Researching Welsh Ancestors

Wales, a small mountainous country
The majority of the population are located along the coasts and the Bristol Channel.
Population Distribution was 3,169,586 people (2011 Census)
13 Historical Counties 1282-1974
They were Angelsey, Caernarfon, Denbigh, Flint, Merioneth, Montgomery, Cardigan, Radnor, Pembroke, Brecon, Carmarthen, Monmouth, and Glamorgan. Counties evolved more slowly in Wales than in England. The **traditional counties** of Wales were created at various times between **1282** and **1536** (when the *Act of Union* between England and Wales took place). During this period, all along the border, districts which had long been associated with Wales were added to the English counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire.

8 Preserved Counties 1974-1996
The county boundaries in Wales changed following reorganization in **1974** and these counties were replaced by eight new counties. They were Gwynedd, Clwyd, Powys, Dyfed, Gwent, West Glamorgan, Mid Glamorgan and South Glamorgan. However, these were never popular and were short-lived. Following further local government reorganization in **1996** they were abandoned. They are now referred to as the **preserved counties** and were replaced by twenty-two new **unitary authorities**

Administrative Districts 1996
These new county names are used on recent maps and in current addresses.
They Are Anglesey, Vale of Glamorgan, Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent, Rhodda Cynonn Taff, Bridgend, Neath and Port Talbot. Swansea, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, Powys, Newport, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire.

Railways Feeding Sea Routes - Wales is home to some of the most famous little railways in the world.

Welsh (*Cymraeg* or *y Gymraeg)* is a Brittonic language of the Celtic language family that is native to the Welsh people, spoken in Wales, by some in England, and in Y Wladfa, (the Welsh colony in Argentina). Historically, it was also known in English as "British", "Cambrian", "Cambric" and "Cymric".

It was suppressed by Henry VIII in 1536 but preserved through the Welsh bible, translated 1567 & 1588. It was the official language in Wales since 2011, 4 dialects currently with 19% spoke Welsh in 2011, estimated 29% in 2021 (per census records).
It is the only non-endangered Celtic language (according to UNESCO). It is compulsory in school to age 16, Welsh radio 1977, TV 1982. Welsh is the *de facto* provincial language in Wales. There are large numbers of Welsh people who speak Welsh, but monolingual speakers of Welsh are relatively rare today since most Welsh speakers speak English.

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Patronymics

Most patronymics disappeared by the early 1800's but some lingered in rural areas until mid-century. The census, parish and probate records make it easy to determine if patronymics were used in naming in a family.

Fixed surnames began in the late 1500's but many were not converted until the 1700's. When surnames were converted an "s" was often added to show the conversion. (e.g. Mary Evan became Mary Evans) A name as Mary verch Evan ap John could become Mary Evans. Evan ap John could become Evan Jones and that would make Mary, Mary Jones. To further confuse things, women could retain their father's name after marriage. Watch for place names and occupations for surnames as well.

Census 1841-1921

https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/census-records/

- 1841 - Ancestry.co.uk
- 1851 - Ancestry.co.uk
- 1861 - Ancestry.co.uk
- 1871 - Ancestry.co.uk
- 1881 - Ancestry.co.uk
- 1891 - Ancestry.co.uk (shows language spoken for Wales only)
- 1901 - Findmypast.co.uk
- 1911 - Findmypast.co.uk
- 1921 - Findmypast.co.uk (now available on Find MY Past)
- 1931 – Burned in a London fire during WWII
- 1941 – No Census taken during the war

1939 Registration List

The 1939 Register was taken on 29 September 1939. The information was used to produce identity cards and, once rationing was introduced in January 1940, to issue ration books. Information in the Register was also used to administer conscription and the direction of labour, and to monitor and control the movement of the population caused by military mobilisation and mass evacuation.

Birth-Marriage-Death Index (BMD)

BMD Reports the _quarter of the year_ the event happened (not the actual day and month) They show given name and surname, Volume and Page number of the register. These are free at freebmd.org.uk

BMDs begin in 1837

- Leave no gaps when searching hard copies (make a list of quarters you have checked)
- Try alternative spellings (some accents drop the "h" making Horton into Orton)
- Consider alternative given names (ie. Middle names or nick names)

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- Consider illegitimacy (until 1926 illegitimate children were given the mother's surname)
- Broaden your time span (ages on marriage and death records are suspect)
- Consider other Districts (the event may have occurred in an adjacent District not where they lived)
- Narrow the field (If you have 17 William Smiths then check his brothers name, Chauncey Smith, for the parents. Don't beat your head against the field rock wall.)

Parish Records
No parish records exist before 1600 and some parish records do not exist at all (lost or damaged), Some parishes have no death or burial registers. From 1783-1794 the "stamp duty" of 3 pence inhibited records keeping so some records may not exist. Some parishes appear, disappear or merge over time so check Parish history before starting your search.

Baptisms are usually held on Sundays. Parishes were interested in Sacramental records and Birth dates were not usually recorded. Do not assume that a baptism date is the birth date.

Non-Conformist Churches are Protestant churches other than the Church of England. Chapels were created primarily after Civil Registration in 1837. Many of these records are held at The National Archives in Kew, "Nonconformist denominations flourished in Wales resulting in nearly six thousand chapels being built." (FamilySearch.org)

When searching for genealogy information it is critical to know what records exist that should be searched. You need to know which chapels existed in a parish even if christening-marriage-burial registers are not in an archive. Knowing which chapels existed in a locality helps find other record types and be confident that no stone is left unturned. See links to spreadsheets that list nearly all chapels known to have existed in Wales with information about various records. Records other than registers of christenings, marriages and burials may exist that can help with family history research.

Dr. Williams' Library: https://dwl.ac.uk/ Main research library of English (and Welsh) Protestant dissent. Holds many records of major 19th and 20th century nonconformist institutions.

Cemeteries – look for cemetery listings with names and dates.

Poor Laws - English Poor Law legislation can be traced back as far as 1536, when legislation was passed to deal with the impotent poor, although there is much earlier Tudor legislation dealing with the problems caused by vagrants and beggars. After the time of the Black Death.
The history of the Poor Law in England and Wales is usually divided between two statutes, the Old Poor Law passed during the reign of Elizabeth I and the New Poor Law, passed in 1834, which significantly modified the existing system of poor relief. The later statute altered the Poor Law system from one which was administered haphazardly at a local parish level to a highly

centralized system which encouraged the large-scale development of workhouses by Poor Law Unions. (Wikipedia)

Poor Law Records

- Settlement and Removal Records
- Workhouse Records
- Admission and discharge registers
- School records
- Death records
- Apprenticeships

Civil Records - Statutory Civil registration began in 1837.

Probate Records

These provide lots of family information.

Burials in Woollens

The Burial in Woollen Acts 1666-80 were Acts of the Parliament of England (citation 18 & 19 Cha. II c. 4 (1666), 30 Cha. II c. 3 (1678) and 32 Cha. II c. 1 (1680)) which required the dead, except plague victims, to be buried in pure English woollen shrouds to the exclusion of any foreign textiles due to the decline of the woollen industry on which so many places in this country depended.

The Act of Parliament was intended to create a new market for woollen cloth. It was a requirement that an affidavit be sworn in front of a Justice of the Peace (usually by a relative of the deceased or some other credible person) confirming burial in wool, with the punishment of a £5 fee for noncompliance.

Parish registers were marked with the word affidavit or with a note **'A' or 'Aff'** against the burial entries to confirm that affidavit had been sworn or marked **'naked'** for those too poor to afford the woollen shroud. Some affidavits survive.

This legislation was in force until 1814 but was generally ignored after 1770. These related records are generally regarded as a source of genealogical information and can help provide evidence of economic status and relationships that may be unavailable elsewhere or ambiguous. The 1666 Act was repealed by the Statute Law Revision Act 1863.

Tax Rolls

- Carriage Tax Rolls, 1785-1798
- Cart Tax Rolls, 1785-1798
- Clock and Watch Tax Rolls, 1797-1798
- Dog Tax Rolls, 1797-1798
- Farm Horse Tax Rolls, 1797-1798
- Female Servant Tax Rolls, 1785-1792
- Hearth Tax Records, 1691-1695

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- Horse Tax Rolls, 1785-1798
- Inhabited House Tax, 1778-1798
- Land Tax Rolls, 1645-1831
- Male Servant Tax Rolls, 1777-1798
- Poll Tax Rolls, 1694-1698
- Shop Tax Rolls, 1785-1789
- Window Tax, 1748-1798
- Consolidated Schedules of Assessed Taxes, 1798-1799

Occupations, Newspapers, Maps

Military records - Almost all military records are held at The National Archives in Kew
Some records can be found at Ancestry and Find My Past and other databases
WWI War Medal Cards list the medal awarded to all participants
WWI Burial cards
There are dozens of Wars, Campaigns and Military Actions Involving British Forces.

Heraldry

Where do I look for all these records?
- GENUKI
- Welsh Newspapers online
- The British Newspaper Archive
- National Library of Wales
- https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/
- National Archives of England   https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/

The British Library's newspaper collections are among the finest in the world, containing most of the runs of newspapers published in the UK since 1800. 181,775 pages of 93 Welsh papers from 1800-1999. The scale of the newspaper publishing industry from the early 19th century onwards is enormous, with many cities and towns publishing several newspapers simultaneously, often aimed at distinct audiences depending on social status, geographical location and political affiliation.

https://newspapers.library.wales/
There are over 120 newspapers, 1800-1919, 15 million articles. You have a choice of English language, Welsh language or both. They are searchable by region, date range, newspaper, category, keywords, Image and transcribed text.

County Record Offices
- **Anglesey Archives** Llangefni

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- **Caernarfon Record Office**, Caernarfon
- **Archifdy Ceredigion Archives**, Aberystwyth
- **Carmarthenshire Archives Service**, Carmarthen
- **Denbighshire Archive**, Ruthin
- **Flintshire Records & Archives**, Hawarden
- **Glamorgan Record Office**, Cardiff
- **West Glamorgan Archive Service**, Swansea
- **Gwent Archives**, Ebbw Vale
- **Meirionnydd Archives**, Dolgellau
- **Pembrokeshire Record Office**, Haverfordwest
- **Powys County Archives Office**, Llandrindod Wells

Other Archives in Wales
The Archives Card is a single archive reader's card which gives you access to original archive material held in archives across the United Kingdom. You need to apply for a Card if you wish to access original documents in any of the participating archives. https://archivescard.com/

Aberystwyth
 www.library.wales
largest collection of books in Wales www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/printed-material
Search 15 million Welsh newspaper articles newspapers.library.wales/
over 5,000 concise biographies of individuals who have made a significant contribution to Welsh national life biography.wales
Maps https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/maps Tithe Maps
https://places.library.wales/
950,000+ Photographs   www.library.wales/collections/learn-more/photographs
www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/photographs
Archives, including estate records archives.library.wales/index.php/?sf_culture=en
Welsh diocesan records, marriage bonds, wills, court records, etc.

Tithe Maps at the Library of Wales, Cardiff   https://museum.wales/cardiff/
- National Museum Cardiff
- St Fagans National Museum of History
- National Waterfront Museum
- Big Pit National Coal Museum
- National Slate Museum
- National Wool Museum
- National Roman Legion Museum

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Kew, England

https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/

The National Archives is home to millions of historical documents, known as records, which were created and collected by UK central government departments and major courts of law for a millennium.

A non-ministerial department, and the official archive and publisher for the UK Government, and for England and Wales

The records form a unique resource for those interested in the history of England, Wales and the United Kingdom

A 2010 Concordat between the Welsh Government and the National Archives has been recently updated to formalise   the arrangement by which The National Archives carries out its statutory functions in regard to Welsh public records, in accordance with the Public Records Acts 1958

Other Resources

FamilySearch.org

GenUKi.org.uk

FindMyPast.com

Ancestry.co.uk

MyHeritage.com

British Newspaper Archive

Society of Genealogists, London

TheGenealogist.co.uk

Workhouses.org.uk

FreeUKGenealogy.org.uk

https://www.welshwne.org/ Welsh Society of Western New England

https://www.facebook.com/WelshAmericanGenealogySociety/ Welsh-American Genealogical Society (WAGS)

http://thomasgenweb.com/brynmawr.html (Brynmawr History Project)

Family History Societies in Wales

Welsh Genealogy by Bruce Durie