

**Belfast**

A digital reinterpretation of the tiled lettering used for Belfast's historic street signage in matching Latin and Gaelic scripts



Belfast's historic tiled street signage is immediately familiar to the city's residents and visitors alike as a representation of its unique character. Originally hand-made with poured clays as white capitals on black tiles during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the tiled signs were first commissioned by the Belfast Corporation for use on major thoroughfares, probably in order to help passengers locate stops on the city's tram system.

John McMillan, Emeritus Professor of Graphic Design at Ulster University and a Belfast resident, had long fostered the idea that the idiosyncratic lettering of Belfast's traditional street signs offered an opportunity to not only be developed into a functional digital typeface but also, as an essential part of Belfast life, to be translated into a corresponding gaelic typeform that would afford bilingual usage and a shared ownership by its citizens.

Working from original photographs of the signs, in 2015, McMillan developed digital drawings reconstructing the Latin characters as a proportionally spaced alphabet. He subsequently created a set of corresponding prototypes for gaelic letterforms with invaluable advice from Irish language expert Dr Art Hughes.

In 2018, John McMillan approached MuirMcNeil to develop both designs into working digital type families. In addition to redefining contours and completing the positive character sets in upper and lower case, MuirMcNeil added new cameo type families for both scripts. Working with the guidance of Liam McComish of Ulster University, an expert in typography for signage, the appearance of the original tiles was replicated in caps and small caps along with several alternate characters found in the original tiles.

The typefaces have been named in their respective languages to reflect their local identity. The gaelic version, Feirste, honours Belfast's Irish name, Béal Feirste, (Béal meaning 'rivermouth' and 'feirste', a sandbar), while the Latin version, Farset, adopts the name of the river that flows from the hills above the city to where Belfast was founded on a sandbar.

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300pt

**A E**

38pt

**SHANKILL ROAD  
BURREN WAY  
BROOMHILL PARK  
FALLS ROAD  
STRANMILLIS  
CASTLEREACH  
LEGONIEL  
SKEGONEIL  
MALONE**



**Ae**

**Shankill Road  
Burren Way  
Broomhill Park  
Falls Road  
Stranmillis  
Castlereagh  
Legoniel  
Skegoneil  
Malone**

Latin 1 standard character  
set in OpenType encoding  
for Macintosh.

**A B C D E F G H H I J K L M M**

**N O P Q R R S T T U V W W X Y Z**

**a b c d e f g g h i j k l m**

**n o p q r s t u v w x y z**

**0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9**

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# airbus

300pt

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BÓTHAR NA SEANCHILLE  
BEALACH NA BOIRNE  
PÁIRC CHNOC NA SCUAB  
BÓTHAR NA BHFÁL  
AN SRUZHÁN MILIS  
AN CAISLEÁN RIABHACH  
LAS AN AOIL  
SCEACHÓIS AN IARLA  
MASH LÓIN



**Ae**

**Bóthar na Seanchille  
Bealach na Boirne  
Páirc Chnoc na Scuab  
Bóthar na bhFál  
An Spuathán Milis  
An Caisleán Riabhach  
Laz an Aoil  
Sceachós an Iapla  
Mazh Lóin**

