

TOWNLAND NAMES

BACKGROUND – NORTHERN IRELAND

In 2001 the Northern Ireland Assembly debated a motion that called on each Government Department to adopt a policy of using and promoting names in all government correspondence and official documents.

This motion gained cross-party support and was supported unanimously.

NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

Following discussions with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), they plans to write to the Environment Minister on the issue of Townland names in the near future. NIGLA highlights that a number of the rural councils are keen to ensure that the historic Townland names are preserved. Indeed, Fermanagh Council in particular has an ongoing campaign in relation to Townland names. It is feared that the present process of introducing road names and numbers in rural areas would lead to the omission and gradual loss of Townland names. These issues are:

- (1) preserving local identity
- (2) providing effective service delivery

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) NI Order 1995 does not allow councils to introduce a policy to identify each house by using a number and the relevant Townland name. Fermanagh Council are requesting that the present legislation be changed. NILGA officers have discussed this with Fermanagh Council and there appear to be several concerns, specifically relating to emergency services and postal services.

NIGLA state that there may be an opportunity within the Reform of Local Government programme to change the legislation giving councils greater ability to preserve these local identities.

Fermanagh Council

The Council is empowered by Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995 to determine the name by which a street or road in its District is to be known. In accordance with the legislation a new name must be expressed in English and may, in addition, be expressed in a language other than English. The Council can also allocate numbers to the properties on a particular road or street.

Fermanagh Council however, does not issue road names or numbers for properties in rural areas. The Council recommends the use of the Townland name in all addresses so as to help retain this part of cultural heritage.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1995¹

Article 11: Powers of councils in relation to street names and numbering of buildings

A Council may erect at or near each end, corner or entrance of any street in its district a nameplate showing the name of the street; and a nameplate erected under this paragraph –

- (a) shall express the name of the street in English; and
- (b) may express that name in any other language

A council may, immediately adjacent to a nameplate erected under paragraph (1) which expresses the name of a street in English only, erect a second nameplate expressing the name of the street in a language other than English.

Neither this Article nor anything done by a council thereunder authorises or requires the use of the name of a street expressed in a language other than English as, or part of –

- (a) the address of any person; or
- (b) the description of any land;
- (c) for the purposes of any statutory provision

QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST – NORTHERN IRELAND PLACENAMES PROJECT

In 1987, the Department of the Environment funded Queens University Belfast in order to establish the Northern Ireland Place-Names Project. This project was created to research the names of physical features and settlements on the Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland 1:50,000 scale map. The research has created a computer database of names providing origin, meaning and historical information. In 1990 work was furthered to include all Townlands. This project contributed to the development of the Pointer address database².

The Pointer address database was launched by Experian³ and Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland (OSNI) in March 2006,. This database provides a standard address for every property in Northern Ireland, including a grid reference to 1 meter resolution, Townland data and unique property reference numbers⁴.

¹ Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995,
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/SI/si1995/Uksi_19950759_en_2.htm#mdiv11

² MOSAIC, http://www.mosaic-ni.gov.uk/where_is_culture_pilot.asp

³ Experian are a global company providing information solutions to organisations

⁴ Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland,
http://www.osni.gov.uk/pressrelease_pointer_release_for_osni_and_nics_websites_.doc

The Northern Ireland Executive recommended that Townland data be incorporated into the Pointer address database⁵.

POINTER⁶

Pointer is the address database for Northern Ireland with the joint support of Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, Valuations and Land Agency (VLA) and the Royal Mail.

Pointer has been created through a process of data matching and ground validation across Northern Ireland. To meet the needs of the above organisations Pointer was created using two types of addressable object⁷;

- (1) Primary addressable objects (an addressable object that can be addressed without reference to a primary addressable object); and
- (2) Secondary addressable object (an addressable object that is addressed by reference to a primary object).

Pointer is maintained through the provision of data from Councils, Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland, Valuation and Lands Agency and Royal Mail. Local Councils will be a source of address information due to powers under Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. Ordnance Survey, Royal Mail and VLA will have responsibility for other elements such as postcodes, building classification, multi-occupancy and building status.

Pointer includes the Townland within its specification. It maintains Townland names with the standard addresses held by the Public Sector.

Pointer has the capacity to hold 'dual names' when more than one name exists for a street or road. Indeed, Pointer has included the Irish and Ulster-Scot street names that have been accepted by Local Councils; this is in addition to the statutory English name.

Detailed information on individual Townlands were made available online by OSNI in Spring 2005 via the Pointer website. To gain access to this information, register using an email address and the service is free thereafter. The search produces a list comprising Townlands with its parish, barony and country in alphabetical order.

Some of the Townland's history and details are also available. The historical information displayed to date consists of the earliest reference to the name and possible references in four further sources: the Escheated Country Maps of 1609, the Calendar of Parent Rolls of James I, the 1659 'Census', and John O'Donovan's suggestion for the 1830s Ordnance Survey of Ireland.

The Townland can be located geographically within Northern Ireland. There is also the option of viewing the relationships of the Townland to other divisions such as county and electoral ward⁸.

⁵ Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland,
http://www.osni.gov.uk/pressrelease_pointer_release_for_osni_and_nics_websites_.doc

⁶ Pointer, http://www.osni.gov.uk/index/faqs/faq_pointer.htm

⁷ Pointer, http://www.osni.gov.uk/index/faqs/faq_pointer.htm

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND - DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY, RURAL AND GAELTACHT AFFAIRS

The Minister for the Department of the Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs announced in May 2003 that he nominated a new Placenames Commission. The function of the Placenames Commission is to provide advice in relation to⁹;

- (1) Research on Ireland's Placenames and the provision of authoritative Irish versions of these names for official and public use;
- (2) Promoting the development of research on placements in third level and other educational institutions; and
- (3) Promoting, in appropriate ways, material published by the Placenames Branch

The Local Government Act 2001 (Part 18) sets out the procedures for changing a Placename, they include the following;

- (1) local consultation;
- (2) decision by local authority; or
- (3) confirmation by Minister for Local Government in a statutory order

The Place-Names (Irish Forms) Act 1973¹⁰ allowed definitive Irish language versions of Placenames to be made available for official use, it also means in legal terms that the Placename remains in the English language only.

Two orders were made under this Act¹¹:

- (1) in 1975 to declare Irish language versions of the names of postal districts
- (2) in 2001 to declare Cnoc Mhuire as the official Irish version of Knock, Co. Mayo

The Minister for the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs passed the Official Languages Bill in 2003 to incorporate the provisions of the 1973 Act, with fundamental amendments. The Minister at the time "*regarded it as unacceptable*"¹² that the legally-recognised Placenames in the Gaeltacht should still be in English with use of equivalent Irish language words only permitted for legal use. Under Part 5 of the Act, the Minister may by Order declare the Irish language version of a Placename specified in the Order¹³.

⁸ The Northern Ireland Place-Name Project,
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofLanguagesLiteraturesandPerformingArts/SubjectAreas/IrishandCelticStudies/Research/NorthernIrelandPlace-NameProject/>

⁹ Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,
<http://www.pobail.ie/en/PressReleases/2003/May/htmltext,9638,en.html>

¹⁰ Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,
<http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/ThePlacenamesBranch/PlacenamesOrders/index.html>

¹¹ Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,
<http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/ThePlacenamesBranch/PlacenamesOrders/index.html>

¹² Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,
<http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/ThePlacenamesBranch/PlacenamesOrders/index.html>

¹³ Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs,
<http://www.pobail.ie/en/IrishLanguage/ThePlacenamesBranch/PlacenamesOrders/index.html>

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS**To the Minister of the Environment on 12/06/2008**

Q. What action the Department is taking to protect and promote Townland names?

A. The Department of the Environment has no responsibility in this area. Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 makes provision in relation to the naming of streets and the numbering of buildings. The Minister is not persuaded that the legislation should be amended to allow for the numbering of individual properties within Townlands as I am not convinced that this provides a feasible or practical way forward.

To Minister for Regional Development on 06/05/2008

Q. Minister for Regional Development to detail his plans to reinstate Townland names on road signs

A. The Department Road Service has advised that for the purposes of traffic signing, Townlands are not considered to be destinations in their own right. Therefore, Road Service has no plans to include them on traffic signs. It may be more appropriate for Townland names to be included on signs that are provided by local authorities. A number of local councils, including Derry city Council have already adopted this approach.

To OFMDFM on 26/02/2008

Q. Detail the actions that are being taken to ensure government departments use Townland names

A. We fully recognise the historic, cultural and linguistic importance of Townlands names. It is however a matter for each department to make a decision as to such usage.

March 2009