

Did a Welshman discover America?

Video transcript – Naming America

Once the new continent had been discovered, it needed a name.

It's generally believed that America was named after the Italian Amerigo Vespucci, who explored parts of South America between 1497 and 1502.

But hang on; if we Welsh discovered the land in the first place, then it only seems fitting that it should be named after a Welshman.

Or at the very least, a man of Welsh descent...

Step in Richard Amerike.

Amerike was born in 1445 and was descended from the Earls of Gwent. His name was an anglicised spelling of ap Meurig, the Welsh for son of Meurig (or Meyrick).

Amerike was the High Sheriff and the King's Customs Officer at Bristol, which was the main port for several voyages of discovery in the 15th century.

He sponsored John Cabot's passage to North America in May 1497.

Some historians believe he may have asked Cabot to name any newly discovered lands after him as thanks for his generosity.

What's more, the ap Meurig family coat of arms bears a design of stars and stripes which may even have inspired the star-spangled banner...

Welsh influences in the US are not so evident these days; the Welsh bought wholeheartedly into the American dream and immersed themselves in their new society.

Yet there's no disputing the enormous part Wales has played in shaping the history of America today.

George Washington once said that "Good Welshmen make good Americans".

And a Welsh inscription on the Washington Monument ensures that the strong bond with Wales continues to this day:

Fy iaith, fy ngwlad, fy nghenedl Cymru – Cymru am byth.

My language, my country, my nation of Wales – Wales forever.