

# What's in a name? Well, quite a lot, actually

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English-language surnames always mean something – or at least they used to.

There were four major sources for our surnames. Some of them were occupational names, like Turner.

Others were patronymics, where sons were named after their fathers – like Jackson and Howson (son of Hugh).

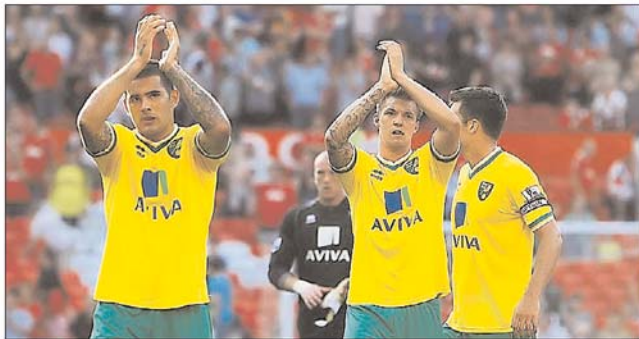
There were nicknames, like Ruddy and Fox and Bunn (from French *bon*, good).

And there were place names, like Barnett and Whittaker – there are a number of white-field or wheat-field place-names in Britain – and Pilkington, a place in Lancashire.

These names were generally the place of origin of people who had moved elsewhere – there would have been no point in calling people still in Pilkington by that name because then everybody there would have had the same name...

Surnames didn't really get established in England until the late Middle Ages – that's when names started getting passed on from one generation to another. Boys started being called Turner or Jackson because their father was called Turner or Jackson, not because they were Turners themselves, or because their father was called Jack.

I keep being asked about my own name – and I think it's quite interesting from a dialect point of view. It's actually an occupational name like Turner. The



**THE NAME GAME:** Norwich City players Bradley Johnson and Anthony Pilkington have traditional English surnames – as do many of their team mates including keeper John Ruddy.

original form was Threadgold, the name given to men who sewed the vestments for the clergy. They literally threaded gold.

Over the centuries, the second syllable of the name was reduced in pronunciation, giving Threadg'Il.

And then there was a special Norfolk/Suffolk dialect factor. Just as our dialect has troshen for threshing and troshel for threshold, so Threadg'Il was Trodg'Il in this part of the world.

All Trudgills are descended from an 18th century Harleston man called William Trodgill.

And we are also obviously the result of a spelling mistake. Most people were illiterate

in those days, so how your name was spelt depended on the vicar listening to what you said your name was, and then doing his best to write it down, hence the 'u' rather than an 'o'. Anyway, that's why my name has a 'hard g' in it.

In the old days, I never had to tell anybody in Norwich that.

People who had grown up in the area were used to us – there were enough of us around – but now incomers don't know and have to guess. And that's also why my name doesn't have an H in it. Even if people occasionally think it does.

■ **What do you think? Contact us at [edpletters@archant.co.uk](mailto:edpletters@archant.co.uk)**