



Improving your Welsh Research Using Place-names, Maps, and Gazetteers

Gwella elch Cymraeg Defnyddio Enwau Lleoedd, Mapiau, a Rhestrau

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Introduction

I hope the above translation is correct because I used <http://translate.google.com> to translate it. It often works well enough. Because the records used to do Welsh research are often the same as those used to do English research, the peculiarities to Welsh research can be over-looked. Anyone who has done even a little research in Wales knows that one thing, in particular, makes Welsh research more difficult than most English research, and that is the commonness of the surnames.

While this class is not about the Welsh patronymic naming system, it cannot be overstated that in order to solve many Welsh research problems, every clue needs to be utilized to full advantage. In this case, understanding the place where your Welsh ancestor lived is often one of those important clues. Because many people in the same parish had the same name (such as John Thomas), the Welsh often used farm names or birthplaces to identify themselves (John Thomas of Pen-y-Benglog).

One other aspect that can make Welsh research difficult specifically when it comes to places is that the same place-name can be used many times in various parts of Wales. A gazetteer can help you identify the most common spellings and the counties that have a place by that name. Also, spellings vary widely in Welsh place-names.

Objectives

By the end of this class, you will be able to:

- 1) Identify the counties and parishes of Wales
- 2) Understand the role of farm names, small hamlets, manors, and estates in your research
- 3) Find the description of these places in gazetteers
- 4) Find these places on maps

Identifying the Counties and Parishes of Wales

When working from home, the best way to gain an understanding of Wales' counties is the FamilySearch Wiki (<http://wiki.familysearch.org>). Search it for "Wales County Maps" or try a

simple "google" search and then click on "images". These maps give the basic boundaries of counties without many details.

For maps of parishes by county, Phillimore's *Atlas and Index of Parish Registers* (Family History Library (FHL) Book# 942 E7pa) is a great place to start. This can also be found online at Ancestry (www.ancestry.com). Also, the parish maps at <http://maps.familysearch.org> is under development for Wales. Welsh parishes can be searched for and found on parish maps though the information is lacking when compared to its English counterpart.

Key books to understanding Welsh parishes are:

Williams, C. J., and J. Watts-Williams, comp. *Cofrestrï Plwyf Cymru* (Parish Registers of Wales). Aberystwyth, Wales: National Library of Wales, 1986. (FHL book 942 V26ste v.13). This book lists all Welsh parish registers, providing the beginning and the ending dates of the registers, locations, and other details about them.

Ifans, Dafydd, ed. *Cofrestrï Anghydfurfiol Cymru* (Nonconformist Registers of Wales). Aberystwyth, Wales: National Library of Wales and Welsh County Archivists' Group, 1994. (FHL book 942.9 K23c.)

Understanding the role of farm names, small hamlets, manors, and estates in your research

Because many people in the same parish had the same name, the Welsh often used farm names or birthplaces to identify themselves. Farm names, small hamlets, manors, and estates may not be listed in gazetteers. Be aware that many farms have the same names. If the farm name is unusual, the National Library of Wales (<https://www.llgc.org.uk/>) website can help you identify the place. It may be possible for you to find the farm name using other sources such as Ordnance Survey maps.

Finding the description of these places in gazetteers

A gazetteer is a dictionary of place-names. Gazetteers describe towns, villages, parishes, counties, rivers, mountains, population, and other geographical features. The place-names are usually in alphabetical order, similar to a dictionary. Use a gazetteer to look up the name of the place where your family lived and to determine the civil and church jurisdictions over those places.

One of the hardest aspects to using gazetteers in Welsh research is the inconsistent spelling of place-names. Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch, meaning "Saint Mary's Church in a hollow of white hazel near the swirling whirlpool of the church of Saint Tysilio with a red cave" in Anglesey is officially the longest place-name in Europe. However, whether you're trying to spell that or another Welsh place-name, you must be prepared for a variety of spellings. A sample gazetteer entry might be "Llanfihangel-Abercowin, a village and a parish in the district and county of Carmarthen. There are chapels for Calvinist Methodists and Wesleyans."

Another difficult aspect is that the same - place-name – can be used many times in various parts of Wales. A gazetteer can help you identify the most common spellings and the counties that have a place by that name. Other difficult aspects to Welsh place-names are:

- 1) Welsh place-names can easily be confused with personal names and other words. For example, Tachwedd is Welsh for November. This word could easily be misconstrued as a personal name or place-name.

- 2) Welsh place-names are often descriptive. Many begin with Aber (meaning "estuary" or "confluence of a river") or Llan (meaning "a church enclosure").
- 3) Many place-names are common to two or more counties. Dyffryn is found in every county; it means valley.
- 4) Places are often known by different names at the same time. For example, in Breconshire the parish of Ty'r yr Abad is also known as New Church, Llandulas and Aberdulas.
- 5) Records may not always use the same name to refer to the same place. For example, a couple living at Peterwell, Carmarthenshire had their place of residence listed as Peterwell in some entries and as Ffynnon Bedr (the Welsh equivalent of Peterwell) in others.
- 6) Townships, hamlets, farms, and other place-names within a parish are sometimes known by the parish name.
- 7) Welsh place-names may use an English spelling. Conversions occur when letters not in the Welsh alphabet are used in the place-name. For example, in Welsh, the 'c' is pronounced like the English 'k', which is not in the Welsh alphabet. Thus, Cellan is sometimes spelled Kellan.
- 8) Because Wales uses both English and Welsh place-names, names can be spelled, spoken, and written in many ways. For example, the Welsh name for Swansea is Abertawe. This is especially true of the anglicized counties of Pembrokeshire, Glamorgan, Flintshire, and Monmouthshire. Melville Richard's *Welsh Administrative and Territorial Units* (noted below) lists both the English and the Welsh versions of many place-names.
- 9) Place-names evolved over time. For example, Ysgeifiog, a parish and village in Flint, has been called Schivaiau, Escynant, Skeynyave, Ysceifoc, and Skifiog.
- 10) Many place-names in Wales begin with "Llanfair." Both currently and in the past, these places are simply called Llanfair. This can create considerable confusion in an area where there are many places with names beginning with "Llanfair."

The FamilySearch Wiki also has a great article on Welsh place-names. Search for "Wales placenames". Other resources for a better understanding of Welsh place-names are:

- Davies, Dewi. *Welsh Place-Names and Their Meanings*. Aberystwyth, Wales: The Cambrian News, 198?. (FHL book 942.9 E2d; film 994051 item 2).
- Jones, Bedwyr Lewis. "Place-Names." In *Welsh Family History: A Guide to Research*. ed. by John and Sheila Rowlands. 2nd ed. Wales: Federation of Family History Societies (Publications) Ltd., 1998, pp.76-83. (FHL book 942.9 D27w 1998).

Because Welsh place-names can have many different spellings, one gazetteer is used by the Family History Library as the standard for spellings. All Welsh places are listed in the FamilySearch Catalog by the spellings shown in:

- Richards, Melville. *Welsh Administrative and Territorial Units: Medieval and Modern*. Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales, 1969. (FHL book 942.9 E5w; fiche 6026396.) This work lists medieval, early modern, and modern jurisdictions, such as urban district councils and urban sanitary districts. These were formed from earlier jurisdictions, such as parishes, townships, and hamlets.

Some helpful gazetteers can be found online. A Vision of Britain (www.visionofbritain.org.uk) is decent and easy to use.

The following gazetteer has information for Wales and England that does list some farm names. *The Ordnance survey gazetteer of Great Britain: all names from the 1:50 000 Landranger map series*. Great Britain: Macmillan, 1992. (FHL book 942 E5o 1992.)

Others are:

- 1) Archif Melville Richards (<http://www.e-gymraeq.co.uk/enwaulleoedd/amr/>). You may want to choose the "English" option. This also includes Richards' voluminous notes not published in his book.
- 2) <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/Gazetteers.html>
- 3) <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/geogdata/ngw/home.htm>
- 4) <http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=subject%3A%22Wales%20--%20Gazetteers%22>

Some in book form and found at the Family History Library are:

- Elwyn Davies, ed. *Rhestr O Enwau Lleoedd. A Gazetteer of Welsh Place-Names*. Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 1967. (FHL book 942.9 E5gw). This gazetteer has a useful list of place-names. It also contains a Welsh/English glossary of terms relating to places, a mutation table, and a pronunciation guide.
- Hill, Ellen, and Del Ora Guymoh Cook. *A Gazetteer of Wales*. 5 vols. Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1953. (FHL book 942.9 E5g; film 823795). This gazetteer incorporates all places listed in Bartholomew's Gazetteer, Lewis's Topographical Dictionary, Crockford's Clerical Directory, The Parish Register Abstract, and Burke's Key to the Ancient Parishes of England and Wales.
- Lewis, Samuel. *Topographical Dictionary of Wales*. 2 vols. London, England: S. Lewis, 1833. (FHL book 942.9 E5l; film 599780 item 2-3; fiche 6026723). While many gentlemen's seats (landed families' residences), lakes, mountains, and other places are included, they are mentioned under the parish or town in which they are located.
- *Cassell's Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland*. 6 vols. London, England: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1894-8. (FHL book 942 E5ca; films 599360-1 and 924936). This work gives parish names and descriptions.
- Wilson, John M. *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales*. Six Volumes. Edinburgh, Scotland: A. Fullerton, 1870. (FHL book 942 E5i; films 897325-7; fiche 6020308-36).

Gazetteers are available for a single county such as Pembrokeshire, or for even smaller places such as Dinas Powys hundred. Gazetteers and similar place-name guides are found in the Place Search of the FamilySearch Catalog by searching the place-name and topics such as "Gazetteers" or "Names, Geographical".

Find these places on maps

Maps can help you find where your ancestors lived. There are many types of maps. Each can help you in a different way. Historical maps describe economic growth and development, boundaries, migration and settlement patterns, and other historical information. Road maps provide details on highways, rivers, and town size. Other types of maps include parish, county, topographical maps, enclosure, civil district, and church dioceses.

Because many localities have the same name, you may need some additional information before you can find on a map where your ancestor lived. Learn all you can about the area using gazetteers as described above including:

- 1) The parish and county in which the place is located.
- 2) The civil registration district that served your ancestor's parish (after 1837).
- 3) The names of the churches and chapels.
- 4) The size of the town and parish.
- 5) The names of other villages in the parish.
- 6) Your ancestor's occupation (this may indicate the industries or the size of the area).
- 7) Nearby localities, such as large cities.
- 8) Places where related ancestors lived.
- 9) Nearby features, such as rivers and mountains.

Since 1800, the Ordnance Survey has been the major source of topographical maps. English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish maps are available in 1, 6, and 25 inches to the mile. The series has been revised and published at different dates. There are also Ordnance Survey maps of greater detail (up to 10 feet to the mile).

Again, the FamilySearch Wiki is a great place to start. Though subtle, **the link to Genuki (www.genuki.co.uk) is critical**. Click on "Wales" and then "Maps" and there are links to several online maps collections. The National Library of Scotland (www.nls.uk) has put numerous maps online including Ordnance Survey maps for England and Wales from around the 1900's. There are also links to Welsh county maps by Samuel Lewis published in 1833 and to maps found at the National Library of Wales (<http://www.ltgc.org.uk/collections/learn-more/introduction3/>).

There are also four book or map collections at the Family History Library that are useful:

- Great Britain. Ordnance Survey. *Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 map series*. Rev. ed. Southampton: Director General of the Ordnance Survey, 1972. (FHL map book 942 E7me.) The 1-inch-to-the-mile edition contains nine sheets covering most of South Wales.
- *Ordnance Surveyors' Drawings, 1790-1840*. On microfiche, 2- and 3-inches-to the-mile. (FHL fiche 6066967). There are 425 microfiche in this set, and the first three fiche are an index to the set. The first ordnance survey maps were made from these ordnance survey drawings. They are very detailed, and represent the best maps in the Family History Library for Wales.
- Gardner, David E., et. al. *A Genealogical Atlas of England and Wales*. Scale (est.) 1:300,000. Provo, Utah: Stevenson's Genealogical Center, 1974. (FHL book 942 E3g 1974.) This is a reprint of 1840s Samuel Lewis maps with an index to parish churches. It shows just over 5 miles to the inch.
- Humphery-Smith, Cecil R. *The Phillimore Atlas and Index of Parish Registers*. Chichester, Sussex, England: Phillimore & Co., 1995. (FHL book 942 E7pa 1995.) This work includes an indexed parish boundary map and general topographical map for south Wales, mid-Wales, and north Wales.