

# How familiar place names have evolved over centuries

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There is an old Norfolk rhyme which goes: "Gimingham, Trimmingham, Knapton and Trunch, Nurreps and Surrepps, all in a bunch". Nurreps and Surrepps are the correct modern local pronunciations of the village names Northrepps and Southrepps – in the Domesday Book of 1086 they are written Norreppes and Sutrepes.

Five of these six place names have very straightforward histories. The endings -ingham "home of the people of" and -ton "enclosure, settlement" are found in very many Norfolk names; and Repps comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "strip of woodland". But Trunch is mysterious.

We do know that the name appeared in a longer form, Trunchet, in the Domesday Book. Professor Ekwall, the great Swedish expert on English place names, thought that it might very well be a Celtic name.

If so, its earliest form would have been Trun-cet, where the first part has the same Celtic root as Welsh *trwyn* "promontory, nose", and the second has the same root as Welsh *coed* "wood". (*Betws-y-Coed* in North Wales is 'prayer-house in-the wood'.) Truncet "wood on a promontory" over time became Trunchet in the mouths of Old English speakers, and eventually



■ The village sign at Trunch - Professor Peter Trudgill explains the origins of the village's name.

Picture: ANTONY KELLY

the -et was lost. Coed is cognate with the English word heath. Cognates are words in different languages which come from the same original source: if someone told you that the Dutch word "moeder" and English "mother" are cognates, you would not be even slightly surprised. It is much less obvious that coed and heath come from the same source – but they do!

The source for these two words was Indo-European *kait*, which in our ancient ancestral language meant "forest, wasteland".

The relationship between them is obscured because Welsh has retained the original k sound from *kait* in *coed*, while English heath has h. It was a

characteristic of our parent Germanic language that Indo-European k sounds changed to h. This is why we have horn, corresponding to Latin *cornu*, French *corne* (which we have borrowed in the form of *cornet*). Similarly, we have hound, corresponding to Latin *canis* "dog", as in canine. And hund-red is cognate with Latin *cent-um* and Welsh *cant*. Taking other regular sound changes into consideration, there is no doubting that coed and heath are related.

Not far down the road from Trunch, near North Walsham, is Witton Heath. There is a strong probability that the Heath in Witton Heath and the -ch in Trunch were originally the same word.