

Seven wells

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Bristol Centre for Linguistics UWE 2010-03-10 1330

Joseph Wright

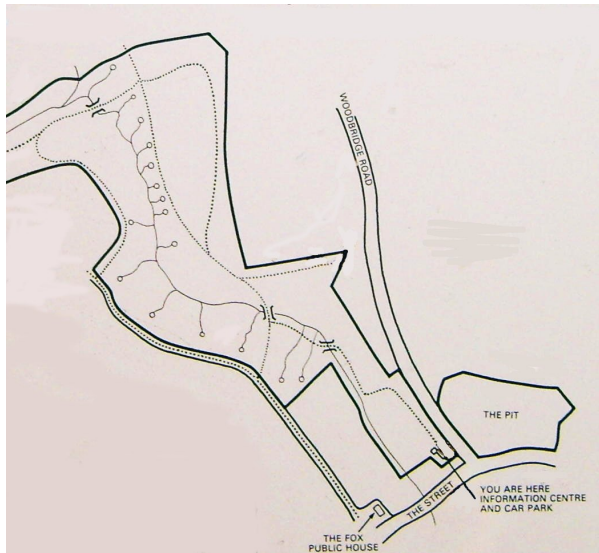
Everybody who would be a philologist must have done mathematics, or be capable of doing mathematics

— Joseph Wright (1855–1930), quoted in *The life of Joseph Wright*, page 74, by E. M. Wright (OUP 1932).

Nine wells

- ▶ Nine Wells, Shelford, Cambridgeshire 1575
- ▶ Newbourne, Suffolk *Neubrunna* 1086 < ON **níu brunnar**
- ▶ Enneakrounos?

Newbourne



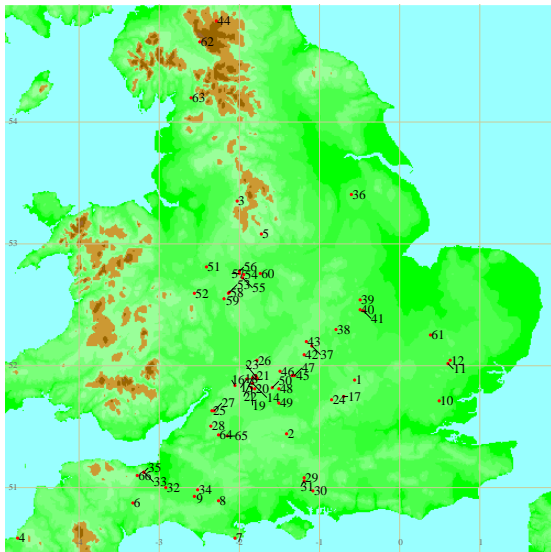
seven

- ▶ OE *seofon*; *sefo*, *sifu* (Northumbrian); *syfan* (West Saxon), *sufon* (late West Saxon)
- ▶ ME *sēven*, *seven(n)e*, *ceven(e)*, *seiven*, *sefne*, *sev(e)*, *sewen*, *sef(fe)*, *souve*, *sen(e)*, *seove(n)*, *zeve(n)*, *sevn*, *sefene*, *seofe(n)*, *seofan*, *seofon(e)*, *seofne*, *sefenn*, *seofenn*, *seffne*, *seoffne*, *seovene*, *soven(e)*, *sove*, *son(e)*

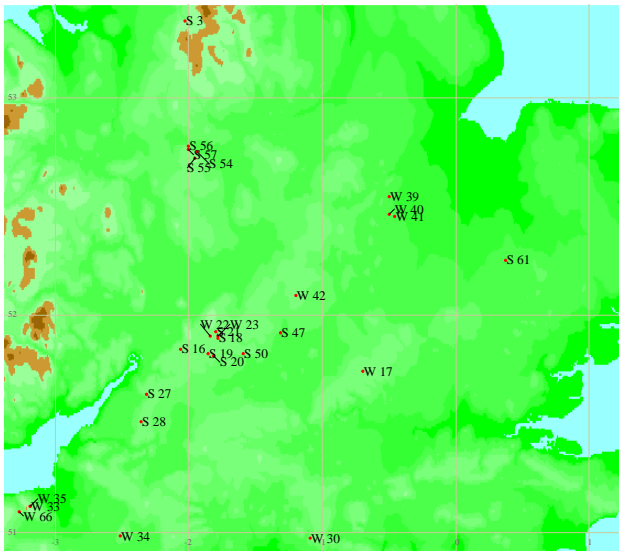
well, spring

- ▶ OE *wielle*, *wylle*, **wiell*, *wyll*, *will* strong masc.; **wiella*, *wylla*, *willa*, *wælla*, *wella* weak masc.; *wielle*, *wylle*, *wille*, *wælle*, *welle* weak fem.
- ▶ ME *wel(le)*, *wele*, *wel(la)*, *weile*, *wal(le)*, *wil(le)*, *wol(le)*, *wul(le)*, *wæl(le)*, *wealle*, *wella(n)*, *wlle*, *willan*, *willom*, *uel*, *ulle*, *vil*
- ▶ ME plural *welles*, *wel(len(e))*, *wallen*, *weallen*
- ▶ *æt þæs bernes ende æt þæs wæteres sprynge* S179 (AD 816)
- ▶ OE *welsprinces* (=fontes), gloss to Aldhelm (11th)

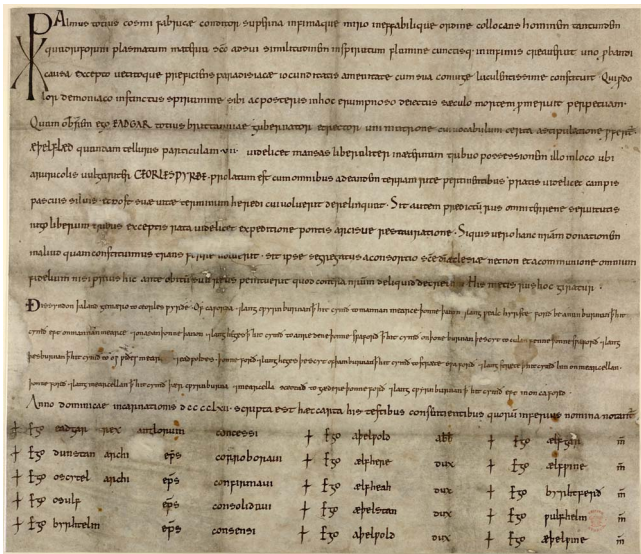
England



England



Sawyer 703 – Chelsworth, Suffolk



Early English place-names

- ▶ *Seofenwyllas* (Cold Aston, Gloucestershire), in a charter of Æthelbald of 737x740 (11th), Sawyer 99. At SP115188 — Shewhill Coppice and Shewhill Barn
- ▶ (*on*) *syfan wyllan*, Tichborne, Hampshire, in a charter of Athelstan of 938 (12th), Sawyer 444. SU574322 — Seward's Bridge
- ▶ *seuen willes þry*, Kingston in Purbeck, Dorset, in a charter of Eadred of 956 (15th), Sawyer 573
- ▶ *þa westran seofon wyllas*, Southstoke, Somerset, a charter of King Edgar of 961 (12th), Sawyer 694
- ▶ *seofan wyllan broc*, Showell, Staffordshire, in a charter of Æthelred of 985 (12th), Sawyer 860

Later English place-names — a small sample

- ▶ Showell, Oxfordshire *Sevewelle* 1086
- ▶ Sewell, Bedfordshire *Sewelle* 1086
- ▶ *Seuwelledale* c.1160, Derbyshire
- ▶ Seawell, Northants *Sewewell* 12th
- ▶ Sowell, Devon *Souewella* 1223
- ▶ Sinwell, Gloucestershire *Suuen well'* 1248
- ▶ Silverlake, Dorset *Sewelake* 1454

Cornish

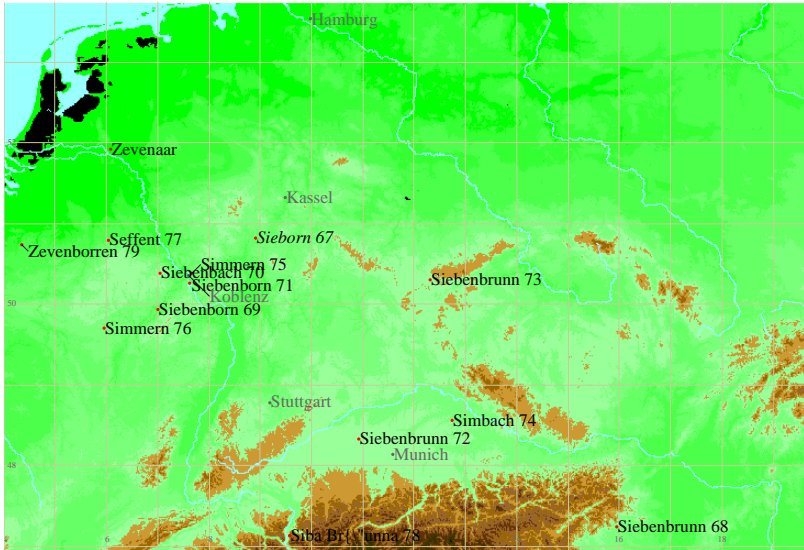
- ▶ Suffenton, Cornwall *Serfenton* c.1190, *Setfonten* 1284
- ▶ < Middle Cornish **seyth+fenten**
- ▶ *G. de septem fontibus* 1298

Sanctification

- ▶ Many Wells Spring, Cranham, Gloucestershire. *Emmanuel Springs* on 1887 OS map
- ▶ Holywell < *hol-wella*
- ▶ Bridewell ('St. Bridget') < *brid* 'bird' or **bryd* 'surging'?
- ▶ St. Chad's Well < *ceald* 'cold'

Ackroyd — *Thames: sacred river* 2008

- ▶ Seven Springs at source; *Setfontaynes* at mouth
- ▶ Wrong! *Ralph de Setfountayns, de Septem Fontibus*, lord of Ockendon

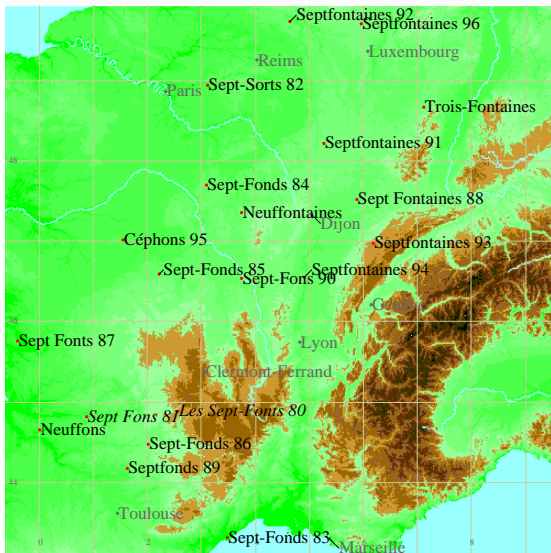


Seffent near Aachen

- ▶ Zwentibold 896: gift of the place called *Septem Fontes* to the abbess Gisela
- ▶ “Charlemagne” *Mox quedam arbor, de qua septem fontes videbantur*

Germanic names — a sample

- ▶ Sieborn, Holzhausen *Sibenbrvnnen* 779 (?)
- ▶ Siebenbrunn, Hartberg *Sibenbrunn* 1112
- ▶ Siebenborn, Maring-Noviad *Septem fontibus* 1157
- ▶ Simmern, Westerwald *Syfenburne* 1216
- ▶ Siba Brünna, Triesenberg, Liechtenstein
- ▶ Zevenborren, Sint-Genesius-Rode, Belgium

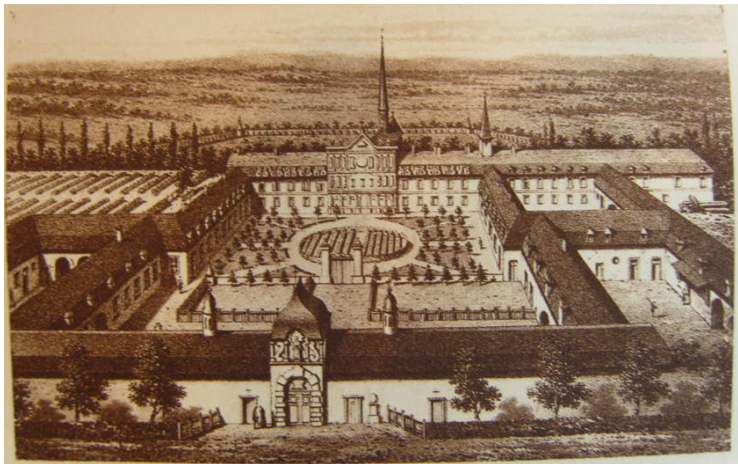


Luxembourg & France — a sample

- ▶ Les Sept-Fonts, Carlat, dépt. Cantal: *in loco qui vocatur ad Septem Fontes* 917
- ▶ Sept-Fons, Diou, Dompierre-sur-Besbre, dépt. Allier. Founded 1132 (Gaulish **devo* 'god')
- ▶ Sept-Fonds, Saint-Fargeau, dépt. Yonne *de Septem Fontibus* 1210
- ▶ Céphons, dépt. Indre. *Septfonz* 1250. Near Levroux
- ▶ Septfontaines (Simmern, Sieweburen), Luxembourg. *de vii fontibus* 12th; *Siebenborn* 1396
- ▶ Septfontaines, Blancheville, Haute-Marne *Septem Fontes* 1134
- ▶ Cerfontaine, Surfontaine, Sirfontaines ??

(Spain: Siete Aguas. Italy: Settefontane, Settefonti, Sièfontànes etc.)

Sept-Fons



Heptapegon (Tabgha) on the Sea of Galilee

- ▶ (Hepta Phreata, Arabia reported by Strabo, before 24 CE)
- ▶ Petrus Diaconus (Liber de locis sanctis 1137, quoting Etheria 381-384): *Ibidem uero super mare est campus erbosus, habens fenem satis et arbores palmarum multas et iusta eas septem fontes, qui singuli infinitam aquam emittunt*
- ▶ Theodosius (early 6th): *De Magdale usque ad septem fontes, ubi domnus Christus baptizauit apostolos, milia II, ubi et saturavit populum de quinque panibus et duobus piscibus*

Heptapegon



Aldhelm (c.640–709)

- ▶ Liber de Septenario: *septem epistolarum rivulis*
- ▶ XIV. FONNS

*Per cava telluris clam serpo celerrimus antra
 Flexos venarum girans anfractibus orbis;
 Cum caream vita sensu quoque funditus expers,
 Quis numerus capiat vel quis laterculus æquet,
 Vita viventum generem quot milia partu?
 His neque per cælum rutilantis sidera speræ
 Fluctivagi ponti nec compensantur harenæ.*

Superstition

- ▶ Jacob of Edessa (c.640-708): “seven well worship” amongst Christian Syrians
- ▶ al-Qazwini (d.1276): seven wells at Tiberias
- ▶ Punjab: 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
- ▶ India: “if there is no rain on April 27th, water taken from seven springs is [. . .] mixed with cowdung and red earth”
- ▶ Syria: “ a sick child . . . to drink from seven wells”
- ▶ *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”

FOLKLORE OF WELLS

BEING A STUDY OF

WATER-WORSHIP

IN EAST AND WEST

BY

R. P. MASANI, M.A.

BOMBAY :

D. B. TARAPOREVALA SONS & Co.

1918

Masani

- ▶ Solicitor's letter: "Our client is a staunch Hindu of old idea and he requires the use of water from seven wells for religious ceremonies. For this purpose he uses the two wells in question and has to go to neighbouring properties to make up the full number of seven wells."
- ▶ There are seven sacred ponds at Nirmal in the Thana district.
- ▶ In Northern India hydrophobia is believed to be cured if the patient looks down seven wells in succession.
- ▶ The water of seven tanks, or at least of one pond, in which lotuses grow, is said to check the virulence of measles and smallpox.
- ▶ In many parts of India the water of seven wells is collected on the night of the Dewali, or feast of lamps, and barren women bathe in it as a means of procuring children.

Scriptural cleansing

- ▶ 2 Kings 5:9–10: So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots, and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you and you shall be clean.”
- ▶ Fifth Ezra (130-300 CE):

parabo tibi arbores duodecim aliis et aliis fructibus et septem fontes fluentes lac et mel

French recension replaces *septem* by *totidem*

- ▶ Book of Zechariah: “seven streams” > “seven eyes”

Suppression of well-worship

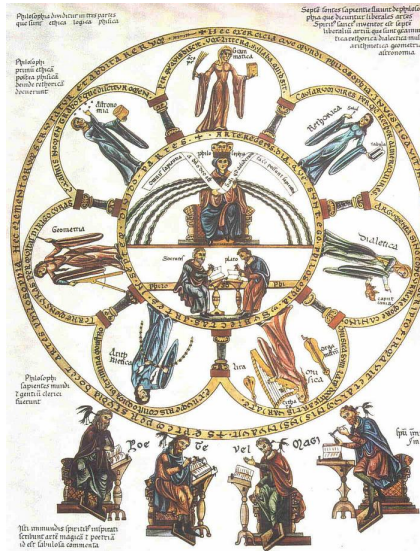
Non licet compensus in domibus propriis nec pervigiliis in festivitates sanctorum facere nec inter sentius aut ad arbores sacrivos vel ad fontes vota dissolvere, nisi, quicumque votum habuerit, in ecclesia vigilet et matricole ipsum votum aut, pauperibus reddat nec sculptilia aut pede aut hominem ligneo fieri penitus praesumat. [... it is forbidden to make vows in groves, at sacred trees or at springs ...]

(Third council of Auxerre, c.573–603. MGH Leges, Concilia aevi Merovingici p.179)

The garden of virtue

- ▶ Herrad of Landsberg, *Hortus deliciarum* (1180): *Septē fontes sapientæ fluunt de philosophia quae dicuntur liberales artes*
- ▶ Lorens, *Somme le roi* (1279): *la fontaine de grace . . . ceste fontaine se devise on VII ruselez ce sont les VII dons du saint esprit qui arousent touz iardins. Les VII peticions 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.*
- ▶ seven trees fed by seven streams
- ▶ Book of Vices and Virtues (14th): *Dis welle is departed in seuene stremes, þat ben þe seuen ʒiftes of þe Holy Gost, þat wateren al þe garden*
- ▶ Mechthild (born c.1210) of Helfta, *Liber specialis gratiae*: . . . a garden or hills of virtues with seven levels, a virtue-fountain on each

Seven liberal arts



Sanskrit — Rigveda

- ▶ Verses 2.12.3 and 2.12.12 mention “seven streams” four times; e.g. *yó hatvā́him áriṇāt saptá síndhūn yó gā́ udā́jad apadhā́ valásya* ‘He who having slain the serpent set flowing the seven streams, he who drove out the cows from Vala’s hiding place’
- ▶ In verse 7.36.6 the *Sárasvatī* river is described as *saptáthī síndhūmātā* ‘seventh, mother of streams’