

# Berkshire, England

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## Berkshire

Royal County of Berkshire

### County




Berkshire shown within England

Coordinates: 51°25′N 1°00′W﻿ / ﻿51.417°N 1.000°WCoordinates: 51°25′N 1°00′W﻿ / ﻿51.417°N 1.000°W

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<b>Sovereign state</b>	United Kingdom
<b>Constituent country</b>	England
<b>Region</b>	South East
<b>Established</b>	Ancient
<b>Ceremonial county</b>	
<b>Lord Lieutenant</b>	James Puxley
<b>High Sheriff</b>	Suzanna Rose
<b>Area</b>	1,262 km <sup>2</sup> (487 sq mi)
<b>– Ranked</b>	40th of 48
<b>Population (2011 est.)</b>	863,800

– <b>Ranked</b>	24th of 48
<b>Density</b>	684 /km <sup>2</sup> (1,770 /sq mi)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	88.7% White 6.8% S.Asian 2.0% Black.
<b>Non-metropolitan county</b>	
<b>Joint committees</b>	Berkshire Local Transport Body Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
<b>NUTS</b>	UKJ11
 <p>Districts of Berkshire</p> <p><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid #000; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Unitary</p>	
<b>Districts</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. West Berkshire</li> <li>2. Reading</li> <li>3. Wokingham</li> <li>4. Bracknell Forest</li> <li>5. Windsor and Maidenhead</li> <li>6. Slough</li> </ol>
<b>Members of Parliament</b>	List of MPs
<b>Police</b>	Thames Valley Police
<b>Time zone</b>	GMT (UTC0)
– <b>Summer (DST)</b>	BST (UTC+1)

**Berkshire** (/ˈbɜːkʃər/ or /ˈbɜːkʃiər/, abbreviated **Berks**) is a county of south east England, located to the west of London. It has also been known as the **Royal County of Berkshire** since at least the 19th century because of the presence of Windsor Castle and was recognised as such by the Queen in 1957 and letters patent issued in 1974.<sup>[1][2]</sup> Berkshire is a county of historic origin and is currently both a ceremonial county and a non-metropolitan county without a county council. Berkshire County Council was the main county governance from 1889 to 1998, except for the separately administered County Borough of Reading. In 1974 the towns of Abingdon, Didcot and Wantage were transferred to Oxfordshire, Slough was gained from Buckinghamshire,<sup>[3]</sup> and the separate administration of Reading ended. Since 1998 Berkshire has been governed by the six unitary

authorities of Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead and Wokingham. It borders the counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Greater London, Surrey, Wiltshire and Hampshire.<sup>[4]</sup>

## History

*Main article: History of Berkshire*



Windsor Castle, viewed from the Long Walk

The county is one of the oldest in England. It may date from the 840s, the probable period of the unification of "Sunningum" (East Berkshire) and "Ashdown" (the Berkshire Downs, probably including the Kennet Valley). The county is first mentioned by name in 860. According to Asser, it takes its name from a large forest of box trees that was called *Bearroc* (believed, in turn, to be a Celtic word meaning "hilly").<sup>[5]</sup>

Berkshire has been the scene of many hot battles throughout history, during Alfred the Great's campaign against the Danes, including the Battle of Englefield, the Battle of Ashdown and the Battle of Reading. Newbury was the site of two Civil War battles, the First Battle of Newbury (at Wash Common) in 1643 and the Second Battle of Newbury (at Speen) in 1644. The nearby Donnington Castle was reduced to a ruin in the aftermath of the second battle. The Battle at Reading took place on 9 December 1688 in Reading. It was the only substantial military action in England during the Glorious Revolution and ended in a decisive victory for forces loyal to William of Orange. It was celebrated in Reading for hundreds of years afterwards.

Reading became the new county town in 1867, taking over from Abingdon which remained in the county. Under the Local Government Act 1888, Berkshire County Council took over functions of the Berkshire Quarter Sessions, covering an area known as the administrative county of Berkshire, which excluded the county borough of Reading. Boundary alterations in the early part of the 20th century were minor, with Caversham from Oxfordshire becoming part of the Reading county borough, and cessions in the Oxford area.

On 1 April 1974 Berkshire's boundaries changed under the Local Government Act 1972. Berkshire took over administration of Slough and Eton and part of the former Eton Rural District from Buckinghamshire.<sup>[3]</sup> The northern part of the county became part of Oxfordshire, with Faringdon, Wantage and Abingdon and hinterland becoming the Vale of White Horse district, and Didcot and Wallingford added to South Oxfordshire district.<sup>[3]</sup> 94 (Berkshire Yeomanry) Signal Squadron still keep the Uffington White Horse in their insignia, even though the White Horse is now in Oxfordshire. The original Local Government White Paper would have transferred Henley-on-Thames from Oxfordshire to Berkshire: this proposal did not make it into the Bill as introduced.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

On 1 April 1998 Berkshire County Council was abolished under a recommendation of the Banham Commission, and the districts became unitary authorities. Unlike similar reforms elsewhere at the same time, the non-metropolitan county was not abolished.<sup>[6][7]</sup> Signs saying "Welcome to the Royal County of Berkshire" have all but disappeared but may still be seen on the borders of West Berkshire District, on the east side of Virginia Water and on the M4 motorway. There are also signs at the south side of Sonning Bridge on the B478

and going north on the A33 at the start of the dual carriageway just past Stratfield Saye.

## Geography



Aerial view of Virginia Water Lake on the southern edge of Windsor Great Park

From a landscape perspective, Berkshire divides into two clearly distinct sections with the boundary lying roughly on a north-south line through the centre of Reading.

The eastern section of Berkshire lies largely to the south of the River Thames, with that river forming the northern boundary of the county. In two places (Slough and Reading) the county now includes land to the north of the river. Tributaries of the Thames, including the Loddon and Blackwater, increase the amount of low lying riverine land in the area. Beyond the flood plains, the land rises gently to the county boundaries with Surrey and Hampshire. Much of this area is still well wooded, especially around Bracknell and Windsor Great Park.

In the west of the county and heading upstream, the Thames veers away to the north of the (current) county boundary, leaving the county behind at the Goring Gap. This is a narrow part of the otherwise quite broad river valley where, at the end of the last Ice Age, the Thames forced its way between the Chiltern Hills (to the north of the river in Oxfordshire) and the Berkshire Downs.



View from Combe Gibbet, looking north over the Kennet Valley

As a consequence, the western portion of the county is situated around the valley of the River Kennet, which joins the Thames in Reading. Fairly steep slopes on each side delineate the river's flat floodplain. To the south, the land rises steeply to the nearby county boundary with Hampshire, and the highest parts of the county lie here. The highest of these is Walbury Hill at 297 m (974 ft), which is also the highest point in South East England region and between London and South Wales.

To the north of the Kennet, the land rises again to the Berkshire Downs. This is a hilly area, with smaller and well-wooded valleys draining into the River Lambourn, River Pang and their tributaries, and open upland areas famous for their involvement in horse racing and the consequent ever-present training gallops.

As part of a 2002 marketing campaign, the plant conservation charity Plantlife chose the Summer Snowflake (a.k.a. the 'Loddon Lily') as the county flower.

## Demographics

According to 2003 estimates there were 803,657 people in Berkshire, or 636 people/km<sup>2</sup>. The population is mostly based in the urban areas to the east and centre of the county: the largest towns here are Reading, Slough, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Wokingham, Windsor, Sandhurst, Crowthorne and Twyford. The Reading/Wokingham Urban Area alone has a population of more than 350,000, making it southeast England's second largest 'city' in all but name. West Berkshire is much more rural and sparsely populated, with far fewer towns: the largest are Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford and Lambourn. The population of Berkshire increased greatly during the 19th century, due largely to proximity to an expanding London<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup>. In 1831, there were 146,234 people living in Berkshire; by 1901 the population had risen to 252,571 (of whom 122,807 were male and 129,764 were female).

### *Population of Berkshire:*

- 1831: 146,234
- 1841: 161,759
- 1851: 170,065
- 1861: 176,256
- 1871: 196,475
- 1881: 218,363
- 1891: 238,709
- 1901: 252,571
- 1951: 198,000 <sup>[8]</sup>
- 1983: 400,000 <sup>[8]</sup>

## Ceremonial County

*Main articles: Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire, High Sheriff of Berkshire and Ceremonial counties of England*

The ceremonial county of Berkshire consists of the area controlled by the six unitary authorities, each of which is independent of the rest. Berkshire has no county council. The ceremonial county has a Lord Lieutenant and a High Sheriff. The Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire is Mary Selina Bayliss, appointed in May 2008<sup>[9]</sup> and the High Sheriff of Berkshire for the year 2011 is Robert Barclay Woods CBE.<sup>[10]</sup>

District	Main towns	Berkshire districts		
		Population (2007 estimate)	Area	Population density (2007)
<b>Bracknell Forest</b>	Bracknell, Sandhurst	113,696	109.38 km <sup>2</sup>	1038/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Reading</b>	Reading	155,300	40.40 km <sup>2</sup>	3557/km <sup>2</sup>

<b>Slough</b>	Slough	140,200	32.54 km <sup>2</sup> 3691/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>West Berkshire</b>	Newbury, Thatcham	50,700	704.17 km <sup>2</sup> 214/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Windsor and Maidenhead</b>	Windsor, Maidenhead	104,000	198.43 km <sup>2</sup> 711/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Wokingham</b>	Wokingham, Twyford	88,600	178.98 km <sup>2</sup> 875/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>TOTAL Ceremonial</b>	N/A	<b>652,436</b>	<b>1264 km<sup>2</sup> 643/km<sup>2</sup></b>

Population figures for 2007 estimates.<sup>[11]</sup> See List of English districts by population for a full list of every English district.

## References

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2. **Jump up** ^ Berkshire Record Office. "Berkshire, The Royal County". *Golden Jubilee 2002 collection*. Retrieved 22 April 2007.
3. ^ Jump up to: <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> <sup>c</sup> *Local government in England and Wales: A Guide to the New System*. London: HMSO. 1974. pp. 1, 31. ISBN 0-11-750847-0.
4. **Jump up** ^ "The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Surrey (County Boundaries) Order 1994". Office of Public Sector Information. Retrieved 14 June 2009.
5. **Jump up** ^ "Dictionary.com". Retrieved 8 November 2008.
6. **Jump up** ^ "The Berkshire (Structural Change) Order 1996". Office of Public Sector Information. 18 July 1996. Retrieved 20 April 2010.
7. **Jump up** ^ "In Berkshire, although the county council will be abolished, the county area will remain. Along with its lord lieutenant, it will retain its high sheriff and its title as a royal county." "Written Answers to Questions Col.830". *House of Commons Hansard Debates*. Parliament of the United Kingdom. 31 March 1995. Retrieved 20 April 2010.
8. ^ Jump up to: <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Berkshire (Planning and Development) (Hansard, 14 December 1983). Hansard.millbanksystems.com (1983-12-14). Retrieved on 2013-07-17.
9. **Jump up** ^ *The London Gazette*: no. 58715. p. 8235. 2 June 2008.
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11. **Jump up** ^ [1]<sup>[dead link]</sup>