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### The slighting of Strensall

Richard Coates (pp. 50–53)

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## ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

Co	Cornwall
Ha	Hampshire
He	Herefordshire
K	Kent
La	Lancashire
Nb	Northumberland
Sf	Suffolk
So	Somerset
Wt	Isle of Wight
CPNE	<i>Cornish Place-Name Elements.</i>
EPNE	<i>English Place-Name Elements, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN BdHu	<i>The Place-Names of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.</i>
PN Brk	<i>The Place-Names of Berkshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Bu	<i>The Place-Names of Buckinghamshire.</i>
PN Ca	<i>The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely.</i>
PN Ch	<i>The Place-Names of Cheshire, Parts 1–5.</i>
PN Cu	<i>The Place-Names of Cumberland, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN D	<i>The Place-Names of Devon, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Db	<i>The Place-Names of Derbyshire, Parts 1, 2 and 3.</i>
PN Do	<i>The Place-Names of Dorset, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Du	<i>The Place-Names of County Durham, Part 1.</i>
PN Ess	<i>The Place-Names of Essex.</i>
PN ERY	<i>The Place-Names of the East Riding of Yorkshire and York.</i>
PN Gl	<i>The Place-Names of Gloucestershire, Parts 1–4.</i>
PN Hrt	<i>The Place-Names of Hertfordshire.</i>
PN Le	<i>The Place-Names of Leicestershire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Li	<i>The Place-Names of Lincolnshire, Parts 1–7.</i>
PN Mx	<i>The Place-Names of Middlesex (apart from the City of London).</i>
PN Nf	<i>The Place-Names of Norfolk, Parts 1–3.</i>
PN Nt	<i>The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire.</i>
PN NRY	<i>The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire.</i>
PN Nth	<i>The Place-Names of Northamptonshire.</i>
PN O	<i>The Place-Names of Oxfordshire, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN R	<i>The Place-Names of Rutland.</i>
PN Sa	<i>The Place-Names of Shropshire, Parts 1–9.</i>
PN Sr	<i>The Place-Names of Surrey.</i>
PN St	<i>The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part 1.</i>
PN Sx	<i>The Place-Names of Sussex, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN W	<i>The Place-Names of Wiltshire.</i>
PN Wa	<i>The Place-Names of Warwickshire.</i>
PN We	<i>The Place-Names of Westmorland, Parts 1 and 2.</i>
PN Wo	<i>The Place-Names of Worcestershire.</i>
PN WRY	<i>The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Parts 1–8.</i>

A place-name which we may provisionally reconstruct as *Strēoneshalh* is found once in Worcestershire (cf. PNWo 144) and twice in the North Riding of Yorkshire (cf. PNYNR 13, 126). Worcestershire also has an apparent weak equivalent *Strēonanhalh* (or *Strēonhalh*) (cf. PNWo 89). These names have been the cause of a great deal of as yet inconclusive discussion. I shall outline the problem and propose a novel solution.

We must concede at once that the first element may be the personal name *Strēon(a)* which is inferrable from and attested in compounds.<sup>1</sup> However, as many have observed before, including most recently Margaret Gelling,<sup>2</sup> it is very odd that every time this personal name crops up in a place-name it should be with a second element *halh* 'corner, nook', 'angulus, hyrne'. (I disregard Ekwall's "discovery" of *Strēon* in *Ingestre* (Staffordshire)<sup>3</sup> as questionable because of the recurrent final *t* or *d*). I think it is more reasonable to assume that the keyword is a genitival lexical compound,<sup>4</sup> but what it means is open to debate.

In OE (*ge*)*strēon* means 'gain, the reward of labour', in contradistinction to *hord* 'treasure, hidden or laid-up wealth'. Metaphorically *hord* is also 'natural endowment', as in *hordcofa* 'heart', *feorhhord* 'soul', *brēosta hord* 'spirit' and the like. It also in the

same vein, covers inherent characteristics, as in *fācen* 'deceit', which is a *hord unclāne*. We can see in *hord* a core meaning of 'hidden, stored or permanent wealth' (cf. *wyrmhord* 'buried treasure', *wordhord* 'vocabulary'); whilst *(ge)strēon* is 'naturally increasing value', 'natural increase', and in the fulness of time 'patrimony, interest, profit, business, rapine' - a natural semantic development. There is a more humane side to *strēon*, though - it means 'procreation'; 'offspring', and this too can be seen as a natural meaning in the semantic area INCREASE. It has been claimed (OED) that the word in OE never meant 'offspring', but it certainly did in early ME.<sup>5</sup> The related verb *strēonan/striēnan* certainly could mean 'beget'. It is therefore not strictly justified, but it is by no means implausible, to explain our keyword in the light of these facts.

What, then, of *Strēoneshalh*? It has been suggested<sup>6</sup> that the name means 'place won by hard word', e.g. 'drained, reclaimed land'. This would be quite compatible with the use of *halh*, one of whose typical meanings is 'outlying or projecting area of a parish'. However, I cannot envisage a polder on top of the cliffs at Whitby (NRY), one of the locations of our name. It could by this token mean 'marginal land', but perhaps we would not then have expected *Strensall* (NRY) to have achieved parish status, under such adverse conditions. (How many *Starve Acres* or suchlike have even become hamlets?) Following the sense of 'begetting', we could guess that it meant just the opposite, e.g. 'fertile

land'; but if so we might conversely have expected more than one of the locations to achieve parish or manor status. This meaning also does not go very well with *halh* as in some way outlying land.

I suggest rather that the name-form is an OE equivalent of *Love Lane* - 'secluded spot used by lovers'. There exists a variety of such names in later times (e.g. *Maiden Lane*, *Petticoat Lane*, *Smock Alley*<sup>7</sup>). This assumption has a useful spinoff in the case of the aberrant weak tenth-century example from Worcestershire (document 1139 in Birch's *Cartularium*, 1370 in Sawyer's list) *strēon halh*, *be strēonen halæ*. A simpler solution than assuming there was also someone called *Strēona* or a profiteer who also happened to have a *halh* is to postulate a confusion between *strēon* (-es, gen. sg.) and *strēne* (-an; gen. sg.) an attested form of *streōwen* 'bed, palliasse', recorded as early as MS Cotton Vespasian A 1, an early ninth-century document, if we follow Sweet.<sup>8</sup> This latter occurs as *strēon* in Codex Exoniensis<sup>9</sup> and in the Psalms (Vossius).<sup>10</sup> Equally, then, the form *Strēnanhalh* would be open to the interpretation 'loving Corner' or more specifically 'begetting Corner', and would be a folk-etymologised form of our keyword.

If anyone is tempted to wonder whether secluded spots for lovers are any more likely to become hamlets than *Starve Acres* are, they should note that certain analogous names to our 'Loving Corner' indeed refer to

habitations; e.g. *Lovedean* (Hampshire) (c.1350 *Levedene*; 1422 and 1426 *Loveden*; from information supplied by Catherine Coutts); *Smock Alley* (West Chiltington, Sussex) and the like.

I conclude, then, that although no absolutely rigorous linguistic case can be made for the gloss *Strēoneshalh* - "Loving Corner", I have produced a conjecture that has the merit of permitting a simple explanation of the weak Worcestershire form. The Ladies of Whitby Abbey would then have sublimely spiritualised a place of *(ge)streōn*.

NOTE: I am indebted in this note to comments by Roger Lass, both as an Anglicist and as a methodologist; not that he necessarily has any time for excessively delicate semantics.

RICHARD COATES

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Cf. W. Stevenson, note in *The Academy* 11/7/1885.
- 2 *Signposts to the past*, Landen, Dent (1978) p. 189.
- 3 *Dictionary of English place-names*, Landen: Oxford University Press (1960) p. 264.
- 4 Cf. Tengstrand, *A contribution to the study of genitival composition in OE place-names*. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell (1940).
- 5 Cf. Early English Text Society, *Old English Homilies*, 2; 19, 24.
- 6 Ekwall, *DEPN* p. 450.
- 7 Cf. Neale, *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 114 (1976), p. 334.
- 8 H. Sweet, *The Oldest English texts*. London: Early English Text Soc. (1885) p. 184.
- 9 Thorpe's edition 337, 22.
- 10 'Vossius' Interlinear Psalms, MS Bodley Junius 27.