

## Settlements

### History

For reasons of history and geography urban life came late to Wales, compared with other parts of western Europe. Until only two and a half centuries ago Wales was a predominantly rural and agricultural country with a population of probably not much more than 500,000 living in small and scattered communities. The Norman conquest had left a chain of medieval boroughs but none had a population of more than several thousand. The mountainous nature of the country – effectively splitting it into two – had made it difficult for any one town to emerge as the prime city or capital, gathering to itself administrative and service functions for a wide area. Furthermore, lack of urbanisation delayed the development of significant industrial or commercial activity.

In 1700 Wrexham may have been the biggest town in Wales with no more than 3,500 people, though it was later overtaken by Carmarthen. By the early 19th century, with the development of the copper-smelting industry, Swansea had become Wales's biggest town, with more than 10,000 people living in its built-up area. However, it was quickly overtaken by Merthyr Tydfil once the rapid development of its iron and steel industry had begun. In 1851 Merthyr's population stood at 34,977, that of Swansea 19,115 Newport 13,766 and Cardiff 10,077.

During the course of the second half of the 19th century growth in Wales three biggest coal-exporting ports – Cardiff, Swansea and Newport – mushroomed. Cardiff grew from 1,500 people at the turn of the previous century to 200,000 people a hundred years later; Swansea's population reached 150,000; and Newport almost 100,000. With hundreds of thousands of people moving into the south Wales coalfield in the latter half of the 19th century from other parts of Wales and from adjoining areas of England, by the end of the 19th century Glamorgan and Monmouthshire accounted for well over half the population of Wales.

### Wales' biggest settlements by population 2001\*

Rank	Urban settlement	Population 2001	Unitary authority area
1	Cardiff	292,150	Cardiff
2	Swansea	169,880	Swansea
3	Newport	116,143	Newport
4	Rhondda	59,602	Rhondda Cynon Taf
5	Barry	50,661	Vale of Glamorgan
6	Cwmbran	47,254	Torfaen
7	Llanelli	46,357	Carmarthenshire
8	Neath	45,898	Neath Port Talbot
9	Wrexham	42,576	Wrexham
10	Bridgend	39,429	Bridgend
11	Port Talbot	35,633	Neath Port Talbot
12	Pontypool	35,447	Torfaen
13	Aberdare	31,619	Rhondda Cynon Taf
14	Caerphilly	31,060	Caerphilly
15	Merthyr Tydfil	30,483	Merthyr Tydfil
16	Colwyn Bay	30,269	Conwy
17	Pontypridd	29,781	Rhondda Cynon Taf
18	Rhyl	24,889	Denbighshire
19	Shotton/Hawarden	24,751	Flintshire
20	Penarth	23,245	Vale of Glamorgan

\*Settlements in Wales by order of population according to the 2001 census data from the Office for National Statistics. These figures include only single settlements and urban subdivisions; they are not the population of local authority areas, electoral wards, or conurbations including more than one single urban area.

### Local authorities by population 2008 Estimates\*

Rank	District	Population	Style
1	Cardiff	324,800	City and county
2	Rhondda Cynon Taf	234,100	County borough
3	Swansea	229,100	City and county
4	Carmarthenshire	180,500	County
5	Caerphilly	172,400	County borough
6	Flintshire	151,000	County
7	Newport	140,700	City and county
8	Neath Port Talbot	137,600	County borough
9	Bridgend	134,800	County borough
10	Wrexham	132,900	County borough
11	Powys	132,600	County
12	Vale of Glamorgan	124,900	County borough
13	Pembrokeshire	118,800	County
14	Gwynedd	118,200	County
15	Conwy	112,000	County borough
16	Denbighshire	97,600	County
17	Torfaen	91,100	County borough
18	Monmouthshire	88,400	County
19	Ceredigion	78,000	County
20	Blaenau Gwent	69,100	County borough
21	Anglesey	69,000	County
22	Merthyr Tydfil	55,700	County borough

Source: [Top40-charts.com](http://Top40-charts.com)

\*The figures are mid-year estimates for 2008 from the Office for National Statistics. These authorities were established with local government reform in 1996. Although styled differently all enjoy the same powers.

### Local government in Wales before 1996 Counties and districts 1974–1996

County Authority	District Authorities
Clwyd	Alyn and Deeside · Colwyn · Delyn · Glyndŵr · Rhuddlan · Wrexham Maelor
Dyfed	Carmarthen · Ceredigion · Dinefwr · Llanelli · Preseli Pembrokeshire · South Pembrokeshire
Gwent	Blaenau Gwent · Islwyn · Monmouth · Newport · Torfaen
Gwynedd	Aberconwy · Anglesey · Arfon · Dwyfor · Meirionnydd
Mid Glamorgan	Cynon Valley · Merthyr Tydfil · Ogwr · Rhondda · Rhymney Valley · Taff-Ely
Powys	Brecknock · Montgomeryshire · Radnorshire
South Glamorgan	Cardiff · Vale of Glamorgan
West Glamorgan	Lliw Valley · Neath · Port Talbot · Swansea

## Historic Counties of Wales

County	County Town
Anglesey	Llangefni
Brecknockshire	Brecon
Caernarfonshire	Caernarfon
Cardiganshire	Aberystwyth
Carmarthenshire	Carmarthen
Denbighshire	Denbigh
Flintshire	Mold
Glamorganshire	Cardiff
Merionethshire	Dolgellau
Monmouthshire	Newport
Montgomeryshire	Welshpool
Pembrokeshire	Haverfordwest
Radnorshire	Llandrindod Wells

Source: Source: Top40-charts.com

Historic County boroughs	County
Cardiff	Glamorgan
Swansea	Glamorgan
Merthyr Tydfil	Glamorgan
Newport	Monmouthshire

The Local Government Act 1888 established a new sort of borough – the county borough. These were designed to be ‘counties-to-themselves’; administrative divisions to sit alongside the new administrative counties. They allowed urban areas to be administered separately from the more rural areas. The smaller pre-existing municipal boroughs became part of the second tier of local government, below the administrative counties and county boroughs. The county boroughs were, like the municipal boroughs, abolished in 1974, being reabsorbed into their parent counties for administrative purposes.

Charters conferring the largely honorary status of city were conferred on Cardiff in 1905, Swansea in 1969 and Newport in 2002. At one time reserved for county boroughs exceeding a population of 200,000, city status entitles the leading elected council member to be styled Lord Mayor rather than Mayor. (Because of its capital city status the Lord Mayor of Cardiff is further titled the Right Honourable.) Merthyr Tydfil lost its county borough status in 1974 as a result of its continued decline in population and was re-incorporated into the then new county of Mid Glamorgan. Bangor and St. Davids are also entitled to the style of ‘city’ by virtue of their cathedrals but no additional municipal powers are accrued.

## Growth of Leading Towns in Wales 1801 – 1921

Town	1801	1821	1841	1861	1881	1901	1921
Cardiff	1,870	3,521	10,077	32,954	82,761	164,333	200,184
Swansea	6,831	11,236	19,115	33,972	50,120	94,537	157,554
Newport	1,423	4,951	13,766	24,756	33,932	67,270	92,358
Merthyr Tydfil	7,704	17,404	34,977	49,794	48,861	69,228	80,116

	1931	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Cardiff	223,651	243,627	260,160	276,790	278,400	283,900	305,353
Swansea	160,000	160,832	169,180	171,320	187,000	186,900	223,301
Newport	95,000	105,285	108,550	112,045	133,100	128,100	137,011
Merthyr Tydfil	71,000	61,093	58,940	55,100	60,300	58,100	55,981

During the medieval period many towns were granted self-governance by the Crown, at which point they became referred to as a borough. The formal status of borough came to be conferred by Royal Charter. These boroughs were generally governed by a self-selecting corporation (that is, when a member died or resigned his replacement would be by co-option). Sometimes boroughs were governed by bailiffs or head boroughs.

### Ancient Boroughs

Chartered Boroughs	Charter Grantee	Date
Abergavenny	Henry VIII	1542
Aberystwyth	Edward I	1277
Beaumaris	Edward I	1284
Caernarfon	Edward I	1284
Cardiff	Hugh le Despenser	1340
Carmarthen	John	1201
Cowbridge	Richard de Clare	1254
Denbigh	Edward I	1290
Flint	Edward I	1284
Haverfordwest	William Marshall	
	1st Earl of Pembroke	1213
Laugharne*	Sir Guy de Brian	1290
Llanidloes	Edward I	1291
Llantrisant	Hugh le Despenser	1346
Machynlleth	Edward I	1291
Monmouth	James I	1605
Newport	Hugh le Despenser	1324
Pwllheli	Edward, the Black Prince	1355
Swansea	William de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick	1158
Usk	Elizabeth de Burgh	C14th

\*Britain's last surviving mediaeval corporation.

Sources: Archives of Wales, various. Note: Charters listed are the most important. Other charters granted before and after these dates in most cases

### Roman Towns in Wales

Cardiff	Moridunum (Carmarthen)
Gelligaer	Leucarum (Loughor)
Pen-y-Darren	Bremia (Llanio)
Cicutio (Y Gaer)	Pennal
Castell Collen	Tomen-y Mur
Mediomanum (Caersws)	Caergai
Isca Silurum (Caerleon)	Bryn-y-Gefeilliau
Venta Silurum (Caerwent)	Canovium (Caerhun)
Gobannium (Abergavenny)	Segontium (Caernarfon)
Blestium (Monmouth)	Caergai
Burrium (Usk)	Bryn-y-Gefeilliau
Bovium (Cowbridge)	Canovium (Caerhun)
Nidum (Neath)	Segontium (Caernarfon)
Alabum (Llandoverly)	