Welsh Surnames of Occupational Origin

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Welsh surnames based upon occupation, while not competing
quantitatively with the overwhelming numbers of patronymics, are not
without importance in the onomastic repertoire. Bearers of such
names are not always aware of their meanings, yet fluent speakers
seem to recognize their essential Welshness, or Celticity.

In their *Welsh Surnames*, T. J. Morgan and Prys Morgan
provided a large-scale study based on Welsh, Latin, and English
texts, including parish registers, local histories, court rolls,
electoral rolls, patent rolls, census returns, genealogies, even
telephone directories. The authors soon discovered that a great
many names in use outside Wales are of Welsh origin, sometimes
drastically reduced or otherwise altered.

Parish registers are often difficult to work with in manuscript
form. Some, however, have been printed (Shropshire, e.g.); they
prove to be a valuable source of onomastic information. Editors of
registers and the like are rarely to be trusted when offering
etymological explanation of names, especially those unacquainted
with Welsh. Users of *Welsh Surnames* do not need to master
Welsh since Morgan and Morgan have provided elucidation of
linguistic and other matters which would perhaps not need to be
explained to those knowing Welsh, although even they can often
profit from expert commentary. Perhaps too many dictionaries of
names are compiled by amateurs.

Morgan and Morgan's work, unlike most of its predecessors,
is devoted to Welsh surnames and not to those of the whole of
Britain (but is not limited by the borders either). In most such
works Welsh names are smuggled into the contents as if constitut-

ing an alien element. This is true of Bardsley's work of a century ago as well as Reaney's of relatively recent date (1958). The former called his work a *Dictionary of English and Welsh Surnames*, while the latter used the title *Dictionary of British Surnames*. ('British' once did not include English; nowadays it often does not include Welsh).

The date of the earliest surnames in Wales should be the sixteenth century, when Henry VIII promulgated the Act of Union (actually 2 acts) of 1542 which made it mandatory to record births, marriages, deaths, etc., in Wales in keeping with the English naming system already in force. Compliance was not always prompt. In some cases, however, persons used both fashions in referring to themselves, both the Welsh and the English.

In the system of Welsh surnames, occupational names have not played a major role compared to most other types — patronymics, placenames, nicknames, hypocoristics. Morgan and Morgan, in a valuable Introduction, give us chapters on the patronymic system, descriptive surnames, surnames from placenames, and hypocoristic names (5-35) but not a word on those of occupational origin. Bardsley said (3) that there is in Wales scarcely a trade name, only a few nicknames, no official surnames that he knew of, just a sprinkling of local surnames, and the rest (95% of the whole) were baptismal names.

There are, nevertheless, instances of occupational names that deserve to be looked at. About a score of them have significance in the production and development of surnames. Half of them are treated here in (English) alphabetical order.

Coedwr, Goyder 'woodman, forester'

This name consists of *coed* 'wood(s)' plus the suffix *-wr*. It means 'woodman, forester' and has various secondary and figurative meanings, such as 'forest dweller,' and denotes certain woodbirds and the like. *Goyder* has 'mutation' of the initial (in this case, voicing). Occurrences of Goyder as a family name are attested from the sixteenth century (Morgan and Morgan 73). *Coedwr* and *Coyder* existed simultaneously with *Goyder*. The occurrences in the sixteenth century are partly common nouns or

epithets, although surnames began in that century. Several occurrences of Goyder on English territory are given in Morgan and Morgan (73). A few surnames in Wales of that date are possibly names borne by Englishmen. Robert Richards points out (158-9) that surnames found in Wales as early as the fifteenth century seem to have been Welsh names borne by Englishmen working in Wales, a situation which was not unknown.

Einion ('anvil'?)

Forms in *B-* (patronymics) include *Beynon, Binyan, Beniams* (Morgan and Morgan 91) and *Binyon* (Bardsley 96). *Ap Eignion* is another patronymic. A further variant, *Anian* was the name of bishops of Bangor and St. Asaph (*Llanelwy* in Welsh) in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In Latin writings it was often given the form *Anianus*, an ecclesiastical version yielding various surnames, e.g., *Anyon* in Chester (Morgan and Morgan 92-3).

In present-day registers and other late sources *Einon/Eynon* and *Beynon* are found in profusion (Morgan and Morgan 93-95), both in England and Wales. This was for a long time one of the most common surnames in Wales. Today, while still found, it occurs less frequently.

The name *Bunyan* has occasionally been regarded as akin to *Einion*, etc. Bardsley once thought that it was of Norman French origin ('Bon-Jean'). In his dictionary, however, he gave up on that theory (147), deciding that *Bunyan* was of Welsh origin and thus belonged with *Einion*, etc.

Most authorities have apparently abandoned the connection of *Bunyan* with *Beynon, Einion*, etc. But their objections seem to be directed at assuming Welsh ancestry for *Bunyan*, which is not relevant here. The name itself is found in the local records of Elstow, Bedfordshire (John Bunyan's birthplace) and neighboring parishes, starting in 1199. Variants of *Bunyan* there remind us of forms of *Einion* found elsewhere in England and Wales.

It seems possible to associate *Einion* and its congeners with *einion/eingion*, the Welsh word for 'anvil.' The name of the anvil could have been used, via metonymy, for the smith who worked with an anvil. This might fit very well with the copious attestation

of the name throughout the centuries. English *Smith* is also a surname of great frequency, also German *Schmidt* (and similarly in other languages and other language groups).

Meddyg 'doctor, physician'

The surname *Meddick*, found at times in present-day registers of parishes and the like, must once have been a version of the noun epithet. *Meddyg* used to be attached to a personal name and constituted the equivalent of a title or occupational epithet. It does not seem possible to pinpoint the date at which the epithet became a surname. Current versions of the name, found both in Wales and in some border regions of England have variants like *Methick, Vethig, Feddig, Methig, Veddyg, Vythig*. The form *Meddick* is found in localities in Wales and, less frequently, in England (Morgan and Morgan 164). Some forms are closer in orthography to the standard spelling of the noun *meddyg* than others, for scribal practices were often individual matters. Forms with *-dd-*, e.g., *Veddyg*, may show an effort to represent the voiced inter-dental fricative (like *th* in *weather*, which is the sound represented by Welsh *dd*). Some *th*'s in the variants listed may indicate the voiceless sound represented by *th* in *oath*. It is conceivable that pronunciation depends in part on the degree of realization of the meaning of the name. The bearer of a name was not always completely successful in conveying the pronunciation of his own name to an English scribe.

Meddyg is, of course, a borrowing from Latin *medicus*. It is regarded as belonging to the earliest stratum of Latin loanwords in Welsh (Lewis, *Datblygiad* 78; Pedersen 1.189-90) or, if early enough, in British. At any rate, the word was apparently acquired during the Roman occupation of Britain. This was a rather thick stratum, since the Romans (not all from Italy by any means) remained some four centuries or more. During that time they provided the Welsh or proto-Welsh with a *Medici* name, as it were.

Melinydd/Mal 'miller'

Melin-ydd consists of *melin* 'mill,' from Latin *molina* plus the suffix *-ydd*, denoting agent or actor. It was used as an epithet from

the end of the thirteenth century until the sixteenth (Morgan and Morgan 165), at which time it became a surname. That did not mean the cessation of its use as epithet, for both functions continued to exist simultaneously. A peculiar feature of this name is that another epithet *Mâl* — in mutated form Vâl — was found affixed to a personal name, cf. *Madoco ap Gryffydd Mâl*. *Mâl* was not from Latin but was evidently cognate with *molīna*, also Welsh *malu* 'grind,' *dannedd malu* 'molars.' *Mâl* meant 'what is ground, what grinds; grinding, mill.' Through metonymy it acquired the sense of 'miller.'

From the epithet *Mâl*, a surname developed, attested both in mutated and radical form. Cf. Morgan and Morgan (163). Examples are *John Valle*, and *Thomas Vale* (1588). Examples of *Val* as a surname are also found in the registers of Bromfield and Shropshire, as Morgan and Morgan point out (164-65).

But caution should be applied in assigning Welsh origin to some (not all) of these names in England (*Vale*, etc.). As Bardsley (779) cautions, they may very well be from English place names, or from Norman French (*Duval*, etc).

Pannwr 'fuller'

This name is often found in an epithet attached to personal names, in some with mutation of the initial consonant (*Bannwr*), in others with the radical (*P-*). Cf. the cognates in Welsh itself: *pannu* 'to full cloth,' *pan* 'fulling,' *pannog* 'fulled.' Epithets are seen: *John Baner*, 1292 and *Heylin Panner*, 1292-3. Surnames seem to have started in the sixteenth century (cf. *John Bannour* [sixteenth century], *Barrie Pannour*, 1616, etc.) (Morgan and Morgan 172).

A version with *-ng-*, *Pengour*, is not easily explained as a variant of *Pannwr*, cf. Morgan and Morgan (174), who also reject the attempt to explain *Pengour* as a compound of *pen* and *gwr*. We have seen under *Einion* the same sort of alternation of *n* and *ng*; hence it is not too difficult to accept forms with *-ng-* as relevant here.

English *fuller* is attested at about the same time as *pannwr* (as both noun and name). The process of 'fulling' underwent changes in technology, and it is dubious whether someone named

Fuller in English or *Pannwr* in Welsh is really aware of what the name means or what the process of fulling has involved.

Pibydd 'piper, bagpipe player'

This name is attested in a few variant forms like *Pybyth*, *Bibbith*, *Bibidd*, *Bibydd*, etc., from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. *Pibydd* consists of *pib* 'pipe' (from Middle English) plus the Welsh suffix (nomen agentis) *-ydd*, cf. Parry-Williams (148, 240). Certain clues help us distinguish between epithets and surnames. The name *Gryffyth Pybyth* is recorded in an entry for March 1522 (day not given) in the letters and papers of Henry VIII. At that time a pardon was granted Gryffyth for stealing (Morgan and Morgan 177). That this *Pybyth* is a surname is shown, in part, by the absence of lenition (i.e., it is not **Bybyth*) and, more significantly, by the identification of his occupation (he was a weaver).

The story of Pibydd resembles that of *Piper* in English, although the Welsh name is first attested slightly later than the English one; and the English name ends slightly later (Bardsley 608). Bardsley is apparently delighted at finding the name Peter Piper and cannot refrain from remarking, 'Whether this was the Peter Piper who originated the alliterative nursery rhyme...I cannot say.' Yes he can.

Welsh matches this story to an extent with the record of the pardon of a piper's son (although not a Tom) for stealing something not specified; at any rate there was no mention of a pig. For some reason the popularity of the bagpipe did not endure in Wales the way it did in Scotland and Ireland. One can guess why.

Pysgod 'fish'

This word was taken from Latin *piscatus* 'a catch of fish.' *Pysgod* served as a collective noun in Welsh, then becoming the regular plural for 'fish.' A singular form was provided by *pysgodyn* (a 'singulative'). (Lewis, *Elfen* 4, 5). Morgan and Morgan (179) point to an English name which strikingly resembles *pysgod* but is unrelated: *Peascod*, *Peasgood*, from *peas-cod* 'peapod,' a nickname for a seller of peas, from the street-cry

'hot peascods!' A number of such epithets are known in English names, which, starting from nicknames for hawkers, became trade epithets, then surnames. That *Peascod* resembles *pysgod* phonetically (at least to a degree) is surely coincidental; that they both designate articles of trade that were 'hawked' is also coincidental, but the process of development of surnames is the same. The article sold is made to stand for the act of selling, then the seller, and an occupational name is provided from a non-human source.

The name (whether employed in a street-cry or not) can refer to things made or cultivated, to animals raised or hunted, to equipment operated, to musical instruments played, etc. In Breton *Le Nours* 'the bear' (with two articles, one Breton, one Celtic, and a French base) can mean the man who leads a performing bear, etc. And Breton *Falc'hun* 'falcon' can by the same metonymic process mean falconer (Gourvil 200-201).

Saer 'carpenter'

Variants of *saer* include *Sayr* and *Sayer* (Morgan and Morgan 189). The resemblance to English *Sawyer*, *Sayer*, *Sayers*, *Sayre*, *Saer*, etc., is not likely the result of etymological relationship. Morgan and Morgan (189) say that Modern Irish *saor* is evidence that Welsh and Irish have a common Celtic word as the origin of 'carpenter.' That statement overlooks the fact that Irish initial *s*-normally corresponds to *h*- in Welsh, Cornish, and Breton, cf., e.g., Old Irish *sen*, Modern Irish *sean* 'old,' Welsh, Cornish, Breton *hen* 'old.' It is true that there are instances in which Welsh has *s*- instead of *h*-, as in *saith* 'seven' (Irish *secht*). But that is a rare occurrence and still lacks an explanation. Despite that, there is some likelihood that in border regions there is some merger of the names. Morgan and Morgan note the same confusion in registers.

Towr 'roofer, thatcher'

This is definitely an occupational name, although the precise meaning of 'thatcher' may not be generally known. It is derived from *to* 'roof' and occurs in various spellings: *Towr*, *Toher*, *Tour*,

Towre. Towr was originally disyllabic (*to* + -*wr*, suffix of nomen agentis). But at an early date it became monosyllabic, with a diphthong *ow*. The noun *towr* is still disyllabic and is so marked. Like English *thatch*, which once meant 'roof' without reference to the material used, Welsh *to* meant 'roof,' as did OE *þak*, Eng. *thatch* (cf. German *Dach*, Swedish *tak* 'roof'). In Modern Welsh, *towr* can mean 'roofer, slater, tiler, thatcher.' Morgan and Morgan have examples, most of which look more like epithets than surnames, but the latter do occur, though not profusely.

Ysgolhaig 'scholar'

Although the present sense of the name is 'scholar,' earlier meanings included 'clerk' in various senses, ecclesiastical and other. Another word for scholar today is *ysgolor*, which is probably from English. This seems not to have produced any surnames. *Ysgolhaig* is a derivative from *ysgol* 'school,' a loanword from Latin *schola*, plus a double Welsh suffix -*ha-ig*.

There are many variants, some being *Scolheig*, *Scolhayke*, *Scoleyk*, *Yscylaig*. Surnames appear in the sixteenth century: *Esgolhaig*, *Yscolhaig*. Surnames are found in the rolls and registers of Wales, and a fair number are in those of Cumbria (England), dating from 1733 to 1796. In Bromsgrove (Worcestershire before the revision of the county names, now West Midlands), the surname survives in the form *Scollick*.

Morgan and Morgan (205) find it difficult to explain why the surname is attached to a woman's name, e.g., *Neest Scolayke*. This seems, however, to be no inexplicable mystery; why cannot a feminine name precede a surname? The fact that it does may actually constitute proof that the name really *is* a surname. Possibly the authors mean that *Ysgolhaig* is inherently masculine. That cannot be particularly relevant in recent or contemporary names, the meaning of which can be wholly forgotten. A woman named Ann Scolick (1796) surely did not think of her name as meaning 'Ann, male scholar.'

A sixteenth century case of 'Clearte' as the equivalent of *Scholaige* leads Morgan and Morgan to suggest, with probable validity, that *Clearte* is to be read 'Clearke.'

In the third branch of the *Mabinogi* (*Manawydan Uab Llyr*), *ysgolheic* is used in two senses, one as the designation of the lowest of holy orders, the other as one of the *scholares* or *clerici vagantes*, the wandering poets and singers of the Middle Ages. The *ysgolhaig* gives a clue by saying that one has come from England, where he has been 'song-making.' Cf. Ifor Williams (244-45). There are several complications to the story, for the clerk is actually in disguise, and the account is fiction, of course. At any rate, we can call *ysgolhaig* and the surnames resulting from it a name of occupational origin.

We are struck by the relatively small number of surviving surnames of occupational origin. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Brittany, where they abound (Gourvil 259). It has been estimated that no country in Europe surpasses Brittany in this respect. We are proffered neither explanation nor statistics.

In Wales the bearers of such surnames are not often aware of their meanings. Fluent speakers of Welsh may not understand the forms the names have now assumed, even when the elements are all Celtic.

Celtic is not the only source contributing to Welsh names, not merely those of occupational origin; others include Hebrew, Latin, Scandinavian, Norman French, English, etc. Sometimes the activity or occupation that furnished the name to begin with has altered greatly or even vanished. *Pannwr* 'fuller' may not mean much to someone with that surname. (The same may be said of *Fuller* in English). And *Einion* 'anvil,' is unlikely to be recognized as meaning 'smith' by metonymy. (American schoolchildren are said to think that the village 'smithy' is the blacksmith himself, standing beneath the chestnut tree).

In Brittany a number of surnames originated as theological or ecclesiastic terms. The name *Bellec* 'priest' is quite common, also *Chalong* 'canon.' (The Reformation reduced the occurrences in Wales, apparently). Such names were used as nicknames for people having little to do with the religious connection implied. When family names became the style, or the legal requirement, the nickname was often retained as family name and passed on to progeny, which priests theoretically did not have. At other times, employees of distinguished persons were jocularly given

the titles of their employers, and names like *Archdeacon* and *Archbishop* were borne by the descendants of servants.

Morgan and Morgan call attention to the interesting circumstance that Welsh first names at times "emigrated" to England and yielded surnames that never came about in Wales itself. In addition, there were Welsh populations across the border in various parts of England. They sometimes acquired surnames at a date earlier than the rise of surnames in Wales. Sometimes they were found in areas not adjacent to Wales. That, in addition to many other things concerning surnames, is surprising.

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