

Our schools should reflect our local historical legacies

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Names of institutions are important. They can be symbolic, and they can tell us much. I'm old enough to remember wondering, when the University of East Anglia was first founded, why the authorities who chose that name couldn't bring themselves to use the name of the city or the county where the university was situated. At around that time we saw the foundation of the Universities of Essex, Sussex, York, Lancaster, Kent, Warwick, Bath, Surrey. So why not the University of Norwich, or the University of Norfolk? Did they think these didn't sound intellectual enough?

The titles of other educational institutions are also very telling. Norwich schools used to have names reflecting local pride, local citizens, and local history. The Hewett School was named after the philanthropist Mordecai Hewett, a churchwarden at St Peter Hungate who, when he died in 1708, left his fortune to an educational charity.

The Blyth School was called after the Norwich citizen E E Blyth who, before he died in 1934, held the distinction of being the last Mayor of Norwich and then its first Lord Mayor. The Alderman Jex was named after Fred Jex, a Norwich boy



■ Amelia Opie. Why aren't we celebrating her in a school name, asks Peter Trudgill.

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who grew up in poverty and became Lord Mayor. Fred Henderson, who gave his name to the Henderson School, was a Norwich-born socialist activist and journalist, who was imprisoned for his political activism, and later became Lord Mayor.

The Gurney School preserved the name of the legendary Norwich Quaker family who produced the prison reformer Elizabeth Fry, and founded the trusted financial institution which became Barclays Bank.

But today we are beginning to see school names in the city which seem to tell a different story. Not only do educational institutions inflate their own significance by designating themselves 'academies' and

'colleges' instead of schools – and by referring to their pupils as 'students'; they also choose names which show insensitivity to the fact they are actually in our city. Had the founders of the new Sir Isaac Newton Sixth Form never heard of our famous Norwich polymath Sir Thomas Browne?

Outrageously, a new school standing on Colegate in Norwich, on the same site as the house where our own famous novelist Amelia Opie was born and grew up, is named after some Hampshire novelist called Jane Austen! Opie was a contemporary of Jane Austen. Would the Amelia Opie School have been such a terrible name for a Norwich educational institution?