

## THE WELSH HERITAGE OF NEWFOUNDLAND: A MYSTERY

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[Published in NINNAU, the Welsh North American Newspaper, September-October 2019 issue.]

The Welsh heritage of Newfoundland remains a mystery even though it goes back to earliest days and is substantial.

While the Sir William Vaughan Trust's prime focus is on the initial 17<sup>th</sup> century Welsh colonization activities (particularly the Trepassey based Cambriol efforts of Sir William Vaughan), one is led inevitably to wondering about the present day descendants of those early settlers.

Tracing pre-1700, even pre-1800, marriages, births and deaths is a daunting task given that church and official records are rare from the period; ships' logs, naval records, diaries, letters and commercial transactions need discovery and analysis.

Moreover most "Welsh Newfoundlanders" seem to think of themselves simply as "Newfoundlanders", a mark perhaps of their ancient roots. But things are changing and the search for Welsh family roots via the internet is a growing area of interest. There is certainly lots of work to be done!

Welsh family names are prevalent throughout the St John's area phone book which covers roughly half of Newfoundland's some 500,000 residents.

In the immediate St John's area, we find such apparent Welsh family names as Bowen; Brace; Crewe; Davies; Davis; Evans; George; Gough; Griffiths; Hopkins; Howell; Hughes; Ing; James; Jenkins; Jones; Lewis; Llyod; Maddox; Morgan; Morris; Owens; Phillips; Powell; Price; Priddle; Prosser; Pye; Rees; Rice; Richards; Vaughan; Vey; Welsh; Welshman; Wrice. Not to mention numerous Edwards, Roberts and Williams which will take the patience of Job to untangle.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Newfoundland "English" heartland on the west side of Conception Bay about an hour's drive from St John's, the Welsh family names become relatively more prevalent (some 30 in a small population).

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the trading port of Bristol (just across the Bristol Channel from Cardiff) was a prime focus of Newfoundland trade. The "Bristol Hope" plantation of 1616 near Bay Roberts seems to explain those 85 Morgan families on its exchange; Bristolmen and the Welsh travelled together.

And Welsh family names also occur in significant numbers in fishing villages for hundreds of miles up along Newfoundland's northeast coast.

The Welsh and their descendants counted among them investors and residents in the Cupids Colony (1610); the 1<sup>st</sup> Governor of the Colony of Avalon (1620) and its constructors; prominent 19th century merchants; a pioneering railway engineer; a printer and publisher; early Methodist clergyman; a modern day judge, former provincial Minister of Fisheries; a university president; 70's social activist; musicians; actor and TV star, etc.

Yet there is no local St David's Association; no public St David's Day celebration except at the Sir William Vaughan Trust's AGM and annual soiree.

The following comment on the North America Wales Foundation website seems apropos the Newfoundland Welsh in a relative sea of English and Irish:

*“The Welsh influence has always been under-recognized in the USA and Canada. Their numbers were less than other migrant groups such as the Irish and Scots but also they were like chameleons, quickly blending into their new environment.”*

So to help puzzle out this mystery, I sat down over coffee with local singer Pamela Morgan.

Everyone in the Newfoundland music scene knows Pam Morgan, the soulful voice of breakthrough Newfoundland folk-rock band Figgy Duffy that nearly single-handedly spurred Newfoundland’s 1970’s cultural revolution. She’s the winner of numerous awards, rescuer of ancient Newfoundland songs, producer of original opera, and known internationally as a true to the bone artist. Check out her website <http://www.pamelamorgan.ca/> and you’ll see what I mean.

I asked her first how she picked her daughter’s name “Rhiannon”. Turns out her sister’s name is Ardyth and she knew from childhood that her family was of Welsh descent. Her grandfather Issac Morgan was from Coley’s Point, thus of one of the Bay Roberts Exchange’s 85 Morgans.

We discussed the Welsh in Newfoundland, when they first came, where they lived and where they spread; whether the well -known musical bent of Newfoundlanders might have in part Welsh roots. She smiled in approval when I mentioned that Newfoundland’s Shallaway Youth Choir won a First and a Second and the Children’s Choir of the World award at the 2015 Llangollen International Eisteddfod.

Admitting that her father “couldn’t hold a tune in a bucket”, she noted that in Newfoundland, music has deep community roots and is a way of life, and the same can be said of Wales and the Welsh in Newfoundland.

Time to dispense with the chameleon. Time to elucidate and celebrate North America’s oldest Welsh community.

Our GoFundMe campaign ([www.gofundme.com/WelshNewfoundland](http://www.gofundme.com/WelshNewfoundland)) described in the last issue of NINNAU deserves your support.