

## Linguistic Notes on Norwich and Norfolk Place-names for Language and Communication Students

### Norwich

There are two things which all newcomers to **Norwich** find out early on. The first is that *Norwich* is pronounced “Norridge” – it rhymes with *porridge*: “there’s no ‘itch’ in Norwich”. The second is that Norwich is a *city* – for many centuries, Norwich was the second (or third or fourth) largest urban centre in the British Isles. Its citizens have a strong folk memory of this importance, and the status of **City** is taken seriously from a linguistic point of view. No Norwich person will *ever* talk of the “town centre” or of going “down town”, or of the “Town Hall” – it is always **The City Hall** (not “City Hall”).

New arrivals who use the taboo word *town* – when talking to bus drivers, for example - will be regarded with disfavour or even hostility. (As a sociolinguist, I use the term *taboo* here in all seriousness!)

Norwich people talk of going “down the City”, while people from surrounding areas are more likely to say “up the City”.



The City Hall from The Walk

### Norwich Streets

The name **Heigham**, as in Heigham Street, Heigham Road, and Heigham Grove, is pronounced ‘Hay-um’. In the local accent this comes out as ‘Ham’. You don’t have to go that far if you don’t want to, but note that saying ‘High-um’ is wrong! In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the spelling ‘Hayham’ was often used. (The Broadland village of Potter Heigham has the same ‘Hay-um’ pronunciation.)

**Sprowston** Road, the road which goes out to the suburb of that name, is pronounced so that the first syllable rhymes with *low*, *know* and NOT with *cow*, *now*.

**Colney** Lane and the village name Colney are both pronounced without an ‘l’ – the name rhymes with “pony”.

The word “Faiths” in **St Faiths Lane** is pronounced “Faithes” i.e. it rhymes with “bathes”. This applies also to the villages Horsham and Newton St Faiths, which are known collectively as “St Faithes”.

When Norwich people say “St Benedicts, St Giles, St Stephens, St Andrews, St Georges, St Augustines” they are referring to the streets which have those names – the word “Street” is omitted. So St Stephens Rd is so called, while St Stephens St is simply known as “**St Stephens**”. (This doesn’t apply to two minor roads, St Vedast St and St Peters St.)



St Benedicts



Unthank Road

**Unthank Road** is so-called because the land on which it is situated was the property of the Unthank family – it was originally called “Unthank’s Rd”. The surname Unthank derives from the name of one of a number of small villages - there are places called this in Derbyshire, Cumberland, Yorkshire and Northumberland. In Anglo-Saxon times, these villages were inhabited by squatters i.e. people who had no right to be there; and the Old English name *Unthances* simply meant “un-thank = without permission”.

**The Walk** - I was well into my teens before I realised that the official name of what everybody in Norwich calls “The Walk” was actually “Gentleman’s Walk” - to use this official name is to identify oneself as an outsider.

### Norfolk Placenames

To say “Great Yarmouth” is also to identify oneself as an outsider. It is never so called by local people, who call it simply **Yarmouth**. (There was originally a Little Yarmouth across the River Yare in what is now Gorleston.)



Happisburgh Lighthouse

As far as pronunciation is concerned, the best-known traps for the unwary newcomer are: **Costessey** = “Cossy”; **Wymondham** “Wind’m”; **Happisburgh** “Hayzbruh”; **Garboldisham** “Garblesh’m”, and **Tacolneston** “Tackleston”. Quite a lot of people pronounce **Cley** as “Cly”, but the correct pronunciation is “Clay” – the name actually derives from “clay, clayey soil”. **Hunstanton** is traditionally pronounced “Hunston”. And, just outside Norfolk, **Bungay** is “Bung-gy” [with a hard ‘g’], and **Lowestoft** is “Lowst’ff”, with the first syllable as in “low”.

As more and more outsiders move into the county, a number of Norfolk pronunciations have been more or less lost, and pronunciations based on spelling and ignorance of local norms have taken over e.g. **Letheringsett** “Larnsett”, **Walsham** “Wals’m”.

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