

## What's in a field name?

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Jen Mathias is the community reporter for BBC Radio Wales in the Lampeter area. Here she takes a look at the importance of field names as part of BBC Wales' **What's in a Name?** project which aims to discover the fascinating origins and folklore around Welsh place names.



◀ [Jen Matthias on Roy Noble's BBC Wales Radio Show](#)

"One of the joys of tracing Welsh field names both of the present and past is that the field name is a description of its situation within the farm land or of its interest to the owner. Therefore the meaning of the name is usually quite clear.

Field names are not necessarily the same now as they may have been in the past but in many cases they have remained and can provide clues to the whereabouts or location of long vanished buildings or other historic features of the landscape.

They can act as a kind of verbal mapping. The settlements or farms in the Lampeter area are quite widely dispersed so their names were very important as a description of where the dwellings could be found.

Examples of names that reflect the position of the field within the farm or in relationship to neighbouring buildings or other farms; 'the field in front of the house', 'the field behind the house', 'the hayfield', 'the field by the well' and so on.

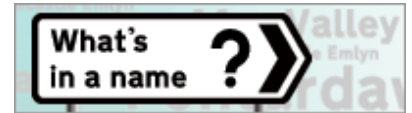
This system is much clearer than pointing and saying "that field over there round the corner of the road, behind that little hillock by the chapel".

Sometimes the names mention a feature or attribute of the landscape or ground. Cae Tricornel (Three cornered field) is found on a Llanwnnen farm in 1841. The tree corners of the field can be identified quite clearly on a drawing dating back to 1777.

Field names are less prone to corruption of meaning than place names for very sensible and pragmatic reasons. If a farmer wants to put his animals in an enclosure he needs to be able to name the exact place he wants them to go.

He probably doesn't want his new lambs to go in a field with deep pools, such as Cae Pwll yr Afr (Goat's Pool) where a goat is said to have drowned, for example. This is why field names have quite specific and practical names that can sometimes appear unsophisticated.

Cae Ceffylau Jac Brooks (The field which has Jack Brooks' horses) was a meaningful name in 18th century Gartheli when Mr Brooks was around, but has no practical meaning or significance today. Therefore the name has changed.



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Conversely, unless the land is severely flattened the small Llangybi pasture called Cae Cnwc (hillock field) is likely to keep its name for many years to come.

Field names were referred to in old documents about a sale of land, or a marriage or mortgage settlement. It was therefore important that the exact location of a piece of land was easily understood by the people involved in the land description or transaction.

It should be remembered that the compulsory registration of land only came into force in recent times and to a local historian these old field names can be very important as first class evidence, or perhaps the only evidence, of the changes in the ownership history of the estate or land being studied.

Other ways of finding out the old names of fields are tithe maps and other estate surveys and old estate agents' sales descriptions.

We have started to compile a database of local field names in the Lampeter area and would welcome any information that could help with the research. A Welsh-speaking farmer can generally give you the names of the fields without a moment's hesitation.

I have recently been given the field names of a Llanfair Clydogau farm (Penlan) where my 70 year old informant last lived around fifty years ago. He had no problems in remembering the fields where he roamed as a boy.

To a farmer intimately concerned with the landscape year in and year out, the names of the farm fields may be just as important and memorable as the names of his children.

These days farmers filling in returns for government departments have to use numbers rather than names for their fields. Numbers are a cold, remote and impersonal method of naming objects."

#### **Examples of Field Names in the Lampeter area:**

##### **Llangybi (2007)**

Cae Gwair (Hay Field), Cae Bach (Little Field), Waun o flaen ty (Wet field in front of the house)

##### **Llanfair Clydogau (In use 50 years ago)**

Cae Llwyn (Grove Field), Cae Ucha' (Upper Field), Cae Isa' (Lower Field), Cae Owen (Owen's field)

##### **Llanwnnen (recorded 1841)**

Cae Shed (Shed Field), Cae Garreg Lwyd (Grey Stone Field)

#### **Article written by Jen Mathias**

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your comments

**phil LLay**

Hugh from Ruthin, i was born in Rhewl and lived in the white houses on Denbigh Road, the bridge just after these houses is named pont rhyd y gwaer, the bloody bridge, there was a battle there, information on the battle can be seen on an information board by the Drovers Arms, not sure if this has anything to do with the battle, but my brother and i on many occasions found little lead balls, on thinking back i wonder if they could have been musket balls or the like, thats if they used muskets during the civil war  
Sun Nov 22 13:43:33 2009

#### **Hugh from Ruthin**

There are two fields in Rhewl which are called maes y gwaed(field of blood) and maes y rhryfel(field of battle) can anyone shed any light for the reasons of these names, is it from the civil war?  
Mon Jul 13 19:12:15 2009

#### **ted cogdell**

I would like to know if possible the true name of Pontyrhydyrun farm. It is on the cross roads at Pontyrhydyrun, cwmbrian and is now the site of the Ashbridge inn.I am 90 years old and ever since I was a boy it's been known as Pontyrhydyrun farm.  
Sun Sep 28 18:07:17 2008

#### **Jessica Gregory, Talylychau**

SteveKail from Guernsey -- Ehedydd is a lark, so that might be your answer.  
Sun Mar 23 11:18:09 2008

#### **SteveKail from Guernsey**

Before moving to Guernsey in 1966 we lived on Cae Heddyd farm in Shirenewton, Monmouthshire.I was always told by my father that it meant "fields of Corn" ? A Welsh friend has told me it doesn't but cannot enlighten me on " hedydd "Can anyone fill me in??ThanksSteve Kail  
Fri Mar 14 12:39:42 2008

#### **Jen Mathias from Lampeter**

Some really interesting comments... Marianne Morgan Golden from New Jersey, USAasked some questions about names in the Llanbadarn Fawr area... perhaps these thoughts might help: - Bwlchygeuffordd – bwlch is a pass, and ffordd a road, ceu can mean enclosed or hollow – so could mean the pass of the hollow way... BUT ceuffordd is also the term for a tunnel, so could possibly refer to a landscape mining feature such as an adit or similar. Ceuffordd can also mean a hollow way, which has a distinct meaning – ie a track or path worn down with use over the centuries, and usually runs below the level of the fields on either side. Bwlch can mean a mountain pass or gap or gully, but in some areas can mean the gate that closes this off. Cefncoed - Wood on the ridge/woodland ridge – cefn means the back or spineGelvachgoch could be derived from Cilfachgoch? Cil is usually a nook /retreat /corner/ recess/inlet Fach = little and Coch = redThe red could be from the colour of the earth, or from the plants that grow there.The word CIL may be a hint that there was an early Irish settlement or connection there – depends on where it is of course - but quite possible in Llanbadarn Fawr which is close to the Irish Sea.Finally, Mynydd mawr – big mounta! in  
Wed Apr 18 10:30:03 2007

#### **Darryl Gwynne, Glen Williams, Ontario, Canada**

A field, almost certainly named after my gggg grandfather, still exists on Goldborough Farm west of Monkton, Pems. In

the mid 1830s agricultural labourer Thomas Gwynne and his family were living at "Gooboro" one of the old names for the property. The Morris family have owned Goldborough for several generations. The current farmhouse was build about 1840 so that the Gwynnes almost certainly lived in one of the (older) current outbuildings that appear to be old cottages. Peter Morris of Goldborough informed me that most of the fields of Goldborough have names (e.g. Daisy Field, Horse Park, Lower Hayguard) that have been passed down orally between generations and various owners of the property. Only one of the fields appears to have been named after a person, however. But - until the link with the history of my Gwynne family - no living person seemed to know who this was. Remarkably the field, not too distant from the Goldborough farm buildings, is still called "Tom Gwyn."

Mon Mar 5 09:49:10 2007

**Marianne Morgan Golden from New Jersey, USA**

I have recently been tracing my Welsh ancestry and have come upon several names of family farms: Bwlchygeuffordd in Llanbadarn Fawr, Cefncoed, Gelvachgoch and Mynydmawr. Can you give me the translation of the names?

Fri Mar 2 10:21:26 2007

**Robert Heming fom Houston**

Thank you Ivor. When I was a child in the 1950's I remember passing the sign to Cobbler's Plain and Bully Hole Bottom and laughing out loud. Sadly my father though from Panteg and very familiar with the area did not know the origins of these names. So is Bully a corruption of Pwll? That could make sense. The names along the Border seem to be a mixture of English-named and Welsh-named but is it possible that most of the apparently English names are simply corruptions of the original Welsh. I notice that many people now pronounce the name of Llanfrechfa as if they were English f's. Is this the beginning of name corruption? I even had to correct the vicar of the Church who was mispronouncing it.

Mon Feb 26 11:00:00 2007

**Ivor Cavill, Itton Chepstow**

In the border country the names of fields and features can trace the changing language patterns as well as giving an insight into the past. Finding the clues and tracing them, often through mispronunciation and corruption, can unlock an understanding of why things are as they are. From Pont Faen through Cae Pwcella to the Mynders Farm by way of Cae Hedydd and then through Bully Hole Bottom to Pant-y-cosyn is a journey through times past and ever present. Did the Romans go throuh the fairy field to the farm on the waste land passing the sky lark-full field to the pool-deep bottom and on to take cheese in the hollow above?

Tue Feb 20 10:07:02 2007

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