

Answer to “KK ha’n SWF”

By Daniel Prohaska

Foreword

Members of the *Cornish Language Society* (CLS henceforth) have received a pamphlet written by an anonymous author this month (August 2008) together with their monthly issue of “**An Gannas**”. It is lamentable indeed that the author does not mention his or her name as it is thus impossible to address him/her in response.

The pamphlet itself will be footnoted in this blue colour and the whole text will appear here as to give readers the chance to refer to the entirety of the pamphlet’s content and see the arguments in the full and proper context.

In the scanning and proofing process some typographical inconsistencies have been removed, such as the inconsistent usage of either IPA or X-SAMPA as a phonetic alphabet as well as a few other symbols. These have been replaced by the appropriate IPA symbols. The original text also lacked consistency in italicisation and quotation marks. I have tried to streamline them here, too, so as not to distract from the content of the pamphlet.

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“KK ha’n SWF

mis-Gortheren 2008

The SWF as compared with *Kernewek Kemmyn*

1 Introduction

The outline specification for a standard written form (SWF) of Cornish is now available. On page iii, a number of people are named as having taken part in the process leading to the SWF. It should not be assumed that all of these gave their advice in the spirit of supporting the introduction of a SWF. In many instances, advice was given, but it was not followed.¹ Many participants always believed that a satisfactory orthography could not be arrived at through compromise or by horse-trading of elements, and their fears are vindicated by the incongruous mixture which is the SWF.² Ben Bruch and Albert Bock

¹ This is true. The linguistic advisors were asked on several occasions to give their recommendations not all of which were, probably could be, followed. It would have been prudent of the SWF description paper authors, especially the arbitrator, to lay out why certain recommendations were followed and why others weren’t. In part, some of the recommendations that weren’t incorporated into the SWF were explained, others were not, or not satisfactorily so. I’m sure this can be remedied.

² A number of people were disappointed by the SWF. This disappointment was not only apparent in supporters of KK (*Kernewek Kemmyn*), but also in supporters of UC (Unified Cornish), UCR (Unified Cornish Revised), KS (Kernowak Standard) and RLC (Revived Late Cornish, Modern Cornish). The AHG (Ad Hoc Group) and the arbitrator Dr Trond Trosterud came up with a compromise orthography that may not satisfy all parties, but have elements of all the supported orthographies, and in that, a workable compromise. Nowhere is this orthography “incongruous”, as the anonymous author claims. The guidelines are clear and nothing radically new has been included in the SWF that was not previously present in one or more of the supported orthographies.

have attempted in the document to give it some linguistic credibility, but this is like painting over the cracks in a faulty surface³.

2 Unified Cornish, *Kemmyn* and the SWF briefly compared

Unified Cornish⁴ was a fair starting point for those wishing to write Cornish in the style of the medieval texts, but unsuitable as a vehicle for spoken Cornish, because the correspondence between writing and sounds was not close enough. Table 1 summarizes how its weaknesses in this regard were removed in *Kernewek Kemmyn*.

Table 1:

Faults in Unified Cornish	Improvements in Kemmyn		Treatment in SWF	See
Insufficiently clear relationship between sounds and writing	The orthography is largely phonemic	morpho-phonemic	Reversion to a phonetic system which is weaker ⁵	3
Insufficiently clear relationship between parts of words	The orthography is largely morphemic			
It is impossible to deduce the length of vowels from the spelling; ⁶	It is possible to deduce the length of vowels if the stress is known ⁷		Improvement lost in loan-words ⁸	4

³ The same can be claimed for all works on orthography for Revived Cornish as native, traditional Cornish is only available to us from the surviving literature. We have no access to native speakers of traditional Cornish, nor recordings of their speech. We will never have 100% clarity over how exactly Cornish was spoken, what the exact features of its phonological system were etc. A degree of modesty in the light of this imperfect knowledge is always called for when dealing with historical linguistics. Albert Bock and Ben Bruch have, under very difficult circumstances, tried to formulate a set of rules balancing between prescriptivism and descriptivism, not just describing traditional Cornish as seen from the texts, but also Revived Cornish as it is spoken today in its varieties.

⁴ It is typical of some KK supporters to refer to UC in comparison to KK, completely ignoring UCR and RLC. While this shows blatant disrespect for members of the Cornish speaking community which use these two latter orthographies, it also ignores the features of them that have improved on the linguistic quality of UC. It can only be assumed that personal dislike of the linguists involved in setting up these orthographies have lead to this uncalled for dismissal. It is unfortunate and unprofessional.

⁵ This is a matter of opinion, rather than a fact. A great number of people felt uncomfortable with the morphophonemic orthography KK which is why this particular spelling system did not attract consensus and was not recommended by the orthography commission of the Cornish Language Partnership, nor by the AHG and the arbitrator.

⁶ This was dealt with in RLC as well as KS, in many cases more precisely than in KK, which, like the SWF, shows a number of inconsistencies in determining vowel length. This ambivalence has to do with the lack of desire to use diacritics in a few ambivalent cases.

⁷ This is not true of many words that have a long vowel despite a following consonant cluster, such as words that follow their long vowel with <ns>, as found frequently in the conjugated forms of bos "be/being".

⁸ Often enough, loan words do not conform to the phonological system of Cornish. In some cases it would seem prudent to treat them slightly differently than the native words that conform to the native phonology. Diacritics can help here, too, and their usage would be minimised simply by many revivalists reluctance to use English loan words. Most earlier, Latin derived loan words were assimilated into Cornish phonology and rarely pose a problem from an orthographical point of view.

It is impossible to deduce how to spell the compounds of words ending in <m, n, l, r>	The simplex words are spelled like their compounds: <mm, nn, ll, rr> or <m, n, l, r> morphophonemically.	Improvement removed ⁹	5
The phoneme /o/ (as in <i>boes</i> 'food') is not recognized as separate from /O/ (as in <i>bos</i> 'to be')	Uses <oe> for /o/	/o/ spelled <oo> when long, otherwise <o>	6
Includes the vocalic alternation seen in some but not all texts	Excludes vocalic alternation, which is an unnecessary ¹⁰ orthographic feature	Vocalic alternation needlessly restored ¹¹	
The phoneme /ɪ/ is not recognized as separate from /i/ ¹²	Uses <y> for /ɪ/ (except in words like <i>kegin</i> , where compounds like <i>keginer</i> demand ¹³ <i>)		
The phoneme /œ/ (as in <i>leur</i> 'floor') is not recognised ¹⁴	Uses <eu> for /œ/	as KK	

⁹ It is a question of opinion, not fact whether this feature can be claimed to be an improvement.

¹⁰ The anonymous author is giving an opinion. This is not factual.

¹¹ Vocalic alternation was a feature of historical Cornish orthography, and most likely phonology. Not being able to explain it or not wanting it to have been part of Cornish does not justify its removal from the Revived Cornish.

¹² The phonemic status of /i/ v. /ɪ/ is far from clear considering the lack of native speakers to ascertain phonemic status. As can be seen from the texts, the assumed contrast can not be proven in all contexts. The matter is further complicated by the fact that earlier /ɪ/, at least in the contexts where it is distinct from both /i/ and /ɛ/, falls in with the latter, and thus a further contrast is lost. In some texts even assumed /i/ falls in with /ɛ/ which makes the distinction between /i/ and /ɪ/ an issue to be questioned.

¹³ Again, an opinion of the anonymous author. There are a number of linguists in the field who disagree with KK's phonology where the treatment of vowel length in polysyllabic words is concerned and that the <i> spelling in KK <*keginer*> is quite unnecessary. While historical linguists can argue about the various contexts of the contrasting pair /i/ and /ɪ/, the practical implication in Revived Cornish are most relevant to the SWF.

¹⁴ UC didn't distinguish /œ/ from /y/ by spelling <u> for both, yet many words that would be expected to show /œ/ have an alternative spelling with <e> meaning /ɛ/ the later reflex of /œ/. This means that the distinction between /œ/ and /y/ wasn't lacking entirely in UC and this problem was sufficiently dealt with in UCR, which spells /œ/ as <ue>, and equally good and traditional graph. KS follows UCR in this. RLC also made the distinction between older /œ/ and /y/, but showed the unrounded reflexes that had fallen in with /ɛ/ and /i/ respectively. By completely ignoring UCR, KS and RLC the anonymous author tries to evoke the impression that KK alone dealt with this problematic feature of UC orthography.

The SWF retains a few improvements fully (<eu> for /œ/, universal <k> for /k/, <hw> for /hw/)¹⁵, some partially (length of vowels and recognition of /o/¹⁶), and discards the others. This haphazard approach to spelling is the result of allowing politics rather than linguistics to be the guiding principle.¹⁷ The SWF is thus better than Unified but not as good as KK. In this light, the change by the Gorsedh to use the SWF instead of Unified may be seen as an improvement. It is to be hoped that they will continue along the path of improvement and adopt KK.¹⁸ Some of these features are considered in more detail below.

3 Phonetic Versus Morphophonemic

A phoneme is “a minimal contrastive unit of sound in the phonological system of a language”, denoted by slanting lines, e.g. in English (and in Cornish), /p/ and /b/ are separate phonemes, as is shown by the minimal pair *pat* v. *bat*, in Cornish, /l/ and /ll/ are separate phonemes¹⁹, as is shown by the minimal pair *pel* ‘ball’ v. *pell* ‘distant’. A grapheme is “a minimal distinctive unit of writing in a language”, i.e. a letter or group of letters, denoted by angled brackets; e.g. in English and in Cornish, represents the sound [b] and <ch> represents the sound [tʃ]²⁰, as in *church* and *chi*. A phonemic orthography is one in which each phoneme is represented by a separate grapheme. *Kernewek Kemmyn* is largely phonemic, but includes a few non-phonemic features (notably <nn> in unstressed syllables²¹) which enable the parts of words (morphemes) to be clearly identified; this means that it is a morphophonemic orthography.

¹⁵ The anonymous author fails to mention that the SWF allows the traditional graphs <c> and <k> for /k/, <qw> for /kw/ and <wh> for /m/. He also fails to mention one of the more serious flaws (my opinion) of the SWF that /k/ following a short vowel is spelt <kk> in native words, but <ck> in loan words.

¹⁶ The anonymous author is mistaken when he claims that a separate phoneme /o/ is recognised in the SWF as it is in KK. The SWF writes <oo> where the Middle Cornish texts suggest [o:] or [ɔ:], but [u:] in the Late Cornish texts. It is not claimed that all varieties of Cornish had three distinct phonemes /ɔ:/ : /o:/ : /u:/ in the back row.

¹⁷ The claim that it is rather politics than linguistics that determine this is untrue. What is true is, that the linguists who have researched Cornish differ in their respective opinions and that some kind of orthographic compromise has to be found for the revived language. KK was inadequate to suggest <oe> in almost all the cases that had /ui/ in Old Cornish, while UC and UCR were inadequate in writing <o> alone, even in the words that show /u:/ in Late Cornish. The SWF offers a workable and linguistically justifiable compromise between these differing theories and opinions. A political solution is not a bad thing. It is actually most welcome as the Cornish language politics were hampered by lack of an official spelling. Who’s to say that a political solution cannot be linguistically sound, too?

¹⁸ The anonymous author sees KK as the path to improvement, no doubt because s/he is closely associated with the person who developed KK, or may indeed even be this person. It must be clear, however, that KK has been deemed unsuitable as SWF, by the commission, the AHG, the arbitrator, as well as Agan Tavas members (76 out of 93 returned ballots were in favour of accepting the SWF). KK failed to attract consensus in the past 20 years of its existence and the Gorsedh was sensible in adopting a form that will be more inclusive of the Cornish language community as a whole.

¹⁹ This is one valid interpretation. The other legitimate interpretation is that /e:/ in <pel> /pe:l/ ‘ball’ and /ɛ/ in <pell> ‘far’ are contrastive.

²⁰ In the original pamphlet the anonymous author used [č] as the symbol for the affricate spelt <ch> in “church”. For consistency’s sake and following linguistic practices, I prefer the IPA symbol and have replaced it with [tʃ].

²¹ Not to forget <i> ~ <y> ~ <u> in unstressed syllables...

The SWF includes “the introduction of phonetic rather than morphophonemic spelling”, (p. 82) This is actually a re-introduction, since Unified tended towards the phonetic. Such a spelling attempts to represent all the ways in which sounds are modified according to whether they occur at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of words. For example, the SWF uses <gh> finally and <h> medially (e.g. *flogh* ‘child’, *flehes* ‘children’), thus destroying the morphemic link between singular and plural²².

There is a significant difference between the users of KK and its opponents. The former have experience of learning and teaching a morphophonemic orthography, and the latter have not.²³ Those who use KK, and especially those who changed from Unified, are aware how much better a morphophonemic orthography is.²⁴ Its clarity (“what you see is what you get”)²⁵ enables the user to see both the structure of words and how they are pronounced. This is extremely helpful in the special

²² Many people consider this to be a definite improvement over KK and UC. Not just for those who prefer traditional graphs, as writing <gh> finally and <h> medially as the SWF now does was the preferred way Cornish scribes wrote and copied the texts, but it is probably a better way to teach the correct pronunciation. Going by the evidence of the Middle Cornish and the Late Cornish texts one can assume the pronunciation can just as well have been [x] in final position and [h] in medial position, with a tendency to have been dropped in Late Cornish. Note the textual spellings of the example word in the pamphlet: SWF <flogh> was spelt with <gh> 52 times, twice with <h> in Late Cornish and once without <h> or <gh>. SWF <flehes> was spelt with <gh> twice, and with <h> 14 times.

In Revived Cornish <gh> is frequently mispronounced. A KK user, one who also gives talks on correct Cornish pronunciation, mispronounces words like KK <arghans> ‘silver, money (sic!)’ and has been recorded saying [ˈɑrkəns] with [k] rather than the recommended [x]. Now this is now doubt interference from his L1 English, as English hasn’t got a phoneme /x/ separate from /k/ and /h/. But English does have /h/, and wouldn’t it be more prudent to help the learner with a possibly even historically correct pronunciation of [h] rather than a more difficult [x] that may or may not have been pronounced in this context in traditional Cornish? In other speakers, I have also frequently heard the mispronunciation of KK <myghtern> as [ˈmɪktərn] where [mɪxˈtɛrn] or [mɪˈtɛrn] would be expected.

²³ This claim is false. I can speak for myself at least. I have sufficient linguistic experience to see the merits and flaws of a morphophonemic orthography. There are aspects of it that are equally difficult to master for the average learners, especially when it comes down to the correct realisation of the recommended pronunciation. This is assuming that the phonological base of KK is sound, which remains in dispute. Even if we see the recommended KK pronunciation as a dialectal variant of Revived Cornish next to the other extant pronunciations we can hear that only a small fraction (in 20 years!) have been able to master the recommended pronunciation. Not even the deviser of KK, Dr Ken George, speaks Cornish with a “KK-accent”, but one that is largely similar to UCR (he distinguishes /y/ from /æ/) and even then heavily influenced by his native English accent. The KK phonological system is without base in Revived Cornish and its validity in historic Cornish, at least around 1500 and later has been severely questioned. I know exactly one person who has mastered KK phonology in speech, has taught Cornish, converses fluently in it, happens to be a linguist. He has told me he prefers the SWF to KK.

²⁴ The anonymous author’s opinion with which the AHG apparently disagrees judging by the resulting orthography.

²⁵ This again is a matter of opinion. In many ways, the largely phonetic orthography of the SWF exemplifies the idea of ‘what you see is what you get’ better than KK does, especially for people who are not native speakers of Cornish and who do not have training in linguistics or familiarity with terms and concepts like ‘phonemes’ and ‘allophones’. This difference is why many people who have learned Cornish with KK pronounce the word <fleghes> as [ˈflɛxɛz], while no one who learns the SWF form <flehes> will do so.

circumstances of Cornish, which almost everybody learns as a second language in the absence of native speakers.

4 Length of Vowels

One of the advantages of *Kernewek Kemmyn* is that, in almost all cases, it is possible to deduce the length of vowels from the spelling, provided that the stress pattern is known. In stressed monosyllables, a vowel is short when followed by two consonants (except *sp, st, sk*). This property is also claimed for the SWF (§3.17) “vowel length in monosyllables may be deduced from the nature of the following consonant or consonants”. But the SWF fails to write doubled consonants in the case of loan-words, so that it is impossible to distinguish (except from the context) the minimal pairs in Table 2:²⁶

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Table 2:

SHORT			LONG		
Kemmyn	SWF	English	Kemmyn	SWF	English
stopp	stop	stop	stop	stop	stoop
pott	pot	pot	pot	pot	kick
Skott	Skot	Scot	skot	skot	subscription
pokk	pok ²⁷	kiss	pok	pok	poke

In this respect the SWF is ambiguous and *Kernewek Kemmyn* is not.

It is of interest to note that in Norway, whence came the arbiter for the process leading to the SWF, bus lanes are labelled BUSS.²⁸

5 Sonorants m, l, n, r; mm, nn, ll, rr

It is well known that traditional Cornish had two forms of *n*, long /nn/ and short /n/. These two forms constituted different phonemes, since minimal pairs may be found which distinguish them, e.g. /tan/ ‘fire’ and /tann/ ‘take’. The differences between /n/ and /nn/ persisted throughout the history of

²⁶ This is, in my opinion, a valid criticism. This section deals with loan words and as such there may be certain ways that they weren't fully, if at all, assimilated to Cornish phonology. Since many speakers of revived Cornish try to avoid loan words anyway the frequency of diacritics that could be used here would be low. The cited lexical items could be spelt *stôp, pôt, skôt ~ scôt, pôk* in the SWF, that is if it can be shown that they indeed had a long vowel in traditional Cornish.

²⁷ SWF **pok** ‘kiss’, to my knowledge, isn't mentioned in the SWF document, which means that the anonymous author has assumed that this is the correct SWF spelling. But if this word should indeed have a short vowel then it must be spelt either with <ck> as SWF <pock> if it is a loan word, or as <pokk> if it is a native word. The anonymous author does not seem to have understood the SWF rules. S/He can refer to § 3.17 for clarification.

²⁸ It is completely unclear as to why this is of interest? What does Cornish spelling have to do with the AHG arbiter's home country? Is the assumption to be that he is bending over backwards in order to make Cornish orthography as different as possible from the two Norwegian orthographies. What does the anonymous author wish to imply by his note, I ask?

traditional Cornish, and so needs to be shown clearly in the revived language. In Middle Cornish orthography, followed by Nance’s Unified Cornish, they were distinguished only after stressed vowels in the middle of words, e.g. *lowena* ‘joy’ v. *lowenna* ‘happier’. At the end of a word, they were both written <n>; e.g. both ‘fire’ and ‘take’ were written *tan*. In Late Cornish, the difference became obvious, since /nn/ when stressed became [dn] and was written <dn>, both in the middle and at the end of words. Any feature that persisted into Late Cornish must have been present in Middle Cornish, whether shown in writing or not.

Kernewek Kemmyn distinguishes between stressed /n/ and /nn/ by using <n> and <nn> respectively, both in the middle and at the end of words; e.g. *lowena* v. *lowenna* and *tan* v. *tann*.²⁹

Table 3: Nouns in <en> with attested compounds

Singular			Plural		O the r comp o unds	
in dictionary		English	in dictionary	in texts	in dictionary	in texts
alusen	f	‘alms’	alusenow	<i>alesonov</i>		
anken	m	‘misery’			ankenek	<i>ankenek</i>
bargen	m	‘bargen’			bargenya	<i>bargidnia</i>
bilen	m	‘villain’	bilens	<i>felans</i>	bileni	<i>belyny</i>
blydhen	f	‘year’	blydhynyow	<i>blethynnyow</i> ³⁰		
edhen	f	‘bird’	ydhyn	<i>ethyn</i>		
fenten	f	‘spring’	fentynyow	<i>-ventinue</i> ³¹		
gossen	f	‘rust’			gossem	<i>gosheny</i>
gwenen	pl	‘bees’				<i>guenenen</i>
horsen	m	‘whoreson’	horsens	<i>horsens</i>		
lodhen	m	‘bullock’	lodhnow	<i>lothnow</i>		
mysterden	m	‘craftsman’	mysterdens	<i>vysterdens</i>		
reden	pl	‘ferns’			redenctin	<i>redanan</i>
sosten	m	‘sustenance’			sostena	<i>sostene</i>
tenewen	m	‘side’	tenwennow	<i>denwennow</i>		
tremen	m	‘transit’			tremene	<i>tremene</i>

The following apply to these nouns:

1. There is no single way in which their plurals are formed.
2. Their gender may be masculine or feminine,
3. In almost every case, their compounds are formed with <n> rather than <nn>.

Kernewek Kemmyn also distinguishes between *n* and *nn* when unstressed. This is not a phonemic feature but a morphophonemic one. It is not phonemic because there is no difference in pronunciation

²⁹ The SWF, RLC (with <dn> for <nn>) as well as KS (with optional <dn> or <nn>) do this, too.

³⁰ further attestations are: *blethednyow* (Gw), *blethanniau* (NB), *blethaniou* (JB), *blenydnyow* (CW), *bledhdydnyow* (CW), *bledhynno* (Lh).

³¹ also *fentidniow* (top.; according to Gendall 1990).

between *n* and *nn* in this position; e.g. *lowen* ‘happy’ and *lowenn* ‘louse’ are pronounced the same.³² It is very useful, however, to maintain the difference in spelling even in unstressed positions, because in compounds the difference in realization ([n] v. [nn]) will re-appear in stressed syllables, e.g. *lowena* ‘joy’, with a half-long *e* before a single *n*, versus *lowennow* ‘individual lice’, with a short *e* before a double *nn*. This valuable morphophonemic property of *Kernewek Kemmyn* is also used in the spelling of Modern Breton, and is a great improvement³³ on that of Middle Breton.

In the SWF this useful property has been abolished³⁴; <n> is written instead of *KK* <nn> in unstressed syllables. The effect of this on nouns with *KK* <en> and <enn> is now examined (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 4: Nouns in <enn> with individual plurals attested in traditional Cornish writings

Singularive			Individual plural	
in dictionary		English	in dictionary	in texts
barrenn	f	‘twig’	barrennow	<i>barennow</i>
blewenn	f	‘hair’	blewennow	<i>vlewennow</i>
boemmenn	f	‘blow’	boemmennow	<i>vommennow</i>
dagrenn	f	‘tear’	dagrennow	<i>dagrennow</i>
dalghenn	f	‘grasp’	dalghennow	<i>dalhennow</i>
dinerenn	f	‘penny’	dinerennow	<i>denerennov</i>
gerenn	f	‘word’	gerennow	<i>gerennow</i>
gwelvenn	f	‘lip’	gwelvennow	<i>guelawennow</i>
hwegenn	f	‘darling’	hwegennow	<i>wegennov</i>
ismegenn	f	‘salve’	ismegennow	<i>ysmegennow</i>
kolmenn	f	‘knot’	kolmennow	<i>colmennov</i>
pedrenn	f	‘buttock’	pedrennow	<i>peydrennow</i>
rosa-noblenn	f	‘noble’	rosa-noblennow	<i>rase noblennov</i>
skorrenn	f	‘branch’	skorrennow	<i>scorennov</i>
sterenn	f	‘star’	sterennow	<i>sterradnou</i>
taklenn	f	‘item’	taklennow	<i>taclennow</i>

The following apply to these nouns:

1. Their individual plurals are formed in every case by adding <ow>.
2. Their gender is always feminine.
3. The <nn> is preserved in the plural.

It is clear from Tables 3 and 4 that the formation of plurals and compounds is different in the two cases. In *KK*, seeing nouns in <enn> tells the learner: the gender is feminine (except in compounds

³² I have personally heard a mispronunciation of the name *Yowann as [jɔ’wadn]. This can only be by misinterpreting the <nn> as indicating stress. I believe (opinion) that such spellings confuse the learner rather than help him or her to learn the Cornish stress patterns. If *lowen* and *lowenn* are pronounced the same, they ought to be written the same. That’s easiest for the learner. Plurals and other morphemic changes have to be learned anyway, so why make the spelling unnecessarily long and complicated?

³³ This is an opinion, not a fact.

³⁴ I know many who agree with the treatment of these words in the SWF.

like *hor'benn* 'ram'), that the individual plural ends in <enow>, and that the <e> in <enow> is stressed and short. On seeing a noun in <en>, the learner knows to beware: the gender is not obvious, and neither is the form of the plural; it will be evident, though, that in compounds where the <n> is followed by a vowel, the <n> is preserved as a single <n> (with very few exceptions).

This vital³⁵ information is absent in the SWF. All the nouns in Tables 3 and 4 are spelled with <en>, so there is no way of determining from the spelling to which category a noun belongs. They have to be learned individually. This is not a good idea for a spelling system intended for use in education, if there is a better system available.

Note also the following pairs, which cannot be distinguished in the SWF.

//n//			//nn//		
Kemmyn	SWF	English	Kemmyn	SWF	English
asen	asen	ass	asenn	asen	rib
kolen	kolen	puppy	kolenn	kolen	piece of coal
kronen	krogen	shell	krogenn		snare
lowen	lowen	happy	lowenn		louse
moren	moren	maiden	morenn	moren	blackberry

They are not phonemically minimal pairs, since each pair is pronounced the same, but they are different morphophonemically.³⁶

As regards this feature, the SWF is ambiguous and *Kernewek Kemmyn* is not.³⁷

6 Treatment of the Phoneme /o/

The identification of the phoneme /o/, written <oe> in *Kernewek Kemmyn*, was a significant advance in our knowledge of Cornish.³⁸ In the SWF the opponents of *Kemmyn* have succeeded in dismantling

³⁵ "Vital", how can this information be "vital"? A single morphemic category's importance is blown out of proportion! Plurals and gender have to be learned along with the word itself and have one morphemic category where gender and plural is predictable isn't such a huge advantage. One can describe many morphemic categories and their features. This is a matter of teaching methods rather than of spelling. I'd rather have a broadly phonetically oriented orthography that allows to predict stress patterns rather than the unnecessary morphemic information in KK. I fully agree with and support the AHG decision to abolish unstressed -enn and write -en instead.

³⁶ If a learner hears ['mɔrən], why should s/he be burdened with the obligation to think about whether to write <moren> or <morenn> in KK? S/he will have to learn the plural <morenyon> and the collective <mor> anyway. Such "vital" morphemic information is unnecessary. In my opinion it is more sensible to spell ['mɔrən] as **moren** and decide from context whether "a berry" or "a maiden" is implied.

³⁷ As regards this feature KK is an example of overkill in morphemic information. Nice for dictionary builders and word-constructions, but those are best left to a dictionary commission anyway. The average learner needn't be burdened with this information. The AHG made a sensible decision to get rid of unstressed <nn>. It is also what Cornish writers did in traditional Cornish.

³⁸ This is one of those areas where the linguists who are researching Cornish disagree with each other. There are several theories around on whether there were three separate back vowels */ɔ/, */o/, /u/ (or as Keith Bailey would propose */ɔ/, */ɔ̄/ and */u/), or whether there were merely two /o/ and /u/

this advance, replacing <oe> with two different graphemes <oo> and <o>. Neither is satisfactory. The grapheme <oo> sits uneasily with the remainder of the orthography, being clearly English. It gives rise to absurd³⁹ spellings like *poos* instead of *poes*. But its worst aspect is that <oo> is inextricably linked to the sound [u:] in English⁴⁰ (the vowel–sound *fool*). No amount of explanation that in Cornish <oo> means [o:] is going to stop learners pronouncing it as [u:].⁴¹ Using <o> for the short vowel is also unwise and historically incorrect; the primary development in traditional Cornish was spelled <u>, as in *arluth*.⁴²

Instead of identifying /o/ across the board and applying the same grapheme to it, the SWF uses a piecemeal “solution”, excluding *kon* ‘dinner’, *tron* ‘nose’, *on* ‘lamb’, *gor* ‘knows’, *hwor* ‘sister’, *kor* ‘wax’, *noth* ‘naked’⁴³ (the latter in spite of *fernoyth* at MC.050, showing <oy> for /o/). That is, it takes the Unified <o> as the default position instead of KK <oe>. By doing so, it fails to distinguish between such minimal pairs as *on* ‘we are’ v. *oen* ‘lamb’⁴⁴.

The SWF fails to treat this phoneme correctly.⁴⁵

one of which the Old Cornish diphthong /ui/ fell in with. It is also hotly disputed whether this merger happened in the same way with the same vowel over the whole area of Cornish, whether in some circumstances the diphthong remained distinct, and the Middle and Late Cornish dialectal reflexes of the three Old Cornish phonemes /o/, /u/ and /ui/. I do not want to venture an opinion on this problem here, but this is one for the historical linguists. In the context of the SWF we need to assess the situation, practicability and relevance this has to Revived Cornish. Some speakers pronounce *bos* ‘be’ and *boos* ‘food’ alike, while others say [bo:z] and [bu:z], or [bɔ:z] and [bɔ:z]. Whatever the exact pronunciation, a differentiation is warranted where Late Cornish orthography shows the vowel was [u:] rather than [o:] ~ [ɔ:]. This is a good as it gets middle way approach until the experts have come up with a model that fits the evidence satisfactorily.

³⁹ SWF *poos* is spelt *pouz*, *pooz* and *powz* in Late Cornish. I must ask is *pooz* an ‘absurd’ spelling? At least the <oo> is authentic and attested which cannot be said for the KK spelling <poes>. These spellings are only ‘absurd’ if we look at them through the eyes of an English speaker. I thought the proponents of KK were not so concerned with making the ‘look’ of the language suit an Anglophone aesthetic. If they were, surely they would have avoided spellings like <kwestyon>! Besides, we have to teach beginners (and children) that the number ‘five’ in Cornish is *pymp*. If we can do that without blushing, surely we can handle *poos*!

⁴⁰ By the same token the KK graph can be linked to [əʊ] in English ‘toe’ or [ʊu] in English ‘shoe’.

⁴¹ And that’s just fine, for at least they will be using a justified sound reconstruction of traditional Cornish with an authentic graph. Note that traditional writes wrote *booze* which Lhuyd phonetically transcribed as *bûz*. By the way, German spells the sound /o:z/ as <oo> in words like *Boot* ‘boat’.

⁴² Many instances of KK <o> in unstressed position also show a later development to <u>, which stresses that the phonemic distinction between the vowels written <o> and <oe> respectively in KK is far from clear-cut.

⁴³ That’s because these words didn’t end up with /u:/ in Late Cornish, and must have taken a different development from the one proposed by Ken George, which the anonymous author is defending. Lhuyd writes *bûz* for KK <boes>, but does not write *ûn for KK <oen>, but ôan; he does not write *gûr for KK <goer>, but gôr (lenition disregarded);

⁴⁴ I can see no evidence that *on* ‘we are’ and *oen* ‘lamb’ showed a distinction or that they were a minimal pair.

⁴⁵ And so does KK. Many words like *whor* ‘sister’, *con* ‘dinner’, *gor* ‘knows’ never ended up with [u:] in Late Cornish. They were identical to /ɔ:/, so that’s how they ought to be spelled and this is what the SWF does. So, over KK the SWF is actually an improvement in the treatment of this phoneme.

7 Vocalic Alternation

Some of the Middle Cornish texts show a different vowel in singular and plural forms; e.g. in the Tregear Homilies, *gwyth* 'trees' and *gwethan* 'tree'. This feature, known as vocalic alternation, was an artefact of Middle English spelling which was carried over into the spelling of Middle Cornish, and later copied into Unified Cornish.⁴⁶ <e> in Middle English had two values, open ϵ and close \acute{e} , and this practice also applied to Cornish; stressed <e> before single consonants in polysyllables could mean ϵ = [ɛː] or \acute{e} = [ɪː]. The use of <e> in words like Nance's *gwedhen* did not mean [ɛ], but [ɪ].⁴⁷ "The SWF acknowledges vocalic alternation" (§3.18). This is a linguistically unwise choice, since it leads to an incorrect pronunciation.⁴⁸ Three of the major tests (PC., RD. and BM.⁴⁹) do not show vocalic alternation. *Kernewek Kemmyn* follows the example of PC. and RD. in writing <y> for [ɪː].

By including vocalic alternation, the SWF is misleading as regards pronunciation.⁵⁰

8 Spelling of Phonemically Voiced Consonants when Unstressed Finally

In Middle Cornish spelling, voiced and unvoiced consonants in final position were not usually distinguished; the same graphemes were usually used for both. In Late Cornish, the distinction was sometimes indicated in spelling. In final unstressed syllables, Nance tended to write all phonemically voiced consonants as unvoiced: e.g. *Kernewek*, *modryp*, *maryach*. Looking at the cases of /g/, /b/, /v/ and /ð/, one finds the following results:

- Unstressed /g/ after vowels is written <k> in both KK and the SWF; KK can afford the luxury of a phonetic spelling here, in an otherwise morphophonemic system, because there are

⁴⁶ This is but one theory, one possible explanation (first suggested by Keith Bailey, if I recall correctly). There is no proof that this was so. All we have are the Cornish texts that show the alternation and alternations that are carried through into the Late Cornish period. It seems more likely to me that mediaeval scribes would write the quality rather than the quantity of the vowel and if half-long were a variation of long, then the half-long vowel would be expected to have the same spelling as the long vowel in the monosyllable. The alternating examples do not show this however. If in doubt about this feature, do as the texts do. Where alternation is attested, use it in the SWF, don't use it where it is not attested.

⁴⁷ This is claimed as though there is absolute certainty as to the mediaeval pronunciation of Cornish. There is, however, no certainty, and the texts, as well as the only phonetic transcription we have of Cornish while it was traditionally spoken suggests that it was indeed [ɛ], cf. Lhuyd <guedhan>. It might be prudent to ask certain experts to distance themselves from their own reconstruction in order to stay objective and see that there may be other explanations. This shouldn't be about egos.

⁴⁸ A pronunciation which the anonymous author can with absolute certainty substantiate? I think not. Linguists tend to be more careful with statements such as these.

⁴⁹ There are instances of Vocalic Alternation in BM: <dyth> ~ <dethyov>.

⁵⁰ By writing Vocalic Alternation the SWF is doing what the Cornish scribes did, people who knew traditional Cornish far better than anyone alive today does. My suggestion is to write VA where it occurred and not where it isn't attested.

scarcely any words containing unstressed /k/, with which it might conflict. The use of <k> for unstressed /g/ means that, as in Unified, the <g> has to be substituted for <k> in compounds.⁵¹

- Unstressed /b/ was spelled <p> by Nance (e.g. *gorthyp* 'answer') and is currently so spelled in KK, but there is a good case for using the phonemic spelling (except for the word *kettep*), because BK. and Late Cornish distinguished /b/ from /p/; i.e. the situation is different from that of /g/.
- Unstressed /v/ was often spelled <f> or <ff> in Middle Cornish because <v> was unavailable; <v> would have been confused with <u> or even <n>. The fact that <f> was used does not mean that the sound was [f].
- It is only in Lhuyd's orthography that any distinction was made between unstressed /ð/ and /θ/ after vowels. All other texts used <th> indiscriminately. The SWF, like KK uses <dh> for /ð/ and <th> for /θ/, with one exception (§5.2), the word for 'new'. This is spelled *nowyth* in defiance of the phonemic spelling **nowydh**, "to reflect that it is found spelled with a <τ> in Lhuyd's *Archaeologia Britannica*". These are insufficient grounds to warrant an exception. In all of Lhuyd's writings, there appear to be ten examples of the word, seven with <dh> and three with <th> (or equivalents).

9 Attacks on the Phonological Base of *Kernewek Kemmyn*

Nicholas Williams seems to think that his ideas on Cornish phonology are the truth.⁵² He often writes "It is true that..." when he means "I believe that...". In his view, the ideas of anyone who disagrees with him must therefore be false.⁵³ He has stated (in his book *Towards Authentic Cornish* and elsewhere) that "KK is based on a spurious phonology". Such is the repetitious nature of these unjustified accusations that others copy them. He seems to think like this: "I am right, so the proponents of Kemmyn must be wrong.⁵⁴ They are intelligent enough to see that I am right, so the only reason they persist with Kemmyn must be pride, stubbornness and not wanting to lose face in admitting their errors". He and others (e.g. some on the Cornwall 24 web-site) may not realise that every criticism of the phonology is taken seriously, and scrutinized.⁵⁵ Measures are taken to correct any errors which may be found. These errors are potentially at two levels:

⁵¹ KK is thus inconsistent by its own rules, but correct since that is what native Cornish writers did. Why is this principle not applied elsewhere?

⁵² As does the anonymous author of this document.

⁵³ As appears to be the case with the anonymous author of this document.

⁵⁴ The same can be said of Ken George, the deviser of *Kernewek Kemmyn*, the anonymous author, and other supporters of *Kernewek Kemmyn*.

⁵⁵ The dubious quality of the scrutinizing and dealing with criticism can be read in George & Dunbar (1997). Some of N.Williams' theories are completely misrepresented, (perhaps deliberately)

- (i) faults in individual words (lexical faults)
i.e. cases where individual words have not been spelled correctly. Here some of Williams' criticisms are justified, and the spellings will be corrected when the new edition of the dictionary is published.
- (ii) structural faults
i.e. faults in the list of phonemes, or in the way in which sounds and orthography are linked. These are more serious. The existence of the phoneme /yw/ (discovered by Keith Bailey) has now been recognized in KK, and approved by the Language Board; it is spelled <uw>. The recognition of /z/ is something for the future. Of those structural faults alleged by Williams, only the case of <tj> and <dj> was found to be partially substantiated. Ken George publicly acknowledged this; the graphemes were removed within months of the criticism being made, yet Williams is still complaining about this twenty years later. His other criticisms are valid only if his ideas about phonology (prosodic shift, pre-occlusion, dialectal variation, significance of vocalic alternation) can be proved. They have all been scrutinized and found to be untenable.⁵⁶

It is imperative that the pronunciation and spelling of Cornish be the best that we can make it. Our standpoint is therefore not that we acknowledge Williams to be right and are scared to admit that we are wrong, but rather that having examined his criticisms, we find them (except for a few minor points) to be without foundation. There is therefore no need to abandon *Kernewek Kemmyn*, nor to change its phonological base.⁵⁷

10 Late Cornish Variants which were not Agreed by the Ad Hoc Group

misunderstood and the tone of this work is beneath contempt. I have heard that this document is used at universities to show how not to conduct an academic argument.

⁵⁶ In the respective opinions of the anonymous author and Ken George, because they differ with their theory of Cornish phonology around 1500. There are other valid interpretations of the data that could equally be true. We will never know for sure, hence modesty and mutual respect is called for. As well as looking into the practical implications this has for Revived Cornish.

⁵⁷ But there is, and the process as well as the commission's findings have shown that *Kernewek Kemmyn* did not become the orthography preferred by all. In fact it has been heavily opposed from the beginning. The 20 years of orthography debate ought to have made this abundantly clear. KK departed too radically from UC and traditional Cornish to be accepted by many speakers. The SWF is a compromise solution that incorporates features from all orthographies, including KK.

I must ask, what does this section have to do with the SWF? Is the anonymous author implying that the SWF slavishly follows Nicholas Williams' reconstructions, while disparaging Ken George's? The SWF is not intended to enshrine either Williams' or George's phonological theories, although it is substantially compatible with both theories. The problem that the hardliners from all sides seem to be having with the SWF is that it does not automatically exclude their opponents' views! Some are upset that the specification contains information that enables people wishing to do so to read the SWF with a KK pronunciation. It doesn't require anyone to, and it doesn't prevent people from using a UC, UCR, or RLC pronunciation either, but that's apparently not good enough. Likewise, some KK supporters, including the anonymous author of this document, seem to feel that since the SWF incorporates features which enable speakers of RLC and Tudor Cornish to deduce their pronunciation from the orthography, it is somehow 'incorrect' or 'less correct' than the KK orthography which is really only suitable for indicating KK pronunciation.

A surprisingly large proportion (one sixth) of the words listed in the SWF document have two variants “of equal status”, one representing Middle Cornish and the other Late Cornish. In §3.1, a group of words is listed which have <a> in the Middle form and <oa> in the Late. The advisers were apparently never asked about this feature.⁵⁸ We are informed that it was neither discussed nor agreed by the Ad Hoc group, but added subsequent to their deliberations, as the result of private discussions between the compilers of the document and supporters of Late Cornish. This “mission–creep” is unacceptable.⁵⁹

The following variants of individual words have been apparently added to the document by its authors without the approval⁶⁰ of the Ad Hoc group; they did not form part of the agreement, because they were not discussed by the group.

Kemmyn	English	Form based on Middle Cornish	Forms based on Late Cornish
aswonn	'to know'	aswon	ajon
awos	'because of'	awos	'wos
beudhi	'to drown'	beudhi	budhi
dew	'two' (m.)	dew	dow
dhiworth	'from'	dhyworth	dhort
euthek	'horrible'	euthek	uthik
gans	'with'	gans	gen
gasa	'to leave'	gasa	gara
Genver	'January'	Genver	Jenver
gorhemmyrna	'to welcome'	gorhemmyn	gorebma

⁵⁸ I was a linguistic adviser to the AHG and I was personally consulted several times on certain features and Late Cornish Main Form Variants. This is because of my experience and interest in Late Cornish pronunciation and respect for the community of speakers who use a Late Cornish based form of Revived Cornish. Why consult advisers who a) show no interest in Late Cornish, b) have little or no experience with Late Cornish, and c) have on many occasions ventured the opinion that Late Cornish is an unsuitable base for Revived Cornish?

⁵⁹ There is no “mission–creep”. It was decided that there were to be several Late Cornish based Main Form Variants where Late Cornish forms differed too much from their Middle Cornish forms to be usable to the speakers of Revived Late Cornish. The advisers and AHG members who are RLC speakers were in fact consulted and additions are continuing to be sent in for reviewing in five years time and to the dictionary commission that the Cornish Language Partnership proposed on several occasions.

⁶⁰ The AHG wasn't the only body that needed to consent to such forms. The arbitrator made allowances for several LC forms. I'm sure these forms can be further discussed. What seems clear though, is that the RLC representatives on the AHG as well as the linguistic advisers with R/LC experience will not be appreciative of supporters and speakers of a Middle Cornish based form of Revived Cornish to decide which Late variant form meets the later group's approval and which one doesn't. Where the SWF system of umbrella graphs is unable to represent both MC and LC based forms, a separate RLC form ought to be included and shown as such.

hemm	'this'	hemm	helm
Hwevrer	'February'	Hwevrer	Hwevrel
kavoës	'to get'	kavos	kawas
kria	'to cry'	kria	kreia
kyttrin	'bus'	kyttrin	kytterin
melin	'mill'	melin	belin
myghtern	'king'	myghtern	mytern
ow	'my'	ow	o
ow	'-ing'	ow	o
peswar	'four'	peswar	pajer
peub	'all'	peub	pob
skwith	'tired'	skwith	skith
ty	'thou'	ty	chy / che
yeghes	'health'	yehes	'ehes
yeth	'language'	yeth	'eth
ynwedh	'also'	ynwedh	y'wedh
yowywk	'young'	yowynk	younk
vy	'me'	vy	ve

There is no way in which a single written form can satisfactorily represent both Middle and Late Cornish forms, because the two varieties are too widely separated. The SWF is not single, but even so does not satisfactorily represent both. Thus the "agreed SWF" has debased the close fit which KK has for Middle Cornish, and yet it does not fit Late Cornish well. Neither aim is satisfied. The only way to get proper fits is to have different (but linked) orthographies for each. This means keeping KK (with any perceived improvements) for a Middle Cornish base, and designing an extension for a Late Cornish base."⁶¹

⁶¹ I must strongly disagree with the anonymous author's conclusion. The Commission and the AHG have decided against supporting KK. It can thus be stated that KK in the ca. 20 years of its use has failed to attract consensus. This is true of all other orthographies as well. It is only prudent that a compromise orthography has been established that includes features from all previously used orthographies. KK was given a privileged position anyway, considering the supporting members of the AHG, as well as the base from which the AHG worked. In this, the anonymous author must concede that the SWF is heavily influenced by KK, more so than critics of KK would like in some cases.

There are many words where Late Cornish based and Middle Cornish based words can be spelt the same guaranteeing inter-dialectal, mutual comprehension. This is important for the Cornish community in my opinion.

The majority of both the *CLS* as well as *Agan Tavas* is not in favour of one particular orthography, but rather in favour of ending the orthography debate which has been going on for 20 years. The people at the base of the Revival want to work together, whether they retain their own orthographic habits or switch to the SWF (or any other orthography for personal use). The SWF allows us to work together and give input, work from common source material and expand on it, instead of working in three separate camps, with three separate organisations, three separate dictionaries, three separate sets of pedagogical materials and three men who represent their respective strand of Revived Cornish "dictating" what they think Revived Cornish should or should not look like. The SWF gives Cornish back to the community of users who cannot be bothered with the nitty-gritty linguistic arguments, and want to work together as Cornish speakers, no matter what orthographical camp they come from.

The linguistic arguments are interesting to the experts, and they should continue, most definitely in a tone of mutual respect and acceptance, and that this is done to increase our knowledge about Cornish. But also, accepting the fact that we cannot and will not know everything about traditional Cornish, that gaps in our knowledge will remain and no single hypothesis can be more absolutely true than the other. The linguists, in certain areas, will have to agree to disagree and find out how questionable theories are applicable in the context of Revived Cornish.

Sometimes it is in the nature of compromise that the hardliners on all sides hate the outcome, but compromise allows for so many more to work together. I would like to see a scenario where we can all work together and say, hey, there are a couple of things I don't like about the SWF, but it sure beats continuing the orthography debate another 20 years.

gans oll ow holon vy,
Daniel Prohaska