

## Welsh markets in marcher towns

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This article explores the parallels between three economically important sites by or in major towns of the English counties of the Welsh Marches, along with some lesser ones, and suggests that their names, two of which have not been explained before, are all Welsh in origin. The historical and sociolinguistic implications of this are briefly broached.

### MAISEMORE BY GLOUCESTER

Maisemore is a former chapelry of St Mary de Lode parish, Gloucester, which has become a parish in its own right. The fact that it once formed part of an urban parish despite being on the other side of a major river from its mother church will prove to be a significant parallel for other places to be discussed below.<sup>1</sup>

The set of historical spellings printed in *EPNS Gloucestershire* (III, 161) is as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Facts from Chandler (2015). It is suggested there that the bifurcation of the Severn above Gloucester took place in historic times, and therefore that Alney island (see below; also *VCH Gloucester*, IV, 66–7) may once have formed a corner of Maisemore parish which was once more easily accessed from the centre of the village than it came to be.
- <sup>2</sup> All abbreviations of documentary sources are exactly as given in the relevant volumes of the Survey of English Place-Names, and will be found explained there. One exception is made in the suppression of *ib[idem]* in favour of a documentary abbreviation. Abbreviated attested spellings of names have been silently expanded.

*Maiesmore, Mayesmore, Mayesmor(a)* 12th, 13th Glouc (frequent), 1316  
*FF*, 1317 GIR, 1322 *Ext* and frequently to 1387 Works  
*Meyesmore* c.1200, c.1235 GIR  
*Maismor(e), Maysmor(e)* 1221, 1270 Glouc, c.1270 *For*, 1291 Tax, 1304  
*FF* and throughout to 1542 *MinAcct*  
*Maesmor, Messmor* 1221 *Ass*  
*Maisemor(e), Maysemor(e)* 1248 *Ass*, 1284 Episc and frequently to 1701  
 PR 14

It is generally accepted that the name of Maisemore is of (Old or) Middle Welsh origin and derives from *mais* ‘field’ + *maur* ‘big’.<sup>3</sup> In Middle Welsh, stress would have been on the second element; the present English name shows English retraction of stress to the first syllable, as in other current names originating in Welsh phrases such as *Barmouth*, *Cardiff*, *Denbigh*, *Knucklas*, *Lampeter*, *Llandaff*, *Llanfor*, *Llynclys*<sup>4</sup> and *Tintern*. *Maisemore* might in theory be from a Middle English surname *May* (of a variety of origins) in the possessive case + *mōr* ‘moor’, but the place-name’s first attestation, in the twelfth century, is almost certainly too early to countenance a surname, especially since all the most relevant sources of the surname are personal names of continental origin.<sup>5</sup>

Maisemore is just north-west of Gloucester on the main droving route into the town from south and mid Wales via Ledbury, lying in what must have been rich grassland in the angle between the rivers Severn and

<sup>3</sup> Watts (2004) agrees; Mills (1998) agrees ‘probably’. Ekwall (1960) also suggests this, but allows Old English *mōr* ‘moor’ as a possible alternative for the second element (see immediately below) without indicating what the first element might be. Among an older generation of scholars, Baddeley (1913, 105) preferred an English solution, from a male Anglo-Saxon given name *Mæg* in the possessive case (of which Mats Redin (1919, 8) said: ‘It is not quite certain whether this is a name or not’) + *mōr*.

<sup>4</sup> On the authority of Professor John C. Wells, <[phonetic-blog.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/ruyton-how-many.html](http://phonetic-blog.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/ruyton-how-many.html)>, post of 15.01.10, accessed 15.12.15.

<sup>5</sup> Hanks, Coates and McClure (2016), entry for MAY.

Leadon.<sup>6</sup> The parish includes the Severn island Alney, which itself was noted for its grazing on the part of it called *Maisemore Ham*. It is just upstream of the main ancient bridge allowing entry to the city from the north-west. All that said, it is very striking that there is no reference to cattle whatever in Herbert's *Victoria County History* essays on Gloucester's early and later medieval trade (Herbert 1988). But there was indeed a cattle market, which in early historic times was held in Barton Street, the eastward extension of the main axial thoroughfare which led from the ancient bridge over the Severn through the town, and was therefore outside the town boundaries (see e.g. *VCH Gloucester*, IV, 23, 261). The relevance of Maisemore for droving is mentioned by Finberg (1954, 13) and Colyer (1976, 107), and as a stopover its status would have been not unlike that of Newent on the droving route from Ross to Gloucester, also mentioned by Finberg.<sup>7</sup>

Macefen in Cheshire (generally understood as representing the medieval ancestor of Welsh *maes y ffin* 'open land at the border'; *EPNS Cheshire*, IV, 37) might be viewed as a parallel for Maisemore, but Macefen is not as closely associated with any large town as Maisemore is with Gloucester. It is a short distance to the east of Malpas, which was granted a fair and market in 1281 (and would therefore be a little inconvenient for the cattle trade from the direction of Wales), and about four miles north of the longer-established Whitchurch, across the county boundary in Shropshire. Both Malpas and Whitchurch are close to the modern (i.e. sixteenth-century) boundary with Wales.

Since it is plausible that Maisemore, on the fringe of, and in a parochial sense part of, a large town in a county of the Welsh Marches,

<sup>6</sup> Welsh cattle were being brought to Gloucester by 1250 (Finberg 1954; *VCH Gloucester*, IV, 23). Information about Welsh cattle droving into England in general can be got from Hughes (1944) and Colyer (1976).

<sup>7</sup> An important book about droving, Hughes (1944), does not mention Maisemore nor anything detailed about Gloucester. The publicly available draft *VCH* article for Maisemore (Chandler 2015) also has nothing on droving.

was a place that served as a destination for drovers of Welsh cattle and has a Welsh name, we can apply the pattern in the case of places which have an obscure name in towns of a similar type and location. Let us examine the street-names *Dolday* in Worcester and *Mardol* in Shrewsbury, both of which remain unexplained.

#### DOLDAY IN WORCESTER

Dolday is presently a street in the centre of Worcester which approaches the Severn roughly at right-angles, at a point just upstream of the main bridge across the river. It was formerly the site of All Saints' parish workhouse, and was regularly considered 'low' and 'disreputable', to judge by Victorian newspaper reports.

The two historical spellings printed in *EPNS Worcestershire* (p. 21) are as follows:

*Dolday* 1272 Ipm, 1391 Pat

Other documents calendared or catalogued and seen in those forms by the author have almost without exception the same spelling.<sup>8</sup> The name has received no satisfactory explanation. Taking the second element to be Old English *hæg* 'enclosure, "hay"' allows no acceptable account of the first syllable, and in any case neither of the medieval spellings in the EPNS record show an <h>. Comparison with the Bavarian word *Dult* 'festival, fair', as in the famous triannual Auer Dult of Munich, is hard to sustain, because the Bavarian word has long been recognized as a borrowing into Old High German from Gothic *dulps*, which has no cognate in other Germanic languages.<sup>9</sup>

A straightforward Welsh solution is available. The name is compatible

<sup>8</sup> For instance 1271–2 *Inquisitiones ad quod damnum* (TNA C 143/3/30). Just one of the many records mentioned in the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service catalogue has the variant spelling *Doleday*.

<sup>9</sup> Thus in standard histories of German, following the thrust of the comparative material offered by Schmeller (1872), I, col. 502.

with a Middle Welsh phrase *dol deheu*, from *dol* ‘(river-)meadow’ + *deheu* ‘south’, with English retraction of stress to the first syllable as in *Maisemore* and reduction of the bulk of the final element [ehei] to a single English diphthong [ei] in the now-unstressed position. Dolday is not south of the city centre of Worcester, but it could represent a built-over southern counterpart, or even an original southern part, of the large open space beside the Severn now called *Pitchcroft*, the present venue of Worcester races, whose centre today is a couple of hundred metres further upriver. This would be comparable with the way Sudmeadow ‘south meadow’ relates to Port Ham in Gloucester. Dolday was on the edge of the built-up area of the medieval city.<sup>10</sup> The connection with Wales, and as in the case of Maisemore with Welsh droving, is established by Ambrose Florence (1828, 13), who noted that ‘[i]n the corporation book, called *Liber Legum*, made in the reign of Henry VII., it is ordered that all “Walshe catell” coming to be sold, be brought to Dolday.’ They would have approached the city from the west, crossed the main bridge into the city and immediately have been in or adjacent to Dolday.

The name, though quite sparsely recorded in early Worcester, seems also to occur in ‘lands and messuages, &c., called *Dulday*, situate in the parish of Llanyskill [Llanycil, RC] (Merioneth)’, west of Bala.<sup>11</sup> Unless this name is copied from Worcester, for which I can imagine no geographically plausible case, the record confirms the Welsh origin of the name.

<sup>10</sup> Map 7 in Baker (1990), unnumbered page at end of thesis.

<sup>11</sup> TNA E 134/9Geo2/Mich16 (1735–6). The name survived a century later; note ‘that Messuage or Tenement, Farm, and Lands, called Pentre, otherwise Pentredulday, together with a Cottage, called Tynyffridd, situate in Waen y Bala, in the said Parish of Llanycil’ (*The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 19 September 1837).

MARDOL IN SHREWSBURY (AND MUCH WENLOCK, KINGSLAND AND  
CLAVERLEY)

Mardol is a street in Welsh Ward<sup>12</sup> in the centre of Shrewsbury town. Like Dolday, it approaches the Severn roughly at right-angles, just upstream of the town's present main bridge across the river from the direction of Frankwell and hence of Wales, which was known as *Welsh Bridge* from at least 1336.<sup>13</sup> If the analogy with Dolday can be pursued further, cattle being driven from north and mid Wales would have crossed this bridge into the medieval town and immediately have been in Mardol, and the town end of the bridge was called *Mardol Gate* (Anon. n.d.).<sup>14</sup> The ancient right to hold a fair in Shrewsbury was granted on four separate occasions up to 1326 (Owen 1808, 457), and cattle markets in subsequent centuries were held on Welsh Bridge (presumably between the gates provided at both ends), in the Castleforegate and/or in the Abbeyforegate (Phillips, Bowen and Hulbert 1837, 172–3). A post-medieval cattle market was held in Raven Meadows, and some of the house-plots of Mardol extended into Raven Meadows (Baker 1990, 216). The modern Smithfield cattle market, established by an act of Parliament of 1847, begun in 1849 and named after its London counterpart, is close to Welsh Bridge and to the north-western end of Mardol. While no cast-iron precise connection between the medieval thoroughfare Mardol and a particular traditional fair or market site has been documented, so far as I can discover, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that there was one. J. A. Morris (1927–8) states that personal names in early deeds associated with Mardol are 'Saxon', which he takes as suggesting pre-Conquest occupation of the

<sup>12</sup> The latter name is significant, of course, but as Fleming (2012, 283) notes: 'If the Welsh Ward had ever been a Welsh ghetto, then it had certainly lost that character by the early sixteenth century'.

<sup>13</sup> The modern bridge was built on a different alignment in 1796, downstream of the earlier one and therefore further from Mardol.

<sup>14</sup> Gelling implies (*EPNS Shropshire*, IV, 22), following Dr William Champion, that the name *Welsh Gate* was also sometimes applied to the one here referred to as *Mardol Gate*.

street, and that the street was almost completely built up by the twelfth century, being occupied mainly by inns and hostleries for tradesmen coming to market, with land to the rear being used to stable animals. Shrewsbury was also in effect the western end in England of the Welsh Road (the Bullock Road, the Welshman's Road), an ancient cattle-droving route from north Wales to the south-east of England, partly coinciding with Watling Street.

No viable etymology for *Mardol* has so far been proposed; Phillips' English etymology ('marl' + 'pastures' + 'ford'; Phillips 1837, 48–9) does not even rest on a correctly read set of spellings. In the absence of an English etymology, as with *Dolday*, it does not seem unreasonable to propose a Welsh one in a major town of the Marches, though the proposal is phonologically and onomastically more difficult than in the case of *Dolday*.

The historical spellings printed in *EPNS Shropshire* (IV, 26–7) are as follows:

- Mardevall* c.1215 HAC, *Mardevall* c.1225 HAC, *Mardevall* 1245–6 (18th) *BodlGoughShrop* I, f. 141, 1591–2 *SBL* 1188  
*Mardewall* 1232 MGS (surname), *Mardewoll* 1404–5 SAS 53  
*Mardeuole* (surname), *Mardiuole* 1252 MGS, *Mardeuol* (surname), *M'deuole* 1271–2 *Ass*, *Mardevol* c.1275 *SBL* 176, e.Ed I HAC, *Mardevole* l.13th *SBL* 3835, 1530 SAS 52, *Mardyvole* 1386 *SBL* 3990  
*Merdevall* c.1245 SAC  
*Mardefol* 1268 MGS, *Mardefole* 1293 HAC and frequently to 1481 *SBL* 3852  
*Mardefolle* 1403 *SBL* 3847, 8, *Mardefoll* 1445–6 SAS 53  
*Mardvole* 1445–6 SAS 52, *Mardvoll* 1557 SAS 4/X  
*Mardevale* 1447, 61 SAS 53, 4/III  
*Marwell Street* c.1540 Leland  
*Mardowell* 1580 SAS 53  
*Mardall* 1549 *SBL* 1217 and frequently to 1705 *SBL* 6468, *Mardall* or *Mardwall* 1644–5 *SBL* 1227, *Mardall* alias *Mardewall* 1648–9 *SBL* 1203, *Mardivall* alias *Mardall* 1709 *SBL* 3391  
*Mardoll* 1596–7 *SBL* 3475(a), 1618 *SBL* 3476(a), 1781 PR(L) 17, *Mardol* 1716 PR(L) 12

The oldest spellings of what appears to be a second element in *Mardol* appear consistent with Middle Welsh *deduawl* ‘legal, legitimate, customary, in accordance with custom’ (modern *deddfol*), showing assimilation of adjacent fricatives [ðv] to a simple [v]. The remaining syllable *Mar-* has no obviously relevant meaning in that form, so I propose, with reservations to be set out at once, that it is a heavily contracted form of Middle Welsh *marchnat*, *marchnad* ‘market’, and that the etymology of the name is therefore the ancestor of Welsh *marchnad ddeddfol* ‘customary market’, with soft mutation of the initial consonant of the adjective required by the preceding feminine noun.

Two objections to this rather drastic syncope might be raised (and met) as follows:

1. The implied loss of the entire second syllable of the phrase is a problem. From a general phonetic perspective, however, the loss of an unstressed syllable between two stressed ones, and directly before the main stress of the phrase in Welsh, should cause no great surprise. (Retraction of stress to the first syllable would be a purely English phenomenon, comparable with the initial stress seen in *Maisemore* and *Dolday*.) Having allowed that, it might still be thought that the loss, without a trace in the record, of a full closed syllable of the form [consonant + vowel + consonant] is too extreme to contemplate. We should note that the [n] in *marchnad*, though completely consistent in the historical record of the word (*GPC*, s.v.), seems to have been influenced (in unclear circumstances) by, or to share a source with, the synonymous Old Scandinavian word *marknaðr*, and is unexpected and irregular in a form derived from Latin *mercatum* (Late Latin *marcatum*) ‘market’. Testimony for an earlier form *\*marchad* in Welsh is lacking, but comparative evidence supplies it in the shape of Middle Cornish *marghas* and Breton *marc’had*. Whilst *marchnad* is first recorded from the fourteenth century, it is possible that the expected and regular form *\*marchad* existed early (or late) enough to feature in the street-name, which is first recorded in the early thirteenth century but may of course be earlier, as hinted above.

The loss of unstressed *-ad* immediately before the stressed consonant beginning the following syllable might be easier to envisage than the loss of *-nad*. However, there is a simpler way of avoiding part of the difficulty. The burden of explaining away the lost syllable could be alleviated if we were to take the <d> surviving in the street-name as the final consonant of *march(n)ad* with simplification of the consonant sequence [dð] in the ancestor of *marchnad ddeddfol* to [d], rather than as a “hardening” of syllable-initial [ð] to [d] accompanying the loss of the unstressed medial syllable. Such a cluster would be inadmissible word-internally in English. The subsequent loss of <ch>, i.e. phonetically [x], between consonants in English [-rxd-], is not at all controversial and can be paralleled elsewhere, e.g. in the normal loss of <h> in the compound *burh-tūn* (< *burg-tūn*) when it develops as the frequent place-name *Burton*.

2. The phrase *marchnad ddeddfol* or its ancestor in Middle Welsh is, so far as I can discover, not on record, nor does *deddfol* appear in another place-name, so far as I know. However, in view of its generalizable meaning, the recurrence of the name *Mardol* in medieval times in another marcher town, Much Wenlock, could be seen as offering support for the suggested etymology, assuming that it is not simply copied from Shrewsbury, the possibility of which is duly noted by Gelling (*EPNS Shropshire*, IV, 27).

Much Wenlock’s *Mardol* is on record from as early as 1321 (*EPNS Shropshire*, III, 260), and in the centre of the town, so there is a fair chance that it is independent of the Shrewsbury name.<sup>15</sup> There are also instances dating from at least as far back as the fifteenth century in Kingsland (Herefordshire) and Claverley (*EPNS Shropshire*, VI, 21); the first is in modern times a pasture, the second a house.

The spellings for the Claverley place, now called *Murdeford* with an

<sup>15</sup> The cross-reference to *EPNS Shropshire*, III, 268, in vol. IV, is wrong; it should be to p. 260.

analogical final element, consistently do not have <a> in the first syllable. It appears as *Mordevil* as late as the first edition of the OS 6" map and as *Murdivalls* in 1617, with other spellings suggesting a proximate etymon in Middle English /er/, not /ar/. The same is substantially true of the now obsolete name Merdevall in Kingsland, which appears in Ministers' Accounts as *Merdeuale* (1413 and 1425), *Merdewall'* (1468) and *Merdivall* (1560), and as *Mardevell* in a survey of 1649.<sup>16</sup> However, it is hard to envisage an alternative etymology for a pair of names otherwise consistent with the one in Shrewsbury and just as obscure. It may be worth pointing out that the dialect of an area centred on Herefordshire has a reflex of Middle English /a/ which is generally fronter than in adjacent areas of the Midlands (i.e. it is like Received Pronunciation [æ]), including before /r/, as exemplified in the two-syllable word **carrot** in the *Linguistic Atlas of England* (Orton, Sanderson and Widdowson 1978, map Ph2).<sup>17</sup> This may have been perceived by some clerks as a reflex of Middle English /e/ rather than of /a/. But Claverley, in Shropshire, does not fall into this area. The *Atlas*, broadly speaking, reflects the speech of the generation born around 1900–1910, from which, therefore, there is limited scope to draw inferences of great historical depth. This phonetic detail therefore remains to be elucidated.

Kingsland was a royal estate in Domesday. It was granted, apparently during the reign of Henry I, to the Braose lords of Radnor, and passed to the Mortimer family in 1247. Edward I granted the lord a charter to hold a weekly market (1304) and an annual fair (1306), 'to be held at the manor' (Letters 2003, s.n. Kingsland). Merdevall was adjacent to the church, castle and bailey, right in the centre of the village. The

<sup>16</sup> My thanks are due to John Freeman for supplying early spellings for this name, and for the reference and the essential historical points in the discussion of Kingsland below.

<sup>17</sup> The *LAE* does not offer a mapping of a word which is a more precise phonological parallel to *Mardol*. Wright (1905, 32), notes the unique or relict pronunciation [kiət] for **cart** (also < Middle English /ar/) in east Herefordshire, apparently not meaning [kiərt].

Braose/Mortimer connection might, in addition, be argued to establish a tenuous link with Wales. Bruce Coplestone-Crow (quoted in Stirling-Brown 1994, 16) has noted that ‘when the King wanted to summon the Braose Lords of Radnor to war he did not send his sergeant there, but to Kingsland ... This may be because the Braoses kept some sort of presence at Kingsland,’ and that because the king’s summons was sent there Kingsland was viewed as the principal residence of the Braose family. In its turn, that might suggest more than occasional contacts between Kingsland and the Braoses’ Welsh tenants.

Taken together, this means that three of the four instances of the name under discussion, those at Shrewsbury, Much Wenlock and Kingsland, relate to places with known markets. The exception is Claverley, where I know of no market.

I suggest therefore that the name of Mardol in Shrewsbury originates in a Middle Welsh phrase ancestral to *march(n)ad ddeddfol* ‘customary market’, implying a contrast with a non-customary or private or unofficial or not legally sanctioned one in or near Shrewsbury and that, on the balance of probabilities, the names of the other places mentioned share this origin. As a name, it may have originated in Shrewsbury and been copied in other market towns (or indeed elsewhere), but the evidence is not decisively against independent use of the phrase in other places, particularly Much Wenlock.

#### CONCLUSION

These considerations endorse the right of *Maisemore* in Gloucester to be viewed as a name of Welsh origin and also to represent a small but significant *type*. It can be seen as the keystone of the argument which locks the other stones of *Dolday* and *Mardol* into place in the arch of this edifice. All are parts of a major town or at least situated within a parish of a major town. There seem to be differences in the known functions of the three sites: *Maisemore* a night-stop or holding-place (I have not seen it reported to be a market-site), *Dolday* both a holding-place and a market, and *Mardol* probably at least a market. But the broad similarity

of function, that they were permanently available halts on, or termini of, drovers' routes from Wales, and gathering-points for further transfer to midland and southern English markets, seems well established.

A question of sociolinguistic interest might be raised at this point. If the large towns in question were in English-speaking territory at the time of the coining of these names, as seems practically certain, why did the names given to them by visiting Welsh-speakers stick in the local place-nomenclature? They seem to imply Welsh settlements or town quarters with a permanent Welsh population at a relatively late date (as was the case in Oswestry, Shropshire, still later), albeit isolated from Welsh territory, but with sufficient local credibility and influence to persuade local English-speakers to adopt the place-names they used. Perhaps such people were largely bilingual intermediaries in the cattle trade whose own names for their suburbs, or for the essential functions of those suburbs, caught on locally. Shrewsbury's Welsh Ward may, in the distant past, have been not merely the ward nearest to Wales but an actual Welsh quarter. Any true 'Welsh quarters' in Worcester and Gloucester in historic times, such as is likely formerly to have existed also in Hereford west of the Wye (Norgate 1887, 295 n. 9),<sup>18</sup> have eluded investigation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In support of the idea, Norgate cites a passage in Florence of Worcester's *Chronicon ex chronicis* referring to 1138.

<sup>19</sup> The *logical* alternative to this possibility is that the names, and their places, survive as entities continuously from pre-English times; but it should be noted that the names are Welsh in form, not British Celtic.

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