

## Astronomy in the Welsh language

Many cultures derived their star lore before the written word, and in many instances civilisations with similar pantheons transliterated myths and legends; the Greeks and Romans being a case in point. There is evidence that the Celtic Britons likewise had a very ancient oral tradition maintained by ancient druids up to the time when Welsh evolved. By about the third or second century BCE, more than seven hundred years before such folklore became literature, some fables had linked hero worship and gods with the sky.

The Roman occupation of Britain provided an opportunity for classical myths to mingle with traditional fables, and British history is littered with similar examples from other invading cultures. It is likely, in Wales, that traditional stories may well have been transcribed as early as the eleventh century which eventually culminated in the eighteenth century interpretations; the Mabinogion folk tales being one of the most well-known. It is known that unnecessary embellishments were concocted. Care has to be taken, therefore, for some of the latter sources have proved to be spurious. Fake news is not new. Hopefully the following examples of Welsh astronomy have some integrity.

### Constellations

Modern constellations are bounded regions of the sky designated by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) in 1930. Although originally based on classical myths and legends, additions were made in the last half of the second millennium as the southern hemisphere was explored and gaps between northern hemisphere constellations were filled in. Standard Latinised constellation names are used internationally, however, some examples with Celtic and Welsh traditions can still be found in Wales.

**Andromeda** (pronounced an draw' meh duh) - The "Chained Maiden", A legendary beautiful Princess of Æthiopia.

#### In Welsh

Andromeda (*nf*), the standard IAU name, is used.

Blodeuwedd (*nf*), a woman, created from flowers, who with her lover slayed her husband Llew Llaw Gyffes, and was subsequently transported to the heavens.

Rhiannon (*nf*), is depicted in the Mabinogion as a horse goddess who rode a magnificent and beautiful white horse with which she used to impress her future husband. It appears Rhiannon, has a Proto-Celtic origin which means "Great Queen".

**Aquila** (pronounced uh-QUILL-uh) - The "Eagle".

#### In Welsh

Gwalchmai, which portrayed the 'Hawk of May' the spirit of Llew Llaw Gyffes in death.

**Boötes** (pronounced bo-OH-teez) - The "Herdsman" or "Ploughman".

#### In Welsh

Boötes, the IAU name, is used.

Hu Gadarn (*nm*), a Welsh folk hero who was the first to use oxen to pull a plough, gave his name to this constellation.

**Cancer** (Pronounced CAN-ser) - The "Crab".

#### In Welsh

Y Cranc (*nm*) literally 'the Crab'. Old Welsh connections to this constellation are difficult to establish and the transliterated IAU name, is used in Welsh.

**Canes Venatici** (Pronounced CANE-eez ve-NAT-iss-eye) - The "Hunting Dogs".

#### In Welsh

Venatici Ffyn literally means 'Canes Venatici', the IAU name in Welsh.

**Canis Major** (Pronounced CAN-iss MAY-ger) - The "Great Dog".

#### In Welsh

Y Ci Mawr (*nm*), literally 'the Big Dog', the transliterated IAU name in Welsh.

**Canis Minor** (Pronounced CAN-iss CAN-iss MY-ner) - The "Lesser Dog".

#### In Welsh

Y Ci Bach (*nm*), literally 'the little Dog', the transliterated IAU name in Welsh.

Y Ci Bychen (*nm*), literally 'the Puppy', the transliterated name in Welsh for what was once, in ancient times, named the "Puppy".

**Capricornus** (Pronounced CAN-iss MAY-ger) - The "Sea Goat".

#### In Welsh

Yr Afr (*nm*), literally 'the Goat', the transliterated IAU name in Welsh

Morvugh, 'sea Cow'.

**Cassiopeia** (pronounced kass ee oh pee' uh) – The “Seated Queen”, the legendary Queen of Æthiopia.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Llys Dôn. literally 'Don's Court', the home of the Welsh sky-goddess, Dôn. Don is the Welsh name of the Celtic goddess Donu. From the Mabinogi folk tales.
- 2) Cadair Dôn. literally 'Don's Chair', the chair of the Welsh sky-goddess, Dôn.
- 3) Cadair Y Foneddige, 'The Ladies Chair'.

**Centaurus** (pronounced s sen-TOR-us) - The “Centaur”.

Y Dynfarch (*nm*), literally 'the Centaur', the transliterated IAU name in Welsh.

Y Saethydd (*nm*). literally 'the Archer', is a Welsh mistranslation. This Centaur does not have a bow and is not 'the Archer'. Sagittarius is the centaur with a bow, and is correctly called y Saethydd 'the Archer'.

**Cepheus** (pronounced see' fee us) - The “King”, the legendary King of Æthiopia.

**In Welsh**

Seffews (*nm*). The IAU name as used with Welsh spelling.

**Cetus** (pronounced see' tus) - The “Sea Monster” which was turned into stone by Perseus.

**In Welsh**

Y Pwca (*nm*). A creature, possibly a shape-shifting imp with Celtic origins.

**Coma Berenices** (Pronounced COE-muh BER-uh-NICE-eez) - “Bernice's Hair”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) The IAU designation, Coma Berenices is used. Coma Berenices is the only constellation named after an historic individual, Berenice II, the wife of Ptolemy III, ruler of Egypt in the third century BCE.
- 2) Nad y Forwyn (*nf*), 'Nad the Maiden'.

**Corona Borealis**

(pronounced kor oh' nuh boar ee al' iss) - The “Northern Crown”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Coron y Gogledd, literally the 'North Crown'.
- 2) Caer Arianrhod was the mythical 'Castle of Arianrhod', where dead, lost souls awaited their fate, from the Mabinogi folk tales.
- 3) Caer Arianrhod was the mythical 'Castle of the Silver Circle' or the 'Palace of Arianrhod', from the Mabinogi folk tales.
- 4) Yr Orsedd Wen, literally 'The White Throne'.

**Cygnus** (Pronounced sig' nus) - The “Swan”.

**In Welsh**

Yr Alarch (*nm*), literally 'The Swan'.

**Draco** (Pronounced dray' co) - The “Dragon”.

**In Welsh**

Draco – named 'Dewi', (David in English) is the centre of ancient Welsh myths explaining the origins of the Red Dragon as the national emblem.

**Gemini** (pronounced gem' in eye) - The “Twins”.

**In Welsh**

Yr Efeilliaid (*npl*), literally 'The Twins'.

**Hercules** (Pronounced HER-kyuh-leez) – after “Hercules”, the famous mythological hero.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Ercwlff (*nm*). Of Welsh origin, literally a man's name meaning 'Hera's Glory', 'Glory of Hera' or 'Great Hera', which is also the meaning of the name Hercules.
- 2) Idris Gwar (*nm*), 'Idris the Giant'.
- 3) Idris (*nm*), who was one of four Welsh giants.

**Leo** (pronounced lee' owe) - The “Lion”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Y Llew (*nm*), literally 'The Lion'.
- 2) Twrch Trwyth, a Welsh mythical wild boar which may have an association with this constellation as may King Arthur.

**Lyra** (pronounced LYE-ruh) - The “Lyre”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Telyn (*nf*), literally ‘Lyre’ or ‘Harp’.
  - 2) Telyn Arthur, literally ‘Arthur’s Lyre’ or ‘Harp’, from the Mabinogi folk tales.
  - 3) Telyn Idris, literally ‘Idris’s Lyre’ or ‘Idris’s Harp’.
- It is also known as King ‘David’s Lyre’ or ‘Harp’, and ‘The Welsh Harp’.

**Ophiuchus** (Pronounced OAF-ee-YOO-kus in English and Welsh) - The “Serpent Bearer”.

**In Welsh**

Rhiain Non (*nf*), literally means ‘Non of the stream’. The Welsh origin of this constellation’s name is that Non is, in Welsh Christian tradition, the 6th century CE mother of Dewi Sant, the patron saint of Wales. She herself became a saint.

**Orion** (Pronounced oh-RYE-un) - The “Hunter”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Orion (*nm*). The IAU name as used in Welsh.
- 2) Y Llatheidan, Literally ‘The Yard’.

**Pegasus** (pronounced peg’ ah sus) - The “Winged Horse”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Pegasws (*nm*). The IAU name as used in Welsh.
- 2) Adeinfarch yr Awen, the winged horse on which Bellerophon flew.
- 3) Yr Adeinfarch ‘the winged horse’.
- 4) Ceffyl Dwr, The white ‘Water Horse’ ridden by the sea-god Llyr. ‘Rhiannon’s Mount’. This is the magnificent and beautiful white horse Rhiannon rode and used to impress her future husband, Llew.

**Perseus** (pronounced per’ see us) – The “Hero” of mythical fame.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Perseus (*nm*). The IAU name as used in Welsh.
- 2) Llew Llaw Gyffes (*nm*), literally the ‘sure handed fair one’.

**Sagittarius** (pronounced SAJ-ih-TARE-ee-us) - ‘the Archer’, Chiron, the centaur with a bow.

Y Saethydd (*nm*). literally ‘the Archer’, the transliterated IAU name in Welsh

**Scorpius** (pronounced skor’ pee us) - The “Scorpion”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Y Sgorpion (*nm*), literally ‘the Scorpion’, the IAU name as used in Welsh is not a traditional Celtic creature.
- 2) Y Addanc. The aquatic monster that attacked people who entered its lake, and was itself killed and placed in the sky, is an independent welsh myth.

**Taurus** (Pronounced TOR-us) - The “Bull”.

**In Welsh**

Y Tarw (*nm*), literally ‘the Bull’, the IAU name as used in Welsh

**Triangulum** (pronounced try-ANG-gyuh-lum) - The “Triangle”.

**In Welsh**

Y Tryfel, literally ‘The Triangle’. The IAU name as used in Welsh.  
Y Triongl, literally ‘The Triangle’. An alternative Welsh name for triangle, the IAU name.

**Ursa Major** (pronounced er’ suh may’ jor) - The “Great Bear”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Arth Fawr *nf*, literally ‘Great Bear’.
- 2) Arth Fwyaf, literally the ‘Greater Bear’.

**Ursa Minor** (pronounced er’ sa my’ nor) - The “Little Bear”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Arth Fach *nf*, literally ‘Little Bear’.
- 2) Arth Leiaf, literally the ‘Lesser Bear’.
- 3) Yr Haeddel Fach, literally ‘The Little Plough Handle’.

**Virgo** (pronounced ver’ go) - The “Maiden”.

**In Welsh**

- 1) Tradition has it associated with ‘the Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach’.
- 2) Y Forwyn (*nf*), literally ‘the Virgin’.

## The Plane of our Galaxy (Y Galaxy)

## The Milky Way

### In Welsh

- 1) Y Llwybr Llaethog (*nm*), literally 'The Milky Way'. The IAU name as used in Welsh.
- 2) Y Ffordd Llaethog (*nf*), literally 'The Milky Way'.
- 3) Y Ffordd Wen, literally 'The white Way'.
- 4) Bwa'r Gwynt, literally 'Arch of the Wind'.
- 5) Heol Y Gwynt, literally 'Road of the Wind'.
- 6) Llwybr Y Gwynt, Literally 'Path of the Wind'.
- 7) Llwybr Caer Gwydion, literally the 'path to the Castle of Gwydion'.
- 8) Caer Gwydion, literally 'Gwydion's Fort'.

The mythical Gwydion ab Don, son of the mother and sky goddess Dôn, was a spirit with knowledge of astronomy who was said to live in the starry regions. The tracks left in the sky by Gwydion were manifest as the Milky Way.

## Asterisms

### Orion's Belt

- 1) Llathen Fair, literally 'Mary's Yardstick'.
- 2) Llathen Teiliwr, literally 'the Taylor's Yardstick'.
- 3) Y Groes Fendigaid, literally 'The Blessed Cross'.
- 4) Y Tri Brenin, literally 'The Three Kings'.

### The Plough

The asterism found in the constellation of Ursa Major (the Great Bear), which is famously used to find the pole star.

### In Welsh

- 1) Jac a'i Wagen, literally 'Jack and his Wagon'.
- 2) Yr Aradr, literally 'The Plough' as spoken today. The IAU name as used in Welsh.
- 3) Y Sosban (*nf*), literally the 'Saucepan'.
- 4) Yr Haeddel Fawr, literally 'The Great Plough Handle'.
- 5) Saith Seren Y Gogledd, literally 'The Seven Stars of the North'.

**The Pleiades** (pronounced ply' uh deez) - The "Seven Sisters". The Pleiades are an example of an open cluster.

### In Welsh

Y Saith Seren Siriol, literally 'The Seven Bright Stars', some say cheerful stars.  
Y Saith Chwaer, literally 'The Seven Sisters', revealing its classical origins.

**The Pointers** - the two stars at the end of the saucepan, Merak and Dubhe, which point towards the pole star, Polaris.

### In Welsh

Y Cyfeiryddion.

### The Summer Triangle

### In Welsh

Y Triongl Haf, a modern asterism, literally 'The Summer Triangle'. The three stars Vega, Altair and Deneb form the triangle.

## Stars (Sêr)

Aldebaran	Llygad <i>nm</i> . found in the constellation of
Arcturus	Arctwrws <i>nm</i> .
Canopus	Canopws <i>nm</i> .
Polaris	Seren y Pegwn <i>n</i> . 'The Star of the North'. Seren Y Gogledd – 'The North Star'. Seren Y Morwyr – 'The Sailors' Star'.
Sirius	Siriws <i>nm</i> , Cian <i>nm</i> , Seren y Ci <i>nm</i> . literally the 'dogstar'.
Spica	Tywysen <i>nf</i> .
Vega	Fega ( <i>nf</i> ), the IAU name as used in Welsh.

## Planets (Planedau)

The Welsh equivalent names of the classical Greco-Roman gods which applied to the planets.

English	Mythical Being	The Planet
Mercury	Mercher <i>nm</i> .	y blaned Mercher

Venus	Fenws <i>nf</i> , Gwener <i>nf</i> .	y blaned Gwener
Earth (the)	Y Ddaear <i>nf</i> .	y blaned Ddaear
Mars	Mawrth <i>nm</i> .	y blaned Mawrth
Jupiter	Iau <i>nm</i> .	y blaned Iau
Saturn	Sadwrn <i>nm</i> .	y blaned Sadwrn
Uranus	Wranws <i>nm</i> , Wranos <i>nm</i> .	y blaned Uranus
Neptune	Neifion <i>nm</i> .	y blaned Neifion