

Andrej Rant

SURNAMES IN SWANSEA AREA (WALES, GREAT BRITAIN) AND IN SLOVENIA

Presented at the *Fourth International Topical Conference ANCIENT INHABITANTS OF EUROPE*, Ljubljana, June 9th and 10th, 2006

Abstract

In the first millennium BC, British islands were populated also with Veneti in England and Wales, as well as with Karni in Cornwall and in Scotland. Beside language remainders in English, Gaelic, and Welsh, and alongside numerous paleoethnic traces, personal names that have their origin in prehistory as well as surnames derived from them are still preserved till to this day. Few names and surnames show their evidence of Venetic origin. A number of them can be identified comparing them with analogous or equal surnames that are conserved in the Alps. Some of these names are very old and they can be explained only with the help of the etymological explanation based on Slovenian language.

The hypothesis that both Karni and Veneti populated the British Isles demands new evidence. Since some names and more so surnames are of great age, the probability, according to the theory of continuity, exists, that their descendants live today and further that they bear prehistoric surnames. Therefore I decided to examine a randomly selected phone book from the countryside, in order to see how many related surnames familiar in Britain and Slovenia exist. In few cases only I include the etymological explanation, since this largely remains the task for the future exhaustive research.

In the prehistoric era a name already denoted a human being, an individual. Individuals were most likely identified by their noticeable characteristics and marks. Through the millennia surnames, denoting membership to a family or lineage, developed from the names. The Romans, when naming individuals, used a personal name (*nomen*), family name (*cognomen*) and lineage name (*nomen gentilis*).

With the advent of Christianity, godchild received one name during baptism; the name given was a name of a saint, who in turn then became the child's patron. In written sources in Slovenia, surnames appear from late 13th to 16th century. They were formed in various ways, most often denoting:

- Characteristics of an individual: Velikonja (*someone large*), Mali (*little*), Debeljak (*obese*), Pleško (*bold*);
- Profession: Kovač (*smith*), Kmet (*peasant*), Kuhar (*cook*), Mlinar (*miller*);
- Place of residence: Bregar (*from the river bank*), Dolenc (*from a valley*), Potočnik (*from a brook*), Pustotnik (*from wilderness*).

Numerous surnames arise from names, originating in prehistory and are retained to this day. Years ago I noticed similarities among some British and Slovene surnames. A famous English football player Owen and also the British ex-foreign minister Owen bear a surname, identical to Slovenian surname Oven, which denotes an animal – a ram (in Slovene “oven”). Such and similar surnames, which have parallels in Britain, as well as in Slovenia, are many. There are, of course, variations in construction and writing; nevertheless, similarities are obvious as seen from Table 1.

In Table 1, the English surnames listed are from a local telephone book [1] of the Swansea County in Wales and have their parallels in Slovenia. The number next to the British surnames shows how many telephone subscribers there are with the same surname in the county.

The manner of writing may be different from the Slovene one, but what must be considered is the pronunciation. Thus here are stressed, first of all, the surnames, which are similar in sound, but in some cases also their meaning is given, at least in one of the languages in question.

I did not include numerous surnames, arising from saints' names. It may be said that among these surnames are current immigrants and those from the previous century. Nevertheless, I believe that when the occurrence of the same surname is larger than ten in one area, it is a widespread surname that could originate in ancient times. Numerous surnames, which are present in Slovenia, but are not of Slovene origin, are also not included.

Table 1. Surnames from Swansea County (Wales) and the Slovene counterparts

Swansea County (Wales)	Slovenia	Swansea County (Wales)	Slovenia
Callan (1)	Kalan	Kotchan (1)	Kočan, Kučan
Callender (1)	Kalander	Kovacs (2)	Kovač
Cobbold (1), Campbell (47)	Kobal	Kumar (1)	Humar, Kumar
Capus (3)	Kapus	Lesniak (1)	Lešnik, Lešnjak
Carman (5)	Čarman	Lewis (1800)	Levc, Levstik
Carne (3), Carney (4)	Krnc, Čarni	Mccowan (1)	Koban
Corn (41)	Corn, Zorn	McDermott (3)	Dermota
Cashman (2)	Kašman	McGorin	Gorenc, Gorjanc, Gorinšek
Chad (1), Chadd (1)	Čad	Mcmurray (2)	Muri
Chadwich (1)	Čadonič	Mcran (1)	Rant
Chick (1)	Čik	Maher (2)	Maher
Cobb (5)	Kobi, Kobe	Male (3)	Male, Malej
Collard (6)	Kolar	Malec (2)	Malec
Colman (1)	Kolman	Malik (3)	Melik
Cunnea (1), Cooney (5)	Kunej	Maliphant (3)	(»mali fant« meaning 'little boy')
Cossins (4)	Kozin, Kozinc	Maryon (2)	Marijon

Swansea County (Wales)	Slovenia	Swansea County (Wales)	Slovenia
Costa (1)	Kosta	Maslen (3)	Maslen
Crabb (4)	Krab	Moore (96), Murray (54)	More, Muri, Mori
Crabbe (6)	Krapež	Moule (22)	Mole, Mulej
Crammer (4)	Kramer	Munday (8), Mundy (4)	Munda
Crews (1)	Krevs (<i>limping</i>)	Ossel (1)	Osel (i.e. <i>donkey</i>), Oseli
Crocker (40)	Krakar (<i>crow</i>)	Ost (2)	Osti
Crall (1)	Kralj	Ovens (3), Owen (342), Owens (79)	Oven
Crowley (22)	Krulej (<i>who rumbles</i>)	Painter (5), Paynter (5)	Pajnter
Dolan (6)	Dolanc, Dolenc	Piper (27)	Fajfer
Dollard (2)	Dolar	Pompa (4)	Pompe
Doogan (1)	Dovgan, Dougan	Rand (5), Randall (29), Randel (1)	Rant
Duran (1), Durandt (1), Durran (5)	Rant	Rendell (12), Randle (1), Randles (1), Rendall (6), Rendel (2)	Rendla
Eager (1)	Jager (<i>hunter</i>)	Robb (3)	Rob, Rop
Fajfer (1)	Fajfar	Roberts (540)	Rupert
Fraser (22), Frazer (5)	Fras	Roda (1), Rodda (4), Rodde (1)	Rode
Gall (3), Galle(15)	Gale	Rodman (2)	Rudman
Gant (4)	Gantar	Rott (5)	Rot
Godrich (2)	Kodrič	Rowan (1)	Rovan
Galley (2)	Goli, Golja	Rogan	Rogan
Greg (1), Gregg (10)	Gregorc	Rudman (2)	Rudman
Grills (2)	Grilc	Russ (17), Russel (52)	Rus
Grimes (11)	Grims	Rutt (2), Rutter (6)	Rutar
Gunn (9), Gunner (1)	Guna	Scale (1)	Skala, Skale
Gunter (12)	Gantar	Scheiga (1)	Šega
Ham (10), Hamm (8)	Ham	Severn (1)	Sever
Herman (4)	Herman	Sked (3)	Sket, Šketa
Huttin (10)	Kutin	Slack (3)	Slak
Inglis (7)	Inglič	Slade (9), Slader (3)	Slade
Jordan (38)	Jordan	Slater (16), Slatter(1)	Zlatner
Jurman (1)	Jurman	Slavin (2)	Slavin
Kapec (2)	Kapš	Smale (19), Small (7)	Smole
Keber (1)	Keber	Stabler (4)	Štibler
Kent (24)	Kenda	Stanley (15), Stann (1)	Stanek
Kern (3)	Kern, Kernelj	Stock (33)	Štoka
Knapp (1)	Knap, Knop	Tasker (8)	Taškar
Kosach (4), Kossach (1)	Kozak	Zaman (1)	Zaman

Animal surnames are very old. Thus we find in Wales the surname **Cooney**, in Slovenia **Kunej** (from the animal “kuna” - *marten*), **Crabb, Crabbe** – Slovene **Krap, Krapež** (from *krap*, i.e. *carp*), **Crocker** – **Krakar** (*krokar* - *raven*), **Keber** - **Keber** (*keber* – *beattle*), **Grills** – **Grilc** (*cricket*). Only after observing Slovene parallels and etymology can the British explain some of their own surnames.

Sometimes the surname differs only in writing, while it is pronounced the same. The modest telephone book of the small county Swansea in Wales, dated 2002, contains around 100 surnames, which have parallels among the Slovenes.

Thus we have the same surnames developed from personal characteristics: **Chad, Chadd** -**Čad** (*sooty, black*), **Crews** – **Krevs** (*limping man*), **Crowley** – **Krulej** (*the one limping*), **Doogan** – **Dovgan** (*very tall person*), **Rant, Ranta** (*the one that argues, talks loudly*), Table 2. In Gaelic **ran** is a verse, **rant** denotes a poet, a bard [2]. Slovenian still retains the expression **rentačiti**, which means *to complain*. In the Alps the surname Rant is present already in 2nd century, found as **Rantillus**, written on the Noric headstone [3]. That the name exists in various forms, also in French variant **Durant**, points to the age of the surname. The wide circulation of it also speaks of its age, in England alone there are more than 12.000 people with this surname.

Table 2. Meaning of the word ‘rant’

In Gaelic	
ran	<i>roaring, screaming</i>
rann	<i>verse, poem</i>
ranntaire	<i>poet, reciter</i>
ranndair	<i>muttering, complaining</i>
In English	
rant	<i>to speak loudly, violently; to recite loudly</i>
rant, ranta	<i>a man speaking loudly, one who complains, speaker, popular poet</i>

The surname **Godrich** has the Slovene parallel **Kodrič** (*little curl or son of a curly man*) [4]. The explanation can be different of course. Cottle [5] maintains that the surname Godrich is of Norman origin and denotes a benevolent king. Godrich was the nickname of the English king Henry I.

Surnames denoting profession are: **Collard** – **Kolar** (*cartwright, wheelwright*), **Crammer** – **Kramar** (*small dealer, merchant*), **Eager** – **Jager, Eger** (*hunter*), **Knapp** – **Knap** (*miner*), **Kovach** – **Kovač** (*smith*).

Surnames with denotation of locality are **Callan** – **Kalan** (*the one living at a source of water*), **Dolan** – **Dolanc** (*the one living in a valley*), **Colman** – **Kolman** (*the one living at a border, abyss*), **Kotchan** – **Kočan, Kučan** (*man living in a cottage*), **Kumar** – **Kumar, Humar** (*the one living at the top of the mountain*).

Interesting and explainable surnames are also **Crall – Kralj** (kralj – king), **Cunnea – Kunej** (kuna - marten), **Galley – Goli, Golja** (gol - bare), **Gall, Galle - Gale** (immigrant from the ancient Gallia). These are just some of the surnames, with similarities and uniformities, but there are many more. These are by no means the surnames of immigrants from the last 100 years, since all surnames are older than that; bearing in mind that earlier there were no appreciable migrations between the two countries. Moreover, the relatively high frequency of these surnames should be of serious consideration. The only possible explanation for the existence of British surnames, which have Slovene parallels, is that they are a remnant of the prehistoric names of Karni and Veneti, peoples living in this area in ancient times. Some of the names and surnames themselves prove this directly.

Surnames such as **Carne** and **Carney** are possible indicators that the ancestors were members of Karni; while surname **Benett**, widespread across Britain, denotes a Vend inhabitant, i.e. a Venet. **St. Vendelin**, in German **Wendel**, is a mediator in times of need, patron of herdsmen, peasants and various diseases. According to the legend he was Scottish king's son, born around 550 AD. As a young man he resigned from the throne and succession. He made a pilgrimage to Rome and went to Trier (*Avgusta Treverorum*), where he lived in solitude and became the abbot of Tholey monastery. He died in 617, and his tomb became a point of pilgrimage, from which grew the town St. Wendel by the river Saar [5]. St. Vendelin was most probably a descendent of the Veneti and since he could communicate in Vend language, he was capable of teaching in the Treveri area, where the Veneti were still present. A written dedication to St. Vendelin, as patron of health, is retained in Čateške toplice (Slovenia), dated 1758. The name **Wendelin** is still retained in the English and Irish names **Gwen** and **Gwendeline**.

The surname **Campbell**, widespread in Britain, has the Slovene parallel in **Kobal**. According to the *Brewer's Dictionary of Names* [6], the Scottish name arose as a nickname meaning 'crooked mouth', from Gaelic *cam* 'bent' and *beul* 'mouth'. However, **Kobali** or **kombali** have accompanied the Shrovetide spirit (**kurent**) and his co-dancers (bal – dance). Surname **Kobal** is very common in Slovenia. Kurent and his dance (*corant, horn-dance*) is preserved to this day in Great Britain [7] as well as in Slovenia. Root **bal** also survived in the English name **Balant**. However, **Balant, Valant, Balantič, Valentič** are common Slovene surnames denoting a *dancer, a man dancing*. The name **Valentine** is of the same origin. St. Valentine, patron of the ill and a mediator against contagious diseases, is a saint who replaced the pagan bali, healer or shaman, who healed using dance and imploring. In Slovenia many pilgrimage points and churches are dedicated to St. Valentine, such as St. Valentine on the Limbarska gora, St. Valentine above Luša pod Starim vrhom. Name Balant is common in Britain. Who does not know the Scotch whiskey Ballantine? The same origin of names could be traced further in the past. One of the oldest names known from historical sources is the name of the king Cunobelinus who reigned after the year 10 AD to the tribes of Catuvellauni and Trinovantes. Cunobelinus is identical to the later Shakespeare's Cymbelline [8]. Slovene meaning of Cunobelinus is 'kuna belica' - *stone marten*. On the other hand, the -belinus part of the name Cunobelinus is still preserved in the Slovenian surname Belinc.

The purpose of this contribution is above all to draw attention to a newly discovered field of investigation. Only with the aid of British researchers, their knowledge of historic sources and of origins and age of surnames in England, Wales, Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland, will it be possible to confirm their Venetic and Karnic origin.

Bibliography

1. The Phone Book for Swansea & district, December 2002
2. MacLennan M, *A Pronouncing and etymological dictionary of the Gaelic language*, Acair and Mercat Press, Edinburgh 1995
3. Alföldy G, *Noricum, History of the Provinces of the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press, London 1974
4. Schaubert V, Schindler M, *Svetniki in godovni zavetniki za vsak dan v letu (Saints and name-day patrons for every day of the year)*, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 1992
5. Cottle B, *The Penguin Dictionary of Surnames*, 2nd ed., Penguin Books, London 1978
6. Room A, *Brewer's Dictionary of Names*, Helicon, Oxford 1995
7. Marckwardt A H, Cassidy F G, Macmillan, J G, *Webster comprehensive Dictionary*, Vol. 1-2, Internatl Ed., J G Ferguson, Chicago 1992
8. Kruta V, *The Celts of the West*, Orbis, London 1985, pp. 17, 21, 33, 74

Povzetek

Priimki na področju mesta Swansea (Wales, Velika Britanija) in v Sloveniji

Britanski otoki so bili v prvem tisočletju pred n.š. poseljeni s staroselci Veneti v Angliji in v Wallesu ter s Karni v Cornwallu in na Škotskem. Poleg jezikovnih ostankov v angleškem, gaelskem in valižanskem jeziku ter poleg številnih drugih paleoetničnih sledi, so se v današnji čas ohranila osebna imena in iz njih izvirajoči priimki, ki imajo svoj izvor v prazgodovini. Nekaj imen in priimkov je takšnih, da že sami po sebi kažejo na svoj venetski izvor, večino pa lahko ugotovljamo s primerjavo s podobnimi in enakimi priimki, ki so ohranjeni na področju Alp. Nekatera od teh imen so zelo stara in se jih da razložiti le s pomočjo slovenske etimološke razlage.