# Stop using the name 'Anglesey' and exclusively use the name 'Ynys Môn'

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 13 Mai 2024
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Reference: SR24/8458-2

**Petition Number:** P-06-1410

**Petition title:** To stop using the name 'Anglesey' and exclusively use the name 'Ynys Môn' or shorten to 'Môn'.

**Text of petition:** Some other counties in Wales don't have a Welsh and English name. Môn is easy to pronounce for all people in all languages. Two names for a county is confusing for tourists, but using one name will help keep the Welsh heritage alive on the island.

# 1. Background

The names of Welsh villages, towns, cities and counties, have developed over a period of two millennia. While the **majority of place-names in Wales are Welsh,** the origin of some place-names lie 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. However, there are several examples of places 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.

Dr. Dylan Foster Evans expands on the evolution of Welsh place-names in this brief article - *What's in a name*? He notes that Cardiff, for instance, 'derives from the medieval Welsh *Caerdyf* (which also gives us the modern Welsh *Caerdydd*)'. He notes that linguists believe the name was likely 'coined in the British language, back when the Romans occupied Cardiff some 2,000 years ago'.

There are examples of English names such as Flint (*Y Fflint*), Wrexham (*Wrecsam*) 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*.

There are examples of anglicised Welsh place-names gradually ceasing to be accepted or used, including Caernarvon (Caernarfon), Conway (Conwy), Portmadoc (Porthmadog) 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 at one time.

## 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. A list of standard forms of the Welsh names of villages, towns and cities in Wales is available online for anyone wishing to use it.

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. 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, Wrecsam/Wrexham).

## 3. Welsh Parliament action

The Senedd has considered several petitions in the last few years relating to Welsh place-names and Welsh house names. In 2021, a petition calling on the Senedd and other bodies to start referring to Welsh cities and towns by their Welsh names was submitted, receiving 108 signatures. The petitioners called on public bodies to start using Welsh terms and place-names to "increase Welsh language use".

The Committee heard from the Welsh Language Commissioner's office during its meeting on 7 March 2022 in relation to the petition. One of the issues highlighted during the session was that it is not the intention of the Panel of experts on the standardisation of Welsh place-names to "push" Welsh forms only:

> I would also emphasise that it is not the panel's agenda to push the use of Welsh place names only; the panel addresses English place names to variations of Welsh place names, such as Caerdydd and Cardiff, for example. But also names that have no relation, such as Abertawe and Swansea, y Bont-faen and Cowbridge. So, the forms used in English are not ignored; they are all given attention and given the same status in the work of the panel..

During the first half of 2020, a similar petition was submitted which called for reverting to the Welsh langauge spelling of place-names. The specific action the petitioners called for was:

> Wales has many place names which have needlessly been Anglicised, and have often been replaced by Anglicised forms for no good reason. […] 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 Petitions Committee of the 5th Senedd considered the petition in June 2020. The petition gathered 1,096 signatures.

In 2018, a petition calling on the Senedd to protect and promote Welsh place-names was submitted. It gathered 431 signatures The specific action the petitioner called for was:

> Increasingly historic Welsh place names and house names are being replaced by English names. This kills the local culture and one of the elements which makes Wales unique… 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.

A year earlier, Dai Lloyd MS won the ballot to propose a Member's bill: Development of the Protection of Welsh Historical Place Names Bill. A Plenary debate was held on 15 March 2017.

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

# 4. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government outlined its activity in this area (May 2018) in response to the petition in 2018 calling on the Senedd to protect and promote Welsh place-names. It noted that, following the passing of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the Welsh Government introduced a statutory list of historic place names, and that:

> Statutory guidance requires local and National Parks 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.

In response to the petition calling to revert to the Welsh language spelling of place-names, the Minister for the Welsh Language at the time noted that:

> **The Welsh Language Commissioner is responsible for providing advice to individuals and organisations on the standardised forms of place names in Wales.** The Commissioner's List of Standardised Welsh Place-names is a useful online resource, which can be searched or downloaded to find the standardised names of villages, towns and cities in Wales...

> However, the Commissioner's role is to suggest forms and spellings for place-names, rather than to enforce them.

Responding to the petition calling on the Senedd and other bodies to start referring to Welsh cities and towns by their Welsh names, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language at the time noted that:

> Welsh place names are currently the subject of close attention from the Welsh Government, with several processes ongoing in order to collect evidence for policy developments.

The Minister concluded by referring to the Welsh Government's Programme for Government Commitment, stating that:

> I know that people feel strongly about Welsh place names, be they the names of houses, geographic features, towns or villages, and they are included in our Cooperation Agreement with Plaid Cymru because we as a Government want to make a real difference.

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language, responding to the current petition, refers to the recent decision taken by Eryri and Bannau Brycheiniog National Parks to use their Welsh name as their sole corporate brand. He states that the decision taken by the National Parks has:

> encouraged their use [Welsh name] by other organisations and individuals and increasing awareness of the language.

Ultimately, the Cabinet Secretary states that the National Parks, as independent organisations, have engaged with their communities to understand their thoughts on renaming. Proposals on the lines of the current petition would need "engagement and open public discussion" says the Cabinet Secretary.