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The place-name Annesley

Carole Hough (pp. 45–49)

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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 1–6.</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 1–6.</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> |

The Place-Name Annesley

Carole Hough

Annesley in Nottinghamshire is a place-name of uncertain origin, generally taken to represent a compound of an unattested Old English personal-name **Ān* with OE *lēah* ‘a wood, a clearing, a glade’. This derivation was tentatively suggested by Ekwall¹ and repeated equally cautiously by the editors of the Nottinghamshire volume of the English Place-Name Survey.² In more recent years, however, caution has been thrown to the winds, and the interpretation ‘Woodland clearing of a man called **Ān*’ is presented as a certainty in the latest place-name dictionary.³ The purpose of this note is to point out that the etymology is by no means secure, and to draw attention to alternative possibilities.

Early spellings of Annesley, as assembled by the editors of *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire*, are as follows:

Aneslei 1086, *-le(i)a* 1166, 1176, 1181, *-lega* 1175, 1186, 1221-30, 1232, 1240, *-lee*, *-ley(e)* c.1180, c.1250, 1287

Anisleia c.1190, *Anyslegh* c.1250

Anseleia c.1190, *Anseleye* 1318-25

Annesleia 1194, c.1200, *-leg’* 1218, 1275, *-lay*, *-ley(e)* 1280-97, 1300, 1302, 1318-25, 1353, t.Hy 8

Anelegh 1220

Ansley 1590, *Annesley al. Ansley* 1722⁴

The second element is undoubtedly OE *lēah*, while the first would appear to be a noun or personal-name in the genitive singular, comprising or beginning with the letters *an*. It is far from certain that this is an Old English personal-name. Ekwall’s suggestion was supported by comparison with the place-name Onesacre in the West Riding of Yorkshire, recorded in Domesday Book as *Anesacre* and

believed to contain the same unattested personal-name.⁵ The county survey now available for the West Riding of Yorkshire attributes both Onesacre and the neighbouring place-name Onesmoor to an attested Old Norse personal-name *Án*,⁶ and this means that there is no external evidence for the existence of a cognate Old English name. ON *Án* might well occur also in the Danelaw county of Nottinghamshire, but a Scandinavian personal-name would be rare in combination with OE *lēah*.

There are further possibilities. A personal-name **Ān* would, as Ekwall proposed, derive from OE *ān* 'one',⁷ which itself occurs in place-names.⁸ It may be no more than a coincidence that OE *ān* also combines with OE *lēah*, as in Olney, Northamptonshire (*Anelegh, boscus de Aneleg* c.1220),⁹ and Anley, West Riding of Yorkshire (*Anele, Anlei(e)* 1086) 'lonely clearing'.¹⁰ Since OE *lēah* is, as Gelling comments, 'certainly the commonest topographical term in English place-names',¹¹ its occurrence in some names with OE *ān* is not statistically significant; and it would be difficult to make sense of a genitive singular formation in such a context. It is, however, possible that a medial syllable has been lost from the place-name before the date of the earliest extant spellings.¹² In this connection it may be relevant that OE *ān-* forms a number of compounds which themselves occur in place-names.¹³ Of these, OE *ānsetl* 'hermitage' appears to combine exclusively with OE *lēah*, and may be another candidate for the first element of Annesley. The word is recorded only once in the extant corpus of Old English literature, within a manuscript of the *Benedictine Rule*,¹⁴ but it also occurs (as *ansætleh*) in a tenth-century charter relating to the see of York,¹⁵ and appears to form the first element of the place-names Ansley in Warwickshire¹⁶ and Anslow in Staffordshire.¹⁷ In both instances, the second element is OE *lēah*, and it may be that the same formation is represented in the Nottinghamshire place-name Annesley. Recorded spellings of Annesley contain no examples of medial *-t-* or *-d-* to support such a derivation, but the consonant is also missing from many early spellings of Ansley. Alongside forms such as *Anesteleye* 1235 and *Anestlege* 1247 assembled by the editors of the Warwickshire volume of the English Place-Name Survey are the following:

Hanslei 1086

Aneslea 1174, 1175, *-lega* 1221, 1241

Ansley 1426, 1458, *Anseley* 1434, 1535, *Anceley* 1550, 1605,

(*al Ansley*) 1618, *Annesley* 1547.¹⁸

Some of these bear a close resemblance to the spellings cited above for Annesley, Nottinghamshire. For instance, forms with *Anes-* are recorded for Ansley between 1174 and 1241 and for Annesley between 1086 and 1287, spellings with *Anse-* are recorded in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries for Ansley and in the late twelfth and early fourteenth centuries for Annesley, spellings with *Annes-* are recorded in 1547 for Ansley and frequently from 1194 for Annesley, and spellings with *Ans-* are recorded in the fifteenth century for Ansley and in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries for Annesley. This raises the possibility that the two place-names may derive from the same origin, a medial *-t-* having dropped out of Annesley at an early stage.

It should be noted that the etymology of Ansley itself is not wholly certain.¹⁹ The editors of the English Place-Name Survey for Warwickshire describe it as 'a difficult name',²⁰ and Ekwall's *leah* with a hermitage²¹ has tended to be accepted for want of a more plausible solution.²² It is in fact unusual for OE *leah* to combine with a word for a structure, and although Gelling describes Ansley as 'the sort of exception which proves the rule',²³ this hardly accounts for the recurrence of the same unusual formation elsewhere. Formally, the name could refer to possession by a hermitage, as suggested by Johansson for the charter spelling *ansælleh*,²⁴ but it is very doubtful whether a mere hermitage – as opposed to a minster church – would have acted as a land-holder in this way.

Notwithstanding the fact that the interpretation of Ansley is problematic, I wish to suggest that the same formation may occur in Annesley, Nottinghamshire. I would posit an original OE **ansettes leah* 'glade with a hermitage' as one of several possible etymologies for the latter place-name. A derivation from an unattested personal-name can no longer be regarded as acceptable.²⁵

Notes

1. E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 1st-4th eds. (Oxford, 1936-60), s.n. *Annesley*.
2. J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire*, EPNS 17 (Cambridge, 1940), 112.
3. A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Oxford, 1991), 10, s.n. *Annesley Woodhouse*.
4. Gover et al., *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire*, 112.
5. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.n. *Annesley*. Gover et al., *The Place-Names of Nottinghamshire*, 112, refer to a place-name Onesacre in Staffordshire, but I cannot trace this and suspect it to be an error for the Yorkshire Onesacre.
6. A. H. Smith, *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, 8 vols., EPNS 30-37 (Cambridge, 1961-63), I, 225-6.
7. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.n. *Annesley*. A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, 2 vols., EPNS 25-26 (Cambridge, 1956), I, 9-10, s.v. *an*.
9. J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Northamptonshire*, EPNS 10 (Cambridge, 1933), 44. Another occurrence of the same formation may be represented in Onley, Northamptonshire (*ibid.*, 14).
10. Smith, *The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, VI, 151.
11. M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, 1984), 198.
12. The loss of a medial syllable is a common occurrence in English place-names. A useful discussion in relation to the shortening of Romano-British names is presented in M. Gelling, *Stiposits to the Past: Place-Names and the History of England* 2nd ed. (Chichester, 1988), 54-5.
13. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, I, 11-12, s.v. *anli(e)pig*; I, 12, s.v. *anset*; I, 12, s.v. *ansiga*. The most recent discussion of OE *ansiga* is in Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, 63-4.
14. A. C. Amos and A. d'P. Healey, *Dictionary of Old English* (Toronto, 1986-), Fascicle 4, 1359, s.v. *an-sel*.
15. W. de G. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 3 vols. and index (London, 1885-99), III, 577, No. 1278; P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography*, Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks, 8 (London, 1968), No. 1453.
16. J. E. B. Gover, A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, EPNS 13 (Cambridge, 1936), 75-6.
17. Anslow has not yet been covered by the English Place-Name Survey for Staffordshire, of which only one volume has so far appeared, but the etymology is supported by the spellings *Ansedl[ega]* c.1180, *Ansedlee* 1300 cited by Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.n. *Ansley*. It is particularly unfortunate that a comprehensive collection of early spellings is unavailable for comparison with those for *Annesley* and *Ansley*.
18. Gover et al., *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, 75-6.



19. The level of certainty does not justify the inclusion of the place-name within the headword entry for *an-sel* in Amos and Healey, *Dictionary of Old English*. Indeed, it seems an odd choice, since more secure place-name occurrences are regularly omitted from their other headword entries.
20. Gover et al., *The Place-Names of Warwickshire*, 75-6.
21. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, s.n. *Ansley*.
22. For instance, K. Cameron, *English Place-Names 3rd ed.* (London, 1977), 130, gives *ansel* without discussion as the first element of *Ansley* and *Anslow*, 'both meaning "glade with a hermitage";
23. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, 206.
24. C. Johansson, *Old English Place-Names and Field-Names Containing Leah*, Stockholm Studies in English 32 (Stockholm, 1975), 43.
25. I am grateful to Barrie Cox for his comments on an earlier version of this article.