

## Naming Welsh Women

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'And she came, with a robe of flame-red silk about her, and around the maiden's neck a torque of red gold, and precious pearls thereon and rubies. Yellower was her head than the flower of the broom, whiter was her flesh than the foam of the wave; whiter were her palms and her fingers than the shoots of the marsh trefoil from amidst the fine gravel of a welling spring. Neither the eye of the mewed hawk, nor the eye of the thrice-mewed falcon, not an eye was there fairer than hers. Whiter were her breasts than the breast of the white swan, redder were her cheeks than the reddest foxgloves. Whoso beheld her would be filled with love of her. Four white trefoils sprang up behind her wherever she went; and for that reason was she called Olwen.'<sup>1</sup>

That well-known passage presents a naming crux. The explanation offered may not be correct, but it accurately reflects the kind of interest people have always taken in names. This paper proposes, in a few pages, an approach to the study of the naming of Welsh women. The problems are huge. Only tentative approaches have been made to the subject of Welsh personal names by serious scholars, most notably by the historian Sir John Edward Lloyd,<sup>2</sup> and by the late Melville Richards.<sup>3</sup> There is no equivalent to Professor Ellis Evans's *Gaulish*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Mabinogion*, translated by Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, (London, 1949), pp. 110-11.

<sup>2</sup> J. E. Lloyd, 'The Personal Name-System in Old Welsh', *Y Cymmrodor*, 9 (1888), 39-55.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Melville Richards, 'Gwŷr, gwragedd a gwehelyth' ['Men, women and lineage'], *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, 1965, 27-45.

*Personal Names.*<sup>4</sup> There is no scholarly dictionary of Welsh personal names. There is even difficulty over deciding what *is* a Welsh name; what follows is an attempt at a definition.

A name may be Welsh lexically, because in origin it can be defined in common terms—for example Gwyneira (white-snow). A name may be Welsh phonologically; in other words an extraneous name is rendered anew: Catherine becomes Catrin, Margaret Marget, Maria or Mary becomes Mair, Jane becomes Siân. A name may even be Welsh orthographically; Elisabeth spelt with an *s* is a signal that this is a Welsh girl. Then there are Welsh hypocoristic forms of Elizabeth, such as Bethan, Betsan. Of course some names present difficulties; is Lleucu derived from Lucy, or is it \**lleu* 'light' + *cu* 'dear'? Is Elin of Celtic origin or not?

To complicate the issue further, for a long period many Welsh women and men were known by two versions of their names. In the mediaeval period it is likely that English scribes, impatient with difficult Welsh names, might insist on using a simpler name in official records. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we can be sure that there were official and unofficial versions of given names. A girl's baptism might have been registered as Catherine, but orally she was Catrin, the Welsh form. The same is true of many other female and male names. This is typical of a situation where, although Welsh was the language of daily life, English was the principal language of law and record. There are two exceptions—the praise-poetry addressed to individuals and families, and the family genealogies which survive from the mediaeval period in extenso, and which generally use Welsh forms of most names because they were recorded by Welsh poets.

More prolegomena—why choose to concentrate on women's names? Because the names are interesting, because the complete field of personal names is too large, and because it is possible to identify several useful sources of material. Historical records are lopsided or male-heavy in this field as in so many others; lists of tax-payers, land-owners, tenants and heads of families are nearly always male-dominated, but sources for female names do exist. I was

<sup>4</sup> D. Ellis Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names: A Study of Some Continental Celtic Formations* (Oxford, 1967); see also his articles listed in Marian Beech Hughes and J. E. Caerwyn Williams, *Llyfryddiaeth yr Iaith Gymraeg* (Cardiff, 1988), nos 279, 284–87, 2102 and 2133.

particularly interested to try to discover what factors, if any, distinguished the naming of girls from the naming of boys. At the same time, many of the points I have to make apply equally to male and female names.

Gender is the most fundamental identifier of individuals at birth, and we reinforce that identification by colour, by dress and by name. In most European societies, the great majority of given names are exclusively male or female. There is of course no necessary reason why this should be, and we all know of names which, to the ear at least, are bisexual—Francis, Leslie, Hilary, Evelyn are traditional English examples. There are also Welsh examples—Ceri, Eirian. Carol is a girl's name in English but a man's name in recent Welsh usage. Meredith and Morgan are Welsh male names, but have been adopted for female use in North America.

In a major article, Professor Ellis Evans has reminded us of the problems attached to the original lexical significance of names.<sup>5</sup> It might be presumed that each name was originally coined with intentional lexical meaning, but that with repetition and familiarity, a name becomes a mere pointer or indicator. But when a new name is coined today we may doubt whether it has the significance that a newly-coined name may have had in a traditional society. Even in the early period, Professor Evans is willing to concede only that 'some names were to be regarded as simply an expression of the hope or desire that the child would emulate the virtues indicated by his name.'<sup>6</sup>

The significance of child-naming in north-west European society varies according to circumstances. At one extreme a name may be chosen with great care, perhaps invoking potent tradition and a near-magical or religious expectation; at the other extreme, it may be the result of sheer whim and fancy. For centuries children in this society have had given names bestowed soon after birth, often acknowledged by a religious ceremony. The process of choice of name may be a complex one. Various influences determine the parental choice. It may be a family choice—a child may be given the same name as its father or grandmother. It may be a spiritual or social choice, in which the child is named after a friend or patron, who may be asked to

<sup>5</sup> D. Ellis Evans, 'A Comparison of the Formation of Some Continental and Early Insular Celtic Personal Names', *Études celtiques*, 13 (1972–73), 171–193.

<sup>6</sup> Evans, 'Comparison', p.184.

act as godparent to the child. It may be a cultural choice, as when a child is named after a hero or heroine, or a religious choice, as in naming a child after a Biblical character or a saint. It may reflect a particular circumstance at the time of birth, as for example the use of the name Christmas for a boy born on December 25th, or the many children called Noel, Noelle or Carol for Christmastide births. Or there may be a more or less conscious moral choice, as when a child is named for some virtue or attraction with which it is hoped the child may be endowed. In recent centuries girls have been particularly subject to moral influence—Prudence, Hope, Faith, Grace and Patience are all well-known. Temperance occurs in Llandaff diocese in the nineteenth century. Cruellest of all was the seventeenth-century Welshman in [??] who christened his daughter Silence Jones, commemorated on a wall-plaque in Conwy parish church. Flower and plant names are a branch of this group, the implication being that the flower is a favourite of the parents, and that the child may share its qualities of beauty, perfume, submissiveness or sheer parasitic dependence—Rose, Lily, Violet, Ivy in English, Ffion, Eirlys in Welsh. The name Sage was popular in Wales from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries; I cannot decide whether it was chosen as a virtue or the name of a herb. Next, a name may denote an obvious physical characteristic, such as blonde or dark hair; Tegwyn (m.) and Tegwen (f.) are Welsh examples, meaning 'fair-white'. Finally, there is the matter of choice for national reasons. A body or stock of names may have lost virtually all lexical significance, but they may retain cultural significance. Members of self-conscious cultural minorities may choose names in order to identify the child as a member of that minority, as an act of cultural and political affirmation.

Melville Richards suggested categories of meanings which can be applied to the lexical meanings of the original stock of Welsh names, at least in the cases where the etymologies are unquestioned:<sup>7</sup>

- Animals
- War and Heroism
- Office or Rank
- Wealth
- Relationship (including the root *Tud-* 'people, tribe')
- Beauty

<sup>7</sup> Richards, 'Gwŷr, gwragedd', pp. 30–32.

- Affection
- Colour
- Praise
- Craft or Skill
- Liveliness
- Metals
- Trees
- Verb-roots with specific meanings.

Not unexpectedly, most Welsh female names conform with European tradition, and belong to the categories Relationship, Beauty, Affection, Colour, Praise and perhaps Liveliness. The most productive Welsh roots in female names are *car-* 'love', *golau* 'bright', *teg* 'fair', *gwen-* 'fair, holy'. *Gwen-* was certainly the most productive root in the earliest period; eleven women saints bore different names each beginning with *Gwen-*. Many roots are common to both male and female names.

So much by way of introduction. The thesis of this article is that the naming of the Welsh may be seen to pass through slow but drastic changes, and that four periods are perceptible. In the first or pre-conquest period of Welsh naming, from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries A.D., an indigenous system of Welsh names, with some early Biblical borrowings, was taken for granted in Wales. It is true that male names include some borrowings from Latin such as Ederne (< *Aeternus*), Ynyr (< *Honorius*) and Padarn (< *Paternus*); the only female equivalent may be Marchell (< *Marcella*). The second period begins with the Norman invasions of the twelfth century and the conquest of Wales in the thirteenth century, and continues until the mid-seventeenth century. During this time there is what we may call a bilingual situation, where Welsh names survive in regular and varied use, but Anglo-French and Biblical names become increasingly popular, and Welsh names suffer attrition both of variety and extent. The third period, from the late seventeenth century till the end of the nineteenth century, is a period of almost total assimilation, when indigenous Welsh names are scarcely used in formal contexts, although the Catrin/Catherine style of bilingual usage persisted. This was, too, a period of considerable conformity. True, the aristocracy and learned classes were less conformist, and one does find names like *Quintiliana*, *Cornelia*, *Caesar* and *Napoleon* used in unexpected times and places in

west Wales, but among the bulk of the population the stock of names is drastically reduced. There is a slight gender difference in this third period. While the stock of current Welsh female names was reduced to two or three, Welsh male names retained a slightly wider variety of choice. There is a practical reason for this; since the patronymic surnaming of children survived, the son of Owen Morgan might be called Morgan Owen; this could not happen to girls, and so a rather larger stock of Welsh male names survived in use.

All three periods of naming reflect contemporary political and cultural history—Welsh independence, the subsequent conquest and co-existence with incomers and the assimilation of new ways. The fourth period is that of renaissance, of a new awareness of Welsh identity. Cultural self-discovery from the second half of the nineteenth century to the present day has led to the revival of traditional Welsh names and the coining of new Welsh names. They are still only given to a minority of children, but there is a wider variety of Welsh names used in this century than at any time since the pre-1282 period.

Reference has already been made to the shortage of sources of female names from the earlier historical period. The best sources available are the names of saints, names from the early genealogies, and names from the early prose literature.<sup>8</sup> Two features became evident in listing these names. The first is the large number of different names, and the rarity of repetition. Seventy-three different names of female saints survive; only four are borrowings from Latin or Irish, while one is Biblical. Only in one case are there two saints sharing the same name. A number of these names are to be found in the earliest Welsh genealogies, published by Bartrum, in which a total of 250 women shared a range of 163 names.<sup>9</sup> This, compared with later periods, is a remarkable statistic. Is it legitimate to speculate that many of these names were coinages created for an individual child, which would not have been expected to pass into general circulation? If they were coined for individuals, were they names bestowed on them in

<sup>8</sup> The Book of Llandaf (J. Gwenogvryn Evans and John Rhys, *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*, Oxford, 1893), an early source but difficult for the inexperienced, includes thirteen women's names, among them the common Angharad, Nest and Lleucu, and the unusual Hindeg (fair-weather) and Gwenhaf (fair-summer). There are two Biblical names, Anna and Elizabeth.

<sup>9</sup> P. C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966) (henceforth EWGT).

adulthood, in connection with their religious vocation? This at least seems unlikely, since so many of the names whose etymologies are obvious are not religious names—Dwynwen 'fair-bearer', Ceindrych 'beautiful-image', Eurgain 'gold-fair', Gwawrddydd 'dawn-of-day', Gwenfron 'white-breast', and so on.

This creation of unique names for individuals, which I would like to call 'inspirational naming', is widely known in literature. There are a number of examples in the Old Testament, as when Leah gives birth to Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; each name is apparently taken from her comment after each birth. Obviously we cannot assume that that is actually what happened in the case of Leah, but inspirational naming clearly seemed valid to the author of the Book of Genesis, although what he may actually have practised was explanatory glossing. Inspirational naming has certainly been the practice of the Plains Indians, where a child may be given a name by an honoured adult name-giver, drawn from his or her vision. As far as Welsh is concerned, the only evidence is to be found in the early literature; Culhwch is so called because he is said to have been born in a pig-sty, Pryderi was his mother's care or grief. Although on a scholarly level these are explanatory glosses incorporated in the tales by their tellers, those tellers *may* have been able to assume an audience which was used to the idea of inspirational naming. Other examples are the naming of Lleu and of Taliesin. In the *Four Branches*, an important phrase is used of naming, as in the case of the child found by Teyrnnon: 'They had the boy baptized with the baptism that was used then.' When Gwri is reunited with his real mother, Rhiannon, she says:

'Between me and God, I should be delivered of my care  
(*pryder*) if that were true.'

A court elder picks up the phrase, saying, 'Well hast thou named thy son—Pryderi!' Pwyll, the real father, supports this, saying:

'That is most fitting, that the boy's name be taken from  
the word his mother spoke when she received glad  
tidings of him.'<sup>10</sup>

I cannot prove that these Welsh examples of inspirational naming are representative of real life. Indeed, it might even be argued that the

<sup>10</sup> Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, p. 23.

author of the First Branch was influenced by the Book of Genesis; the Old and New Testaments provided the Welsh with names from the sixth century onward, and were perfectly well-known, and the redactor of the *Four Branches* was probably a cleric. However, every society is used to the idea of inspirational naming—we call it 'nicknaming'. Nicknaming, of course, has been particularly important in Welsh society in recent centuries due to a lack of variety in both first names and surnames.

When we turn to literature simply as a source of names in the early period, we find that the female names used in early Welsh literature are mostly unique to literature. The name Heledd, for example, although belonging both to an early saint and to a heroine of poetry, was not taken up as an ordinary personal name in the medieval period. There are exceptions; among the many women at King Arthur's court in *Culhwch and Olwen* are a Morfudd, a Gwenllian, an Elliw, a Gwen, a Goleuddydd and most important, a Gwenhwyfar. These were popular Welsh names throughout the medieval period. But the other names, especially the heroine-names, in *Culhwch and Olwen* and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* are rare or unique; no-one in the medieval period seems to have been called Olwen, Branwen, Rhiannon, Aranrhod, or Blodeuedd. Even the names of the heroines of the later Welsh Arthurian romances, Luned and Enid, were not transferred into popular usage. This is all the more remarkable because the story-names Enid, Esyllt, Luned, Creirwy, Tegau and Hindeg or Indeg became standards of beauty for the fifteenth century poets of the aristocracy. The poets derived many of these names from Welsh versions of Arthurian romances, ignoring the names of the female characters of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. Nevertheless, the approval of the poets did not ensure popular acceptance. It will not suffice to argue that it would have been unlucky to name a child after tragic heroines such as Branwen or Rhiannon, or a minx such as Aranrhod. It has occurred to me to suggest that knowledge of literature was confined to an élite—an élite which followed naming fashions which were set, not by the poets or storytellers, but the incoming tide of Anglo-Norman culture. However, although the *Mabinogion* survive only in a handful of manuscripts, there are plenty of manuscripts of the Welsh translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannorum*, yet the personal names in that work do

not seem to have influenced either popular or aristocratic usage to any perceptible extent.

Yet although neither Enid nor Luned became popular names, Gwenhwyfar at least was a common name. Was this in spite of the tradition that Arthur's queen was an adulteress? Or was that tradition, Anglo-French as it was, less important in Wales, where tradition told of Gwenhwyfar's abduction by Melwas, not her adultery with Lancelot? Better to argue that neither tradition was important. It is interesting to compare this putative lack of literary influence on nomenclature in mediaeval Wales with the powerful influence of the poetry of Tennyson in Victorian England. It was surely due to him that Enid became a popular name in England, and surely due to Guinevere's adultery that her name never seems to have been used for christening Victorian girls. The Victorians would for obvious reasons have preferred the suffering submission of Enid to the immorality of Guinevere.

One question more about the early literary names, though they need a volume. It is accepted that names like Modron and Rhiannon survived from their pre-Welsh Celtic forms, \**Matrona* and \**Rigantona*—'divine mother', 'divine queen'. They seem never to have been names in current use, yet if that is so, how did they survive, as they certainly did, from pre-Christian Celtic culture into twelfth-century Wales? They may well be evidence of a persistent oral culture which survived the language-change from Brittonic to Welsh.

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To summarise, thus far. The original stock of Welsh names can be divided in two groups, the literary and the ordinary, though a few names like Gwenllian, Ellyw, Morfudd, Gwen and Goleuddydd are common to both groups. One at least of these figures had a pre-literary existence in the historic sixth century, Morfudd, originally daughter to Urien Rheged and sister to Owain. It should be noted, too, that a similar distinction can be made between literary and non-literary male names. The male names of literature—Cai, Bedwyr, Pwyll, Pryderi, Math, Gwydion, Manawydan, Lleu, Arthur—rarely or never appear in the genealogies and the histories. There are exceptions; the names Mabon and Arawn appear in the Book of Llandaf, and Peredur occurs several times in the early historical genealogies as well as in his own

romance, but Owain is the only name important in both historical and literary spheres, and Owain ab Urien, brother to Morfudd, is a known historical figure who attracted elements of legend and thus became a major figure in literature.

The second period of Welsh naming is that of the later middle ages, roughly from 1250 to the seventeenth century. The best available sources consist of the Merioneth Lay Subsidy of 1292–93<sup>11</sup> (a list of tax-payers) and the fourteenth-century Black Book of St Davids<sup>12</sup> (a detailed list of tenants), both of which include many women; the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century genealogies published by Bartrum;<sup>13</sup> the fourteenth-century court rolls of the Lordship of Ruthin;<sup>14</sup> the Conwy Parish Register;<sup>15</sup> and early seventeenth-century Cardiganshire wills.<sup>16</sup> There is a regrettable gap in the early sixteenth century, for which I have not yet discovered a suitable source.

During this second period we see a sharp diminution in the native stock of Welsh names, and a remarkable influx of extraneous female and male names. We have already noted that penetration into Wales by these names actually began well before 1250, but was only a trickle. In Bartrum's collection of genealogies from 895 to 1215 there are 86 different Welsh names, a sharp reduction from the earlier collection of genealogies already referred to. And though Welsh names are the commonest—Gwenllian, Angharad and Gwladus are the top three—Margaret is fourth, Jane sixth, Joan eighth and Jonet ninth. Elen, at seventh, is a problem, as I have already explained: are we dealing with a Welsh name or an intrusion?

Bartrum's next collection, for 1215–1350, shows Welsh names still in popular favour, but Margaret is now the commonest name, with Angharad second and Efa, or Eve, third. However, the Meirionnydd Lay Subsidy of 1293, covering part of the Welsh heartland in deepest

<sup>11</sup> *The Merioneth Lay Subsidy Roll 1292–3*, edited by Keith Williams-Jones (Cardiff, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> *An Extent . . . Usually Called The Black Book of St David's*, edited by J. W. Willis-Bund (London, 1902).

<sup>13</sup> P. C. Bartrum, *Welsh Genealogies AD 300–1400*, 8 vols (Cardiff, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Information derived, through the kindness of Drs Padel and Barrell, from the ongoing calendaring project at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

<sup>15</sup> *Conway Parish Registers 1541–1793*, edited by Alice Hadley, vol I [= all published] (London, 1900).

<sup>16</sup> Among the Church in Wales records in the National Library of Wales.

Gwynedd, shows that here at least there was no penetration except by the name Eve, always appearing as *Eua*. Otherwise Angharad, Gwenllian, Gwladus, and an unusual form I have found nowhere else, *Tudgech* (also spelt *Du(d)gech*, and also as *Tudgoch*, *Turgech*, *Tygech* and *Dugoch* once each), were the commonest names in that area.<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy however that the stock of names is much smaller—200 women share a mere 20 names, and eleven of those names have only one or two examples. This diminution of stock suggests that, if it were true that there had been a tradition of creating new names for particular individuals, then it had died by this date.

However, in regions further from *pura Wallia*, the Welsh heartland, the position is very different. In the fourteenth-century Black Book of St Davids, covering an area which included substantial foreign settlement, the commonest female names are Eva, Isabel, Alice and Amabilla, with Elen, Gwenllian and Angharad lagging behind. Here 192 women share 36 names. The fourteenth-century Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls from north-east Wales provide a valuable control. It might be argued that my previous sources—saints' names, aristocratic genealogies and taxpayers—do not represent the lower grades of so hierarchical a society. But court rolls include thieves and murderers—what of their names? At present the data-base created by the researchers, intended for other purposes, is not entirely helpful for mine. The name Angharad may occur 30 times in the year 1340, but the database cannot at present say how many Angharads are involved; there may be ten references to the same woman. However, the decade 1340–50 for which the database provides names shows that the names of north-east Wales, including all social classes, were much as in the genealogies; in their work on the Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls, Dr Oliver Padel and Dr Andrew Barrell have counted women's names in descending order of frequency during that decade as Gwenllian, Alice, Lleucu, Angharad, Efa, Gwerful, Gwladus, Agnes, Margaret, Tangwystl and Dyddgu. Some sixty women's names occur—if, that is, we count Margaret, Margery, Maret, Maryot and Magot as one name. Some unusual names are in this list—Generys and Erddylad were still fairly common, Hunydd and Gwledyr uncommon, Hulyn rare and baffling. Morfudd is very rare. Mary is also very rare, and the Welsh

<sup>17</sup> Dr Oliver Padel persuasively suggests to me that these are local variants of Dyddgu, a name not otherwise found in the Roll.

equivalent, Mair, completely absent. Despite the diminishing variety of Welsh names, Oliver Padel and Andrew Barrell have shown that in the mixed Anglo-Welsh society of Dyffryn Clwyd, individuals of English origin might generate families where Welsh names predominate after the second generation. The slow diminution in name-stock is readily apparent from an elementary table:

	<i>EWGT</i>	Bartrum 895-1215	Bartrum 1215-1350	Bartrum 1350-1415
Names	85	86	78	72
Women	250	480	1680	2124

When we move to the fifteenth century, still within my second period, so many genealogies survive that Bartrum produced six volumes of them, regionally divided. We can therefore compare the popularity of names in the six regions during that century, in descending order of frequency in each column, followed by the total number of different names in each area:

S.E. Wales	S.W. Wales	E. Wales	N.E.-Central	N.E. Wales	N.W. Wales
Margred	Margred	Gwenllian	Margred	Catrin	Margred
Catrin	Gwenllian	Margred	Catrin	Annes	Catrin
Joned	Joned	Mawd	Elen	Joned	Elen
Elsbeth	Catrin	Elen	Gwenllian	Elsbeth	Annes
Ann	Elsbeth	Jonet	Gwenhwyfar	Angharad	Lowri
Joan	Mawd	Catrin	Jane	Gwenllian	Gwenhwyfar
Gwenllian	Lleucu	Joan	Gwen	Gwen	Angharad
63 names	55 names	60 names	69 names	45 names	51 names

There are 94 separate names, some of which occur only once or twice, in Bartrum's fifteenth-century lists. Admittedly this is an increase on the stock of fourteenth-century names (78), but they were shared between 10,778 women. And of these ten thousand-plus women in the fourteenth century, 3,500 shared just three names—Margred, Catrin and Gwenllian. The briefest perusal of these lists of the seven most popular names in each region will show that there was a considerable degree of uniformity across Wales, despite the country's geographical and political diversity. Closer examination shows that, although the

names as used seem 'very Welsh', they are nearly all names from the common European stock in Welsh guise—e.g. Catherine is Catrin, Margaret is Margred, and so on. Only Gwenllian, Gwenhwyfar, Gwen and Angharad are definitely Welsh, with Lleucu and Elen possibly Welsh in origin. North-west Wales, the last surviving independent principedom, included Meirionnydd, the region which in 1292-93 had 99% Welsh names. By the fifteenth century the most popular women's names in Gwynedd seem no more 'Welsh' than those of any other region.

Although in Bartrum's genealogies the commonest female names occur with almost uniform frequency across the whole of Wales, there are significant regional variations in the genealogies for the less common names. Crisli, Eleanor, Joan, Lliwelydd and Sage are names which occur chiefly or only in South Wales. Gwladus is commonest in the south-east; Julian, Lisod, Maesod, Tudful and Tудо occur only in the south-east. Morfudd is common only in the north-west, while Dyddgu and Goleu are commonest in the south-west and east-central Wales, and Ellyw occurs only in the south-west and north-west. Elen, Lowri, Mali, Gwenhwyfar and Gwen are much commoner in North Wales, while Erddylad and Rose are unique to North Wales. The only one of these distributions for which there is an obvious explanation is that of the name Tudful; Tudful was an early female saint, honoured by dedications which became place-names in the south-east. But I can find no evidence of other female saints' names becoming popular names within their cult areas. Perhaps it is worth commenting that these frequencies strengthen the near-certainty that Dafydd ap Gwilym's Morfudd and Dyddgu were both real women; he refers to Morfudd as coming from the north-west where the name is common, while Dyddgu is commonest in Dafydd's own area, the south-west. However, care is necessary on two counts. Despite the large number of women counted in Bartrum's fifteenth-century genealogies, there is no certainty that every woman's name current in the period appears in the genealogies. Poets of the period use women's names that do not appear in the records—Dafydd Nanmor addressing Llio, or Gwilym ab Ieuan Hen addressing Dwynwen, neither of which names appears in the genealogies. But then they may not have been addressing real women, or may have revived literary or saints' names in order to conceal real identities.

Although the difficulty of deciding exactly what is a Welsh name prevents a statistically accurate conclusion, it would seem that by the fifteenth century, if not before, only a minority of Welsh women had names of Welsh lexical origin. This situation, with a majority using names of extraneous origin, albeit often in Welsh guise, but with a minority clinging, whether consciously or not, to the Welsh stock of names, survived into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The sixteenth century is short on available sources of names. One of the few surviving transcribed parish registers is that of Conwy.<sup>18</sup> Conwy was an English garrison town in origin, but the population had become thoroughly mixed by the mid-sixteenth century when the register begins. The opening years of the register, from 1540 onwards, show how the mixing of English and Welsh has not doubled the number of names, but reduced it drastically. The first 107 women named in the register share twelve names, but 31 are Catherines, 24 are Janes, 19 are Elins and 16 are Margarets—only five names between 96 women. The only names of undisputed Welsh origin are Gwennlian and Gwenhoen, one each, with Lowri in addition. Other Welsh names appear in later years—Gwyneth (1577), Gwen, Gaynor, Elliw, Morfudd, Angharad. The international stock also increases slightly, with Dorothy, Cicely, Marsli, Susanna and Mary. One woman's burial is recorded as:

Elena verch Thomas gwynethe ali(a)s gwrach y gwenniath  
(6.11.1581). (*Elen daughter of Thomas Gwynedd, alias the  
Witch of 'Y Gwenniath'*).

The name Gaenor, or Gaynor, calls for individual comment. The first Gaenors I have found, three of them, occur in Bartrum's fifteenth-century genealogies covering Gwynedd Uwch Conwy. It is unusual to find a newly-coined Welsh personal name at this period. However, it cannot be a 'new' name in the sense of having been derived from recognisable roots, because the name has no apparent lexical meaning in Welsh. It seems certain that it is a shortened or popular version of Gwenhwyfar. It would be good to find solid evidence of this, some legal or ecclesiastical entry saying 'Gaenor alias Gwenhwyfar', but nothing has yet come to light; nevertheless, this does seem by far the best suggestion. Gaenor became quite popular in

<sup>18</sup> See above, n. 15.

North Wales in the seventeenth century and was one of the last of the Welsh stock of names to disappear from view at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It has been revived during the present century, though not fashionable at present among young parents.

Wills become a useful source of women's names from the mid-sixteenth century. I have studied several hundred wills from south-west Wales from 1550 to 1620, in which a total of 371 women are mentioned. They share 47 names, which suggests some reduction in the fifteenth-century name bank, but not a large one. Slightly fewer than a quarter of these women had what can be roughly defined as Welsh names. What is most significant, however, is that 224 of the 371 share only six names between them—Catherine, Elizabeth, Elen, Jane, Margaret and Mary. The commonest Welsh names are Gwennlian, Dyddgu, Angharad, Lowri and Gole. Gwenhwyfar is represented, but as we have already seen it was commoner in North Wales than in the South. The Welsh name-bank was losing credit by the early seventeenth century, while only comparatively few of the Euro-Biblical stock of names were popular. It may seem remarkable that, although so many more names had become available during the mediaeval period, the actual common stock diminished in variety, with a few names becoming overwhelmingly common.

The third period is that from the late seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, when we see the virtual disappearance of the Welsh stock of names, at least in written form. By now the sources of material are overwhelming, since so many parish registers survive, and it would require months I do not have of research to do anything like justice to the subject. From the parish registers I have used, however, several factors emerge.

- (a) The overwhelming prevalence of a small stock of names in English form—Catherine, Anne, Elizabeth, Jane, Mary. The same is true of male names—David, William, John, Thomas, William, Richard, Hugh.
- (b) Welsh female names are even rarer than Welsh male names. In the Cardiganshire parishes I have examined, Gwen is the only Welsh female name to survive with any frequency throughout the period. In the National Library of Wales index to 19th-century wills in Llandaff diocese, Gwennlian and Gwinifrid both occur.



- (c) Although the common stock of names is drastically reduced, so that ninety per cent of women share some twelve names and ninety per cent of men about sixteen names, nevertheless unusual and odd names still occur, usually in the case of the children of the wealthy. These names often take classical form, as in the case of Quintiliana Morgan baptised in Tregaron in 1683, or Appolonia [*sic*] Prichard, buried in Llanymawddwy in 1749. There can also be local names of interest. For example, Cornelius Le Brun, a seventeenth-century mining engineer from Cologne, came to the lead-mines of west Wales round Aberystwyth, married an heiress and had a daughter whom he christened Avarina. From that day to this, Avarina has been a name in regular use in the district. Even at a time of maximum conformity, originality was still possible.
- (d) Quite eccentric is a Welsh name adopted for daughters of the aristocratic Verney family, resident in England but with some Welsh connections; during the 18th century, several girls were christened Morforwyn, 'mermaid'.

Sample remote parishes in entirely Welsh-speaking districts of north-west Wales show a similar pattern of decline and revival between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries. By the 1680s the stock of current Welsh female names had been reduced to Gwen or Gwenllian, Lowri, Gaynor and Elin. These, though still occurring quite frequently, are already outnumbered by Catherine, Mary, Elizabeth, Margaret and Eleanor. The use of the patronymic form for a woman, Jane verch Robert, is last attested (in the registers I have examined) in Llangian in 1702. In 1697 a married woman could still be known by her maiden name: Elizabeth Wynne wife of Hugh Hughes was buried in that year. In Llangian in 1694 one Lowri was baptized, but three Lowris were buried.

Even more remote is the parish of Llangwnnagl, an enchanting spot in the Llyn peninsula. The parish records here show that although the stock of Welsh names shrank to Gaynor, Gwen and Lowri, this bare minimum survived into the 1830s, later than in the Cardiganshire parishes, where only Gwen survived so long. Similarly the isolated Merionethshire parish of Llanymawddwy preserved a bare minimum of Welsh female names. The last Elliw was christened in 1667; Mallt remained a popular name in the 1680s but then went underground,

reappearing in the 1750s. Annes Richards was buried in 1687, the last of her name in the parish. Gaenor, like Mallt, was revived briefly in the latter years of the eighteenth century, but the only name appearing with any consistency is Gwen. A typical year was 1766, when 13 girls were baptized: 6 Catherines, 3 Elizabeths, 1 Martha, 1 Jane and 2 Gwens. Despite the tenuous survival of Gwen, and the reappearance of Gaynor in 1810, the early 19th century saw the virtual disappearance of Welsh female names in Llanymawddwy.

This period, then, from about 1700 to 1850, is the low point in the use of Welsh baptismal names, especially for women. It is no coincidence that this is also the period when Welsh political and institutional life had reached a low ebb. Wales had been politically integrated with England in 1536; the Council of Wales and the Marches was abolished in the 1680s. There was no Welsh university, no separate Welsh church until the Calvinistic Methodist breakaway of 1811, no Welsh party or interest in the House of Commons, and no regular National Eisteddfod.

The first sign of a revival of interest in Welsh names seems to be the assumption of bardic names by poets and scholars in the mid-eighteenth century, coinciding with the foundation of the first Welsh cultural institutions just mentioned. Lewis Morris, Goronwy Owen and Evan Evans, the major classical Welsh poets and scholars of the period, used names based on traditional mediaeval forms—Y Llew o Fôn, Goronwy Ddu, Ieuan Fardd. The next generation did the same; Thomas Price became Carnhuanawc, Edward Williams became Iolo Morgannwg, and christened his son Taliesin ab Iolo. One of this circle, John Lloyd of Caerwys, christened his daughter Ann (1780–1866); she not only changed anglicised Lloyd back to Welsh Llwyd, but expanded Ann to Angharad, and became an important scholar of Welsh language and literature. Lady (Augusta) Hall of Llanover (1802–96), wealthy and eccentric patron of everything Welsh, called herself Gwenynen Gwent, more in the bardic style.

The Welsh-speaking population had imitated the gentry by slowly anglicising their names and naming-system, and they were equally slow to react to this new intellectual leadership in the matter of naming their children. In 1841 the census of the town of Aberystwyth shows not a single woman with a Welsh name. Nor does one appear in 1851 or 1871. But in 1881 Welsh women's names begin to appear: Myfanwy

aged 3, Gwladys aged 1, Olwen aged 5, Ceridwen aged 8. It seems that we may, in this district, date very closely the reappearance of Welsh women's names in common use. They are exceptionally interesting names. While Gwladys is resurrected from Welsh history and common usage, Ceridwen and Olwen are both names from the Mabinogion, names which were not in common use in the mediaeval period. It is no coincidence, surely, that the first University College of Wales had opened in Aberystwyth in 1871, one of that clutch of national institutions which appeared from the 1850s onwards. The National Eisteddfod had been held in Aberystwyth in 1865; its secretary used the bardic name *Ivon*, and he was perhaps the most enthusiastic individual in the town's Welsh cultural life. We can be certain, too, that the popularity of the music of Joseph Parry, professor of music at Aberystwyth, is connected towards the end of the century with the widespread use of the names Blodwen and Myfanwy, which occur in the titles of two of his most popular works.

Church registers, which from 1841 are a less complete source than the census, nevertheless show the same development. The first revivals of Welsh names occur between 1860 and 1900, a period of new national self-consciousness and pride, a period of renaissance in Welsh scholarship. At first it is a matter of reviving traditional names—Gwladys, Myfanwy, Ceridwen, Eluned—from past history or literature. Then new names are coined—Dilys, Heddwen.

This is a tendency which has gathered pace during the twentieth century. At a time when the Welsh-speaking population is half what it was in 1900, Welsh names are far more common among the Welsh population than they were in 1900. This can best be measured by an examination of school registers. Aberystwyth has an English-medium high school of 1000 pupils, and a Welsh-medium high school of 600 pupils.<sup>19</sup> The 486 girls counted in the English-medium school share a stock of no fewer than 193 first names. Of these names, 23 are Welsh names—about one-sixth. The enormous increase in the stock of names deserves comment, though without detailed research it is not easy to explain. I suggest that it indicates the breakdown of the traditional consensus society and the growth of individualism, with film and television supplying new and often transatlantic or antipodean options

<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to the respective headmasters, Mr Elwyn Bowyer (at the time of writing) and Mr Arwel George, for copies of nominal rolls.

for naming girls—who incidentally use a wider variety of names than boys: 193 female names to 145 male. This is a significant difference, which I can only suggest is due to a comparative conservatism in naming boys alongside a certain flamboyance or whimsicality in naming girls.

In the smaller, Welsh-medium school the 341 girls share 144 names, of which 56, rather more than one-third, are Welsh in form. Those 56 Welsh names are distributed among 188—more than half—of the girls. To see the whole picture for the age-group in the area, we must add the totals together; of 827 girls, 240 have Welsh first names—nearly a third. This may not seem indicative of a revolution, but it is certainly a renaissance by comparison with the 1870s, especially given that a considerable percentage of the schools' pupils were born either outside Wales, or to parents born outside Wales. Of the Welsh names given to girls in the area, none is as overwhelmingly common as Margred or Gwenllian in the mediaeval period. Of the 188 girls in the Welsh-medium high school, Rhian and Nia claim 15 examples each, Siân and Bethan 12 each. There are fashions within the Welsh name-stock; Blodwen, Dilys, Gaenor, Gwladys and Myfanwy have almost disappeared in the under-30 group, though they were popular with several earlier generations in this century. No-one has revived the name Gwenhwyfar, and there seems to be a general preference for names of one or two syllables.

Some current Welsh given names can be attributed directly to recent literary sources. The best-known examples are Siwan and Nia. The original for Siwan is Joan, illegitimate daughter of King John and wife of Llywelyn the Great, the prince of the early thirteenth century. Although the Welsh form Siwan does not occur in the later genealogies, it was used of the princess in the Welsh Chronicle of the Princes,<sup>20</sup> and I have found a seventeenth-century woman of that name in the Monmouthshire parish register of Grosmont. It has attained popularity in modern Wales because of the splendid play, *Siwan*, by Saunders Lewis, broadcast in 1954 and later published, televised and translated into English. Nia is an Irish name, but was borrowed into Welsh by the poet T. Gwynn Jones in the phrase *Nia Ben Aur* ('Nia of

<sup>20</sup> e.g. *Brut y Tywysogion . . . Red Book of hergest Version*, edited by Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1955), p. 236.

the golden head'), and is now one of the commonest of Welsh female names.

History and literature provided a source for the revival of Welsh names; what of the creation of new names? For girls, new names have been of the traditional pattern—either from desirable personal attributes, or from plants and trees. Heulwen (sunshine), Siriol (cheerful) and Mirain (wonderful) are examples of the former, and Gwenith (wheat) and Ceirios (cherry) of the latter, all easily understood. Less obvious are names such as the popular Rhian, which may be considered either as a shortening of Rhiannon or a simplification of Rhiain, 'maiden'. Nerys is a popular name, generally considered to be Welsh, and possibly deriving from medieval Welsh Generys; however, Nerissa in the *Merchant of Venice* makes one pause. New names for Welsh boys seem to be derived almost entirely from place-names—Berwyn (a well-known mountain range), Aeron (the river), Maldwyn, Meirion, Ceredig, Eifion, Aran, Caron—all derive from well-known places, even though some of those place-names in turn owe their origin to personal names. Such names often occur, with girls as well as boys, as second or middle names, on the pattern James Cellan Jones.

To summarise my argument, then, I suggest that the evidence of naming reflects changes in society, in political status and in national consciousness and self-awareness. Over the centuries the Welsh people swung away from from Welsh names almost entirely to European names, but in the last century, and particularly in the last three decades which have seen for the first time the election of Welsh National Party Members of Parliament, there has been a strong revival of interest in the use of Welsh names for Welsh women, and Welsh men as well.

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There is no time to treat of the Welsh system of surnaming, nor in the context of women's names would it be appropriate, since the system was so overwhelmingly patriarchal. I may simply refer to the final disappearance in the eighteenth century of the last vestige of a female system, the use of *ach* or *ferch* with the patronymic. *Ap* 'son of' was revived at the end of the last century, but *ferch* has not been; a very few parents have used the *ap* form for girls, but it jars on many Welsh ears.

What I have attempted to show is that there was originally a large stock of Welsh personal names available for naming girls, perhaps originally by inspirational naming. The impact of a new culture brought new names but eventually drove out many of the old, while conformity reduced the stock of widely-used names to a minimum. A revival of national consciousness brought not only the resurrection of many old names, but the creation of new ones, while the reduced pressure for conformity and a growing cult of individuality brought a far wider range of names, both Welsh and other, into general use. Hearers of the original talk on which this article is based commented that this thesis exactly reflected the history of naming in Jewish and in Finnish culture; it is probably traceable in other cultures.