THE REPRESENTATION OF MIDDLE CORNISH /o/

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In the 1980s a hitherto unidentified phoneme /o/ was discovered, being the development of Old Cornish /ui/. The treatment of this phoneme in SWF is unsatisfactory, and its treatment in KK is also open to criticism. The difficulties arise because /o/ differs from other phonemes in that its realization in different phonetic environments varies considerably. SWF attempts to allow for this variation by using different spellings, while KK uses <oe> for all allophones.

Case 1:	**in stressed monosyllables before a single consonant** N.B. the clusters /sp, st, sk/ behave as a single consonant
Traditional spelling:	In Middle Cornish, it was most frequently spelled <o> (53% of cases) and <oy> (39% of cases). In Late Cornish, it appeared as <û> and <oo>.
Pronunciation:	The spelling <oy> indicates a diphthong ['oɪ] in early Middle Cornish. By the time of the texts, this had become a monophthong, a long close *o* ['oː], although <oy> was still used. We know this because words like *vloyth* 'year' were rhymed with the English loan-word *forsoyth* (now spelled *forsooth),* which was pronounced [fɔr'soːð]. In Late Cornish, the vowel was raised to ['uː].
Revived spelling:	Finding a suitable graph for the sound ['oː] proved difficult, because all of the obvious candidates were already in use for other sounds. <o> could not be used, because it meant ['ɔː] in words like **bos** 'to be; neither could <oy>, because it meant ['ɔɪ] in words like **joy**. After some deliberation, <oe> was chosen for the spelling in KK, since this digraph is found fairly often in place-names with /o/. SWF opted for <oo>, which is inappropriate because it comes from a different orthographic tradition, that of "signpost spelling". In Middle Cornish <oo> meant ['ɔ·ɔ], in words like *roow* 'gifts', and this is how we should use <oo> now, just as we use <ee> for ['ę·ɛ] in words like **leel** 'local'.

Case 2	**in stressed monosyllables finally**
Traditional spelling:	This case is included for completeness, but the only word which falls into this category is *lo* 'spoon' (Old Cornish *loe*, Middle Cornish *lo*, cf. Breton *loa*, Welsh *llwy*).
Pronunciation:	Here the original diphthong has apparently become ['ɔː]
Revived spelling:	<o> in both KK and SWF.

Case 3:   **in stressed polysyllables before a single consonant**,

Traditional spelling: In Middle Cornish, the vowel was again largely spelled with a mixture of <o> and <oy>, but the proportions are very different: 94% <o> and only 1% <oy>.

Pronunciation: Here we would expect the vowel to be half-long; the Middle Cornish spelling suggests strongly that the realization was ['ɔ·] rather than ['o·].

Revived spelling: The SWF spelling <o> fits the apparent pronunciation. Hitherto KK has taken the pronunciation to be a half-long form of that in stressed monosyllables, viz. ['o·], fitting the spelling <oe>, e.g. *koedhas* 'fell'. If the correct pronunciation is ['ɔ·], however, then this sound should not be treated as an allophone of /o/, but as belonging to the /ɔ/ phoneme, and should be spelled in the same way as that phoneme, viz. <o>. KK needs to be amended.

Case 4:   **in stressed monosyllables and polysyllables before a consonant cluster**
        e.g. KK *toemm, toemma*, SWF *tomm, tomma* 'warm, warmer'

Traditional spelling: In polysyllables in Middle and Late Cornish, the vowel was spelled <o> in 76% of the cases and <u> in 21% of the cases. In monosyllables, the percentages are <o> 44% and <u> 44%.

Pronunciation: Being before a consonant cluster, the vowel is short, but its quality is notably different from the long vowel; it is believed to be ['ɤ], similar to the sound ['ʌ] in English RP *strut*, but closer.

Revived spelling: SWF spells ['ɤ] as <o>, even though <o> is also used for /ɔ/. This is a mistake which needs rectifying. It is a mistake because /ɔ/ and the short form of /o/ were kept apart during the whole history of traditional Cornish. KK uses <oe>, which is reasonable for monosyllables such as *toemm* 'warm', but looks silly in polysyllabic loan-words like *boekka*, *roegbi*. It would be better to use <u> for this vowel. The following table shows three minimal pairs which are distinguished in spelling in KK but not in SWF:

/ɔ/ phoneme			/o/ phoneme				
English meaning	Sound	Spelling	English meaning	Sound	Spelling		
		SWF & KK			SWF	KK	Recommended
breast	['brɔn:]	*bronn*	reeds	['brɤn:]	**bronn**	*broenn*	**brunn**
pool	['pɔl:]	*poll*	sense	['pɤl:]	**poll**	*poell*	**pull**
hole	['tɔl:]	*toll*	deceit	['tɤl:]	**toll**	*toell*	**tull**

Case 5: **unstressed**

Traditional spelling: When unstressed and short in final closed syllables, the vowel was most commonly spelled <u> in Middle Cornish. For example, in the word for 'lord', it is spelled <u> 593 times and <o> only 5 times. The unstressed vowel appears pre-tonically in place-names with 'wood' as the first element

Pronunciation: The pronunciation has often been taken to be the same as that in Case 3, viz. [ɤ], but it may have been [ʊ], the sound in English RP *foot.* It is apparently the same as in the medieval Latin suffix *-us,* as is shown by historical forms of the place-name Probus. The Cornish forms include *Lanbrebois* in Domesday Book, showing the Old Cornish diphthong /oɪ/ still in place, and *Lambrobus* 1540, with the diphthong reduced. There are numerous Latin forms such as *Sancti Probi* and *de Sancto Probo,* which show *Probus* being declined as if it were a Latin noun in *-us.*

Revived spelling: SWF uses <o>, spelling the word for 'lord' as *arlodh.* This is unwise. It is sensible to use a different spelling from that for stressed monosyllables, since the sound is very different, but <o> is clearly not the best one to choose. The spelling **arludh** would be far better. KK <oe> is compatible with the orthography's phonemic principle, but appears strange for an unstressed vowel. As for Case 3, <u> is recommended.

Interaction with other phonemes

In the status quo shown in the table below, the spellings for the two o-type phonemes (/o/ and /ɔ/) are kept apart in KK (though apparently unnecessarily so in Case 3). In SWF, they are not kept apart in Cases 4 and 5 (highlighted). This problem would be solved by using <u> instead of <o> in those cases (column labelled New).

Case	Historic /o/				Historic /ɔ/	
	Sound	Spelling			Sound	Spelling
		KK	SWF	New		KK / SWF / New
1	['oː]	<oe>	<oo>	<oe>	['ɔː]	<o>
2	['ɔː]	<o>	<o>	<o>	['ɔː]	<o>
3	['ɔ˙]	<oe>	<o>	<o>	['ɔ˙]	<o>
4	['ɤ]	<oe>	<o>	<u>	['ɔ]	<o>
5	[ʊ]	<oe>	<o>	<u>	[ɔ]	<o>

Removing the ambiguity in <o> in SWF, however, causes a potential ambiguity in <u>. This is because <u> is used to represent the /y/ phoneme, found in words like **tu** 'direction' and **rudh** 'red'. To examine this, we construct a table with /y/ as the comparison phoneme, with ambiguities again highlighted.

Case	Historic /o/		Historic /y/				
	Sound	Recomm-ended spelling	Sound	Spelling KK / SWF	Example	Sound Recommended	Spelling Recommended
1	['oː]	<oe>	['yː]	<u>	*rudh* 'red'	['yː]	*rudh*
2	['ɔː]	<o>	['yː]	<u>	*tu* 'direction'	['yː]	*tu*
3	['ɔ˙]	<o>	['y˙]	<u>	*hudel* 'magical'	['y˙]	*hudel*
4	['ɤ]	<u>	['y]	<u>	*stumm* 'bend'	['ɪ]	*stymm*
5	[ʊ]	<u>	[y]	<u>	*marthus* 'marvel'	[ʊ]	*marthus*

Now there is a clash in Case 4 between <u> meaning ['ɤ] in *tumm* 'warm' and <u> meaning ['y] in *stumm* 'bend'. With these spellings, these words appear to rhyme, but do not do so. The way around this problem is to note that there are very few words with ['y]. The inventory comprises *stumm* 'bend', *drumm* 'ridge' and *hirdrumm* 'long ridge'. They are found only in place-names, often with <y> instead of <u>, indicating unrounding of /y/ to /ɪ/. If these words were written and pronounced with the unrounded vowel (e.g. *stymm* instead of *stumm*), then the clash would disappear. (The very common word **unn** 'one' also belongs in this category, but is best treated as a special case, especially as one would expect a single /n/ rather than a geminate /nn/ on considering its etymology).

In Case 5, there is formally an ambiguity between the unstressed vowels [ʊ] and [y] both being spelled <u>, but this is less important the present one between the stressed vowels ['ɤ] and ['ɔ] both being spelled <o> in SWF. It would not matter seriously if words like **marthus** were pronounced with [-ʊs] rather than [ɪs].

It is recommended that this scheme be adopted by both SWF and KK. It would have the benefit of bringing them closer together, and closer to the traditional language.