

## Some more Scandinavian elements in Suffolk

Keith Briggs

This note considers several examples of road-names, a water-name, and a field-name which could be claimed to be purely Scandinavian. These names are of special interest because such types are of extreme rarity in Suffolk. Some of the elements involved are scarce even in more highly Scandinavianised parts of England.

\*

The study of Scandinavian elements in Suffolk place-names by Boulton and Briggs (2017) found a number of new examples in field-names and other minor place-names beyond those already well-known from major settlement names. However, nearly all of these could be said to have a hybrid Anglo-Scandinavian nature, either because they incorporate an anglicised form of a Scandinavian personal name, or because they have a generic such as *holm*, *toft*, or *thwaite*, these being words which were borrowed into English and cannot be called purely Scandinavian.

Further study has, however, turned up a few further examples of a significantly different character. These names are either compounds of two purely Scandinavian elements, or are derivatives of a purely Scandinavian word in a non-anglicised form. The existence of these extreme rarities might be interpreted as evidence of a longer-lasting or more influential community of Scandinavian speakers in Suffolk than has usually been assumed.

My first example is *Snavegate*. I have already published a note on this name (Briggs 2019), and a summary only will be given here. There are three instances, in the parishes of Kirton, Mellis, and Stanton. In Kirton, feoffments of 1296 and 1428 record a way (*via*) called *Snauergateweye* and *Snaregateweye* respectively.<sup>1</sup> In Mellis, there is reference to *Snaueregate* c.1240 and *Snaueregatemedwe* c.1230–40 in two charters

---

<sup>1</sup> Suffolk Archives C/3/10/2/4/2/2 and C/3/10/2/4/2/5.

from Eye Priory.<sup>2</sup> The Stanton case appears as *Snavyrgate* or *Snawyrgate* in charters from 1347 to 1420; in later records the name is written *Snapyrgate*, *Snapiргate*, or *Snapiргate*, until the last mention in 1544.<sup>3</sup> The etymology is Old Danish *snævergata* ‘narrow way’. The word *snæver* (Old Norse *snæfr*, with *-r* part of the stem) is common Scandinavian, but not found with certainty in other branches of Germanic. In England, apart from the three Suffolk examples of *Snavergate*, the word is found only in Yorkshire and Lancashire dialect, in the form *snever* or *snether*.<sup>4</sup> No other place-name examples incorporating *snæfr* appear to be known.

An antonym to *Snavergate* is provided by *Mycelegata* ‘great way’ in Trimley (Domesday Book, folios 314b, 342b). But surprisingly, there is another. A road called *Brackett* is recorded in several seventeenth-century documents from the area of north Suffolk between Bury St Edmunds and Thetford. The name is at first sight mysterious, but the following records (especially the 1401 item and the 1639 alias) make it quite obvious that we have here an Old Danish *breithgata* ‘broad road’.<sup>5</sup>

*Breygatawaye* 1401 (FL602/3/1, Little Livermere)

*Bracket Way* 1613 (E14/4/1, Wordwell)

*Broadegate Went als Brackettes* 1638 (E14/4/3, Honington)

*Breyate als Brackett Way* 1639 (E14/4/4, Great Livermere)

*Brackett Way* 17th (E14/4, Ingham)

This important way must have been a single route across these parishes, probably the present main road from Bury St Edmunds to Thetford; it must have become very well established in order for the name to survive (in a significantly modified form) until 1639. There is a close parallel in Braygate Street in Appleton le Street in North Yorkshire (*Braiþagate* 13th, PN NRY 47). That road runs east–west from Hildenley to Malton, and gives its name to Swinton Braygate and Broughton Braygate. It is believed to be at least partly Roman (Margary 1973: 424). Another north Yorkshire case is Braygate Lane which forms the main street of Levisham, but no

<sup>2</sup> Brown (1992), documents 188 and 202.

<sup>3</sup> Dymond (2009), documents 141, 207, 217, 247, 295, 300, 317, 320, 321, 335, 353, 363, 362, 366, 410.

<sup>4</sup> OED s.v. **snever** (<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/183184>> accessed 7 July 2019, recorded from 1640 to 1855 and given the senses ‘narrow, slender, slight, neat’), and EDD under the same headword (<<http://eddonline-proj.uibk.ac.at/edd/index.jsp>>, accessed 7 July 2019).

<sup>5</sup> The references are all to documents in the Suffolk Archives in Bury St Edmunds.

early forms are reported in PN NRY 92. It is also likely that Braegate Lane in Colton in Yorkshire is an instance (*Brag Gate* 1846; PN WRY 4 224). There are also two modern roads called Braygate in Lincolnshire: Braygate Lane in Toynton St Peter, and Braygate Bridge in North Somercotes. Both are minor, and neither appears to be treated in the EPNS Lincolnshire volumes.

This occurrence of Old Danish *breith* in Suffolk is exceptional; a derivative word *breithing* occurs in the next two examples. Otherwise the Scandinavian word is recorded in place-names only in northern counties, as Old Norse *breiðr* (VEPN 2 15).

Our third example is Breydon Water, part of the Yare estuary, which forms the border between Suffolk and Norfolk. The name has already been well treated by Ekwall (ERN 478), who gave the etymology *\*breithing* ‘place where a narrow piece of water widens itself’, but below we give some additional forms, and a second example of the name in Felixstowe.

- (*aqua apud*) *Breyingh*’ 1268–9 TNA JUST1/569A m22  
*Breything* 1304 Yarmouth Borough Court Rolls [PN Nf 2 29]  
(*apud*) *Breything* 14th Hudson and Tingey (1906 & 1910: i.142)  
(*ad aquam de*) *Breything* 14th Hudson and Tingey (1906 & 1910: i.133)  
*Braydyng* ?14th Gough map (Anon. 1996)  
*Breydyng* 1462 Hudson and Tingey (1906 & 1910: ii.391), 1539  
Rutledge & Richwood (1970: 26)  
*Breydon Water* 1783 (Dymond 1972)

The reading *Breyingh*’ in JUST1/569A (the Norfolk eyre of 52–53 Henry III) is slightly uncertain (the -y- has no dot, and Ekwall thought it might be -b-), but omission of the dental fricative would be a typical feature of Norman orthography. On the Gough map, *Braydyng* is only just readable (possibly prefixed by *fl* for *fluuius* or *flumen*), and is positioned to the west of Norwich (Anon. 1996). It is written in red ink, not normal for most place-names on the Gough map, and may be a later addition. The 1462 record (in English) refers to a cross called *Hardley Crosse next Breydyng*, and if that cross was in Hardley parish (about 10 km south-west of the present Breydon Water), then the name Breydon must have been used for a longer stretch of the river in the past. This might have some relevance to the position of *Braydyng* on the Gough map. The name Breydon is very briefly treated in PN Nf 2 29; it is curious that the Swedish author of this

volume showed so little interest in what was believed at the time to be a unique Scandinavian name.

The interpretation of the name of Breydon Water is, however, supported by what appears to be a second example, recorded in Felixstowe. The records are:

*Bredinge* 1339 Calendar of Patent Rolls Edward III v.4

*Bredynge* 10 Hen IV (1408/9) Felixstowe Priory Roll (Suffolk Archives HA119/50/3/81)

*Breadinge* 1613 Rathborne survey (Suffolk Archives HB8/1/201 p. 492)

*Great Breathings, Little Breathings, Road to Breathings* 1740 Kirby map (Suffolk Archives HD1881/1)

The location of this place, immediately to the north of Felixstowe parish church in Old Felixstowe (TM314358), at the top of a slight valley running eastwards down to the coast, which was perhaps once wetter than now, was determined by Davison (1974: 143–46). Kirby's 1740 map shows the three *Breathings* items at this location. The name may in fact not refer to this valley, but to a much larger area to the north of Felixstowe church, which is now drained marshes. There have been significant changes to this part of the coast, and the marshes may have been an inlet in the medieval period (Bailey et al. (2021)).

The etymon of the names Breydon and *Breathings* has exact parallels in Scandinavia. A place-name *bræiðing* occurs in the 'legendary' saga of St Olaf (Johnsen 1922: 29). Only one Old Danish record appears to include this word in the form found in Suffolk (though it is monophthongised); *aqua que uocatur brething* occurs in the *Liber Census Daniae* of 1231, surviving in a document of c.1300 (Nielsen 1873: 32). A lost Danish place-name written *Breidingj* in 1340 is recorded by Rygh and Kjær (1897–1936: 599). Rygh (p. 327) also has another *Bredhing* 1559. More recent Danish documents appear to only have the forms *bredening* and *brædningh*, but in the same sense of a broadening of a waterway (GDO under *brethning*). The stretch of water south of Nykøbing in Denmark is still called Bredningen, and is topographically very like Breydon Water. There are several other examples of the name Bredning applied to broad waters in Denmark, such as Bredning near Ribe (Brøndum-Nielsen et al. c.1944: 43). The village of Bredinge (or Bring) in Öland in Sweden is now dry, but the topography suggests the former presence of an inlet connecting it to the sea. Ståhle

(1946: 527) gives a form *breninge* 1469, and considers an etymology from the adjective *bred* ‘broad’ for this name.

As a final example of a purely Scandinavian compound from Suffolk, I offer *Bondebothes*, a field-name in South Elmham All Saints. Martin and Satchell (2008: 96) discovered this name, and place the field at about TM338818, near Rumburgh. The records are:<sup>6</sup>

*Bondebothes* c.1300 Suffolk Archives HA12/741/30

*Grete Bombothe, Little Bombothe* e.16th TNA E36/160 [M&S 96]

*Bumbothes* 1538 [M&S 96]

*Bumbers* 1842 Tithe award map [M&S 96]

I interpret this name as ‘booths of the serfs’, from Old Danish *bōnde* (in the genitive *bōnda*), compounded with *bōð*. Possibly it is ‘booths of the peasant landowners’, the exact sense of *bōnde* being uncertain. This name contains the East Scandinavian form *bōnde* (or *bōndæ*, Lund 1877: 16 and Gordon 1957: 170) of ON *bóndi*. The East Scandinavian genitive was probably *bōnda* in both singular and plural; this was the case in West Scandinavian (Gordon 1957: 288; Haugen 1976: 159). The main text in the earliest document (HA12/741/30, an undated extent of Rumburgh priory) refers to *ij acr’ iac’ in bondebothes*; in addition undated marginal notes mention *le bomboth*. Both elements of this name are unique in Suffolk, and the compound is possibly unique anywhere (VEPN 1 125, 134). There is a theoretical possibility of the place-name being derived from the surname of *Will’mus Bonde* mentioned in membrane 2 of HA12/741/30, but it seems more likely that this William is named from being a serf. On Middle English *bonda* as a Scandinavian loan-word, see Wollman (1996: 223).

**Keith Briggs**

keith.briggs@bt.com

### Acknowledgements

I thank Peder Gammeltoft for help on *Snavergate*, and on Danish examples of *Bredning*. I thank Diana Whaley for comments on an earlier draft.

---

<sup>6</sup> [M&S 96] indicates forms taken from Martin and Satchell (2008: 96), without verification.

### Bibliography

- Anon. (1996), *Gough Map*, facsimile of MS Gough Gen. Top. 16 (Oxford: Bodleian Library)
- Bailey, M., P. Wain, and D. Sear (2021), ‘The transformation of the Suffolk coast c.1200 to c.1600: from Orford Ness to Goseford’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* 45, 86–114
- Boulton, David and Keith Briggs (2017), ‘Scandinavian elements in Suffolk place-names’, in *Scandinavian Names and Naming in the Medieval North-Atlantic Area*, ed. by Gunnstein Akselberg and Inge Særheim, NORNA-rapporter 95, Proceedings of the 44th Symposium of NORNA in Caen 23–25 April 2014 (Uppsala: NORNA-förlaget)
- Briggs, Keith (2019), ‘Snavegate: a unique Old Danish term in medieval Suffolk’, *Notes & Queries* 66, 498–99
- Brown, Vivien, ed. (1992), *Eye Priory Cartulary and Charters Part 1*, Suffolk Charters 12 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer)
- Brøndum-Nielsen, Johs. et al., eds. (c.1944), *Sønderjyske stednavne III, Danmarks Stednavne 5* (København: I Kommission hos G. E. C. Gad)
- Davison, Katharine (1974), ‘History of Walton Priory’, *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology* 33, 141–49
- Dymond, David, ed. (1972), *The County of Suffolk Surveyed by Joseph Hodskinson of Arundel St, Strand*, Suffolk Records Society 15, repr. 2003 as *Hodskinson’s Map of Suffolk in 1783* (Dereham: Larks Press)
- Dymond, David, ed. (2009), *The Charters of Stanton, Suffolk, c.1215–1678*, Suffolk Charters 18 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer)
- GDO = <https://gammeldanskseddelsamling.dk/>
- Gordon, E. V. (1957), *An Introduction to Old Norse*, 2nd edn, rev. by A. R. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Haugen, Einar (1976), *The Scandinavian Languages: an introduction to their history* (London: Faber and Faber)
- Houken, Aage (1976), *Håndbog i danske stednavne* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal).
- Hudson, William, and John Cottingham Tingey, eds. (1906 & 1910), *Records of the City of Norwich*, v.1, Documents relating to the government and administration of the city, with an introductory sketch of its municipal development; v.2. Documents relating to the social and economic progress of the city, with an introduction (Norwich & London: Jarrold & Sons)
- Johnsen, Oscar Albert, ed. (1922), *Olafs saga hins helga: efter pergamenthaandskrift i Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek* (Kristiania [Oslo]: J. Dybwad)
- Margary, Ivan D. (1973), *Roman Roads in Britain*, 3rd edn (London: John Baker)
- Martin, Edward, and Max Satchell (2008), ‘Where most inclosures be: East Anglian Fields: History, Morphology and Management’, *East Anglian Archaeology* 124 (Ipswich: Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)
- Nielsen, O., ed. (1873), *Liber Census Daniae: Kong Valdemar den Andens Jordebog* (København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag)

- Rutledge, P. and D. L. Richwood, eds. (1970), *Great Yarmouth Assembly Minutes 1538–1545: The Norwich accounts for the Customs on stranger's goods and merchandise 1582–1610* (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society)
- Rygh, Oluf, and Albert Kjær (1897–1936), *Norske gaardnavne: oplysninger samlede til brug ved Matrikelens revision; efter offentlig foranstaltning udgivne med tilføjede forklaringer af Oluf Rygh* (Kristiania [Oslo]: W. C. Fabritius & sønners bogtrykkeri: I kommission hos Cammermeyers boghandel)
- Ståhle, Carl Ivar (1946), *Studier över de Svenska ortnamnen på -inge*, ed. by Jöran Sahlgren, *Studier till en Svensk ortnamnsatlas 5* (Uppsala: A.-B. Lundequistiska Bokhandeln)
- Wollman, Alfred (1996), 'Scandinavian loanwords in Old English', in *The Origins and Development of Emigrant Languages: proceedings from the Second Rasmus Rask Colloquium, Odense University, November 1994*, ed. by Hans Frede Nielsen and Lene Schøsler (Odense: Odense University Press), pp. 215–42