Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
Commissioner

Guidelines for Standardising Place-names in Wales

Background

The principal aim of the Welsh Language Commissioner, an independent organisation established under the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011, is to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh. This entails raising awareness of the official status of the Welsh language in Wales and imposing standards on organisations. This, in turn, will lead to the establishment of rights for Welsh speakers.

Two principles will underpin the work:
- In Wales, the Welsh language should be treated no less favourably than the English language
- Persons in Wales should be able to live their lives through the medium of the Welsh language if they choose to do so

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The Welsh Language Commissioner's advisory service

The Welsh Language Commissioner is responsible for advising on the standard forms of place-names in Wales. The Commissioner has convened a Place-names Standardisation Panel to provide expert advice in this field. In formulating its recommendations, in addition to the Guidelines given below, the Panel gives consideration to the meaning, history and etymology of the place-names, as well as their usage. These recommendations on the standard spellings of place-names can be found in the List of Standardised Welsh Place-names on the Commissioner's website.

The Guidelines below are specific to Welsh settlement names (villages, towns, and cities) and topographical features (lakes, rivers, mountains). They are not necessarily applicable to house or building names, but they do cover many valuable principles which may be applied to those names or when coining names for new developments. This document is updated as the Panel considers different names and it is possible that additional principles may occasionally be added to the guidelines.

The Commissioner offers an advisory service to organisations and individuals on matters relating to place-names. You can contact us by using the online form or by emailing post@welshlanguagecommissioner.wales.

1. Standard orthography

The current principles of standard Welsh language orthography should be followed. The Place-names Standardisation Panel recognises the authority of *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (The University of Wales Dictionary of the Welsh Language) in matters pertaining to the orthography of the Welsh language, and the forms given in the Dictionary should be followed as far as possible. However, the Panel recommends the use of a circumflex in some names – contrary to the rules of standard orthography – in order to avoid ambiguity and ensure correct pronunciation (*Yr Hôb, Aberbîg, Y Pîl*).

2. *A Gazetteer of Welsh Place-Names*

As a starting point, forms recommended in Elwyn Davies, *Rhestr o Enwau Lleoedd/A Gazetteer of Welsh Place-Names* (3rd edn; University of Wales Press, 1967) should be recognised, alongside the previous recommendations of the Welsh Language Board's Place-Names Standardisation Team. The *Gazetteer* used to be the standard reference work for Welsh place-names. One should not deviate from its recommendations without good reason. However, as many villages, suburbs and towns have developed since 1967, and today's linguistic climate in Wales is different, the Panel needs to interpret

and update the forms given in the *Gazetteer*. This document is an attempt to formalise, explain and adapt, where necessary, the conventions used in the *Gazetteer*.

3. Hyphen

i)   The main stress in Welsh words normally falls on the penultimate syllable (the last syllable but one). It should be assumed that the stress falls on the penultimate syllable of a Welsh place-name (*Rhymni, Tyddewi, Rhydyclafdy, Rhosllannerchrugog, Penyberth, Moelyci*).

ii)   The hyphen is used in Welsh compound words when the stress does *not* fall on the penultimate syllable. So, if the stress falls on the final syllable, the hyphen is used to highlight this to the reader (*Aber-erch, Aber-cuch*).

iii) The hyphen is also used when the Welsh definite article (*y/yr*) occurs before a final monosyllabic element in a place-name. In such names hyphens are used before and after the definite article in order to highlight the individual elements and ensure correct pronunciation (*Betws-y-coed, Porth-y-rhyd*). Note that hyphens are used only *after* the definite article where the *'r* form of the definite article occurs before a final monosyllabic element (*Troedrhiw'r-clawdd, Islaw'r-dref*).

iv)   There are exceptions however, i.e. those names which have become well established and recognised nationally (*Llandaf, Caerdydd, Llanrug, Llanrwst, Penarth, Pontypridd, Llansanffraid*).

v)   Similarly, it is unnecessary to use a hyphen to show that the stress is on the final syllable if another diacritic already demonstrates this (*Llandygái, Caersŵs, Aberdâr, Pentredŵr*). However hyphens *are* necessary in such names when the definite article occurs before a final monosyllabic element *(Llannerch-y-môr, Tre'r-ddôl)*.

vi)   The hyphen is used to separate a cluster of consonants when there is a danger of misinterpreting them as digraphs (*Pont-hirwaun, Coed-duon*).

vii) The hyphen is also used after the element *pont* when it precedes the name of a ford (*rhyd*) containing the definite article and a monosyllabic element (*Pont-rhyd-y-fen, Pont-rhyd-y-groes*).
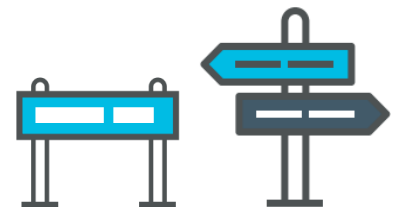
4. One word or more?

i)   The names of settlements are normally written as one word (*Nantperis, Cefncribwr*) in order to differentiate between them and topographical features (*Nant Peris, Cefn Cribwr*).

ii)   The names of topographical features are usually written as separate words. Each individual element is capitalised, with the exception of the Welsh definite article (*y/yr*), as seen in *Llyn Cors y Barcud*, for example. However, the elements are combined into one word to reflect the pronunciation in some names where the stress falls on the penultimate syllable (*Llyn Dubach, Llyn Garneddwen, Llyn Gelligain*).

iii) If the name of a settlement contains two or more stresses, its elements are combined retaining the double -*n*- and double -*r*- of the original elements

(*ffynnon+groyw = Ffynnongroyw, rhos+llannerch+(g)rugog = Rhosllannerchrugog*, not *Ffynongroyw, Rhosllanerchrugog*).

iv) Names which begin with the elements *pen-bont*, *pen-y-bont* and *tal-y-bont* are usually written as two words or more if the final element refers to an established site or to a proper noun (*Pen-bont Rhydybeddau*, *Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr*, *Tal-y-bont ar Wysg*; but *Pen-y-bont-fawr*).

v) Names which begin with the element *pentre(f)* or *tre(f)* are usually written as one word (*Pentrefelin, Treffynnon*). However, it is conventional to write them as two words or more if the second element refers to an established site or to a proper noun (*Pentre Llanrhaeadr, Pentre Tafarnyfedw, Tre Taliesin*).

vi) This convention also applies to some ecclesiastical features (*Betws Garmon, Eglwys Brewys, Capel Bangor, Capel Betws Leucu, Llanbedr Pont Steffan, Eglwys Wen, Merthyr Dyfan, Mynwent y Crynwyr*).

vii) When a place-name is written as one word, proper nouns are not capitalised (*Glyn-taf, Cwm-twrch, Llan-fair*) unless they are preceded by a definite article or prepositional element (*Llanfihangel-y-Pennant, Betws-yn-Rhos*). The exception *Saint-y-brid* should be noted.

viii) Names containing a proper noun may be written as two or more words where no definite article or prepositional element separates the main elements. The proper noun may also be capitalised *(Llan Ffestiniog, Dre-fach Felindre, Bryn Pen-y-lan)*.

ix) Settlement names containing the element *uchaf/isaf* (upper/lower) are written as one word (*Efailisaf, Rhyduchaf, Pentre-uchaf*) unless *uchaf/isaf* is used as an element to differentiate between two names or in the case of parish names and electoral ward names. In those instances, the names are written as separate words, with a capital letter for *Uchaf/Isaf* (*Brynaman Isaf, Cilâ Uchaf*).

x) The same pattern is also followed in the case of the element *Eithaf* (*Llanfair Mathafarn Eithaf*).

5. Personal names

The original forms of personal names should be taken into consideration when discussing orthography *(Cei Connah, Rhyd-y-Brown)*. However, Welsh adaptations of personal names are common (*Treforys/Morriston, Pont-iets, Porthmadog*).

6. Coining new names

Pedantic or revived antiquarian forms or literal and whimsical translations should be avoided, unless there is sound evidence that they are in common use (*Brychdyn, Cei Connah, Cil-y-coed*). Logical coinages based on well-established names may be used. For example, *Aberddawan* is the established Welsh form of *Aberthaw*, so *Dwyrain/Gorllewin Aberddawan* may be adopted, despite the lack of historical written evidence of a Welsh form for *East/West Aberthaw*.

7. Dialect

Dialectal or local evidence should be taken into consideration with regard to orthography, pronunciation and stress, especially if a local form has been adopted nationally (*Dole, Pencader, Cwm-cou, Froncysyllte*). However standard orthography should be used as far as possible, since place-names belong to the whole of Wales and a name, or an element of that name, may also appear in many parts of Wales: (*blaenau, gwaun, cadair, heol*).

8. Dual forms

If the difference between the Welsh form and the 'English' form consists of only one or two letters, the use of a single form is recommended, with preference being given to the Welsh form. This accords with the recommendations of the Ordnance Survey and the Highway Authorities. However, established variations should be recognised (*Caeriw/Carew, Biwmares/Beaumaris, Y Fflint/Flint, Wrecsam/Wrexham*).

9. The Welsh definite article (*y/yr/'r*) and other non-emphatic elements

i)   The definite article is an integral part of several Welsh place-names (*Yr Wyddgrug*, *Y Drenewydd*).

ii)   This practice is in a state of flux and the definite article is no longer considered to be an integral part of some place-names, and it may not be used in every context (*y Tymbl, y Gaerwen*). However, in these cases the definite article is still often used as part of a phrase in formal contexts (*mynd i'r Tymbl*), although it is commonly omitted in less formal contexts (*mynd i Gaerwen*).

iii)   Where it is difficult to decide whether the definite article is an integral part of a name or only occurs as part of a phrase, the Panel favours conservatism by including the definite article as an integral part of the name if only to offer guidance on mutation (*i'r Bala* rather than *i Fala*). This may be especially valuable to those whose first language is not Welsh.

iv)   Non-emphatic elements (the definite article or a preposition) should be written in lower case when they appear in the middle of a name (*Pen-y-banc*, *Porth-y-rhyd*, *Pont-ar-sais*).

v)   The definite article which precedes a place-name should be written in lower case when it forms part of a sentence (*Mae gen i deulu yn y Borth*).

vi)   The definite article should be written in upper case when the name forms part of a postal address or as an item in a list (*25 Heol Haul, Y Borth*).

10. The diaeresis on penultimate stressed -i-

Where the last element has two syllables, no diaeresis is required (*Caerllion, Llanrhian, Llwynypia*) unless the pronunciation is ambiguous (*Gïas, Llangïan* (cf. *gïau*)). If the final element has more than two syllables, a diaeresis *is* required (*Cwmsyfïog, Llandybïe*).

11. The apostrophe in Welsh language place-names

The element *Tyn* (Tyddyn) is usually written without an apostrophe (*Tyn-y-ffordd, Tyn-y-groes, Tyn'reithin*).

12. Punctuation in English language place-names

A number of English place-names refer to the names of saints. The current convention is to omit a full stop at the end of a contraction which includes the final letter of a word (*Saint > St*) and omit the possessive apostrophe (*St Brides Major, St Davids, St Dogmaels, St Mellons*).

13. Tautological topographical names

Some topographical names contain elements appearing more than once, for example *Llyn Dulyn* and *Llyn Cwellyn. Llyn* is commonly omitted at the beginning of other lake names (*Glaslyn, Gloywlyn*). The descriptive noun (*llyn, afon*) may be included before names containing *llyn* where that is the most common form. It can also be a convenient way to distinguish between two features sharing the same basic name (e.g. *Llyn Hiraethlyn* and *Afon Hiraethlyn*).