

REVIEWS

Iwan Wmffre, *The Place-names of Cardiganshire*. British Archaeological Reports, British Series 379. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2004. 3 vols, pp. cxxx + 1,403. ISBN 1 84171 665 0. Price: £105.00.

This is the toponymic equivalent of manna from heaven: a rich diet of place-names that will sustain those traversing the sparse historic terrain of medieval and early-modern Ceredigion. Iwan Wmffre's compilation of the identifiable place-names of Cardiganshire includes some 15,000 headwords spread over nearly 1500 pages in three hefty volumes weighing in at 5.145 kgs and costing over £100. It is at once informative, thought provoking, and sometimes irritating. The irritation comes from the absence of a lexical glossary (yes, more pages are needed), the arrangement by civil parish rather than historic ecclesiastical parish (a mistake candidly admitted by Wmffre), and the decision to exclude lost place-names and (more reasonably) the majority of microtoponyms (field names and the like). Fellow toponymists have already taken issue with Wmffre's methodology and somewhat prescriptive introduction in two rather sharp reviews (Richard Morgan in *Welsh History Review*, vol. 22 (4) and Simon Taylor in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, vol. 153). However, most of us will gratefully accept what is on offer, essentially an exhaustive treatment of locatable place-names, navigating our way through the book using the serviceable index of fifty pages, locating names on O.S. maps from the six-figure grid references, and relishing the fully-referenced historic forms for the majority of place-names.

The continuity of place-names in west Wales can be astonishing. Heather James has demonstrated that the area known as Gwaun Henllan in Carmarthenshire can be identified with the 'guon hen llan' in the eighth- or ninth-century Welsh memoranda in the Book of St Chad. Cardiganshire cannot quite

match that historical depth, but Wmffre has many interesting observations on the ancient administrative and settlement names depicted on William Rees's map of *South Wales and the Border in the Fourteenth Century* (1933) and discussed in John Edward Lloyd's *The Story of Ceredigion* (1937). The discussion of 'macrotoponyms', usefully collected together at the end of this book, highlights the need for sustained work on the boundaries of administrative units which ranged from *cantref*, *cwmwd*, and *plwyf* to the tithing divisions (*rhandir* or *parsel*), sometimes traceable from the sixteenth century, which may replicate more ancient divisions. David Williams's *Atlas of Cistercian Lands* (1990), not referred to by Wmffre, has already shown that the boundaries of many granges can be recovered and mapped.

The survivability of settlement names is uneven but can be surprisingly good. Dafydd ap Gwilym's *bro* has been firmly located in the Penrhyncoch area from the place-name references in his poems. Some two-thirds of the eighteen place-names mentioned by Dafydd can be located, as Geraint Gruffydd and David Jenkins have demonstrated. Unfortunately Wmffre's methodology precludes him from discussing the half-dozen unlocated names, but he has some interesting things to say on the locatable names, including 'Masaleg' (< L. *basilica*, 'church'), the older name for the river Stewi (etymology uncertain), which he suggests is connected with the otherwise uncommemorated early Christian site excavated near Gogerddan.

Wmffre demonstrates that numerous current farm names can be traced from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. These names are precious survivals generally pre-dating the surviving physical buildings of a farmstead, except at exceptional sites like Gwastodgwrda (the second element here interpreted as the personal name Gwrdaf rather than *gurda* or 'gentleman'). Nevertheless sixteenth-century sources do show the volatility of some settlement names, especially those relating to smaller farms. In the sixteenth century many *tyddynod* acquired alternative

names with changes in ownership and the consolidation or reorganization of holdings. It is a process that Wmffre notes but it needs to be critically examined.

Wmffre is an assiduous place-names detective and promises a volume on *Welsh Place-name Elements*. However some names have resisted interrogation. Wmffre struggles with the etymologies of Wstrws and Bowls, for example, but in the end has to admit uncertainty. Even the origin of a relatively recent place-name like Bow Street (first citation 1782) is difficult to pin down with certainty, although suggestions abound. Sgotlan (Little Scotland, 1756) and Navy Hall (1746) are more satisfactorily explained. Some of these English-language place-names embody a humorous element but they are also an index of the economic and social linkages of Cardiganshire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some place-names commemorated battles (Jib < Gibraltar or Alma (Crimea)) in which Cardiganshire soldiers and sailors had taken part. Other non-Welsh place-names were an expression of Cardiganshire's maritime heritage. Ironically in the era of cheap travel the narrowing of horizons is suggested by the loss of many exotic port names bestowed by Victorian mariners on their homes, now replaced by the prosaic Hafod or Bryn-teg.

Undoubtedly this book will become the first port of call for those working on farm and parish histories. This is to be expected because of Wmffre's meticulous recording of sources. For the archaeologist and landscape historian there is much information on antiquities, settlements and boundaries, signalled by such place-name elements as *sarn*, *cwrt* and *llys*. Wmffre suggests for example that Cwrt, Llanwenog, was the administrative centre of Tir-newydd grange. It is interesting to report that recent RCAHMW aerial photography has indeed revealed extensive earthworks of the grange site at Cwrt (reported by Toby Driver in *Archaeology in Wales*, vol. 42).

This type of study is never complete. There are of course always more sources to explore. The National Library's on-line index has expanded the range of available sources since the book was completed. One must also mention the usefulness of the unindexed plea rolls of the Court of Great Sessions and probate records as sources for place names. Wmffre is mainly concerned with the names of settlements but each settlement is associated with numerous field names, which remain uncollected. Wmffre advocates the methodical collection of fieldnames using a map base. One can only agree, and hope that someone will take up the challenge and initiate a project along the lines of the Ardudwy place-names survey currently coordinated by Rhian Parry. It is surely the type of project that could be supported by this Society. However, one has the sense of a race against time. Many upland farms have gone down since World War II and their field names have inevitably fallen out of use. Everywhere there has been farm amalgamation and changes in land use. The farmer who ranches several historic farmsteads using a quadbike no longer has the same relationship with the land that his father or grandfather had when they walked the farm. And yet interest in place-names has never been greater – as the increasingly dilapidated library copies of Iwan Wmffre's magnum opus already demonstrate.

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