

TOURIST'S GUIDE TO WARWICKSHIRE

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Tourist's Guide to Warwickshire by G. Phillips Bevan

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G. PHILLIPS BEVAN

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PREFACE.

A CHEAP and portable guide-book seems a fitting accompaniment to a cheap tour; and the Editor has endeavoured to produce one which shall fulfil this purpose, while it directs the attention of the traveller to all that is best worth seeing. Superfluous description has been avoided, the object of the work being merely to denote the leading points, and thus not to encumber the tourist with unnecessary remarks, which entail a more or less bulky volume.

1882.

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WARWICKSHIRE.

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

WARWICKSHIRE, the centre and heart of English soil, is as typical a county as can be found anywhere. Whatever may be the taste of the visitor, he will find material of the highest interest everywhere awaiting him. The scenery is soft and tender, comprising shaded woodland, breezy downs, lanes and fields studded with flowers, graceful rivers and streams. The history of Warwickshire, so pregnant with the stirring events that go to make up the history of England, lives again in her antiquarian remains, her venerable castles and numberless relics of mediæval domestic life; while the student of to-day will find in the multifarious industries of the county ample stores of technical information, or will note the ever-changing problems of industrial life and politics. Few, if any, of the English counties are more representative than is Warwickshire, in which the past and present are ever in sharp juxtaposition, and in which the glories of the "good old times" offer such a contrast to the more prosaic and more restless life of the present day.

The county of Warwick, which ranks twenty-fourth in size, contains an area of 881 square miles, or 566,458 acres. It is surrounded by the counties of Stafford, Leicester, Northampton, Oxford, Gloucester, and Worcester, the two latter interchanging their borders constantly with Warwickshire, so that it would be hard for the tourist to say at a guess in which county he was standing. Many an English county has an outlying portion elsewhere, but nowhere is this disjointed condition carried to such an extent as in the S.W. of War-

wickshire. The physical features are not remarkable for any great variety of elevation, there being no mountains whatever in the county, and, with the exception of the northern spurs of the Cotswolds, few hills of any size. But it must not be assumed that the surface is flat, for it is almost everywhere undulating with a singular freedom from monotony. In the north, indeed, the scenery may be said to rise to an almost high order west of Sutton Coldfield, extending to Barr Beacon on the Staffordshire border, a district comprising the really wild and beautiful Sutton Park, a Birmingham lung which any capital might envy. A still more broken and beautiful bit of country is found to the W. of the Watling Street, between Atherstone and Nuneaton, equal to parts of Wales, though somewhat spoiled by the encroachments of collieries. It gradually dies out S. of Arley and Corley. South of these districts is the extensive wooded country known as Arden, which in early days was a dense forest, stretching from Coleshill on N. to Brandon, Coventry and the valley of the Avon, and on W. as far as the Worcestershire border. Indeed, the early topographers divided Warwickshire into the two districts of the Arden and the Feldon—the latter being the open and undulating agricultural country to the S. of Warwick and Southam. The term Arden, as applied to forest land, is seen also in the Ardennes; though its present aspect is so changed to what it must have appeared at the date at which Shakespeare wrote his 'As You Like It,' that one is almost tempted to imagine that the locality was intended rather for the Ardennes. The N.E. side of the county is occupied by a long stretch of high ground, passing from Leicestershire S. to Rugby, Dunchurch and Southam, in which occasional elevations make their appearance, such as Wormleighton and Napton Hills. On the western border, too, the country becomes prettily broken along the valley of the Avon, and a ridge of table-land stretches from Alcester to near Stratford-on-Avon. The extreme S. is very picturesque in many parts, particularly in the valley of the Stour about Easington, and that of the Dene at Wellesbourne. Separating Warwickshire from Oxfordshire is the conspicuous plateau of Edgehill, which as it runs S. becomes broken up and merges into the Cotswold escarpments.