

CECIL of Allt-yr-ynys (Herefordshire), Burghley Northampton), and Hatfield, Hertfordshire

The claim that this distinguished English political family is of Welsh origin calls for some clarification. The ancestral name, which appears in the family pedigrees as 'Sitsyllt' and was softened down to 'Sissild,' 'Cyssel,' 'Cecild,' and 'Cecil' in the course of the 15th and 16th century, is presumably the Welsh Seisyll; but the founder of the family, ROBERT SITSYLLT, first appears in history as a follower of the Norman **Robert Fitzhamon** in his conquest of the lordship of Glamorgan in the 11th century; he acquired the family seat of Allt-yr-ynys (now in Herefordshire, though the estate extends into Monmouthshire) by marriage into the family of the dispossessed Welsh owners. From this time on the 'Sitsyllts' generally married into Norman families and are frequently found fighting against the Welsh. Towards the end of the 15th century, however, RICHARD CECIL, the first to use the modern form of the name, married into the Brecknock family of Vaughan of Tyle-glas. His younger son DAVID CECIL (died 1541) migrated, with some of his Brecknock 'cousins,' to Northamptonshire, where he entered the service of **Henry VII**, became a Yeoman of the Chamber, 1507, acquired the stewardship of several Crown manors, and served as sheriff of Northampton in 1529-30. His son RICHARD CECIL of Burghley (died 1552) married into one of the Brecknock families that had settled in Northamptonshire in his grandfather's time, was a royal page at the Field of Cloth of Gold (1520), further enriched his family by monastic spoils, and became the father of

WILLIAM CECIL (1520-1598)

Baron Burghley (1571), Secretary of State)1550-3 and 1558-1572), and Lord Treasurer (1572-98). Burghley's continued interest in Wales appears in the pains he took to establish his Welsh pedigree, his introduction into princess Elizabeth's household of one of his Brecknock connections, **Thomas Parry** (1560), who became her Comptroller, his investment in trials for copper in Anglesey, and by his association with **Morys Clynnog** who wrote to Burghley from Rome a letter in Welsh (May 1567), warning him of the queen's impending excommunication. Burghley's elder son THOMAS CECIL (1542 - 1623), earl of Exeter, was equally anxious to establish his Welsh descent and deplored the change in spelling that obscured it; but his second son ROBERT CECIL (1563? - 1612), earl of Salisbury, James I's Secretary of State, snubbed a Welsh correspondent bent on tracing the Cecils back through the Vaughans to the princes of Wales by disclaiming all interest in 'these vain toys' or desire to hear of 'such absurdities.'

The parent stem at Allt-yr-ynys was still in friendly contact with its more distinguished offshoot as late as 1603, but soon afterwards came to an end, though the family mansion survives.

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Images

Jacobus Houbraken, **William Cecil Lord Burleigh**

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