

It's all in a name - and there are so many variations

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■ London to us - but the French insist on calling our capital city Londres.

It's rather well known that French-speaking people don't call our national capital London, they call it Londres. It's perhaps not so well known that the Greeks call it Londino, the Italians Londra, and the Poles Londyn. In Albanian it's called Londer, in Finnish Lontoo, in Lithuanian Londonas and, in the original language of this country, Welsh, it's Llundain.

There's a common tendency for places which have been of historical importance to have different names in different languages. We call München Munich, the Italians call it Monaco, the Poles say Monachium, and the Czech name is Mnichov.

It's not like that for humble settlements, of course. A place such as, say, Blickling, is not going to be called anything other than Blickling. And, sadly, even our local capital city has not had foreign language names in modern times, apart from the Latinised version Norvic - though it was formerly called Noordwijk in Dutch (Yarmouth was Jarmuiden). That's a pity - having different names in other languages is a sign of fame and distinction.

We ourselves have lots of English-language names for important centres which are different from their local names. Rome, Athens, Venice, Gothenburg, Florence, Belgrade, Prague, Lisbon, Cologne, Copenhagen, Vienna are just a few such names - Vienna is Wien, Prague is Praha, Florence is Firenze.

But some of the English names we used to have for important foreign places have been forgotten. The German city of Trier used to be Treves in English. We originally called Leipzig Leipsic, but most people don't know that anymore. Other names are now in the process of being forgotten.

The English for Basel is Basle, but Ryanair don't know that. It's probably more common to write Lyon than Lyons these days. Some Americans talked about

Torino during that city's winter Olympics because they didn't know the English name is Turin.

And who now remembers that Calais - which was actually part of England for a couple of centuries - and Boulogne used to have English-language names? Calais was called Callis. And the English name for Boulogne was Bullen.

Bullen is also a surname, of course. This isn't a coincidence. The family name is probably derived from the English word for Boulogne.

It's a surname which is much more common in Norfolk than almost anywhere else in Britain. And there's a special resonance for us about this name because of the one very famous Norfolk person, probably born at Blickling, who bore it - our tragic queen Anne Boleyn.