

COUNTIES, TOWNS AND PLACES



England is divided into smaller parts known as **counties**¹, (not countries!), and these are similar to your okres. There are about 50 counties in England. Wales, Scotland and Ireland also have counties. Each county is responsible for local government, and provides services such as education, health and police forces for a large region. Local services and facilities such as leisure centres², libraries and street cleaning are provided by town or borough³ councils in each county.

Travelling from one county to another, whether on foot or by car, you probably wouldn't immediately⁴ notice any particular difference between one county and the next, apart from perhaps seeing a road sign welcoming you. Most counties, however, do have special characteristics, be it geographical, architectural or sociological, that help to make it unique in some way.

People are often proud of where they were born or where they have lived for a long time, (for some it's almost like supporting⁵ a football team). In the north they say "You can take a man out of Lancashire but you'll never take the Lancashire out of the man". In other words, if you were born and brought up in a Lancashire village or town, it doesn't matter where you move to

kind example of human kindness.

Each county has its own badge⁶ which is used on signs and official correspondence. Look carefully and you'll notice that even policemen, although all wearing a similar uniform, have a unique silver badge on their helmet that represents the county police force they work for. Incidentally¹⁰, many of Britain's war ships were named after towns or counties. HMS Manchester is one example, (it was said that smaller battle ships¹¹ were named after towns, and bigger ones after counties).

Geographically, many counties have distinctive features. In the east of England, the Norfolk Broads, (in the county of Norfolk), for example, is famous for its flat terrain and network of inland waterways, (excellent for boating and bird watching). Kent, on the other hand, is not only famous for its towns of Dover and Canterbury, but is also famous for its garden and fruit industry. Known as the 'Garden of England', Kent used to produce many famous types of apples. Before and after the Second World War, thousands of poor families from the East End of London used to spend long summer 'working holidays' in the fields of Kent. Here they would spend the days helping to pick hops¹² for

or for how long you live there, the Lancashire traditions, loyalties and habits will always remain⁸ with you.

People from the northern county of Yorkshire (often known as James Heriot country because he based many of his stories there) have a distinctive⁷ character, they are well known as 'straight talkers', always saying exactly what they think, and never trying to be something they are not: with people from Yorkshire 'What you see is what you get'. But most people from outside Yorkshire know that behind the hard exterior of every Yorkshire man and woman lies an honest⁶,

Kent's beer industry and, camped close to the fields at night, would enjoy a bit of singing and drinking!

Further down, heading towards the South-East of England, the county of Hampshire has a great naval tradition. Two of its coastal towns, Portsmouth and Southampton, have much to attract the visitor today. Portsmouth is home to HMS Victory, Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, whilst a newer museum item is the remains¹³ of the Tudor war ship Mary Rose. This ship was once part of Henry VIII's fleet¹⁴ of ships. It left Portsmouth harbour in 1545 and didn't return until 1982! (Having been wrecked¹⁵ with hundreds of lives lost.) Southampton, today, is a popular place for sailing but it has received fame once again as people were reminded that it was from the docks of Southampton where the Titanic was launched, destined¹⁶ to meet a watery grave¹⁷ nearly ninety years ago. But, on a more cheerful note, Hampshire is also proud of the fact that Jane Austen lived in Chartown, a small Hampshire village, and wrote or revised¹⁸ six of her books there.

SOME TERMINOLOGY

Village: Smaller than a town. It might have a Primary school but very unlikely to have a Secondary school.

Town: Has the usual facilities such as schools, shops and police station. May not necessarily have a hospital. Most towns have a Town Hall and a Mayor, (unlike mayors in other countries, he or she has very little power and really only has an honorary title). Towns are governed by town councils, (parish¹⁹, district or borough council all mean something very similar).

City: Everything is bigger! Wider range²⁰ of facilities including a comprehensive²¹ transport system, (often an airport too), and a university. A general unofficial rule is that a city is only called a city when it has a cathedral, (it doesn't necessarily have to have a very large population).

County: A region which includes a city, collection of towns and villages, and is organised for administrative purposes²² as a county.

Suburb: A suburb²³ is usually bigger than a village. Towns between about ten and twenty miles from the centre of London could be called suburbs of London. Similarly, small villages or towns resting close to a large town are suburbs of that town.

Nation: This term usually refers to the people or government: Wales is a nation. The Welsh, as a nation, are well known for their love of singing. Whether at a rugby match, in

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the pub, or on the stage²⁴, the Welsh love to sing and are famous for their male voice choirs. The Welsh, it is said, were born to sing!

There are some large regions of England, (that incorporate towns and several cities), which have an unofficial title. Ask most people what or where the **West Country** is, for example, and they will tell you that it refers to counties such as Devon and Cornwall. Other examples of geographical regions (more than one county) that are known by special names are:

The Home Counties - the counties close to London on its north and north-east side, including: Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire.

The Midlands are counties such as Derbyshire and Warwickshire. (Before arriving in north-east England.)

The Potteries is an area famous for its pottery²⁵ industry, particularly around Staffordshire.

East Anglia includes the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk.

The Lake District is a region in the county of Cumbria famous for its hills and lakes. You can't have all those lakes without a lot of rain! (parts of Cumbria have five times as much rain as London), but the impressive scenery and fresh air make

up for the windy, wet conditions.

You might have noticed that many counties end with the word **'shire'**, (usually pronounced 'sheer'). This is an old English word which really means county. Often it was used to name a region after its most important town, - Oxford is the main town of Oxfordshire. Other towns or counties take their name from the local river. The river Exe, (Exeter, Devon), and the river Cam, (Cambridge), are two examples. The larger towns in a county are often known as market towns, and the largest town is usually known as the county town.

Elsewhere in England history shows that settlers and invaders²⁶ from outside left their mark on places. The names of these places give a clue²⁷ to who used to live there. The Romans called England's capital city 'Londinium' and Danish Viking invaders have left us with county names such as Sussex and Essex. If I tell you that Sussex meant the 'south people' and Wessex the 'west people', I'm sure you can work out what Essex meant.

Urban²⁸ means: belonging to a town or city. In England most people live in urban areas, - (built-up areas with lots of concrete, buildings, traffic and people).

Rural²⁹ has the opposite meaning. People

who live in quieter or less built-up areas, (particularly in the countryside and villages), live in a rural area/district. Although many students of English often talk of **the nature**, (also common in American English), British people talk of *walks in the country*, or about their love of *visiting the countryside*, (not: **visiting the nature**). Quiet places away from busy towns and roads, where you can walk in woodland and see animals in their natural surroundings are all part of the countryside, (or often shortened to: **the country**).

Steve Harris

1okraje, district; 2zariadenia ako centrum voľného času; 3samostatné mestá; 4okamžite; 5podporovať; 6zvyky navždy zostanú; 7osobitný, typický; 8úprimná; 9odznak, znak; 10mimochoďom; 11vojnové lode (battle - bitka); 12chmel; 13pozostatok; 14národná flotila, loďstvo; 15stroskotala; 16vypustený, predurčený; 17hrob; 18urobila recenziu; 19cirkevná obec; 20rozsah; 21podrobný, rozsiahly; 22účely; 23predmestie, okrajová časť; 24na javisku; 25hrnčiarstvo; 26okupanti, tí, čo robili nájazdy; 27pomôcka, oporný bod, vodítko; 28mestský; 29dedinský