

# P-05-952: Revert to Welsh language spelling of place names

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 28 Ebrill 2020  
Petitions Committee | 28 April 2020

Reference: RS20/12391-1

**Petition Number:** P-05-952

**Petition title:** Revert to Welsh language spelling of place-names

**Text of petition:** Wales has many place names which have needlessly been Anglicised, and have often been replaced by Anglicised forms for no good reason. Not only is this disrespectful to Welsh people and the Welsh language, but the Welsh language is, according to Law, supposed to be on an equal footing with English in Wales.

Places such as Trevor (from Welsh Trefor) near Wrexham are not only undermining, but obscure the etymologies of such names! This is surely unacceptable.

I, and the undersigned, therefore petition the Welsh Assembly to take action and change these Anglicised forms of Welsh names – throughout Wales – and restore their original Welsh spellings. The petition does not go so far as to call for English names to be abolished where a Welsh name also exists (Caerdydd next to Cardiff, etc).



# 1. Context

The names of Welsh villages, towns and cities have developed over a period of two millennia. While the **majority of place-names in Wales are Welsh**, many place-names have their origins in English, French, Latin, Irish, Norse and Brittonic/British (evolving to become *Cymraeg* as we know it today).

Examples of some recognisable **Welsh only place-names** include Aberystwyth, Bangor, Tonypandy, Penarth and Pontypridd to name just a few. However, there are several examples of cities, towns and villages in Wales that have both a Welsh and English name.

Some of those places with Welsh and English names have very **similar spelling and pronunciation** in both languages. Places like:

- *Caerffili* - Caerphilly;
- *Caerdydd* - Cardiff;
- *Merthyr Tudful* - Merthyr Tydfil;
- *Treorci* - Treorchy; and
- *Rhuthun* - Ruthin.

There is a strong likelihood that for a number of these places, the names have simply been anglicised over time due to various economic, cultural and social changes. This is not necessarily true in all cases however. There are examples of English names such as Flint (*Y Fflint*), Wrexham (*Wreccsam*) and Caldicot (*Cil-y-coed*) that have been adopted by the Welsh rather than the other way around. Similarly, the original name for Biwmares was the Norman-French name - Beaumaris.

Other places in Wales have alternate names unrelated to each other. Examples include:

- Newport - *Casnewydd* (the Welsh meaning New Castle);
- Swansea (derived from the Norse meaning Svein's Island") - *Abertawe* (the Welsh meaning the Mouth of the River Tawe);
- Brecon (derived from Welsh Kingdom of Brycheiniog) - *Aberhonddu* (Welsh taken from River Honddu)
- Anglesey (derived again from Norse - *Ongul*), while the Welsh name *Môn*, was first recorded as Latin *Mona*.

Dr. Dylan Foster Evans, an expert on Welsh place names writes in an article - [What's in a name?](#) on Wales.com (the Welsh Government's website to promote Wales) about the evolution of many Welsh place names, and how some have been anglicized:

In other places, Welsh names were changed by being taken up into English. The modern Welsh name *Dinbych* ('the little fort') has the final - *ch* sound whose equivalent disappeared from the English language some centuries ago. So two places called *Dinbych* gave rise to the English forms *Tenby* in Pembrokeshire and *Denbigh* in Denbighshire. These rhyme with each other, despite the different spellings. But to avoid confusion, the former - a seaside resort - is known in Welsh as *Dinbych-y-pysgod*: 'Dinbych of the fish'.

There are of course examples over the years of anglicized Welsh place-names gradually ceasing to be accepted or used, including Caernarvon (*Caernarfon*), Conway (*Conwy*) and Llanelly (*Llanelli*).

There are also places where there are ongoing disagreements over whether the Welsh spelling should be used exclusively or not, such in [Varteg](#) ([Farteg](#)) which has had some publicity in recent times.

## 2. The Place-names Standardisation Panel

The [Welsh Language Commissioner](#), an independent body established by the [Welsh Language \(Wales\) Measure 2011](#) is responsible for providing advice on the **standard forms of Welsh place-names** to individuals and organisations. A list of standard forms of the Welsh names of villages, towns and cities in Wales is now [available as an online resource](#) for anyone wishing to use it. It is continuously being updated.

The Commissioner established a [panel of experts](#) to work on and make recommendations on the standard form of Welsh place-names. The Commissioner's website notes that in forming its recommendations, 'the Place-names Standardisation Panel gives consideration to the **meaning, history and etymology of the place-names**, as well as their **current usage**'. The panel is also guided by the [Guidelines for Standardising Place-names in Wales](#) (PDF 243KB). Section 9 - *Dual forms* notes the following advice for the panel to consider:

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 Fflint/Flint, Wreccsam/Wrexham).

The [List](#) was launched on 20 June 2018, and it is possible to search among 3,475 place names that are currently included. Trevor/Trefor – the village noted in the petition itself is **not currently included** within this list.

The Commissioner notes on the website that if a place name in Wales is not on the published *List*, individuals should complete a short [query form](#) noting the name, grid reference and local authority area of the place in question.

### 3. Assembly and Welsh Government actions

A [petition calling on the Assembly to protect and promote Welsh place-names](#) was submitted in 2018. The specific action the petitioner called for was:

Old Welsh place names/building names should be protected by law; and new developments should have a mandatory Welsh name in order to preserve our unique culture and language.

The Welsh Government [outlined its activity in this area](#) (PDF 198KB) in response to the petition. It noted that, following the passing of the [Historic Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#), the Welsh Government has introduced a statutory list of historic place names. It states:

Statutory guidance requires local and National Park authorities and Natural Resources Wales to take account of the list when their functions involve naming or renaming places. This includes the naming or renaming of streets, properties and other places, either directly or by another party. The intention is that the operation of the list and the statutory guidance together will lead to a reduction in the number of formal changes to historic property names.

However, the Welsh Government noted:

...these measures stop short of providing formal protection for historic place names. Detailed consideration was given to providing statutory

protection for historic place names during the development of the 2016 Act, when a number of representations similar to the current petition were made. However a number of significant issues, including enforcement, potential additional burdens on local authorities and human rights, militated against it.

In January 2017, Dai Lloyd AM won the ballot to propose a Member's bill: [Development of the Protection of Welsh Historical Place Names Bill](#). Dai Lloyd AM provided the following [Explanatory Memorandum \(PDF 195KB\)](#) prior to the [Plenary debate](#), which was held on the 15 March.

The Welsh Government did not support the bill, and it did not receive leave to proceed.

As part of its 2017 inquiry into the [Historic Environment](#), the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee considered the List of Historic Place Names of Wales. It stated that the Welsh Government should keep the matter under "active review and should be willing to introduce further protection for historic place names if the current list does not prove effective".

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.