

Report on the List of Historic Place Names

Recommendations

- R1 The primary functions of compiling and promoting the List of Historic Place Names, as undertaken by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, are on-going tasks. The Royal Commission's work of collecting, recording and sharing historic place names should therefore continue. The Royal Commission should work to ensure that not only all relevant organisations and bodies are using the List, but also that the wider public are as aware of it as possible.
- R2 The List should give particular attention to certain categories of names that are at risk of being lost without being recorded. The Royal Commission should liaise with local societies and projects to provide a repository for any existing collections and to help develop new place-name projects that will feed their data into the List.
- R3 The List should continue to collect names from a variety of sources but should make it easier to search for names from specific time periods (e.e. pre-1914, pre-1800 etc.) so as to enable a more developed historical understanding of the archive of Welsh place names.
- R4 The Royal Commission should act on the results of the user survey to increase the usability of the website and improve the user experience.
- R5 The bodies listed in the statutory guidance on *Historic Environment Records in Wales: Compilation and Use* (2017), namely local authorities, the National Park authorities and National Resources Wales, should report on their use of the List on an annual basis. This should include detailed data on changes to place names and on new names bestowed on the basis of the List or on any other basis. They should also provide naming data to the List on an annual basis in UPRN format.
- R6 The Welsh Government, with guidance from the Royal Commission, should draft a street-naming-and-numbering policy template for local authorities based on the good-practice model provided by – amongst others – Ceredigion. The Welsh Government should also formally remind local authorities that their policies must be published and be easily available on the internet.
- R7 Research should be commissioned and funded to identify where, how and why place name changes are taking place and consider both topographical and property names. The List provides evidence of changes to the stock of historic names. This in itself is not surprising, as place names inevitably change over time in a number of ways and for a number of reasons. There is, however, a striking lack of data to enable a full understanding of the current rate and extent of this phenomenon and of whether historic names are being changed more often and for different reasons than in the past.

- R8 The Royal Commission and the Welsh Language Commissioner should work together to maximise the joint impact of the List of Historic Welsh Place Names and the List of Standardised Welsh Place Names. [Welsh Place Names \(welshlanguagecommissioner.wales\)](http://welshlanguagecommissioner.wales)
- R9 The Royal Commission should discuss with Welsh Government the possibility of a place-name portal within any wider language-resource portal that might be developed to strengthen the digital infrastructure of the Welsh language.
- R10 The Royal Commission should formalise its relationship with key international bodies, especially with Logainm.ie (The Placenames Database of Ireland), given the latter's experience in engagement with the public, its production of educational resources and its willingness to share digital expertise, and adapt it to the Welsh context.
- R11 The Royal Commission should develop ways in which its content could be used for educational purposes, especially in the context of the new Curriculum for Wales, and in doing so should seek to co-operate with Logainm.ie, the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office, Welsh Place-Name Society and the local education consortia.
- R12 Building on its successes in providing advice to local authorities, the Royal Commission should explore avenues to actively promote the naming assistance it can offer to local authorities, developers and other property owners and to emphasise the role played by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office in the standardisation of official Welsh forms.

Background

- 1 On the basis of Section 34 of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016 it has been a statutory requirement (since May 2017) that Welsh Ministers 'compile and maintain a list of historic place names in Wales'. There is no statutory definition of 'historic'. Statutory guidance relating to the List is summarized in the Annex below (§30–5).
- 2 This list – known as the 'List of Historic Place Names' – is compiled and maintained by the Royal Commission. The List has concentrated on sources that pre-date 1914 but also incorporates later data. Oversight has been provided by an advisory group made up of representatives of Cadw (the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Service), the Welsh Archaeological Trusts, the Welsh Place-Name Society, the National Library of Wales, the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies.
- 3 In order to enable the compiling and maintaining of the List, the Royal Commission has employed a full-time member of staff (Dr James January-McCann) to undertake the duties noted in Appendix A.

- 4 Although referred to as a 'list', the data is accessible via a searchable database and map freely available on the [List of Historic Place Names](#) website, hosted by the Royal Commission.

Statistical Summary of Content and Usage of the List

- 5 The List is by far the largest collection of Welsh place names. As of 20 May 2022, it has 692,773 individual records of place names.
- 6 These records are based on 1,252 individual sources of varying kinds. Some include large-scale projects such as the Archives and Records Council Wales project 'Cynefin: Mapping Wales' Sense of Place' (repairing and then digitising more than 1,100 Welsh tithe maps held at the National Library of Wales [NLW], transcribing the maps and related documents, and making them available via the NLW [Welsh Tithe Maps](#) website). Another key project is the [Cymru1900](#) project based on Ordnance Survey maps of c. 1900. This provides one of the base maps for the List's website. Names have also been sourced from local projects, such as [Perci Penfro](#), from various estate maps and manuscripts (e.g. NLW Peniarth 147), and from numerous contributions by members of the public.
- 7 The number of hits are on average 271 a day, from 389,523 individual users to date. As of 20 May 2022, there have been 244 enquiries using the online contact form.
- 8 Survey data collected in 2022 are based on 252 responses to an on-line questionnaire. These show that while the majority of users are occasional visitors, there is a core of around 16% who use the site regularly. Users are divided almost equally between those looking up specific names and those with a more general interest in place names. The data reveal that the Welsh-speaking public is far more aware of the purpose of the List, and the fact that they can add to it, than are English speakers. An invitation to offer suggestions as to how to improve the List elicited 49 responses. Eleven respondents said that the List needs to be promoted far more widely and often, particularly via the the Royal Commission's social media, but also in the media more generally. Eight suggested that additional work needs to be done on the website, to improve the search function, and to add sound files to the glossary. The need to ensure correctness of transcriptions was also frequently mentioned.
- 9 The List is also a resource for various kinds of research projects. For instance, the Royal Commission has recently been asked to act as a partner organisation to a proposed AHRC-funded project based on the Great Sessions records. This would allow use of the List to geolocate cases by the place names recorded in Great Sessions records, and then enable key details of the records to be added to the List.

Local Authorities, National Park authorities and National Resources Wales

- 10 Local authorities (LAs) are making use of the List, with twelve of the twenty-two LAs having informed the Royal Commission that they have done so, either in person or by requesting access to the Web Feature Service [WFS] feeds. The Project Officer has been directly requested to suggest names for several housing developments in Caerphilly, one in Carmarthenshire, and one in Pembrokeshire.
- 11 Nevertheless, it has proven difficult to get a full picture of the how the List has been used in the context of LAs' street naming and numbering policies. Some of these policies are – as they should be – easy to find online. Some refer specifically to the List and how it should be used, with links provided for easy access. Others are far less clear, referring only (for instance) to the fact that that the LA itself 'will take into account the list of historic place names when considering a house name change', without making it clear that the List is publicly available and accessible for free via an easy-to-use website. Others do not refer to the List at all.
- 12 Likewise, online forms for changing property names vary considerably. Some simply ask for the name to be changed and the name with which it is intended to replace it. No reference is made to the importance of historic names, or of the existence of the List. Others ask whether the original name is historic and what is the reason for the proposed change and provide a link to the List and simple guidance on its use. This approach may be considered more proactive than that commended as good practice by the published statutory guidance on *Historic Environment Records in Wales: Compilation and Use* (2017, p. 18):

If there is good evidence that the property has a historic name that has appeared on historic mapping, then the local authority should ask the applicant to reconsider the proposed change and retain, or perhaps adopt, the historic name. Some local authorities in Wales [...] already employ this policy and evidence suggests that it is effective in encouraging the continued use of historic place names in postal addresses.
- 13 Some LAs have produced reports that provide information on changes to house names. For example, Ceredigion's 'Street Naming and Numbering Policy Update' (4 December 2017) provides details of changes to property names, noting that seven were changed from Welsh to English, 28 from English to Welsh, 22 from Welsh to Welsh, and five from English to English. It also notes that 'the letter to consider the context of changing the property's name appears to have influenced people'. Recent reports of this kind that might provide direct evidence of the List's impact are difficult to find. Furthermore, without detailed research it is difficult to know whether the names that have been changed are 'historic' (however that term might be defined). It would appear that property names in some LAs are considered an aspect of language policy, whereas in other LAs they are considered to be part of

planning/building regulations. This also leads to inconsistency in data collection and monitoring

- 14 The List Project Officer is in regular contact with Parc Cenedlaethol Eryri, both concerning their standardisation project in partnership with the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner and the Treftadaeth Ardudwy project, the names collected from which will be stored in the List.
- 15 The List Project Officer has contacted National Resources Wales in order to incorporate their place-name data into the List.

Relationship with other bodies

- 16 It is noted that the Royal Commission is not the only body engaged with collecting, recording and sharing place-name data in Wales.
- 17 The Welsh Language Commissioner, via the Place-names Standardisation Panel, has produced a List of Standardised Welsh Place-names. This list currently consists, in the main, of settlement names (e.g. villages and towns) and so has a narrower range of names than the List of Historic Place Names. These names, however, have been standardised with regards to their orthography, in order to be as consistent as possible with modern spelling practices. There is regular dialogue between the Royal Commission's List and the Office of the Welsh Language Commissioner, and one future aim is the use of the standardised forms as 'head names' for the Royal Commission's List.
- 18 Gwynedd have recently appointed an 'Indigenous Place Name Project Officer' (Meirion McIntyre Huws), the first such project officer in any of the Welsh LAs. The List Project Officer has liaised with Gwynedd on this project, to enable effective use of the List and also to ensure that any names collected as part of the Gwynedd project may be shared with the List.
- 19 The Welsh Government's Welsh Language Division is active in the field of language policy, corpus planning, and public access to linguistic resources, as indicated by its 2021 consultation on a 'National policy on Welsh linguistic infrastructure'. This refers to the creation of a 'central website' to include links to 'authoritative corpora' of various kinds, including 'place-names and street names' (p. 17).
- 20 The Welsh Place Name Society also has place name recording projects and will shortly make more of its own collections publicly available via an interactive map.

International context

- 21 In the initial period since its creation, the List has naturally concentrated on collecting, recording and publicising names in a Welsh context. It is very much aware,

however, of its specific status as a *statutory* list of historic names, an unusual if not unique position that is certainly of note on an international basis. Place names are a field of interest in a wide range of contexts and so attention is only drawn here to a small number of the most relevant points of international comparison.

- 22 The List has a close relationship with Logainm.ie (The Placenames Database of Ireland) and [An Coiste Logainmneacha](http://AnCoisteLogainmneacha) ('The Placenames Committee') (the bodies responsible for place name use in Ireland, both academic and official). Irish legislation affords that every settlement in the Republic of Ireland should have an official name in both Irish and English, except for settlements in the Gaeltacht (officially designated Irish-speaking regions), which are (in general) named only in Irish. The previously existing English forms of Gaeltacht names no longer have any official status once a relevant place names order is in place. The Irish Language Commissioner has an oversight role in ensuring that public bodies comply with the provisions of the Official Languages Act 2021. [An Coimisinéir Teanga . Placenames \(coimisineir.ie\)](http://AnCoimisin%C3%A9irTeanga.Placenames.coimisineir.ie).
- 23 The List is also aware that definitions of 'historic names', as well as policies to protect them and ensure their use, have been the subject of legislation and public policy in other parts of Europe. Sweden's Place-Names Advisory Board, for instance, has produced a 'Guide to the Standardisation and Preservation of Place-Names' that is referred to as '[Good Place Name Practice](#)': 'good place-name practice means not changing place-names that are established by long usage unless there is good reason to do so' (p. 3). These policies also give regard to the [United Nations Conferences on the Standardisation of Geographical Names](#). (See also: Nyström, Staffan. 2019. [Place-name policies in Scandinavia and elsewhere](#). *Mitteilungen der Osterreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 1, pp. 263–79.) It is, however, worth noting that place-name legislation elsewhere generally focuses on street level and above, and as such is not concerned with individual house names.

Education and Civic Society

- 24 Now that the List is well established, there are opportunities for further engagement with various stakeholders. Perhaps the most obvious field is the new curriculum: [Curriculum for Wales](#). This curriculum, and its focus on concepts such as *cynefin* and exploration of pupils' home areas, is an ideal opportunity for the production of educational resources based on place names.
- 25 The List project officer, Dr January-McCann, has provided a series of talks on place names to local groups across Wales, both in person and via Zoom, as restrictions have allowed. Pre-recorded talks are freely available on the Commission's [Youtube](#) channel.
- 26 The List project officer also writes regular articles for the [Welsh Place-Name Society Bulletin](#) and has published articles on the List in various other journals.

Policy Implications

- 27 The List is of relevance to:
- the commitment in the Welsh Government – Plaid Cymru 2021 'Co-operation Agreement' to 'ensure Welsh language place names in the built and natural environments are safeguarded and promoted' (p. 10).
 - the recent Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan consultation and its proposal to 'explore new ways of raising awareness of and promoting the List of Historic Place Names of Wales' (p. 13).
- 28 Given the lack of concrete data from LAs regarding changes to place names, it is difficult to provide a statistical indication of how widespread the practice of changing historic property names has become. Certainly, there are examples of the loss of historic names, with the new names replacing the old on Ordnance Survey maps, e.g. 'Hakuna Matata' rather than 'Banc y Cornicyll' in Carmarthenshire, and 'Little Pudding Cottage' rather than 'Pontpren Ddu' in Powys. The historic names are of course recorded on the List. It seems, however, that properties are more commonly given new names on an 'unofficial' basis for the purposes of advertising as holiday lets, for instance. In such cases new names may not be recorded via the LAs, but are used on websites and also on signage on the buildings themselves or on gateposts, etc., thereby replacing the historic names in the landscape. The List can certainly be used as a means of ascertaining the nature of such changes, but the data available are currently insufficient for that to be done thoroughly.
- 29 The Royal Commission is committed to providing data that will enable policy discussions to take place on an informed basis and to further the understanding of historic place names.

Annex: Statutory Guidance relating to the List

- 30 Cadw has published statutory guidance on Historic Environment Records in Wales: Compilation and Use (2017), issued by the Welsh Ministers under the powers in section 37 of the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016. This guidance relates to the work of local authorities, the National Park authorities and National Resources Wales and explains how these bodies:
- may contribute to the compilation of historic environment records and assist in keeping them up-to-date
 - should make use of historic environment records in the exercise of their functions

31 The guidance further states that ‘the public bodies named in the Act should provide the Royal Commission with any information that will contribute to the ongoing development of the list of historic place names’ (3.2.8). It also states that:

All of the public bodies named in the Act should take account of the list of historic places names, which can be accessed through the historic environment records, when considering the naming and renaming of streets, properties and other places, either directly or by another party. Local authorities should take account of the list of historic place names in the exercise of their statutory role in the naming and renaming of streets and properties.

32 An Annex to *Historic Environment Records in Wales: Compilation and Use* (2017) provides ‘Guidance for Local Authorities on the Use of the List of Historic Place Names which can be Accessed through the Historic Environment Records’. This guidance operates within the framework of the current legislation (the Towns Improvement Clauses Act 1847 and the Public Health Act 1925) that ‘regulates the logical and consistent naming and numbering of streets and properties to support postal and emergency services’.

33 It is also noted that:

All local authorities in Wales should have policies on the naming and numbering of streets and properties. They should set out clearly the principles that govern the assignment of names and numbers to new streets and properties, and the handling of any requests to change names. The importance of historic place names in the local historic environment should be recognised in these policies, and their continuing use should be encouraged either as the basis for new naming or through the retention of existing names.

34 The statutory guidance further notes that:

When considering applications for a change to a property name that appears in an official address, the local authority should now also check the proposal against the list of historic place names. [...] If there is good evidence that the property has a historic name that has appeared on historic mapping, then the local authority should ask the applicant to reconsider the proposed change and retain, or perhaps adopt, the historic name.

35 In the case of street names, the guidance states that:

The Welsh Government encourages local authorities to employ historic place names as the basis for the naming of new streets or other developments whenever possible. When considering an application from a developer for new place naming, the local authority should consult the list of historic place names. If there is an appropriate historic name (for example, a name deriving from a historic field name or settlement name), then the developer will be

informed and encouraged to use it. The final decision on the naming of a street rests with the local authority.

Appendix A

Duties of List of Historic Place Names Project Officer:

- to develop an authoritative and dynamic List that will evolve and grow over time, drawing on existing place name research and incorporating the various forms and spellings used to record structures or places up to the start of the First World War
- to provide easy access to a single searchable map and text-based source of information on historic place names
- to enable users – including the Historic Environment Records, Local Planning Authorities and Government Departments in Wales – to download and update the List, or relevant subsets, through an open Web Feature Service interface
- to raise awareness of the value of historic place names, help members of the public learn about the history of their communities and support academic research
- to respond to enquiries from professional and private users of the List, including members of the public who submit additional place name information based on their own knowledge and research
- to promote the use of the List by all appropriate means, including participation in forums where placename policy is on the agenda, giving talks and publishing articles and social media posts on Welsh place-name history
- to work with local and National Park Authorities and Natural Resources Wales in executing their responsibilities as outlined in the statutory guidance on historic environment records
- to encourage decision-makers to draw upon the List in their stewardship of the historic environment, especially in development control work, the naming of streets, new commercial and housing developments and in implementing the recommendations of the 2020 Monuments and Street Names Audit (to which the List contributed).