

Why are sweets called ket?

From the sweeties.net wiki

In the North East of England, sweets are kets. A child in Sunderland might spend pocket money on a bag of kets. It sounds like simple slang, but it has a long and slightly grisly history.

Where it is used

Wiktionary records ket in the sense of sweetmeats in Northumbria, and in the sense of a sweet, treat or candy on Wearside, around Sunderland. The linguist Laura Bailey describes it as a North East word for sweets. One Sunderland reader, commenting on her blog about the 1980s, remembered kets as cheap sweets, the trashy mixture you would get from a pick and mix, though how the word was used varied from place to place.

From flesh to sweets

The word probably comes from Old Norse, from a word like kjöt, meaning meat or flesh. Its relatives are still used in the Scandinavian languages today: kjöt in Icelandic, kött in Swedish, kød in Danish and kjøtt in Norwegian, all meaning meat.

In older northern English, ket kept a much less appetising meaning. Across northern England it meant carrion, dead flesh, or any kind of filth. So the same word could once mean either a rotting carcass or a bag of sweets, depending on where you were and who was talking.

How did that happen?

Nobody knows for certain, but Wiktionary offers two explanations.

- **Sweetmeats.** Sweets used to be called sweetmeats, and in that word meat simply means food. The old sweetmeat, from the Old English swete mete, meant a sweet delicacy or confection. Ket, a word for meat, may have followed the same path.
- **A warning to children.** The other idea is that grown ups called sweets ket, rubbish, as a way to put children off eating too many.

Today, in the North East, kets means sweets.

Kets and other sweet words

Ket is one of many regional words for sweets in Britain. In Scotland they are sweeties, in parts of Yorkshire and the north they can be spice, and liquorice was long known as Spanish: see [what people call sweets around Britain](#) and [why is liquorice called Spanish?](#) Across the Atlantic, they are candy, a word that came into English from the Old French for sugar candy: see [what is the difference between sweets and candy?](#)

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