

Editorial Note: Spelling of ‘Rum’ or ‘Rhum’

In presenting papers for publication, authors used both spellings for the name of this island and the advice of Professor Derick S. Thomson, Professor of Celtic at the University of Glasgow, has been taken.

He states:

The etymology of this island name is not at all certain. Whitley Stokes took the name to be related to Greek *rhombos*, and W. J. Watson noted that “the isle is lozenge-shaped”. It may well be a pre-Celtic name. It has, however, been acclimatised to Gaelic for a very long time now, and its standard Gaelic spelling is *Rum*. The name came into English from Gaelic. The initial *r* is lenited where the name occurs with *Eilean* (island) prefixed, and the practice of writing *Rhum* may have begun because of the lenition of *r* in *Eilean Ruim* (the island of Rum). It is not, however, the practice of Gaelic orthography to indicate lenited *r* by writing *rh* (though *h* indicates the lenition of many consonants). In expressions such as *Rum is Eige’s Canaigh* (Rum and Eigg and Canna), the *r* is not lenited. Altogether it is clearly preferable to use *Rum* as the standard form in both Gaelic and English.

When the island was acquired by the Nature Conservancy in 1957, they adopted ‘Rhum’ for the name of the Reserve and this style has since had publicity throughout the world and is used in all documents and publications by the Nature Conservancy Council on the Reserve. ‘Rhum’ has been used also by UNESCO in declaring the Island a Biosphere Reserve. In 1968, the Scottish Committee of the Nature Conservancy agreed that the Conservancy should continue to use ‘Rhum’.

The form ‘Rhum’ has therefore been adopted for use throughout this volume as this would appear to be the more common usage by the Nature Conservancy Council and scientists in general.