

THE BWBACHOD

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Bwbachod, pronounced boo-ba-khod. Welsh brownies whose outstanding characteristic is a dislike of teetotallers and dissenting ministers (Dictionary of Fairies).

In Wales there are elves
who are called bwbachod
whose idiosyncrasy is
that of the servants of God
and the children of men
none so earn their disdain as
dissenting ministers
and total abstainers
but what will befuddle
these bigoted aliens
are bibulous Baptists
or dry Episcopalian

The above poem is what I wrote when I first encountered the creatures of the title. But as none of the dictionaries I normally consult (Webster's Third, the OED, Chambers Twentieth Century, and the Australian-produced Macquarie) have any knowledge of the **bwbachod**, readers of **Word Ways** may be interested in the full entry from Katharine Briggs' A Dictionary of Fairies (Allen Lane, London, 1976; reprinted in Penguin, 1977), pages 55-56:

Bwbachod (boobachod). The Welsh equivalent of the Brownies, whom they very closely resemble both in their domestic helpfulness and their capacity for obstreperous and even dangerous behaviour when they are annoyed. According to Sikes in British Goblins (pp. 30-31), they have one outstanding characteristic, which is their dislike of teetotallers and of dissenting ministers. Sikes tells a story of a Cardiganshire bwbach who took a special spite against a Baptist preacher, jerking away the stool from under his elbows when he was kneeling, interrupting his prayers by clattering the fire-irons or grinning in at the window. Finally he frightened the preacher away by appearing as his double, which was considered to be ominous of death. This was a Bogy or Bogey-Beast prank beyond the range of most Brownies, otherwise the Bwbach differed only linguistically.

It is clear from this text that **bwbachod** is the plural of **bwbach**. The next entry in the Dictionary of Fairies mentions another type of brownie called the **bwca**, with no plural given. I checked a small Welsh dictionary (Collins-Spurrell Welsh Dictionary, Collins,

London, 1960) and found the following entries:

bwbach (-od), n.m. bugbear, bogey, scarecrow
 bwci (-ïod), n.m. bugbear, bogey, ghost

so the words do have an existence in Welsh.

In this context, "dissenting" means "not a member of the Church of England or of the Church of Scotland", and applies to both Roman Catholics and non-Episcopalian Protestants. For the purposes of rhyme, I changed "Church of England" into "Episcopalian", which is close enough, historically and culturally.

QUERY

Ira Brilliant of Phoenix, Arizona wants to know the longest possible letter-sequences into which one can interchangeably insert the five vowels A, E, I, O and U to form words. His seven-letter example blAnder-blEnder-blInder-blOnder-blUnder is matched by pAtting-pEtting-pItting-pOtting-pUtting. The eight-letter clAcking-clEcking-clIcking-clOcking-clUcking has one rare word (cleck, to hatch). ThAnking-thEnking-thInking-thOnking-thUnking and trAcking-trEcking-trIcking-trOcking-trUcking are somewhat less meritorious examples because they rely upon variant obsolete spellings of the same word.

*Can readers of **Word Ways** suggest other long examples? If variant spellings are allowed, a nine-letter example (perhaps mined out of the OED) seems possible.*