Whitchurch (5221). The more important towns not mentioned above are Broseley, Coalbrookdale, Madeley (this parish including Ironbridge and Coalport) and Much Wenlock, which are embraced wholly or in part by the borough of Wenlock; Market Drayton (5167) and Shifnal (3321). Lesser towns are Clun (1915) which gives name to Clun Forest, and Cleobury Mortimer (1810) in the south. The county is in the Oxford circuit, and assizes are held at Shrewsbury. It has one court of quarter sessions, and is divided into 18 petty sessional divisions. The boroughs of Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Wenlock have separate commissions of the peace and courts of quarter sessions. There are 267 civil parishes. Shrewsbury is divided between the dioceses of Lichfield and Hereford, with a small part in the diocese of St Asaph, and contains 284 ecclesiastical parishes or districts, wholly or in part. There are four parlia­mentary divisions—Mid or Wellington, North or Newport, South or Ludlow, and West or Oswestry, each returning one member, while Shrewsbury returns one member.

*History.—The* district which is now Shropshire was annexed to the kingdom of Mercia by Offa, who in 765 constructed Watt’s Dike to defend his territory against the Welsh, and in 779, having pushed across the Severn, drove the king of Powys from Shrewsbury, then known as Pengwerne, and secured his conquests by a second defensive earthwork known as Offa’s Dike, which, entering Shropshire at Knighton, traverses moor and mountain by Llanymynech and Oswestry, in many places forming the boundary line of the county, and finally leaves it at Bron y Garth and enters Denbighshire. In the 9th and 10th centuries the district was frequently overrun by the Danes, who in 874 destroyed the famous priory of Wenlock, said to have been founded by St Milburg, granddaughter of Penda of Mercia, and in 896 wintered at Quatford. In 912 Æthelflead, the lady of Mercia, erected a fortress at Bridgnorth against the Danish invaders, and in the next year at Chirbury. Mercia was mapped out into shires in the 10th century after its recovery from the Danes by Edward the Elder, and Shropshire stands out as the sole Mercian shire which did not derive its name from its chief town. The first mention of it in the Saxon Chronicle occurs under 1006, when the king crossed the Thames and wintered there. In 1016 Edmund Ætheling plundered Shrews- bury and the neighbourhood.

After the Conquest the principal estates in Shropshire were all bestowed on Norman proprietors, pre-eminent among whom is Roger de Montgomery, the 1st earl of Shrewsbury, whose son Robert de Belesme forfeited his possessions for rebelling against Henry I., when the latter bestowed the earldom on his queen for life. At this period a very large portion of Shropshire was covered by its vast forests, the largest of which, Worf Forest, at its origin extended at least 8 m. in length and 6 m. in width, and became a favourite hunting-ground of the English kings. The forest of Wrekin, or Mount Gilbert as it was then called, covered the whole of that hill and extended eastward as far as Sheriff Hales. Other forests were Stiperstones, the jurisdiction of which was from time immemorial annexed to the barony of Caus, Wyre, Shirlot, Clee, Long Forest and Brewood. The constant necessity of defending their territories against the Welsh prompted the Norman lords of Shropshire to such activity in castle-building that out of 186 castles in England no less than 32 are in this county. Of these the most famous are Ludlow, founded by Roger de Montgomery; Bishop’s Castle, which belonged to the bishops of Hereford; Clun Castle, built by the Fitz-Alans; Cleobury Castle, built by Hugh de Mortimer; Caus Castle, once the barony of Peter Corbett, from whom it came to the Barons Strafford; Rowton Castle, also a seat of the Corbetts; Red Castle, a seat of the Audleys. Other castles were Bridgnorth, Corfham, Holgate, Pulverbatch, Quatford, Shrewsbury and Wem.

Among the Norman religious foundations were the Cluniac Priory at Wenlock, re-established on the Saxon foundation by Roger Montgomery in 1080; the Augustinian abbey of Haughmond founded by William Fitz-Alan; the Cistercian abbey of Buildwas, now a magnificent ruin, founded in 1135 by Roger, bishop of Chester; Shrewsbury Abbey, founded in 1083 by Roger de Montgomery; the Augustinian abbey of Lilleshall, founded in the reign of Stephen; the Augustinian priory of Wombridge, founded before the reign of Henry I.; the Bene­dictine priory of Alberbury founded by Fulk Fitz-Warin in the 13th century; and Chirbury Priory founded in the 13th century.

The fifteen Shropshire hundreds mentioned in the Domesday Survey were entirely rearranged in the reign of Henry I., and only Overs and Condover retained their original names. The Domesday hundred of Ruesset was replaced by Ford, and the hundred court transferred from Alberbury to Ford. Hodnet was the meeting-place of the Domesday hundred of Odenet, which was combined with Recordin, the largest of the Domesday hundreds, to form the modern hundred of Bradford, the latter also including part of the Domesday hundred of Pinholle in Staffordshire. The hundred of Baschurch had its meeting-place at Baschurch in the time of Edward the Confessor; in the reign of Henry I. it was represented mainly by the hundred of Pimhill, the meeting-place of which was at Pimhill. Oswestry represents the Domesday hundred of Mercete, the hundred court of which was transferred from Maesbury to Oswestry. Munslow hundred was formed in the reign of Henry I., but in the reign of Richard I. a large portion was taken out of it to form a new liberty for the priory of Wenlock, the limits of which correspond very nearly with the modern franchise of Wenlock. The Domesday hundred of Alnodestreu, abolished in the reign of Henry I., had its meeting-place at Membrefeld (Morville). The hundreds at the present day number fourteen.

Shropshire was administered by a sheriff, at least from the time of the Conquest, the first Norman sheriff being Warin the Bald, whose successor was Rainald, and in 1156 the office was held by William Fitz-Alan, whose account of the fee-farm of the county is entered in the pipe roll for that year. The shire court was held at Shrewsbury. A considerable portion of Shropshire was included in the Welsh marches, the court for the administration of which was held at Ludlow. In 1397 the castle of Oswestry with the hundred and eleven towns pertaining thereto, the castle of Isabel with the lordship pertaining thereto, and the castle of Dalaley, were annexed to the principality of Chester. By the statute of 1535 for the abolition of the marches, the lordships of Oswestry, Whittington, Masbroke and Knockin were formed into the hundred of Oswestry; the lordship of Ellesmere was joined to the hundred of Pimhill; and the lordship of Down to the hundred of Chirbury. The boundaries of Shropshire have otherwise varied but slightly since the Domesday Survey. Richard’s Castle, Ludford, and Ludlow, however, were then included in the Herefordshire hundred of Cutestornes, while several manors now in Hereford- shire were assessed under Shropshire. The Shropshire manors of Kings Nordley, Aveley, Claverley and Worfield were assessed in the Domesday hundred of Saisdon in Staffordshire; and Quatt, Romsley, Rudge and Shipley in the Warwickshire hundred of Stanlei. By statute 34 and 35 Henry VIII. the town and hundred of Aberton, till then part of Merionethshire, were annexed to this county.

Shropshire in the 13th century was situated almost entirely in the dioceses of Hereford and of Coventry and Lichfield; and formed an archdeaconry called the archdeaconry of Salop. That portion of the archdeaconry in the Hereford diocese included the deaneries of Burford, Stottesdon, Ludlow, Pontes- bury, Clun and Wenlock ; and that portion in the Coventry and Lichfield diocese the deaneries of Salop and Newport. In 1535 the Hereford portion included the additional deanery of Bridg- north; it now forms the archdeaconry of Ludlow, with the additional deaneries of Montgomery, Bishops Castle and Church Stretton. The archdeaconry of Salop, now entirely in the Hereford diocese, includes the deaneries of Condover, Edgmond, Ellesmere, Hodnet, Shifnal, Shrewsbury, Wem, Whitchurch and Wrockwardin. Part of Welsh Shropshire is included in the diocese of St Asaph, comprising the deanery of Oswestry in the archdeaconry of Montgomery, and two parishes in the deanery of Llangollen and the archdeaconry of Mexham.