

# **Placenames Database of Ireland**

## **Bunachar Logainmneacha na hÉireann**

### **Project Information**

Fiontar (DCU) and An Brainse Logainmneacha (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs) are creating a database of Irelands placenames on this site. Work commenced on the project in April 2007 and the Placenames Database of Ireland will be launched publicly at the end of September 2008.

The principal objective of the project is to make available through the Internet, Irish placenames that have been approved by the Placenames Branch, searchable under both Irish and English versions. The following additional features are also being developed:

1. A system to enable simultaneous Irish-English and English-Irish translation of lists of placenames.
2. Sound recordings of some placenames. Sound files have been included in the entries of some of the placenames of Co. Waterford and Co. Galway in the pilot version of the site. Sound files are currently being developed for some of the placenames of Co. Donegal. Sound files will be added to other counties on a phased basis.
3. Information notes pertaining to certain placenames. Scanned images of the historical records have been included in the editorial interface only. These records will be input gradually in a searchable form on the public interface.

Phase one of the project will be completed by the end of 2008. Further work on sound files and inputting of historical records will continue after that date.

The pilot version of the site will be tested by groups of users from April to September 2008. The feedback from these groups will be valuable in developing the final version for future users of the site.

An estimated 100,000 placenames approved by An Brainse Logainmneacha are available here and searchable in Irish and in English. The technical solution is based on the model created by Fiontar for [www.focal.ie](http://www.focal.ie).

### **An Coimisiún Logainmneacha**

An Coimisiún Logainmneacha, which was established in 1946, advises on the research of the placenames of Ireland and on providing authoritative Irish forms of those names for official and public use. The Commission reports to the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Head of the Placenames Branch in that Department is Secretary of the Commission.

### **New Beginning**

In 2003, the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs established the Commission on a fresh footing by changing its terms of reference and by appointing a new membership. The following are the new terms of reference:

To advise the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs concerning:

- a. specifying for purposes of law forms of placenames in the Irish language, as enacted in the Placenames (Irish Forms) Act, 1973
- b. the study of the placenames of Ireland, as defined in article 1. of the Act, in order to determine forms of those names in the Irish language
- c. preparing placenames orders as enacted in article 2 of the Act
- d. matters relating to Irish language forms of placenames not included in article 1. of the Act, namely, names of minor features and streetnames.
- e. the publication and official use of forms of placenames in the Irish language
- f. the development of research and study of placenames in third level and other institutes of education
- g. promoting, in appropriate ways, the research of the Placenames Branch.
- h. other matters relating to the placenames of Ireland.

### **History**

Irish people have been interested in their placenames since time immemorial. For example, *dinnseanchas*, or 'lore of famous places' – which sought to explain the meaning and origin of some hundreds of the more noted Irish placenames – was among the most popular genres of early Irish literature. The great majority of our placenames have their roots in the Irish language; others derive from Old Norse, Norman French and of course English. But by far the greater part of our Gaelic-origin placenames occur in an English or Latin language-context, cloaked in the orthography of those languages. Since they appear in this guise, a great deal of scholarly labour is usually required to establish the correct original forms.

High-quality academic research on Irish placenames commenced when the Ordnance Survey appointed to its staff in 1830 the eminent Irish scholar John O'Donovan. As a member of the Survey's Topographical Department (disbanded in 1842), *O'Donovan* and his colleagues – *Petrie*, *O'Curry*, *O'Conor*, *O'Keefe*, and others – did enormously valuable work on a great number of names (including those of more than sixty thousand townlands, almost two and a half thousand parishes and very many minor names). At the close of the 19th century and the beginning of the twentieth the leading authority on Irish placenames was *Patrick Weston Joyce (1829-1914)*, author of that great work *Irish Names of Places, I-III (1869-1913)*.

Among the scholars who did worthwhile work on various aspects of our placenames in the first half of the 20th century were: *Seosamh Laoide*, *Patrick Power*, *Edmund Hogan, SJ*, *Paul Walsh*, *Risteárd Ó Foghludha*, *Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha ('An Seabhac')* and *Liam Price*.  
Establishment

Following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 with a native government whose policy was to promote the use of Irish in various areas of public life, there was particular urgency for authoritative work on Irish placenames, since Irish forms of those names would be required for regular use by both government departments and the general public. That urgency was increased with the coming into force of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* [The Constitution of Ireland] in December 1937 which gave a special status to the Irish language according to Article 8.1: 'The Irish language as the national language is the first official language.' Accordingly The Placenames Commission was established by warrant of the Minister for Finance, *Frank Aiken*, on 24 October 1946. *An Seanadóir Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha* was appointed chairman and he retained that position until his death at the end of 1964.

These were the terms of reference given to the original Commission under its warrant of appointment:

1. To examine the placenames of Ireland, namely
  - \* names of townlands, parishes, baronies, districts and other geographical areas,
  - \* names of postal towns, villages, towns and cities,
  - \* names of other principal denominations not included under (a) and (b) above, and to search for the correct original Irish versions of those placenames insofar as they had Irish forms and those forms can be established.
  
2. To prepare for publication and for official use lists of those names, in their Irish forms.

### **Membership**

Sixteen members were appointed to the Commission at that time:

- \* *An tAthair Tomás de Bháll, PP, Canon,*
- \* *An tAthair Eric Mac Fhinn,*
- \* *An tAthair Pádraig Mac Giolla Cheara, DD, PP, Canon,*
- \* *Col. Niall MacNeill,*
- \* *Dr Séamus Ó Ceallaigh,*
- \* *Fr Michael Connellan, PP,*
- \* *Séamus Ó Dubhghaill,*
- \* *Michael Duignan,*
- \* *James Delargy,*
- \* *An tAthair Pádraig Ó Fearghail,*
- \* *An tAthair Donnchadh Ó Floinn,*
- \* *Risteárd Ó Foghludha,*
- \* *Fr John Ryan, SJ,*
- \* *An Seanadóir Pádraig Ó Siochfhradha,*
- \* *Seán Ó Súilleabháin.*

*Risteárd Ó Foghludha* ('*Fiachra Éilgeach*') was appointed Director of the Commission's small research staff. The only other members were *Micheál Ó Murchú* as assistant and *Máire Nic an Ríogh* as typist.

The Government suspended the Commission on 3 June 1948. When it was reinstated at the end of 1951, *Risteárd Ó Foghludha* was appointed Advisor to the Commission and he continued in that post until his death in August 1957. *Pádraig Ó Niatháin* was brought on secondment from the National Museum as Director-Secretary in January 1952 and *Micheál Ó Murchú* served as his assistant. Three Temporary Assistants – *Meadhbh Ní Chonmhidhe* (later to be known also as *Maeve Conway-Piskorski*), *Conchubhar Ó Cuileanáin* and *Ciarán Mac Mathúna* – were appointed in the summer of the same year.

### **Work Commences**

The Commission's early years saw the initiation of the research from which derived the list of Irish name-forms of postal towns later published in the book *Ainmneacha Gaeilge na mBailte Poist* (1969). In the year 1952 the Director-Secretary paid a visit to Uppsala to study the methodology of the institute – now called the Ortnamnsarkivet – which was engaged in the study of Swedish placenames, but two years later two of the research staff, *Meadhbh Ní Chonmhidhe* and *Ciarán Mac Mathúna*, left the Commission to work in Radió Éireann.

In the summer of 1955 the Government decided that responsibility for the research work should be given to a special section, The Placenames Branch, to be based in the Ordnance Survey.

The Commission's terms of reference were changed so that it would henceforth be an advisory rather than an executive commission and the head of the Placenames Branch was named as its secretary. The Commission's research staff and their accumulated research were transferred to the Placenames Branch of the Ordnance Survey in July 1956, and *Ruaidhrí de Valera* was placed in charge as Senior Placenames and Archaeological Officer. *Éamonn de hÓir* succeeded him, as Chief Placenames Officer, at the beginning of 1958.

For more than four decades after that The Commission oversaw the research work of the Ordnance Survey's Placenames Branch and advised the government on matters to do with placenames.

### **An Brainse Logainmneacha**

Is é céad chúram an Bhrainse Logainmneacha sa Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta, taighde a dhéanamh chun ceartfhoirmeacha Gaeilge logainmneacha na hÉireann a aimsiú agus a fhoilsiú le húsáid go hoifigiúil. Foilsítear toradh taighde an Bhrainse i bhfoirm liostaí de réir mar a bhíonn liostaí oiriúnacha réidh. Is de réir contae a dhéantar taighde de ghnáth. Chomh maith, freastalaíonn an Brainse ar riachtanais oifigiúla eile a bhaineann le logainmneacha. Is é Ceann an Bhrainse Rúnaí an Choimisiúin Logainmneacha.

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### **Contact**

*If you have any question about the Commission we ask you to contact us at the address below:*

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**Important** | This is a trial version of a website which is still under development.

[www.logainm.ie](http://www.logainm.ie)