

## WHY ARE BRITISH PLACE NAMES SO HARD TO PRONOUNCE

### СЛОЖНОСТИ В ПРОИЗНОШЕНИИ БРИТАНСКИХ ГЕОГРАФИЧЕСКИХ НАЗВАНИЙ

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This article examines the pronunciation of British place names. Throughout the history pronunciation of British place names underwent numerous changes. All the tribes that lived on the territory of modern Britain, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced the way we pronounce them today. The article outlines the basic rules of pronunciation of British place names with the exceptions in order to avoid mistakes.

*Keywords:* British place names; pronunciation; language; accent; tourists; invaders; settlements.

В статье рассматривается произношение британских географических названий. За время становления Великобритании произношение топонимов претерпело многочисленные изменения. Все племена, проживавшие на территории современной Великобритании, в большей или меньшей степени повлияли на то, как мы произносим топонимы сегодня. В статье изложены основные правила произношения британских географических названий и исключения.

*Ключевые слова:* британские топонимы; произношение; язык; акцент; туристы; захватчики; поселения.

British place names can be tricky to pronounce. Some of them can be genuinely fiddly for foreigners. There are difficult-to-pronounce place names all over the world. California has Zzyzx, Slovenia has Ptuj, Greenland has Qeqertarsuaat. Even Welsh natives struggle with this one: “Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogochaside”.

But deliberately hard-to-pronounce place names were invented for promotional purposes. British place names cause more trouble than most, because they often look straightforward, but contain nonsensical phonetic traps that are impossible to predict. Frome is officially the most mispronounced place name in Britain, and that's according to a proper survey. Tourists don't know how to say something properly simply because they're from a different country and could never reasonably be expected to have predicted a local pronunciation that contradicts the basic rules of language. So, the following itinerary may cause difficulties in pronunciation for tourists: starting in Beaulieu head over to Rampisham then down to Mousehole. Next, travel north up to Towcester then a quick jaunt to Gotham

followed by a stop in Quernmore before finishing up in Alnwick which is near Newcastle.

No letter in the English alphabet is safe from being pronounced any of dozens of different ways. Thankfully, there are some general rules you can stick to:

"Cester" is pronounced [ste]: *Leicester, Worcester, Gloucester*.

W, at the start of the final syllable, is silent: *Norwich, Berwick, Southwark*.

"Er" is pronounced [a]: *Berkshire, Clerkenwell, Hertfordshire*.

But for every rule in the English language, there are always exceptions, such as the "cester" in *Cirencester*, the W in *Sandwich* and the "e" sound in *Berkhamsted*, which is in *Hertfordshire*.

The only way to be absolutely sure of pronouncing British place names correctly is to live there long enough to learn every single one of them one at a time. Excitingly, by looking at a map of Britain today, we can clearly see which invaders influenced the English language and where, by plotting the origins of British place names.



Fig. 1. The map of main settlements on the territory of modern Great Britain

The map shows which languages different British place names belong to and, in fact, it is a living history of early settlers and subsequent invaders (image 1). The oldest place names are of the Celtic origin (image 2). This is where you'll find all the place names with words like Tre, Loch, Bryn and Aber. Such as *Aberystwyth*, meaning the mouth "Aber" of the river "Ystwyth", which coincidentally is exactly where we find Aberystwyth today.



*Fig. 2.* The map of Celtic settlements on the territory of modern Great Britain (Cornish, Welsh, Gaelic)

Celtic languages were once spoken all across the British Isles, but are now reduced to a small minority of mountain-dwellers. And that is because low-lying middle-England Brits turned out to be worse at resisting invading armies. First up were the Romans who brought to Britain Latin influences.

Any place name that ends in *-caster*, *-cester*, *-chester*, or *-xeter* was a Roman fort (the Latin word "*castra*" meaning Roman fort). But the Romans didn't stay long. So, although their naming system was long lasting, the actual names they used weren't, which is perhaps unsurprising when we learn they used names like *Castra Exploratorum* and *Belgic Oppidum*, which was sensibly renamed Braintree.

Next, we have the biggest group, Germanic Anglo-Saxon (image 3). Any place containing the words *ham*, *hurst*, *ley*, *bury*, *ford*, *port*, *mere*, *stead*, *ton*, *stow*, *wick*, *wich* or *mere* are of good old Anglo-Saxon origin, and massively dominate southern England. Like *Buckingham* or, a low lying area of land, belonging to an Anglo-Saxon called Bucca.

Perhaps the most upheavalling thing to happen to Britain's place names was the Vikings, who swept in from Scandinavia in the 9th century committing brutal crimes including rape, pillage and the renaming of small to medium-sized settlements (image 4). You can tell a place was named by the Vikings if it ends in *thwaite*, *thorp*, *kirk*, or *by*. Such as Grimsby, named after an important Viking called Grim famed for his infectious positive energy, Grimsby literally means "Grim's village".



*Fig. 3.* The map of Anglo-Saxon settlements on the territory of modern Great Britain

We're all familiar with these common settlement suffixes, but what's so striking is how clearly this map of Viking place names reflects the extent of the Viking invasions. You can practically see the exact location of the Danelaw, dividing Viking and Anglo-Saxon England without needing to draw it on with thick red pen.



*Fig. 4.* The map of Old Norse settlements on the territory of modern Great Britain

Following all these invasions, Britain was littered with place names that originated in different languages and accents. But the final thing that would make its place names truly unpronounceable, was time. Over hundreds of years, locals who were too busy to pronounce all the syllables in "cester" reduced it to "ster" to save time. But they couldn't read or write, so the spelling stayed the same.

And while the English language has continued to gradually evolve, place names haven't. Resulting in a language landscape littered with phonetic traps. But what about Frome? Which linguistic group is responsible for Britain's so-called hardest place name? Unusually for a place name in England, Frome is from a surviving Celtic word "Frama", which means fair, fine, or brisk. Probably, describing the flow of its lovely river. So, it is not really surprising that the oldest language in these islands is the one that's drifted the furthest from pronounceability.

To sum up, as a result of various conquests of the territory of modern Britain and the influence of many tribes British place names are really hard to pronounce. But helpfully there are some common rules that can help avoid mispronunciation.

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### **‘ANNUS HORRIBILIS’. HOW PUBLIC OPINION OF THE ROYAL FAMILY CHANGED AFTER 1992**

### **‘ANNUS HORRIBILIS’. КАК ИЗМЕНИЛОСЬ МНЕНИЕ ОБЩЕСТВА О БРИТАНСКОЙ КОРОЛЕВСКОЙ СЕМЬЕ ПОСЛЕ 1992 ГОДА**

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The royal family is an integral part of the political and cultural life of Great Britain. Its events deeply influence British society, but its members are far from being perfect. The year 1992 was particularly rich in troubles for the Royal Family, and the media reaction only made the situation worse. The article describes the main events of 1992 and how they influenced public opinion about the Royal Family.

*Keywords:* Royal family; terrible year; public opinion; divorce; Queen Elizabeth II.

Королевская семья является неотъемлемой частью политической и культурной жизни Великобритании. События, происходящие в ней, глубоко влияют на британское общество, но её члены далеко не идеальны. 1992 год был особенно богат на невзгоды в королевской семье, а реакция СМИ только ухудшала