

The Counties

The Newsletter of the
Association of
British Counties

*Free to A.B.C. members
Spring 2009*

The Development of County Flags

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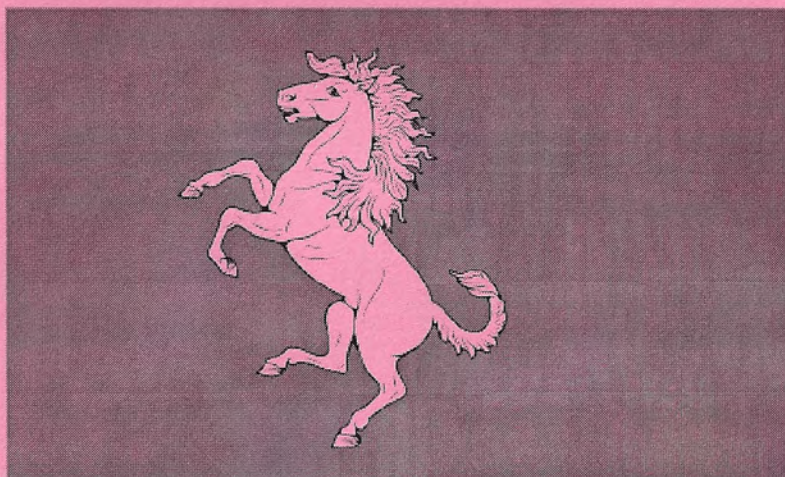
Portrait of Monmouthshire

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Our Digitised Boundary Data

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ABC's 20th Anniversary



County Flag of Kent

Government Statement 1974:

"The new county boundaries are for administrative areas and will not alter the traditional boundaries of Counties, nor is it intended that the loyalties of people living in them will change."

The Association of British Counties

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Editorial

Browsing the historic County boundaries of England on Google Earth is dangerously addictive. You can download the whole thing from the Historic Counties Trust website at www.county-borders.co.uk. However, do be warned—you'll need to set aside plenty of time to roam across our green and pleasant land following the ancient borders as they twist and turn across the landscape revealing the tell-tale signs of land use or river courses in the distant past. You can of course also click to show modern administrative borders simultaneously—prepare to be irritated by officialdom's penchant for constantly 'tidying up' quirky or angular bits of boundary, as the attempt is made to provide easily administered blocks of territory. This wouldn't matter so much if these administrative areas didn't purloin the names of our historic shires! Of course, ABC freely admits that this

Google Earth data demonstrates our historic Counties are far from appropriate units for modern governance. The boundary of Worcestershire and Warwickshire, as it runs diagonally across acres of uniform housing, almost clipping the very corner of Edgbaston cricket ground, is a perfect example. Numerous others can be found, not least the Middlesex-Hertfordshire boundary in the vicinity of Potters Bar. Our position is that these Counties, fundamental to our history and identity on these islands, are the natural geographical units for addresses, maps, popular usage and academic study. Endlessly shifting administrative borders are not.

The boundaries of our land—both County and parish—were laid out many centuries ago for a variety of very definite reasons. Now we can gaze down on them, seeing where they follow the edges of woods or the lines of hedges—proving the antiquity of those features—or where they converge or turn on boulders, rocky outcrops, tumuli or Roman roads. The Notts-Lincs boundary preserves in it the memory of vast meanders of the Trent, now disappeared. The lovely church of St Mary

Redcliffe is clearly within Somerset, the diverted course of the Avon fooling some (including your editor) into assuming it lay within Gloucestershire. Anyone with an interest in ancient boundaries and their courses should acquire the splendid *History on the Ground* by Maurice Beresford (Sutton Publishing) which explains how Anglo-Saxon boundary charters can be followed on the land. They should also avail themselves of HCT's brilliant Google Earth boundary data package. It really is indispensable.

On an entirely different note, the cause of County flags is certainly progressing apace. The latest place to catch the bug (so to speak) is Westmorland, a County so long neglected by the media who assume it has disappeared into a black hole named 'Cumbria'. ABC members know better of course, and so do thousands of Westmerians who have never given up on their heritage. This sense of identity has now manifested itself in pressure for a County flag through the letters page of the local newspaper *The Westmorland Gazette*, printed in Kendal on the edge of the Lake District. ABC, always keen to see more County flags registered with the Flag Institute, has put forward its own suggested design for a Westmorland flag. It is a seven branched apple tree (as seen on the old Westmorland CC coat of arms)

with two red bars on a white field. The bars come from the de Lancaster family, barons of Kendal, and the apple tree comes from the seal of the borough of Appleby-in-Westmorland. This is a familiar design, and the Appleby tourist office already use it on gifts such as mugs and badges. However it is likely that a competition will have to be held before this, or another design, is accepted by the Flag Institute.

A few excerpts to give a flavour of the letters to the *Gazette*:

"I have lived many years in the beautiful County of Westmorland and feel that, not only is the design of the flag a good one [referring to ABC's suggestion] but that we must see it flying on every possible occasion.

"This will not only fill all Westmerians with pride and identity and heritage, but also help out tourist industry as visitors can once again recognise where in this beautiful country of ours they are."

"A flag for Westmorland. Why? Well, Westmorland has heritage which is still very much in evidence—the *Westmorland Gazette*, the Westmorland MP, the wrestling, the County Show, to name just a few.

"The proposed design put forward by the Association of British Counties is simple, distinctive and embodies the

elements of the original of the county shield.

"A good example to prove how effective a County flag can be is Northumberland, which proudly sports the flag, car stickers and even lights which project the emblem onto buildings after dark."

"I wondered if there was a Westmorland Group of any kind promoting the County? I would be most interested to hear from anyone who was interested in starting one up. It is important to keep the name and the boundaries of the County alive not only for the present generation, but for the ones to come—and for all the family historians trying to trace where they come from!"

"Nominate a Westmorland Day which would entail official use [of the flag] and there is no reason why the flag could not be flown throughout the year from private and public poles and even from angled poles projecting from retail premises."

"I would like to see the Westmorland flag in use. I was born in Ambleside in 1925 and I worked for the County Roads and Bridges for 24 years. I am proud to be called a Westmerian and not a Cumbrian."

Such comments will no doubt warm the hearts of ABC's members and supporters. Such latent enthusiasm

for a historic County brought to the surface by the mere suggestion of a County flag! Hopefully it will not be long before a flag is registered for Westmorland. In the meantime we will keep you up to date on developments.....

County Quotes

"As a political entity,
Hampshire is older than
France."

Robert Beckford,
Christianity—a History,
Channel 4,
6th March 2009.

"....Humberside is York-
shire still
And Lancashire is over
the hill
And loneliness is Gaping
Ghyll
We never fought and we
never will...."

Lyrics by Simon Armitage for
rock band The Scaremongers.

From the ABC archives.....



The twentieth anniversary of ABC has led to lots of reminiscing about the Association's history and achievements, and much quiet satisfaction at the progress we feel we have made.

The above photo was taken on 15th October 1991 at the Department of the Environment. From left to right: John Ley Morgan (Back to Somerset campaign); Valerie Andrews (North Berkshire campaign and then Secretary of ABC); Michael Portillo MP (Minister for Local Government); Michael Bradford (then Chairman of ABC); and John Butcher MP (then President of ABC).

This meeting, and the campaigning that went on before and after it, should be seen as having had an important impact on the government's attitude to local identities. Eventually this welcome attitude resulted in the 1996 local government changes which attempted to undo some of the damage the 1974 Act had wrought on public perception of the Counties. Michael Portillo expressed total agreement with ABC's position, and felt strongly that local government should not be based on alien pseudo-geographical areas which have been unthinkingly superimposed over ancient allegiances.

'The Development of County Flags': the Perrin Lecture 2008

by Rupert Barnes

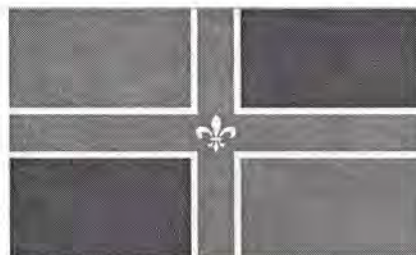
In November I was invited to the Palace of Westminster for the Flag Institute's 2008 Perrin Lecture, on the subject "The Development of County Flags". The lecture was hosted by Andrew Rosindell MP, a resolute champion of real Counties. I was delighted to meet him again before the lecture.

The Flag Institute is dedicated to the study of flags, or "vexillology". It has become a respected authority in the field. Seeing the recent, spontaneous appearance of "County flags", the Flag Institute has taken upon itself to bring order to the field; to regulate and improve the quality of County flags. They have created the "UK Flags Register", to be the definitive record.

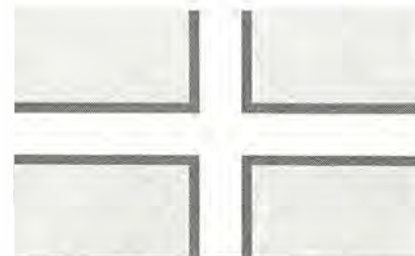
The Association of British Counties stands for traditional Counties and County traditions. County flags are not traditional though; only Cornwall's is old, and most are 21st century. Nevertheless, the local pride and identity they represent are very much our thing. Our concern is to ensure that a "County" flag represents a real County, not a transient local government concept.

The meeting was opened by the Institute's President, Michael Farrow OBE. Readers of *The Times* might have read Mr Farrow's letters on County flags over the summer. After thanking Mr Rosindell for making such prestigious premises available, Mr Farrow launched straight into the matter at hand. County flags are a new phenomenon, and a fascinating one. The task of getting some order to such things he compared with herding cats, and after hearing the story of County flags so far, I could understand why. For that though he handed over to the main speaker; Graham Bartram, the Chief Vexillologist of the Flag Institute.

Mr Bartram was born in Montrose, Angus, and now lives in Pinner, Middlesex, two eminent Counties to give a sound perspective. Flags are about identity, he explained. A man may have many overlapping identities; Mr Bartram claims identity as a man of Montrose, of Angus, as a Briton and as a Scot, amongst others. We all have the Union Flag to express our identity, but a part of any-



Lincolnshire flag



Dorset: St Wite's Cross

one's identity is his County, and this has been reflected in the adoption of County flags.

The Flag Institute will accept only historic Counties as founts of County identity. This is something I wholeheartedly cheer. The men of Angus are attached to their County, but no man felt attached to "Tayside", and none will identify with "Bath and North-East Somerset". Therefore all County flags must be for historic Counties, not for local government areas which, as Mr Bartram observed, change seemingly every week.

County flags differ in their origins. They have arisen individually, not as



Pembrokeshire flag

a nationwide project. It is instructive to look at how they arose.

The oldest of the flags is that of Cornwall; a plain white cross on black, quite ubiquitous in Cornwall now and devised in the nineteenth century. Essex and Kent have older designs (as badges if not as flags); three seaxes and a white stallion are the arms anachronistically attributed respectively to the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of Essex and Kent since at least Elizabethan times. Derived from the Essex arms are those granted in 1910 to Middlesex County Council. That design has flown as a flag for many years, and may still be seen flying at the Middlesex County Show each summer.

The Pembrokeshire flag came from activism and local acceptance. The idea of local stalwart Peter Stock, when his beloved County was scrubbed from the maps in 1974, it has flown ever since. The Yorkshire Ridings Society and the Friends of Real Lancashire have promoted their respective white and red rose flags for many years. All three flags were registered in 2008.

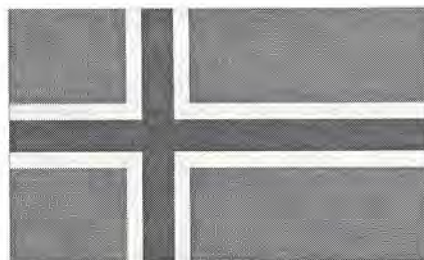
A Shetland flag has been flown since 1969, the 500th anniversary of Shetland's transfer from Norwegian to Scottish rule. In Scotland though all flags are controlled by the law of arms and it was not until 2005 that the Lord Lyon made an official grant

of the flag to the local council. He granted Orkney a flag too in April 2007.

The registered Northumberland flag is a banner of the arms of Northumberland County Council, which is to say the design of the Council's shield spread onto a flag. Under heraldic law, such a banner is the strict property of the armiger, the County Council. The Council "released" the banner for general use by Northumberland folk in 1996 and so the Flag Institute felt able to register it (noting on the register that Northumberland is wider than merely the county council area). Since the lecture Hertfordshire county council too has released its own banner.

Mr Bartram has reviewed other councils' arms and considers many unsuitable to serve as flags. That gives scope for creative ideas to step forward.

The latest flurry of County flags began in Devon in 2002, the idea no doubt spurred by the success of neighbouring Cornwall's flag. A public competition was held through the BBC, and a striking design chosen. Local businesses created a "Devon Flag Group" to make and sell them, and soon the flags were flying all across Devonshire. (The same year a competition in the Scilly News in 2002 created a local flag for the Isles of Scilly, showing that it is



Orkney: St Magnus' Cross

not just Counties which may have flags.)

Since then, the BBC has run public competitions for flags in Lincolnshire (2005), Derbyshire (2006) and Sussex (2008, unregistered). The latter was the initiative of ABC member Ian Steedman. Elsewhere other routes have been followed: the Sheriff of Gloucestershire initiated a competition which resulted in an interesting green, blue and cream flag known as the "Severn Cross" (2008). In Dorset a flag was chosen by a public competition held by the County Council. The "St Wite's Cross" is certainly the brightest and



Hertfordshire flag

most cheerful flag so far.

All these competitions have resulted in fimbriated crosses, apart from Sussex.

So far 16 counties of 92 have flags. There are more current proposals, promoted by individuals or groups. I was cheered to hear the positive reaction to the Huntingdonshire proposal I developed.

There is new interest too, we were told, in town and village flags. (Petersfield, where Michael Farrow lives, has its own now.) We were shown a proposal for a Greater London flag, which is uncomfortable; we must ensure it is never seen as a "county" flag.

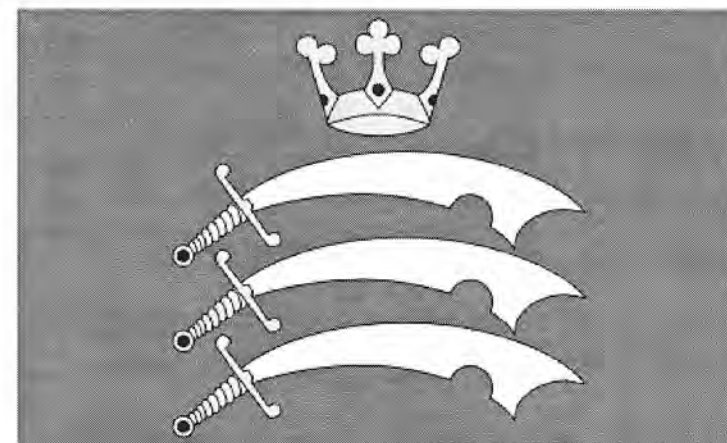
There will be more flags arriving in the next few years. In the meantime Mr

Bartram gave some useful guidance on good flag design. To summarize:

- Keep it simple
- Use meaningful symbolism
- Use two or three basic colours, with contrast
- No lettering or seals
- Be distinctive, or be related
- How will it fly in the wind?

I found few differences with the Flag Institute. One is the Isle of Wight, which is an honoured part of Hampshire and yet is about to get a "county" flag! Otherwise I hope that the Association of British Counties can help to make County flags a reality for those Counties which are most in need.

RB



Middlesex flag

County Portrait
MONMOUTHSHIRE

By Andrew Hawley



**The Sugar Loaf from
summit of the Skirrid**

Monmouthshire is an appealing County. It is blessed with a little of everything: coast, uplands, important towns, monuments of the past; although it perhaps fails to win national laurels in any of these categories. Here, one may suspect, lies its appeal.

Monmouthshire, moreover, is something of an odd County. Its career has not followed the normal path. Famously it long occupied a peculiar limbo, being officially neither of England nor Wales. Acts of Parliament mentioned it by name, lest it should slip through a legal loophole. Controversy attended the vexed

question of its true identity, even well into the twentieth century, until the long-held view that its soul is essentially Welsh became the recognised orthodoxy, indeed an officially established fact, rather than the assertion of a Romantic. Now it is held to be undeniably Welsh; the diehards who asserted it to be an English changeling of a County are outnumbered.

This pleasant, and nowadays affluent, County has, like all our Counties, its own pattern of landscape

and human habitation. It could be considered to be very vaguely basin-like in layout: its boundaries tend to follow the higher ground, especially to the west and north. Mostly it is a comfortable rural County of rolling land, established farms and peaceable villages; to the west, however it includes a thick strip of those uplands which contain the South Wales Coalfield. Here the essential character of Monmouthshire is, of course, immediately different.

Monmouthshire enjoys a small-scale, understated coastline. As the view across the 'sea', or rather the estuary of the Severn, is simply the grey hills of Somerset beyond, little sense of a true maritime identity persists. However, the presence of Monmouthshire's largest town, Newport, reinforces the County's relationship with the widening, suggestive sea. Here is a town built on trade and the movement of goods and men. It is an unashamed port, dilapidated and perhaps a little disappointing to the casual visitor, but - and here's the rub - still there. In fact it has been there, as Monmouthshire outlet and gateway, since mediaeval times, or before. Newport is a port, true; but 'new' it certainly is not. The River Usk, which debouches in a desultory turgidity at this point, has seen it all: the products of Victorian vigour; the troops of Middle Ages warmongering; the arrival of stern-eyed colonists from the Mediterranean, intent

on setting up forward-posts and, if the natives - those intractable Silures - could be subdued, a civitas capital, complete with forum and baths. Indeed, those early Romans must have experienced a momentary chill not unlike Joseph Conrad's enigmatic narrator of *Heart of Darkness*, Marlowe, when he was moved to say, 'And this too has been one of the dark places of the earth.' Stare at the unresponsive mudflats for long enough and you can, with a little imaginative licence, fancy those days are still here. The forlorn vistas of dockland Newport assist immeasurably in this mental exercise.

To the east Monmouthshire has that mainstay of the Picturesque Tour of a couple of centuries ago, the Wye Valley. Or rather it has half of it for, as often as not, the boundary between Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire, Monmouthshire and England, is the venerable and tortuous Wye itself. Wooded heights enclose the wandering waterway, and limestone cliffs emerge to accentuate the sense of wildness and grandeur. This is a land of mossed cottages and wood smoke; of plots and clearings of 'beechen green'; of innumerable and enduring literary and artistic associations. Tintern Abbey, famous for all the right reasons, reinforces these links. Turner. Wordsworth. The names have become almost hackneyed, the real significance too often carelessly overlooked. But, as we

gaze on the stately stonework and soaring tracery, we in the know secretly tell ourselves: how lucky merry Monmouthshire is!

While the new town of Cwmbran will always have its adherents (although few), and the mining communities of the Valleys will always be redolent of a stirring past, perhaps it is true to say that the discerning traveller in Monmouthshire will not seek out these places. More likely he will find himself, almost by default, in some appealing old town where the past is still present and where beauty has not entirely been banished. Usk, a dear, miniature place of inns, curious corners and a lovely, overgrown castle, is one such place. There are others. Caerleon, with one foot in times gone by, remembering the legions who founded the place and who threw up the stone amphitheatre that stands in a field close by; or perhaps neighbouring Caerwent, where their empire-building brothers



Usk castle

built another mighty complex, now just a dusty village of warm stone and intriguing relics. Where to go next? So much from which to choose, depending on taste.

Better than all, to some at least, is Monmouth. Like much of the County to which it lends its name, the county town has a reserved charm and a quiet dignity. Its glories are chiefly Georgian and Victorian, but much that is earlier survives, lending the appealing townscape an intriguing variety. The only fortified bridge in the whole of the British Isles looks across from the sloping high street to the ancient suburb of Overmonnow which, as the name implies, lies over the Monnow. Elsewhere are established taverns, prestigious schools and reminders of Henry V, Harry of Monmouth, whose golden likeness looks down on Agincourt Square. Monmouth sleeps on, dreaming its memories of great men and great doings, while fleeting modernity sears by on the dual carriageway



Chepstow townscape from castle

from the Midlands to South Wales, indifferent to a site of such distinction and antiquity. Sleep on, dear old Monmouth, sleep on...

To the north and west are giants. They unnerve the traveller as he approaches Abergavenny. They have presence and character, and the excited traveller knows he will be soon among them. They are Monmouthshire's compelling colossi, its aspirant alps. And what shapes they have! No lumpen uplifts of mere moorland these. The stately Sugar Loaf is identifiable from any angle and almost any distance. Is there a hill of such comely proportion or graceful lines anywhere else in Wales? To those who look up to their old friend Sugar Loaf each day, the answer will be no. And no less dramatic is the nearby Skirrid, another of Abergavenny's sentinels. Its whaleback ridge lends this holy hill a rare beauty. From some angles, such as the road from Hereford, it is easily

confused with the Sugar Loaf, but the Skirrid is lower and easier of ascent. The view from the summit, site of a holy cell, is not one to be quickly forgotten. The coloured Counties of the Marches step off into indistinctness, while the vista includes the undulating Malverns and, in the far south, the Bristol Channel and beyond. And how did the Skirrid obtain its unusual shape? The land shook with an almighty earthquake, causing slippage and landslide the very hour Christ was crucified. Ask any local.

Monmouthshire endures. It is real to its residents, not as just a name on a map or a road sign, but as a real, unchanging County. It has a feel, an identity. It is a little bit of Wales, with a little bit of everything that makes Wales special. And, as Henry V said (through the words of the Bard), may it last 'from this day until the ending of the world.'

AH



Monmouthshire-Gloucestershire boundary, River Wye

News from the Committee

For its Autumn 2008 meeting the Committee were delighted to visit Redcar, North Riding of Yorkshire, as guests of the Yorkshire Ridings Society. Thanks are due to Chris Abbott, YRS Chairman, for arranging the venue and his wife Glynis who organised the catering. The main issues discussed are described below, along with an update of developments since the meeting.

County Flags

The development of new County flags continues apace. The Flag Institute now includes 16 County flags in its UK Flag Registry, the latest being the Hertfordshire Flag. There are currently several other Counties with flags in various stages of the development and registration process. In general, the Committee considers that the development, registration and, most importantly, use of County flags is a very welcome development, provided such flags relate to a historic County. ABC will seek to encourage the development, registration and use of further such County flags. We are currently working with local people to help move forward flag proposals in Huntingdonshire, Westmorland and Berkshire.

On 4th November 2008, Peter Boyce

and Rupert Barnes attended the Flag Institute's Perrin Lecture on the subject of "The Development of County Flags in the United Kingdom" at the Palace of Westminster. The speaker was Graham Bartram, the institute's Chief Vexillologist. Rupert has written a review of this lecture elsewhere in *The Counties*. The meeting provided an opportunity for Peter and Rupert to meet the Flag Institute and discuss ways of encouraging the development of further County flags. Graham has kindly agreed to give an updated version of this talk to the ABC 20th Anniversary Meeting on Sat 13th June 2009 (see notice elsewhere in this issue). This will no doubt provide some fascinating insights. ABC members are heartily recommended to attend.

Local Government

9 new Unitary Authorities will take over responsibility for local government in their respective areas from 1st April 2009. ABC's concern has always been that none of these should adopt the style 'county council' and that none should miss-use the name of a traditional County. There have been mixed results.

The following are excellent names from ABC's point of view:

- Bedford Borough Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Cheshire East Council
- Cheshire West and Chester

Council

- Cornwall Council

However, the following are less than ideal, since the local government areas exclude key population centres of the historic Counties whose names they borrow.

- Shropshire Council
- Wiltshire Council

Whilst these omit the word 'county' from their names, they do make unqualified use of a County name despite their areas not containing a sizeable part of the population of the historic County whose name they borrow (in Telford and Swindon respectively).

Worst of all is that two of the new Unitary Authorities have chosen to simply use the name of the old county council, including the style 'county council'.

- Durham County Council
- Northumberland County Council

Neither of these authorities should use the name of the historic County without qualification. The Government also recommended that the new authorities be seen as new corporate bodies with new identities. In this context, the statement from the Chairman of the new 'Northumberland' UA is particularly bizarre:

"It is important to reiterate that

whilst the single unitary will adopt the name of an existing council, this is emphatically not a County Council takeover."

This all makes a further nonsense of local government terminology. A 'borough council' could be a lower tier council in a two-tier area or it could be a 'unitary authority'. A 'county council' could be a higher tier council in a two-tier area or it could be a 'unitary authority'. Or a unitary authority might simply be called 'council'. The Government needs to address this issue and come up with a logical, consistent set of terminology for local government areas (one which makes no reference to 'county').

There are currently local government reviews ongoing in the local government areas of 'Norfolk', 'Suffolk' and 'Devon'. The intention here is, again, to replace two-tier local government structures with unitary structures. ABC has made a submission to these making our two key points: (i) that none of the new authorities should make inappropriate, un-qualified use of a County name; (ii) that none of the new unitary authorities should use the style 'County Council'.

At the Committee meeting, Martin Philips gave an update on his ongoing project to survey attitudes of local authorities to the historic Coun-

ties. He has expanded this survey into Wales and County Durham. Particularly encouraging replies had been obtained from Sunderland Council, Bolton Council and Powys Council. It was agreed that this survey should be continued and would provide many possible opportunities for action.

County names in postal addresses

At the Committee meeting, Peter Boyce noted that QAS are the market leaders in Address Management software and are arguably a bigger influence than Royal Mail in this area. He presented a page from the QAS 'Quick Address' manual relating to their treatment of Counties. This made it clear that QAS believed its customers continued to want County data in its products. Peter Boyce pointed out that the default set-up for QAS products is to include the former postal county. This can be turned off, though it's doubtful that many users do this. Alternative data (e.g. administrative or 'geographical' county data) can be supplied at extra cost. The wording of the manual implies that QAS does not have a clear understanding of the nature of former postal county data, the implication being that it updates some of this data itself based on 'geographical boundaries'. It was suggested this might explain some of the apparent expansion of the area in which 'North Humberside' addresses appear.

Peter suggested that one way to influence QAS might be to update and re-package our own traditional County postal data and approach QAS with a proposal to enter a partnership with them to supply this data in its products. Peter and Rupert will consider this possibility.

Border signs

At the Committee meeting, it was noted by Martin Philips that Trafford Borough Council would be erecting its signs marking the Cheshire / Lancashire border in Autumn 2009. Saddleworth White Rose Society has also obtained agreement with Oldham MBC and Saddleworth Parish Council for the erection of Yorkshire / Lancashire border signs in its area.

Tim Butterworth drew the meeting's attention to the Department of Transport's Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/05 on traditional directions signs. Some traditional signs carry historic County names, others carry former local authority names. Martin Philips noted that FORL had used this leaflet to get local authorities to restore some traditional signs.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will take place on the afternoon of Saturday 13th June at Banbury Museum, Oxfordshire (see notice elsewhere in this issue). All members are welcome to attend this. The meeting will mark our 20th anniversary **PB**

News from the Historic Counties Trust

Digitised border data for all of the historic Counties of England has now been released in Google Earth (KMZ) and Arcview Shape (SHP) formats. This can be obtained from the Trust's Historic County Borders Project (<http://www.county-borders.co.uk>) website. This data is a magnificent resource, finally supplying a key missing link in our attempts to make the historic Counties a credible alternative geographical reference frame based on electronic data. It is also tremendous fun to overlay it on GoogleEarth images and track the footpaths, tracks, streams, old rivers beds, ancient earthworks, etc., which form our County borders. Once complete, this project will make such data available for the whole of the UK.

The Trust has also progressed with the consultation exercise on its Historic Counties Standard. Copies of the consultation document have been sent to all relevant bodies. Encouraging responses have been received from many bodies, notably English Heritage, the English Place Name Society and the Victoria County History. Submissions to the consultation exercise will be welcome until summer 2009. Any interested individual

or organisation is welcome to make a submission (see the Trust's web site <http://www.historiccountiestrust.co.uk/> for details). A final version of the Standard will be published later in 2009.

The Trust's web site has also been expanded by including a set of brief descriptions of each of the 92 British Counties. The intention is to produce a booklet (in PDF) format as a guide to the Counties, based on these descriptions and the County map.

ABC Members' Letters

Dear Sir,

ABC, Yorkshire Ridings Society, Friends of Real Lancashire, etc., all aim to safeguard our traditional County boundaries. They all maintain that they are not concerned with administrative boundaries. I think this is wrong. The administrative boundary changes matter a great deal. It is doubtful whether ABC, YRS and FORL would have come into existence if the 1974 Act had not forced some people into the control of a local authority of a different County.

I was made well aware by the Yorkshire exiles in West Craven and Bowland that the new road-signs at the true County boundary were very welcome but they wanted nothing less than a complete return to York-

shire administration. They are not convinced that they remain in their home County when they see Lancashire police on the streets; schools, libraries and fire services owned by Lancashire CC. They have to pay council taxes to Lancashire CC. Maps show them in Lancashire and the press and media regard them as Lancastrians. In a poll of schoolchildren most thought they lived in Lancashire. A similar situation must exist in Middlesbrough, Sedburgh, Saddleworth, Barrow-in-Furness, etc.

I believe ABC, YRS, and FORL should add to their aims the restoration of administrative boundaries to strictly within traditional boundaries of Counties and Ridings as existed before 1974. After all, I think our traditional Counties came into existence to define areas of responsibility for taxation, law and order and other administrative purposes.

Yours sincerely,
Geoff Hoyle
Skipton, Yorks.

Reply from ABC Chairman Peter Boyce:

Should ABC commit itself to seeking the restoration of administrative boundaries which lie strictly within the boundaries of the traditional Counties? Is this a realistic aim? Is this a desirable aim? I'd say it is neither.

First, I believe that it is totally unrealistic to think that ABC could, somehow, bring about a wholesale return to local government based on the traditional Counties.

When modern local government was first created, in 1888, the areas of its 'administrative counties' were based on the historic Counties. The history of local government reform since then has been that of an uninterrupted set of governments, commissions etc. that don't actually consider the historic Counties to be a suitable basis for local government and which have made amendments to local government which reflect this view. Very many small changes were made prior to the 1960s. From the 1960s to the present-day, massive changes have been made to local government.

Each wave of local government reform produces a set of local government areas less and less like the historic Counties. The plain fact is that the traditional Counties are not considered by the powers that be to be a suitable basis for local government. Some might argue that ever basing local government on them (in 1888) was a mistake. To seek to keep the historic Counties alive by using them as a basis for local government is totally unsustainable. For ABC to seek to turn the clock back 50 years is an utter impossibility. There is simply no interest in this from any of the main political parties (or from the

civil service!).

In some small areas it might prove possible, with sufficient local pressure, to persuade Government to amend administrative boundaries to better reflect historic County identities. However, given the never ending changes to local government areas, any such supposed gains are likely to be relatively short-lived. ABC is in this for the long term.

Second, I would not consider it desirable that ABC should seek a realignment of local government with historic Counties. Rather, what ABC seeks is to establish an identity for the historic Counties which is totally distinct from that of local government.

It is the confusion of the historic Counties with local government which undermines the Counties' identities. This confusion was started by the basing of local government on the Counties in 1888. With hindsight, we can see that this was never going to be a sustainable situation, given changing demography and the changing nature and needs of public administration. However, the association in the public mind of local government with counties was fostered. It is this confusion which today still undermines the identity of the historic Counties.

For example, the phrase 'county

council' is still used to describe many local authorities, although few of these authorities have an area anything like any historic County. Many local authorities still use the name of an historic County despite having an area radically different to that of the historic County whose name they borrow. The local government areas known as 'Lancashire', 'Somerset', 'Lincolnshire' etc., are classic examples of this.

The resulting widespread public confusion has a detrimental effect on both local government and the historic Counties. The Yorkshire identity of West Craven and Bowland is not so much undermined by the fact they do not lie in a local authority based solely in Yorkshire, but by the fact that the local authority which does serve them shamelessly misuses the name of an historic County and pretends to be the institutional embodiment of that County.

An aim of ABC, therefore, must be to ensure that local government is given a set of terminology and local authority names which give it an identity distinct from that of the historic Counties. Then we can build an identity for the Counties free from the public confusion which bedevils our efforts. For ABC to seek to lobby for a return to local government based on the Counties would be to totally confuse our message and confound our own ends.

Association of British Counties

20th Anniversary Meeting

"The Development of County Flags in the United Kingdom"

Speaker: Graham Bartram – Chief Vexillologist,
The Flag Institute

11.00am, Saturday 13th June 2009

Banbury Museum, Castle Quay, Banbury,
Oxfordshire

All Members Welcome

To celebrate our 20th Anniversary, a special meeting will be held with guest speaker Graham Bartram FFI, Chief Vexillologist of the Flag Institute. Graham will describe the history, development and possible future of our County flags. Graham will talk for about 45 minutes. There will then be plenty of time for questions, followed by a further chance to meet Graham over lunch.

In the afternoon, there will be a meeting of the ABC Committee which all ABC members are also invited to attend.

If you intend to attend this meeting, we would be very grateful if you let Peter Boyce know in advance (peterboyce@ntlworld.com, 02920 333728).
