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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR  
REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE  
STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE THIRD UNITED  
CONFERENCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

Report by the United Kingdom

Paper presented by the United Kingdom

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PART A : General Information

The United Kingdom paper on toponymic guidelines deals only with names in Great Britain. Part B of this paper deals with the collection and recording of place-names on Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland maps.

In the United Kingdom, offshore names are the responsibility of the Hydrographic Department of the Ministry of Defence, but the source for names will include the surveying agencies such as harbour and port authorities, and for offshore oil facilities the oil company or corporation responsible for the operations. For features on land, names from the official land maps are taken as authority.

Most mapping concerns in the United Kingdom are computer-oriented, and map production from field survey through photogrammetry to final publication is becoming increasingly automated. In some particular cases, gazetteers have been produced as a by-product of field collection of names for mapping purposes. Names as well as map symbols are items for computer emplacement, especially on mapping held in digital form or plotted from digital data.

For decades there has been a 1:250,000 official gazetteer of Great Britain (covering England, Wales and Scotland). All names are referenced to the national grid and the map sheets of the 1:250,000 series. Strictly speaking, therefore, it is an index to names on that series. Names from the 1:50,000 series have similarly been collected and stored in a computer, thus providing the means of publishing a gazetteer (or index to names) for the 1:50,000 series.

Since the last Conference in Athens, the United Kingdom has been represented at the United Nations Group of Experts meetings and has participated in United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences and International Cartographical Association meetings.

Those of you who knew Mr P J M Geelan will mark his absence. He has retired from the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names but continues to be associated with the work of the Committee from time to time. The Committee has been severely handicapped through staff shortages, and financial restrictions have had to be borne. Recently the situation regarding staff, accommodation and equipment has improved, and the staff is becoming increasingly involved in computer-aided techniques.

In 1979, the decision was made to adopt Pinyin. Those who were present at the Athens Conference will recall the problems outlined by the United Kingdom delegation at the time as to why Pinyin could not immediately be taken into use. As we expected, its adoption has proved to be difficult. This does not mean we are in contention with Pinyin per se. In our view it is a less clumsy system than Wade-Giles and, whilst we would prefer not to have to use certain letters of the alphabet in the way they are used in Pinyin, the system has much to commend it.

The problems associated with Pinyin are not, therefore, to do with the system but rather with how to apply it. They arise from the linguistic problems in non-Chinese language areas: from the relationship of local name to administrative name; from the recurrence of the same name in two or more places in close proximity; from the varying location of administrative centres all the way down to commune level. All these difficulties were known to us from our work prior to the adoption of Pinyin. They have remained so since we adopted it. We simply understand them more fundamentally. In September 1980, some aspects of these matters were discussed with a Chinese delegation which visited the United Kingdom, and a certain amount of advice was received. The basic problems, however, remain.

As evidence of our efforts at introducing Pinyin, all Wade-Giles names of the People's Republic of China were converted to Pinyin on the plates of the sixth edition of the Times Atlas of the World (1980), and in its index.

Apart from the great effort made in implementing the decision to replace Wade-Giles by Pinyin, the staff of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names have been deeply involved in office processing of names, studies of romanization systems, and work on gazetteers.

## PART B : The Collection and Recording of Place-Names on Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland Maps

### 1 Brief Historical Background

During the first complete and official survey of Ireland, undertaken by the Irish Ordnance Survey at six-inch scale between 1825 and 1845, very careful attention was given to ascertaining an acceptable form of spelling for the various names that were to appear on the published Ordnance Survey maps.

Because the survey was carried out essentially for the civil needs of providing the basis for a detailed valuation of land and buildings for taxation purposes, special attention was paid to administrative areas, particularly townlands, which were at the time the smallest and the basic administrative unit. The research and collection of these names was undertaken by the noted Irish scholar John O'Donovan, a native Gaelic speaker.

To facilitate this work, the Ordnance Survey created a system of names collection, authentication and recording, in the form of "field name books", one for each map. In each book there were printed columns in which were recorded the received name, the various ways of spelling it, the authorities for spellings, the geographical situation, and any descriptive remarks.

O'Donovan travelled all over Ireland, mostly on foot, noting from surviving Gaelic speakers the current pronunciation of townland and other names, consulting local government and other records (including pre-Ordnance Survey maps), before finally recommending the anglicized form in which each name should appear.

## 2 Collection and Approval of Names

In Northern Ireland, except for certain administrative names, there is no official body responsible for deciding the names and spellings to be published on official maps. The Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland was set up in 1922, and from that time it has assumed this responsibility. In making its decisions the Ordnance Survey is guided primarily by local usage and custom, and makes such enquiries and consults such authorities as appear appropriate. Among the learned bodies consulted are the Place-Names Branch of the Ordnance Survey in Dublin, the Department of Celtic Studies at The Queen's University Belfast, and the Ulster Place-Names Society. Any conflict is resolved by the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

Although there has been some modification (notably the use of grid coordinates for position) since O'Donovan's time, the system of names collection and recording in "field name books" has remained largely unaltered. Each re-survey or revision of a large-scale map - 1:1250, 1:2500 and basic 1:10,000: i.e. not derived from 1:2500 maps - produces a new or revised set of place-name documents of its own. In practice, the surveyor confirms existing names and their spellings in the field, and also collects and records new names of sufficient importance or value. Smaller-scale maps carry a selection of the more important and well-known names, taken from the larger-scale publications.

Names appearing on Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland maps may be divided into three distinct categories: (a) administrative, (b) distinctive, and (c) descriptive.

### (a) administrative names

Although townlands are no longer administratively significant, they are of great historical importance and continue to be widely used by the community. Moreover, they remain the basic unit constituting the current administrative regions. The vast bulk of the townland names are the anglicized forms (of the original Gaelic usage) published on the original 1825-45 six-inch (1:10,560) Ordnance Survey maps. Only in very rare instances have new townlands been constituted: for example, as a result of land reclamation. In such instances the naming authority is the Boundary Surveyor for Northern Ireland. Other administrative areas include Local Government Districts and Wards, the authority for such names being the relevant Act of Parliament.

### (b) distinctive names

These comprise the bulk of proper place names: names of geographical features such as mountains and hills, as well as cities, towns, hamlets, churches, schools, and other significant buildings. Here again the existing Ordnance Survey map is the authority for names on new and revised editions. For new names, and in cases of doubt about the validity of existing names, the field surveyors make enquiries from the appropriate authorities and local residents, and obtain signed approval. In some instances, such as street names, the visual (nameplate) evidence is accepted.

### (c) descriptive names

As the title implies, these are names given to features to describe or define their use or characteristics, such as Recreation Ground, Allotment Gardens, Boundary Stone, etc. To achieve standardization on published maps, the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland uses an authorised list of descriptive names and their abbreviations.

### 3 Problems

About 1974 the Post Office reorganized its postal services to allow letter delivery by vans rather than by the local postmaster. Each van covers a relatively large postal area, and the new postman could not be expected to know every family in his area. All houses were therefore numbered and all roads were named to provide addresses which could easily be found. The task of road-naming was carried out by Post Office personnel with no training in place-name work. They unfortunately did not consult the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, and had only minimal consultation with the local councils, who are the statutory bodies responsible for naming roads. This resulted in quite a number of spelling anomalies which the Ordnance Survey has endeavoured to resolve. The current policy is to accept the visual evidence of road nameplates where these exist, and to consult the local authority where they do not.

Some time later a number of local authorities, under pressure from the local inhabitants and other interested groups who much preferred the old system of addresses incorporating townland names (names they considered were now in danger of being lost), voiced their discontent with the new system of road names. Indeed, in some cases road nameplates were actually removed by the local authority. Meanwhile the Ordnance Survey had published many maps containing these road names, and this continues to pose problems.

The second major problem lies in cases where the same name has a number of different applications. Often, for instance, several features (such as a townland, church, school) in a locality have the same name, yet each is spelt differently. The reason for this lies in the Ordnance Survey's statutory obligation to retain the original or "legal" spelling of townland names, while accepting changes in spellings (duly authorised according to current Ordnance Survey policy) for other names features and incorporating these in succeeding map editions. In consequence, the Ordnance Survey is sometimes accused of spelling errors on its maps, and has decided to print townland names in a distinctive style on the current 1:50,000 maps in an attempt to overcome this difficulty.

### 4 General Remarks

The field surveyor is responsible for collecting and recording distinctive names, descriptive names, and house numbers. Administrative names are dealt with by the Ordnance Survey Boundary Section. The form (eg whether full or abbreviated) in which names are to appear on the published map is determined by the Ordnance Survey Examination Section.

### 5 Gazetteers

A Topographical Index is published by the Registrar-General for each Census of Population. Whilst these are not Ordnance Survey publications, they are gazetteers in the sense that they list various categories of administrative units in Northern Ireland. The spelling of names of territorial divisions generally follows that adopted by the Ordnance Survey.

The Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland intends to publish a gazetteer for the 1:50,000 maps when the series is completed in 1984. It is envisaged that the gazetteer will list in alphabetical order the names that appear on all sheets of the series, and give the Irish Grid coordinates for each name. This information will be produced by use of a computer phototypesetter, as part of computerised management of place-names information.