

GLAMORGAN RECORD OFFICE

*Serving the authorities of Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil,
Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan*

The Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NE.

Tel: 029 2078 0282; Fax: 029 2078 0284;

Email: glamro@cardiff.ac.uk; Website: www.glamro.gov.uk

Hours of opening: Tuesday-Friday: 9.30am-5pm (4.30pm on Friday).

Late opening by appointment, Wednesday 5.00-7.00pm.

Closed Mondays, Bank Holidays and usually the day following.

THE EDWARDS MILLIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this leaflet is to assist enquirers seeking information about the Edwards family and its supposed fortune. This fascinating story has gripped generations of 'Edwardses' for over one hundred years, not only in Wales but in parts of England and, of course, the United States of America where the origin of the fortune (now thought to amount to 650 billion dollars) is said to lie.

1. The legend

The fortune is said to result from a lease in 1778 by a Welshman, Robert Edwards, of approximately 77 acres of land in New York forming what is now a significant part of Manhattan and on which stands not only Wall Street and Broadway but such valuable properties as The Stock Exchange and The World Trade Centre. The land was leased to the brothers John and George Cruger for 99 years with the condition that thereafter it would revert to the heirs of Robert Edwards named in the lease as his brothers William, Jacob, Leonard, Joshua, John and Thomas and his sister Martha. The lease expired in 1877 and ever since families called Edwards have been trying to stake claim to the fortune on the basis that they were descended from one of Robert's heirs.

2. The genealogical problem

Genealogically speaking, the problem of proving descent stems from the fact that there were no standard spellings of surnames in Wales at the relevant period. Thus the surname eventually standardised as 'Edwards', deriving from the christian name Edward by the addition of a final 's' can appear interchangeably in documents of the period as 'Edward', 'Edwards' or even 'Edwardes'. When the members of one family use these spellings interchangeably and when a number of families favour the same christian names, it is virtually impossible to differentiate between them. The Welsh patronymic naming system in common use during the 18th and

preceding centuries whereby a son or daughter takes as a second or surname the christian name of his or her father further compounds the problem by providing us with numerous unrelated Edwards families.

Another major problem is the paucity of information available from such records of the period as survive. Parish register entries are sparse giving little more than that a particular person was baptised, married or buried on a particular date. Few families have records detailed enough to supplement these entries and those which do find even this information difficult to verify officially.

3. The identity of Robert Edwards

The honest answer to the question *Who was Robert Edwards?* is *No-one really knows*. He is difficult to identify positively for a number of reasons. To start with, there are British and American versions of the legend. Some say he came from a family which originated from England or Wales but which emigrated to America in the 1620s or 30s; others that he, himself, emigrated to America from South Wales with his brothers Jacob, Joshua and John. Confusion is compounded by the fact that several claimant families appear to have basically the same family tree with slight variations. On the basis of just two of these, we find one Robert Edwards born 1716 with brothers and sisters as named in the lease and one Robert Edwards born 1730 with brothers and sisters identically named plus additional ones. One thing is certain, the name Robert Edwards was not uncommon. Indeed when one realises that the surname derived from the christian name Edward it should come as no surprise to be told that not all families bearing the name are related to each other.

If the legends are to be believed, Robert Edwards was a man of many parts being variously described as a captain in the army, an officer in the navy, a shipbuilder, a buccaneer who was granted the land for services to the British Crown, and the the saviour of an Indian Princess whose father, the Chief of the local tribe, awarded him the land for saving his daughter's life! That there was a Robert Edwards serving as an officer in the British navy at the relevant period can be verified by navy records. The other stories have as yet no firm basis in fact.

4. Documents held by the Glamorgan Record Office

a) Papers of the Edwards family Claimants' Association of South Wales deposited in 1983 by an interested party who had purchased them from the Organising Secretary. These comprise minutes, accounts and correspondence 1947-68, as well as files on individual claimants claiming descent from William Edwards (1719-89) builder of Pontypridd Bridge; from Thomas Edwards (born 1723) and Jacob Edwards (1729-97), brothers of Robert Edwards who leased the land in New York; plus miscellaneous certificates and pedigrees of claimants with unproven genealogies. In the front of the Record Office handlist to this collection have been placed copies of articles which appeared in **Family Tree Magazine** in 1996 in which *Helen Hinchliff PhD, Chairman, Consumer Protection Committee, National (USA) Genealogical Society* expresses her reservations about the Edwards story and warns of past frauds perpetrated in connection with it. Philip Berrill (*see below*) responds to her findings. [ref. D/D X 354]

b) Papers relating to the Edwards family of Ness Strange, Shropshire and Edwards Hall (unidentified), Glamorgan. These comprise two files of xerox copies of the lineage of the Edwards family compiled c.1894; a summary of the Edwards family's claim and 'facts in connection with the title of Trinity Church to its property acquired by royal grants' compiled by Counsel for the Corporation of Trinity Church, 1955; a xerox copy of an article from the Daily Mirror, 1912 highlighting the discovery by Edwards claimants of a 1688 bible with Edwards family information on the flyleaf; a pedigree of the Edwards family (incomplete) compiled 1985; a xerox copy of a letter from Robert L. Cartmell of Toronto, Canada speculating on the location of Edwards Hall and on the Edwards claimants, 1987; and the two books detailed in the bibliography below.

[ref. D/D X 350]

c) Copy of 1778 lease extracted from records of the state of New York; Counsel's opinion (Tasker Watkins, on behalf of South Wales claimants) and copy of lease made 1950; letter from Mrs Fannie Edwards Claud to Mrs Tanner of Cardiff (secretary of the South Wales Association) concerning Edwards heirs, 1954

[ref. D/D Xn 7, 8]

5. Other sources

a) We understand that collections of documents relating to the Edwards family of Ness Strange, Shropshire are held by the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth and the Shropshire Records and Research Centre, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury.

b) Unlike the Edwards family Claimants' Association of South Wales (referred to in 4a above) which drew its activities to a close in the 1960s, its American equivalent the Pennsylvania-based 'Association of Edwards Heirs' is still flourishing. It is headed by Cleoma Foore who can be contacted at: *RD1, Box 133, Six Mile Run, Pennsylvania, USA*. The Association's attorney, John Smarto, has actively co-operated with the BBC which has featured the Edwards story in its series of programmes hosted by Gloria Hunniford entitled 'Good Fortune' (November/December 1994). The free-lance producer for the Edwards element of the programme, Philip Berrill, has undertaken to produce a twice-yearly newsletter to keep everyone up to date with research and further developments. Newsletters are produced under the title *The Edwards Information Service* and can be obtained direct from Philip Berrill, *60 Leyland Road, Hesketh Park, Southport, PR9 9JA*. Copies of the newsletter will be supplied to the Glamorgan Record Office for consultation by interested parties (*see bibliography below*).

c) Edwards enquirers should be aware that the 1992 Edition of the IGI (International Genealogical Index) compiled by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon) contains a number of entries relating to the births of members of an Edwards family at Edwards Hall, Cardiff. The Glamorgan Record Office has no original documents recording this information and even the very existence of an Edwards Hall near Cardiff has yet to be established. From the source reference - shown on the IGI against each entry - the information does not come directly from documents but appears to have been supplied by a private individual from his or her own family papers. Certainly the same information is reproduced by David Edwards in **The Edwardes Legacy** (*see bibliography below*).

The same edition of the IGI also lists a number of Edwards births/baptisms at Merthyr Tydfil which do not appear in either the parish registers or in any known nonconformist chapel register.

All these entries must needs be regarded with caution until the source is revealed and the information verified.

6. Bibliography

The Edwards of Northampton, Bruce Montgomery Edwards, The Montgomery Publishing Company, Knoxville, Tennessee 1973 [ref. D/D X 350/3]

The Edwardes Legacy, David D. Edwards, Gateway Press, Inc., Baltimore 1992 [ref. D/D X 350/7]

The Edwards Millions, Mary McKenzie, Glamorgan Record Office Annual Report, 1984, pp. 21-22

The Edwards Information Service: Newsletters Nos. 1-3, Philip Berrill, 1994-96 [ref. D/D X 858]

Conclusion

In the years which have elapsed since the expiry of the lease in 1877, many attempts have been made to claim the fortune. All have failed. In most instances the evidence produced was either deemed inconclusive or was mishandled by unscrupulous lawyers looking to make easy money. Claims have been further hampered by the Statute of Limitations in the state of New York which requires claims to be made within fifteen years of the expiry of any lease. Genealogical problems aside (and these at present seem insurmountable), the wouldbe claimant faces a massive legal battle with little apparent hope of success. Indeed the chance of making a legitimate claim has been likened to that of winning the jackpot on the National Lottery.

This is not to say that if you are an Edwards you should give up trying to trace your family tree. Far from it. It can, and should be, an enjoyable hobby. Just be prepared to follow things through systematically generation by generation. If ultimately this results in financial gain, all well and good but look upon this possibility as a bonus. The immediate satisfaction of the amateur genealogist comes from placing the family in its context and in tracing one's own personal roots.

April 2002