

Seven wells

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Abstract

At least one hundred instances of place-names apparently meaning ‘seven springs’ or ‘seven streams’ are known from England, France, Germany and elsewhere, whereas instances of any other numbers attached to similar water features are far less frequent. All current reference works interpret these names literally, leaving them explained but unmotivated. I will give evidence that the names belong to a continuous tradition starting from pre-Christian sacred springs with associated superstitions. Early Christianity first tried to suppress these superstitions and, when this failed, adopted the names with a new interpretation.

1. The English names

SEWELL ... This is a difficult name. The only suggestion that can be made is that the first element is a pers. name *Seofa*, not on record ... The same name seems to occur in Sewell (Nth).

Thus wrote Mawer and Stenton in PN BdHu in 1926.¹ However, by 1933 (PN Nth: 40), they are able to attempt an explanation of Seawell Farm:

There are numerous springs in the neighbourhood, and this is probably for *seofonwiellan* ‘seven springs.’ A tradition of seven springs is common in place-names [several examples follow].

This explanation, probably due to Ekwall, is now generally accepted as correct. However, motivation for the number seven is lacking in all known examples. It is highly unlikely that seven springs could be precisely counted in any such location, so that there is still much to be explained. It is sometimes said that ‘seven’ represents ‘an indefinite number’, but it is hard to find examples where this meaning is unambiguously the intended one. This major problem has been left untackled for several decades, so that

Gelling & Cole (2000: 33) were only able to say that Seawell, Sewell, Showell and Sywell “may belong” to a group having reference to religion and superstition. Even as recently as 2005, Horovitz (2005: 483), when discussing the name Showell (St), stated that “now-forgotten folk-lore probably influenced the choice of seven as the number commonly found in association with OE *wælle* ‘a spring’ ...”. We will see that these views are largely correct, but in fact that the folklore is partly recoverable. There has been no systematic examination of ‘seven wells’ names which relates them to the many non-English ones, and my aim here will be to initiate such a study by collecting the relevant place-name data and peripheral documentary and literary material. It will become clear that this is a complex subject and definitive solutions to all the problems raised cannot be expected; I will attempt only to indicate the general direction in which I believe the solution lies. Although my priority is to explain the English names, to understand these will require us to examine numerous continental names of the same meaning.

Throughout this article, *well* never has its modern sense of ‘an artificially constructed shaft’ but, like its OE etymon *wella*, has as its main sense ‘spring’ and as a secondary sense ‘stream’. *Wella* historically belongs to the strong *i*-declension, but is also found declined as a weak noun. There are OE dialectal variants of *well(e)*; West Saxon with diphthongization or fronting as *wielle*, *wyll(a)* etc.; and Mercian with lowering as *wælla* etc. (EPNE). I take it as axiomatic that all ‘seven wells’ names have a single explanation. It is hardly conceivable that the many and widespread instances of a name of such unusual type could have been created independently.

How much more frequent is ‘seven’ than other numerals in English place-names? It is hard to give a definitive answer, since it depends on whether we count frequent (and probably mostly modern) minor names of the type *Four Acres*. But if we consider just the names of springs and streams, we find at least fifty examples in which ‘seven’ is either explicit or suggested by the current or an earlier form. The same numeral is found with words meaning ‘hill’ or ‘mound’, and with tree names. The number ‘nine’ occurs at least twenty times in names of the type *Nine Wells*. By contrast, examples of other numerals attached to water features are very scarce; the following list is probably close to complete:

- Twywell (PN Nth: 188)
- *Fourewell* 1389 (PN C: 351)
- Five Wells, Chelmorton, Db. Cf. *Fivewells* on the 1883 OS map
- Fivewells (*Fiwelles* 1377; PN Nth: 276)
- Five Wells (Lanarkshire, NS 944 012)

- Six Wells Bottom (*The Six Wells* 1822; PN W: 182), the source of the R. Stour.

We also have examples of ‘many wells’: *Manywells*, Wilsden (PN YW 3: 275); *Manywells Beck*, Bingley (PN YW 4: 168); Many Wells, South Luffenham (PN Ru: 271, 393) and *Many Wells Spring*, Cranham (PN Gl 1: 158), which appeared as the curiously sanctified Emmanuel Springs on the 1887 OS map. A list of English, French, German and Italian place-names meaning ‘seven wells’ appears below in the gazetteer.

The general nomenclature of springs and associated folklore has been discussed by Scherr (1986, 1990) and Rattue (1995). For a comprehensive treatment of the role of watery places in early English Christianity, see Blair (2006: 472 ff.). These authors, however, do not discuss the numerical names. Some apparent numerals in place-names are the result of folk-etymology: for example, Threelandsend Farm is from *Threel-land* (PN Sx 1: 135); Six Hills is from *Seggeswold* (c. 1200; PN Nt: 259); and Twentywellsick (Norton, Db) is from *Quintinwell* (PN Db: 285). Sometimes the corrupt form did not survive, as in Thixendale which has earlier forms like *sextenesdala* (PN YE: 133). Other names such as the River Seven (PN YN: 6) or Forty (PN W: 43) do not contain numerals and seem never to have been so (mis-)interpreted.

The oldest English records of ‘seven wells’ names are four instances in pre-Conquest charters. This is a very remarkable fact, from which we must deduce that many other examples once existed, since to reach us such a name needs to be on the boundary of an estate and a charter must survive, and these are both unlikely circumstances. These instances (three from Wessex, one from Mercia) deserve a detailed discussion:

1. *Seofenwyllas* (lost; Cold Aston, Gl), in a charter of Æthelbald of 737x740 [e11th], S: 99†.

Expert opinion is divided on the authenticity of this charter, with a tendency towards doubt.² The bounds have been discussed in Grundy (1935–6: 177–81). *Seofenwyllas* must be located at SP 115 188, where the present parish boundary of Cold Aston has an angle. Shewhill Coppice and Shewhill Barn are nearby. Smith states that this is “probably *shewell* ‘scare-crow’” (PN Gl 1: 176), but the name may in fact continue *Seofenwyllas*. There is a huge gap in the records, but as Gelling (PN Brk 3: 620) notes, “In Berks, as in O[xfordshire] [...], there are many instances of names which occur as boundary-marks in charters and are then not heard of again until they appear in a recognisable form in a Tithe Award.”

2. (*on*) *syfan wyllan* (lost; Tichborne, Ha), in a charter of Athelstan of 938 [12th], S: 444 (Finberg 1964, no. 55).

Grundy (1921) and Roberts (1992) agree in placing *syfan wyllan* quite precisely at the northern extremity of Tichborne parish, at the location now called Seward's Bridge (SU 574 322).³ It was *Sewers Bridge* (crossing a "Small River called Sewers Water") on Ogilby's 1675 map of Hampshire (plate 51). I conjecture that the name was formerly **Sewell(s) Bridge*. This name-form is consistent with the usual development of OE *seofan wyllan*, and it may therefore preserve the ancient 'seven wells' name. This land belonged to Old Minster, Winchester. The current Sevington Farm is 3km south of Seward's Bridge, but Roberts (1992) shows that one estate once covered the whole area, which was afterwards split up. The name Sevington is very likely connected to *syfan wyllan*, but the details of this connection are quite unclear. Gover (1958: 75) records a form *Sevenhampton* (c. 1200) for Sevington, as well as a nearby *Sefnhemehulle* (1245). It looks as if a river-name descending from *seofan wyllan* has been abbreviated in forming the new compound Sevenhampton. See further the discussions in PN W: 107, Wo: 27, 35–6, and Tengstrand (1940: 161–2).

3. *seuen willes pry* (lost; near Kingston in Purbeck, Do), in a charter of Eadred of 956 [15th], S: 573 (Finberg 1964, no. 596), Kelly (1996, no. 20).

Kelly considers this charter to be a spurious conflation of S: 534 and S: 632, neither of which mentions *seuen willes*. Hinton (1994), on the other hand, while admitting that there are problems with all three charters, considers S: 632 the least reliable. We cannot doubt, however, that the name *seuen willes pry* was used at some stage before the date of the surviving copy, and probably much earlier. Grundy (1935: 123–8) has analysed the bounds, with which Hinton (1994: 12–16) agrees. These place *seuen willes pry* at about SY 963 777, in the stream leading down to Chapman's Pool. Here *pry* must be the dative of *brūh* 'trough' (with loss of final *-h*), probably in the sense 'gully' (PN Do 1: 32). The mysterious *seuen diche* of the Sixpenny Handley charter S: 630 should be considered here. It seems to refer to one of the earthworks on Gussage Down, but may have some connection to the nearby Sovell Down at ST 990 107, which looks like another possible 'seven wells' name.

4. *seofan wyllan broc*, referring to Showell (St) in a charter of Æthelred in 985 [12th], S: 860.

The bounds have been studied in Hooke (1983: 27–30, 63–5), Hooke & Slater (1986: 17–23) and Horovitz (2005: 492). *Seofan wyllan broc* was between the sites labelled Wulfrunn’s Well (SJ 910 003) and Spa Well (SJ 918 002) on the 1889 OS map, but is now built over. This charter records the grant of land to Wulfrun for the founding of a minster (now St. Peter’s church). The name Showell derives from the ancient name.

The phonetics of the typical developments /sowel/, /su:wel/, /ʃowel/ etc. deserve some attention. It is clear that the *-n* of *seofon* was dropped and the /-v-/ assimilated to the /w-/ of *wi(e)llan*. The first stage was perhaps generally common in speech – cf. Northumbrian OE *seofo* and frequent ME forms such as *seve*, *souve*, *seove* etc.⁴ Intermediate stages such as *Sevewell* occur in the earlier records of several names.⁵ The same form apparently also survived quite late as a surname: an Anne *Sevewell* was buried at Deopham (Nf) in 1765.⁶ The initial assibilation (perhaps via an intermediate /sj-/) in Showell is irregular but has parallels such as *Showsley* for Swardsley (PN Nth: 99), *Sheuestern* for Sewstern (PN Lei 2: 58) and, with different following vowels, *Sh-* forms for Silverstone (PN Nth: 44) and Syresham (PN Nth: 59).

In recent centuries the name *Seven Springs* has become popular (Figure 5), the earliest example probably being Seven Springs, Eyford (Gl), recorded in 1777. The date suggests a deliberate antiquarian revival of the early ‘seven wells’ name-type, and there is no evidence that the older associations of the name were remembered. According to Muddiman (1933: 355–6), the 1789 edition of Camden’s *Britannia* stated that the River Flete in Pancras rose from seven springs between Hampstead and Highgate. ‘Seven springs’ seems to have been considered a symbol of ancientness, and if so this would explain its application to one of the sources of the Thames. We find the name appearing on 20th-century OS maps (first in 1927) at Exning in Suffolk, where earlier maps had St. Mindred’s or St. Wendred’s well. The house-name *Seven Springs* currently occurs at Upper Lambourn (Brk), Taplow (Bk), Steeple Aston (O), Pen Selwood (So), Iron Acton (Gl) and Gosberton (L).⁷

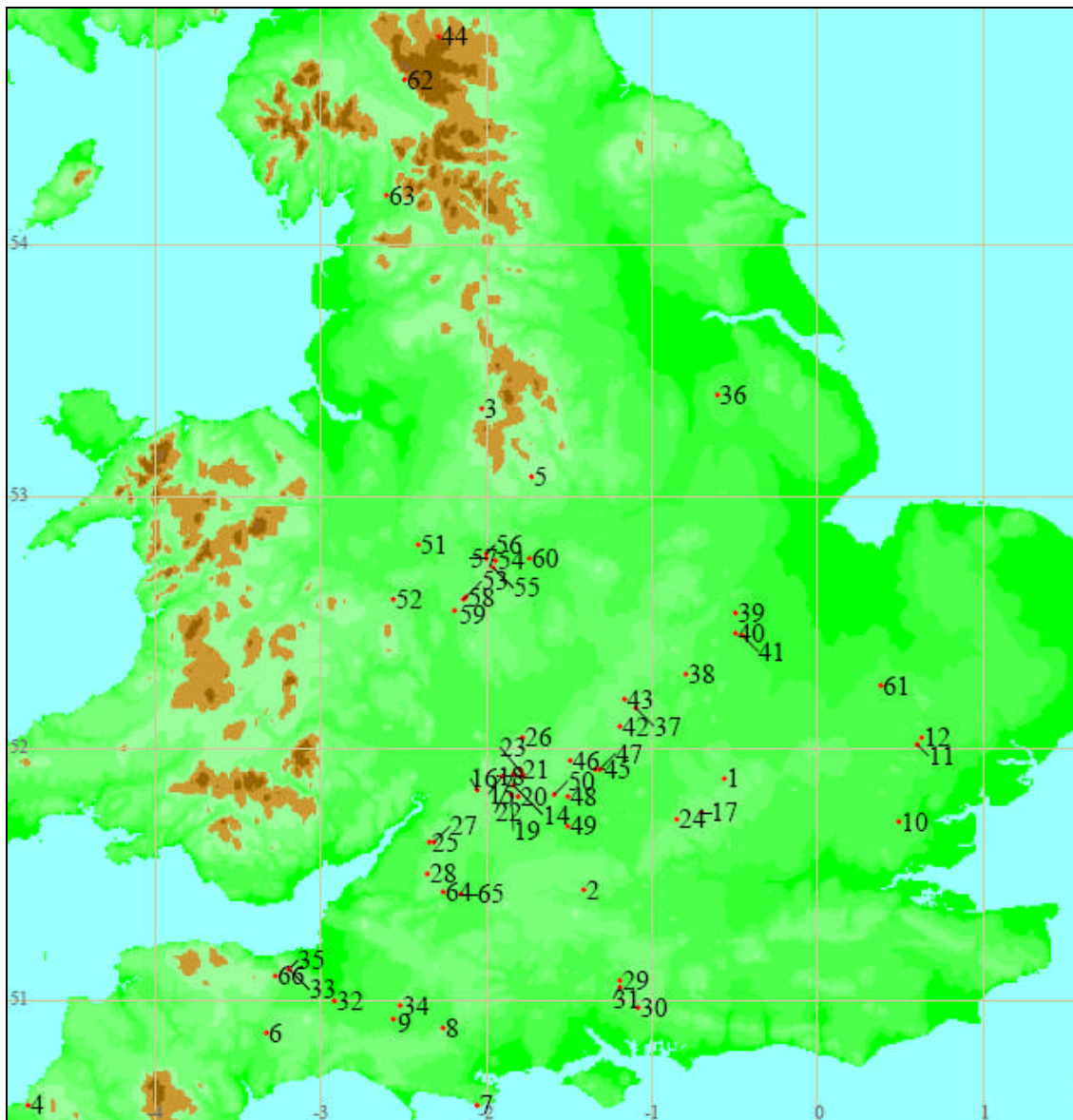


Figure 1: All English names considered, with numbers from the gazetteer.

2. Superstition

The English ‘seven wells’ names are concentrated in the limestone country extending from Somerset, through the Cotswolds to the midlands. Whether this is simply due to the higher number of springs in that region is unclear. Some names of the *Sewell* type are of old manor houses next to springs and often with a moat, with a neighbouring tightly nucleated village. Such topography suggests that the settlement is ancient and was sited to exploit a spring considered sacred. Examples include Higher Swell (So), Sewell’s Pond (Nth), Swinbrook (O), Synwell (Gl), Showells (St) and Sevenwells

Farm (Stoke Doyle, Nth). Some of these instances may be early minster sites contained within a *septum monasterii*; such as apparently the case with Bisley (Gl; Blair 2006: 197), where the springs are sited in the south wall of the enclosure.

I have not been able to find definite reports of ‘seven wells’ superstitions from Britain, except for a vague item in Evans (1893: 399), where it is stated that *Fons Baraliuen* was “Perhaps a well in a field now called Croft Hir, near Nant farm house. This well is resorted to for wishing and said to have seven springs. – J. A. Bradney”. The number seven receives only a brief mention in the comprehensive collection of British folklore by Westwood (1985: 202). However, in European, Middle-Eastern, and Indian folklore we find frequent references to ‘seven wells’ with a superstition attached, and it seems very likely that similar customs were once followed in Britain. For example, W. R. Smith (1956: 181 ff.) reports several instances of ‘seven wells’ in early Semitic religion: he mentions that the Semites attach a special sanctity to groups of seven wells and he reports that Jacob of Edessa (c. 640–708) mentions in his canons “seven well worship” amongst Christian Syrians. Smith also claims that the Arab writers al-Qazwini (d. 1276) and al-Bakri (1179–1229)⁸ refer to seven wells at Tiberias and to the Pleiad waters at Dāriya respectively. Rose (1902: 65, 1922: 45) describes a Punjabi tradition in which the water of seven wells is poured into the gutter of a house to guard against bad luck thought to threaten a child of one sex born after three births of the opposite sex; other Indian traditions are given by Crooke (1881: 136): “Hydrophobia is cured by making the patient look down seven wells in succession”, and Westermarck (1905: 33) says “if there is no rain on April 27th, water taken from seven springs is [...] mixed with cowdung and red earth”. Pata (1944: 119–20) notes two customs recorded in Damascus in 1870 involving the water of seven wells. In M’Kenzie (1907: 256) we read that in modern Syria [19th century] there is a custom of “making a sick child that is thought to be bewitched drink from seven wells, or cisterns”, and Andrews (1903) discusses customs amongst Sudanese living in Algeria at a place called, in Arabic, ‘Seven Springs’ near Algiers.

I suggest that the interpretation of the European ‘seven wells’ names is that a pagan sacred spring has been deliberately replaced by a Christian site. Such a process is very well documented (Rattue 1995). The replacement could simply be a renaming of the spring with the name of a saint, or the siting of a minster church or monastery at the spring. We may compare here the English Bath and Wells (both maintaining their watery names), Glastonbury, and several French and German names to be considered later. Similarly, an association with Darley Abbey could be the explanation of the lost *Seuwelledale* in Aldwark (Db: 340) in Monkdale, and Sewell in Bedfordshire belonged to Dunstable Priory. Indirect support

for this interpretation comes from apparent instances of deliberate suppression of references to seven wells in scripture, of the Christianization of associations of the number ‘seven’ as in the ‘garden of virtue’ theme, and from the existence of Heptapegon in Galilee. I will consider each of these points in turn.

Evidence for scriptural cleansing can be seen in the so-called Spanish recension of the apocryphal fifth book of Ezra (probably of 130–300 CE), which contains the text:

parabo tibi arbores duodecim aliis et aliis fructibus et septem fontes fluentes lac et mel. (Bergren 1990: 374)

[I will prepare for you twelve trees with fruits and seven springs flowing with milk and honey.]

In this place, the traditionally accepted “French” recension replaces *septem* by *totidem* ‘as many’. Bergren (1990) claims the text just quoted is older and reflects a lost Greek original. Furthermore, in the Book of Zechariah, Lipiński (1970), by a detailed analysis of the original Hebrew, determines that the passages usually translated ‘seven facets’ or ‘seven eyes’ (Zechariah iii: 9; iv: 10) in fact refer to ‘seven streams’.

Concerning the Christianization of ‘seven’, we know that Aldhelm (c. 640–709, Abbot of Malmesbury and afterwards Bishop of Sherborne) wrote on the biblical symbolism of the number in a surviving letter to King Aldfrith of Northumbria (*Liber de Septenario*; Giles 1844, Lapidge & Herren 1979). In this he refers to *septem epistolarum rivulis* ‘rivulets of seven epistles’. Perhaps more significantly, one of his riddles is entitled *Fons* or *De Fonte*, and is the fourteenth of the seven-line set (*Ænigmata heptasticha*; Giles 1844, Pitman 1970). Very likely, this riddle contains additional hidden clues concerning the number ‘seven’; for example, lines one, three, four and six all have seven words.

3. The French and German names

French names meaning ‘seven springs’ (*sept fontaines*, *~fons*, *~fonts*, *~fonds*⁹) occur more than a dozen times, and several of these denote monasteries. Names such as Siebenbrunnen are about equally frequent in Germany. The earliest example appears to be the place now called Seffent, near Aachen, which has late 9th-century records.¹⁰ It is mentioned in a document of Zwentibold (896 [c. 1191], *MGH* 1960, no. 11) which records the gift of the place called *Septem Fontes* to the abbess Gisela. A 12th-century forgery, purporting to be a letter of Charlemagne (*MGH* 1896, no.

315) refers to *Mox quedam arbor, de qua septem fontes videbantur* ‘next a certain tree, from where seven springs were to be seen’. Another forgery from the same period (*MGH* 1896, no. 34) refers to *VII fontes*. These are probably both references to Seffent, and could be regarded as weak evidence that the name goes back to the early 9th century, if the forgeries are based on old originals. In any case the name was clearly well-known in the early medieval period. Soon afterwards we have the first record of the lost *Les Sept-Fonts* (Carlat, dépt. Cantal): (*in loco qui vocatur*) *ad Septem Fontes* 917 (Doniol 1863). This is a remote place in south-west France, a long way from Seffent. Thus the name already appears to be widespread, even in the oldest records.

Reliable data on early forms of the German names of the Siebenborn / Simmern type is more difficult to obtain. An early attempt to explain them was made by Beck (1910), who thought the sense was “a large or complete” number of springs. Later, Bach (1953: 126) proposed an etymology for these names unrelated to ‘seven’:

Ob der Name von *Simmern* in Luxemb ... hierhin gehört, muß fraglich bleiben; es kann sich um eine Volksetymologie handeln, etwa für eine ältere Form *ze dem sīfenden borne*.

[Whether the name Simmern in Luxembourg belongs here must remain questionable; it could be a folk-etymology for an older form ‘at the trickling brook’.]

Given the large number of Latin, French and English names to which this etymology cannot apply, we must reject it, though it is formally and phonetically possible for German names. However, another frequently-occurring German river-name type, that represented by *Der Seifen*, *Siefen*, *Siepen* and names ending in *-siefen* (Bach 1953: 297, 473, 621), does have a good etymology. Like *sīfenden* above, they belong to the root *sīfe*, explained by Lexer (1961) as

langsam fliessender sumpftartiger bach, von einem solchen durchzogene bodenstelle; bergm.[-ännisch] das herauswaschen der metalle u. der ort, wo sich waschmetall findet.

[slowly flowing swampy stream, a place through which such a stream passes; amongst miners the washing-out of metal, and the place where wash-metal [metal sieved from the water] is found.]

These names are relatively late and occur in mining areas such as the Erzgebirge.

We need next to consider the naming traditions used by the Cistercian order for their foundations. These were highly conservative, the same few elements being constantly recycled. Most names were dithematic, typical first elements being *clair*, or *bon(ne)*, and the second element

frequently being *fontaine* or *vau(l)x*. We need not believe that these names were in any way descriptive of the site; they may rather be abstract or fanciful names. This tradition perhaps arose during the period of the abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, founder of many daughter houses, who was born in Fontaine-lès-Dijon in 1090, but also reflects the Cistercian interest in hydraulic engineering (Leroux-Dhuys 2006: 46). Streams were diverted to supply many Cistercian houses. Bernard refers in a letter to the Abbot of Prémontré (Bernard n.d., epistola CCLIII) to *Septem-Fontibus*, perhaps a reference to the abbey of that name founded 1125, and he refers to it again (in Bernard n.d., Appendix ad diatribem) as a “colony”. According to Leroux-Dhuys (2006: 172), at the original Cistercian site of Cîteaux, there was a place called *Cent Fonts*. The first foundation with a “numbered springs” name was Trois-Fontaines (Marne) in 1118. This name is probably connected to Tre Fontane in Rome, the legendary site of St. Paul’s martyrdom, possessing a monastery going back to the 7th century which became Cistercian in 1140. The tradition of *-vaux* names was continued with the English Cistercian abbeys; thus we have Rievaulx and Jervaulx; Fountains (1132) must surely be seen as a continuation of the French series of names.¹¹

In the early 12th century, names meaning ‘seven springs’ were adopted by several monastic orders, perhaps after the example near Aachen. The name *Septfonds* in Tarn-et-Garonne is apparently recorded as *de Septemfontem* in 1040–47.¹² If this is correct, it predates the foundation there of the abbey of *Sancta Maria de Septem Fontibus* in c. 1130.¹³ The Premonstratensian abbey of St. Nicholas de Septfontaines (Haute Marne) had already been founded in 1125. The history of the Cistercian monastery of Sept-Fons at Diou near Dompierre-sur-Besbre is, however, clearer. A pagan site is certain here; remains of a temple have been located and the name Diou very likely comes from a Gaulish **devo* ‘god’ (Lacroix 2007: 45). The monastery was founded in 1132 under the name Saint-Lieu as a daughter of Fontenay (Lamy 1937). In 1164 the name Sept-Fons is first recorded, which Lamy (1937: 8) describes as “vulgaire”. Lamy (p. 9) discusses the name as follows:

Pourquoi ce nom de Sept-Fons? Est-ce, comme on l’a cru pendant longtemps, parce que sept sources jaillissaient dans l’enclos primitif du monastère? Non, il n’en a jamais paru une seule. C’est plutôt parce que les eaux amenées du dehors, par des infiltrations de la Besbre et de la Loire, se distribuaient en sept endroits différents, selon les exigences de l’installation. [Why this name of ‘Seven Springs’? Is it, as has been long believed, because seven springs gushed forth in the original enclosure of the monastery? No, not one has ever appeared. It is rather because the waters led in from outside, from the Besbre and Loire, were distributed to seven different places, as required by the living arrangements.]¹⁴

The engraving on page 16, however, shows seven trees before the front wall, three to the left and four to the right of the main entrance, and the plan on page 272 shows an arm of a canal extending to the position of the rightmost tree. Perhaps these seven trees were each fed by their own branch of this channel, according to the “Garden of Virtue” theme which we will consider later.¹⁵ In any case, it seems likely that the fame of the Abbaye Sept-Fons was the inspiration for several other abbey names, including the Augustinian Zevenborren near Brussels.

Septfontaines in Luxembourg appears to be a particularly well-known example of our name, and is recorded from the 12th century. A renovation of the enclosing structure, which contained seven tanks (apparently used for laundry purposes in 1928), is described in Klensch (1928); this document also gives the Luxemburgisch dialect form *Sieweburen* of its name.

The case of (*la*) *Céphons* (Indre) is especially interesting, as Gendron (2004: 25) documents a tradition, reputedly going back to St. Martin in the fourth century, that this was considered a healing well, the village of Levroux (a name related to ‘leprosy’), being sited at the source of this stream (Nègre 1990–98: 5196). The earliest record is *Septfonz* 1250 (Gendron 2004: 42). This is a clear example of a ‘seven springs’ name with an associated superstition.¹⁶

The name Septfontaines was transferred to England in the early 13th century via the family of Ralph of Setfontayns (de Septem Fontibus) of Chelsea (VCH Ess, vol. 7), who obtained the manor of Ockendon (Essex), resulting in forms such as *Wokindun Set Funteines* (1274; PN Ess: 125); this name is therefore manorial rather than topographical, despite Ackroyd’s recent claim (2007: 290) that there were seven springs here. The family name is also surely the origin of the lost field-name *Setfontaynes* in Mucking (PN Ess: 598).

Other compounds of numbers with *fontaines* are Troisfontaines; Couvent de Cinqfontaines (though Lacroix (2007: 71) attributes Cinqfontaines, in Meurthet-Moselle, to a Gaulish god *Sinquatis*); Abbaye Saint-Gilbert de Neuffontaines (*Novem fontanas* 12th, Nègre 20427); and Neuffons (Nègre 20396). The *Inventaire des Sceaux de Champagne* (Roger 2003) mentions a *Sexfontaines* (1273); this may be Nègre 17341, which Nègre derives from the personal name Saxo.

As well as these well-documented French and German names, occasional references occur in Latin medieval documents to lost places and to people with derivative names. In the charters of the Abbaye de Cluny, under the year 1037, we read *Willelmus, comes Provinciae, et uxor ejus Lucia dant Monasterio Cluniacensi Diliadam et Septem Fontes* ‘William, count of Provence and his wife Lucia give to Cluny *Diliadam* and *Septem Fontes*’ (ARTHIS n.d.); a document of 1097 refers to the church of S.

Cristina in Ozzano (Emiglia) as *positam in loco de Septifonte* (there is at present a Settifonti 10km south of Ozzano);¹⁷ a papal bull of 1140 refers to *cellam sancti Pancracii sitam in loco qui dicitur Septem fontes*, apparently

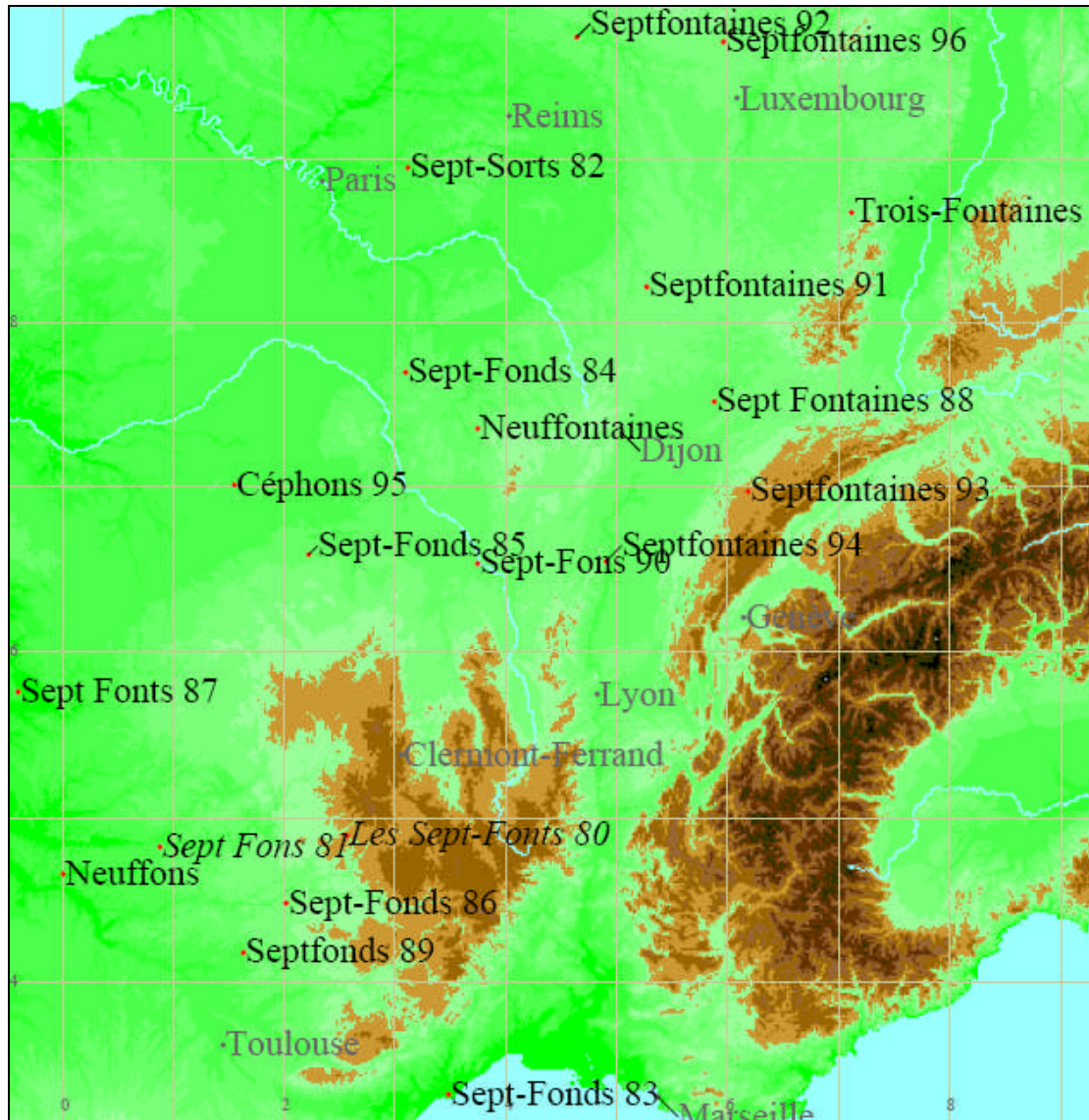


Figure 2: French names

in the region of Vulci, Italy (Cilla 1998); a document of 1218 records a *Domnus Guido de Septem-fontibus de Faventia* (i.e. Faenza; *MGH* 1903: 461). There was apparently a *Septem Fontes* near Turón in southern Spain: *In ualle Turone ecclesia Martini at Sancte Andree at alia loca que dicuntur Amnes et Septem Fontes* [...] (Pelayo, n.d.); in Duvernoy (1993: 130), a 13th-century *bastida de Septem Fontibus* is referred to; the *Livre des fiefs*

of Guillaume de Blaye (bishop of Angoulême, 1273–1307), refers to *quadrivio ad septem fontes*, apparently the crossroads at Beauvoir-sur-Niort (Deux-Sèvres; Nanglard 1904–5: 122). Finally, Hofmann’s *Lexicon Universale* of 1698 (vol. 3: 143) has this entry, likely to refer to Semifonte, the castle destroyed by Florence in 1202:

SEPTEM FONTES, urbs fuit agri Florentini, ad radices montium, alias sui justis, postea a Florentinis excisa, incolis Florentium migrare jussis.

[SEVEN SPRINGS, a city which was in the territory of Florence, at the foot of the mountains, formerly self-governing, afterwards destroyed by Florence, the inhabitants forced to migrate thither.]

A lost *Septfontaines* is mentioned by Duranty (1878: 1), who states:

Près de Pressigny, petite ville du centre de la France, se trouve le château de Septfontaines. Il y avait, paraît-il, sept sources dans le parc de ce château.

[Near Pressigny, a small town in the centre of France, is situated the château of Septfontaines. There were, it seems, seven springs in the park of this château.]

These examples demonstrate the widespread diffusion of the name, but do not explain where it came from. We must seek earlier references.

4. Heptapegon

The site of Heptapegon¹⁸ on the north-east shore of the Sea of Galilee between Magdala and Capernaum, is generally believed to correspond to the *erēmos (topos)* ‘desert place’ of the New Testament (Matthew 14: 13–21, Mark 6: 31–44), the Greek term implying a secluded place of refuge or retirement. Lipiński (1970: 27) gives early attestations of this Greek name. The modern name Tabgha (or et-Tabgha) is a phonetic reduction of the Greek name, probably first given in the period of Byzantine rule, which means ‘seven springs’. The archaeology of the site is discussed by Loffreda (1978: 1970), Pixner (1985b) and Bacon (1909); general discussions of the region are given by Masterman (1908: 259) and Pixner (1985a). There was certainly at least one spring here, which was used at an early period to drive a water-mill. This place was occasionally called *Beersheba* (cf. *ad Bersabe* 5th, *CCSL* 175: 241), creating confusion with Beersheba in southern Judea; on the latter name, Rainey (1978: 3) writes “Beer-sheba is so called because of an oath sworn there to Abraham (Gen 21: 31) and later in another version by Isaac (Gen 26: 33). There is no connection with seven wells!” Nevertheless, it is possible that Heptapegon acquired its name

because *Beersheba* was mistakenly thought by Greek speakers to mean 'seven wells'. A search for seven wells at the southern Beersheba, claimed to be successful (but which must be read with scepticism), was described by Robinson (1901).

Heptapegon became very early a destination of European pilgrims since it was believed to be the site of the New Testament miracle of the feeding of the multitude. But was the site and its name well-known in Europe? If so, it might have provided a prototype for the Christianization of European 'seven wells' sites. We thus need to consider the records of these pilgrims. The earliest report is that of Egeria (also known as Etheria and Sylvia) of her travels in 381–384 (McClure & Feltoe n.d.; Wilkinson 1999). Egeria possibly came from near Mont St. Michel in France (Weber 1998). Her report is partly lost, but was known to Petrus Diaconus of Monte Cassino who quoted from it in his *Liber de locis sanctis* in 1137. There, we read:

Ibidem uero super mare est campus erbosus, habens fenum satis et arbores palmarum multas et iusta eas septem fontes, qui singuli infinitam aquam emittunt

[In the same place on the sea is a grassy field, having much hay and many palm trees and by them are seven springs, which each emit much water (CCSL 175: 99).]

Eucherias, possibly bishop of Lyon in the first half of the 5th century, refers to *Beersheba* in northern Judea; this is Heptapegon (Wilkinson 2002: 97). A certain Theodosius, who visited probably between 518 and 530, wrote:

De Magdale usque ad septem fontes, ubi dominus Christus baptizauit apostolos, milia II, ubi et saturavit populum de quinque panibus et duobus piscibus.

[From Magdala to the seven springs, where the Lord Christ baptised the apostles, two miles, where he sated the people with five loaves and two fishes (CCSL 175: 115; Tsafirir 1986: 130, Wilkinson 2002: 105).]

Heptapegon is mentioned in a text of Epiphanius (7th century) and in the document known as *Commematorium* (Basel, 9th century; Wilkinson 2002: 214, 256). It has continued to attract visitors into modern times; for example, H. Rider Haggard described a visit in 1900 in his book *A winter pilgrimage*. Given that these pilgrim reports were widely copied in European monasteries (some were known to Bede, who used them to assemble his own *De locis sanctis*, which, however, includes no reference to *septem fontes*), it appears likely that the place called Heptapegon or *Septem Fontes* was well known in ecclesiastical circles, even in the pre-Crusade period.

Note that Strabo in his *Geographica* (before 24 CE) refers to a *Hepta Phreata* in Arabia in section 16.4.24.¹⁹ This is a Greek name meaning ‘seven springs’, but nothing further is known about this place. The possibility must remain open, however, that this is the prototype of the Galilee name.

5. The garden of virtue

To the medieval religious mind, ‘seven springs’ was more a moral or philosophical concept than a place. The exact meaning varied, but generally was linked to the flow of seven types of wisdom from Christ, and was viewed as opposing, or washing away, the seven deadly sins (on the sins, see Wenzel 1968, Tuve 1964). I see this concept as the result of a deliberate propaganda campaign, designed to Christianize ways of thinking that the church had failed to suppress. In the early middle ages, the ‘seven streams’ theme became greatly elaborated, and was associated with the seven liberal arts. The *Hortus deliciarum* (1180) of Herrad of Landsberg, abbess of Mount St. Odile, 1167–95 (Cames 1971), contains a famous illustration (Figure 3)²⁰ showing a personification of Philosophy with seven streams emanating, the associated text reading *Septē fontes sapientæ fluunt de philosophia quae dicuntur liberales artes*.

Even better known was the *Somme le roi* of Lorens, written for the king of France in 1279. This Old French text has been discussed in detail by Kosmer (1978). Many copies were made, including in England. Lorens describes ‘seven streams’ thus:

la fontaine de grace ... ceste fontaine se devise on VII ruisselez ce sont les VII dons du saint esprit qui arousent touz iardins. Les VII petitions sont ausic come VII tres beles puceles qui ne cessent de puisier des VII ruissiaus les caves vives pour a rouse ces VII arbres qui portent le fruit de vie par durable (Kosmer 1978: 303).

[the spring of grace ... this spring divides into 7 rivulets which are the 7 gifts of the holy spirit which irrigate all gardens. The 7 petitions [of the paternoster] are also like 7 very beautiful maidens who never cease to collect the 7 streams in tanks in order to nourish the 7 trees which bear the everlasting fruit of life.]

Surviving manuscripts are illustrated by figures showing seven trees fed by seven streams. It seems very possible that real gardens were built according

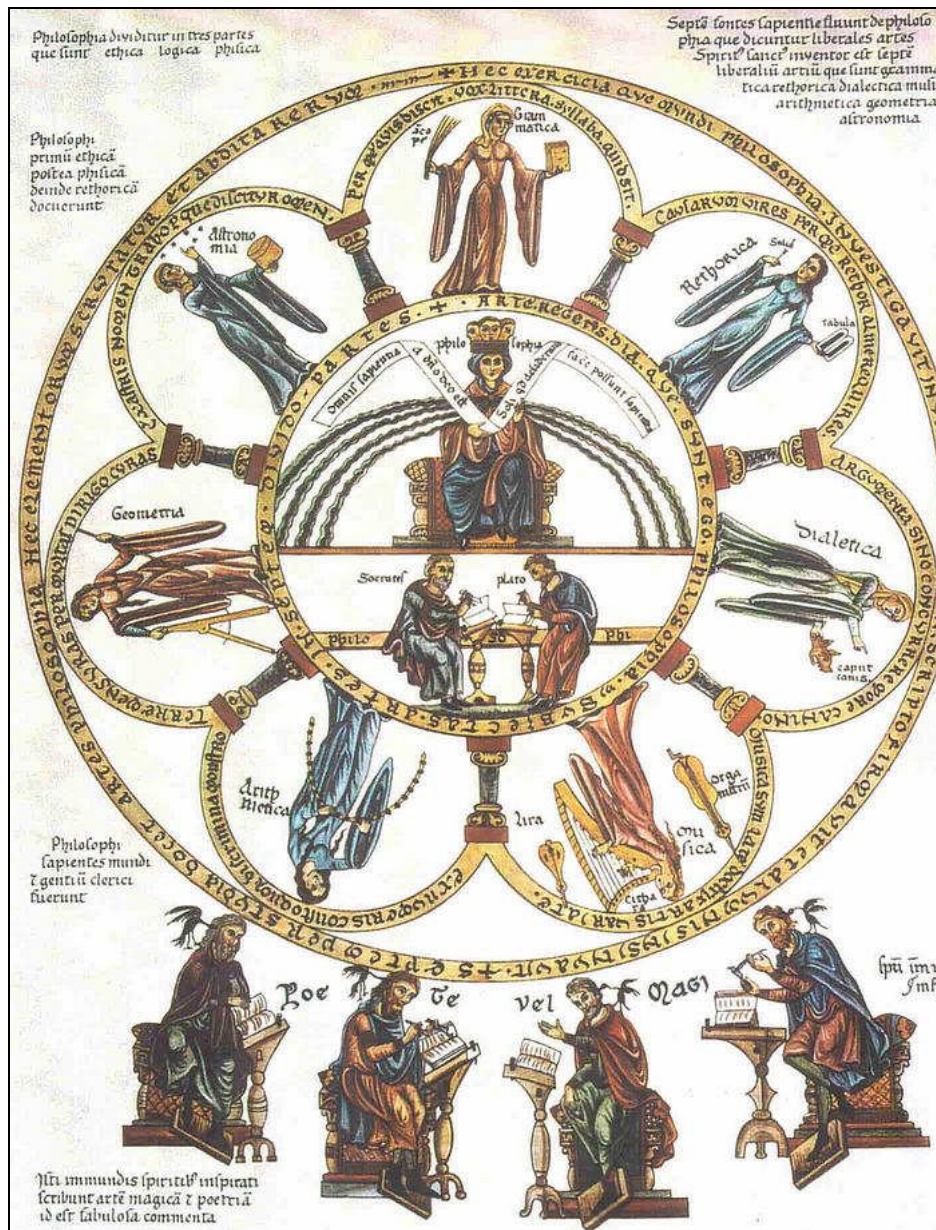


Figure 3: The seven liberal arts according to Herrad of Landsberg

to this pattern, though I know of no actual example. Knowledge of the *Somme le roi* in England certainly continued at least until the 14th century, when an English translation known as *The Book of Vices and Virtues* was made. This gives the text above as *Pis welle is departed in seuene stremes, þat ben þe seuen 3iftes of þe Holy Gost, þat wateren al þe garden* (Francis 1942: 96). In the *Gesta Romanorum*, another book of morality tales, probably from the end of the 13th century, the seven trees theme occurs but not the seven streams (Hertridge 1879).

Jeremy (1962: 66) discusses the book *Liber specialis gratiae* of Mechthild (born c. 1210) of Helfta near Eisleben. Here, seven fountains occur in a vision described in part one, chapter 13: "... a garden or hills of virtues with seven levels, a virtue-fountain on each. Bathing in these removes the seven deadly sins". Jeremy states that in Florence, Boccaccio referred to this book, and it was also known to Dante, whose Matelda in Canto 13 of *Purgatorio* was inspired by Mechthild.²¹

These medieval philosophies are, however, not the beginning of the story. The special significance given to the number seven in many cultures, for which there are records going back to Egyptian, Babylonian and Vedic times, has been amply discussed in a vast literature, for example, Williams (1945), Hopper (1938), Blair (2006), Robledo (2003), W. R. Smith (1956). A detailed treatment of the Biblical symbolism of seven (chiefly occurring in Genesis and the Revelation of St. John, but nowhere related to water) has been undertaken by Kittel (1964, s.v. *hepta*). Almost any type of object has at some time been counted in sevens; we need only note here here an early case involving streams: the Indian 'seven river land' is said to comprise the rivers Indus and Sárasvatī plus the Punjab, the latter meaning 'five rivers' (Puhvel 1987: 41; Wheeler 1968: 131). But this appears to be a realization of a mythical action of Indra, described in the *Rigveda*. Verses 2.12.3 and 2.12.12 mention seven streams four times; for example: *yó hatvāhim áriṇāt saptá síndhūn yó gā udājad apadhā valásya* 'He who having slain the serpent set flowing the seven streams, he who drove out the cows from Vala's hiding place'. Furthermore, in verse 7.36.6 the Sárasvatī is described as *saptáthī síndhūmātā* 'seventh, mother of streams'.²²

6. Conclusion

I suggest that the accumulated indirect evidence supports the view that in the early English and European 'seven wells' names, we are dealing with a spring or group of springs, probably considered sacred, but the exact meaning of any associated superstition is lost. In most of the English examples, the name underwent phonological changes and the meaning was forgotten. In several French and German examples, the name maintained its transparent meaning and was used for a Christian foundation. The original pre-Christian folklore belongs to a very old tradition that may possibly be a continuous one back to Rigvedic times. However, the name Seven Springs represents a modern revival of the old tradition.

There are several loose ends. Several names of the types Sevenhampton and Sevington remain mysterious. Next, the Nine Wells names need a separate study. Most have no early records, but note

Enneakrounos or ‘nine springs’, a water supply system in ancient Athens, referred to by Thucydides (Owens 1982). This may have inspired the name Nine Wells at Shelford, south of Cambridge, as it supplied Hobson’s conduit and so the first public water supply of Cambridge. This would be an academic joke, like the naming of the River Isis at Oxford or the Sinodun Hills (Coates 1999–2000). But this can hardly apply to the ON name *níu brunnar* of Newbourne in Suffolk (Briggs 2006). Note that the ancient reservoir on the Oppian Hill in Rome (which supplied the Baths of Trajan) now known as the Sette Sale ‘seven rooms’ actually has nine equal compartments (Claridge 1998: 292). Perhaps this structure was inspired by the *Enneakrounos* in Athens. Next, I suggest the ‘seven trees’ names need re-examination. Are these connected to the ‘garden of virtue’ theme? Was such a garden built in the grounds of Knole House in Kent, giving rise to the name Sevenoaks? Furthermore, can archaeology contribute to this problem area? Perhaps we can locate seven artificially constructed channels at one of the monastic sites with a ‘seven wells’ name? Finally, I have identified three likely unrecognized ancient ‘seven wells’ names: Sovell Down, Seward’s Bridge, and Shewhill. More research is needed to determine if these identifications are correct.

7. Gazetteer

Uncited early forms are from dictionaries or EPNS survey volumes. Each place is given a unique number, corresponding to those on the maps (Figures 1, 2, 6).

Additionally, PN C: 351 has *Sevewelles*, *Sewelles* (1250), *Sywelle* (1395), all unlocated; a lost *Sevenewelles* in Leicestershire is mentioned in PN Nth: 139–40; Seabeach (PN Sx: 68) may well be ‘seven streams’; Seven Wells is a road in Amotherby (Y); and in Wales we have Saith Ffynnon near Carmel at SJ 154 773, Seven Wells in Gwrhyd at SO 070 847, and *Sewells Hooke* occurs as a 1680 spelling for Shoales Hook (Pembrokeshire; Charles 1992: 452).

Bedfordshire

1. Sewell SP 995 229 (PN Bd: 129, Wa: xlii)
 - Sewelle* 1086
 - Sewell* 1247
 - Siwell* 1287
 - Seywell* 1287

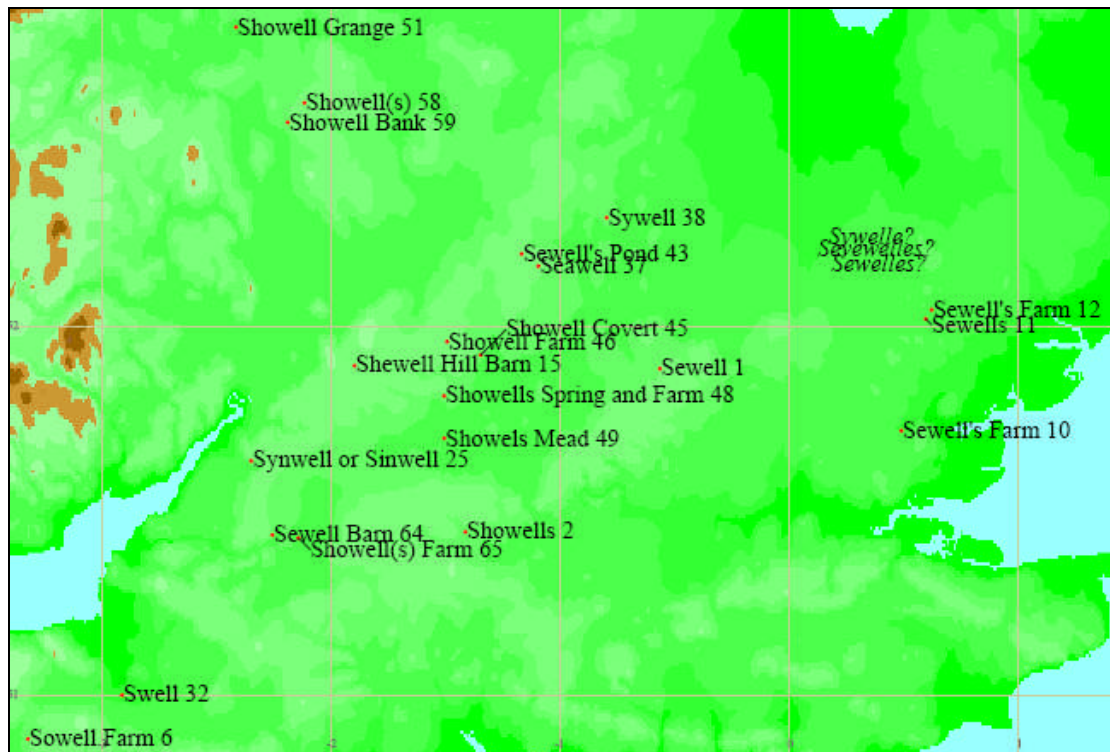


Figure 4: Names of the *Sewell* and *Showell* type, with numbers from the gazetteer. Not shown: Sewel Field Westmorland NY 68 29.

Berkshire

2. Showells (*Showels* 1830 PN Brk: 275), Welford SU 414 720.

Near Easton. Note also neighbouring Sole Farm SU 410 712.

Cf. also Sheffield Fm (PN Brk 1: 206), *Sewelle* 1086; *Seven Bridges*, Reading (PN Brk 1: 171; now Bridge St.).

Cheshire

3. Seven Springs, Danebank SJ 986 841 (OS 2006)
Not in PN Ch. Cf. Seven Oaks Farm (*Seven okes* 1353; PN Ch 2: 133), whence modern Senna. Also *le Seven Okys* c. 1300, *le Sevenakis* c. 1300 [15th], PN Ch 4: 83.

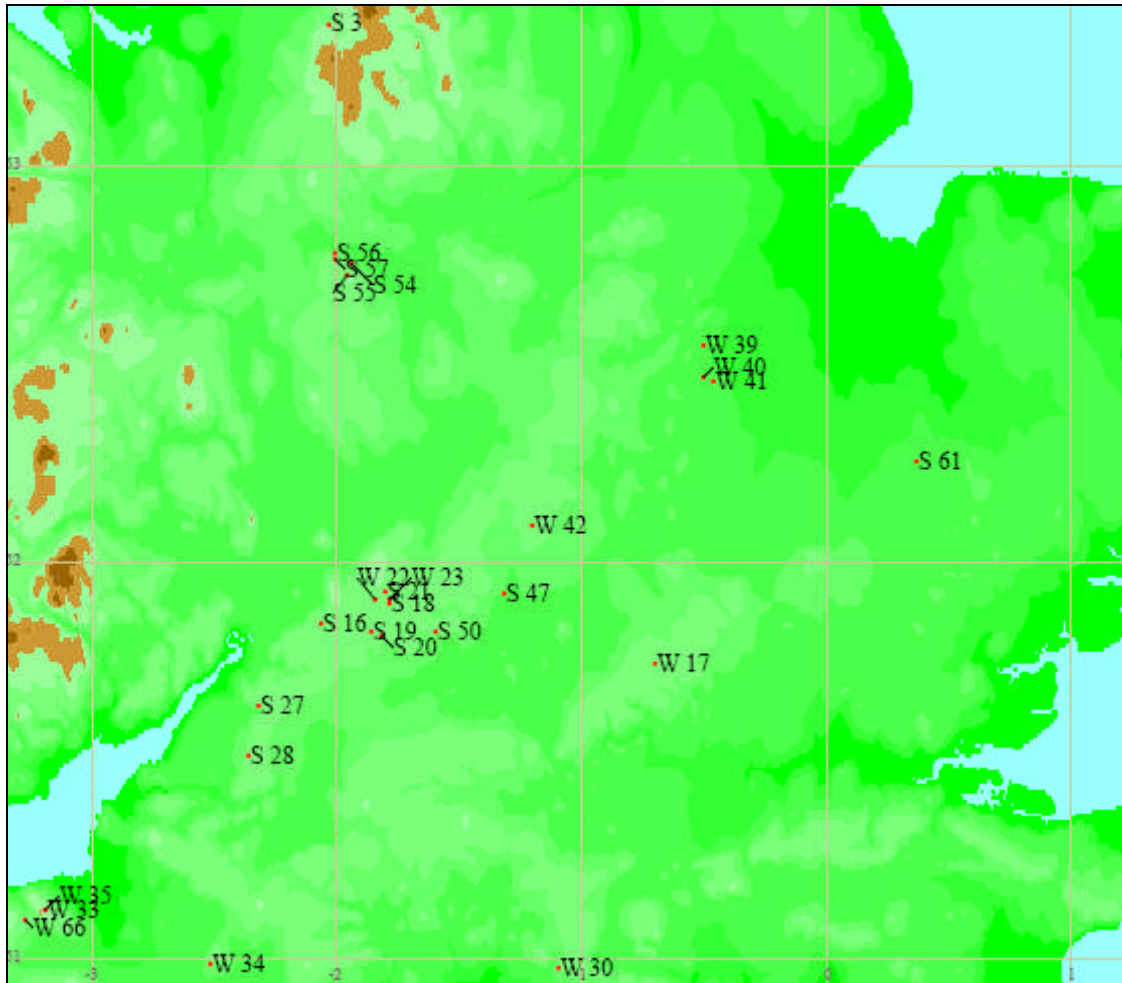


Figure 5: 'seven wells' (W) and 'seven springs' (S) names, with numbers from the gazetteer. Not shown: Seven Springs, Northumberland NY 826 489.

Cornwall

4. Suffenton SX 053 804
de septem fontibus n.d. (*ex inf.* O. Padel)
Surfontem 12th Cartulary of Plympton Priory (Blair 2006: 521)

Derbyshire

5. *Seuwelledale*, Aldwark SK 188 544? (PN Db: 340 (450?); cf. Derbyshire Arch. Soc. xxii, 24, cited at PN Nth: 139).
Seuwelled', -dale c. 1160, Hy 2, c. 1191
Sevewelladala Hy 2

Seuen(e)welledale 1162–80, 1280
Sewelledale c. 1240

Devon

6. Sowell Farm, Kentisbeare ST 072 101 (PN D: 565)
Souewella 1223
Seuewell 1244
Seuewyll 1329
Souewille 1333
Sowyll 1498

Dorset

7. *seuen willes (bry)* 955 [14th], *Sufewella* 15th (PN Do 1: 32), Kingston SY 963 777
8. *(Rivulum de) Sevewella* c. 1270 (PN Do 2:242), Shillingstone ST 825 115
9. Silverlake (Cottages & Farm; *Sewelake* 1454, PN Do 3: 305), Castleton ST 615 154.

If really a ‘seven wells’ name, it is a unique example compounded with OE *lacu*, and shows that folk-etymological development to *silver* can occur. Cf. the Reading examples above.

Essex

10. Sewell’s Farm (cf. *Sewallesfrith* 1323, PN Ess: 235), Great Baddow TL 72 05.
11. Sewells, Little Yeldham TL 78 39 (PN Ess: 469)
William fil’ Sewall’ 1274
Sewals 1768
12. Sewell’s Farm (cf. *William Sewale* 1327, PN Ess: 410), Belchamp Otton TL 80 42.

Gazetteer items 10–12 all probably from personal names.

13. Setfontaynes, Mucking TQ 92 89? (PN Ess: 598)

Gloucestershire

14. Shewhill Coppice, Turkdean SP 112 188 (PN Gl 1: 176)
Shewhill 1771
 cf. *Shewhill Barn* 1888–91 OS map
15. Shewell Hill (*Showell* ~ 1807, PN Gl 2: 18), Hawling SP 079 227
16. Seven Springs, Coberley SO 968 169 (PN Gl 1: 153)
Seven Wells Head 1760
Seven wells 1777
 Source of the Churn. On 1889 OS map (Walters 1928: 108, item 1).
17. Seven Wells, Bisley SP 903 060 (*Bisley Well* 19th OS maps; Walters 1928: 108, item 6).
18. Seven Springs, Bourton-on-the-Water SP 159 222 (Walters 1928: 108, item 3). Not on OS maps.
19. Seven Springs, Northleach SP 107 143 (OS 1889, 2006; Walters 1928: 108, item 2)
20. Seven Springs (1830, PN Gl 1: 172), Eastington SP 130 131
21. Seven Springs (1777, PN Gl 1: 199) Eyford SP 148 252, between Naunton and Swell. Stream now dammed.
22. Seven Wells, Naunton SP 115 234 (PN Gl 1: 200)
23. Seven Wells (ground) (1847; PN Gl 1: 209), Upper Slaughter ?SP 155 232
24. Seven Waters (OS 1889, Walters 1928: 108, item 8; Severn Waters 2006 OS map), Leonard Stanley SP 799 034. According to PN Gl 2: 201 there was a priory of St. Leonard here, founded *c.* 1200. Cf. Swynnerton (1922).

25. Synwell or Sinwell ST 765 933 (PN Gl 2: 258)
Suuen well' 1248
Synwel' 1248
Sinwell 1541
Synwell 1541
Sunwell 1624
26. *Senewell'* (1225; PN Gl 1: 239) Chipping Campden SP 157 390, perhaps for *Seuwell'*.
27. Seven Springs, Ozleworth ST 789 934 (Walters 1928: 108, item 4). Not named on any map.
28. Seven Springs, Dodington ST 751 799 (PN Gl 3: 48; Walters 1928: 108, item 5)

Hampshire

29. *syfan wyllan* 938 [12th] S: 444, Tichborne SU 574 322
30. The Seven Wells (2006, OS), Old Winchester Hill SU 646 204
31. Sevington (1872 OS 457951, 129369), Tichborne SU 574 296. Not in Coates (1989).

Somerset

32. Swell (1889 & 2006 OS), ST 368 235
Swella c. 1080
Sewelle 1086
Swell 1212
33. Seven Wells, Over Stowey ST 1779 3740 (ADS)
 cf. Seven Wells Wood and Stream 1890 OS
 Seven Wells Wood 2006 OS, ST 173 377 (cf. VCH So 6: 158–62)
34. Seven Wells Farm, Corton Denham ST 645 218 (OS)
 The source of River Yeo, also known as Seven Sisters Well.
35. Seven Wells, Adscombe ST 173 377 (OS)

Lincolnshire

36. *Seuenwelles* Ed1 [14th], c. 1329 [14th] (PN L 6: 182), Hemswell SK 932 911

Spring at Hemswell.

Northamptonshire

37. Seawell SP 625 525 (PN Nth: 40)
Sewell(e) 1086
Sewewell 12th
Seuewell 1220, 1235, 1242
Seywell Close, Seawell Coppice 1681
Se(y)well 1761
Seywell 1930

(Grounds and Wood) near Blakesley. On a hill, near a minor tributary of R. Tove. Caswell is nearby.

38. Sywell SP 825 675 (PN Nth: 139)
Snewelle 1086
Siwell(a) 1086
Seywell 1287
39. Seven Wells (f.n.; PN Nth: 40), Apethorpe TL 025 955
40. Seven Wells (f.n.; PN Nth: 40), Stoke Doyle TL 022 863
 Sevenwells Spring on modern map.
41. Seven Wells (f.n.; Thompson 1917), Barnwell TL 05 85
42. Seven Wells (f.n.; Thompson 1917), Sulgrave SP 556 448
43. Sewell's Pond, Fawsley SP 570 561 (PN Nth: 23)
Sewellmede 1333
Seywell 1791

Not mentioned in a charter of 944 (S 495†) discussed in Brown & Key (1977–8), of which this place is a point on the bounds.

Northumberland

44. Seven Springs (1865 & 2006 OS maps), Knockshield Moor NY 826 489

Oxfordshire

45. Showell Covert, Steeple Barton SP 451 255 (PN O: 249)
Seuelle 1210
Seuwellestlade 1210, 1240
Sewelle late 13th
46. Showell Farm, Little Tew SP 358 291 (PN O: 291)
Sevewelle 1086
Sivewelle 1086
Sefewella c. 1154–63
Seuelle 1207
Sewelle 1241–64
Swelles 1252
Sowelle 1278–9
Showel early 18th
47. Seven Springs House (2006 OS map), Steeple Aston SP 472 255. Not on 1884–5 OS map. Not in PN O: 247.
48. Showells Spring and Farm (*Showel Spring* 1822, PN O: 314), Crawley SP 343 132
49. Showels Mead (f.n.), Aston Bampton SP 340 003 (PN O: 303)
50. Seven Springs (f.n. 2006, OS map), South Lawn SP 285 145
 Approx. 5km north of Swinbrook village. On 1885 OS map. Not in PN O: 383.

Shropshire

51. Showell Grange (2006 OS), Sambrook SJ 722 248. Also Showell Mill SJ 719 242. Both on 1891 OS map.

52. *Seuewallesych* 1321, *Seall' Syche* 1550, Much Wenlock SJ 623 001

Gelling (PN Sa 3: 268) comments that this is 'Seven Springs'.

Staffordshire

53. *seofan wyllan* 985 [12th] S: 860, Wolverhampton SJ 912 005

54. Seven Springs, Rugeley SK 04 17 (PN St: 109)

55. Seven Springs, Cannock Forest SK 032 147 (Horovitz 2005: 482)

56. Seven Springs, Cannock Forest SK 004 206 (Horovitz 2005: 482)

57. Seven Springs, Cannock Forest SK 006 180 (Horovitz 2005: 482).
The above four are probably modern.

58. Showell(s), Wolverhampton SJ 92 01 (Horovitz 2005: 492)

Sewale 1286

Sewall(e) 1287, 13th, 14th

Seawall 14th

Shewells 16th

Se(a)well 16th

Shawell 1614

Show Hill 1834

Showell Farm 1889 OS map

This is the name customarily related to *seofan wyllan broc* of S: 860 (above).

59. Showell Bank, Springhill SO 87 95 (Horovitz 2005: 492). Probably connected to the previous name.

60. *Sewalmedowe* (1415; Horovitz 2005: 492), Barton-under-Needwood SK 185 185

Suffolk

61. Seven Springs (2007 OS), Exning TL 621 643. Not on 1894, 1891, 1892 OS maps. Associated with St. Wendreda's Well. Probably a modern name.

Westmorland

62. Sewel field (cf. *Sinewelle close* 1539; PN We 2: 95), Appleby NY 68 29
63. *Seaven Mires* 1690, Kirkby Lonsdale SD 61 78. Also *Seven Acres* 1676 (PN We 1: 46).

Wiltshire

64. Sewell Barn (cf. *Sywelegh* 1382, PN W: 94), Colerne ST 820 711

The 1889 OS map has a farm near the village centre, just south of the church, with an unreadable name which could be “Sall” or “Swall”.

65. Showell(s) Farm (1889 OS 390934, 170980; *Showell* 1773, PN W: 104), Lacock ST 908 709

Just south of Chippenham. “Well” marked on 1889 OS map.

Worcestershire

66. Seven Wells (1891, 2006 OS), Broadway ST 119 346 (Walters 1928: 108, item 7)

Germanic names

67. *Sieborn*, Holzhausen, Kirchhain (50.8191, 8.9178); Förstemann (1915: 711) gives the very early form *Sibenbrvnnen* 779.
68. *Siebenbrunn*, Hartberg (47.2455, 15.949); Förstemann (1915: 711) gives *Sibenbrunn* 1112.
69. *Siebenborn*, Maring-Novian (49.9345, 6.9938)
Septem fontibus 1157
Septem fontes 13th

Förstemann (1915: 711) gives *Septem fontes* n.d.

70. *Siebenbach*, Mayen-Koblenz (50.3795, 7.0367)

- 71. Siebenborn, Brey (50.2626, 7.6267)
- 72. Siebenbrunn, Haunstetten (48.3227, 10.9262)
- 73. Siebenbrunn, Markneukirchen (50.3098, 12.3051)

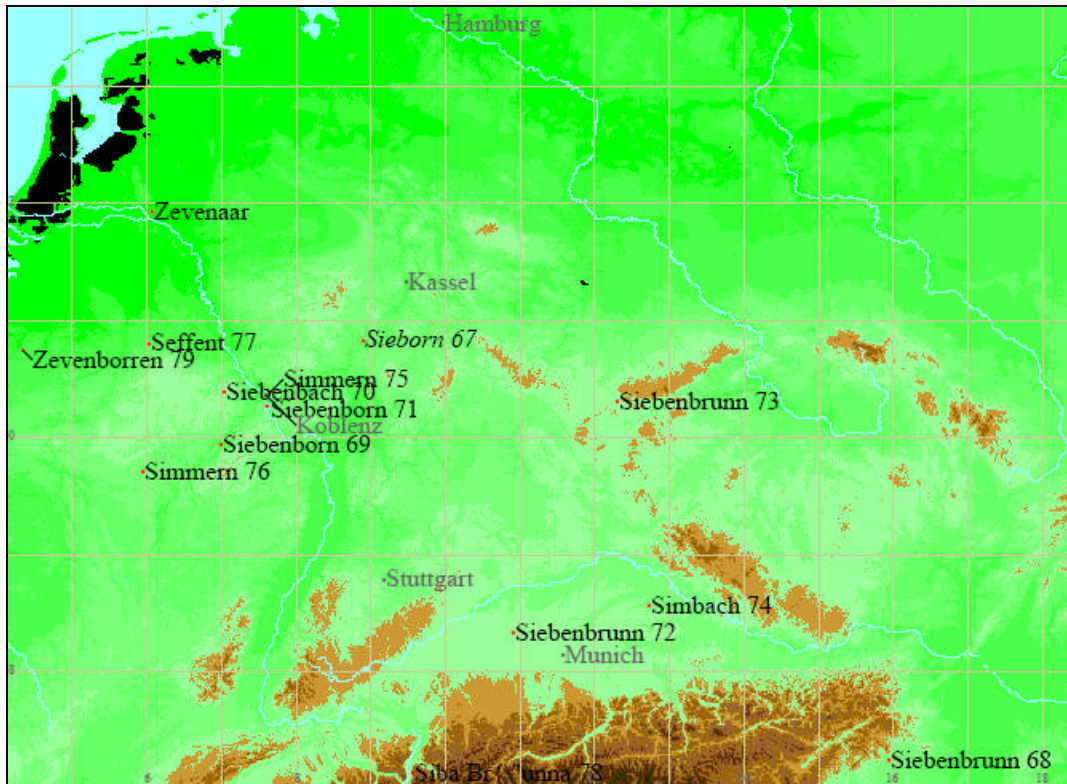


Figure 6: German names

- 74. Simbach, Dingolfing-Landau (48.5661, 12.7369)
- 75. Simmern, Westerwald (50.3909, 7.6739)
 - Syfenburne* 1216 (Berger 1999: 246; Gysseling 1960: 917; Bach 1953: 126)
 - Sivenburn* 1420 (Berger 1999: 246)
- 76. Simmern, Luxembourg (49.6996, 5.9653)
 - de vii fontibus* 1144–68, 1192 (±1222) (Gysseling 1960: 917)
 - Siebenborn* 1396 (Berger 1999: 246)
 - Septem fontium* 1205 (1215) (Gysseling 1960: 917)

Known as Septfontaines in French.

77. Seffent, Laurensberg (50.7892, 6.0402) From *Septem Fontes*
78. Siba Brünna, Triesenberg, Liechtenstein (47.1255, 9.5783)
79. Zevenborren, Sint-Genesius-Rode, Halle-Vilvoorde, Belgium (50.745, 4.3456). The generic here is a Flemish cognate of German Brunne. An Augustinian abbey, founded in the 14th century. Latinized as *Monasterium septem fontium*, apparently borrowing its name from the Cistercians.

Romance names

For each French name, I give the commune (if it is not itself a commune) and the département, followed by the latitude and longitude. Where no authority is cited, the name was found on modern maps and may not be old. N-numbers refer to Nègre (1990–98).

80. *Les Sept-Fonts (ad Septem Fontes 917; Doniol 1863)*, Carlat, Cantal (44.8891, 2.5651)
81. *Sept Fons (Septem Fontes 1124, ex inf. J.-H. Billy)*, Cadouin, Dordogne, possibly to be identified with the modern Septfonds at 44.8119, 0.8727
82. Sept-Sorts (*Septem Sortes*, 1135; N 20845), Seine-et-Marne (48.9375, 3.103)
83. Sept-Fonds (*ad Septem Fontes 1184, Hamlin 2000*), Agde, Hérault (43.3081, 3.4733)
84. Sept-Fonds, Saint-Fargeau, Yonne (47.702, 3.0974)
de Septem Fontibus 1210
Septem Fontes 15th (N 20367).

The commune of Sept-Fonds was absorbed into Saint-Fargeau in 1972.

85. Sept-Fonds, Saint-Jeanvrin, Cher (46.5858, 2.2115)

Near Fontenay and Fonteneau.

86. Sept-Fonds (*de Septemfontibus* 1341, N 20397, Vincent 1937), Villeneuve, Aveyron (44.4767, 2.0214)
87. Sept Fonts, Saint-Sulpice-de-Cognac, Charente (45.7654, -0.4139)
88. Sept Fontaines, La Vernotte, Haute Saône (47.5211, 5.8774). No early forms (N 20428b, Dauzat & Rostaing 1963).
89. Septfonds, Tarn-et-Garonne (44.1783, 1.6188)
de Septemfontem 1040–47 (*ex inf.* P.-H. Billy)
de septem fontibus 1267 (N 20397, Dauzat & Rostaing 1963)

The abbey of *Sancta Maria de Septem Fontibus* was founded here c. 1130.

90. Sept-Fons, Diou, Allier, near Dompierre-sur-Besbre (46.534, 3.7412)
monachi de Septemfontibus 1134 (Vincent 1937)
Abbaye de Sept-Fons (Cistercian), 1132 (Lamy 1937)
91. Septfontaines, Blancheville, Haute-Marne (48.2231, 5.2595).

The *Inventaire des Sceaux de Champagne* (Roger 2003) mentions a *Septfontaines* in the Diocèse de Langres (1361). This very likely refers to this place. The Premonstratensian abbey of Saint-Nicolas was founded here in 1125 in the Forêt de Heu. The name was recorded as *Septem Fontes* 1134 (Roserot 1903). Under Philippe le Bel (1299), it became a royal abbey.

92. Septfontaines, Fagnon (49.7383, 4.6368)
de Septem Fontibus 1150 (N 20428a)
Septem fontium 1218 (Gysseling 1960)

Former abbey (prémontrés, 12th cent.), Charleville-Mézières, Ardennes.

93. Septfontaines, Doubs (46.9811, 6.1828)
Satfontaines 1248 (N20445)
Sepfontaines 1477 (Dauzat & Rostaing 1963)
94. Septfontaines, Tournus (46.5556, 4.9084)
95. Céphons (*Septfonz* 1250, Gendron 2004: 42), Indre (47.0104, 1.5555)

96. Septfontaines, Luxembourg (49.6996, 5.9652)

See Simmern, Luxembourg (above)

97. Siete Aguas, Chiva, Valencia (39.472, -0.917) (Celdrán 2002)

98. Settefontane, Trento (46.003, 11.1058)

99. Settefontane, Sover (46.2009, 11.3277)

100. Settefonti, Ozzano dell'Emilia (44.3957, 11.4629)

101. Sette fontane, Santu Lussurgiu, Oristano (40.1424, 8.6557) (Crudeli 1952)

Several streets in Italian towns have 'seven springs' names: Maso Sette Fontane, Giovo, Trento; Via de Sette Fontane, Genazzano, Roma; Via alle Sette Fontane, Trento, Trentino-Alto Adige; and Via delle Sette Fonti, Tornimparte, L'Aquila.

Other instances of 'seven springs' names of uncertain date are Sjukällan and Sju Källor in Sweden; *Hepta Piges* on Rhodes and Telega Tujuh in Malaysia. It is disputed whether the Spanish Cifuentes means seven or ten springs (Celdrán 2002).

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Appendix: false friends

Certain names have a superficial similarity to ‘seven wells’ names, but are known to have an unrelated origin. Many field-names (and probably farm names: Figure 4) of the Showell type are from OE *scofl* ‘shovel’. Examples include *Scouledale*, *shouells* (PN Lei 3: 342) and Shovel Acre (PN Gl 4: 169). We also have field-names from ME *shewell* ‘scare-crow’. Finally, some farm-names of the *Sewells* and *Showells* type are from personal names related to the modern surnames Sewell and Saywell, derived from OE *Sigeweald* and *Sǣgeweald*, or ON *Sigvaldr* (Reaney 1976).

Seeving Well, (Mitcheldean, Gl; Walters 1928: 140), is probably the same name as Seeding Well < *Seething Well* (PN Ch 3: 244; another PN Sr: 63) and *Exceeding Well* (PN Ch 3: 273), the sense being ‘bubbling or “boiling” spring’. The ON *sef* ‘sedge’ appears in many northern place-names, but seems never to have been confused with seven. Seaville (PN Cu: 293, *Seuyll* 1397) is possibly a bilingual compound of this element with OE *w(i)elle*. The name Spirewell (PN D: 261) ‘sedge-well’ proves that ‘well’ names can be formed in such a fashion.²³

An origin unrelated to ‘seven’ is possible for Dutch names containing the element *zeve*: van Berkel & Samplonius (1995, s.n. *Sevenum*) says “... Vlaams *zeve* ‘een soort verlaat waarin gaten aangebracht om het drijvend vuil tegen te houden’” ‘a type of sluice in which holes have been made to stop floating debris’. Thus it is uncertain whether Zevecote in Belgium is ‘seven cottages’ or ‘sluice cottage’. In any case, a transfer of this name to Norwich may explain the lost *Sevecote Rowe* (1289; PN Nf 1: 148).

In Norwegian dialect, *seven* is said to mean ‘damp’ (Fick 1909, s.n. *safan*), and this perhaps appears in Scandinavian place-names.

Notes

1. It is not clear to which Northamptonshire name they are referring: Sewell’s Pond PN Nth: 23, Seawell Farm Nth: 40, or Sywell Nth: 139.
2. <http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet/?do=seek&query=S+99/> (accessed Oct. 5th 2007).
3. Grundy (1921: 158) interprets *syfan wyllan* as ‘Syfa’s spring’. Such a personal name is unrecorded, and in view of the other evidence I have assembled, this must surely be a ‘seven’-name.
4. Cf. also German dialect forms such as Liechtensteiner *siba* and Luxemburgisch *siwe*.
5. Curiously, the forms *Sv(v)elle* DB and *Sewell* 1584 occur for Swell (PN Gl 1: 226), as well as other spellings suggesting a disyllabic pronunciation; *Suwell(a) c.* 1146–50 and *Suelle c.* 1155 are recorded for Southwell (PN Nt: 175); and

Sheffield Farm (PN Brk: 206) was *Sewelle* in DB. None of these names is thought to be a 'seven wells' name.

6. Norfolk Record Office, LDS Microfilm #1526811, Item 4.
7. Data from www.houseprices.co.uk, checked April 2007.
8. I have modernized Smith's spelling of these names.
9. Latin *fōns* masc. 'spring' (stem *font-*, nom. pl. *fontēs*, dat./abl. pl. *fontibus*), dim. *fontāna* fem. 'fountain' have Romance reflexes: OF *font* masc. or fem., (sometimes in the plural confused with *fonds* < *fundus* 'foundation'), only used now in the phrase *les fonts baptismaux* 'font', replaced in the sense 'spring' by *source*; ModF *fontaine* fem., 'fountain'; Gascon *hounta*; Italian *fonte* fem., 'spring' (pl. *fonti*), and *fontana* fem. 'fountain' (pl. *fontane*); Spanish *fuentes* fem.
10. Aachen itself is of course a spring-name, from *Aquae Grani*.
11. Note that seven bridges and seven elms are recorded at Fountains Abbey (Mauchline & Greeves 1988: 48; PN YW 5: 192).
12. *Ex inf.* P.-H. Billy.
13. It is unclear whether this abbey was Cistercian. It is considered so at www.caussade-patrimoine.com/dossier-septfonds.htm, but not included in the comprehensive lists at <http://www.cistercensi.info/>. (Both sites visited 6th July 2007).
14. In this article, all translations into English following quotations are my own.
15. An engraving of the Abbaye St-André in Villeneuve lez Avignon (Berthier 2000: 8) shows seven trees each side of the avenue from the main entrance.
16. We also have several instances of the curious type *Cerfontaine*, *Surfontaine*, *Sirfontaines* etc., which probably have various origins, but whether the first element is in any case derived from *sept* is unclear. *Cer-* may have been transferred from names such as Cercamp (a Cistercian abbey), which was Latinized as Caricampi, as if meaning 'dear field', but which may have a completely different origin. For Surfontaine(s), Aisne, Nègre (20428c) gives *Septem Fontes* 12th, but this may be a misidentification. The *Cartulaire blanc de Saint-Denis* records *de Serenis Fontibus* for this place under the year 1158. For Cerfontaine (Avesnes-sur-Helpe, Nord) Gysseling (1960: 226) gives *Serfontanis*, *Serfontaines* 1188 'sacra fontana', whereas Nègre (23289) renders the same forms as 'fontaines du cerf'. There is also a Cerfontaine in Belgium. For Surfonds (Sarthe) Nègre (20844) gives *Sorfons* 13th. Two instances of Sirfontaines (Azois and Ormois, both in Haute-Marne), are derived by Nègre (17979, 17982) from the personal name Siricus. For all these names, an origin in the name of a Gaulish goddess **Sirona* (Lacroix 2007: 177) might be considered.
17. www.comune.ozzano.bo.it/siti/internet/contenuti/vivere_la_citta/cenni_storici/il_medioevo/ (visited 7th Nov. 2007).
18. Israel grid 202 254.
19. Strabo also has 'seven trees': his chapter 16.4.24.111 is titled 'De septem arboribus'.
20. Surviving only in a 19th-century copy.
21. For more on these ideas, see Kosmer (1978), Robertson, Jr. (1951).
22. For further discussion of Vedic creation myths, see Brown (1965).
23. The form *Senecaump* (1288) given by Baddeley (1916: 179) is possibly for *Sevecaump*, in which case we have a mystery to be solved.

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