

INTRODUCTORY :

To My Relatives

Sources

Welsh Sources

CHAPTER I

AN ATTEMPT

at a

FAMILY HISTORY

of certain

MORGAN,

JENKINS,

JAMES,

and

OTHER FAMILIES

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hope of compiling a family history. I had little idea that the task would take so long, would involve so much tedious searching of the available records and above all would prove to be so time-consuming. Now at last I think I have done what I set out to do, by putting together the contents of the various boxes which remain, but which I have not yet had time to process.

INTRODUCTORY

To My Relatives

Sources

Welsh surnames

J.L.N.
Dec.

When I first began early in 1981 to collect a few facts in the hope of compiling a family history, I had little idea that the task would take so long, would involve so much tedious searching of the available records and above all would prove to be so time-consuming. Now at last I think I have gone as far as I reasonably can in piecing together the connection between so many families. Some loose ends remain, but there comes a stage when the flesh recoils from the drudgery of pursuing what is likely to be a fruitless quest anyhow. So I have decided to call an end and to present what I have done to the many relatives who have helped me and who have doubtless wondered whether I should ever produce a result. To all those who have aided me I give my sincere thanks. I hope they will find this book worth waiting for. I am sure it contains mistakes. No matter how hard one tries to avoid them, in copying out rough notes made in graveyards, for instance, or done in pencil in record offices and registries where nothing else may be used; in typing and re-typing, errors inevitably creep in. Please forgive them; but do please tell me when you find them, so that I can send corrections to everyone concerned.

"Old, unhappy, far-off things" are part of many a family's history. When I have found them, I have let them take their place in the chapters that follow - "warts and all" as Cromwell is said to have insisted. One should not fudge history, however humble it may be.

I apologise for the low standard of the typing. I am not a good typist, but at least my typing can be read. My handwriting is much worse, and can only be read with some difficulty, as I too find out when I struggle with my own rough notes.

Some of my sources have been in the Welsh language, which I spoke as a boy in the colloquial style that passed in family circles, though outside those circles the universal language in Barry and the Vale of Glamorgan was English. I did not take Welsh as a subject in school and so did not learn much of the grammar. Nevertheless, I have ventured to translate into English, with a little difficulty and a dictionary, passages from SEREN CYMRU and other publications for the benefit of those of you whose knowledge of Welsh is even less than mine. For the poor quality of these translations, too, I offer my apologies in advance.

Why have I done it? I suppose the answer is that, as far as I could, I just wanted to know.

J.I.M.
Dec. 1984

SOURCES

It may be helpful to those of you who are not familiar with them if I mention very briefly the main sources where I have discovered the details assembled in the following pages. For most of the more recent family developments I have, of course, relied on what my relatives have told me. Information about the remoter past I have derived from many and various places, records and documents.

PARISH REGISTERS kept by the established church over centuries are by far the most important local records available to the amateur genealogist for those long periods before the start on 1st July 1837 of our national system of civil registration in England and Wales. These old parish registers vary a great deal: some were well kept, others not. The early ones especially were not written in uniform printed books designed for the purpose, but in whatever the incumbent could find to hand. Baptisms and burials were often not entered immediately in any kind of register, but only perhaps in rough notebooks, intended to be written up in the register proper at a later date. In this way, it is thought, many entries were missed, vicars and curates were forgetful, scraps of paper were mislaid. Many of the older registers are now tattered, some have been lost altogether.

BISHOP'S TRANSCRIPTS were copies of the registers that incumbents were required to make and send in to the diocesan registry annually, usually after Lady Day. These transcripts can sometimes help in making good the deficiencies of the parish registers, though they too have not all survived. At one time they had to be written on parchment (at the vicar's expense) and some of the 18th century transcripts I have seen were closely written on such tiny scraps of parchment that I have often wondered that they were not lost long ago. All the transcripts for the Welsh dioceses are now held by the National Library of Wales, which has many of the parish registers too, though most of the latter are now deposited at County Record Offices.

When we come to the 19th century the investigator finds the going a little easier. Parish registers still figure prominently in his researches, but they are less old, they are better kept and more carefully preserved. There are also some NON-PAROCHIAL REGISTERS, now mostly with the Public Record Office in London, though some of the Welsh ones are at the National Library of Wales. These registers were kept mainly by non-conformist chapels. Most marriages and burials of dissenters were recorded in the registers of the Church of England, because only church marriages were valid in law and non-conformist chapels did not at first have their own burial

grounds. Births were a different matter, not generally recorded at all, only the christenings being registered by the local clergy. ~~Strict~~ Baptists did not believe in infant baptism. Even those sects that did sprinkle their children could do so without calling on the services of the parish priest. However, from time to time it became necessary to produce evidence of birth. Admission to government posts usually required the production of a certificate and non-conformists struggled hard for the recognition of such certificates signed by their own ministers, for which purpose they began to keep their own registers. Many Baptist chapels too began to keep registers of births. In some cases these non-parochial baptismal or birth registers are vastly superior to those of the established church in the amount of detailed information they give, particularly those of the Methodists, who gave their chapels uniform printed books in which to enter christenings. A good example is the old register of Tabernacle Chapel, Cardigan, now at the Public Record Office, from which I was able to collect much valuable information about the James family.

On 1st July 1837 there began in England and Wales the CIVIL REGISTRATION system that we have today, under which all births, marriages and deaths are supposed to be registered; with penalties for failure to do so, but only since 1875. Indexes to the registers are available for consultation, either locally, or nationally at St. Catherine's House and Alexandra House (for deaths) in London. A full certificate will today cost £5.

The CENSUS RETURNS, which become available for inspection after 100 years, comprise another very useful source. The first decennial census was taken in 1801, with others following every ten years, except in 1941; but the first four of these recorded only the number of persons in each household and not their names. In any case the detailed returns for 1801-1831 have been destroyed. Individual names were first written down in the 1841 returns. Five census returns are now open to public scrutiny, taken on the following dates:-

7th June 1841
30th March 1851
7th April 1861
2nd April 1871
3rd April 1881

Unfortunately because of the poor quality of the ink some of these are now so faint as to be virtually illegible. Photo-copies can be ordered at a cost of £1 a page and I have been pleasantly surprised to find how legible a copy the staff at the Public Record Office can make out of very unpromising material.

Other good hunting grounds are churchyards and cemeteries, where the inscriptions on gravestones can sometimes furnish a wealth of information about an entire family. The older stones are fast becoming indecipherable through long exposure, while efforts to tidy up burial grounds and to simplify maintenance cause the loss of many others. Some effort is being devoted by Family History Societies and similar bodies to copying and indexing these inscriptions, but the amount of work involved is enormous and volunteers are few.

Reports in LOCAL NEWSPAPERS, mainly in the last 100 years or so, can yield a valuable harvest to the patient researcher. Newspapers were printed for those who could read and who could spare the money to buy them, so the earliest of them did not cater for the common people or report their doings, unless they were of a criminal or scandalous nature. The spread of education late in the 19th century brought about great changes in contents and customers. The Newspaper Library at Colindale in North West London (a branch of the British Library) houses a fine collection of national and local newspapers going back over very many years, in some cases almost to the very beginnings. The National Library of Wales has a section devoted to binding and preserving Welsh and other newspapers and magazines.

WILLS can be most helpful, as will be seen from the few copy wills I have included in this book. Some of them name all the testator's children; others mention brothers and sisters, nephews and grandchildren. In an Act of 1857 Parliament legislated to centralise in the civil courts of England and Wales the granting of probate and letters of administration. Before 1858 the proof of wills and the issue of grants had for centuries been a matter for the ecclesiastical authorities. Under the old system grants could be obtained in a multiplicity of church courts, sometimes in the Prerogative courts of Canterbury and York, more often in the consistory court of the diocese, but most frequently of all in the archdeaconries - in Wales the archdeaconry courts functioned largely through surrogates, i.e. local priests appointed by the ecclesiastical court to deal with testamentary matters; such were the vicars of St. Mary's, Cardigan and at one time the vicars of Cowbridge. After it has been proved, a will is a public document; a valuable safeguard against wrongdoing. From 1858 the Probate Registry at Somerset House has kept all wills and the public can search the indexes there, and can have a will produced and can order a copy. Most of the wills proved ^{in England} before 1858 are now deposited at the Public Record Office or at County Record offices. Pre-1858 wills proved in Wales are kept at the National Library of Wales.

LAND TAX ASSESSMENTS (LTAs). The Land Tax is said to date from an Act of 1692, though similar taxes had been levied on property before then. Payment of land tax on freehold property worth £2 or more annually established a voting qualification, which is one reason why the records were kept by the Clerks of the Peace. The only entirely uniform record is for the year 1798 for almost the whole of England and Wales, which is contained in 121 leather-bound volumes in the Public Record Office at Kew. Otherwise such records as still exist are now with the County Record Offices. No assessments for Cardiganshire have survived except as part of the 1798 record at Kew. Between 1772 and 1909 the rate of tax was 4s. in the £ on the estimated annual rental value; it is said that in most counties no revaluation of properties was made after the end of the 17th century, so rentals and assessments have an unrealistic appearance. The Act of 1692 provided that Roman Catholics who refused to take the required oaths were to be charged double and relief was not granted for a century or so. The tax could be redeemed by payment of a capital sum at rates which varied from time to time. Compulsory redemption in certain events, e.g. the death of the beneficial owner, was introduced by the 1949 Finance Act; all unredeemed tax was finally abolished by the Finance Act of 1963. The value of the LTAs for the genealogist is that the records state the names of the proprietors and the occupiers of the properties assessed; some of them also state the names of the properties, others do so only occasionally.

One of the difficulties of any Welsh genealogical research arises from the great prevalence of common surnames, and that in turn arises from the facts of Welsh history. In England family surnames were gradually adopted from the 12th century onwards, at first among the nobility and wealthier classes, and then the custom slowly spread through all social levels, so that by about 1500 it is thought that most people in England had hereditary surnames, derived from place names, occupations, descriptive names or just relationships, e.g. patronymics. In Wales the early conquests of the Normans were limited in extent and it was not until the campaigns of Edward I in 1282/84 that the whole country was brought under English rule. Even then, with certain modifications, he left the Welsh to be governed by their own laws, including the custom of gavelkind, under which at a man's death his estates were divided among his sons.

In THE STORY OF SURNAMES by L.G.Pine (1969) it is said that:-

"Because of the need for every man to prove his identity and his right to his land, the Welshman carried his pedigree with him in his mind and on his lips; hence there was no need for surnames."

"Rees ap Morgan ap Evan ap Caradoc ap Bleddin ap Griffith was not a surname in the English sense at all, but a string of genealogical facts, a rudimentary pedigree. The Welshman in reciting these six names had with him the account of himself and his family for a hundred and fifty years. He knew whence he came, and his exact genealogy was a rebuke to those whose genealogical knowledge was confined to a vague account of grandad"

" . . . in 1542 Henry VIII put through Parliament the Act which united England and Wales. With the passing of this Act, English law prevailed in Wales, and one of the consequences was that surnames began to be assumed. For if the English lawyers refused to recognise Welsh law and customs, they also looked for the surnames with which they were familiar in England To the Welshman this meant one thing, that he had to conform to English ways and to take a surname. He did so by taking the name nearest to him, that of his father."

He had been accustomed hitherto to call himself, say, "John ap Evan". Now the lawyer or official would turn the "Evan" into a surname in the way that was already familiar in English usage, by adding an "s" to make it "Evans". Thus John became Jones, William became Williams, Griffith became Griffiths - they are patronymics, the simplest form of surnames. The rapid spread of this practice of, as it were, manufacturing surnames could (and did) sometimes bring confusion and lead to father and son bearing quite different surnames. If the father had hitherto called himself Evan ap Gwilym (William in English) he could end up as Evan Williams, while his son would be John Evans.

All this may explain how Wales came to be a land inhabited by people named Evans, Williams, Jones, Davies etc., but it does nothing to ease the task of the patient searcher for his forebears

when he is confronted with a mass of such entries in the old registers, with little chance of being sure which, if any, of them are the ancestors for whom he is looking.

A learned article on "Surnames in Glamorgan from the 13th to the 18th centuries" appeared in CYMMRODORION TRANSACTIONS 1961, Part II, in which the author traced innumerable examples of old Welsh bynames and nicknames derived from occupations, place-names, physical characteristics and other sources which were in common use - sometimes along with the "ap" custom as well - in the earlier centuries of the period surveyed. It seems that Wales at one time did not lack the potentiality for just as varied a structure of surnames as now exists in England. The difference was that when it came to putting names down onto official paper, those who did so in England were using a language they and the people knew and spoke daily; while in Wales a couple of centuries later the job was done by an alien or anglicised administrative class either ignorant of or without sympathy for the language spoken by the great bulk of the inhabitants. In the same way it was the influence of an alien clergy and other officials that led to the prevalence of English Christian names and the virtual disappearance of the old Welsh Christian names, now fortunately returning again. The author of the article concludes his study on a note of sorrow that the patronymical forms should have ousted so many of the old Welsh bynames.

"The elimination of so many of the fine old Welsh names is a matter of regret, for their distinctive variety was replaced by the monotonous ubiquity of John, William and Thomas which the patronymical system of nomenclature perpetuated until consolidation ensured that the Joneses, Williamses and Thomases should be with us forever, even though we seek some escape today with our christian "place" names (Morrison Jones), our hyphenated surnames (Edwards-Thomas), our emphatic initials (S.T.Roberts), and our reversion to 'ap'".