

Encouraging the use of “Cymru” and “Cymry” when referring to ourselves in Welsh and English

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 21 Ionawr 2020
Petitions Committee | 21 January 2020

Reference: RS19/11218-1

Petition Number P-05-929

Petition title: Encouraging the use of “Cymru” and “Cymry” when referring to ourselves in Welsh and English

Text of petition: We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to refer to our country as Cymru, and the nation as Cymry, in Welsh and English in all official statements. The origins of the terms "Wales" and "Welsh" refer to us as foreigners and vassals in our own country. It is time for us to define ourselves rather than being defined by another nation – and a symbol of this would be to refer to ourselves as Cymry and our country as Cymru.

BACKGROUND

Cymru and Cymry

Cymry means the Welsh people, while **Cymru** means Wales.

A History of Wales, by Dr John Davies, stated that it is likely that the term Cymry was adopted around 580 AD, and was used to refer to people in Wales as well as in Northern England and Southern Scotland (known as ‘yr Hen Ogledd’ at the time). It evolved from the Brythonic word ‘Combrogî’, or fellow countrymen, and gradually supplanted the term ‘Brython’. Dr Davies stated that both Cymru and Cymry were spelt ‘Cymry’ or ‘Kymry’ until about 1560 AD. An early reference to Cymru spelt as ‘Kymry’ was contained in a praise poem to Cadwallon ap Cadfan, the King of Gwynedd at the time, probably written in approximately 633 AD in Dr Davies’ view.

Professor Gwyn Alf Williams stated in *When Was Wales?* (page 3) that by the 8th Century people in present-day Wales were:

...beginning to call what was left of the Britons *Cymry* or fellow-countrymen. Pretty soon there was nobody left to call *Cymry* except themselves. Their stronger kings started to hammer the whole bunch together and to make a country called Cymru.



According to Dr Davies, the terms Cymry and Cymru evolved into their present spellings in around 1560 AD.

Wales and Welsh

There has been academic debate around the origins of the terms ‘Wales’ and ‘Welsh’, and what they meant at the time. Some of the main contributions are outlined below.

In *When Was Wales?*, Professor Gwyn Alf Williams described the people of Wales in the 8th Century as (page 3):
...stuck in their peninsulas behind a great dyke and rampart raised by an alien people who called them foreigners – in that ancient language *weallas* – Welsh.

This description matches that of Professor Jeremy Black, who stated in *A New History of Wales* (page 21) that:
The conflict with the Anglo-Saxons defined Wales culturally, ethnically and politically; a frequent situation in post-Roman Europe, as peoples defined themselves following the collapse of the concept of unity under Roman rule. Wales was given identity by the conquerors in terms of otherness: the Saxons used *Walas* or *Wealas* to describe the Britons, and it meant both serfs and foreigners.

The historian David Ross also writes of the Anglo-Saxons defining ‘Welsh’ as foreigners in *Wales: History of a Nation*. He asserts that (page 66):

...intermittent warfare went on into the ninth century. No longer could the Welsh kingdoms consider themselves part of an interrelated set of peoples occupying almost the whole of the British landmass. The realisation of this probably fostered the development of the name ‘Cymry’, ‘comrades’, which came to be the Welsh people’s own name for themselves. However great their internal arguments and dissensions, they were aware of an essential unity. To the Anglo-Saxons, they were the Wallas, ‘foreigners’, a name which leads directly to present-day Welsh.

In *A History of Wales* (page 69) Dr John Davies provided a different historical context for the development of the word ‘Welsh’. He stated that the term ‘Welsh’ had a number of other historical meanings as well as ‘foreigner’, and that:
...it would appear that ‘Welsh’ meant not so much foreigners as peoples who had been Romanized: other versions of the word may be found around the borders of the Empire – the Walloons of Belgium, the Welsch of the Italian Tyrol and the Vlachs of Romania.

WELSH GOVERNMENT ACTION

The Minister for International Relations and the Welsh Language’s letter of 11 December to the Committee states that “promoting the Welsh language is clearly a major priority for the Welsh Government: we want Wales to be a confident, bilingual nation.” Looking specifically at the petition, she notes that:

I support the idea of encouraging the use of Cymru and Cymry in a way that enhances our message: but believe that it’s also important to remain flexible in our approach, and to ensure that we do so in a way that is appropriate to the context and audience of our work.

The Minister’s letter also discusses practical ways that the Welsh Government uses Cymru and Cymry. She notes that the Welsh Government’s brand marquee or logo is always used bilingually, and that Cymru and Wales are both used in the government’s campaigns. The Minister gives the example of using ‘Cymru’ without translation in English language straplines to enhance messaging, such as using ‘This is Cymru’ as part of brand campaigns, and in Cardiff Airport materials. Her letter also states that the Welsh Government will continue to refer to the Welsh people as ‘Cymry’ where appropriate.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES ACTION

During consideration of the *Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2019*, a number of amendments were passed by the Assembly which related to the future name of the Assembly and its Members.

The Act provides that the Assembly will be renamed ‘Senedd Cymru’ or ‘Welsh Parliament’, after an amendment proposing this was passed in *Stage 2 proceedings*. Originally, it was proposed the Assembly be renamed the Senedd in both the Welsh and English languages.

Once the Act comes into force, Assembly Acts will be renamed Acts of Senedd Cymru, or Deddfau Senedd Cymru, using Cymru and Senedd in both languages. Assembly Members will be renamed Members of the Senedd, or Aelodau o’r Senedd, and the Assembly Commission will be renamed the Senedd Commission or Comisiwn y Senedd.

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.