

Llangwm: The Village Name



The first, probably erroneously, claimed mention of the village occurs as late as **1244**, in connection with the lease of grazing land in the Presellis by David de Rupe (David de la Roche), lord of **Landegunnie** and Maynclochauc, to the Abbott of Whitland¹. I have previously questioned this account², which appears, mistakenly, to identify a British Museum manuscript catalogue number (1244) for the date of a document written in **1303**. This document, written in Latin, in difficult-to-decipher medieval script, is a Grant by David de Rupe, Lord of “Landegunnie” and Maynclochauc, giving to the abbot and convent of Alba domus [Whitland] the right to pasture their cattle on David’s lands on Pressely for seven years from 1303. A second version³ from the de la Roch (de Rupe) family archives of the same 1303 document transcribes the name as **Landegame**: “David de Rupe Dominus de Landegame et Maynclochaut salutem in domino...”. A third transcript⁴, again of the same manuscript, by E. J. L. Scott (Assistant-Keeper of Manuscripts, British Museum) in 1885, has the name as **Landegumme**.

According to Llangwm historian, Grenville Thomas⁵, David de Rupe, now named as Lord of **Landegom** and Maynclochau, renewed the lease of Preselli grazing lands to the Abbot of Whitland in **1303**, though this “renewal” appears to refer to the same original document. Thus, different copies of the same Medieval Latin document from 1303 have given rise to four versions of the village name, **Landegunnie**, **Landegame**, **Landegumme** and **Landegom**.

The figures below are photographs of the original document held in the British Museum. Hand-written as it is in Medieval Latin using letter forms of the time, it is difficult for modern readers to decipher, and it seems quite plausible that the same manuscript has been erroneously copied by different copyists, only some of whom were familiar with the phonetic name of the village, giving rise to apparently several different names.

“Lande-”, is presumably an attempt by a Norman clerk to render the first syllable the name into a familiar French form. For the second syllable, “-gunnie”, may be an attempt at copying the original Medieval Latin script by someone who had no familiarity with the real name of the village. The other versions, “-game”, “-gumme” and “-gom”, might then suggest that these copyists of the original Latin were more familiar with the actual pronunciation of the village name at the time they made their copies.

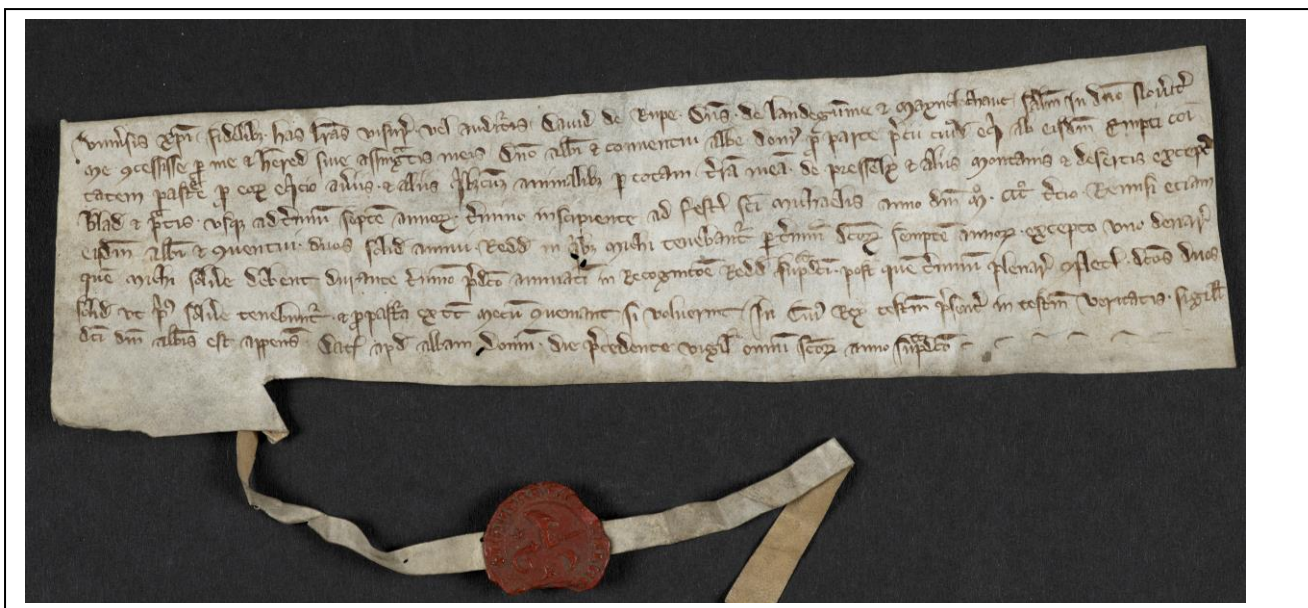
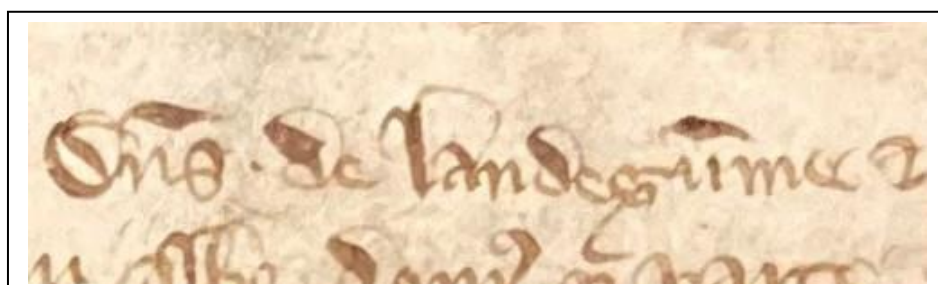


Image of the original manuscript in the British Museum in which David de Rupe gives to the abbot and convent of Alba domus [Whitland] the right to pasture their cattle on David's lands. The lower picture is an enlarged version of the first sentence in which the village name appears most likely to be Landegume.

Image provided by British Museum. © The British Library Board



Vniuersis Christi fidelibus has literas vis uris vel autlituris Daud de Rupe dominus de Landegumme et Maynclochanc salutem in Domino. Noueri tis me concessisse pro me et heredibus sine ass ingnatis meis domino abbati et conuentui albe domus pro parte precieiusdam eqni ab eisdem empti communitatem pasture pro eorum equicio averiis et aliis qilibuscunque animalibus per totam terrarum meam de Pressely et aliis montanis et desertis exeeptis blado et pratis usque ad terminum septem annorum, termino inscipiente ad festum sancti Michaelis anno domini millesimo tercentesimo tertio. Remi si eciam eidem abbati et conuentui duos solidos annuireditus in quibus michi tenebantur per terminum dictorum septem annorum, excepto vno denario quem michi soluere debebat durante termino predicto annuatim in recognitione redditus supra dicti, post quem terminum plenarie completum dictos duos solidos oportet prius soluere tenebuntur, et pro pastura ex tunc mecum conueniant si voluerint. In cuius rei testimonium presentibus in testimonium veritatis sigillum elicti domini abbatis est appesurn.

Datum apud Albam Domum die precedente vigiliam omnium sanctorum anno supra dicto.

The transcript of the Latin copy of the original document in the Roche family manuscript archives, from Joseph Hunter and J.M. Traherne³

Previous to 1303, in **1287**, David de Rupe's father, Gilbert of **Landigan**, had been involved in leasing a farm called Russell's lande to one Philip and his wife Alice³. Grenville Thomas⁴ identifies this farm as Rushland, so perhaps, Rushland is the name of a farm near Llangwm? Equally, since the de Rupe family held land all over Rhos, it may be part of another de Rupe holding. The next version of the name occurs as a reference to the church of **Landegom**, in records of the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*, in **1291**⁶. According to BG Charles, this version was sometimes transcribed as **Landegoin**, consistent with the difficulty in distinguishing "m" from "in" in medieval script.

This David died in 1324, and was succeeded by his eldest son, Adam. Adam's brother, also David, Adam's presumed heir to the Llangwm estate, reunited the Roch and Llangwm branches of the de la Roche family in 1315 when he married his cousin Johanna de la Roch. Their son, Robert, is mentioned in 1334 (Henry Owen, *Old Pembroke Families*, page 76)⁷. Accounts now differ; one mentions a Sir John de la Roche as their grandson, who died in 1376. But Sir John may instead have been the lord at Roch, holding it on behalf of Margaret Fleming, the rightful heiress, during her minority (i.e. she was a child and couldn't hold property). By this time, the family held extensive estates across Pembrokeshire (see Grenville Thomas⁴, page 15), including the manors and advowsons of **Landecombe**, as well as land in **Guildford**, part of the Burton parish⁸. Sir John's beneficiary, Thomas, grandson of David and Joanna, inherited his estate, including **Landegom** (1382).

According to different accounts, Thomas died in either 1413 (or, perhaps, 1440) without sons, but the estate passed through his daughters, who retained the rights to nominate the rector to the living of the parish for several further centuries. One of those rectors was John Don, who was mentioned as rector of **Landegon** in **1453**, while in **1489**, following John Don's resignation, according to the St Davids Episcopal Register, William Leya became rector of **Langome**. **Langome** gets a further mention in **1535** as a consequence of Henry VIII's survey of ecclesiastical institutions in England and Wales in preparation for his offensive against the monasteries, the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. It remains **Langome** in **1539**, a parish of Haverfordwest, under the first *Act of Union*, but under the second *Act of Union*, **1543**, it is not part of the new County of Haverfordwest, but reverts to being part of the Hundred of Roose, in the parliamentary constituency of Pembroke Boroughs.

According to George Owen, in his "*The description of Penbrokeshire*" (1603), (note the spelling of the county name) the village name derives from the Norse *Lang Heimr*, meaning the long village, which developed into **Langheim**. Grenville Thomas⁴ points out that, quite apart from the total lack of evidence of any Norse settlements (as opposed to visits) in Pembrokeshire, at the time of Norse activity around the coast and in the estuary, if Llangwm existed at all, it would have been a few scattered dwellings, certainly not a long village. Grenville Thomas calculates a maximum of perhaps 15 dwellings in the entire parish (including the area now occupied by Hook) as late as 1563. Indeed, from the Ordnance Survey maps, the development of Llangwm as a long village did not begin until the nineteenth century³.

The evolution of today's name

Detail from Christopher Saxton's map of Pembrokeshire, 1578, showing spelling as Llangwm.





*Detail from Great Britain's Coasting
Pilot by Capt Greenville Collins (ca 1693)*

By **1750**, the spelling seems to have settled down to **Llangwm**. Thus, the Welsh Methodist leader, Howell Harris, described his visit to Llangwm, including how he, in passing Llangwm Ferry “had a view of the riches of the Lord, the majesty, glory, etc....” Nevertheless, eccentric spellings continued. The alms house established to help the poor (of which there were many) in the village in **1768** was recorded in the same document both as being in the parish of **Llanghwm** and that of **Langhwm**. But in the same year, the rector, James Higgon, writing in the Register of Baptisms and Burials of the parish uses “**Llangwm**, alias **Llangome**”. And in the dedication of the village church to St Jerome, in **1786**, the spelling is **Llangwm**. It remains **Llangwm** in Lewis' Topographical Dictionary of Wales (**1833**).

Then, for a few years, the version **Langum** reappears, after a more than a century's absence, in both the **1820** and **1863** 1:50000 Ordnance Survey maps, and, most famously, in the engraving on the old school (**1870**). Curiously, though, in an **1868** letter to the Privy Council, in which he is concerned with raising money for building the very same school, the rector, Thomas Williams, refers to the village as **Llangwm**. The **1847 Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales** (the infamous virulently anti-Welsh “Blue Books”), use both the spellings Langwm and Llangwm.

The **1901-1912** 1:50000 edition of the Ordnance Survey remains with **Langum**, but by **1906** the Ordnance Survey had revised their spelling to **Llangwm**, and that is how the name has remained over the past century, having first appeared in that form as early as 1489, and preceding the spelling Langum (1700) by over two centuries.

Llangwm 1489, 1613, 1699, 1750, 1768, 1786, 1833, 1868, 1906 ...

Langum 1700, 1861, 1863, 1870...

Llangum 1578, 1611, 1670, 1715

Langum or

Llangwm?

Richard Howells, who served as a reporter and news editor on the *Western Telegraph* newspaper for 15 years, writes that the popularity of the Langum spelling arose because the owner and editor of that newspaper, John Thomas (1880-1943), from Hook, who had attended Llangwm school, decreed that the spelling on the school, Langum, should be adopted for all articles in that paper ¹².

The Other Llangwms

A sometimes confusing aspect of any attempt to establish the history of the village's name is the existence of two other villages in Wales with the same name, one in the former Denbighshire (now Conwy), the other in Monmouthshire (now Gwent). The first mention of the Conwy village that I have found is a reference to a battle fought at Lhangwm, in about 712, in which Edwal, King of Gwynedd, son of St. Cadwalader Fendigaid, King of Gwynedd (630-664)¹³. Later, the village appears again as the place of a battle in 993 *"a battle took place between the sons of Meurug and Maredudd near Llangwm, and the sons of Meurug conquered, and there Tewdwr son of Einon was slain"*¹⁴. The Clwyd Powys Archaeological Trust Historic Settlement Survey – eastern Conwy – 2014 refers to this same Llangwm⁹. Described as simply meaning “ ‘the church in the valley’, according to this document, the first documented appearance of this Llangwm was in the 1291 Taxation as Landegoin. Landegumme was noted in 1303, Landecombe in 1376, Llangome in 1539 and finally Llangwm at end of the 16th century”. The close similarity with the evolution of Pembrokeshire Llangwm's name could, of course, simply reflect the development of spelling customs in Wales over the years. Alternatively, the two villages may have been easily confused in the documentation and the North Wales Llangwm has mistakenly taken its history from the Pembrokeshire documentation.

Nevertheless, the existence of two other villages in Wales with the same name, Llangwm, provides an instructive parallel in the development of the name. In the late 16th century, the map maker, Christopher Saxton, created a series of maps of the UK counties. We have already seen that he names the Pembrokeshire village “Llangum”. The village in Monmouthshire carries the name “Llangomes”, while our Denbighshire namesake is clearly named “Llangwm”. So why were Denbighshire's and Monmouthshire's Llangwm spelled differently from our Llangwm in maps from the same mapmaker?

A potential explanation comes from the evolution of the Welsh spelling. In old Welsh, which was the version in use until about the twelfth century, the use of the double L (*ll*) to represent the “lateral fricative” sound had not yet been adopted and the Latin L continued in use. (Indeed, many words, like “calon”, spelled in modern Welsh with a single l, were previously written “callon”). Instead, the modern Welsh ll letter was sometimes written as lh (see spelling of the Conwy village name above). The modern ll sound was also sometimes indicated by a “blackletter L”, an L with a loop like a P. Further, the Latin letter *u* was used to represent diverse sounds in Welsh that became on the one side *u*, or *w* and, on the other, *f* and *v* respectively, by the mediaeval period. In discussing whether the name “Llangwm” is simply a modern day version of an ancient Welsh name, the other two Llangwm villages in Wales are also instructive. Both have been called “Langum” in the past. Thus, Llangwm, Clwyd, is referred to in the foundation charter of Oswestry Hospital in 1210-1215 as 'Langum'. In a variation, the Norwich Taxation of 1254 has the church there, 'Ecc'a de Langun' at a value of £2, while 'Ecclia de Llagwm' is recorded in 1291 at £7 13s 4d. Similarly, Llangwm, Gwent has also been referred to in legal documents as Langum. Thus, “messuages, lands, tenements and hereditaments” in Langum, among other places, were seized to settle debts of £26.10s on 6th October, 1693, and £1086.10s on 6th April, 1694. Further reference to sale of lands, and inheritance in Langum are recorded in 1699 and 1711, respectively¹⁵.

In Welsh-speaking areas such as the old Denbighshire, the transition from old- to middle- to modern Welsh would have occurred in step with the rest of Welsh-speaking Wales. In particular, the transition from middle- to modern Welsh was strongly influenced by the translation of the Bible into Welsh (William Morgan, 1588), standardising accepted spelling, much as the King James Bible (1611) stabilised English spelling. But in primarily English-speaking communities (such as South Pembrokeshire) there would have been no such impetus to modernise and standardise old Welsh spellings, allowing older variations in spelling to perpetuate. The adoption of the Ll form in the spelling of our village as early as 1489 (admittedly in a document from St David's, a Welsh speaking area) is thus remarkable for an village in south Pembrokeshire in which the Welsh language is commonly held to have been extinguished.

Further, apart from a single occurrence in 1700 (when both Langum and Llangwm were used in the same document), the spelling Langum does not appear until the end of the nineteenth century, a time

when use of the Welsh language was being actively suppressed in Welsh schools. While such suppression would have been redundant in Llangwm, is the odd spelling a local reflection of events in Welsh-speaking areas not too far away?

So, it seems quite likely that the village name has always been some version of Llangwm/Langum/Landgumme, perhaps derived from old Welsh meaning a settled piece of land, which came to mean particularly a religious enclosure (llan) in the valley (cwm). Although over the years various forms in Welsh, or English, or even Norman French have been used, as spelling became standardised, both in Welsh and English, the name that has settled down most frequently is the current version, Llangwm, pronounced in the village and locally as Lan-gum.

Notes

1. British Museum MSS Relating to Wales
https://archive.org/stream/p3catalogueofman04brituoft/p3catalogueofman04brituoft_djvu.txt. *Journal Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, xli, 168
2. Dai Stephens, “Medieval Llangwm in Context”. *Pembrokeshire: Journal of the Pembrokeshire Historical Society*, 2019. <http://www.pembrokeshirehistoricalsociety.co.uk/medieval-llangwm-in-context/>
3. Joseph Hunter and J.M.Traherne “Copies of Original Charters of the family of de la Roche of Pembrokeshire” *Archaeologia Cambrensis, New Series*, No.XII, October 1852, pages 258- 271
4. E. J. L. Scott (Assistant-Keeper of MSS, British Museum) (1885) “Some Original Documents Relating to the South Part of Pembrokeshire”, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association: First Series*, 41:2, 153-175, DOI: 10.1080/00681288.1885.11887742
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00681288.1885.11887742>
5. W. Grenville Thomas. “Llangwm through the Ages” Haverfordwest, 1991
6. Dugdale, Monasticon, iv, 503 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae auctivitate* p. Micholai IV, circa AD1291, ed T Astley, *Rec Comm* (1882) 272 – 277
7. Henry Owen, “Old Pembroke Families”, page 76;
<https://archive.org/stream/oldpembrokefamil00owen#page/92/mode/2up>
8. Dai Stephens. “Vado Gilberti: Early History of Guilford”. <https://www.llangwm-pembrokeshire.org.uk/files/bygonedays/Vado%20Gilberti.pdf>
9. <http://www.cpat.org.uk/ycom/conwy/llangwm.pdf>
10. George Owen of Henllys, “The Description of Pembrokeshire”, Gomer Press, 1994
11. *Freedom after Ejection. A Review (1690–1692) of Presbyterian and Congregational Nonconformity in England and Wales*. Page 332. See also: Dai Stephens and Barry Childs “A History of Schooling in Llangwm, Pembrokeshire”, 2022.
12. Richard Howells, personal communication. See also article from Hook History Society
<https://www.hookhistorysociety.org.uk/hook-history-articles/people-of-hook.html>
13. *The History of Wales*, author Caradoc of Llancarvan (translated Dr. Powell; revised by Richard Llwyd, Shrewsbury, 1832).
14. *Brut y Tywysogion; or The Chronicle of the Prince.s* Edited and translated by John Williams ab Ithel, 2012
15. <http://www.gwentarchives.gov.uk>.