

Thomas Smith
De republica Anglorum
London
1583

DE
REPVBLICA
ANGLORVM.

The maner of Gouvernement or policie of the Realme of England, compiled by the Honorable man Thomas Smyth, Doctor of the ciuil lawes, Knight, and principall Secretarie vnto the two most worthe Princes, King Edwarde the sixt, and Queene Elizabeth.

Seene and allowed.

AT LONDON,
Printed by Henrie Midleton
for Gregorie Seton.
Anno Domini
1583.

<book 2, chapter 16>

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Of parties of Shires called hundreds, lathes, rapes, wapentakes.

CHAP. 16.

An hundred, or lath, rape, or wapentake be called of the diuisions or partes of shires in diuers countries diuersly named after the manner and language of each countrey. For the shires be diuided some into x. xii. xiii. xvi. xx. or xxx hundreds, more or lesse, either that *they were at the first C. townes and villages in ech hundred: and although now they be but xvi. xx. xxx. xl. l. lx. more or lesse, yet it is still called an hundred, or else there were but so many at the first as be nowe, or a few more or lesse, and they did finde the king to his warres an hundred able men. Lath, and rape I take to be names of seruice, for that so many townes in old time, and in the first pouertie of the Realme did meete together in one day to carrie the Lordes corne into his barne, which is called in olde English a Lath. Or that they mette at commaundement of the Lorde to reape his corne.

*<r. 'there'>

Wapentake I suppose came of the Danes or peradventure of the Saxons. For that so manie townes came by their orders then, to one place, where was taken a mouster of their armour and weapons, in which place from them that could not finde sufficient pledges for their good abearing, their weapons were taken away: weapen or wapen in olde English doe signifie all armes offensiue, as sworde, dagger, speare, launce, bill,

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bowes, arrowes.

Of the place where the *monsters were taken or where the saide seruices were doone, the hundreds, Lathes, Rapes, and wapentakes had and haue yet

*<r. 'mousters'>

their names, which be most commonly good townes,
and it is to be thought at the first they were all such.
But sometime nowe in places whereof the hundred
hath the name, no mention nor memorie of a towne
remaineth, such mutation time bringeth with it of
all thinges. A hundred hath one or two high Consta=
bles, who hath some authoritie ouer all the lower, and
particular Constables. Those high Constables bee
made by the lustices of the peace of the shire, and each
hundred hath his baylife, who is made by the Lorde if
any hath that libertie, or else by the sherife of the shire
for the time being.

<Sir Thomas Smith wrote this book in 1562–5, while he was serv-
ing as ambassador to France. After circulating in manuscript, it
was put into print in 1583 (STC 22857); the author was dead
by then (he died in 1577). Another ten editions appeared after
that, between 1584 and 1640 (STC 22858–67); from 1589 on-
wards it carried the title 'The common-wealth of England'. (The
most recent edition, which I have not seen, is T. Smith, *De re-
publica Anglorum*, ed. M. Dewar (CUP, 2009).) This excerpt is
taken from the 1583 edition; because of alterations made else-
where, the chapter number increased in subsequent editions –
to 18 in 1589 (STC 22859), to 19 in 1601 (STC 22861) – but
the text remained exactly the same in all of them (apart from an
occasional misprint, apart from the usual variability in spelling
and punctuation). Smith's comments about the word 'lath' are the
only reason for including this transcript here. A Latin translation,
made by John Budden, was first published in an undated edi-
tion at London (STC 22868) and reprinted three times at Leiden
(1625, 1630, 1641); the corresponding excerpt from that will be
found in a separate file. – C.F. October 2010.>