district, the famous Norfolk Broads being a series of navigable meres or lakes from about 15 to 400 acres in extent, most of them connected with the rivers Yare, Bure, and Waveney and their tributaries.

3. Size. Shape. Boundaries.

Norfolk ranks fourth in size among the counties of England, the three larger counties being Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, and Devonshire. Its length, measured from Yarmouth on the east coast to West Walton on the Cambridgeshire border, is 67 miles; its breadth, measured from Diss on the Suffolk border to Blakeney Point on the north coast, is $40\frac{1}{2}$ miles; and the entire area of the county is 1,308,439 acres or 2044 square miles—about one forty-third part of the entire land area of Great Britain.

Norfolk is bounded on the north by the North Sea. The sea is also its boundary on the east; but in the south-east corner of the county a small portion of Suffolk lies

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between it and the sea. On the south it is bounded by the rivers Waveney and Little Ouse, both of which have their source in a small tract of marshland in the parish of South Lopham, which is situated near the middle of the county's southern boundary. The Waveney flows eastward to the sea; the Little Ouse flows westward and



The Little Ouse near Brandon

joins the Ouse. These two rivers divide Norfolk from Suffolk. On the west, Norfolk is bounded by Cambridge-shire, from which it is separated by the river Nene; while on the north-west it is bounded by the Wash.

It will thus be seen that the boundaries of Norfolk are natural ones with the exception of the small part, less than two miles in extent, separating the head waters of

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the Waveney and Little Ouse. Owing to the abrupt turn northward of the Waveney near Lowestoft we have the small portion of Suffolk lying between Norfolk and the sea already mentioned; while, close by, a small portion of Norfolk, for the same reason, seems to push itself into East Suffolk.

From Yarmouth on the east coast to Sheringham on the north, the coast-line of Norfolk makes a fairly regular curve north-westward. Westward of Sheringham it becomes more broken up, and at Blakeney a long narrow strip of land projects some distance into the sea, though not beyond the one-fathom line of depth. The end of this strip of land is called Blakeney Point. Between Weybourn and Gore Point, which is the north-western extremity of the county, large tracts of what are called “meal marshes” border the coast. Some of these meal marshes, with their sandy or shingly beaches and undulating sand-hills, are separated from the mainland by small streams or salt creeks; so that they are really detached portions of the county. They are rarely visited except by wild-fowlers, and they are the nesting-places of great numbers of sea and shore birds. They are very interesting places, and we shall have something more to say about them in a later chapter.

4. **Surface and General Features.** **Broadland.**

Thomas Fuller, who lived in the seventeenth century, wrote that “all England may be carved out of Norfolk,

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represented therein, not only to the kind, but degree thereof. Here are fens and heaths, and light and deep, and sand and clay ground, and meadow and pasture, and arable and woody, and (generally) woodless land, so grateful to this shire with the variety thereof.”



A Norfolk Fenland Scene

What this old writer said about the county is not quite true; for Norfolk is without mountains and has nowhere any very high ground. But to call it a flat county, as strangers sometimes do, is a mistake; for although in its fenland and marshland it has some of the