



Comisiynydd y  
Gymraeg  
Welsh Language  
Commissioner

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# Guidelines for Standardising Place-names in Wales



**Enwau Lleoedd** Safonol Cymru  
Standardised Welsh **Place-names**



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## Background

The principal aim of the Welsh Language Commissioner, an independent organization 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 organizations. 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 responsibility



The Welsh Language Commissioner is responsible for advising on the standard forms of Welsh place-names. The Commissioner has convened a Place-names Standardisation Panel to provide recommendations and expert advice in this field. In forming 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 Guidelines are specific to Welsh place-names, i.e. the names of settlements (villages, towns, and cities) in Wales. They are not necessarily applicable to house names or other topographical features, however they do cover many valuable principles which may be applied to these names or when coining names for new developments.

## 1 Standard orthography

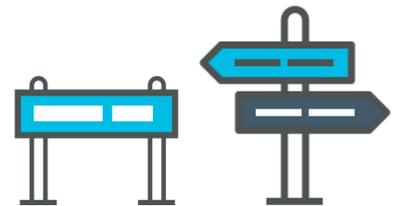
The current principles of standard Welsh language orthography should be followed. The Place-names Standardisation Panel acknowledges the authority of *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* (The University of Wales Dictionary of the Welsh Language) in matters pertaining to the orthography of the Welsh language, and the forms given in the Dictionary should be followed as far as possible. However, the Panel recommends using a circumflex in some names – contrary to the rules of 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* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn; University of Wales Press, 1967) should be acknowledged, alongside the previous recommendations of the Welsh Language Board's Place-Names Standardisation Team. The Gazetteer is the standard reference work for Welsh place-names. One should not deviate from its recommendations without good reason. However, as many settlements, suburbs and towns have developed since 1967, and today's linguistic climate in Wales is different, the Panel must interpret the forms given in the Gazetteer. The remainder of this document is an attempt to formalize and interpret 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. Therefore, if the stress falls on the final syllable, the hyphen is used to show this clearly 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 aid 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 recognized nationally (*Llandaf, Caerdydd, Llanrug, Llanrwst, Penarth, Torfaen, 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 following the element *pont* when it precedes the name of a ford (*rhyd*) which contains 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) 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+rugog = Rhosllannerchrugog*, not *Ffynngroyw, Rhosllanerchrugog*).
- iii) 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 a recognized site or a proper noun (*Pen-bont Rhydybeddau, Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr, Tal-y-bont ar Wysg*; but *Pen-y-bont-fawr*).
- iv) Names which begin with the element *pentre(f)* are usually written as one word (*Pentrefelin*). However, it is conventional to write them as two words or more if

- the second element refers to a recognized site or a proper noun (*Pentre Llanrhaeadr, Pentre Tafarnyfedw*).
- v) 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*).
  - vi) Names of areas, settlements or prominent geographical features may be capitalized if they appear as established place-name elements (*Llanfihangel-y-Pennant, Betws-yn-Rhos*).
  - vii) Names may be written as two words or more if they include the name of another area, settlement or prominent geographical feature where no definite article or prepositional element separates the main elements; the name of the area, settlement or geographical feature may also be capitalized (*Llan Ffestiniog, Dre-fach Felindre, Bryn Pen-y-lan*).
  - viii) The names of parishes and electoral wards containing the element *uchaf/isaf* (upper/lower) are usually written as two separate words, with a capital letter to the upper/lower element (*Brynaman Isaf, Cilâ Uchaf*). The same pattern applies to names of settlements and Lower and Upper are placed separately when they are a differential element, however there are some standard exceptions that are well-established (e.g. *Efailisaf*).
  - ix) The same pattern is followed in the case of the element *eithaf* also (*Llanfair Mathafarn Eithaf*).

## 5 Personal names

The forms of personal names should be taken into consideration since they can have a bearing on orthography (*Llan-non, Pochin, Cei Connah, Rhyd-y-Brown*). The exception *Morrison/Treforys* should be noted however.



## 6 Coinages

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 may be seen relating to well-established names e.g. *Aberddawan* is the established Welsh form of *Aberthaw*, so *Dwyrain/Gorllewin Aberddawan* may be adopted despite there being no 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 or 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 it should be borne in mind that place-names belong to the whole of Wales and that the name, or an element of that name, may also appear in many parts of Wales: (*Blaenau [Gwent], Y Waun, Llansanffraid*).

## 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, recognized variations should be acknowledged (*Caeriw/Carew, Biwmares/Beaumaris, Y Flint/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 usually used as part of a phrase (*mynd i'r Tymbl*).
- iii) 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 in this matter, including the definite article as an integral part of the name if only to offer guidance (*i'r Bala* rather than *i Fala*). This may be especially valuable to those without Welsh as a first language.
- iv) Non-emphatic elements (the definite article or prepositions) should be shown 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 shown in lower case when it forms part of a sentence (*mae gen i dŷ gwyliau yn y Borth*).
- vi) The definite article should be shown in upper case when the name forms part of a postal address or as an item on list (*25 Heol Haul, Y Borth*).

## 10 The dieresis on penultimate stressed -i-

Where the last element is disyllabic, no dieresis is required (*Caerllion, Llanrhian, Llwynypia*) unless the pronunciation is ambiguous (*Gïas, Llangïan* (cf. *gïau*)); if the final element is longer than a disyllable, a dieresis is required (*Cwmsyfiog, Llandybïe*).

# 11 Punctuation in English language place-names

A number of English place-names reference 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 the word (*Saint* > *St*) and omit the possessive apostrophe (*St Brides Major*, *St Davids*, *St Dogmaels*, *St Mellons*).