



Have you ever wondered how the place where you live got its name?

Risca / Rhisga (originally from either yr+is+cae or from the word "rhisgl")

(phonetic: r-hisk-car)

OS Grid Reference - ST 245 905

There are two conflicting explanations for this place name, which dates back to at least 1146 (sourced from *'Cartae et alia Munimenta de Glamorgan'*; G.T.Clark 1910). One derivation is from "yr is cae" meaning "the lower enclosure", referring to its location at the lower end of upland areas. The other suggested meaning is that the name comes from "rhisgl" meaning "tree bark", which may have been used in leathermaking and refers to the use of bark on the outside of log-built houses; there is no evidence of such structures ever being in the area however. Shown variously as *Risca* 1330, *Ryscha* 1535, *Riskey* 1559, *Risgaf* 1566, *Riseley* 1577, *Risga* 1623, *Rishka* 1695 and *Rhisga* in 1778.

Tŷ Sign (originally from tir+y+sygn or sugn)

(phonetic: tea-sign)

OS Grid Reference - ST 247 907

A curious example of what appears to be very literally a bilingual name with the first word in Welsh and the second in English. Recorded as *The Signe* in 1654, *Kaye nessa yr Signe* (field next to the sign) in 1685, *Tyr y Signe* 1760 and the current spelling appears in 1832 as *Ty-Sign*. The name may come from "tir" and an old Welsh word "sygn" (originally the Latin *signum* and then Old English *segn* or Old French *signe*) meaning a sign of the Zodiac or possibly it comes from the Welsh word "sugn", which means "suction" as there may have been very marshy or boggy land in the area.

Ochrwyth / Ochwith (ochr+chwith)

(phonetic: oh-ch-rr-wee-th)

OS Grid Reference - ST 234 888

The word "ochr" means side and "chwith", though normally meaning "left" (i.e. the opposite of "right") can also mean "wrong" in certain contexts. One explanation for the name is that the village, though near **Risca**, was in the parish of **Machen**, in other words the village was "on the wrong side" of the mountain from its parish church. Signage over the years has corrupted the name into **Ochrwyth**, as the assumption was that the derivation came from the word "chwythu" (to blow) and that the meaning was "windy hillside", which is not correct but the spelling is in common usage on signage and other written material by today. On maps, the village is shown as split into Upper Ochrwyth and Lower Ochrwyth.

Pontymister / Pont-y-meistr (pont+y+meistr or pont+y+mystwyr)

(phonetic: pont-uh-may-stir)

OS Grid Reference - ST 240 900

The settlement gets its name from the local bridge, recorded in 1624 as *Pont y Maister* and as *Maister Bridge* the following year. The name itself dates back even further as the farm in the area was recorded as *Maestyr* in 1600, *Maes Tire* in 1668 and as *Maister* c1700. A possible meaning is "the (iron) master's bridge", but another origin of the name goes back to a time when the former grange of Llantarnam Abbey was located there, near a water mill. This name even pre-dates the farm as records show the mill name *Mayster Kynfawr* from 1204 (*Kynfawr* is possibly the Welsh personal name Cynfor), *Mayst* (an abbreviated form of *Mayster*) in 1254 and *master myll* in 1581. The Welsh word "mystwyr" comes from the Latin "monasterium" and could be a reference to the Abbey.