

WELSH GENEALOGICAL RECORDS

Names

Hereditary surnames were generally not used until the 16th and 17th Centuries. Before this the Welsh used a patronymic system. In addition to a given name, the *mab*, *map*, *ab* or *ap* (meaning son of) and the father's given name were recorded. For daughters the word *verch*, *rerch* or *ach* was recorded (meaning daughter of). Examples Thomas ap John ap Owen, Gwenllian verch John. Over time given names became surnames. Example: Thomas John or Thomas Jones.

Census Records

- 1841 Taken on June 7. Lists each family member, their age, sex, address, occupation, and whether born in the county. Ages are usually rounded down to a multiple of 5 years for individuals over age 15. Relationships are not recorded.
- 1851 Taken March 30
- 1861 Taken April 7
- 1871 Taken April 2
- 1881 Taken April 3
- 1891 Taken April 5
- 1901 Taken March 31
- 1911 Taken April 2
- 1939 Wales Register

The 1851 and later census records list names, ages, occupations, relationships to the head of household, parish and county of birth. Indexes and images for the 1841-1911 censuses available on Ancestry, FamilySearch and Findmypast.

Church Records

The parish is the basic unit of the Church of Wales. The minister of the parish was responsible for recording vital records of the members of his congregation.

Christening (baptism) records: Children usually christened a short time after birth. They give at least the name of the child and the christening date. Often the name of the father, his occupation and residence. Later records usually provide the given name of the mother.

Marriage records: Usually took place in the bride's parish. Early records often only give the date of marriage and the names of the bride and groom. Later records give marital status, residence, groom's occupation, fathers' names and occupations, and signatures of witnesses.

Burial records: Before 1813 these records give the name of the deceased, burial date, residence, sometimes the age and occupation. Sometimes the husband's or father's name is given. After 1813 the records provide the name, age, residence, and burial date.

Bishop's Transcripts: Beginning in 1598, a copy of the parish register was made and sent to the bishop of the diocese. If there are gaps in the parish registers or they are hard to read, the bishop's transcripts may fill the void(s).

Nonconformist records: An act was passed in 1662 requiring everyone to conform to the Church of England. Persons who did not conform were called nonconformists. It is estimated that by 1851 about 75% of the Welsh people belonged to a nonconformist group. Indexes at FamilySearch 1588-1977; Ancestry 1567-1970). Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act required that a marriage be performed in the parish church of one of the spouses by an Anglican clergyman. The only exceptions were Jews and Quakers. Other denominations became valid in 1837 with the advent of civil registration.

Civil Registration

The government began recording births, marriages, and deaths on 1 July 1837.

Birth Certificates: Give the child's name, sex, birth date and place, parents' names (mother's maiden name), father's occupation, informant's signature, residence and relationship (if any). Rarely provide name of an illegitimate child's father.

Marriage Certificates: Give the marriage date, place, and denomination (if a church marriage), names of the bride and groom, whether single or widowed, ages, occupations, and residence(s), names and occupations of their fathers, signatures of the bride, groom, and witnesses.

Death Certificates: Give the name, age and occupation of the deceased, death date, place, and cause of death, signature, relationship and residence of the informant. Sometimes give a spouse's name, parent's name often provided if the decedent is a child.

Indexes: Available on Ancestry (1837-1915) FreeBMD, FamilySearch (births 1837-2008; marriages 1837-2005; deaths 1837-2007).

Ordering Records: Can be ordered online from the General Register Office or from local registrars. GRO has a pilot service providing PDF copies of birth records 1837-1917 and death records 1837-1957, which cost £6. Must include index reference. Marriage certificates are not part of the PDF service. They must be ordered under the GRO's regular service for £9.25. URL: <https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/login.asp>

Probate Records

Types of Probate Records

Will. Technically, a will conveys real (immovable) property to heirs after an individual's death. A registered will is an official copy made by a court clerk.

Testament. A testament conveys personal (movable) property to heirs. Eventually referred to both a will and a testament.

Administration, Letters of Administration, or Admon. Refer to a document appointing someone to supervise the estate's distribution for someone who died intestate (without a valid will). This document usually gives the name of the administrator, who was usually a relative of the deceased.

Admon with Will. Grants administration to someone else when the executor named in the will is deceased, unwilling, or unable to act as executor. A copy of the will is attached.

Inventory. Lists belongings and their values, including such items as household goods, tools, and personal items. Occupations are often mentioned.

Bond. A bond is a written guarantee that a person will faithfully perform the tasks assigned to him by a probate court. The executor posted a testamentary bond, the administrator posted an administration bond, and the guardian of a minor child posted a bond of tuition or curation.

Probating a Will

Usually the location of the deceased property determined which court had jurisdiction. The probate process began by presenting the will to the court. The court recorded a probate act authorizing executors to carry out the will's provisions. The original will was endorsed and filed in the court's records. A handwritten copy was given to the executors. (Before 1600 the executors may have received the original.) The clerk may also have copied the will into a book of registered wills.

Pre-1858 Probate Courts

In Wales, four types of church courts probated wills: peculiar, archdeaconry, Bishops', and the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. Usually the court with primary jurisdiction probated the will, but wealth, status, or convenience could have affected which court was used.

The four types of Welsh probate courts:

Peculiar courts had limited jurisdiction over small areas (sometimes just one parish). The only peculiar court in Wales is the Hawarden Peculiar, which covers Hawarden parish in Flintshire.

Archdeaconry courts were divisions of a diocese. The only archdeaconries which had probate jurisdiction were in the diocese of St. David's. The probate records for St. David's diocese were divided into two groups: The Archdeaconry Court of Brecon, and the combined archdeaconries of St. David's, Cardigan, and Carmarthen and Gower.

Bishops' courts (also called episcopal, commissary, diocesan, or consistory courts) were the highest local courts. In Wales there were four main bishops' courts: Bangor, Llandaf, St. Asaph, and St. David's. A small area in Flintshire and Denbighshire was under the jurisdiction of the Bishops' Court of Chester in England. Parts of Monmouth, Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire were under the jurisdiction of the Bishops' Court of Hereford in England.

The Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) was the highest court. This court was used if the deceased had property in more than one diocese.

Availability

Original wills in Wales have survived from 1565, depending on the court where they were probated. The courts have wills from then until 1858, when ecclesiastical probate courts were abolished.

Post-1857 Probate Courts

On 11 January 1858, the Principal Probate Registry replaced all ecclesiastical probate courts. All wills and administrations were then probated at district courts or at a central court in London called the Principal Registry. Online indexes available 1858-1966 for both wills and administrations at ancestry.com under search Tax, Criminal, Land & Wills records. Indexes also available at FamilySearch 1858-1957.

Estate Duty Wills and Administrations

Beginning in 1796 a tax was levied on probates of estates valued over £10. Copies of the probate documents were filed with the Estate Duty Office in London when the tax was paid. Over the years various exceptions to the laws could have exempted the tax from being paid and a will from being filed.

Estate Records

The National Library of Wales has many estate records. Most county record offices have collections of estate papers. The staff of the National Library of Wales is preparing indexes to estate records. The documents are grouped in three main categories: personal records, business records, and government records.

The address for the National Library of Wales is:

National Library of Wales
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 3BU
Wales