

Thetford shares a lot in common with the Germans

Peter
Trudgill



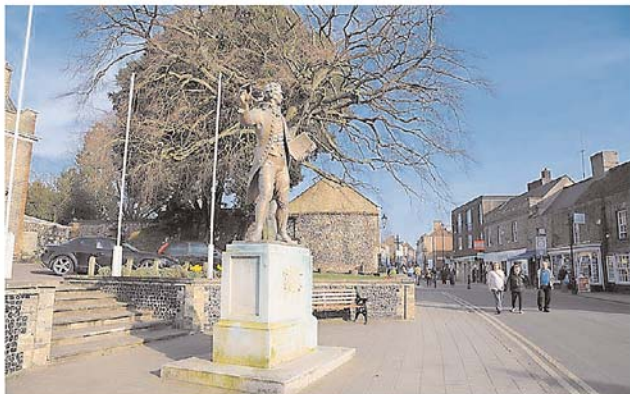
email: newsdesk@archant.co.uk

Have you ever wondered what the connection is between Thetford and the Germans? You probably haven't. But there is one.

It's obvious that Thetford is called Thetford because there was a ford there across the River Thet. It's obvious, but it's totally wrong. The naming was the other way round. The River Thet is called the River Thet because there was a ford across it which was in Thetford.

This way of forming river names is called "back-formation". The name of the River Glaven has the same sort of origin. The Glaven is called after the village of Glandford which it flows through, not vice versa. The oldest recorded forms of the village name are Glamford and Glanford. Experts think that the original form was probably Gleam-ford, where gleam was an Old English word for merriment – so it was a "ford where sports were held".

Exactly the same thing is true of the River Nar. Narford is not named after the river; the river is named after Narford. The "nar" part of the name meant narrow – so it was a ford in a pass or a narrow place.



■ Thetford has a lot in common with the Germans.

The River Thurne and the River Stiffkey are also named after villages on their banks.

But then the question arises: where does the "Thet" bit of Thetford come from? The answer is that the original Anglo-Saxon name for the settlement was Theodford. Theod was an Old English word which meant people, so Theodford was the people's ford. Theod went back to an ancient Proto-Germanic word, thiud, which also had a related form thiudiskaz meaning of the people. That word came down into Old English as theodisc, which

no longer exists in the modern language.

But the corresponding word in Old High German took the form of diutisc, which has made it into modern German as Deutsch. This now refers, not just to people generally, but to the German people specifically, and to their language. In English we use the same word, but in the form of Dutch.

So the Thet in Thetford, the Dut in Dutch, and the Deut in Deutsch were all originally the same word. Strange but true.

And that's the connection.