

## **History of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names: Highlights of the PCGN Archives<sup>1</sup>**

### **Background**

Geographical names help us to understand our world, and British explorations of the world inspired an interest in the systematic writing of foreign geographical names.

In 1836 an enlightened naval officer, Commander (later Admiral) John Washington, R.N., became Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), and in the same year the Society accepted Sir William Jones's<sup>2</sup> principles for the writing of foreign geographical names<sup>3</sup>. In 1841 Washington returned to the Admiralty, where he developed a conventional alphabet based on Jones's principles and applied it to vocabularies of the then-termed Eskimo dialects of Labrador (1850) and Greenland (1853). In 1885 the RGS adopted a set of rules for the spelling of native names of places, which were "identical with those adopted for Admiralty charts"<sup>4</sup>. These rules became known as "the RGS System".

*"The charts and maps issued by the Admiralty and War Office have been, since 1885, compiled and extensively revised in accordance with the RGS System. The Foreign and Colonial Offices have accepted it.....Even more important...is the recent action of the Government of the United States of America, which, after an exhaustive enquiry, has adopted a system in close conformity with that of the RGS"<sup>5</sup>.*

During World War I, staff paid by the War Office worked at the house of the RGS (the RGS had moved to their current premises, Lowther Lodge<sup>6</sup>, on Kensington Gore in April 1913). They worked under the supervision of the Secretary RGS on the transliteration of names of foreign map sheets, the compilation of sheets of the 'International Map of the World on the Scale of 1:1 million', and on the preparation of indexes to series of British tactical maps.

A note<sup>7</sup> (see Annex A) was published in the Geographical Journal<sup>8</sup> in August 1919 describing the inconvenience that had arisen during World War I due to the variety of forms and spellings of foreign

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<sup>1</sup> Compiled by PCGN staff past and present, particularly Mr P.J.M. Geelan (Secretary PCGN 1955-79) and Mrs A. Dollimore (PCGN Toponymist 2014-present).

<sup>2</sup> Sir William Jones (1746-1794) was an English philologist, Orientalist and a hyperpolyglot. He published a great number of works including a dissertation 'On the orthography of Asiatick words in Roman letters' in which he recommended applying English symbols for consonants and Italian symbols for vowels when translating from Asiatic languages.

<sup>3</sup> Journal of RGS 6 (1836), p.51, footnote.

<sup>4</sup> Proceedings of RGS 7 (1885), p.535.

<sup>5</sup> Proceedings of RGS 14 (1892), p.117.

<sup>6</sup> Lowther Lodge was designed by Richard Norman Shaw in 1875 for the politician William Lowther. After Lowther died in 1912, his son sold the house to the Royal Geographical Society, and it has been its headquarters since 1913.

<sup>7</sup> A copy of which is included in a Colonial Office Circular from Viscount Milner, dated November 1920.

<sup>8</sup> The academic journal of the Royal Geographical Society.

geographical names. The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty<sup>9</sup> invited other government departments to approve a proposal that the Royal Geographical Society be invited to form a permanent Committee to deal with the question of the orthography and transliteration of foreign place names.

### **The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names**

A meeting was held at Lowther Lodge on April 29<sup>th</sup> 1919 (in effect the first meeting of PCGN) to discuss the proposal. A second meeting on May 13<sup>th</sup> recommended the establishment of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, to which the Admiralty, War Office, Foreign Office, Colonial Office, India Office, Post Office, Board of Trade, Board of Agriculture, and the Royal Geographical Society should appoint representatives. Thus PCGN began life as a committee of the Royal Geographical Society, staffed by its personnel, principally Arthur R. Hinks, then Secretary of the Society. The Committee resolved to ask the Admiralty to approach the Treasury to seek a grant of £500 for the first twelve months. The Colonial Office Circular (see footnote 7) explains that a grant from Imperial funds towards the expenses of the Committee was approved by the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury, with a view to preparing authoritative lists of 'doubtful' place names for official use. The resolutions, taken as a basis for the constitution of the proposed Permanent Committee, were recorded in the minutes of the meeting (see Annex B). PCGN undertook the revision of the RGS System and produced the RGS II System (see Annex C).

In November 1919, a Sub-Committee appointed by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names produced the first presentation of PCGN general principles (see Annex D). The following year the first Chairman of PCGN, Major-General Lord Edward Gleichen<sup>10</sup>, wrote the following:

*"Most things have but small beginnings; and in this instance the hare was started, it is believed, through the Admiralty not being able to make up their minds as to what to call the place generally known as Walfisch Bay. It is indeed a hard nut to crack, there being at least three languages concerned in the matter (English, German, and Dutch, and perhaps Hottentot as well). Once the discussion had started, difficulties concerning the spelling of numerous other names cropped up; and finally the Admiralty suggested that the Royal Geographical Society should be invited to form a permanent committee to deal with the question of geographical names."* (See Annex E).

### **The first initiatives of PCGN**

The principal objective of the Committee in its first seventeen years, under the chairmanship of Lord Gleichen until his death in December 1937, was the provision of standardized names in those parts of the world affected by the geopolitical consequences of World War I. The architect of this endeavour, resulting in the publication of forty lists of names (see Annex F), was John Hardwick Reynolds, who served initially as assistant and subsequently in 1924 as the first independently recruited Secretary to the Committee until his death in January 1937.

By the mid-1920s, PCGN had begun to recruit its own staff as the work of the committee had become too great for the RGS staff to undertake on top of their normal duties. The outbreak of World War II led to an increase in the workload of the committee, so the Admiralty and War Office engaged extra staff (paid by the Services). They worked under the supervision of the PCGN Secretary, who since

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<sup>9</sup> The command and control of the Royal Navy.

<sup>10</sup> Major General Lord Edward Gleichen was a relative of Queen Victoria, and second cousin of King George V. He served in the Grenadier Guards and became military attaché to Berlin in 1903-6. He was the military attaché to Washington D.C. in 1906-7, where he met the Wright brothers. After serving in World War I he became Director of the Political Intelligence Bureau at the Department of Information 1917-18, and served as the first chairman of PCGN from 1919 to 1937.

1937 had been Marcel Aurousseau<sup>11</sup>, on the revision of names in hydrographic Sailing Directions publications and the transliteration of names on foreign charts and maps. The quantity of work required was such that the Committee's position had to be further reviewed in 1943, with the provision that it be re-examined yet again at the end of the war.

Among the Committee's wartime achievements was the publication of detailed glossaries of geographical terms in seven major languages and the compilation of the first comprehensive gazetteers of Greece and Albania. Aurousseau was particularly concerned with the general problem of name standardization after the end of World War II. He wrote many papers on the subject for the *Geographical Journal* and was the inspiration behind the PCGN *Principles of Geographical Nomenclature*, published in May 1954.

In the 1950s, Aurousseau and a new Chairman, Lt.-Col. Geoffrey Wheeler<sup>12</sup>, took the Committee into much closer working relationships with the then-named Directorate of Military Survey, the Hydrographic Office, and the Foreign Office, and these associations have continued to this day. There was also a close relationship with the Colonial Office, which lasted until that department's incorporation into the Foreign Office in 1964.

One of Aurousseau's innovations in the 1950s was the launch of the Lists of Names (New Series), which greatly expanded the size and detail of the Committee's pre-war lists. The first three to be published were for Persia (1955), Poland (exact date unknown) and Czechoslovakia (1958), though the programme was then discontinued for financial reasons. He also continued the wartime series of glossaries with an eighth, for Japanese, in 1954.

### **Expansion into the international arena**

There had been little direct contact between PCGN and the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN), though each acknowledged the other's role in pursuit of names standardization. BGN took the lead in pressing for closer cooperation and proposed a first working conference between the two bodies. This took place in the Royal Geographical Society in October 1947. A framework for future cooperation was established and a first important, practical agreement was reached on the transliteration of Russian names (this being vital in the early days of the Cold War). The fascinating letter at Annex G, from S.W. Boggs of the US Department of State describes the various methods and lengths of time taken by the BGN staff to make their way back across the Atlantic following this 1947 meeting<sup>13</sup>.

Subsequent exchanges of correspondence on difficulties with Middle East mapping led to a Second Conference, again at the RGS, in October 1955, when agreement was finally accomplished on the transliteration of Arabic. The value of these conferences being established, it was agreed that future meetings would be held alternately in London and Washington D.C. This arrangement has continued to the present, the most recent meeting being the 32<sup>nd</sup> Conference in early 2018. One result of the Conferences' success is the establishment of over 50 jointly-agreed [BGN/PCGN systems of romanization](#).

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<sup>11</sup> Marcel Aurousseau, from Australia, was Secretary of PCGN from 1937-55. After seeing service in World War I, he returned to Australia to continue teaching geology. He later worked for the Carnegie Institution in Washington D.C. and the American Geographical Society in New York before moving to London. He wrote the classic work *The Rendering of Geographical Names* in 1957 (Hutchinson University Library, London).

<sup>12</sup> Lt.-Col. Geoffrey Wheeler was an eminent historian of Central Asia; in the 1950s he founded the Central Asian Research Centre in London and edited its journal *Central Asian Review*.

<sup>13</sup> One of them saw the *Bermuda Sky Queen*, a seaplane that had ditched at sea on October 14, 1947. After the rescue of all passengers and crew she was sunk by the American coastguard.

Wheeler, the Chairman from 1955, was a committed believer in the importance of the BGN/PCGN relationship and it was at his insistence that P.J.M. (Patrick) Geelan, Arousseau's successor as Secretary from 1955, was sent on a first liaison visit to Washington D.C. in February 1957. Geelan forged an extraordinarily close relationship with the then BGN Secretary, Meredith ('Pete') Burrill, which lasted productively until Burrill's retirement in 1972.

A serious impediment to a closer working relationship with BGN before this time had been the lack of instant communication. Telephone was far too expensive, while formal letters necessarily involved formal replies and longer subsequent correspondence. Geelan and Burrill overcame this obstacle by embarking on a constant exchange of informal letters (a total of over 400 between 1955 and 1973) by means of which current issues and differences, on both sides, could most often be speedily resolved. Any necessary formal agreement was then more easily reached at BGN/PCGN Conferences as their frequency and importance increased.

It was in 1959 that the United Nations first became involved with the international standardization of geographical names. Its first practical step was the setting up of a group of experts at UN Headquarters in June 1960. Burrill and Geelan met with geolinguists from China, Cuba and Guatemala to establish the guidelines to be followed by the formally constituted United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN), which first met in 1964. One of the first UNGEGN recommendations was to establish wider international UN Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names, the first of which met in Geneva in 1967. PCGN and BGN staff have been a major presence at all the UN Conferences and UNGEGN Sessions since their inception.

As the Committee pursued its ambitious attempt to standardize geographical names throughout the world, the problems of dealing with non-Roman alphabet languages became increasingly important. As already mentioned, the first significant achievement in this respect was its agreement with BGN in 1947 on a system for the transliteration of Russian, which brought order to the copious toponymy of the Soviet Union. Over the years that followed, BGN/PCGN collaboration devised and agreed romanization rules for many languages, from Amharic and Arabic to Thai and Ukrainian<sup>14</sup>.

Three instances of BGN/PCGN romanization achievements in linguistically troublesome areas are particularly noteworthy. PCGN's work, first for the Directorate of Overseas Surveys and then for Military Survey, on the determination and provision of names for medium- and large-scale mapping of countries in the Middle East, grew substantially from the 1960s onwards, including notably in the 1970s with the provision of some twenty-five thousand names for the 1:50,000-scale map series of the Yemen Arab Republic. All of this work involved the concentrated application of the BGN/PCGN romanization system for Arabic to names throughout the Arabian peninsula and the wider Middle East, leading to a standardized nomenclature for the first time (although the romanization of Arabic still remains a problem to this day in the Maghreb).

The second achievement involved the vast expanse of China, where the romanization of names had long been close to insoluble. The first serious attempt at standardization had been the Chinese Imperial Post Office system of transcription, resulting in agreed Roman-script spellings for tens of thousands of cities, towns and villages. Spellings such as Soochow and Tientsin became standard throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. But as time passed a more accurate representation of Chinese characters was required, and BGN/PCGN's adoption of the academic Wade-Giles system led for the first time to a standardized nomenclature throughout China, hence Su-chou and Tien-chin. The incoming Communist government after 1949 realised that the important minority languages of the north and west needed to be treated differently from standard Chinese, and by the 1970s they had devised the Han Pinyin system for application to Chinese-language names in mainland

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<sup>14</sup> Up-to-date versions of these and many other romanization systems and tables of correspondences can be found on the PCGN website <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/romanisation-systems>

China (so, Suzhou and Tianjin), plus separate Pinyin systems for Mongolian, Tibetan and Uighur designed for use in Inner Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang respectively. Both PCGN and BGN adopted and applied these Pinyin systems as soon as adequate source materials became available.

More far-reaching still were the changes brought about by the break-up of the Soviet Union. The languages of the newly independent states now had to be recognised and BGN/PCGN's application of transliteration systems for 11 newly official non-Roman languages was a major task over the turn of the century. In this 1990s period of vital geopolitical change, the former Geelan-Burrill liaison was continued very successfully by the contemporary incumbents of those posts: Paul Woodman, the PCGN Secretary from 1979 until 2009, and his counterpart Randall Flynn, the BGN Executive Secretary for Foreign Names from 1993 until 2009.

### **Operational support**

PCGN has also frequently played a vital role in support of operations. For example, following the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands in April 1982, PCGN immediately set about remedying the lack of a source for the names of the geographical features there. The Secretary at the time, Paul Woodman, instigated the rapid production of an operational gazetteer of the toponyms of the islands, containing both English-language and Spanish-language names, which was published as the *Gazetteer of the Falkland Islands and the Falkland Island Dependencies, GSGS 5442, Edition 1-GSGS, Directorate of Military Survey, April 1982*. This work contained over 3000 entries for places and features in the Falkland Islands, plus approximately 830 entries for places and features in the then Falkland Islands Dependencies (South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands). This gazetteer was produced to meet an exceptionally tight operational deadline and inevitably it contained certain deficiencies, the most notable of these being a duplication of name entries where a single feature appeared across neighbouring map sheets. To remedy such problems, a second edition of this gazetteer was produced only three weeks later. Following the swift production of its first and second editions, a revised third edition of the gazetteer was published almost four years after the cessation of hostilities, as the *Gazetteer of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, GSGS 5442, Edition 3-GSGS, Directorate of Military Survey, 1986*. As with the previous two editions, this third edition was produced under the toponymic direction of the PCGN and it remains the most complete single source of geographical names of the Falkland Islands.

### **A continuity of purpose**

PCGN's fundamental purpose today remains the same: to advise across HM Government in order that there may be widespread access to accurate, consistent and standardized foreign geographical names, for the purpose of avoiding ambiguity and significant diplomatic issues. The documents and information on the PCGN website give a representative flavour of the current work of PCGN and, though the methods and priorities may be rather different from those 100 years ago, PCGN's principal role is still to establish and promote principles and policies on foreign geographical names, in line with UK foreign policy, for HM Government.

## Annex A

Scanned extract from the Geographical Journal dated August 1919.

[Enclosure in Circular despatch of 23rd November, 1920.]

EXTRACT FROM "GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNAL" OF AUGUST, 1919.

### GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES FOR BRITISH OFFICIAL USE.

Much inconvenience has arisen during the war from the variety in the form and spelling of geographical names found in charts, maps and geographical publications generally, owing chiefly to the fact that there is not, for the British Empire as a whole, any body such as the United States Board of Geographic Names, or the Geographic Board of Canada, to examine cases of doubtful nomenclature and spelling, and to prepare an authoritative list of names for official use.

In the spring of this year the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty invited other Departments of State to approve a proposal that the Royal Geographical Society should be asked to form a permanent Committee to deal with these questions, on which each Government Department concerned should be represented. The various Departments having concurred, a Conference was held at Lowther Lodge on April 29 for a preliminary discussion of the constitution of and reference to such a Committee, and a second meeting of the Conference was held on May 13. This Conference proposed the establishment of a Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, to which the Admiralty, War Office, Foreign Office, Colonial Office, India Office, Post Office, Board of Trade, Board of Agriculture, and the Royal Geographical Society should appoint representatives; and the formation of this Committee has now been approved by all the Departments named. The Chairman of the Committee is Major-General Lord Edward Gleichen, and the Secretary of the Society is acting provisionally as its Secretary. A sub-Committee is now at work on details.

As a basis for the work of the proposed Permanent Committee it was suggested by the Conference that the duty of the Committee should be to examine all cases of doubtful geographical nomenclature and spelling, with a view to the ultimate preparation of an authoritative list of doubtful place-names for official use; that the findings of the Committee in regard to place-names of the British Empire should not be published until they

that the Committee should accept whenever possible existing official name-lists such as those provided by the Gazetteer of India, the Board of Geographic Names of Canada, the Survey of Egypt, etc., it being understood that such lists would not be accepted as authoritative for names outside the limits of the territories to which, in the main, they refer; that the Committee should aim at simplicity, and avoid as far as possible the use of diacritical marks, and should, where it is desirable, add indication of pronunciation and stress; and finally, that it should be the duty of the Committee to prepare a list of those names which, although not in accordance with either local use or the strict rules of transliteration, have become established in a conventional form which it would be inconvenient to discard.

It will be seen that the work of the Committee as outlined by the preliminary Conference will be essentially conservative; it is not proposed to start upon an heroic campaign for the revision of immense numbers of place-names, but to achieve so far as possible the very desirable end of eliminating the variants which for want of an authoritative list have been so common in official publications, and consequently in the newspapers, maps, journals, books of reference, and school books.

The Chairman of the Committee invites any reader of the "Journal" who may have personal knowledge of confusion or doubt in place-names to send information to the Secretary, Committee on Geographical Names, c/o Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore, London, S.W. 7. Any such statement should include the variants of the name carefully written in Roman capitals with particulars of the alternative uses, local reasons for preferring one form to another, and any other information which may be useful to the Committee, who will deal in due course with all cases brought before them. Owing however to the large number of names which will come before the Committee, it will be impossible to enter upon discussion by letter, or to give any immediate decision on cases submitted for consideration. The decisions of the Committee, after ratifications by the Governments concerned will probably be published in the "Journal," and collected at intervals into lists for official promulgation.

The images above, taken from the Geographical Journal in August 1919, describe the inconvenience that arose during World War I due to the variety of spellings of foreign geographical names. The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty invited various government departments to approve a proposal that the Royal Geographical Society be invited to form a permanent committee to deal with the question of the orthography and transliteration of foreign place names. This conference led to the establishment of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

**Annex B**

Scanned minutes of the first meeting of the Committee of Geographical Names dated 29 April 1919.

*Secretary's corrected copy.*

**COMMITTEE ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES**

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1919  
The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty having suggested that the Royal Geographical Society should be invited to form a Permanent Committee to deal with the question of Geographical Names and that each Government Department concerned should be represented on the Committee, a Conference was held at Lowther Lodge at 3 p.m., on Tuesday 29 April for a preliminary discussion of the constitution of and reference to such a Permanent Committee.

There were present: Rear-Admiral Parry, Captain Smith, Dr. H. N. Dickson, and Mr. R. G. Collingwood, representing the Admiralty; Lieut-Colonel Jack and Captain McCaw representing the War Office; Mr. Foster representing the India Office; Mr. H. F. Downie representing the Colonial Office; and Major General Lord Edward Gleichen, Sir John Keltie, and Dr. Corney, with the Secretary, representing the Royal Geographical Society.

On the motion of Admiral Parry the Chair was taken by Lord Edward Gleichen, who asked the Secretary of the Society to undertake for the time being the duties of Secretary to the Committee.

After discussion the following Resolutions were taken as a basis for the constitution of the proposed Permanent Committee:

1. That the Committee should be called the Committee on Geographical Names.
2. That the Committee should be constituted as requested by the Board of Admiralty to examine cases of doubtful geographical nomenclature and spelling, and to prepare an authoritative list of names for British official use. *(eventually)*
3. That the findings of the Committee in regard to place-names of the British Empire should not be published as authoritative until approved by the Government Departments concerned.
4. That names appearing on the Ordnance Survey maps of the British Islands should be accepted and should be outside the scope of the Committee's action.
5. That the Committee should accept whenever possible existing official name-lists, such as are provided by the Gazetteer of India, the Board of Geographic Names of Canada, the Survey of Egypt, etc., it being understood that such lists are not accepted as authoritative for names outside the limits of the territories to which, in the main, they refer.

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6. That the Committee should aim at simplicity, and avoidance as far as possible of diacritical marks.
7. That the list, whilst providing definite names, might usefully add indications of pronunciation and stress, and should specify alternative names which are not intended for use.

It was resolved to ask the Admiralty to approach the Treasury to sanction an expenditure not exceeding £500 in the first twelve months, to be expended through the Royal Geographical Society under the direction of the Committee when formally constituted.

Members of the Committee undertook to make notes on problems arising in different areas, and to submit them to the next meeting of the Provisional Committee as a basis of discussion on matters of general principle.

Lord Edward Gleichen	undertook	Mesopotamia.
Mr. Foster		India.
Dr. Corney		Polynesia.
Mr. Downie		British Colonies
Dr. Dickson and Mr. Collingwood,		Africa.

It was resolved to communicate the account of this first meeting of the Preliminary Committee to the Foreign Office, Board of Trade, and Post Office, and to invite them to send representatives to the meeting on May 13.

The meeting was adjourned to Tuesday, 13 May, at 3 p.m.

The images above are the minutes of the first meeting of the Committee of Geographical Names on 29 April 1919. They record the invitation by the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to the Royal Geographical Society to form a Permanent Committee on Geographical Names and that each government department should be represented on the Committee. The Resolutions agreed at the meeting were taken as a basis for the constitution of the proposed Permanent Committee.

## Annex C

Scanned images of the PCGN Rules for the Spelling of Geographical Names (RGS II System) 1932.

### PERMANENT COMMITTEE ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

#### RULES FOR THE SPELLING OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES FOR BRITISH OFFICIAL USE.

(Termed the R.G.S. II. System.)

- (1) The spelling of every place-name in an independent country or self-governing dominion using the Latin alphabet \* shall be that adopted by the country or dominion, except in the case in which certain important localities have also, in addition to the official name, another customary name, notably different, in which case the name customary in British use (*i.e.* "conventional") may be adopted (*e.g.* Geneva, Warsaw, etc., for Genève, Warszawa, etc.).
- (2) In colonial possessions the spelling of such place-names as belong to languages coming under Rule (1) will be spelt in accordance with that rule; but native names (African, Oceanic, etc.) come under Rule (4).
- (3) The accents and diacritical marks in official use by the above countries will be retained. Wherever it appears desirable, the pronunciation will be shown by giving the name as transliterated on the system below.
- (4) All other place-names throughout the world will (with the exception of "Conventional" names and some others) be spelled in general accordance with the following system, which is based upon, and differs only slightly from, the system long used by the Royal Geographical Society, from which are derived the War Office system, 1906,† and the system of the Intelligence Division, Naval Staff, 1917.‡  
The broad features of this system are—
  - (a) That vowels are pronounced as in Italian and consonants as in English;
  - (b) That every letter is pronounced, and no redundant letters are used.

The system aims at giving a close approximation to the *local* pronunciation; but it is recognised that in some languages, notably Russian, Greek, and Arabic, the necessity for letter-for-letter transliteration often renders this impossible.

\* Including "Latin" alphabets containing extra or modified letters, such as Czech, Serb-Croat, Polish, Romanian, etc.

† 'Rules for the Transliteration of Place-names occurring on Foreign Maps.' Compiled in the Topographical Section, General Staff, by Alexander Knox, B.A., Map Curator. 1906.

‡ 'Instructions for the Spelling of Place-names in Foreign Countries.' Naval Staff Intelligence Division. 1917.

## TABLE OF SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION R.G.S. II.

<b>a</b>	The long and short Italian vowels, as in <i>lāvā</i>	Somāli, Rāvennā.*
<b>ä</b>	Between <i>a</i> in <i>fat</i> and <i>e</i> in <i>eh?</i> ; chiefly in Teutonic and Finno-Ugrian languages ... ..	Mähring, Pärnu.
<b>ai †</b>	The two Italian vowels, frequently diphthongal almost as in <i>aisle</i> ... ..	Wadai; Shanghai.
<b>au</b>	The two Italian vowels, frequently diphthongal almost as <i>ou</i> in <i>out</i> ... ..	Sakau; Bauchi.
<b>aw</b>	When followed by a consonant, or when terminal, as in <i>awl</i> , <i>law</i> ... ..	Dawna, Saginaw.
<b>b</b>	As in English.	
<b>c</b>	Not to be used, but always replaced by <i>k</i> or <i>s</i> ; except in the compound <i>ch</i> , and in many conventionally-spelt words, as ... ..	Kabul, Serang. Calcutta, Celébes.
<b>ch</b>	As in <i>church</i> ; never <i>tch</i> or <i>tsch</i> for this sound	Chad, Kerch.
<b>d † ‡</b>	As in English.	
<b>dh</b>	Soft <i>th</i> as in <i>they</i> ; a slight <i>d</i> sound sometimes preceding it in Semitic languages ... ..	Hadhramaut, Riyadh.
<b>e †</b>	Long as in <i>eh?</i> ; short as in <i>bet</i> . (For the <i>e</i> sound in the French <i>je</i> , see note at end on the "neutral vowel") ... ..	Gēlo; Mafēking.*
<b>(ee)</b>	Used for <i>i</i> ( <i>q.v.</i> ) only in a few conventional names ... ..	Darjeeling, Keelung.
<b>ei †</b>	The two Italian vowels, frequently diphthongal as in <i>rein</i> ... ..	Beirut, Raheita.
<b>(eu)</b>	Not used as a single sound.	
<b>f</b>	As in English; <i>ph</i> must not be used for this sound (except in Greek; see <i>ph</i> ) ... ..	Mustafa, Maidan-i-Naftun.
<b>g</b>	Hard, as in <i>get</i> , <i>gift</i> ; never as in <i>gem</i> , <i>gin</i> ... ..	Gedáref, Gilgit.
<b>gh</b>	Soft guttural, the Arabic <i>ghain</i> (غ) ... ..	Ghadames, Baghdad.
<b>h</b>	Used only when sounded; or in the compounds <i>ch</i> , <i>dh</i> , <i>gh</i> , <i>kh</i> , <i>sh</i> , <i>th</i> , <i>zh</i> ... ..	Ahmadabad, 'Abdullah.
<b>i</b>	Long as in <i>marine</i> ; short as in <i>piano</i> ... ..	Fijī; Kībonde.*
<b>j</b>	As in English; except in transliteration of Russian§, Bulgarian, and Chinese, where it equals <i>zh</i> or the French <i>j</i> ... ..	Juba, Ujiji (Eng. <i>j</i> ); but Jitómir, Jelezna, Jaoping (Fr. <i>j</i> ).
<b>k</b>	As in English: hard <i>c</i> should never be used (except in conventionally-spelt words)—thus, not <i>Corea</i> , <i>Cabul</i> , but ... ..	Korea, Kabul.
<b>kh</b>	Hard aspirated guttural, as in the Scottish <i>loch</i> (not as in <i>lock</i> ) ... ..	Khan, Sebkha.
<b>l †</b>	} As in English.	
<b>m</b>		
<b>n †</b>		

\* The long and short symbols given here are merely for explanation, not for use.

† Pronounced differently in Greek.

‡ See note at end on *Liquid sounds*.

§ This decision has been arrived at owing to the usage for many years by the Geographical Section, General Staff.

<b>ng</b>	Has three separate sounds, as in <i>vanguard</i> , <i>finger</i> , and <i>singer</i> . If necessary to distinguish, a hyphen may be placed, as in <i>van-guard</i> , <i>sing-er</i> ... ..	In-gall ; Bongo ; Ng-ami, Tong-a.
<b>ngg</b>	May be used for the sound of <i>ng</i> as in <i>finger</i> ...	Trengganu, Yanggang-a.
<b>o</b>	Long as in <i>both</i> ¶ ; short as in <i>rotund</i> ... ..	Kigōma ; Hōnōlulu.*
<b>ö</b>	As in German ; equals the French <i>eu</i> in <i>peu</i> ; or nearly the English sound in <i>fur</i> ... ..	Barköl.
<b>(oo)</b>	Used for <i>u</i> ( <i>q.v.</i> ) only in a few conventional names, chiefly Indian and Chinese ... ..	Poona, Foochow.
<b>oi †</b>	The two Italian vowels, frequently diphthongal as in <i>oil</i> ... ..	Hanoi.
<b>öi</b>	The diphthong as in French <i>œil</i> and Norwegian <i>høi</i> ... ..	Höiland.
<b>ou †</b>	Dissyllabic, and not as French or English <i>ou</i>	Zlatoust, Yaroua.
<b>ow</b>	Used as a diphthongal combination of <i>ö</i> and <i>ü</i> only in the romanisation of Chinese.	Hankow.
<b>p</b>	As in English.	
<b>ph</b>	As in <i>loophole</i> ; not to be used for the <i>f</i> -sound, except in Greek or conventionally ... ..	Chemulpho ; Paphos, Haiphong.
<b>q</b>	Represents only the Arabic Qaf (ق) and the Hebrew Qof (ק) : <i>i.e.</i> a guttural <i>k</i> (as a rule)	Qena, Qiryath.
<b>qu</b>	Should never be employed to represent the sound of <i>kw</i> : thus, not Namaqua, Quorra, but	Namakwa, Kworra.
<b>r</b>	As in English ; should be distinctly pronounced.	
<b>s †</b>	As English <i>ss</i> in <i>boss</i> , not as in <i>these</i> or <i>pleasure</i> ... ..	Burgos, Masikesi.
<b>sch</b>	As in <i>discharge</i> ... ..	Ruschuk.
<b>sh</b>	} As in English.	
<b>t †</b>		
<b>th</b>	Hard <i>th</i> as in <i>thick</i> , not as in <i>this</i> (except conventionally in Fijian) ... ..	'Athlith, Thingvellir.
<b>u</b>	Long as in <i>rude</i> , or as <i>oo</i> in <i>boot</i> ; short as in <i>pull</i> ... ..	Zülü ; Rüanda.*
<b>ü</b>	As in German ; equals the French <i>u</i> , as in <i>tu</i>	Üsküdar.
<b>v</b>	} As in English.	
<b>w</b>		
<b>x</b>		
<b>y †</b>	Always a consonant, as in <i>yard</i> ; it should not be used as a terminal vowel, <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> being substituted ; <i>e.g.</i> not Kwaly or Wady, but ...	Kikuyu, Maya. Kwale, Wadi.
<b>z</b>	As in <i>gaze</i> , not as in <i>azure</i> .	
<b>zh</b>	As the <i>s</i> in <i>treasure</i> , the <i>z</i> in <i>azure</i> , or the French <i>j</i> in <i>je</i> ; but for the sound in Russian, Bulgarian, and Chinese use <i>j</i> ( <i>vide</i> note above under <i>j</i> ) ... ..	Zhob.

¶ The true Italian *ō* is broader than this : almost as in *broth* (= R.G.S. II. *aw*). The letter *o* is conventionally used for this sound in certain names in Nigeria, Tonga, etc. : *e.g.* Oyo, Fofoa.

\* The long and short symbols given here are merely for explanation, not for use.

† Pronounced differently in Greek.

‡ See note at end on *Liquid sounds*.

## NOTES

- The doubling of a vowel or a consonant is only necessary when there is a distinct repetition of the single sound, and should otherwise be avoided ... .. Nuusafee, Moorea, Jidda, Muhammad.
- Accents should not generally be employed; but in order to indicate or emphasise the stress, an acute accent may be used ... Saráwak, Qántara, Tong-atábu, Paraná.
- A long or short mark over a vowel (*e.g.* ā, ö) should only be used (and that sparingly) when without it there would be danger of mispronunciation\* ... .. Küt, Kyōto, Abóso.
- Hyphens will not be used except to indicate pronunciation or with the particle *-i-* (in Persian, Fijian, etc.) ... .. Ta-if; Pusht-i-Kuh, Nuku-i-Ra.

**Inverted Comma and Apostrophe.**—The inverted comma ‘ is employed only to represent the Arabic ‘*ain*, ع and the Hebrew ‘*ayin*, י. The apostrophe ’ in foreign words indicates a liquid sound (see below).

**Liquid Sounds.**—The occasional “liquid” or “palatalised” sound of *d, l, n, s, t*, etc. (as in *d’you, lure, new, pursue, tune*, etc.) is as a rule sufficiently represented by a following *y*; where, however, owing to a following consonant, or to the letter in question coming at the end of a word, the *y* is inapplicable, the liquid sound will be represented by an apostrophe, thus: *d’, l’, n’, s’, t’*, etc.

**The “Neutral Vowel.”**—The “indeterminate” or “neutral” vowel sound (*er*), i.e. the sound of *a* in *marine*, *e* in *often*, *i* in *stir*, *io* in *nation*, *o* in *connect*, *ou* in *curious*, *u* in *difficult*, etc., *e* in French *je*, or the often unwritten vowel ( Fat-ha) in Arabic, etc., is represented as a rule by *a*: as in Basra, Hawiya; but sometimes by *e*, when the sound approximates more to *e* than to *a*: as Meshed, El Gezira.

(In any guide to pronunciation issued by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, the “neutral vowel” is represented generally by the italic *e*: occasionally also by italic *a* or *u*.)

This sound must not be confused with *e-mute*, where the *e* is not sounded at all: as in Abbeville.

**Nasal Vowels.**—In illustrating the pronunciation of French, Portuguese, Polish, etc. nasal vowels, the nasalisation will be represented by italic *n*: as Cześtochowa, pr. Chąstokhóva.

\*  $\bar{\epsilon}$  and  $\bar{\omega}$  are conventionally used to represent the Greek  $\epsilon\tau\alpha$  ( $\eta$ ) and  $\omicron\mu\epsilon\gamma\alpha$  ( $\omega$ ): Kythéra, Kōs.

EDWARD GLEICHEN, Major-General,  
Chairman, P.C.G.N.

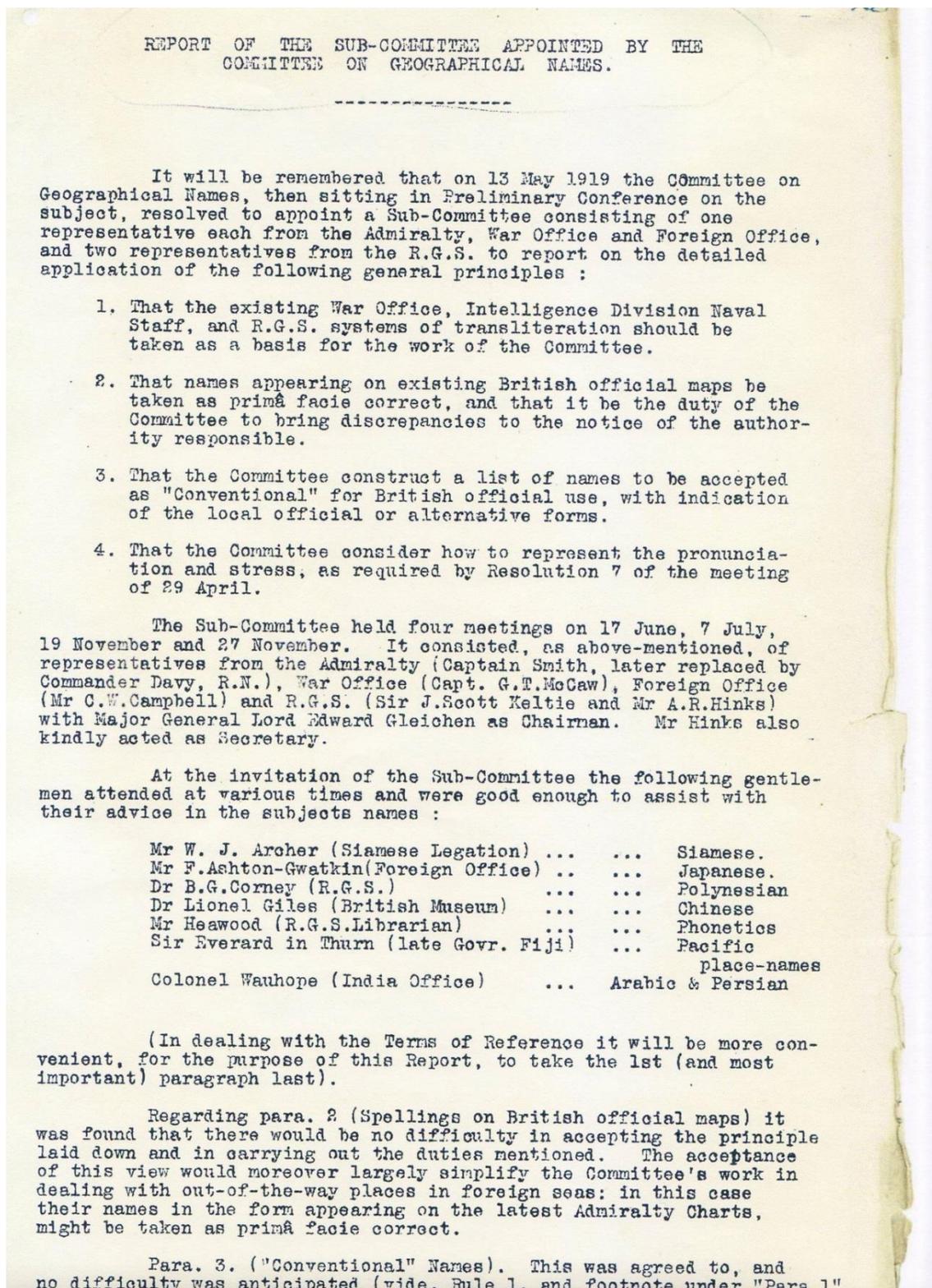
Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore, S.W. 7.  
1932.

W. C. & S. LTD.

The images above are the PCGN Rules for the Spelling of Geographical Names for British Official Use (Termed the RGS II System). The system gives guidance on how to write foreign geographical names using the Latin alphabet. Dated 1932.

## Annex D

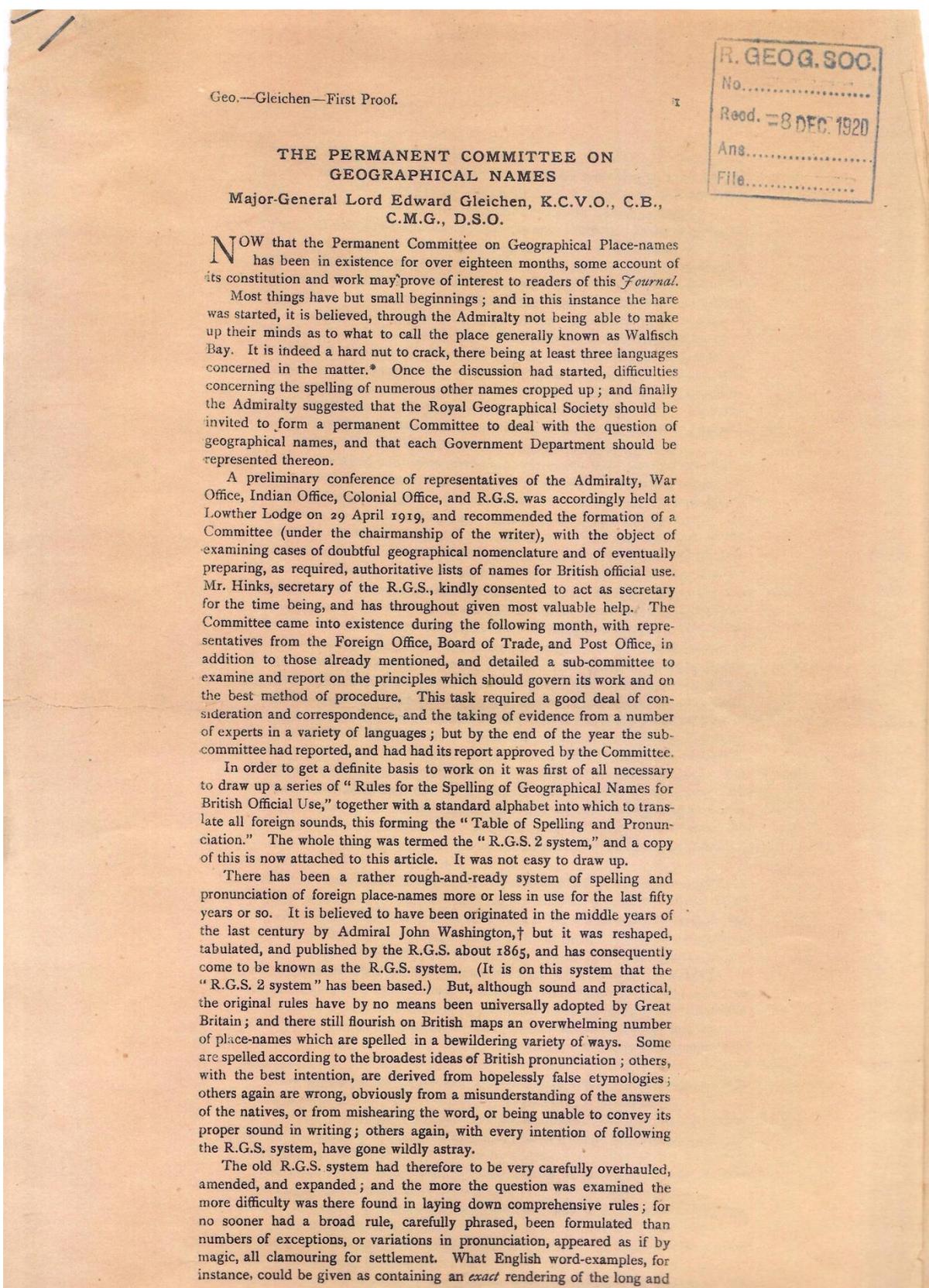
Scanned image of the first presentation of the PCGN general principles.



The image above is an extract containing the first presentation of PCGN general principles, produced by the Sub-Committee appointed by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. These included using the RGS systems of transliteration as a basis for the work of the Committee, that names appearing on existing British official maps would be taken as accurate, that the Committee would create a list of "Conventional" names for British official use and that the Committee would consider how to represent pronunciation and stress.

## Annex E

Scanned extract of a leaflet about PCGN written for the Geographical Journal dated December 1920.



The image above is part of a leaflet written by the first Chairman of PCGN, Major-General Lord Edward Gleichen for the Geographical Journal describing the difficulties that the Admiralty had met when spelling foreign geographical names. This led the Admiralty to suggest that the Royal Geographical Society should be invited to form a permanent committee to deal with the orthography and transliteration of foreign place names.

## Annex F

Number	Year	Month	Title
1	1921	January	Rules for the spelling of geographical names for British official use (termed the R.G.S.II.system)
2		April	First general list of European names
2*		July	First general list of European names (corrected)
3			First general list of Asiatic names
1*		December	Rules for the spelling of geographical names for British official use (termed the R.G.S.II.system)
4			First general list of African names
5	1922	February	First list of names in Tanganyika Territory
6		March	Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use. Francis Younghusband, President, R.G.S.
7		May	First general list of Oceanic names (foreign dependencies)
8		August	First list of names in 'Iraq (Mesopotamia)
9	1923	January	Second general list of European names
10		July	Second general list of Asiatic names
11			First list of names in Gold Coast and British Togo
1**	1924	January	Rules for the spelling of geographical names for British official use (termed the R.G.S.II.system)
12		May	First general list of names in Empire of India
13			Second and third general lists of Oceanic names (Australian and New Zealand dependencies)
14		July	Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use. (Lord) Edward Gleichen and John H. Reynolds
15			First list of names in Czechoslovakia (Bohemia only)
16	1925	February	First list of names in Palestine
3*		March	First general list of Asiatic names (corrected)
17			Hebrew (revised transliteration table for pages 67/69 of the publication 'Alphabets of foreign languages transcribe into English according to the R.G.S.II. system')
18		July	First list of names in Abyssinia
19			First list of names in Fiji
4*	1926	January	First general list of African names (corrected)
5*			First list of names in Tanganyika Territory (corrected)
20		March	Second list of names in Czechoslovakia (Moravia and Silesia)
21		June	First list of names in Romania (Transylvania only)
22	1927	February	First list of names in Tonga
23		July	First list of names in Syria
24			First list of names in Trans-Jordan
25			First list of names in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan
11*			First list of names in Gold Coast and British Togo (corrected)

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\* = re-issue

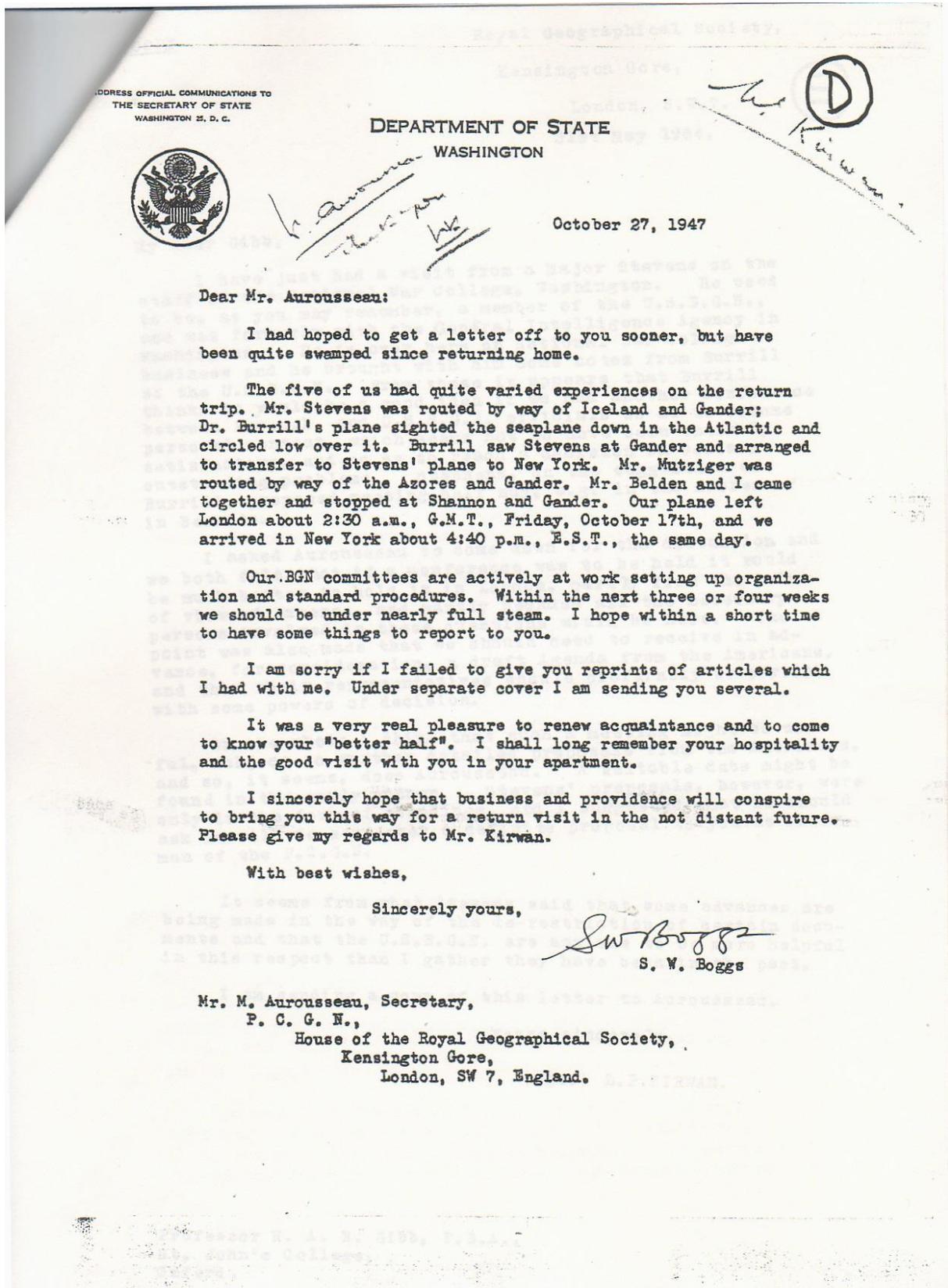
26	1928	February	First list of names in the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), north-west
27			First list of names in Somaliland Protectorate
28		March	First list of names in Nigeria and British Cameroons
29		June	First list of names in Persia (south)
2**		July	First general list of European names (corrected and revised)
30		September	Second list of names in Romania (Banat, Crişana, Maramureş)
31		October	First list of names in Poland (west) and Danzig
9*	1929	August	Second general list of European names (corrected and revised)
32			Second list of names in Persia (north)
33			Second list of names in Egypt (Upper)
34	1930	April	Third list of names in Czechoslovakia (Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia)
35		November	Second list of names in Poland (east)
10*			Second general list of Asiatic names (corrected)
36	1931	December	Second list of names in Yugoslavia (south-east)
37			First list of names in Arabia (north-west and south-west)
38			Fourth general list of Oceanic names (Western Pacific High Commission, except Tonga)
1***	1932	December	Rules for the spelling of geographical names for British official use (termed the R.G.S.II.system)
8*			First list of names in 'Iraq (Mesopotamia) (revised)
15*	1935	August	First list of names in Czechoslovakia (Bohemia only) (corrected)
7*			First general list of Oceanic names (foreign dependencies) (revised)
13*			Second and third general lists of Oceanic names (Australian and New Zealand dependencies) (revised)
39		December	First list of names in Turkey (west of the Bosphorus)
40	1937	March	Second list of names in Arabia (north-east and south-east)
16*			Revised list of names in Palestine

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\* = re-issue

**Annex G**

Scanned letter from the US Department of State dated 27 October 1947.



The image above is a letter from S.W. Boggs of the US Department of State describing the various methods and lengths of time taken by the US Board on Geographic Names staff to make their way back across the Atlantic following a meeting with PCGN in London in 1947.