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No Snickering: That Road Sign Means Something Else

By [SARAH LYALL](#)

CRAPSTONE, England — When ordering things by telephone, Stewart Pearce tends to take a proactive approach to the inevitable question “What is your address?”

He lays it out straight, so there is no room for unpleasant confusion. “I say, ‘It’s spelled “crap,” as in crap,’ ” said Mr. Pearce, 61, who has lived in Crapstone, a one-shop country village in Devon, for decades.

Disappointingly, Mr. Pearce has so far been unable to parlay such delicate encounters into material gain, as a neighbor once did.

“Crapstone,” the neighbor said forthrightly, Mr. Pearce related, whereupon the person on the other end of the telephone repeated it to his co-workers and burst out laughing. “They said, ‘Oh, we thought it didn’t really exist,’ ” Mr. Pearce said, “and then they gave him a free something.”

In the scale of embarrassing place names, Crapstone ranks pretty high. But [Britain](#) is full of them. Some are mostly amusing, like Ugley, Essex; East Breast, in western Scotland; North Piddle, in Worcestershire; and Spanker Lane, in Derbyshire.

Others evoke images that may conflict with residents’ efforts to appear dignified when, for example, applying for jobs.

These include Crotch Crescent, Oxford; Titty Ho, Northamptonshire; Wetwang, East Yorkshire; Slutshole Lane, Norfolk; and Thong, Kent. And, in a country that delights in lavatory humor, particularly if the word “bottom” is involved, there is Pratts Bottom, in Kent, doubly cursed because “prat” is slang for buffoon.

As for Penistone, a thriving South Yorkshire town, just stop that sophomoric snickering.

“It’s pronounced ‘PENNIS-tun,’ ” Fiona Moran, manager of the Old Vicarage Hotel in Penistone, said over the telephone, rather sharply. When forced to spell her address for outsiders, she uses misdirection, separating the tricky section into two blameless parts: “p-e-n” — pause — “i-s-t-o-n-e.”

Several months ago, Lewes District Council in East Sussex tried to address the problem of inadvertent place-name titillation by saying that “street names which could give offense” would no longer be allowed on new roads.

“Avoid aesthetically unsuitable names,” like Gaswork Road, the council decreed. Also, avoid “names capable of deliberate misinterpretation,” like Hoare Road, Typple Avenue, Quare Street and Corfe Close.

(What is wrong with Corfe Close, you might ask? The guidelines mention the hypothetical residents of No. 4, with their unfortunate hypothetical address, “4 Corfe Close.” To find the naughty meaning, you have to repeat the first two words rapidly many times, preferably in the presence of your fifth-grade classmates.)

The council explained that it was only following national guidelines and that it did not intend to change any existing lewd names.

Still, news of the revised policy raised an outcry.

“Sniggering at double entendres is a loved and time-honored tradition in this country,” Carol Midgley wrote in *The Times* of London. Ed Hurst, a co-author, with Rob Bailey, of [“Rude Britain”](#) and [“Rude UK,”](#) which list arguably offensive place names — some so arguably offensive that, unfortunately, they cannot be printed here — said that many such communities were established hundreds of years ago and that their names were not rude at the time.

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“Place names and street names are full of history and culture, and it’s only because language has evolved over the centuries that they’ve wound up sounding rude,” Mr. Hurst said in an interview.

Mr. Bailey, who grew up on Tumbledown Dick Road in Oxfordshire, and Mr. Hurst got the idea for the books when they read about a couple who bought a house on Butt Hole Road, in South Yorkshire.

The name most likely has to do with the spot’s historic function as a source of water, a water butt being a container for collecting water. But it proved to be prohibitively hilarious.

“If they ordered a pizza, the pizza company wouldn’t deliver it, because they thought it was a made-up name,” Mr. Hurst said. “People would stand in front of the sign, pull down their trousers and take pictures of each other’s naked buttocks.”

The couple moved away.

The people in Crapstone have not had similar problems, although their sign is periodically stolen by word-loving merrymakers. And their village became a stock joke a few years ago, when a television ad featuring a prone-to-swearing soccer player named Vinnie Jones showed Mr. Jones’s car breaking down just under the Crapstone sign.

In the commercial, Mr. Jones tries to alert the towing company to his location while covering the sign and trying not to say “crap” in front of his young daughter.

The consensus in the village is that there is a perfectly innocent reason for the name “Crapstone,” though it is unclear what that is. Theories put forth by various residents the other day included “place of the rocks,” “a kind of twisting of the original word,” “something to do with the soil” and “something to do with Sir Francis Drake,” who lived nearby.

Jacqui Anderson, a doctor in Crapstone who used to live in a village called Horrabridge, which has its own issues, said that she no longer thought about the “crap” in “Crapstone.”

Still, when strangers ask where she’s from, she admitted, “I just say I live near Plymouth.”

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