

Preposition names. An endangered system of place-names

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In the 16th and 17th centuries, it was quite common in Denmark to use preposition names as *På Bakken* ‘On the Hill’, and *På Hjørnet* ‘On the Corner’ for farms and houses. This type of place-names can be traced in the islands of Læsø and Bornholm and in other areas dominated by single farm settlement.

Preposition names are rare in Denmark today; the name-type only survives in street names and very few farm names. This is caused by the names’ structure not fitting the more common type of place-names in Denmark consisting of a generic element which states what kind of location it denotes, i.e. *Holt* ‘small wood’ and *Vestergård* ‘Western Farm’, and the fact that they are difficult to identify in the written sources where it is seldom obvious if a preposition belongs to a name or not.

The preposition names are unusual by only describing the surroundings of the denoted place, and not saying anything about what kind of location it refers to. Thus, most of the names found in the 16th and 17th centuries have changed during the 18th century into common place-name types, i.e. *På Bakken* ‘On the Hill’ > *Bakkensgård* ‘The Farm of the Hill’, and *På Hjørnet* ‘On the Corner’ > *Hjørnet* ‘The Corner’. These changes in the names must be seen as a result of standardization caused by an increased use of farm names by the authorities, i.e. for mapping or to list taxation. It seems that the preposition names are only suitable for use in a limited context such as the local community, and not in a wider context, such as for people outside of the community.