

Features Of Welsh And British Celtic Onomastics

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The number of Welsh surnames of Celtic origin is relatively low. Family names "arrived" late there, and, despite alleged occurrences as early as the fifteenth century, the practice of combining given name with surname was not general until the mid-eighteenth century.¹ This article will treat a few Welsh names of Celtic origin, one or two of them quite venerable.

1. Tudur: Tudor

The House of Tudor that ascended the throne with Henry VII and ruled from 1485 to 1603 was a Welsh family bearing the name *Tudur*, still the "standard" orthography. Despite the spurious association of the name with *Theodore*, it is Celtic and is attested in Old Gaulish inscriptions, as well as in British ones. The Celtic original would be nom. **Teuto-rīks*, gen. **Teuto-rigos*. In British Celtic, although foreshadowed in late Gaulish (Dottin 60, 120; Zupitza 591-94) the corresponding forms would be *Totorix*, oblique *Totorigo-*. The meaning was 'King of people(s)'. Old Welsh descendant forms would be nom. *Tudyr*, oblique *Tudri*, although nominal cases were, as is well-known, leveled in Welsh.

A number of orthographical variants can be found at various periods, including *Tudor*, *Tudor*, *Tuddr*, *Tudr*, *Tuder*, *Tuderi*, *Teder*, *Tyder*, *Teddir*, *Tewder*. Most of these can serve as both given and family name (Morgan and Morgan 199-200). The form *Theodore* is sometimes recorded for a person whose name is known from other evidence to have been *Tudur*. This equation of *Tudur* with *Theodore* was, in most instances, made by English scribes, but at times the Welsh accepted the "approximation" themselves. Complications arise when names of different origin (*Theodorus*, *Theodrosius*, *Theordoric*) are written as *Tudor* in Welsh, even though those names have other Welsh equivalents (*Tewdwr*, *Tewdws*, *Tewdrig*).

A Welsh woman named Elizabeth Tudor informed the writer that when she traveled in England, her name on her luggage tags caused her to be treated with extreme deference. Actually a person of strong nationalis-

tic feelings, she was amused that the English seemed to regard her as connected with an English dynasty, the Englishness being facilitated by the convenient ambiguity of "British."

Spellings like *Tidder* and *Tydder*, frequently attested, show scribal effort at rendering the first vowel of the Welsh name. The spelling *Tewder*, etc., when not representing *Theodore*, can be explained as a Welsh "phonetic" version of the English pronunciation of Tudor (Morgan and Morgan 200).

2. Llewelyn/Llywelyn: Llewellyn

There should be no medial double *l* here. Yet the spelling *Llewellyn* is frequent, both as given name and as surname. Those who use it do not as a rule know Welsh, cf. the authors Alun Llewellyn and Richard Llewellyn (whose last name was Lloyd). The *ew* is not like the *ew* in English *flew*. The early spelling *Llywelyn* is perhaps evidence against such a pronunciation. In fact, the *e* and *w* belong to different syllables. In the days when John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers, was fighting with President F. D. Roosevelt, one New York columnist suggested that people might find J.L. Lewis less terrifying if they knew that his middle name was what the columnist called "Lou-Ellen." *Llewelyn/Llywelyn* was actually the name of two powerful Welsh princes celebrated as national heroes. In early periods it was frequent as a first (or only) name.

The British Celtic source of *Llywelyn* would have been **Lugobelinos*.² The spelling *Llew-*, replacing older *Llyw-*, is a result of mistaken association of the name with Welsh *llew* 'lion,' a Latin loanword. There developed a habit of equating *Llywelyn/Llewelyn* somehow with *Lewis*. That practice began with medieval clerks seeking Anglo-Norman names as equivalent of unfamiliar Welsh ones. Peculiarly enough, many Welshmen accepted that and if their name was *Llewelyn* regarded *Lewis* as the "official" or received form. This spread beyond references to Wales, and a Welsh work calls King Louis of France "Llewelyn Ffreinig," i.e. "French Llewelyn" (cited in Morgan and Morgan 150).

Lewis is a name of high frequency in Wales, and it cannot be determined in most instances whether it was *Lewis* from the start (hence a Norman, that is Germanic, name) or a substitute for Celtic *Llywelyn*. Many citations confirm the association of the two names, but not the chronological sequence, cf. "Llewelyn ap Madoc, alias Lewis Rede, archdeacon of

Brecon, 1437" (cf. Bardsley 480). And some history books have entries in their indexes like "Lewis or Llywelyn."

The name *Lewis* now has a single initial *l*-, but there was a time when *Llewis* occurred as a competing form (Morgan and Morgan 149). When English scribes registered the names of Welshmen, they had difficulty with the initial sound of *Llywelyn* understandably, as did Shakespeare and others. Some of the writings employed are *Thelewin*, *Swelin*, *Flewelin*, *Fuellen*, *Flawelling*, *Thelwyn*, and even *Fllewelin* and *Yleulin*. The spelling *Yl*- for Welsh *Ll*- is found in other names, too: *Yloyd* (for *Llwyd*) and *Yleward* (for *Llywarch*) (Morgan and Morgan 147-151). As knowledge of the Welsh language declines (not everywhere in Wales), the initial sound is sometimes replaced by a single *l*, not too unlike English *l*, although somewhat more palatal. A surprising contradiction, however, is this: many people who have lost the ability to speak Welsh have retained all the native sounds in names.

3. Lloyd/Llwyd

The adjective *llwyd* 'gray' (and other meanings) and the surname *Llwyd* have the same initial sound as in *Llywelyn*, above. The kinds of substitutes found in the orthography of the latter occur here too: *Lloyd*, *Lloud* (where *ou* = *oy*), *Lhuyd*, *Floyd*, *Flooyde*, *Fludd*, *Flewett*, *Flood*, *Yloyd* (mentioned above), etc. Today the most frequent spelling is *Lloyd* and, despite the orthography, has a single *l* as its initial pronunciation. Occasionally the name is written *Llwyd*, and bearers of the name use the unilateral voiceless fricative as the initial sound. The famous Celtic scholar and scientist Edward Lhuyd preferred the *Lh*- form, whereas his father wrote the name *Edward Lloyd*. Whether they had different pronunciations of the family name can only be guessed. The son was a philologist, as well as a natural scientist, and he may have been insisting on a historically precise pronunciation. Today not every person named Lloyd is aware of the meaning.

4. Vaughan

This has an Anglicized spelling that gives the name an un-Welsh look. It has a form with "mutated" initial *fychan* [vɛxan] of *bychan* m. 'small, little.' It also could mean 'junior,' a fact not noticed by Bardsley (780), who

calls it a nickname. He was aware, however (488), that the English family name *Little* also meant junior.

When written by scribes not familiar with Welsh, the form assumed strange shapes, although there was an effort to represent sounds made by the bearer. Thus, the *gh* in *Vaughan*, now otiose, once stood for Welsh *ch* [x]. The *au* is a less successful attempt to denote a shwa, represented by *y* in Welsh. The use of *v* for Welsh *f* (a voiced sound!) is understandable enough. But exalting the mutated form to the status of the “radical” is a more drastic alteration than most of the changes noted. Many variants have been found throughout the centuries, including: *Vauzan* (*z* = Welsh *ch*), *Vawzan*, *Vahhan*, *Vaham* (with some analogy of English names in -ham), *Bougham*, *Boughan*, *Baughn*, *Baughan*, *Baugham*. It is clear that the initial *B* represents pedantic retention, or restoration, of what was realized to have been the original initial. That similar precision is not seen in the rest of the word is surprising. It is very unlikely that presentday speakers of Welsh, including those bearing the name, are aware that it was, to start with, Welsh *bychan* ‘small’. Those interested in genealogy may have learned this, of course.

5. Coch/Goch

Like *Vaughan*, this name has survived largely as a form with “mutated” initial, *Goch*. Applied to a person, the adjective normally means ‘red-haired’. Non-Welsh scribes wrote *Cogh* or *Koz* for the non-mutated form. Here *z* is, once more, a writing for a voiceless velar fricative, as was seen in variants of *Vaughan*, above.

The mutated variant *Gogh* has the following guises: *Goughe*, *Gouch*, *Gouz*, *Gouh*, *Gozhe*, *Gouth*, *Goygh*, and many more (cf. Morgan and Morgan 72-73). *Couch* is a variant in which *ch* was ultimately replaced by the affricate *c* as in English *such*, etc. In Cornish there was a similar development. A well-known bearer of the name is Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (known as “Q”). Here the name rhymes with *pooch* whereas the original Cornish adjective *cough* ‘red’ had a final voiceless fricative like that of Welsh *coch*, an obvious cognate. That led to a new, would-be phonetic spelling *Goff*.³

6. Maredudd: Meredith

In early Welsh poetry, the form of this name was *Maredudd*, and the meter showed that the stress was on the penult, as it still is in modern Welsh (*Merédith*). It was a man's name and also became a surname. The masculine gender is attested by many entries referring to "Meredith son of Owen," etc.

In addition to metrical evidence, alternative spellings like *Mredudd* and *Mredyth* show that the accent could not very well have been on the first syllable. Anglo-Norman scribes altered Maredudd to *Mereduth*. They probably did not easily distinguish the voiced fricative *dd* [ð] from the homorganic voiceless equivalent *th*[θ]. In later times, in Welsh as well as English contexts, the writing *th* resulted in the victory of the voiceless final. It is in the surname that this pronunciation prevailed. As the first name, *Meredydd* is customary. Thus a man may be named *Meredydd Meredith*.

For some reason, Meredith has become predominantly feminine in this country. It hardly suffices to cite *Edith*, which accidentally matches the last five letters of *Meredith*, but is unrelated. Nor can *Mary* and *Marion* (of ambiguous gender) account for the change. (One thinks of an example of a masculine Meredith in the name of the American musician-composer Meredith Willson, but it is difficult to think of another).

The reason for the shift of accent to the first syllable here (not in Wales) is also hard to explain, despite names like *Merrill*, *Merrick*, *Merewether*, et al., (cf. Morgan and Morgan 160). Thus, association of similar names may have had something to do with the accent shift, even in America.

7. Rhys (Reese, Reece)/Rice, Price, etc.

This name traveled into England, was subjected to sound changes there and subsequently returned to Wales to join the names that had stayed there. English scribes used the spellings *Rees* and *Reece* in an effort to indicate the vowel of *Rhys*, imperfectly but not impossibly. Writing *Reece* (to rhyme with *fleece*) was probably an attempt to correct the ambiguity of *Rees*, where the final *-s* could have suggested a *z*-sound as in *bees*. *Rice* looks superficially as if the name had reached English territory before the operation of the so-called "great vowel shift." It may have been there early enough to participate in the change of [i]: to [ai]. It is, to be sure, not ab-

solutely known that the name reached England as early as that. If not, *Rice* could reflect a scribe's interpretation of the spelling *Rhys* as indicating by *y* the sound of the vowel of *my* or *try*.

Be that as it may, patronymics were formed on *Rice*. The familiar *p*-prefix (a reduction of *ap/map* 'son') produced forms like *Frys*, *Preece*, *Price*, etc. In no instances did English scribes make any obvious attempt to indicate the aspirate initial represented by Welsh *rh*-.

Bardsley, (644), noting that *Rice* seems more frequently attested in the United States than in Britain, concludes that this is proof that the Welsh have been "great wanderers." He overlooks the significant fact that a name like *Rice* or *Price* in the United States can be of many origins, e.g. German *Reis*, *Reuss*, *Ries*, *Preis*, etc., not to mention numerous other languages.

Morgan and Morgan call attention to the interesting circumstance that Welsh first names "emigrated" to England at times, yielding surnames there that never came into being in Wales itself. *Cynddelw*, the name of a famous bard of twelfth-century Wales, did not survive as a first name in Wales. It was, therefore, surprising to find occurrences of it as a surname in England. That discovery, says T.J. Morgan "was like bringing up the coelacanth in the fishing net."

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Notes

1. Robert Richards, pp. 158-59, shows that it is possible that the few family names found in Wales in the fifteenth century were borne by Englishmen working in Wales. The date of the first occurrence of surnames in Wales should be the sixteenth century, when Henry VIII promulgated the Act of Union (1542), which made it mandatory to record births, marriages, and deaths, etc. in Wales in keeping with the already existing English naming system. Compliance was not very prompt.

It is intriguing that Welsh surnames arose in England long before Wales knew them. Cf. the names *William Meredith*, Staffordshire, 1191; *John Morgan*, Northumbria, 1279; etc. In 1287 the Cheshire assize rolls have the form *Thlewelin ap Euer*, showing the form of a Welsh patronymic as well as a Saxon attempt to write the name *Llywelyn*. Such entries in English works were usually made by scribes with no knowledge of Welsh.

2. It is a compound, the first member of which is a mythological Celtic name, the second a historical military figure, a name found, coincidentally, as the second element of *Cunobelins* (Cymbeline), father of Caratacus. Cf. Jackson, 414, 440.

3. Pedersen 1.197, 253; Lewis, 68.

4. Similar things happen to the name of the painter van Gogh, when attempted by speakers of English, who do not succeed in pronouncing the name without special training: [xo x]. One hears *Van Go*, *Van Gow*, and, in England, *Van Goff*, but never a pronunciation with the velar fricatives, of course (at both ends).

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