

URBAN NAMES – IDENTITY, EMOTION, PRESTIGE. A CASE STUDY FROM UPPSALA

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Abstract: During the Middle Ages the naming system was not always very constant, and the names were given spontaneously. Only two examples of ideologically-conditioned names can be traced, with the Pope and the Cathedral clergy as actors.

By the 17th century, official name-giving already occurred in Uppsala as in other Swedish towns, e.g. the street-names *Drottninggatan* 'Queen's Street' and *Kungsgatan* 'King's Street', which reflect deference to the strong monarchy of the time. Today, political, ideological and commercial players are becoming increasingly more active in the name-giving arena. Name-giving to commemorate famous people usually arouses lively debate. Building firms try to create attractive, selling names for new housing areas.

Keywords: urban name, place-name, name-giving, motives.

The most important function for a place-name is to identify a locality. However there are also other motives for giving names, e.g. emotive and ideological. Such name-giving, both official and unofficial, is especially typical of towns all over the world. This paper focuses on such aspects in Uppsala, especially in relation to the actors on the name-giving arena.

The Middle Ages

The place which originally bore the name *Uppsala* is situated just north of today's city centre and is now called *Old Uppsala*. It was an extremely well-known place in ancient Scandinavia and a centre of Swedish royal power already during the first centuries after Christ. Several huge funeral mounds are found there, dating back to the 5th century. The Christian God replaced the heathen gods rather late. An Archbishop's diocese was founded in 1164, and a cathedral was built. But when the archdiocese was founded, Uppsala had already begun to lose its importance. Due to the elevation of the land, it was at that time no longer possible to reach Uppsala with boats along the river Fyris. A thriving merchant centre instead began to develop in the centre of present Uppsala around the rapids, which prevented the boats to go further. This trading centre was called *Aros*, meaning 'river mouth' – the river here fell into a large shallow water area.

In the middle of the 13th century the cathedral in Uppsala was severely damaged by fire, and today only half of the building remains. In 1258 the Pope issued a charter saying:

“...That their church is situated in a worthless and despicable place ... and during the high festivals of the Uppsala church hardly anybody comes to hear the Archbishop preach the word of God. Therefore, because of their humble supplication, the said church, preserving its old name (‘retento sibi suo antiquo nomine’), should be transferred to another place...” (Wahlberg 1994: 15). The Pope thus can be seen as the first actor on Uppsala’s name-giving arena with his rather extraordinary decree that the name should follow the cathedral to its new location. That the site of the archdiocese should be moved to the very small merchant centre Aros was decided in 1270 and the building of a new cathedral started soon after that. But it was of course not easy for the inhabitants to get used to the fact that Aros had been renamed *Uppsala*. In the dating phrase in a document issued by the Archbishop in 1280, “Actum et Datum Arvs Vpsalie”, the scribe first wrote the old name *Aros* and then changed it to *Uppsala*. To implement the name change of course took some time. A document from 1286 says: “piscaturam sub ponte. Arusie que nunc vppsalia dicitur” (‘the fishery under the bridge in Aros, which is now called Uppsala’), and as late as in 1292 the old name *Aros* is still used (Wahlberg 1994: 15).

Several street names are known from medieval Uppsala, which most certainly have arisen spontaneously as in other Swedish towns. Although the written sources preserved to our time do not give a detailed picture of the use of street-names, it has nevertheless been assumed that several streets and lanes did not bear names or were referred to only with the appellative *allmänningsgata* ‘public street’, denoting a street of a certain quality, even if the street also had a “real” name.¹ A street could also be mentioned by a description of its position, e.g. “when you go from the square to the monastery” or “the street which leads from the bridge to St. Peter’s church”, referring to two streets in 14th century Uppsala. From the point of view of name formation they can be regarded as a preliminary stage to real street-names. These streets were later called *Klostergatan* ‘Monastery Street’ and *S:t Persgatan* ‘St. Peter’s Street’, being examples of street-names referring to a well-known building to which the street led, a common name category in most medieval Swedish towns (Wahlberg 1994: 37–38, 41).² For our knowledge of the location of certain buildings and places in medieval towns, such names can give complementary, sometimes crucial information. The location of the meeting-place for the court of the old *härads*-district of Ulleråker, which surrounds Uppsala, is not known from historical documents or archaeological finds. With the help of the street-name *Ulleråkersgatan* ‘Ulleråker Street’, found in a document from 1595, it is possible to locate the meeting-place of the district and perhaps also the holy field of the pagan god Ull to a place near Uppsala cathedral.

The spontaneous name-giving system was not always very constant, the names could change, and alternative names could be used at the same time for the same street. The main “shopping street” in medieval Uppsala, leading along the eastern shore of the river Fyris to the church of Our Lady, was called ‘the public street’ 1308 and several times up to 1492, *Köpmannagatan* ‘Merchant Street’ 1344, 1345, *platea beate Virginis* ‘The Holy Virgin’s Street’ 1376, *Vårfrugatan* ‘Our Lady’s Street’ 1437 and several times up to 1565, and “as you go from the square to the church of Our Lady” 1459.

¹ King Magnus Eriksson’s national law (ca. 1350) states: “All public streets shall be eight ells’ [ca. 8 meters] broad, making it possible both to drive and ride.”

² For references henceforth concerning individual street-names in Uppsala, see Wahlberg (1994).

Numerous examples of medieval Swedish street-names are derived from personal names, in most cases referring to men having a house on that street. From Uppsala one can mention *Eric Benedicti gränd* 'Eric Benedicti Alley' (1489, referring to a cathedral canon and vicar). Such names, however, are to be regarded more as descriptions than as real names. Since the person referred to was probably the most prominent inhabitant in the lane or the one who had a house at the head of it, these names were normally changed when the person died or moved. A Stockholm document from 1495 mentions "Bishop Birger's lane, which is now called Johan Bengtsson's lane, since he is living at the head of the lane" (Wahlberg 1997: 186). Such names could, though, continue to be in use after the death of the person in question. A street in Uppsala called *Nils Svarts gata/gränd* in 1549 refers to a burgher who died in 1510 at the latest, and in Stockholm a few 16th-century names of this type are still in use.

Other street-name types can be exemplified by *Bredgränd* 'Broad Alley' and *Östra gatan* 'East Street'.

Swedish medieval towns were normally divided in four districts, called *fjärding*, meaning 'quarter'. Most of these district names had the word *fjärding* 'quarter' as the second element and a characterising first element. But only one of Uppsala's four districts names contains the word *fjärding*. Due to this the word *fjärding* could function on its own as a distinguishing name, *Fjärdingen*, for that district, which surrounded the cathedral. But some instances of the name have a distinguishing first element *skitna* 'dirty, muddy' (*Skitnafjärdingen*), probably referring to a muddy area near the river. The name form *Fagrafjärdingen* 'the beautiful quarter' for this district, found twice in the cathedral land register of 1376, should probably be interpreted as a euphemism created by the priests, disliking a name meaning 'the muddy quarter' (Wahlberg 1986: 18–29). If the variant *Skitnafjärdingen* is the original name, which I consider likely, the simple form *Fjärdingen* could also be seen as a euphemism. Such a kind of name manipulation can be compared with the wish today among building firms to replace an existing district name with one that has a more appealing ring to it, or to create attractive, selling names for new housing areas.

The 17th, 18th and 19th centuries

During the 17th century many Swedish towns had their medieval town plans considerably changed, following the rectilinear grid model of the Renaissance, making a regular street pattern with crossings at right angles and rectangular town blocks. Such a new town plan was also introduced in Uppsala, following a royal resolution from 1643 (Wahlberg 1994: 54–58). It was not only the predominant demand for orderliness of the 17th century, but also an intention to reduce the risk of fire in the narrow streets and alleys with mostly wooden houses ("for the embellishment and adornment of the town ... that the town with its streets and alleys, houses and yards in orderliness and regularity may be formed and adjusted, so that all inconveniences, troubles and dangers which may occur due to the buildings and houses in the town being constructed in disorder and confusion ... as we know, fire is to be feared ... should be prevented and averted ..."). The 1643 resolution includes a map with the new town plan over the old medieval street system (Figure 1). A new Renaissance style town square was created with streets leading at right angles from the

sides of the square. All changes were to be made at the citizens' own cost – they had to pull down the old houses and build new ones and also arrange the totally new street system. The plan was carried out towards the end of the 1660's.

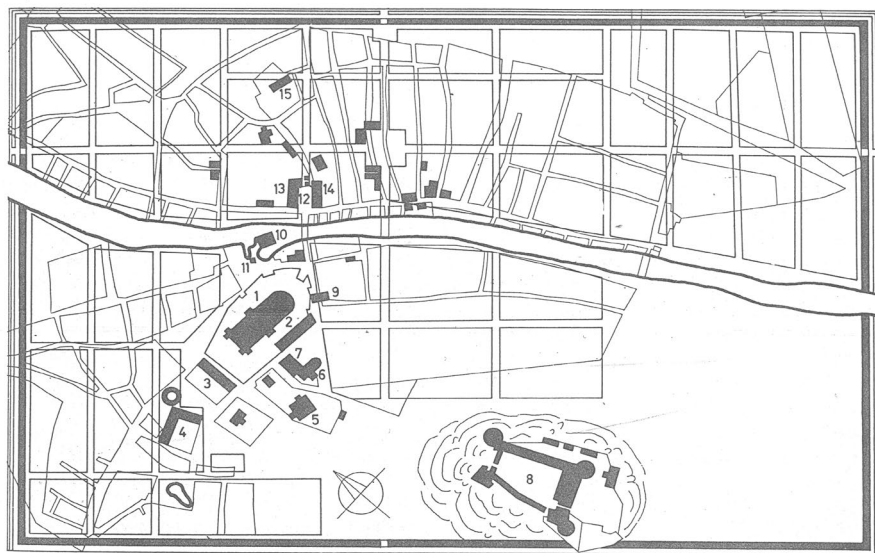


Figure 1. Map of Uppsala from 1643, showing the new town plan over the old medieval street system (fair copy).

Since the new streets in most cases did not correspond to the old ones, it was necessary to create new street names. For that reason a Naming Committee was appointed in 1669 with six members from the town council and two from the university (Wahlberg 1994: 58–70). A new name-giving era starts in Uppsala, official name-giving, with the interest from society in focus. The result of the committee's work can be seen in a book of maps from 1671, containing a separate map for each of the new small town blocks, stating the owner of each building and the street names.

The Naming Committee did excellent work. Only a few of the old names could be preserved, but the majority of the 26 new names did have a local connection. A street could be named after a house situated by the street, such as *Akademigatan* (the old University building), *Rundelsgränd* (an old fortification called *Rundeln* 'the round'), *Ladugatan* (*lada* 'barn': barns by the city border), *Valvgatan* (*valv* 'vault': leads through a vault, Figure 2).

Three of the new names reflect deference to the strong monarchy of the time: *Stora Konungsgatan* 'Great King's Street', *Stora Regeringsgatan* 'Great Government Street' and *Drottninggatan* 'Queen's Street'. These names are probably borrowed from Stockholm. The two men responsible for the carrying out of the street regulation in Uppsala had earlier been responsible for a street regulation of the same kind in Stockholm, where these names were introduced, probably in honour of the infant Queen Christina and her regency government.



Figure 2. Valvgatan 'Vault Street'.

During the Middle Ages we do not find any *King's Streets* or *Queen's Streets* in Scandinavia, but they exist occasionally in other parts of Europe, for instance in England, where we find *King's Street* in York already in the 12th century and in London in 1295. These names first became common in Sweden at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, when royal power was consolidated. The earliest Swedish example is *Kungsgatan* 'King's Street' 1621 in Gothenburg, probably named in honour of King Gustavus Adolphus, who founded the town in the same year. Nowadays we find *Kungsgatan* and *Drottninggatan* 'Queen's Street' in most Swedish towns as a part of a common street-name onomasticon. These early royal street-names in Uppsala and Stockholm are interesting also because they are instances of a new naming practice, systematised name-giving, the names being taken from the same semantic category, a phenomenon to which I will return.

It is interesting to note that several new street names contain names of saints, although Sweden at the time was very orthodox Lutheran and anti-catholic: *Sankt Olofsgatan* (St. Olof), *Sankt Eriks gata* (St. Eric), *Sankt Larsgatan* (St. Laurence), *Sankt Johannesgatan* (St. John) or *Sankt Nicolai gata* (St. Nicholas) and *Sankta (Jungfru) Maria gata* (St. Mary). St. Olof, St. Eric and St. Laurence, as the patron saints of the cathedral, were probably rather uncontroversial, but also two other saints are found, as well as the Virgin Mary, whose cult was certainly not very encouraged in Lutheran Sweden. But her street led to the old chapel of Our Lady in the cathedral, where a medieval altar dedicated to St. Mary was still kept, although the chapel had been transformed into a royal funeral chapel.

As a result of regulating the street pattern in Stockholm in the 1630's and the 1640's there were not only new street names created by the authorities. Another interesting innovation was the naming of the small square blocks of buildings, in Swedish called *kvarter* 'quarter', which arose as a result of the new rectilinear grid plan. Also in Uppsala names were given

to these new blocks. Many of them have a local connection, such as *Sandbacken* 'The Sand Hill', *Trädgården* 'The Garden' and *Fågelsången* 'The Bird Song', the last two being parts of the old castle garden. A couple of the names refer to persons owning buildings in the block, for instance, *Bryggaren* 'The Brewer' and *Pistolen* 'The Pistol', where a pistol maker owned a house.

But quite a few quarter names have no local connection: *Bävern* 'The Beaver', *Draken* 'The Dragon', *Duvan** 'The Dove', *Hjorten* 'The Deer', *Hästen** 'The Horse', *Jungfrun** 'The Maiden', *Lejonet** 'The Lion', *Lekatten* 'The Ermine', *Leoparden* 'The Leopard', *Lindormen* 'The Lindworm', *Näktergalen* 'The Nightingale', *Oxen** 'The Ox', *Svalan* 'The Swallow', *Svanen** 'The Swan' and *Örnen** 'The Eagle'. All these names designate animals; nevertheless, among them we also find *Jungfrun* ('The Maid'), certainly not an animal, but in Swedish also the name of a constellation (Virgo), as are some of the other animals (marked with an asterisk). This kind of systematised name-giving was probably borrowed from Stockholm, where it was introduced among new quarter names some decades earlier.

Systematised name-giving had been introduced earlier in Copenhagen (Jørgensen 1970: 107–116). In a district laid out in 1618 we find *Kongens gade* 'King's Street', *Dronninggaden* 'Queen's Street' and *Prinsensgade* 'Prince's Street'. In another district, laid out in the 1610's, we find *Delfinstræde* 'Dolphin Street', *Hummorgade* 'Lobster Street', *Laksegade* 'Salmon Street' and *Støregade* 'Sturgeon Street' – these names are first recorded in the 1650's. They were probably chosen in association with the street-name *Ulkegade* 'Bullhead Street', known from 1574. The choice of fish names can be seen in light of the fact that this district was the home of navy people. In another new district of Copenhagen, planned in the 1630's and in the 1640's, there were chosen street-names containing designations for plants (nine streets) and animals (14 streets). It has been argued (Jørgensen 1970: 116–124) that Amsterdam has served as a model to the semantically grouped street-names in Copenhagen. Several Dutch engineers were involved in town planning and engineering in Denmark during the 17th century, and many of the Danish engineers had studied or worked in Holland, where systematised name-giving had been practised already in the 16th century. As early as in 1596 some streets in a newly built district for textile workers in Delft were named after Flemish towns. In 1614 a number of new streets in a new district in Amsterdam were named after plants, e.g. *Anjelijsstraat* 'Carnation Street', *Lavendelstraat* 'Lavender Street' and *Rozenstraat* 'Rose Street'. This was a new kind of naming system, which focused on the street pattern, not on each separate street. Thus, the systematic planning of a new town district also included the names of the new streets (Rentenaar 1995: 125–126).

If the naming of streets in Uppsala after the work of the Naming Committee of 1669 continued to be an official issue is not known. Some street-name changes during the 18th century seem to have been an adaptation to spontaneous development. *Stora Konungsgatan* 'Great King's Street' was changed to *Kungsängsgatan* (leads to *Kungsången* 'Royal Meadow') and *Stora Regeringsgatan* 'Great Government Street' to *Svartbäcksgatan* (leads to *Svartbäcken* 'Black Brook').

Some of the street name changes which took place during the 19th century seem to have been done by the town authorities. The new names reflect important changes around the streets. *Gräsgränd* 'Grass Alley' was changed to *Bangårdsgatan* 'Railway Yard Street', when Uppsala got a railway station in 1866 (and the old alley was made broader), *Västra Ladugatan* 'Western Barn Street' was changed to *Kyrkogårdsgatan* 'Church Yard Street' after

the establishment of a new church yard, and *Norra Ladugatan* 'Northern Barn Street' to *Skolgatan* 'School Street' after the building of a secondary grammar school in 1869.

Several names of new town blocks, proposed in 1862 by the professor of Scandinavian languages at Uppsala University, are an example of official naming, mirroring contemporary ideas. The growing interest for Scandinavia's prehistoric history and old myths is reflected in names such as *Balder*, *Nanna*, *Frigg*, *Njord* (gods), *Bredablick* (home of Balder and Nanna), *Ymer* (giant) and others. These names are also examples of a revival of the systematised name-giving from the 17th century.

The 20th and the 21st centuries

As of 1923 Uppsala has got an official Street Name Committee, which is responsible for the name-giving of streets, squares, parks, bridges etc. During the first decades the members of the committee were mostly onomasticians, philologists and historians, but as of 1959 all members primarily represent a political party. The name-giving is regulated, and the names are officially provided by the committee; only very important matters are submitted to the municipal council.

Many modern officially given street-names have, of course, a local connection. But there are two kinds of names which most of all characterise the name-giving of today in Uppsala as well as in other Swedish towns.

Systematised name-giving

The most prominent feature is systematised name-giving, when names taken from the same semantic category are chosen for a whole new district or area. In one district, built in the 1960s, all names refer to berries, fruits, vegetables and spices – the district was previously characterised by market gardens. Some examples are *Betgatan* (beet), *Fänkålgatan* (fennel), *Kålrotsgatan* (turnip), *Lökgatan* (onion), *Morotsgatan* (carrot), *Pepparrotsgatan* (horseradish), *Potatisgatan* (potato), *Purjogatan* (leek), *Rotfruktsgatan* (root vegetable), *Rädisgatan* (radish), *Rättikgatan* (black radish), *Rödbetsgatan* (beetroot), *Vitkålgatan* (cabbage). The town blocks are accordingly given the names *Fänkålen* ('the Fennel'), *Kålroten* ('the Turnip') etc. The naming practice from the 17th century has been revived. Such name-giving can provide, to some extent, a feeling of identity if, as in this case, the name category reflect the history of the district, though each name in itself is not meaningful – fennel or black radish did not specifically characterise the streets with names containing these words, and those vegetables were perhaps not grown at all in the district. Such a naming principle is, of course, practical, when you have to give names to many streets in a new district at the same time. Many people probably know in which district these vegetable streets are found, but it is certainly not easy to distinguish the different street-names once you try to orientate yourself within this district.

Commemorative names

Another predominant naming feature is the growing use of commemorative names, following an international trend. Politicians and different interest and pressure groups tend

to think that the main purpose for street-names is to commemorate different prominent persons. Whether the names are suitable as names from a linguistic and local historical point of view is seldom discussed. Ideologically-conditioned urban name-giving is and has been very common throughout the world, especially in dictatorship regimes wanting to manifest themselves, though such names fortunately have never been a characteristic of Sweden. But commemorative names, referring to locally, nationally or internationally known persons, very often arouse lively debate.

Four commemorative names for open places around the Central Station in Uppsala, proposed by the Street-Name Committee at the prospect of the reconstruction of the area in 2002, can serve as an example. The persons in question were Anders Diös (1891–1986), an influential and well-known Uppsala building contractor, Nils Ericson, well-known leader of Sweden's railway construction in the 19th century, Olof Palme, Sweden's prime minister in 1969–1976 and 1982–1986, murdered in 1986, and Raoul Wallenberg, Swedish diplomat, world-famous for saving Hungarian Jews during the Second World War, caught by the Russian army, unknown destiny. A decree from the politicians in the Municipality Council had earlier been sent to the Street-Name Committee with a demand to find some place or street in Uppsala to commemorate Olof Palme and Raoul Wallenberg. The fact that only men were proposed aroused lively debate among the general public and the politicians. One political party wanted half women/half men; two other parties wanted only women. Due to this debate the Street-Name Committee made a new proposal, where Nils Ericson and Anders Diös were replaced by the women Blenda Ljungberg and Alva Myrdal. Blenda Ljungberg was a member of the Uppsala Municipality Council for 27 years and its chair in 1959–1963, as the first woman in Sweden holding this position. Alva Myrdal was born in Uppsala and a nationally and worldwide well-known politician and Nobel Peace Prize winner. To commemorate her, though, was very much questioned, since she and her husband Gunnar Myrdal in their book *Crisis in the Question of Population* (1934), about social reforms promoting individual liberty (especially for women), child-bearing, and encouraging Swedes to have children, were also in favour of compulsory sterilisation programs. This made the Street-Name Committee propose another woman instead of Alva Myrdal, namely Anna Lindh, a popular Swedish foreign minister, murdered in 2003. Thus, the names eventually officially established were *Olof Palmes plats* 'Olof Palme's place', *Raoul Wallenbergs plats*, *Blenda Ljungbergs plats* and *Anna Lindhs plats*. But also the commemoration of Olof Palme, admired but controversial as prime minister, had been brought up for discussion, since he had no special link to Uppsala. Olof Palme's plats is dominated by a big statue made by Bror Hjorth, a nationally well-known Uppsala sculptor and painter (Figure 3). Following the principle that a place, street etc. should get a suitable name, not that a name should find a place, a better name would have been *Bror Hjorths plats*.

A name commemorating the black American freedom fighter Martin Luther King was proposed by the members of the Social Democrat Party in the Municipality Council in 1968, when King had newly been murdered. The place chosen to commemorate him had no official name at the time but had earlier been called *Kamphavstorg*, a name still in use by many citizens of Uppsala. There was an intensive debate if it was appropriate to commemorate King. This was not due to him as a person – he was and still is very much respected for his achievements. But his only connection to Uppsala was the fact that he

should have participated in the congress of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala in 1968. The name *Martin Luther Kings plan* was, nonetheless, officially established. In my opinion a better solution would have been to reuse the old name *Kamphavstorg*.



Figure 3. The statue Näckens polska 'The Neck's (evil spirit of the water) polska dance' by Bror Hjorth at Olof Palmes plats 'Olof Palme's place'.

Another, more controversial name, *Fadimes plats* 'Fadime's place', commemorates Fadime Şahindal, a young Kurdish woman from Uppsala, who was murdered in 2002 by her father, because he disliked her way of living; she did not accept an arranged marriage but instead selected her own boyfriend. This tragic event was very much in the centre of attention at that time in Sweden, and still is. Fadime had become well known in Sweden after having openly talked about her situation at a seminar arranged by the Swedish Parliament. That she should be commemorated with a name in Uppsala was a request from several politicians, who wanted to draw attention to the so-called honour killings and the problematic question of how to integrate immigrants into the Swedish society. This gave rise to a long and sometimes heated debate. The matter was delicate because of the controversial murder, and the Kurdish immigrant population in Uppsala was very negative, thinking that a name commemorating Fadime would form an inequitably negative picture of the Kurds. Only after ten years a rather insignificant garden square without an older name in central Uppsala was chosen. To rename the street where Fadime was murdered was probably considered out of the question, even if such a proposal was made and, of course, all significant streets and places in central Uppsala already had a name. The inauguration of the place was made as a kind of manifestation with the head of the Municipality Council and the head of the Street-Name Committee present. It should be noticed that only the woman's first name is used, she became widely known only as *Fadime*.

Soon after the death in 2007 of the world-famous Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman there was a demand from several politicians in the Municipality Council in Uppsala for a name commemorating him. His link to Uppsala is not very strong, but as a child he often visited his grandmother who lived in central Uppsala, and he was very much influenced by the films he saw at a local cinema nearby. It was thus desirable to find a suitable street or place in that area. In 2012 a secluded short part of the street leading

past the old cinema was given the name *Ingmar Bergmansgatan*, a rather happy solution. The problem with all such names is that streets commemorating famous persons cannot be situated in remote parts of a town or refer to insignificant places – a town centre is always fully named, and to change an old name is complicated.

Commercial interests

So far, commercial interests have not influenced the name-giving in Uppsala to any great degree, even if attempts have been made. Estate agents often stretch the boundaries of high prestige settlement areas or even try to establish new selling names in their advertisements for flats and houses. An article from the London newspaper *Sunday Times* (27 January 2002) deals with “rebranding” – a new or slightly changed district name could transform districts with a low reputation to smart and desirable places to live in and, not least, add thousands to property prices, for instance *Marylebone* changed to *Marylebone Village*. Newly created names relating to water are also popular, giving associations to “good to walk along” and “peaceful”.

I will give only one example of a name of this kind from Uppsala, namely *Fornby*, a totally new name meaning ‘Old village’, invented by the building firm. The name exploits the fact that the settlement area is situated in the vicinity of Old Uppsala with its glorious and mystical heathen past and the famous burial mounds: “Here nobody has lived before you. And nevertheless Fornby is a historic settlement area. Fornby is close to Gamla Uppsala (‘Old Uppsala’) where people have been living for thousands of years. Excavations show that experienced craftsmen lived here, and the farming was also developed. Here the old Svea people gathered to worship their gods. And still today you can feel the old history. Or what do you think about the fact that the two ravens of the old asa god Wotan, Hugin and Munin, have given their names to the new houses which have been built and are planned in Fornby.” It is to be wondered if the estate agency is planning a revival of the heathen cult for the buyers of the houses. But, in fact, the area lies at a rather long distance from the ancient site of Old Uppsala. The tempting views of Old Uppsala in one of the advertisements cannot be seen at all from the settlement area. A rune stone shown, one of the most famous in Scandinavia, is not found at Old Uppsala; the people who created the advertisement must have found a picture of it on the Internet and used it without bothering about its origin.

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