

A response (02/09/2006) by the author to the review by Richard Morgan (2005 *WHR* 22:778–80) of Iwan Wmffre *The Place-names of Cardiganshire*, vols.1–3, Oxford: Archaeopress. 2004.

This review is likely to mislead readers as to the value of *The Place-names of Cardiganshire (PNCards)* implying as it does that it falls short of achieving the standards of the English Place-Name Society's county volumes and the only comparable Welsh work, B. G. Charles's *The Place-Names of Pembrokeshire (PNPemb)* (2 vols, Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales. 1992). The reviewer readily accepts Charles's work as "authoritative" (to which I do not object) whereas he seems to countenance my work as only an attempt at such an opus, and furthermore one which is "bound to raise serious criticism".

I was candid in mentioning any substantive weaknesses in my work (xiii, xviii), but, from reading the review, readers could be excused from thinking that my work showed no improvement on previous publications from the point of view of presentation and of the depth of the information contained. This calls for a corrective.

The reviewer grumbles at the lack of "a fuller index" even though *PNCards*'s place-name index contains about 9,800 entries, compared to only about 3,000 entries in *PNPemb*'s place-name index (both areas under study being comparable in size). I contest the gratuitous assertion that there is no regular cross-referencing of headwords in the work, notwithstanding some lapses. I agree that there would have been no harm in including the well-known non-Welsh aliases *Cardigan*, *New Quay*, *Saint Dogmaels*, *Strata Florida* in the place-name indexes for cross-reference purposes, though it is unlikely that anyone would be long in finding these places using the map which gives the parish-number concordance (x–xi). Considerations of space held me from giving all the variant forms as headwords.

In Welsh toponymic circles, the tiresome mantra that the county volumes of the English Place-Name Society are the only models to be followed for presentation neglects the fact that the EPNS volumes have been reprehensibly late in adopting map grid-references for headwords. This is reflected in *PNPemb* where no precise geographical references are given whereas *PNCards* does give precise grid-references for every last headword.¹

PNCards attempted to present traditional local pronunciations for every name in an IPA transcription. This entailed much fieldwork which also proved itself to be very beneficial in discovering new place-names or in locating otherwise unlocated place-names. There is nothing of the sort in *PNPemb* which methodological failing results in an avoidable accumulation in the category of 'lost place-names' (xxx–xxxii).²

Thus, in general, *PNCards* regularly gives readers the precise location and pronunciation of place-names discussed whereas *PNPemb* fails to do so. Its place-name index is also more comprehensive. From the present review one would not know this, and indeed one might suspect the contrary. (Readers might be interested in contrasting this review with those

of Terrence James in 2005 *The Carmarthenshire Antiquary* 41.182–83, and Simon Taylor in 2006 *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 153.162–63).

The usefulness of *PNCards* is actually questioned simply on the basis that the reviewer found no index of lexical elements. In this context, he should have mentioned that the reason for this supposed ‘lapse’ is that I intend to publish a readable thematic discussion in my forthcoming *Welsh Place-name Elements* (which I mention twice: ix, xv), a work which will exceed 400 pages. A simple lexical index could not cover the ground which is covered in that book and a discussion of the semantic ambiguities of many terms cannot be profitably dealt with in the case of each and every place-name without undue and wasteful repetition. Until the above book is published curious readers will have to make do with Welsh dictionaries and this, in the vast majority of cases, should clarify the immediate meaning of the element.

Like most avenues of research, the scope of toponymics is so large that it requires ongoing investigation, investigation so unbounded that the term ‘definitive’ can only constitute hyperbole when describing any assembly and discussion of toponymic forms. Considering the scale of the enterprise it is hardly surprising that some historical forms were missed and the reviewer usefully mentions a few, though – in over 1400 pages – arguably only *Thlanvyhangel in Cruthyn* 1295 and *Llanvidales in Dyhewed* 1570 constitute substantive omissions and neither of these impact on the etymologies given.

PNCards is chided for not having made use of historical sources published in the years 1998, 2001, 2002, but this boils down to an accusation that its author lacked supernatural foresight. Had the reviewer read the first page of the introduction (viii) he would have seen that the work was in fact completed in 1998 and that 2004 simply represents the year of publication. Since then I have moved on to carry out other pieces of research. Nevertheless, the reviewer – albeit unintentionally and indirectly – raises the important question of how corpuses of toponymic material can be added to and improved once they have been published.

None of the criticisms of particular etymologies in *PNCards* are convincing. The reviewer is simply wrong when stating that I equate *Pen-uwch* with *Pen-ucha*, all I do is point out the anomaly of the use of the comparative rather than the superlative grade of the adjective in a Welsh place-name. The fact that he gives older forms of that name does not impact the conclusions as he implies (635–36). Concerning my discussion of *Llandydoch* (1209) the reviewer gives useful medieval forms for *Castell Toch* that support it as an instance of a similar element, however, Welsh phonology precludes *Llandethauk* 1353 and *Llandethauke* 1465–67 (the older forms of *Llandawke* in Carmarthenshire) from being equated with *Llandydoch*.

The reviewer dismisses the form *Clywedogau* in favour of *Clydogau* (490) because of the earlier and more common occurrence of the latter form in the historical attestations given but such mechanistic superficial toting up does not hold, simply because the unlikely word **clydog* ‘sheltered place’ is nowhere attested (except in an attempted exercise of etymology of this very

same name in 1811) nor is the relationship between the two forms of *Clywedogau* is understood. However, in this particular instance, I committed the serious methodological lapse of not having discussed my reasoning succinctly, as a result of which the reviewer was misled, for which I am sorry. The reason for favouring *Clywedogau* rather than *Clydogau* is, unfortunately, only given elsewhere (491, 1238–39). There is nothing more straightforward or regular in Welsh than the phonological reduction of the pre-stress syllable *Clywedogau* → *Cly'dogau* and this was pointed out in page 100 of another book of mine *Language and Place-names in Wales: The Evidence of Toponymy in Cardiganshire* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 2003).

For a number of years I have been engaged in a somewhat lonely ‘campaign’ to persuade other Welsh toponymists that fieldwork and linguistic expertise are imperatives for our discipline. And whilst the benefits of fieldwork carried out with local informants seems too commonsensical to merit further discussion, that of linguistic expertise, especially that of phonology and of the historical development of language, may gain from illustration. My reviewer’s unfamiliarity with the subtleties of phonology is a timely opportunity to demonstrate the dangers of ignorance in such matters.

How can the suggestion that *Coedigyll* (215–16) derives from *cuddygl* ~ *cufygl* be credible, unless one dismisses the relevance of the number of syllables and equates, in a willy-nilly fashion, <d> with <dd> as well as <ll> with <l>? In all seriousness, this must be likened to an attempt to correct a mathematical operation while being unable to count. Such a naïve approach of explaining particular spellings of Welsh place-names through superficial similarities was all the rage in nineteenth-century Wales before the pioneering work of scholars such as John Rhŷs, John Morris Jones, Ifor Williams; work which put paid to the apprentice alchemists who had hitherto dominated the field, by bringing the insights of modern linguistics to bear on toponymic problems. It is precisely in order to bear down on such amateur etymologising that I spent so long in writing the abovementioned historical-phonological guide of Welsh, *Language and Place-names in Wales*.³ The tone here may sound harsh, but it is needed in order to highlight the disparity between the knowing tone of the reviewer when judging upon such matters and his blatant ignorance of phonology and language history. These last should, at all times, constitute one of the weapons of choice in the arsenal of any toponymist who claims to be in earnest in their investigations.

The reviewer feels it “a pity ... that Wmffre wastes so much space in his long-winded descriptive presentation” but, whereas I cannot vouchsafe that every one of the fifty pages involved make fascinating reading, the matters discussed do address important methodological questions on presentation, on spelling conventions as well as including a unique overview of work carried out in Wales by other toponymists. Does the reviewer consider this wasteful simply because he is not interested in such questions? And if so, what does this imply about his interests in maintaining and developing high standards of scholarship in Welsh toponymics?

Undoubtedly, the unsympathetic tone of this review was prompted by what the reviewer described in terms of regret as the wasteful effort on my part of “unfavourably criticizing the work of others who have contributed so much to place-name study”. From this readers may guess that the work of the reviewer himself was included in the criticism which, indeed, was the case. However, it should be made clear that my quote of an entry from his and G. G. Evans’s *Enwau Lleoedd Buallt a Maesyfed* (Llanrwst: Carreg Gwalch. 1993) was made in order to exemplify a criticism of the lack of discussion of place-name elements thought to be self-explanatory, which is all-to-common in place-name studies (xxx) – even in my work, as was seen above. Upon reflection, I can sympathise with the fact that Morgan may have felt affronted that a contribution of his was singled out, all the more so since the example quoted is not particularly typical of that book and that I did not explain clearly the insufficiency of the discussion for the exemplification of the general criticism I was making.

The entry in question was for the place-name *Cefngast*, near Llangamarch in Breconshire, and the explanation given by Morgan and Evans ran as follows (in translation): “A farmhouse on a little hill above the Irfon river. It is certain that name contains the animal’s name.” Now, of course, it may well be that there was nothing much to say about this place-name, but this discussion hardly tells the reader anything more than could be gleaned from the perusal of an ordinary Welsh dictionary under the words *cefn* and *gast*. Consequently, it is fair to ask whether there was any point in including this name – from among hundred of farms – in a booklet which could only hope to deal with the more important place-names? The answer (though this is not made plain) seems to be that it was also a division of the township of Treflys. This critique is, however, only a minor point since there is no reason to criticise the inclusion of one minor place-name when the rest of the booklet deals effectively, as it set out to do, with more important names.

The following, I trust, will demonstrate why I think that the terse uninformative entry on *Cefngast* constitutes an exemplary illustration of a discussion insufficiently developed from the point of view of toponymic scholarship. Firstly, why is the feminine noun *gast* unlenited here? Why do we not have the more typical **Cefn-yr-ast*? Could it be due to delenition? Cf. *Kwm y Gasseg* 1587 > *Cwm Caseg* 1772 in a Cardiganshire place-name (958). Perhaps the lack of the leniting definite article is because the name was coined long ago in the Old Welsh period when the definite article was much less in evidence, cf. *Penpont* and *Pencelli* in Breconshire. Does *gast* ‘bitch’ here refer to a legendary (?giant) wolf-bitch associated with megalithic monuments as in *Penllech-yr-ast* in Cardiganshire (H. Owen (ed.) 1892 *Owen’s Pembrokeshire*, London: Clark, 1.252). If older forms of *Cefngast* supported the lack of a definite article in the name, then a very likely interpretation would be that this name means ‘bitch’s back’ based on the fancied resemblance of the hill to the shape of this creature’s back, cf. the archaic name *Ceinmeirch* ‘horse’s back’ in Denbighshire. Inspection of the local topography around *Cefngast* might help to confirm or to infirm that particular hypothesis.

Finally, a matter that is difficult to settle to everyone's satisfaction in a country where two languages are widely spoken. The reviewer views as "odd" my decision to use Welsh conventions for some headwords which might have been given using English conventions. No mention seems to be given to the fact that I gave clearly reasoned arguments for favouring the native forms and spellings of place-names wherever appropriate (xiv–xv, xxxii–xxxiii). If the reviewer and others find such Welsh forms jarring then so be it, we will have to disagree, for if I might have set some minor hurdles to straightforward cross-referencing to other English documents or maps, conversely, I have gained in being able to reveal to readers a human, social, ethnic, national reality masked by anglicised official spellings. And as regards the Welsh spellings such as *Blac-hors* (for *Black Horse*) and *Ficrej* (for *Vicarage*), there is no absolute imperative that impels us to write a name of foreign origin in the conventions of the language of origin, a *reductio ad absurdum* of such a position would demand that the Cardiganshire *Ferwig* be written as *Berwick* and *Mold*, in Flintshire, be written as *Mont Haut*.

I sense in the reviewer an unwillingness to enter into dialogue as to how to improve the methodology of toponymics as a discipline. My criticisms are described as "unfavourable", as if criticisms in themselves were a felony. My criticisms are motivated by the good of the discipline and if they target particular approaches that I find either insufficient, faulty or both, it should be borne in mind that my judgement is considered and based on a long experience not only of toponymic work in Wales, but also in other European countries, besides England. Of late I heard a scholar interested in Welsh toponymy state that fieldwork was of no concern to toponymists but was the remit of the Welsh Folk Museum, despite the fact that that institution has long ago ceased to send workers into the field [CHK Beth Thomas]. The absence of fieldwork and, even more damnably, the lack of awareness of the need for fieldwork means that an enormous quantity of the place-name heritage of Wales is all the while being lost whilst we Welsh toponymists, for the most part, are content to restrict ourselves to investigating libraries and archives.

¹ Grid referencing is first found in the EPNS series with the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1961 and Gloucestershire 1964 (4-figure grid-reference), however such grid referencing was applied only to the parish/township name and we have to await the volumes for Cheshire in 1970 for 6-figure grid-reference numbers to be given to a number of principal place-names within a parish, an arrangement followed by the volumes of Dorset 1977 and Shropshire 1990. Other subsequent volumes of the EPNS, such as those for Rutland 1994 and Leicestershire 1998, have neglected grid referencing completely, while the volumes for Staffordshire 1984 and Norfolk 1989 have applied grid referencing only to the parish name. It should be noted that in the 1970s a Welsh toponymist did in fact pioneer the use of 8-figure grid-references for all place-names within a township (Hywel Wyn Owen *The Place-Names of East Flintshire*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 1994).

² In the late twentieth century only one other Welsh toponymist (Dafydd Iolo 'Enwau Lleoedd Cwmwd Deuddwr'. MA Univ. of Wales, Aberystwyth. 1980) carried out fieldwork and the transcription of place-name pronunciations in a place-name study.

³ The section on the importance of phonology and traditional local pronunciations in *PNCards* will also be found worthwhile (xxiii–xxvii).