

THE WELSH WORDS

Sikes glosses a term once and then uses it for a hundred pages. This is the card to keep beside the book. The pronunciations are approximate and English-based; they are meant to let you say the word, not to satisfy a Welsh speaker.

Word	Say	What it means
tylwyth teg	TUL-with teg	“the fair family” — tylwyth, family or kindred, and teg, fair or beautiful. The ordinary Welsh name for the fairies and the one that covers everything Sikes divides into five classes. The politeness is the point: you call them fair because you would rather not call them anything accurate. Sikes treats it as one class among his five. It is the umbrella over all of them, and the commonest thing a Welsh person of 1880 would have said.
bendith y mamau	BEN-dith uh MAM-eye	The mothers’ blessing, a Glamorgan euphemism for the same beings — and a second instance of the same instinct. A name that flatters is a name that is safe to say out loud.
ellyll	ETH-ith (the ll is the breathed one)	an elf or goblin; plural ellyllon. Sikes makes these his first class. The word also carries a sense of a shade or spectre, which is why the boundary between his fairies and his ghosts keeps failing.
ellylldan	eth-ITH-dan	ellyll + tân, fire: the elf-fire, the will-o’-the-wisp that leads travellers into bogs. One of the tidiest compounds in the book.
coblyn	COB-lin, plural cob-LIN-eye	a knocker or mine spirit; plural coblynau. Heard rather than seen, striking in the rock ahead of the workings. Whether the English goblin is related is an old question and not a settled one. They knock where the ore is. The belief travelled with Welsh miners to the American coalfields, which Sikes — an American consul in a coal port — does not mention.
bwbach	BOO-bach (ch as in loch)	a household spirit; plural bwbachod. Does the work if fed and offended if thanked or paid — the same bargain as the English brownie.
pwca	POOK-a	the Welsh puck: a mischievous spirit that misleads travellers, sometimes carrying a light. Sikes argues at length that Shakespeare’s Puck comes from here. It is an attractive claim, an old one, and it has never been established.
gwyll	GOO-ith	gloom, dusk, darkness; plural gwyllion, used of the mountain fairies. The word for the creature and the word for the failing light are the same, which tells you when you were expected to meet one.
Annwn	AN-oon	also Annwfn. The Welsh otherworld — not hell, though later usage pulled it that way, but another country, entered through a lake, a mound or a mist. Its king in the Mabinogi is Arawn. In the medieval tales it is a country with a king and a court, entered by accident rather than by dying. The later drift towards meaning hell is a Christian overlay, and the folk material in this book sits on the older side of it.
gwraig annwn	GWRIGHT AN-oon, plural gwra-GEDD (dd as th in this)	Woman of Annwn; plural gwragedd annwn. The lake maidens of Book I chapter III, who marry mortals on conditions and leave when the conditions are broken.
cwn Annwn	koon AN-oon	The hounds of Annwn, the otherworld pack, heard in the air before a death. Their cry is said to be loudest when they are furthest away, which is the kind of detail that makes a belief hard to argue with.

Word	Say	What it means
canwyll corff	CAN-with corff	“corpse candle” — canwyll, candle, and corff, body. A light seen moving along the road a coffin will take. Its size is read: a small flame for a child, a large one for an adult. Sikes spells it canwyll corph, and that spelling is kept in his text. Sikes writes canwyll corph; the modern spelling is corff. His form is kept in his text.
cyhyraeth	cul-HUH-raith	a cry or groaning heard before a death, sometimes at a river-mouth or a cross-roads. The etymology is disputed and this edition does not pretend otherwise; what is certain is that the word names a sound and not a shape. Sikes spells it as he found it. The word names a sound, which is what distinguishes it from the apparition it is often confused with.
gwrach y rhibyn	GOO-rach uh HRIB-in	the hag of the death-warning: she comes at night, may be met at a ford, and calls the name of the one who will die. Gwrach is a hag or witch; the second element is disputed and the confident derivations you will meet are guesses.
tolaeth	TOL-aith	the sound of an event before the event — a funeral heard, hammering heard before a coffin is made, footsteps on a stair that is empty. Also found as toili for the phantom funeral itself.
plentyn newid	PLEN-tin NEW-id	Changed child — the changeling. Plentyn, child; newid, to change. Sikes writes it plentyn-newid.
gwahoddwr	gwa-HOTH-oor	the bidder: the man who goes from house to house with a staff to invite a wedding and to collect the promises of contribution. From gwahodd, to invite. He carried a decorated staff, learned a formal verse invitation, and was paid for the office. The plate in Book III is the best likeness of him anywhere.
gwylnos	GWIL-nos	the wake-night: gŵyl, a vigil or festival, and nos, night. The night before a burial.
eisteddfod	ay-STEDH-vod	literally a session or sitting, from eistedd, to sit. The competitive assembly of poetry and music. Sikes attends one and describes it as a curiosity; it was, and is, the central institution of Welsh literary life. Plural eisteddfodau. The institution was in the middle of a nineteenth-century revival when Sikes attended one, and its ceremonial owes a great deal to Iolo Morganwg’s inventions.
cwm	koom	a valley, especially a steep-sided hollow. Cwm Llan, in the fairy-money chapter, is one.
llyn	thin (with the breathed ll)	a lake. Llyn Barfog, the bearded lake, is where the elfin cow comes from.
ffynnon	FUH-non	a well or spring. The first element of half the place-names in Book IV.
cromlech	—	the Welsh term, used throughout, for a megalithic chambered tomb — the stone table under which Sikes’s fairies hold their frolic.
hiraeth	HEER-aith	the untranslatable one: a longing for a place or a time, with grief in it. Not a word Sikes uses, and the missing term in most of his chapters on the otherworld. Included because it is the word this book most needed and never used. A great deal of what Sikes files under superstition is people talking about loss.

Word	Say	What it means
Gwyn ap Nudd	—	in Welsh tradition a lord of Annwn and leader of its hunt; the sovereign of the fairies, and Sikes does name him — in the argument to Book I chapter I, in the legend of St Collen, and in the passage that calls him ruler over the goblin tribe in general. What Sikes does not do is connect him to the medieval literature he comes from, which is a small instance of the book's larger habit: the folk material is collected and the literary tradition that would explain it is left on the shelf.
Dyn hysbys	—	the “knowing man”, the cunning man or wizard consulted about theft, illness and bewitchment. He appears repeatedly in Book II under English names.

The letters that catch people out. W and y are vowels — cwm is roughly koom, bwbach is boo-bach. Dd is the th of this; f is a v and ff is an f; ll has no English equivalent and a breathy thl will do. The stress is almost always on the last syllable but one.

From British Goblins by Wirt Sikes, Valice Classics 16. Free at valicepress.com/companion/british-goblins