

## VOWEL EU

The pure long vowel eu [œ:] developed in late southern Brythonic (the immediate ancestor of both Cornish and Breton), originally from long back vowels [a:] [o:] [u:] in closed monosyllables. A parallel development of [a:] and [o:] occurred in late central Brythonic, the immediate ancestor of Welsh, but the outcome there was [aʊ]. By virtue of the Middle Cornish prosodic shift the long vowel [œ:] is shortened to [œ] when a plural ending is added. It is both shortened and affected to [y], later [ɪ], when it precedes a syllable containing an i-vowel – KS writes this latter change, SWF does not (e.g. **uthyk** < **euth** ‘terror’, SWF *euthyk*).

### Examples

Brythonic (from Proto-Celtic) \*lan- ‘full’, Breton **leun**, Cornish **leun**, Welsh **llawn**

Brythonic (from Proto-Celtic) \*mor- ‘great’, Breton **meur**, Cornish **meur**, Welsh **mawr**

Brythonic (from Proto-Celtic) \*scod- ‘shade’, Breton **skeud**, Cornish **skeus**<sup>†</sup>, Welsh (y)**sgod**- (Welsh only in compounds, so never monosyllabic)

Brythonic from Latin \*(h)or- ‘specific time’, Cornish / Breton **eur**, Welsh **awr**

Brythonic (from Proto-Celtic) \*bu-d ‘was’, Cornish **beu**<sup>‡</sup>, Welsh **bu**

† Older **scod** continued to exist in Old Cornish as a by-form, and adjective **scodek** ‘shady’ was still in use at the time of Lhuyd

‡ Breton **boe** had a different evolution

The sound-change was operative well into the life of Cornish itself: for example, **deu** ‘over, finished’ borrowed from Middle English *do*.

Brythonic (from Proto-Celtic) \*essi ‘is’ became Cornish and Breton **eus** by a different route (\*essi > \*uys > \*əs > **eus**, cf Welsh **oes** directly from \*uys).

### Further development within historical Cornish

[eu:] > [e:]

[eu] > [ɛ] – this is reflected in the spelling of **goskes** ‘shelter’, verb **goskesy** (but SWF *goskeusi*)

In revived Cornish it will be useful to keep the older pronunciation when ambiguity could otherwise result. So **beu** (preterite) is best pronounced to contrast with **be** (imperfect subjunctive), **deu** (a form of verb **dos** or adjective ‘over, finished’) should be pronounced to contrast with **dê** ‘yesterday’, **leun** ‘full’ needs pronouncing to contrast with **len** ‘faithful’.

A separate development [y] > [e] accounts for later **pens** ‘pound’, earlier **puns**. The spelling *peuns* is misconceived – this word never had the eu vowel.

### Unified Cornish

Unified Cornish was a worthy attempt to standardize a spelling for Cornish largely on the basis of the *Ordinalia*. It gave strong impetus to the early Revival. Nance was however unwilling to permit digraphs for single vowel sounds in his spelling system (he had no such scruple with consonants, hence his masterly introduction of dh). UC therefore has insufficient graphs to distinguish eu: it can only write e or u, essentially at individual discretion, leaving a reader to identify the correct sound in each case entirely from context.