

## The Evolution of Our Map.

BY BECKLES WILLSON.

**I**T comes as a shock to most of us to be credibly informed that the present shape of this kingdom, with which not only every Briton but the whole world is so familiar, is quite a modern innovation. With whatever fond faith in its immutability we turn to the national configuration, indented by hundreds of bays, capes, and inlets, flanked to the west by a squat *escalope* of equal eccentricity

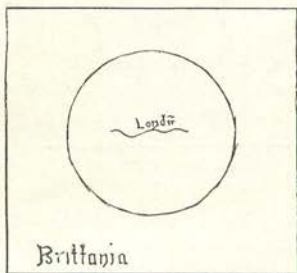


FIG. 1.—THE EARLIEST IDEA OF BRITAIN.

of outline, we must remember that the map of England was quite a different thing to our ancestors.

Assuming that the Saxon cartographers were right, Britain was once an irregular circle with London in the middle of it (Figs. 1 and 2). A time, indeed, came when this circular Britain grew out of itself and took on the similitude of a square, which grew oblong, whose corners became rounded,



FIG. 2.—SEVENTH CENTURY CHART.

until at length, as the later maps which accompany this article show, was evolved what we are proud or vain enough to think every school-urchin in any quarter of the globe immediately recognises as the island of Great Britain.

The oldest map of Britain—apart from the aforesaid circle of the monks—occurs in

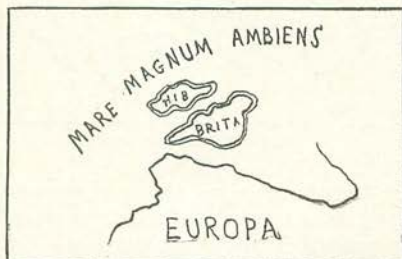


FIG. 3.—RICHARD OF CIRENCESTER'S MAP.

the Peutinger table. All that it represents of our island is the south and part of the east coast, and the names figuring in it are a little difficult to determine. Richard of Cirencester's map (Fig. 3), although compiled from authorities, perhaps in point of antiquity prior to the Peutinger table, is now admitted



FIG. 4.—TENTH CENTURY ARABIAN MAP.

to be a work of the thirteenth century; from which period we are to date maps made among ourselves.

But long before this geographers were



FIG. 5.—ELEVENTH CENTURY ARABIAN MAP.

flourishing in Arabia, which possessed some very curious English charts (Figs. 4, 5, 6) as early as the tenth century. One map-maker,

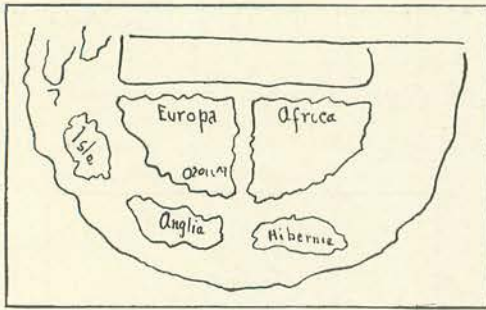


FIG. 6.—LATE ELEVENTH CENTURY MAP.

Edrisi, issued a very elaborate geography in 1153, which was in much use among the geographers and astrologers of Europe during the Middle Ages. When Edrisi made his chart in the twelfth century (Fig. 7) an English scholar, named William Platt, sent him the names of various English places. The Arabs had naturally great difficulty in rendering foreign words in their character. The task, now, on these old maps is to decipher the English names. For instance, Afardik and Durhalma are Berwick and Durham, while eighty miles from Afardik is Agrimes (Grimsby), and 100 from Agrimes is Nikole (Nikolas or Bikola),

Lincoln. Boston is Beska, and on Edrisi's map Narghlik is Norwich; Djartmand is Yarmouth. On this map, south of Djartmand forty miles, is the River Thand or Thames. Gharkaford is Hertford. But when we get to Gharham, which we make out to be Wareham, Edrisi begins to puzzle us. He says that among the cities of the west one must reckon the opulent Sansahnar, twelve miles from the sea. If Edrisi is right, if the information William Platt furnished him be correct, early historians have shamefully deceived us. At any rate, Sansahnar has

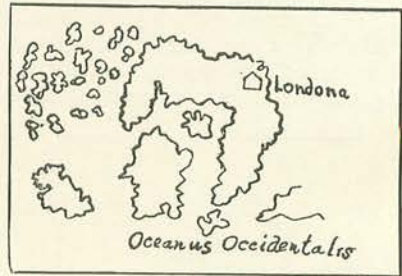


FIG. 8.—FRISCIAN MAP.

disappeared like Carthage. The other Arab geographers copied from Edrisi, and the rest of Europe in the Dark Ages copied from the Arabs, so that one can readily believe the fame of the English Sansahnar to have spread universally, and tales of its opulence passed from mouth to mouth. Is it not a blot upon his *magnum opus* that Sharon Turner should have utterly failed to tell us anything about it?



FIG. 7.—EDRISI'S CHART—TWELFTH CENTURY.

Alfred the Great (871—901) wishing to have some more or less exact information concerning the quarters whence came the North Sea pirates, Wulfstan and others were sent on a tour of geographical observation. They accomplished their mission of mapping out roughly the Eastern World, calling the fruit of their labours the *Hormesta*. Thenceforward a knowledge of

the North became a speciality of the Anglo-Saxons.

*Hormesta* was not accompanied by any geographical chart; but maps (Fig. 8) were, however, made at that time, and an excellent specimen is attached to the Priscian MSS., to which it, of course, does not belong, but to the epoch of Alfred. The execution of this chart is extremely neat, but very much damaged by time. The writing is in the odd and minute Latin of the epoch—with the Anglo-Saxon P or W often recurring. The interpretation of places is on the whole very difficult. It comprehends, of course, Britain and Ireland (Urbani for Hibernia), Londona, Pintona (Wintona, *i.e.*, Winchester), Stera (Exestera, Excester). On the neighbouring continent is the name *Opyrias*, which country was merely an English legend of the time.

Edward Luyd, in a letter to Rowland, tells him he had been to see a map of England and Ireland in the Public Library at Cambridge, said in the catalogue to have been made by Giraldus Cambrius. It was the outline of the two islands, with "Britania" and "Hibernia" inscribed at hand, and the Orcaides instead of the Hebrides between both. This is probably the map of Benet College to-day, which is here (Fig. 9) reproduced. If Ireland is correctly represented she has since considerably changed her appearance. It resembles very much the sole of a foot—perhaps an adumbration of the foot of the conqueror planted in that distressful country.

Endeavouring to consider the maps in chronological order, we are now brought face to face with a rectilinear Britain (Fig. 10), which seems to have been our cartographical condition in the twelfth century.

A MS. of Higden's Polychronicon exhibits as a map of the world a planisphere in an oval, having Paradise at the top and the columns of Hercules at the bottom. The margin is green, and represented the sea. Some historical particulars of the region are inserted, and even sketches of several capital cities. But the only interesting particular vouchsafed about this kingdom is that it

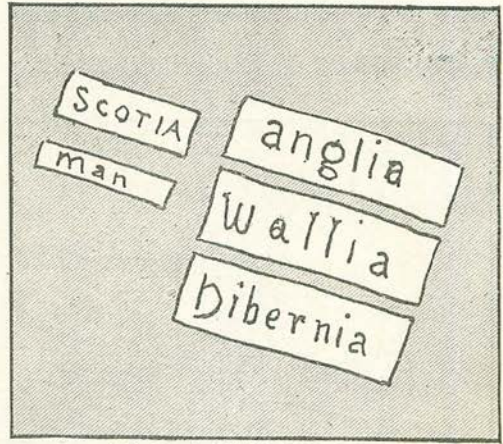


FIG. 10.—A RECTANGULAR BRITAIN.

is square, and Ireland also is square (Fig. 11).

But a time is at hand when we are seen emerging from our unpicturesque angularity. In a Dutch map of the thirteenth century England makes a conspicuous figure—a sort of semicircle surrounded by a river or sea, into which runs the Thames, mayhap translucent in those days, having on the north of it London and Oxford. But the most surprising and inexplicable thing is Ireland, which has grown circular; Wales,

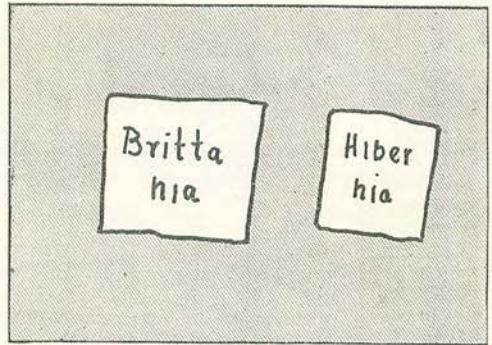


FIG. 11.—MAP FROM HIGDEN'S POLYCHRONICON.

bearing a human face, is a long, narrow island off the west coast; and Scotland (*Scotia olim pars Brittanie*) is a square island a little larger than the Isle of Man, which it adjoins. As is evinced by numerous maps, our cathedrals and castles were rather formidable in those days.

In a MS. of Matthew Paris's history, written by his own hand in the middle of the thirteenth century and presented by him to the monastery of St. Albans, is a map (Fig. 12) of Great Britain, in which one

begins to see at last some relationship with the present contour of our country. It must be admitted the relationship is slight.

bury; Suhantum, Southampton; Purland, Portland; Rosa, Rochester; and Windleshores, Windsor.

In the library of Hereford Cathedral is preserved a very curious map of the world, inclosed in a case with folding doors on which are painted the Virgin and the Angel. It is drawn with a pen on vellum fastened on boards, and is 6ft. 4in. high to the pediment and more than 5ft. wide. It served anciently for an altar-piece in this church. On this map, England, Ireland, and Scotland occur; and apparently they have gone through much suffering since the last record of their configuration. There is a look of peace, following a long-drawn-out agony, which is especially noteworthy. Poor Ireland, from a footprint, has grown into the semblance of a thin human arm. Perhaps it was Nature's whimsey to match Italy's leg (Fig. 14).

In the reign of Edward III. one finds a map which, for the first time, lays down roads and distances.

We now pass over several centuries of map-making until we come to George Lilly (son of William, a famous grammarian), who lived some time at Rome with Cardinal Pole, and drew the first approximately

exact map of this island, which was afterwards engraved. Mercator, the father of modern geography, compiled a particular work on the British Isles from the best information he could procure. In his atlas printed at Duisburg, 1595, the year after his death, by his two sons, are maps of England in five plates, Scotland in two, and Ireland (no longer neglected) in five.

During the Commonwealth maps of England and Ireland were stamped on our Great

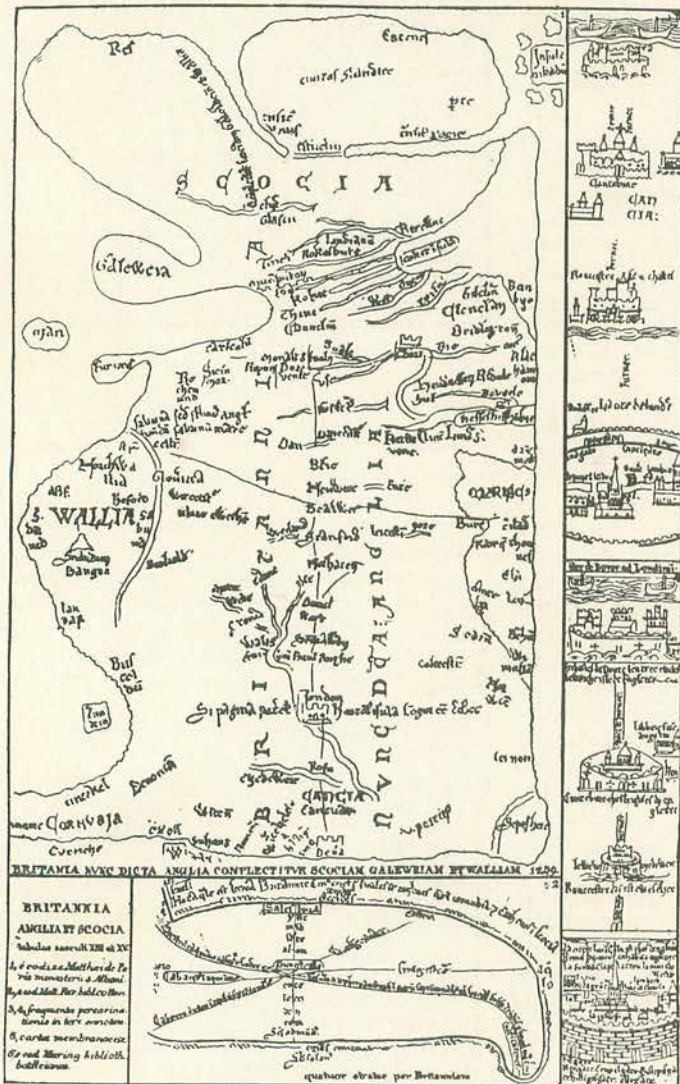


FIG. 12.—MATTHEW PARIS'S MAP—FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

A half century later we come upon Great Britain in its then geographical state (Fig. 13), and begin to see our way clearer. This map, which is now in the Cotton Library, takes in the whole extent of the island. At three of the sides are the cardinal points expressed in capitals, Auster, Oriens, Occidus. Beginning at the western extremity we find Cornubia (Cornwall), and travelling east many curious names will puzzle the reader. Hashig, he may be told, is really Shaftes-

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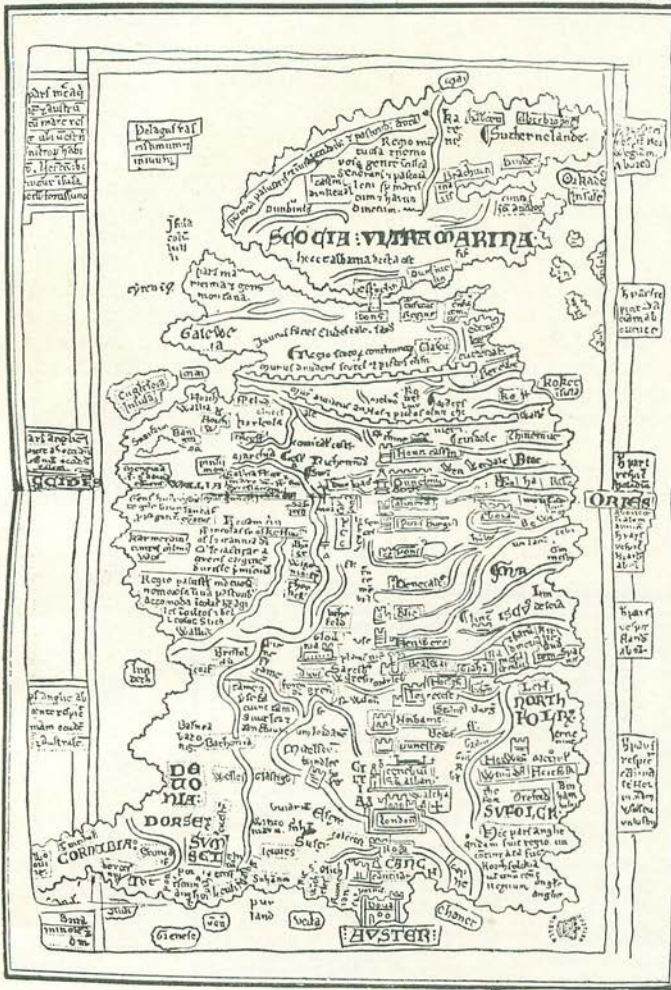


FIG. 13.—MAP IN THE COTTON LIBRARY—EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

Seal by the order of Oliver. The seal for the Court of Common Bench, executed by the celebrated engraver Simon in 1648, bore a small outline of the two kingdoms; but on that of the third Parliament they appear much more accurately represented, with the islands, rivers, seaports, counties, cities, towns, and castles, "so distinctly expressed, and named in such minute characters, as to make it a work truly admirable and beyond compare." All the names are engraved in Roman capitals; and between the two islands are, in larger capitals, THE IRISH SEA and THE BRITISH SEA. The diameter of the seal, which is to be seen in the British Museum, is 6in.

The map of our kingdom is now nearly evolved. Hallan's maps of England and Wales, commonly called the Quartermaster Maps, were published in 1676, and boast a fairly accurate outline. One map of the period bears this title: "The natural shape of England, with the names of rivers, seaports, sands, hills, moors, forests, and many other remarks which the curious will observe. By Philip Lea."

Early in the eighteenth century, one, J. Gibson, was employed by Newbery, the publisher, to construct for him, amongst other charts, a map of England and Wales. Gibson went about his task with a true fervour, combining the spirit of the careful draughts-

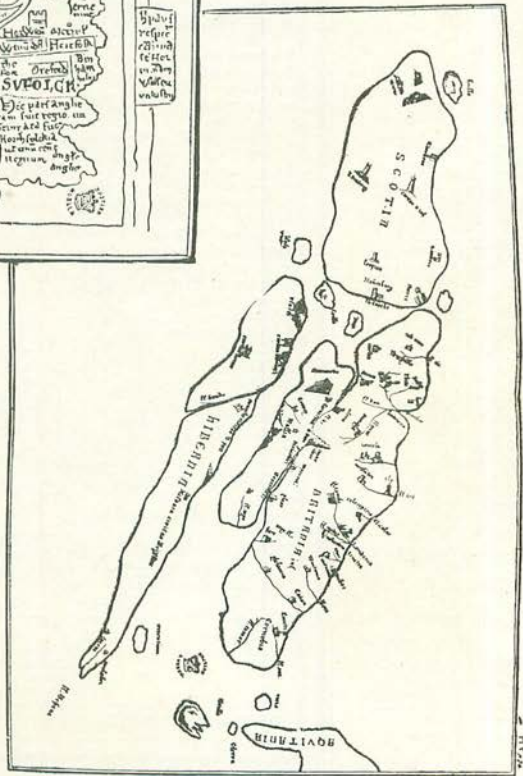


FIG. 14.—MAP IN HEREFORD CATHEDRAL.

man with that of the antiquary. It was determined not to trust to previous surveys, which had chiefly been undertaken by private parties with little or no assistance from the State. It should be remembered that before France set the example later in the century the "whole art of map-making had been treated as a matter of private speculation." To the French belong the credit of carrying out the cartographic survey of a country at the expense of the State. Gibson laboured under difficulties, and of so many blunders was he guilty, in spite of the pains he took, that the first plate was destroyed. Somewhat later, Eman Bowen, geographer to His Majesty George II., undertook a revision of Gibson's map, of which a copy is here appended (Fig. 15). Some singular details of this production will not escape the attention of the curious. It is strange to reflect that neither Birmingham, Brighton, nor Manchester were thought worthy of inclusion, while such centres of importance as Rye, Appleby, Cockermouth, and Retford are included. Southampton, it will be further seen, figures as a county; while the spelling of such places as Gloucester, Surrey, and Edinburgh leaves something in modern eyes to be desired. Excellent as the map is, in many ways, it is, after all, but an approximation to the exact truth, although its faults would probably then, and will probably now, escape the general detection.

But as a man's portrait may possess his eyes, nose, mouth, and forehead, and still, if not actually defying recognition by his friends, be far from a good likeness, it was not until 1772 that one Thomas Kitchen, cosmographer, presented to the world a true likeness of this and the adjacent islands. For this achievement Kitchen should be immortal, and his outlined bust adorn the frontispieces of our school geographies; for beyond all question this is the brilliant and painstaking person who first made Britannia (in a cartographical sense) what she is to-day.

Since Kitchen's time there has been a long line of brilliant cartographers, closing with the familiar names of Stanford, Bartholomew, and Philip. From the middle of the last century all the States in Europe have shown great activity in map-making, and the British Government has not lagged idly in the rear. In 1801 there was published a topographical map at a scale of 1 in. to the mile,

which necessitated 355 sheets. In 1855 was projected a 25 in. map, comprising 3,625 sheets; and the work of the topographical department of the War Office still goes merrily on. It must be borne in mind that owing to subsidences of land in one quarter of the country and reclamations from the sea in another, the configuration of England cannot ever be permanently fixed; but the lapses are on a scale so small that it would take a map vaster than any publication in Great Britain to exhibit them.

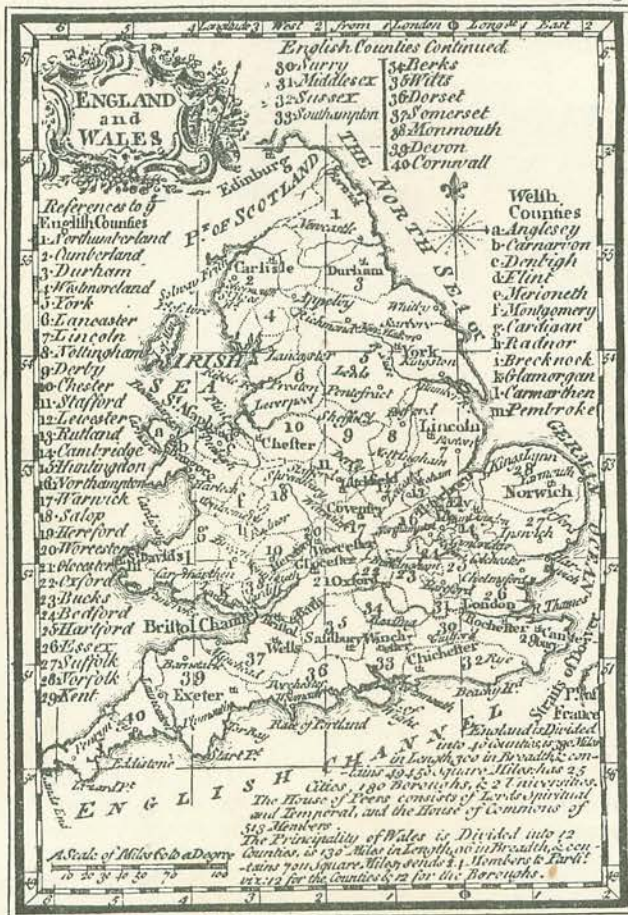


FIG. 15.—THE FIRST MAP OF GREAT BRITAIN WITH AN ALMOST CORRECT OUTLINE-1742.