

From Manuscript to Database:

creating a database from the electronic catalogue of Radnorshire marriage bonds available online from The National Library of Wales¹

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the computer occupies as significant a place in the public library as does any reference book available on its shelves. For some readers the machine merely facilitates catalogue searches. For others, it is a vital research tool affording almost immediate access to valuable primary sources, even though those sources may be housed in libraries many miles distant from the reader seated in front of its screen.

Like other great libraries of the world, the *National Library of Wales* (hereafter *NLW*) is in the process of digitising its priceless historical collections. *NLW* first entered the electronic age during the nineties when it subscribed to ISYS – Integrated System Services – a tool designed specifically to enable catalogue searches to be made on public websites. Among the manuscripts from the archives collections so catalogued by *NLW* at this time were marriage bonds from the dioceses of Wales: St Davids, St Asaph, Llandaff, Bangor and the archdeaconry of Brecon.

The bonds cover the years 1616 – 1837 but there are many gaps in the records of the various dioceses. Nevertheless, the number remaining was sufficient for this writer's purpose, which was to complete a Master's thesis on migration of the 'middling sort' from early modern Radnorshire.

In the nineteen-seventies, Brodsky-Eliot had used English marriage bonds for similar purposes. Her calculations were probably carried out on a computer the size of a modern office photocopier, for her research was completed long before the personal computer, let alone the laptop, was even thought of.ⁱⁱ However, this now common and compact portable device enabled the present writer to access Radnorshire's marriage bonds from home for, while consulting the original bonds in the *NLW*, she was taken ill and subsequently forced to spend several weeks in bed. While convalescing, she gained access to the bonds via her own small but invaluable laptop, which made it unnecessary for her to consult the original manuscripts in Aberystwyth. Nevertheless, an example was digitally scanned at the library and forwarded to her via email.

The pursuit of a marriage partner was a major reason for migration during the early modern period, potential spouses being sought within and sometimes outside one's home county.ⁱⁱⁱ Distance inevitably imposed limitations upon choices. Eversley maintained that:


Marriages between persons resident in the same parish, and those involving a partner from an adjoining parish or one within a five mile radius, account for 75-80 per cent of all marriages, and if we extend the radius to fifteen miles, we are likely to include all except an insignificant fraction of places of origin of partners.^{iv}

This writer aimed to test the validity of Eversley's claims as they pertained to the 'middling sort' living in early modern Radnorshire. Marriage bonds were the most effective primary source for this purpose because, as they sometimes involved considerable financial outlay, their use was largely confined to the middling sort. Before obtaining a marriage licence the bridegroom, together with a friend, would enter into a bond. (Fig 1, below)

Noverint universi per presentes; Nos *David Morris de s^r Harmon in Cond Radnor yound et Thomam Hoik de Trofoglwy in Cond Monbgomery yound* tenori et firmiter obligari Reverend^o in xpo patri ac Dno Dno Thoma p^{re} dia Mendoc^o Epi in *Centum* libris bona & legalis moneta Angliæ solvend^o eidem *Dno Episcopo* aut suo certo Attornato, Executoribus, Administratoribus, vel Assignatis suis: Ad quam quidem solutionem bene & fideliter faciend^o obligamus Nos & utrumq; nostrum per se pro toto & in solido, Heredes, Executors, & Administratores nostros firmiter per presentes; Sigillis nostris sigillat^o Dat^o *quod dicitur* *primo die mensis Aprilis* *anno Dni 1699* *Quig Willi & Charib Dei gra nunt^o clug^o et Tho fidi defons^o et quarto 1699*

THE Condition of this Obligation is such, That if there shall not hereafter appear any lawful Let or Impediment, by reason of any Pre-contract, Consanguinity, Affinity, or any other just Cause whatsoever; but that *if above bounden David Morris of s^r Harmon afores^d & Margarett Root of s^r sawd in e^t County of Radnor afores^d spinster* may lawfully Marry together: And that there is not any Suit depending before any Judge Ecclesiastical or Civil, for, or concerning any such Pre-contract: And that the consent of the Parents, or other the Governours of the said Parties, be thereunto first had and obtained. And that they cause their said Marriage to be openly solemnized in the Face of the Parish Church of *Moughtrog in e^t County of Monb-gomery* between the Hours of Eight and Twelve of the Clock in the Forenoon: And do and shall save harmless, and keep indemnified the above-named *Th^o Bpp^o his vicar generall* his Surrogates, and all other his Officers, and Successors in Office, for and concerning the Premises; That then this Obligation to be void and of none effect, or else to remain in full force and vertue.

Signat' Sigillat' & Diliberat'
in presentia
Johis Huggins

Signat'
M 


Signat'
J 

Fig 1: A Seventeenth-century Radnorshire Marriage Bond

Two or more bondsmen bound themselves, if an impediment to the marriage should arise, or if the conditions of the licence should be breached, to forfeit a large sum of money, ranging from £20 to as much as £1,000. The sum was noted in the bond.

More bonds than licences are extant today because, whereas the licence was retained by the couple, the bond was lodged in the diocesan records, in this case St Davids or the Archdeaconry of Brecon. Records held there pre-date by more than one hundred years more than fifty per cent of Radnorshire's marriage registers which, in any event, would not indicate that a couple were married by bond. Armed with the correct bond and licence, the middling sort chose to be married in this way, rather than by the calling of banns, because it was a mark of their status. It was also quicker and less public, particularly in the case of a pre-marital pregnancy. It was also possible to be married by licence in Lent and on Fast days, times normally proscribed by the church for the celebration of marriage.

The original marriage bonds deposited in the *NLW* were modified by the Library's staff in order for them to be able to create an online index. However, crucial elements from these primary sources were retained and presented electronically, thus: the names of the bride and bridegroom, their rank or occupation, their marital status, their home parish, the date of the document, the church where the marriage was to take place, the type of document available, e.g. B(bond) Lic (licence) O (order).

Canlyniadau Chwilio ISYS:web Search Results

Archifau: Ymrwymadau Priodas - Archives: Marriage Bonds

Aberhonddu / Brecon → 1701-1750 (Dynion) (Men)

ADIS, Edward, gent, Bugeildy, RAD. 1720, Aug 26. At Nantmel, Llanbadarn Fawr or Cefn-Ilys. Anne Dackins. B. 3/13.

ADDIS, Roger, gent, Bugeildy, RAD. 1732, January 25. At B. Mabell Rowland. B. 3/16.

ARTHUR, Edward, gent, Nantmel, RAD. 1732, January 22. At N. or Cwmteuddwr. Lydia Price. B. 22/40.

ARTHUR, Meredith, gent, Nantmel, RAD. 1730, April 24. At N. Elinor Jones. B. 78/95. [see also 78/96].

BADHAM, David, gent, Glasbury, RAD. 1712, Nov 10. At Llowes or Llanddewi Fach. Anne Price. B. 74/21. ["D.B." on O., but "John" on B. and endorsement].

BADHAM, David, yeoman, Boughrood, RAD. 1713, July 20. At Gladestry. Amey Evans. B. 89/24.

BADHAM, John, gent, Glasbury, RAD. 1712, Nov 10. At Llowes or Llanddewi Fach. Anne Price. B. 74/21. ["J.B." on B. and endorsement, but "David" on O].

BADAM, Thomas, yeoman, Glasbury, RAD. 1706, Oct 30. At G. or Llanfilo, BRE. Elizabeth Davies. B. 84/49.

BADHAM, Thomas, gent, Glasbury, RAD. 1737, Feb 11. At G. or Llowes. Ann Rowland. B. 74/62.

BARNETT, Richard, gent, Cleiro, RAD. 1713, Aug 8. At C. Elizabeth Probert. B. 89/26.

BASKERVILLE, James, gent, Aberedw, RAD. 1714, May 27. At A. or Llandeilo Graban, or Llanddewi Fach. Mary Taylor. B. 2/18.

BASKERVILLE, James, Aberedw, RAD. 1742, Nov 8. At A. Mary Weal. B. 89/101.

BASKERVILLE, Nicolas, gent. 1703, January 7. At Llanbedr Painscastle, Llowes or Glasbury, RAD. Elizabeth Williams. B. 74/10.

BASSETT, Charles, Kington, HERE. 1736, May 25. At Cleiro, RAD. Elizabeth Powell. B. 17/52.

BAXTER, Thomas, gent, Nantmel, RAD. 1721, July 17. At N. or St. Harmon. Elizabeth Evans. B. 76/59.

BAXTER, Thomas, gent, Nantmel, RAD. 1722, May 7. At N. Llanfihangel or Llanyre. Anne Evans. B. 78/77

BAYNAM, William, Llandegla, RAD. 1738, Feb 13. At Ll. or Llanbister. Hannah Lewis. B. 42/41

Fig 2: Radnorshire Males, Extract from Marriage Bond Index, National Library of Wales^v

It was necessary to transfer the data from this Index into a relational database. As Townsend, Chappel and Struijvé have pointed out, 'the relational model is based on the premise that the database is formed of related [tables](#) whose composition takes the form of rows as individual items and columns as [fields](#) of information about those items.'^{vi} The model enables the user to access the data in different ways without having to reorganize the database tables. The system this writer employed was *Access*, part of the Microsoft Office suite. Transfer of the data was time-consuming and exacting. Firstly, it involved selecting from the Index only Radnorshire bonds for the dates of interest i.e. 1660-1725. Names of brides had to be re-linked with their prospective grooms as these had been separated for indexing purposes. This was achieved by using the proposed date of marriage as the identifying key. In most cases this was unique. In the ten cases of duplication, further inspection of the respective Index entry revealed the name of the intended spouse, thus facilitating the resolution of any remaining ambiguities. After reconciliation of the bonds, 220 pairs were identified in all. This number was considered great enough to illuminate overall trends in the movement of marriage partners within the county.

While the *NLW* Index significantly facilitated the conversion of the marriage bonds into related tables, nevertheless the present writer needed to design her own tables to suit her research purposes. She constructed two, one for brides, the other for grooms, containing the following fields: no. of entry, date of proposed marriage, first name, surname, age, parish, hundred, and finally 'notes.' Under 'notes', details of the proposed venue for the marriage were included. Figure 3, an

extract from the database report, illustrates how brides and grooms were matched with one another, according to the fields described above.

Queries run on the database yielded the following information. During the sixty-five year period examined, seventy-nine marriages of 'the middling sort' were scheduled to take place between the months of May and June with sixty-nine due to be celebrated between the months of October and November. Thus most Radnorshire weddings occurred when the yearly round of agricultural work permitted. Such ceremonies followed the old Celtic Calendar, when the two pivotal dates of the Welsh year were 'Calan Mai', the Calend of May, and 'Calan Gaeaf', the Calend of Winter. The year began on 1st November when farming was at a low ebb. Writing of a twentieth century community in Radnorshire's adjacent county of Montgomeryshire, Alwyn Rees said:

The seasonality of cultural activity is reflected in the social life of the community. Leisure and ready money mark out May and October-November as holiday periods...May and late October are the months of fairs in the neighbouring market towns. May-June and October-November are also the favourite months for weddings.^{vii}

Clearly some rural practices have not changed in three hundred years.

Of the 220 cases in the database constructed by this writer, twenty-four bridegrooms were described as gentlemen and fifty-five as yeomen, while no status was recorded for the rest. The majority of gentlemen lived in Clyro, near the English border, and in Nantmel, an upland parish of the hundred of Rhayader. The yeomen lived mainly in the west of the county, in the parishes of Llanyre, Llanbister, Nantmel and St Harmon. Seventy-three marriages, i.e. thirty-three per cent, were between couples from the same parish. The remainder married partners from adjoining parishes. The few cases where neither party was from the parish where

the marriage was scheduled to take place occurred when a particularly stylish venue for the wedding had been chosen, e. g. Christ College, Brecon, St Mary's or St. John the Evangelist, both the latter also in Brecon. In some cases, the marriage was solemnized in the groom's, not the bride's, parish. For example, Thomas Williams, gentleman of Colfa, and Margaret Williams of Bryngwyn were married in William's home church of Colfa on June 2nd 1683. Colfa was the parish church of several local gentry, as memorial tablets there testify.

Of the bonds examined, three brides came from parishes in Breconshire, four from Montgomeryshire and one from Herefordshire to marry Radnorshire men. In all cases, the out-of-county parish lay not far from the county boundary with Radnorshire. Joan Jones's parish was Mochdre, only 10.5 miles over the Montgomeryshire border from St Harmon, which was the home parish of her husband, David Morris. Mary Tanner came from Brampton, Herefordshire, only eight miles from Knighton, to marry Evan Davies of Llanfihangel Rhydeithon, south of Knighton. Interestingly, only two marriage licence applications, as opposed to bonds, were made by Radnorshire residents to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office between 1543 and 1869.^{viii} They were requested by members of the county's wealthiest residents, living at Clyro and Presteigne, near to the English border of the county.

Fig 3: Extract from Database Report - Radnorshire Couples Marriage Bonds

ID	Partner	Date	First Name	Surname	Parish	Hundred	Status	Notes
18	57	03 May 1690	Edward	Buffton	Llanddewi Ystrad	Knighton		at Diserth
57	18		Briget	Griffiths	Diserth	Colwyn	Full	?
19	49	15 November 1692	Griffin	Buften	Llanddewi Ystrad	Painscastle	?	at Llanbis/LI Rhyd
49	19		Jane	Evans	Nantmel	Rhaedr	Full	spinster at Llanbis/LLRhyd
22	147	12 June 1680	Alexander	Crowther	Cleiro	Painscastle	gent.	at ?
147	22		Anne	Morgan	Llansanffraid	Colwyn	Full	sp at ?
23	150	18 November 1684	Morgan	David	Nantmel	Rhaedr	?	at Nantmel
150	23		Eleanor	Morris	?	?	Full	sp at Nantmel
26	70	13 February 1696	Edward	Davies	Llanbadarn Fawr	Cefnlllys	yeoman	at ?
70	26		Rachel	Hodges	Cefnlllys	Cefnlllys	Full	sp ?
27	230	02 February 1682	Evan	Davies	Llanfihang Rhyd	Cefnlllys	?	at Ll. Rh.
230	27		Mary	Tanner	Brampton	HEF	Full	sp at Ll Rhyd
28	76	21 May 1688	Evan	Davies	Llanyre	Rhaedr	?	at St Mary's, Brecon
76	28		Joyce	Hughes	Lland. Ystrad.	Knighton	Full	sp at St Mary,Brec
29	28	02 June 1690	Evan	Davies	?	Rhaedr		at St Harmon
28	29		Elizabeth	Davies	St Harmon	Rhaedr	Full	sp at St Harmon

Radnorshire was one of the smallest counties in Wales, extending only twenty-nine miles from north to south and twenty-seven miles from east to west. However, the routes between parishes were frequently over hazardous mountain tracks. Eversley noted that differences in soil types and patterns of farming could also have a bearing upon the selection of suitable spouses, as each partner would be familiar with farming practices in his/her own area.^{ix} This writer's database analysis supports Eversley's observation. There were no early modern marriages of the middling sort between parishioners from St Harmon in Radnorshire's harsh north-west uplands and from Clyro, in the richer south-east.

Of the fifteen recorded remarriages of widows, five took place outside their home parish. Again the gentry opted for a fashionable church for, on 31st January 1693, Margaret Jones, widow, of Llowes, Radnorshire, married Thomas Watkin, gentleman, of Talgarth, Breconshire, in St Mary's Church, Brecon. Charity Price of Glascwm married Thomas Williams, yeoman, of Cregrina, in her neighbouring parish of Cregrina. On the other hand, Jane Willcock of Cefnlllys and Evan Lloyd, gentleman, also of Cefnlllys, near Llandrindod, were married in the parish of Gladestry near the English border.

Eversley's assertion, based on his analysis of parish registers, concerning the distances travelled by early modern migrants in search of a marriage partner has been corroborated by this writer's research. He concluded, 'had people habitually moved across county or regional borders a higher proportion of marriages between persons described as migrating from distant places should indicate this.'^x Analysis of

Radnorshire's early modern marriage bonds shows that 'only an insignificant fraction of parishioners migrated' more than a distance of fifteen miles in search of a marriage partner.

Cameron and Richardson have pointed out that, '...the internet has transformed the way in which historians organise their work'.^{xi} From this writer's home in Cardiff to the National Library in Aberystwyth is a distance of seventy-four miles. The return journey by road would normally have caused her few difficulties. However, given her health problems during the period of her research, it was a journey that was impossible for her to make. Without the electronic resources available to her from the National Library of Wales, she would have been unable to complete her work successfully within the time period allowed.^{xii}

Townsend, Chappell and Struijvé commented,

A significant proportion of historical databases created thus far have been drawn from broadly tabular sources... It is, however, possible to convert other highly structured, but non-tabular, sources into a tabular form whilst retaining the important aspects of the original data.^{xiii}

With the digitising of so many of its precious artefacts now taking place at the National Library of Wales, it is to be hoped that many other scholars will not only find even more innovative ways of using these newly accessible resources, but will also, by means of the World Wide Web, disseminate their findings to colleagues across the world.

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- ⁱ <http://isys.llgc.uk/isys/query/irla420/5/doc>. accessed 16 October 2008.
- ⁱⁱ V. Brodsky-Elliot, *Mobility and Marriage in pre-industrial England*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1976.
- ⁱⁱⁱ C. Pooley, J. Turnbull, *Migration and Mobility in Britain since the 18th Century* (London, 1998), 71.
- ^{iv} D.E.C. Eversley, 'Population history and local history,' in E.A. Wrigley, *An Introduction to English Historical Demography from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century* (London, 1966), 21.
- ^v <http://isys.llgc.uk/isys/query/irla420/5/doc>. accessed 16 October 2008.
- ^{vi} S. Townsend, C. Chappell, O. Struijvé, <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/history/creating/guides/digitising-history/index>.html, accessed 16 October 2008.
- ^{vii} A. W. Rees, *Life in the Welsh Countryside* (Cardiff, 1996), 47.
- ^{viii} Harleian Society, *Applications for Marriage Licences issued from the Faculty Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury at London 1543-1869* (London, 1889), vol. XXIV, 80, 160.
- ^{ix} D. E.C. Eversley, 22.
- ^x Ibid.
- ^{xi} S. Cameron, S. Richardson, *Using Computers in History*, (Basingstoke, 2005), 1.
- ^{xii} H. L. Yewlett, *Migration in early modern Radnorshire c1500-1700*, unpublished MSt thesis, University of Cambridge, 2008. (also deposited in NLW).
- ^{xiii} S. Townsend, C. Chappell, O. Struijvé, <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/history/creating/guides/digitising-history/index>.html, accessed 16 October 2008.