

Welsh and Celtic Place-Names

Suggested Reading

Unfortunately there is no reliable, straightforward introduction in English to either Celtic names in general or Welsh names in particular. There are, however, numerous dictionaries of names, the better examples of which illustrate the technique of place-name study; several also have useful, though generally brief, introductions which pull together some themes and points of particular interest. There are also good introductory studies of naming in both England and Scotland, and since both of those countries have significant early Celtic strata, that is where I would begin background reading. In these circumstances I have arranged the literature by area, rather than in a sequence beginning with introductions.

England (inc. Britain more generally)

Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 2nd edn (Chichester, 1988). The most readable general account of the subject. Especially relevant are chapters 1 'The Languages', 2 'The Place-Names of Roman Britain' and 4 'The Celtic Survival'. Pdfs supplied.

Oliver Padel, 'Brittonic place-names in England', in J. Carroll and D.N. Parsons (eds), *Perceptions of Place* (Nottingham, 2013), pp. 1–41. A useful modern survey. Pdf supplied.

Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, *Celtic Voices, English Places* (Stamford, 2000). Part a series of studies (some of them questionable), part a useful county-by-county survey of Celtic names in England.

A.L.F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979). A fundamental survey – covers Wales and Scotland as well as England, of course. I'll supply a few examples, but if you can get hold of it, do. Useful for comparable Continental names too.

The English Place-Name Society's county surveys (many authors, 1925–) provide the basic material for place-name study in England, and it is their method that is perhaps particularly important to us on this course. I will provide several examples, but if you can get hold of any of the books, do look through them. More Celtic names in counties further west, in general.

E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th edn (Oxford, 1960). Ageing but fundamental, with a good brief introduction. Widely available secondhand and in local libraries ...

A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* (Oxford, 1991, and subsequent editions). This is a single reference work for all of Britain and Ireland. Entries are broadly accurate though very concise, losing much of the contextual interest of the names. More reliable for England than for the other areas. A decent short introduction, especially for England.

V. E. Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge, 2004). More up to date than Ekwall and fuller entries than Mills. The introduction does not really discuss Celtic names, unfortunately.

Scotland

W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 2001). A splendidly written survey. Specialists quibble with some of his historical interpretations, but as an introduction to the layers of language it is good and very readable. Pdf of introductory chapter supplied..

W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 1926). Available in modern reprint. Old but broadly accurate and with extensive examples. Also online at <https://spns.org.uk/resources/history-of-the-celtic-placenames-of-scotland>. (Nb. some other good resources are also there on the Scottish Place-Name Society's site.)

G.W.S. Barrow, 'The uses of place-names and Scottish history: pointers and pitfall', in S. Taylor (ed.), *The Uses of Place-Names* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 54–74. Pdf supplied.

A modern series of county surveys has recently begun to appear, headed by Simon Taylor's majestic 5-volume *Place-Names of Fife*. Again, I can supply some sections for illustrative purposes.

The Continent

English-language literature on the Celtic names of the Continent is inevitably limited, but two excellent – if very specialised – works have recently come from scholars based in Aberystwyth:

P. Sims-Williams, *Ancient Celtic Place-Names in Europe and Asia Minor* (Oxford, 2006). Pdf of the introduction supplied.

A. Falileyev, *Dictionary of Continental Celtic Place-Names* (Aberystwyth, 2010).

Much of the work I am familiar with is in French. Useful works of reference include:

X. Delamarre, *Noms de Lieux Celtiques de l'Europe Ancienne* (Arles, 2012)

P. H. Billy, *Dictionnaire des noms de lieux de la France* (Paris, 2011)

Despite the article's subtitle I considered some aspects of the Continental names in 'Tracking the course of the savage tongue: place-names and linguistic diffusion in early Britain', in *Celtic from the West*, ed. B. Cunliffe and J. T. Koch (Oxford, 2010). Pdf supplied.

I can supply on request a separate list (all French) for names in Brittany.

Finally, an interesting recent survey of the question of Celtic origins – in general, not principally on place-name evidence – is P. Sims-Williams, 'An Alternative to 'Celtic from the East' and 'Celtic from the West'', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30 (2020), 1–19. Available at

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340388012_An_Alternative_to_%27Celtic_from_the_East%27_and_%27Celtic_from_the_West%27

Wales

General

Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (Llandysul, 2007).

The one scholarly survey of the major place-names of the whole country. Hywel Wyn Owen has also brought out a paperback, *The Place-Names of Wales*, 2nd edn (Cardiff, 2015), which is largely a selection of names from the larger dictionary.

Ifor Williams, *Enwau Lleoedd* (Liverpool, 1945).

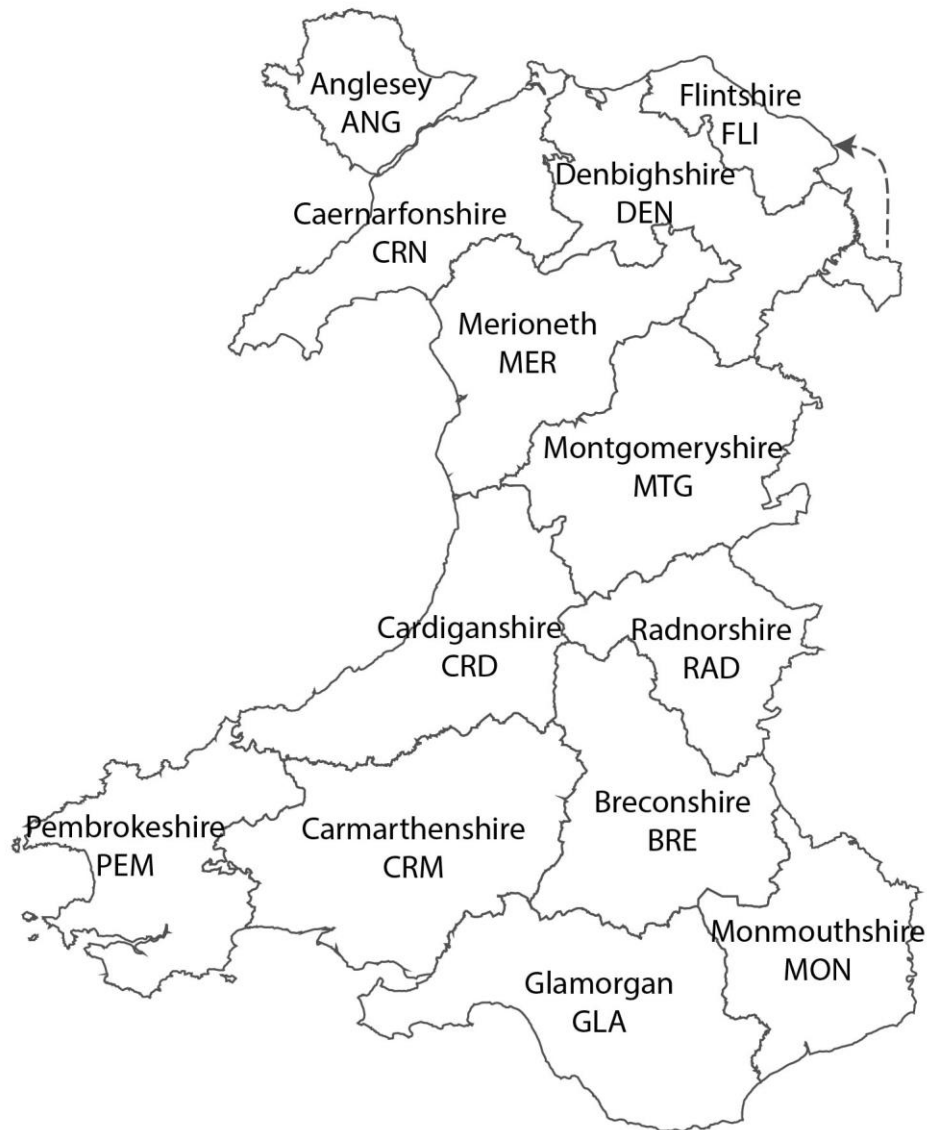
A fundamental work, though by now showing its age. It has not been translated.

Anthony Lias, *A Guide to Welsh Place-Names* (Llanrwst, 1994).

The closest thing to a general introduction in English, containing much of value though not wholly to be relied upon, especially in historical matters. Another 'popular' book that can be recommended is Myrddin ap Dafydd, *Welsh Place-Names Explained* (Llanrwst, 2016), which presents its material in useful and interesting ways. Many other books of this genre, of 'The meaning of Welsh place-names' type, are without much value to the university student (clue: if they don't discuss early spellings of the names, they're not doing it properly!).

Regional surveys

Work on place-names tends to be arranged by historical counties, which – in Wales's case – means between the counties as they existed between 1536 and 1974. These are the counties, with abbreviations often used:



For Carmarthenshire and the four north-western counties (Anglesey, Caernarfonshire, Denbighshire and Merioneth) there are as yet no useful county-survey volumes (though don't worry: that doesn't mean you can't study them!). The others are covered by works (of variable size and scope) as follows:

Breconshire

R. Morgan and R. F. Peter Powell, *A Study of Breconshire Place-Names* (Llanrwst, 1999).

Cardiganshire

I. Wmffre, *The Place-Names of Cardiganshire*, 3 vols (Oxford, 2004).

Flintshire

E. Davies, *Flintshire Place-Names* (Cardiff, 1959).

H. Wyn Owen and K. Lloyd Gruffydd, *Place-Names of Flintshire* (Cardiff, 2017).

H. Wyn Owen, *The Place-Names of East Flintshire* (Cardiff, 1994). [Detailed study, not of the detached Maelor Saesneg as you might expect, but of the area around Hope and Buckley.]

Glamorgan

R. Morgan, *Place-Names of Glamorgan* (Cardiff, 2018).

G. O. Pierce, *The Place-Names of Dinas Powys Hundred* (Cardiff, 1968). [Detailed study of the area south-west of Cardiff, including Penarth, Barry, etc.]

Monmouthshire

R. Morgan, *Place-Names of Gwent* (Llanrwst, 2005).

Montgomeryshire

R. Morgan, *A Study of Montgomeryshire Place-Names* (Llanrwst, 2001).

Pembrokeshire

B. G. Charles, *The Place-Names of Pembrokeshire*, 2 vols (Aberystwyth, 1992).

Radnorshire

R. Morgan, *A Study of Radnorshire Place-Names* (Llan-rwst, 1998).

In addition to these surveys there are, of course, many articles on individual names and various studies of broader topics (place-names and the early church, place-names on the border, etc.). I will issued a revised version of this reading-list incorporating some of these later in the course.