



WILTSHIRE, England

History and Description, 1868

"**WILTSHIRE**, an inland county in the south-west of England, bounded on the N. and N.W. by Gloucestershire, on the N.E. by Berkshire, on the E. and S.E. by Hampshire, on the S. by Dorsetshire, and on the W. and S.W. by Somersetshire. It lies between 50° 55' and 51° 43' N. lat. and 1° 30' and 2° 22' W. long. Its shape is nearly quadrangular, rounded at the northern extremity; its extreme length from N. to S. being 54 miles, and its greatest breadth 37 miles. Its area is about 1,350 square miles, or 865,092 acres. The original populations appear, from the names of the rivers and mountains, to have been Iberians, but they were supplanted at an early period by the Celtic Britons or Welsh, and those in their turn by the Teutonic tribes of the Belgæ and Attrebatii, who occupied it at the time of the first Roman invasion.

In the Roman division it was included in the province of *Britannia Prima*, and under Vespasian was brought into entire subjection, when the stations of Sorbiodunum, Old Sarum, Verlucio, near Heddington, and *Cunetio*, a little to the E. of Marlborough, were founded, and several military roads constructed, the lines of which may yet be traced in several places. The principal Roman road that traversed the county was a continuation of the *Tulia Strata*, which, entering from Bath, proceeded north-eastward, by Medley and Spy Park, to the station of Verlucio, and thence by Colston, and across the river Kennet, to that of *Cunetio*, beyond which it stretched across the eastern confines of the county.

The Fosse Way branched from the *Julia Strata* at Bath-Ford, and passed by Banner Down, Easton Grey, and Malmesbury to Cirencester, in Gloucestershire; another great road entered from Cirencester, and passed south-eastward, by Cricklade, to Wanborough; and the Ridgeway is clearly visible on the chalk ridge extending north-eastward from Avebury into Berkshire. In the beginning of the 6th century the county was replanted by the West Saxons under Cerdic, who defeated the Britons in numerous engagements, but did not succeed in entirely expelling them from the southern districts till about 577, when the county was finally incorporated into the kingdom of Wessex, and received the name of *Wiltscire*, probably from Wilton, the town on the river Willey, or, perhaps, from the Wilts, a North-German tribe, who are said to have settled here.

In the 9th century it was much devastated by the Danes, under Guthrum, who defeated Alfred the Great at Wilton in 871, and burnt Chippenham in 878, but were afterwards overthrown at Eddington. In 995 the Danes, under Sueno, overran all North Wilts, and continued their devastations till 1016. At the Norman Conquest it came to William D'Ewe, Edward de Saresbury, Ralph de Mortimer, Milo Crispin, and others. In the civil war a battle was fought in 1643 on Roundway Down, and the castles and towns of Salisbury, Marlborough, Devizes, Malmesbury, Ludgershall, Warminster, and Wardour were besieged.

The population at the commencement of the present century was 183,820, which in 1851 had increased to 254,221, but in 1861 partially declined to 249,311, of whom 122,592 were males, and 126,719 females, inhabiting 63,126 houses.

The geological strata of the county are principally cretaceous, belonging to the great central chalk district of England, but are traversed nearly through the middle of the county by a narrow belt of greensand, composing the Vale of Pewsey, and which separates the chalk of the Marlborough downs and Salisbury Plain on the S. and E. from the oolitic formations which underlie the chalk, except where laid bare in the N. and W., appearing in narrow strips of oolitic freestone, coral rag, Oxford clay, forest marble, and other strata belonging to the upper, middle, and lower oolite, but these occupy only a small proportion of the surface. In the S.E. corner of the county is a deposit of London, or plastic, clay, belonging to the Hampshire formation.

The chalk rises into lofty downs in parts; at Westbury Down 775 feet above the sea, Alfred's Beacon 800 feet, Beacon Hill, near Amesbury, 600 feet, and Walbury Beacon 1,011 feet, being the highest chalk in England. There are quarries of good building stone, usually called Bath stone, containing fossils at Box, Swindon, Tisbury, and other places; also limestone at Silbury Hill, sandstone and freestone in the N., chalk and flint in the downs. There are mineral springs in the Oxford clay, as at Heywood, Holt, and Middle Hill Spa, a chalybeate spring at Chippenham, and a saline and chalybeate spring near Melksham.

The drainage belongs to three distinct basins - the Thames, which rises on the Gloucestershire border, drains the north-eastern part of the county, receiving the waters of the Churn, or true Thames; the Key, or Kay; and the Cole; and beyond the limits of the county those of the Kennet, which rises near Wroughton and flows 20 miles through Wiltshire to the Thames at Reading, in Berkshire, receiving the Ogbourn, Aldbourn, and Hungerford brook in its course.

The Bristol, or Upper Avon, which belongs to the basin of the Severn, drains the north-western part of the county, receiving the streams of the Tetbury brook, Marden, Devizes river, Mere, and Frome. The Lower, or Salisbury Avon, is a distinct basin, discharging its waters into the English Channel; this river drains the southern part of the county, being formed by five head streams - the Ebele, Nadder, Willy, Avon, and Bourne; its whole length in Wiltshire is 41 miles. None of the Wiltshire rivers are of much service for navigation, but they turn numerous mills, and feed the three important lines of canal which traverse the northern division of the county, the Thames and Severn, the Kennet and Avon, and Wilts and Berks canals. The only lake of any size is Bradon Pond.

The county is separated into two divisions, N. and S., by the vale of Pewsey, and an irregular line marked throughout by downs. The northern part consists principally of a fertile level tract, except towards the northern boundary, where the land begins to rise in the direction of the Cotswold hills, and towards the centre, where it is broken by a ridge of downs. The southern portion is more varied, being broken by downs, some of which are of considerable altitude, and intersected by some fertile and well-watered valleys, especially along the rivers Avon, Willey, and Nadder. In this division is the platform range of downs, known as Salisbury Plain, for the most part unenclosed and bleak, but well adapted for sheep-walks. The number of sheep kept in this part of the county averages between six and seven hundred thousand, yielding about 8,500 packs of wool. Around Orchester are extensive water meadows, and near the Dorchester border are dairy farms, where much butter is made.

This county is chiefly celebrated for its bacon and cheese, the latter being usually sold as single and double Gloucester, though made in Wilts. The manufactures of Wilts are of considerable extent and importance, especially those of woollen goods and broadcloth, which have long been established in the county. Bradford is the seat of the cloth trade, though there are several mills at Westbury, Chippenham, Trowbridge, and Melksham, at which last there are also looms for hair-cloth and sacking, and at Chippenham and Devizes silk-throwing mills; at Salisbury are factories producing excellent cutlery and hardware goods; at Malmesbury lace is made; at Swindon gloves and railway carriages; and in the vicinity of Wilton carpets. In all the large towns malting and brewing are extensively carried on, especially of strong ale for the London market, where it is sold under the names of Wiltshire and Kennet ale.

Communication is maintained with all parts of the kingdom by means of the canals above mentioned, and the railway system of the Great Western, the main line of which enters the county from London a little S. of Highworth, and passes by Swindon, Wootton Bassett, Chippenham, Corsham, and Box to Bath, a distance of 62 miles, and so to Bristol and Exeter. From the mainline several branches diverge: one from Swindon runs by Purton and Cirencester to Cheltenham, Gloucester, and Birmingham, thus communicating with the N. and E. parts of the kingdom; another, called the Wilts, Somerset, and Weymouth, goes by Melksham, Bradford, and Trowbridge to Westbury, Warminster, and Frome; and a third branch, from Warminster to Salisbury; a short line also goes from Reading to Hungerford.

About 7 miles of the London and South-Western railway enters the county from London by Dean to Salisbury, where branch lines from Bishopstoke and Basingstoke join. There is a new line from Salisbury to Yeovil, which is to be continued to Exeter. The main lines of road radiating from Devizes are that by Avebury and Silbury Hill to Swindon and Highworth, with a fork to Marlborough and Hungerford; that by Calne and Bowood to Cirencester, with forks to Malmesbury and Cricklade; that

by Spy Park to Chippenham and Corsham; that by Melksham and Bradford to Bath and Bristol, with a fork to Trowbridge; that by Earlstoke and Westbury to Warminster or Frome; that by Market Lavington, over Salisbury Plain, to Heytesbury and Shaftesbury, with a fork to Wilton, Salisbury, and Southampton; that by Rushall and Ludgershall to Andover, or by Amesbury to Stonehenge, Salisbury, and Winchester.

The county forms two divisions, South and North: of the former, the cathedral city of Salisbury is the capital, where the winter assizes and the parliamentary elections for the South Division are held; and of the latter Devizes, where the summer assizes and the elections for the North Division are held; these towns are also parliamentary boroughs, each returning two members, as do likewise Chippenham, Cricklade, and Marlborough; while Calne, Malmesbury, Westbury, and Wilton each return one member to parliament; the whole of the above-named towns, except Wilton, are market towns, and most of them have public buildings and churches; the other market towns, not being boroughs, are Amesbury, Bradford on Avon, Hindon, Market Lavington, Melksham, Mere, Swindon, Trowbridge, Warminster, and Wootton-Bassett. The Epiphany and Easter sessions are held at Salisbury, the Midsummer sessions at Warminster, and the Michaelmas at Devizes.

The county is included in the Western Circuit, and in the South-Western Military District. Its government is entrusted to a lord-lieutenant and *custos rotulorum*, a vice-lieutenant, sheriff, and about 55 deputy-lieutenants, assisted by 250 magistrates. For ecclesiastical purposes it is included in the dioceses of Salisbury and Gloucester and Bristol, both in the province of Canterbury.

By far the larger part belongs to that of Salisbury, forming the archdeaconries of Salisbury and Wilts; the former comprises the deaneries of Amesbury, Chalk, Salisbury, Wilton, and Wily; and the latter those of Avebury, Marlborough, and Poterne, and until recently Cricklade and Malmesbury, but these two last were taken away by the Act 6 and 7 William IV., cap. 77, by which they were annexed to the diocese of Gloucester and Bristol. It is divided into 28 hundreds, 17 Poor-law Unions, and 12 new County Court districts, comprising 336 parishes, besides 20 ecclesiastical districts.

This county is distinguished for its numerous remains of antiquity; of these the most conspicuous are Stonehenge, 2 miles westward of Amesbury; Avebury, 5 miles W. of Marlborough; the vast earthwork of the Wansdyke, conjectured to have been the northern boundary of the Belgæ, stretching across the county for nearly 20 miles from Bath to Marlborough; the Ridgeway, another earthwork, or perhaps a Roman road, extending along the high chalk ridge north-eastward from Avebury into the adjoining county of Berks; Grimsdyke and Bokerley dyke, about 12 miles in length, lying to the S. of Salisbury; Old Ditch, running from Knooke to Durnford; the Julia Strata, Fosse Way, and other Roman roads; numerous ancient encampments, the largest and most noted of which are the fortifications of Old Sarum, including an area of nearly 30 acres; Chisbury Camp, to the N.W. of Tidworth, covering 17 acres; Winklebury, or Vespasian's Camp, enclosing 39 acres; numerous sites of British villages and consecrated places, chiefly in the neighbourhood of Salisbury Plain and the Marlborough downs; remains of the abbeys of Kingswood, Laycock, and Malmesbury, &c."