

**JOURNAL OF THE
ENGLISH PLACE-NAME SOCIETY**

Volume 49

2017

including the 93rd Annual Report
for the year 2017

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ISSN 1351-3095
Nottingham 2018

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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 1–8</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 meaning of *lēah*

Sarah Wager

Studies of topographical place-names in England have been, and remain, a very important part of the research which develops or refines understanding of the meaning and significance of various place-name elements (Carroll and Parsons 2013: *passim*). The detailed work of Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole (Gelling 1984; Gelling and Cole 2014), which has greatly advanced knowledge and understanding of this type of place-name, has been given due recognition (Carroll and Parsons 2013; Cullen 2013; Ryan 2011a). However, the Old English (OE) noun *lēah*, described as ‘incomparably the commonest topographical term in English place-names’ (Gelling and Cole 2014: 220), and usually appearing in place-names ending in current spellings of *-ley*, *-ly*, or *-leigh*, continues to be of special interest, because uncertainty remains over its meaning and therefore over what its use tells us about early medieval topography and society. This paper seeks to throw more light on both the distribution of place-names containing *lēah* and the meaning of the word.

The standard work on English place-name elements cited a definition published a century earlier, ‘a wood, a clearing in a wood’ (EPNE 2 18, citing Leo 1852). Although the entry explained that in literary contexts the use of *lēah* was infrequent and that, with one exception, ‘the few examples that occur are not decisive as to meaning’, the author concluded that the meanings most likely to occur in place-names included both ‘wood’ and ‘clearing’ (EPNE 2 18–19). The reasoning which led to this conclusion will be examined in this paper, together with subsequent discussions about *lēah*. This dual meaning is also given in a recent dictionary of English place-names (Watts 2004: xlvi–xlvii). The Institute for Name-Studies at the University of Nottingham is reviewing all of England’s place-name elements in order to replace the EPNE volumes with a much more detailed dictionary (Parsons and Styles with Hough 1997; Parsons and Styles 2000; Parsons 2004), but this project, which is to include minor place-names, has no immediate plans to publish any work on elements starting with the letter

'1'.¹ In the meantime the Institute's 'Key to English Place-Names' gives the translations 'a forest, wood, glade, clearing; (later) a pasture, meadow'.² A. H. Smith (EPNE 2 18–20) cited the meanings of cognate words in other languages, but relied chiefly on place-names themselves to discuss the meaning of *lēah* in those names. Gelling (1984: 198) adopted the same approach, declaring that the 'massive testimony provided by place-names ... is the main evidence for the word's meaning'. The present paper proposes that the way in which place-name evidence has been used and interpreted is the key to the duality of meaning which has been attached to *lēah*.

There have been earlier studies of the dual meaning which has been attached to *lēah*. A detailed study published by Christer Johansson (1975: 7) expected that a curious reader might be 'baffled' by the usual translations of place-names containing *lēah* as either 'wood' or 'glade', because those 'words seemed to be antonyms rather than synonyms'. A year before that study appeared, Gelling (1974) had published an article in which she tried to resolve the dichotomy by suggesting that isolated names containing *lēah* were likely to refer to woods in open country and clusters of settlement names containing *lēah* might refer to woodland clearings. This suggestion was repeated in subsequent publications and applied in detail to parts of the West Midlands, including Cheshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire (Gelling 1984: 199; Gelling and Cole 2014: 220, 237; Gelling 1992: 6–19). Within the last decade this suggestion has been rejected and a solution proposed by combining both meanings. Della Hooke (2008a: 374, 376) has suggested that *lēah* denoted 'patches of open woodland used as sources of timber as well as wood-pasture' and advised that the starting interpretation of *lēah* should be 'as wood – but wood of a characteristic open type – or wood pasture rather than clearing'. A subsequent suggestion was that 'an interpretation as "wood", albeit an open wood, should always be considered before that of "clearing"' (Hooke 2012: 185), and this line has been followed in other publications (Hooke 2011: 154; 2013: 34–35, 43; 2017: 13–14, 16, 18). Richard Coates (1989: 10–11) had earlier reached a similar conclusion, describing the two meanings as 'not really incompatible', in the sense that a word meaning 'wood' could be applied metonymically to a place in a wood.

Whilst the debate has continued, scholars writing about the early medieval landscape have chosen to translate *lēah* as either 'wood' or

¹ See the Institute's website: <<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ins/vocabulary.aspx>>.

² Available at: <<http://kepn.nottingham.ac.uk/#>>.

‘clearing’, sometimes both, and sometimes ‘wood pasture’ (e.g. Costen 1994: 102; 2011: 110; Everitt 1986: 129; Higham 2004: 15–16, 27–28, 30, 102; Banham and Faith 2014: 155; Tinti 2010: 219; Wareham 2013: 195; Rackham 1990: 46, 107; Blair 1994: 25). This uncertainty over the meaning of the word is unhelpful for people interested in the topography of early medieval England and what that may tell us about social and economic development in that period. It also does not sit comfortably with a basic principle of Margaret Gelling’s studies, one which has been described as the most important of her findings about topographical place-names: the precision of such names (Cullen 2013: 163–67). In the spirit of her express hope that her studies would encourage others to undertake field-work into local topography and refine her conclusions (Gelling 1984: 8), this paper seeks to move towards precision in the meaning of *lēah*. It will examine critically the nature and strength of the evidence which has been used hitherto and particularly why what seems to be conclusive evidence for a more precise meaning has not been generally accepted.

Although Johansson’s study (1975) relied chiefly on the evidence of place-names themselves in order to investigate what its author called ‘the problem presented by *lēah*’, it also included other types of evidence. After considering the evidence for the meaning ‘wood’, that study proceeded to make what the author described as an ‘equally strong case’ for *lēah* meaning ‘glade’ or ‘clearing’. However, the evidence then cited was essentially different in kind from that given for the meaning ‘wood’ and was much stronger (Johansson 1975: 31). Two direct translations of the noun *lēah* have survived. An original charter dated to 805 deals with two sulungs of land in Bochoht, Kent (S40; Brooks and Kelly 2013: 480–81). The text is in Latin and states that the two sulungs (*aratra*) were called by some people *campus armentorum, id est Hriðra leah*, a phrase which has been translated as ‘a field of oxen, that is *Hriðra leah*’. In another Latin text, by Asser in the late ninth century, the meaning of the name *Aclea* is explained in the phrase *id est ‘in campulo quercus’* ‘that is, the little field of the oak’ (Johansson 1975: 31, citing Stevenson 1904: 6). To these two direct and authentic translations may be added information from a recent study of place-names on the Welsh side of the border with England which has stated that ‘Old English *lēah* has been accurately translated by Welsh speakers as *llannerch* “glade, open space”’ (Morgan 2008: 208, 210).

Little importance seems to have been attached to these apparently incontrovertible meanings. Despite the translation of *Hriðra leah* being cited as the ‘one exception’ to the statement that literary examples of the word were ‘not decisive as to meaning’, the standard work on English place-name elements effectively proceeded to make a case that the

exception was not decisive either (EPNE 2 18–20). Both of the direct translations into Latin come from the ninth century, the former from the beginning of that century. It could therefore be argued that the period between the adoption of OE and the ninth century was long enough for a change to have occurred in the meaning of the noun *lēah*. However, whether it is reasonable to propose that during that period the noun had changed its meaning from ‘field’ or ‘open space’ to an apparently opposite meaning ‘wood’ is questionable, especially when the meaning ‘open space’ is supported by the etymology of *lēah*.

Etymology

Johansson (1975: 8–9) drew on the work of several continental scholars to provide an etymology which explained that OE *lēah* came from an Indo-European (IE) root **leuk-* ‘light, shine: see’, and an IE word *louko-s*, which gave rise to Primitive Germanic (PrG) **lauh-*. This in turn was given as the source not only of the OE noun *lēah*, translated as ‘wood; glade’, but also of cognate nouns in other north European languages, including Old High German (OHG) *lōh*, translated as ‘grove; bush-grown clearing, undergrowth’ and Old Norse (ON) *ló*, ‘clearing, low-lying meadow’, also Latin *lūcus* ‘grove’. The Latin cognate is known from classical Latin, but the 1975 study did not attach a chronology to the development of the cognates in the north-west European languages. Nor was there any explanation of the apparent divergence in meaning, with translations of the German word concerned solely with woods, the ON term being confined to open ground, whilst both meanings were attributed to the OE noun. A recent dictionary, covering PrG alongside OHG, cites the compound *dornlōh* in OHG from the end of the eighth century and confirms the translation of *lōh* as various types of woodland (Lloyd and Springer 1988: viii). However, the same dictionary’s translation into modern German of the earlier, PrG word is ‘heller Platz, Lichtung’ with no reference to woods (Lühr 2014: 1421–22). ‘Heller Platz’ means ‘light place’ and ‘Lichtung’ has been translated as ‘light place, clearing/opening’ (Messinger 1964: 288, 433, 372). No explanation is offered for the change in meaning between PrG and OHG.

Although these translations of the cognate nouns in the languages of north-west Europe suggest a divergence in meaning during the respective development of these languages, the translations attached to them when used in place-names seem to tell a different story. They seem to carry the same duality of meaning as that which has been attached to OE place-names containing *lēah*. German place-names containing the elements *-loh(e)-*, *-lo-* and *-(e)l* have been given meanings of ‘wood, grove, copse;

woodland with few trees, used as pasture; woodland clearing'. In the area of the later Netherlands place-names containing *-loo-* and *-lo-* are said to denote 'wood, grove; open space in a wood, meadow' (Johansson 1975: 9–10).

It is possible for the meaning of a word to have been modified during the period in which the word was used in the formation of place-names. For example, a word which originally meant fence or hedge might come to mean an enclosure in the countryside formed by a surrounding fence or hedge, and a word which originally meant light could come to denote a space in the countryside which was well lit, hence the meaning 'clearing' which has been given to *lēah*. However, whether it is reasonable to expect a new meaning to be the opposite of the original is questionable.

The original root of the OE noun *lēah* points to the meaning associated with light rather than woodland. Johansson (1975: 8–9, 33) noted other words which came from the same IE root, including Greek *leukós* 'white', Latin *lūx* 'light'. He concluded that 'the meaning of IE *louko-s* was obviously approximately "an opening where there is light; an open space in the wood"' but added that 'It would probably not be very far from the truth to give *lēah* the meaning "woodland" in the language of the first Anglo-Saxon invaders.' Gelling (1984: 198) also explained that *lēah* was believed to be related to the OE word for 'light' and stated that the meanings 'glade' and 'clearing' were 'more obviously appropriate to this ultimate etymology' than meanings such as woodland. However, she then added that it seemed probable that the meaning 'woodland' 'was the earlier sense in English place-names'. The reason for this view is examined later in this paper.

Johansson (1975: 33) also noted that 'the word has been retained in modern, poetical usage' as 'lea', defined as 'a tract of open ground, either meadow, pasture, or arable land'. He explained that in Middle English (ME) it had the meaning 'a piece of open land; a field, meadow, lawn; an opening in a wood, a natural glade or a clearing'. These meanings match the original etymology of *lēah*. However, little importance has been attached to them in discussions about the OE word. The standard work on English place-name elements stated that the sense 'meadow, open land, lea' 'is really a very much later one found chiefly in poetic usage and in this usage there has been some confusion of meaning with *lǣs* "meadow"' (EPNE 2 18). However, more recently it has been pointed out that in the Anglian form of OE, *lǣs* was also the nominative plural of *lēah* and that

the ME *lea* and *ley* may also have their derivation from *lēah* (PN Le 2 252; PN Li 2 66).³

Both the original etymology of OE *lēah* and the meanings of its ME successors match the two authentic ninth-century translations of the word and support a meaning of ‘field’ or ‘open space’. When subjected to critical evaluation, evidence from place-names themselves supports these meanings.

Use of topographical place-names as linguistic and historical evidence

Topographical place-names have been, and continue to be, used as important evidence of the nature of the English landscape during the early medieval period. They refer to hill and vale, rivers and streams, roads and trackways and river crossings, moors, marshes, woods, fields, meadow and pasture. Often the OE words for these features are compounded with other nouns or adjectives to qualify the noun. The many compounds with *lēah* provide good examples of this; they refer to individual species of tree (oak, ash, willow, hazel, birch etc.), other vegetation (such as bent-grass), wild animals and birds (deer, boars, hares, mice, eagles etc.), woodland products (such as boards) and livestock (including calves, horses, and sheep), as well as the size, shape, site or ownership of the *lēah* (EPNE 2 18–19; Gelling 1984: 203–6).

As with all historical evidence, place-names must be used with care. Expert philological knowledge is needed to determine the etymology of a name from its earliest recorded spellings and this is sometimes difficult, because even the earliest records will usually long postdate the name’s creation (Gelling 1988: 11–14). A modern place-name ending in *-ley* may turn out to derive from another place-name element and not to contain *lēah*. It is very rare to have any evidence to suggest when an OE name was formed, even approximately, although there are a few examples with personal names known from documentary records (Gelling 1988: 181–82). The influence of Scandinavian migrants in the ninth and tenth centuries gives a *terminus post quem* for names with Danish or Norse elements, although debate continues over the chronology and contexts of these names (e.g. Abrams and Parsons 2004; Townend 2013). However, *lēah* was an OE word and could have been in use throughout the centuries in which OE was common speech. Gelling (2014: 237) drew attention to the relatively few examples of *lēah* amongst the earliest-recorded place-names and inferred from those examples that the word was not often used in place-names before the middle of the eighth century. She also suggested that it

³ These references were kindly provided by Jayne Carroll.

might have been used less frequently after about the middle of the tenth century and that it acquired an additional meaning of ‘pasture, meadow’ towards the end of the period. However, the frequent association of *lēah* with minor settlements, as well as some major settlements, could be the reason for its under-representation in early records, which tended to refer to places of national importance or of more than local significance.

An understanding of the sense of place-names is fundamental to another basic principle of onomastic studies. Once a name is given or adopted it takes on a life of its own and denotes a place rather than the original meaning of the word or words from which it was formed; it loses its original sense (Coates 2013). That is easy enough to understand when one looks at the modern form of some place-names which have been so changed from the original as to give little or no clue as to the original meaning. However, even when the origin of a place-name seems plain in the light of its earliest form and of expert information provided by philologists, those who use place-name evidence must be aware that the feature or features which prompted the name may have undergone significant change since the formation of the name and may no longer resemble the original.

Gelling (1984: 7) celebrated the ‘vast and subtle topographical vocabulary’ of the speakers of OE. She showed, for example, that they had different words for the different shapes of valleys and hills in the English landscape and that the distribution of certain nouns in place-names reflected regional and local differences in topography. The underlying geology of the English landscape has changed little over the centuries and it is possible, therefore, by comparing sites around the country, to identify the differences in hills and valleys which sprang from regional and local variations in geology and which were appreciated by speakers of OE, because these differences, unless they have been quarried away, are still visible in the modern landscape (Gelling and Cole 2014: *passim*). However, changing management of the land did not match the relative permanence of geological formation. An understanding of changes in land management is essential to a discussion of the meaning of *lēah*.

Much has been written about changes in land use during the early medieval period, and published studies reflect the growth in archaeological evidence and its interpretation. There are now thought to have been significant changes in the respective amounts of land used for agriculture or pasture, or left as moor, marsh, or woods. The reasons for such changes have been, and continue to be, much debated and may include decreases or increases in population as a result of disease, war or migration, and other social and economic developments; exact chronological and regional

variations remain unknown. Whatever the reasons for changes in land use, developments such as the creation of large open fields in some parts of England must have altered the appearance of the landscape in those areas. Successive changes in land use could have occurred throughout the period between the end of the Roman occupation and the Norman Conquest (Williamson 2013: *passim*; Banham and Faith: 141–43). To argue from a place-name, whether major or minor, that the nature of a place when first recorded is the same as when the name was formed, possibly centuries earlier, ignores the possibility, in the case of *lēah* one might even say the likelihood, of changes in land use. Unfortunately, this is exactly what has happened in some of the studies of *lēah* in place-names. The implications for the meaning of *lēah* of changes in ecology after a name containing that element was formed have been largely overlooked. Consideration of the nature of early medieval woodland, and of its propensity to change, is essential to a discussion about the meaning of *lēah*.

Early medieval woodland

The nature of some early medieval woodland can be inferred from documentary evidence of the uses of woods. There are references in Anglo-Saxon charters to pasture in woods and for rights to take building materials and fuel from woods (Hooke 2011: 145–61; 2010: 143–52; Rackham 1990: 44–45, 144). Although such records are available for only a small proportion of the country and relate only to the times at which the records were made they are nonetheless widely enough distributed in both time and space to give a general picture of woodland which was used and managed for these purposes. At the end of the early medieval period some of the information in Domesday Book reflects differences in management practice. The entries for a few counties distinguished coppiced woodland (*silva minuta*), managed to provide crops of wood and timber, and woods used for pasture (*silva pastilis* or *silva pastilis per loca* – ‘wood pastured’ or ‘wood pastured in places’) (Rackham 1990: 45, 48–54). Coppice is characterized by species of tree, such as hazel, which regrow from the stump after cutting to produce crops of wood; these may be interspersed with timber trees. Livestock need to be excluded from coppice woods, as they will severely damage the regrowth on newly cut coppice stools. Woods in which animals are pastured may also provide timber and fuel; the growth of saplings to replace trees which have been felled will depend on the intensity of grazing and browsing.

Domesday Book gives a broad indication of the uneven distribution, and in some regions the amount, of woodland (Rackham 1990: 50–52), although it does not show exactly where the woodland attached to

particular manors was situated. It is also possible that for some counties the Domesday record included only those woods which yielded income by way of customary dues from the tenants of the manor and omitted those which were reserved for the use of the lord (Wager 1998: 11–13).

The perception of England as a largely wooded country in which Anglo-Saxon invaders cleared woodland to establish settlements has long since been replaced by archaeological evidence of the distribution and density of Romano-British and early medieval settlement and agriculture and by research into the nature of woodland. Oliver Rackham (1986: 67), an acknowledged expert on the nature and history of woods in England, reminded readers that ‘Almost all land by nature turns into woodland.’ However, he concluded (2006: 112) from the evidence of archaeology and the analysis of preserved pollen deposits that, although there were some local increases in the amount of woodland after the Romano-British period, ‘there is no sign of a general or overwhelming increase’. Similar conclusions have been reached in recent archaeological studies, especially for southern Britain (e.g. Harrington and Welch 2014: 56–57; Williamson 2013: 216, citing Dark 2000: 81–129). However, it is the local increases and the susceptibility of woodland to local changes in land use which have most relevance to the meaning of *lĒah*.

Rackham (1990: 56) pointed out that ‘A clearing can arise as easily by the retreat of agriculture – by the surrounding fields becoming woodland – as by new fields being made.’ This has been acknowledged by David Horovitz (2005: 63). Tom Williamson (2013: 213–14) has written of ‘the instability of woodland’ in describing woodland regeneration and degeneration and has developed his argument in more detail (Barnes and Williamson 2015: 12–16) in discussing dynamic models of woodland vegetation and showing how some of Norfolk’s allegedly ‘ancient’ woods are secondary woodland, which regenerated during or after the late medieval period. Hooke (2011: 144) has also urged the need to understand the changes in the nature of woodland, pointing out that land use ‘rarely remained static ... and woodland was subject to cycles of clearance and regeneration’, particularly through the use of woods for pasturing livestock. She has argued (2008a: 366–67) that such use, clearly documented in the early medieval period, affected the nature and extent of woodland and that ‘wood-pastures can vary from almost open grassland to, as Rackham describes it, “a close approximation to woodland”, depending upon the amount of grazing practised and the methods chosen to control it’. It is this view of early medieval wood pasture as open and light, resembling some of the wooded commons of the later medieval period (Rackham 1990: 143–47), which seems to have led to the conclusion

(Hooke 2008a: 374) that *lēahs* were ‘patches of open woodland used as sources of timber as well as wood pasture’.

If *lēah* were to denote a wood which is open enough to let in light, then it should be just as applicable to woods enclosed and managed solely for wood and timber as to wood pasture with open areas. The traditional practice of harvesting underwood by cutting it on a rotational basis, that is, cutting all the coppice stools in one particular area of the wood one winter and moving to different areas in succeeding years, was established by the late medieval period. Although the extent of this practice, as distinct from wandering through a wood and taking out individual poles or trees according to the needs of the job in hand, is unknown for the early medieval period, it would have made sense to concentrate efforts in one area of a wood when larger amounts were required and when wood or timber of varying sizes was required or acceptable. It is also much easier to extract wood and timber when the adjacent coppice stools or trees have already been cut and removed and have left a space into which the next tree or crop of poles can be dropped. An area of coppice wood opened up in this way lets in the light, which allows spring flowers such as wood anemones, primroses and bluebells to bloom in profusion, and other wildlife to flourish, especially in the second and third springs after coppicing and before the regrowth on the coppice stools increasingly shades the area in subsequent years until the underwood is cut again (Rackham 1990: 38–45, 134). Coppicing on a rotational basis creates a succession of temporary clearings within the wood.

The evidence adduced by scholars for the meaning of *lēah* needs to be re-examined not only in the light of the ways in which woodland was managed, but also the instability of land which was not managed. The meaning ‘clearing’ implies that trees have been cut down to create an open space within a wood. Some open spaces in early medieval woodland may have been created in that way, and kept open by grazing and browsing animals or turned over to crops. However, it is also possible that open spaces within woodland were the remains of long-established, larger, open areas on to which adjacent woodland had gradually encroached or new woodland had developed when the larger area used for arable or pasture was reduced or neglected. The smaller spaces which remained, at that stage surrounded by trees, would have been little different in appearance to spaces formed by clearings. Irrespective of their origins, both types of space would have been open to light, in contrast to surrounding woodland.

Place-name evidence for the meaning ‘open space’

What has been termed the ‘internal evidence’ of place-names – the specific elements with which *lēah* was compounded at the moment when the names were formed – includes compounds showing that the *lēah* in question must have been an open space when named. These specifics refer to crops such as barley, wheat and flax, as in Barley, Wheatley, and Flaxley and Linley, implying that the *lēah* was agricultural land, or to wild plants such as bent-grass and heather, as in Bentley and Heathley (Johansson 1975: 26, 17). Places called Stoneleigh and Stanley were presumably characterized by stony ground (Johansson 1975: 123), which may have been visible only when cultivated.

It has been claimed that names referring to crops were ‘a very tiny percentage of the entire *lēah* corpus of names’ and that ‘it is not inconceivable that these were “catch crops” within a woodland clearing or on land that had been cleared of trees but continued to keep its *lēah* name’ (Hooke 2011: 157). This claim assumes that such land had a proper name, rather than being described using *lēah* as a common noun. If this were the case the original name was presumably either *lēah* in its simplex form or *lēah* compounded with a word which did not refer to crops. When the place was re-named with specific reference to a crop it would have made better sense to alter the generic part of the name at the same time and replace *lēah* with a word carrying the unambiguous meaning of the clearing or field in which the crop was being grown. The figures behind the claim that the percentage of names referring to crops was ‘very tiny’ relate to the place-names, minor and major, of Gloucestershire. They amount to four per cent (fourteen out of four hundred names); the figure for specific species of tree is described as ‘rather more’ and seventeen names ‘referred to the kind of domestic animals that might be pastured in a wood’ (Hooke 2008a: 375; 2012: 186). Figures calculated from early medieval records of place-names and field-names in *lēah* provide some instructive comparisons. About seven per cent referred to arable crops, the same for trees, approximately the same again for other wild vegetation, slightly lower for wild creatures, and also lower for domestic animals and for appearance or other qualities (sand, stones, rough etc.), slightly more for the shape or size of the *lēah*, and twenty per cent included personal names (Johansson 1975: 17–27). Taking all these figures, and the diversity of compounds, into consideration the proportion of names referring to crops cannot be dismissed. Moreover, it is unlikely that a *lēah* would have taken its name from temporary use such as a ‘catch crop’.

A similar pattern emerged from a recent study of ‘agricultural’ compounds with *lēah* which included names recorded in the late, as well

as the early, medieval period, but was confined to major place-names (Coates 2012). The study compared compounds with *lēah* and those with the habitative place-name element *tūn*. The etymological meaning of *lēah* ‘wood, glade’ was interpreted as ‘a natural clearing in the wildwood ... or perhaps one created by, and limited by, felling, having no constructed enclosure’ (Coates 2012: 212). Words for certain species of tree, oak, alder, ash, elm, hazel, thorn, sallow, willow, pear and plum, were compounded with both *tūn* and *lēah*, whilst some other species, aspen, birch, yew, and lime, were compounded only with *lēah*. The study suggested that the names ending in *tūn* may have denoted places with managed orchards and coppices or have been distinguished by a conspicuous tree of that species or have supplied produce from that species, whereas those ending in *lēah* may have denoted places in which the trees grew in the wild. For example, the frequency of ‘Appleton’ in place-names, contrasted with the absence of a compound of *tūn* with the ‘ancient derived form *apuldor* “apple-tree”’, may suggest that these places had an economic function related to apples rather than taking their name from a particular apple tree (Coates 2012: 218–19). Most words for crops and wild plants harvested for various purposes, domestic animals and products such as honey and butter, were also compounded with both *tūn* and *lēah*. Hooke (2012: 186–87) compared all types of specifics attached to *lēah* and *tūn* in place-names in the western half of Warwickshire, not just those which might be linked to agriculture, and found that ‘the prefixes used were surprisingly similar: with personal names being most frequent in both cases’, the exception being in respect of vegetation, with those for *lēah* being ‘more specific’.

Many of the specifics compounded with *lēah*, including personal names, adjectives referring to size, shape or situation, or ownership, could have been applied either to woods or open spaces. Others, such as buildings or meeting-places, were more likely to have been situated in open spaces than in woods. There are examples, in Anglo-Saxon charter bounds, of *lēah* in its simplex form, prefaced with a definite article, indicating use as a common noun rather than a name, but Johansson (1975: 37–38) concluded from the text of the charters that it was ‘impossible to say what *lēah* denotes in each case’. However, in the charter bounds for West Meon in Hampshire in 932 there is also a reference to an unnamed *wudu* ‘wood’ (S 417). The bounds for Cold Aston in Gloucestershire (S 414) included not only *lēah* as a common noun but also a compound place-name *Heort leage*, a wood with the name of its owner, a grove (*graue*) and a shaw (*sceagan*); the accompanying modern online translation has ‘small wood’ for shaw and

‘hart wood’ for *Heort leage*.⁴ Neither document gives the meaning of *lēah*, but the context in both implies that *lēah* was distinct from various types of woodland. Each of the three words for wood in these charter bounds has come down into modern English and all three modern words ‘wood’, ‘grove’ and ‘shaw’ are words for a wood. The same cannot be said for *lēah*.

Some land called *lēah* was presumably named when it was in use as pasture, especially in cases when *lēah* was compounded with words for livestock, as in Calveley, Cowley, Shipley and Horsley, but this does not mean that a *lēah* was necessarily wood pasture. The number of specifics which seem to relate exclusively to woods is no greater than that relating to crops or other plants characteristic of open ground. When the reasons why so much importance has been attached to allegedly woodland specifics are carefully examined, their weaknesses become apparent, and the specifics relating to crops therefore become more significant.

Evidence interpreted as supporting the meaning ‘wood’

Johansson (1975: 31) stated that words referring to trees, woodland products (stakes etc.), wild animals and heathen gods all pointed to *lēah* meaning ‘wood’. However, place-names such as Elmley, Oakley, Birchley, Ashley etc. could all have referred to a single tree, or a small group of trees, within an otherwise open space, or to the dominant species amongst trees surrounding an open space. People cutting stakes, poles (sometimes called yards), boards, firewood or timber from a wood need open space in which to sort and stack the produce before it is taken away; places called Yardley and Bordesley could derive their names from such a space. Wild animals, birds, and bees are just as likely, if not more likely, to be seen crossing an open space surrounded by woodland than amongst the trees and undergrowth of the wood itself. Although some heathen gods might have been associated with sacred groves, there was no automatic link between gods and woods.

Other evidence which has been used in support of the meaning ‘wood’ can be interpreted differently when onomastic principles are applied in the light of the instability of woodland. In accepting both ‘wood’ and ‘clearing’ as meanings for *lēah*, Gelling (1984: 198) concluded that the former was probably the ‘earlier sense in English place-names’, noting that the Weald of Kent and Sussex was called ‘both *Andredesweald* and *Andredesleage*’. The name *Andredesleage* is also presented in the standard study of English place-name elements (EPNE 2 19), by Johansson (1975: 29–30), and by Eilert Ekwall (1931: 97; 1960: 292), as evidence that the term *lēah* meant

⁴ Available at: <<http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/414.html>>.

‘wood’. (*Lēah* often appears in inflected forms of its masculine and feminine declensions, hence *lēage* in this name (Johansson 1975: 13–15).) *Andredesleage*, and the other wood-names which have been cited by scholars when discussing the meaning of *lēah*, deserve careful consideration in relation to the instability of woodland.

The name *Andredesleage* is known from a single occurrence, in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the earliest surviving copy of which has been attributed to the late ninth century, although it is apparent from the various versions of the Chronicle that this copy was based on earlier manuscripts (Swanton 2000; Bately 1986). The entry for the year 477, dealing with a Saxon invasion on the south coast, refers to *wudu* ‘wood’ and states that it is named *Andredesleage* (Bately 1986: 19). The reliability of the Chronicle in recording events which took place centuries before the recorded entry has been debated (Brooks 1989: 60–61; Yorke 1989; 1990: 3–4; 1995: 33–35). Even if the earlier part of the Chronicle is based on oral traditions which have some basis in fact, the appearance of *lēah* as part of the name of a wood cannot be taken as definitive evidence that *lēah* meant ‘wood’ when the name was formed. If the common noun *lēah* meant ‘wood’ then it might be asked why the writer of the annal for 477 used *wudu* instead of *lēah*. The first element of the place-name *Andredesleage* is derived from a fort of the Romano-British period, called in Latin *Anderitum* (Coates and Breeze 2000: 337). Presumed to have been situated in the hinterland of the fort, which was sited at Pevensey, Sussex, the *lēah* would have belonged to that place, rather than referring, as has sometimes been assumed, to the whole of the area covered by the Kent and Sussex Weald (Ekwall 1931: 97; Hooke 2011: 150; Whitelock 1961: 11; Swanton 2000: 14; Coates 1989: 10). However, oral tradition about a battle near Pevensey could have been established after *Andredesleage*, an open space when it was named, had become woodland. From what is known about the development of secondary woodland, it should not be assumed that *Andredesleage* was woodland when the name was given. Moreover, if place-names in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle were to be taken as reliable evidence of the meaning of *lēah*, equal weight would have to be attached to other apparently very early names ending in *lēah* which also appear in the Chronicle as reputedly being the sites of battles associated with the Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain. Barbara Yorke (1989: 86) has drawn attention to the apparent duplication of accounts of the arrival of the West Saxons in what became Hampshire and their victories in battles at places called *Natanleaga*, in 508, and *Cerdicesleage*, in 527. The record in the Chronicle for 508 states that afterwards the *lond* ‘land’ was called *Natanleaga* (Breeze 2000: 97; Johansson 1975: 110). The record for 527 refers to a

stowe ‘place’ called *Cerdices leaga*, but in at least two instances this has been translated as ‘wood’ (Johansson 1975: 59; Swanton 2000: 16). Under the year 584 the Chronicle records another battle with Britons in a *stede* ‘place’ which men called *Fethanleag* (Bately 1986: 24), and in at least one case this too has been translated as ‘wood’ (Swanton 2000: 16). However, the text does not describe any of these three places as a wood.

Both *Andredesleage* and *Natanleaga* have been cited as examples of names in which *lēah* was attached to large districts or regions (Johansson 1975: 29–30). It has also been claimed that there was a similar region in Worcestershire, called *Weogorena leage* (Johansson 1975: 29, 30; Ekwall 1931: 97–98). This regional theme has been continued by Hooke (2008a: 369–74; 2008b: 93, 95; 2011: 153; 2012: 182; 2013: 84) in citing *Weogorena leage* as evidence for the use of *lēah* to describe a wooded region, one which she has defined relatively recently as ‘woodland between the present [Wyre] forest and the river Teme to the south’ (2012: 182). Her views have received some support elsewhere (e.g. Williamson 2013: 221). However, this support is not universal and the assertion does not stand up to scrutiny in the light of the charter evidence and subsequent research.

As explained in the appendix to this paper, the boundary points given in the charter of 816, which contains the sole occurrence of the name, seem to indicate that the *lēah* of the *Weogorena*, although not a region or a district, was the name of an area of land apparently extending for about four miles from north to south and of uncertain width. It is presumably the size of this area which has led to this name, and other examples of place-names ending in *lēah* which were attached to large areas of land, being seen as a mixture of woods and open pasture rather than as a single wood or clearing. Hooke (2008a: 374; 2012: 186) has identified a hierarchy of names ending in *lēah* according to the size of the places to which they were attached and has suggested that those names associated with large territories were formed earlier than the rest. In addition to *Andredesleage* and *Weogorena leage*, this argument has been supported with two other examples of places in regions which were well wooded (Hooke 2008a: 369–74). One is *Earmundesleia*, thought to have included Appleton, Eaton and Bessels Leigh, places formerly in Berkshire but now in Oxfordshire, and to have been attached to a large area or district, despite the spurious character of two charters in which the name appears and which attributed eighty and eighty-three hides respectively to the place (PN Brk 2 443–44). The other is the medieval Groveley Forest in Wiltshire which has been identified with a name in an OE charter boundary, *grafan lea*; it has been suggested that the entry in Domesday Book referring to the *foresta de Grauelinges* was derived from that name (PN W 13; S 469; Thorn and

Thorn 1979: f. 74b). Whilst the place called *grafan lea* might have come to name the legal entity which was the late medieval Groveley Forest, there is no evidence that it denoted an early medieval wooded region of approximately the same extent. However, the association of *Earmundesleia* with a large area or district deserves consideration alongside the apparent extent of *Weogorena leage*.

A detailed discussion about how regions or districts acquired their names is beyond the scope of this paper, but the question is relevant to the meaning of *lēah*. *Weogorena leage* itself provides two examples of different ways in which such names could have been formed. As explained in the appendix, the element *Weogorena* arguably refers to a region. It has been taken to refer to a group of people, who gave their collective name to the territory which they controlled. Names of this type have been traced in various parts of England (Bassett 1989: *passim*). Although *Weogorena leage* referred to the name of a putative region it was not itself a regional name, instead designating a particular place within that region. Initially it could have been the name of a relatively small topographical feature and then have been used to denote a larger area which had a particular function within the region, economic, social or administrative. Many settlement names are attached not just to the spot in, on, or next to, the feature from which they were derived, whether that be a topographical feature, such as a ford, or an enclosure, building or group of buildings, but also to the surrounding land belonging to the settlement and its inhabitants. If one of these settlements was, or became, the central place from which a territory, containing other places with their own proper names, was controlled, then it is understandable that the name of the central place was used to designate the whole of the territory. In the case of a large territory such a name has been treated as a regional or district name. It should not be assumed that *Weogorena leage* and *Earmundesleia* were the names of large territories from the outset. They could have originated as the name of a relatively small topographical feature which then became attached to a larger area because of the social or economic importance within that area of the settlement which had taken its name from that feature. It should not be assumed that the names covered the whole of that larger area from the moment of their creation. The origins and inferred history of such names are demonstrably different from that of regional names derived from a ruling group. The variation in size of the places with names ending in *lēah* is likely to reflect developments in territorial organization during the early medieval period rather than any difference in meaning of the common noun *lēah*.

Some other names have been used as evidence that *lēah* meant ‘wood’. The bounds of land in Salwarpe (Worcestershire) were described in OE (S 1596). Part of the boundary clause, which was copied into a cartulary separately from a charter, runs ‘*betpynan ac pudu and pulle lea & spa æfre betpyx tham tpam pudan*’; this phrase has been translated as ‘between Oak wood and Pool *lēah* and thus always between the two woods’ (*pulle* is thought to be a mis-transcription of *pulle*) (Hooke 1990: 397–400; Johansson 1975: 115). The use of capital letters in the translation suggests that these phrases should be understood as proper names rather than descriptions of the local topography. The existence of two woods, one on either side of the boundary, is not in dispute, and one of them is presumably the oak wood. However, the other could have been either an unnamed wood which was part of the place called *pulle lēah* or an area of secondary woodland which had grown up on a piece of land which was named *pulle lēah* when it was still an open space. Woods often lay on the boundary of the land unit to which they belonged and were often described in the late medieval period as the wood of that place rather than having a proper name. Examples of this practice in the early medieval period occur in the OE description of the boundary of Crowle (Worcestershire). They included *be croh lea puda* ‘by Crowle wood’ and *into oddinga lea puda* ‘into Oddingley wood’ (S 1591; Hooke 1990: 384–85; Johansson 1975: 64, 110). The woods belonged to places called Crowle and Oddingley and were situated on the boundary of the lands attached to those places. Pool *lēah*, Crowle and Oddingley were place-names and in the context in which they appear should not be used to define the original meaning of *lēah*.

Other evidence which has been cited includes woods, recorded in the early medieval period, called *Stercanlei*, *Pohanlech* and *Trinlech*, and a wood and fields called *Earneleia* (Johansson 1975: 31). All these woods could have been secondary woodland, and have acquired their names before trees grew on the land to which the name was attached. In essence these names were no different from other names ending in *lēah* and described in Anglo-Saxon charters by words meaning place (e.g. Johansson 1975: 39–40, 42, 46, 47, 54, 57, 88, 89, 90, 142, 144). As argued above, the element *lēah* within them should be treated as part of a place-name, and not as a common noun.

***Lēah* in settlement names**

Recent study of *lēah* in settlement names has been influenced by ‘the opinion of Margaret Gelling based on her work in the Birmingham area that *tūns* are names of open country and *lēahs* of woodland’ (Coates 2012: 214). Gelling (Gelling and Cole 2014: 237–38) concluded from her 1974 study of the distribution of *lēah* and *tūn* that in areas where they are predominant types of settlement name:

They are mutually exclusive to a remarkable extent, and it can be demonstrated that *lēah* was the usual term for settlements in heavily wooded country and *tūn* for those in land from which most trees had long since been cleared.

The distribution map reproduced to illustrate this statement shows an area centred on Birmingham and extending from Derby and much of Staffordshire in the north to most of Warwickshire and Worcestershire in the south. It has been suggested (Coates 2012: 227–28) that:

a crude extra understanding of the distinction between *lēah* and *tūn* might be added ... *lēah* is suggestive of subsistence agriculture and *tūn* of more advanced farming practice, at least at a time when both elements were involved in active toponymic creation and therefore in semantic contrast.

There has been more research into the relationship between these two place-name elements and their significance. Rosamond Faith (2012; Banham and Faith 2014: 214) has supported the association of *lēah* with wood pasture, and related it to the importance of pastoral farming in many parts of England in the early medieval period. She concluded initially that a *lēah* ‘originally signified an area, not a specific place in the way that a *tūn* did’, but her more recent research has suggested that ‘some places with the element *lēah* in their names resembled the enclosed areas taken in from the woodland and surrounded by a boundary of some kind’. She noted, as Gelling did, the way in which many places called *lēah* entered the historical record in Domesday Book as settlements (Banham and Faith 2014: 214). Gelling went so far as to say that ‘Although technically topographical, *lēah* is for the most part a quasi-habitative term in settlement names’ (Gelling and Cole 2014: 220). However, this position is open to question.

Most of the comparisons between *lēah* and *tūn* have been based on major place-names. This has obscured the difference between the two elements in respect of minor place-names. Gelling herself acknowledged

(1984: 199) that a ‘thorough study’ of *lēah* would need to cover the names of farms and hamlets as well as other minor names. For names recorded during the early medieval period this was done by Johansson (1975: 27), who concluded that seventy-five per cent of the compound names in which *lēah* appeared were what he termed ‘field-names’ as distinct from place- or settlement names. This pattern is also reflected in the large number of minor names in *lēah* first recorded in the late medieval period but arguably much older. When these names occur within land units whose central settlement is known by a name ending in *tūn*, they are not taken into account in the distribution maps which have been prepared on the basis of major settlement names. Two examples may be taken from Warwickshire.

Sutton Coldfield, a large parish of over 12,000 acres which was first mentioned in Domesday Book and which has a name ending in *tūn*, includes places called Roughley, Walmley, Langley, Wyndley, Streetly, and Ley Hill, and in the late medieval period it also had *Wylnerdesleye* and *Ravennsley* and a wood called *La Lee*, now lost. No minor name ending in *tūn* has been recorded in the parish (PN Wa 49–52; Wager 1998: 67–69). Sutton is an example of the common type of name in which *tūn* is qualified by a directional term such as north, south, east, west, upper, high, lower (nether) and middle. It is arguable that such names were created when *tūn* had developed the meaning ‘estate’ and a large territory was subdivided, with one part of it being given a distinctive name, which described the whole of the subdivided part (Gelling 1988: 124). The territorial link was presumably uppermost in the minds of those who gave the name Sutton to the southern portion of a larger territory, rather than designating that portion by the name of one of the settlements within the area; perhaps this southern area was one of dispersed settlement with no central place. Whatever the reason, none of the various minor places with names in *lēah* was identified with, or used to name, the area covered by the ecclesiastical parish of Sutton. Yet these places, and the number of them, may be a better indication of the type of early medieval landscape in the area than the name of the parish. The large ecclesiastical parish of Wootton Wawen had places called Aspley, with the *færn læge* in the description of its boundary, *Teodeces leage* with the *ealdan læge* in the description of its boundary, *Wyttokesleye*, Mockley, Botley, Henley, Whitley, Foxley, and arguably the lost Domesday manor of *Donnelie*.⁵ Similar examples may be found in

⁵ There are early or late medieval records of all the place-names listed here. The early medieval charter with boundaries of *Teodeces leage* and Aspley is S 1307. For Botley, Henley, Mockley and Whitley see PN Wa 243–45 and for Foxley and Wyttokesleye the archives of King’s College Cambridge KCAR/6/2/181/11/WOW/90 and 66. For discussion about the site of *Donnelie* see Bassett and Wager 2017.

other counties. In her study of Wychwood (Oxfordshire) Beryl Schumer noted ‘the subsidiary nature of the *leahs*’ in manors whose principal settlement, as recorded in Domesday Book, had a name ending in *tūn* (Schumer 1984: 13). The debate about the relationship between *lēah* and *tūn* needs to take into account minor names.

The significance of minor names is also apparent when considering how Gelling (Gelling and Cole 2014: 237) tried to resolve the dichotomy of the dual meaning attached to *lēah* by suggesting that ‘isolated names containing *lēah* are likely to refer to woods in generally open country, where they would be jealously preserved’. She gave ‘as a clear example’ Elmley Castle, on the northern slopes of Bredon Hill in Worcestershire, describing the name ‘as a single item interrupting the ring of *tūn* names which surrounds Bredon Hill’. Woodland in Elmley is well recorded in the late medieval period, with references not only to the wood of the lord but also to a grove and pannage.⁶ Bounds attached to a lease dated 1042 refer to a hyrst, which may be translated as ‘wooded hill’ (S 1396; Hooke 1990: 362–65; Gelling and Cole 2014: 234). There was also woodland elsewhere on Bredon Hill in the early and late medieval periods, in Ashton-under-Hill,⁷ Grafton,⁸ Overbury,⁹ and Bredon’s Norton.¹⁰ The extent of early medieval woodland on Bredon Hill is unknown and some of it might not even have existed at the time Elmley was named. However, in Elmley Castle itself there are two minor names including *lēah*, *Bradley* and *Le Lee grove*, recorded in the late medieval period; the former of these could have

⁶ Worcestershire Record Office, 899:95 BA 989 – see in particular BA989/1/1 dating from 1348.

⁷ There are references in 1422–23 to *Ayssham Wode*, Worcestershire Record Office, 899:95 BA 989/1/15. Modern maps show a wood called Ashton Wood by the village of Ashton-under-Hill.

⁸ The first element of this compound place-name in the parish of Beckford is an Old English word for a wood which has become the modern ‘grove’ (PN Gl 2 43).

⁹ An Anglo-Saxon charter for Overbury (S 216) is regarded as ‘interpolated or untrustworthy’, but has a boundary clause in Old English. This clause, regardless of the suspicion attached to the charter itself, is presumably an accurate account of the bounds of Overbury at some point in the early medieval period; it includes two references to woods (Hooke 1990: 125–29). The wood (*bosco*) of Overbury is recorded in an undated, probably thirteenth-century deed, in accounts from the early fourteenth century, and in legal proceedings of 1275 (Worcester Cathedral Library, B606, C698; Röhrkasten 2008: 115).

¹⁰ A lease of land at Bredon’s Norton, on the south-western side of Bredon Hill, is dated to 1058 (S 1405) and includes a grove (*graf*) with its own boundary clause (Hooke 1990: 368–70).

been as old as the major place-name Elmley.¹¹ Therefore it should not be claimed that Elmley was an isolated name of this type. Even if the amount of woodland in the area was relatively small there could have been enough to surround two open spaces called a *lēah*, one of which was characterized by a single elm tree or a small group of elm trees or was situated within a wood in which elm was the dominant species. Minor place-names ending in *lēah* can be found in other areas in which major place-names of this type are scarce.

Warwickshire east of the Avon is one such region (Wager 1998: 155–56, 254). Gelling (1992: 14) drew a parallel between Elmley Castle and Ratley, the name of a parish on Edge Hill near to the Warwickshire and Oxfordshire border, overlooking the open country of the Warwickshire Feldon; she proposed that the meaning attached to *lēah* in this place-name should be ‘wood’.¹² Ratley appears in Domesday Book as *Rotelei* and in late medieval documents as *rottele*. The original suggestion was that the first element might mean ‘cheerful’ (PN Wa 272–73), but more recently the meaning ‘roots’ has been proposed (Watts 2004: 492). Woodland was assarted in Ratley in the twelfth century, when there were woods or groves called *Knichthe graue* and *estlee* (Wager 1998: 13–14, 154–55).¹³ If there was enough woodland in Ratley for assarts to be created in the twelfth century, the woodland in earlier centuries could have been just as extensive, or even more so, and have surrounded one or more open spaces. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the place had a mixture of woodland and agricultural land in the early medieval period, and that the name Ratley was given to a woodland clearing in which the roots of trees were still visible when the name was formed, and that the name *estlee* was given to another open space which by the twelfth century had become a wood.

The frequency with which *lēah* is found in the names of settlements can be explained by the suitability of open land amongst woodland as a potential site for human habitation, subject to other necessary conditions, such as a suitable supply of water. Areas with plenty of woodland were often characterized in the medieval period by dispersed settlement and

¹¹ Worcestershire Record Office, 899:95 BA 989/1/15 and BA 989/1/19. The spelling of the name Lee suggests a later coining (Jayne Carroll, personal communication).

¹² Gelling (1992: 14) also suggested the meaning ‘red wood’. The name was misprinted as Radley, possibly a confusion with the adjoining parish of Radway. However, the Domesday and later forms of the name do not sustain this meaning: Jayne Carroll, personal communication.

¹³ The meaning ‘red wood’ follows Gelling 1992: 14, but, as explained above, cannot be justified.

small-scale farming and by places called *lēah* which entered the historical record as farmsteads or minor settlements of unknown age. The evidence indicates that not all places called *lēah* were originally used for dwellings; some of the words with which *lēah* was compounded suggest other uses, including agriculture, pastoral farming, woodland products, collecting wild plants or hunting wild animals or wildfowl. Some places called *lēah* might have housed a group of families rather than individual farmsteads, later appearing as hamlets or villages. Some might have had relative local importance, being or becoming the site for the dwellings of a local lord and his servants and retainers and giving their name to the land unit over which their lord had control. They could have been locally important places before the end of the early medieval period. Some individual farmsteads were presumably used for subsistence farming, but others could have had a specialist function in a local land unit. Both types could have developed into larger or more diverse settlements over the centuries, especially with increases in population and other social and economic changes. The density of settlement and the organization of the rural economy and society in well-wooded areas are thought to have varied between and within regions, influenced by relief and drainage, climate, soils, and past land use, as well as by social and economic factors (Banham and Faith 2014: 201–21).

When minor and local place-names are taken into account in addition to settlement names, it appears that names ending in *lēah* were no more habitative names than place-names ending in other topographical terms which offered suitable sites for dwellings. Gelling (1984: 140) acknowledged such a similarity between settlements called *lēah* and settlements next to fords or on relatively low, flat-topped hills (*dūn*). Many places with names in *lēah* were simply very convenient places for human habitation and exploitation of local resources in areas with plenty of woodland, so convenient that the word came to outnumber other topographical terms in forming place-names in those areas.

Conclusions

Although much has been written about the topographical significance of place-names ending in *lēah*, especially their relationship to woodland regions and pastoral farming, there has been no effective review of the statements made about the meaning of the term. Although the standard work on English place-name elements treated *hriðra leah* as ‘decisive’ evidence for the meaning ‘clearing’, it nonetheless accepted a dual definition of ‘wood, clearing’ which was published in the middle of the nineteenth century and which cited *hriðra leah* on the one hand and the names of woods from Anglo-Saxon charters on the other (EPNE 2 18–20

citing Leo 1852: 101–2). EPNE also used the assumed interpretation of *Andredesleage* as evidence of the meaning ‘wood’ (2 18–19). Assertions about *Andredesleage* and *Weogorena leage* were made as long ago as 1931 and have been repeated with no questioning in the case of the former and only some modification in the case of the latter. The dual meaning attached to *lēah* is so well established that the editors of the most recent edition of the original charter in which the translation of *hriðra leah* appears interpreted the name as ‘wood or clearing (*leah*) of the cattle’ and described it as ‘evidently a reference to an area of wood pasture’ (Brooks and Kelly 2013: 483).

This situation exists despite the many and great developments in the study of early medieval England, covering its society, economy and topography, which have taken place over the last eighty years. In the context of those developments, when research into the nature of medieval woodland and basic onomastic principles are applied to the subject, together with better knowledge about surviving Anglo-Saxon charters, it becomes apparent that the evidence cited in support of a dual meaning for *lēah* can, and also should, be interpreted differently.

The conclusion from the available documentary evidence, especially that in which *lēah* appears as a gloss or in translation, is that the noun referred to a light area in the landscape, into which light penetrated in contrast with surrounding darker areas. Woods offered contrasting areas of darkness, which explains why *lēah* is associated with woodland. This association is not in question. The IE etymology of the word implies a contrast between light and dark, and in the English countryside woods are the most obvious source of darkness. Comparison with *feld*, another OE word associated with open land, is also useful. *Feld* has been defined as ‘open country’, an area which might have been within sight of woodland, but not surrounded by it, and where the wood might be some miles away on the horizon (Gelling 1984: 235–45; Gelling and Cole 2014: 270–71). The association of *lēah* with woodland explains its prevalence in areas known from other sources to have had plenty of woodland in the medieval period.

Some medieval woods carried a name ending in *lēah*, but they could have been either woods belonging to a settlement of that name or secondary woods which had encroached on to previously open ground after a name ending in *lēah* had been given to that open ground. Although some secondary woodland may have had a name ending in *lēah*, *lēah* did not

mean secondary woodland.¹⁴ On the contrary, the evidence leads to the conclusion that the secondary woodland did not exist when the name was given but developed subsequently when trees grew on what had been an open space. Many of the words compounded with *lēah* in place-names were trees or woodland products, but those compounds are compatible with open spaces within or adjacent to woods. Some places were named after crops or given names denoting bare ground; they must have been open spaces which were cultivated when they were named. Some of those open spaces might have been created by chopping down trees, but not necessarily; they might have been the remnants of larger areas of open land on to which trees had encroached. The translation ‘clearing’, apparently based originally on old, discredited assumptions that Anglo-Saxon invaders colonized a largely empty, untamed wooded country, is misleading.¹⁵ A ‘light area’ (amidst or surrounded by woodland) is a better translation, because it does not specify how the open space, with its contrast between light and shade, was formed.

This conclusion fits the evidence and also resolves the difficulties in the debate about the meaning of *lēah*. It matches the etymology of the word from its IE source. It removes the practical difficulties of having two contrasting meanings for the same word at the same time. It gives the term the precision which has been found in the rest of the OE topographical vocabulary but which has been wanting in the case of *lēah*. It explains why *lēah* appears so often in settlement names in woodland regions, and occasionally in areas with less woodland but enough to surround a few open spaces. It also explains why *lēah* was attached to places which were apparently not settlements but used for other purposes, depending on the site, size and natural resources of the *lēah*. A *lēah* might have been used for pasture, but ‘wood pasture’ is not a satisfactory translation of *lēah*, because in some cases the *lēah* was cultivated, rather than grazed or browsed, at the time it was named.

People who compiled boundary clauses in OE did not see a need to define their terms. For practical reasons they had a commonly understood vocabulary, including the meaning of *lēah*. If two opposite meanings were in use simultaneously there would have been no obvious choice of meaning in areas which had both woods and open areas within them. This would have affected those making a description of a boundary and any person reading the description. It would not have been possible for readers to

¹⁴ As has been suggested by Hooke (2001: 167; 2008a: 365), despite Wager 1998: 154–55.

¹⁵ This assumption was still current when Johansson (1975: 30–31) published his study.

comprehend the meaning of the word unless they knew the land being described. There would have been confusion instead of the precision which has been found in so many topographical terms. It could be argued that confusion would have occurred only if the opposite meanings were in use simultaneously, but if one contradictory meaning replaced the other over time there would have been some confusion during the transitional period.

The meanings given to cognate words in OHG and some other north European languages are one of the reasons why the meaning ‘wood’ has persisted in English place-name studies (EPNE 2 19). This reason is still cited in discussions about *lēah* (e.g. Hooke 2012: 186). It has to be asked whether these cognate words have been studied in the same way as the OE *lēah*, by looking principally at place-names, and are therefore open to the same scrutiny as this paper has given to the meaning of *lēah*. Moreover, as noted in the earlier section of this paper summarizing the etymology of the word, the older, PrG, meaning apparently had the restricted meaning ‘light place’, ‘opening/clearing’. Those who propose that the earlier meaning in English place-names was ‘wood’ do not explain why a word whose etymology has been traced back to an older word arising from ‘light’ first acquired the meaning ‘wood’, and then underwent another change in which the meaning reverted to the original association with ‘light’. They have used place-names in *lēah* which became attached to woodland to conclude that the original meaning of the OE word was ‘wood’, whereas the evidence suggests that the original meaning of *lēah* was not ‘wood’, and that its original meaning was a light, open space within darker woodland.

As with many other place-name elements, the period during which the common noun *lēah* was used to name places remains uncertain. However, this review of the evidence has found no grounds to support the theory that *lēah* underwent a major change in meaning during that period, or that it had different meanings in different types of landscape. It came down to us through ME and then into early modern English with a meaning derived from its original sense denoting open ground. It was used to denote light places, contrasting with relatively dark surroundings in the form of woods. It was essentially a topographical place-name element, but it described a common topographical feature whose natural advantages offered either a suitable site for dwellings or the opportunity to use open land in various ways to provide a living for the local inhabitants.

Appendix – *Weogorena leage*

The place-name *Weogorena leage* occurs only once in surviving records, in a charter dated to 816 and regarded as ‘authentic’ or ‘probably authentic’ (S 180; Tinti 2002: 254). The text of the charter, which is known from copies taken from a lost original, is relatively short and does not provide full details (Hooke 1990: 113–15). The cartularies into which this and other charters from the cathedral church of Worcester were copied have been the subject of detailed scholarly research covering their content, arrangement, purpose and context (Tinti 2010; Wareham 2013). This research and its conclusions have provided scope for reconsideration of the texts of individual charters. Careful study of the charter of 816 in the context of this research shows that it contains no convincing evidence that *Weogorena leage* was a large district or region.

The standard list of Anglo-Saxon charters equates *Weogorena leage* with Hallow (S 180). This is presumably because the charter of 816 was used as the basis for a much later, spurious charter in Hemming’s Cartulary (compiled at the end of the eleventh century to record those lands lost to the Church of Worcester and also those of the Church’s lands intended to support the monks of Worcester Cathedral Priory) in which *Weogorena leage* is not mentioned, but Hallow appears alongside some of the other places from the earlier charter, albeit with different bounds to those of *Weogorena leage* (S 179; Tinti 2010: 219; 2002: 254; Finberg 1972: 184–96). The evidence within the earlier charter, which is regarded as authentic or probably authentic, does not support the assumption that Hallow referred to the same area of land.

The charter of 816 granted exemptions from certain dues for various lands held by the cathedral church of Worcester, starting with three places, Whittington, Spetchley, and Tolladine east of the River Severn, and then naming *Weogorena leage*, which was described as lying west of the Severn and containing thirty *manentes*, a measurement equated to the hide (Ryan 2011b: 210). It also extended the exemptions to Chaddesley (further north in Worcestershire), which was said to contain twenty-five *manentes*. However, no figures were given in the charter for Whittington, Spetchley and Tolladine, an omission which suggests that the thirty *manentes* included these three places in addition to *Weogorena leage*; a gap in the manuscript (presumably owing to damage to the original by the time the copies were made) may have corresponded to a word referring back to these places (S 180; Hooke 1990: 113).

The first three places were described as having the River Salwarpe to the north and east and are then said to follow their known boundaries. The

reference to known boundaries is not helpful, but because the Salwarpe is about five miles north of both Whittington and Tolladine the charter must be dealing with an area of land significantly larger than the places currently holding those names (Kitson forthcoming). The river meanders near to its confluence with the Severn north of Worcester.

The boundaries given for *Weogorena leage* have been described as ‘far from clear’ and consist of only five boundary points, *Moseleage*, *Subbingwic*, *lapern*, *hagan*, and *Temedam* (Hooke 1990: 114–15). The first, third and last of these have been identified respectively as Moseley in the southern part of the ecclesiastical parish of Grimley, the Laughern Brook, and the River Teme, all in the area west of the Severn opposite to the city of Worcester, which is situated on the east bank. It is generally accepted that the Severn formed the eastern boundary of the land in question and that the boundary did not extend further north than Moseley. It has been claimed that it included Moseley (Hooke 1990: 118), but this was not necessarily the case. Gelling (1968–69) followed H. P. R. Finberg (1972: 184–85) in assuming that the boundary must have run approximately straight from the Severn to the eastern edge of Moseley, about a mile to the west of the river. They agreed that the boundary then ran to the Laughern Brook, passing by *Subbingwic* on the way, and followed the Laughern southwards towards its confluence with the Teme, a tributary of the Severn, and they concluded that it encompassed all the land between the Laughern and the Severn from Hallow Heath down to Powick Bridge, a strip measuring about four miles from north to south. There is no agreement over the location of *Subbingwic* and *hagan*. It has been suggested that *Subbingwic* might be an alternative name for Kenswick, which lies further west from Moseley (Hooke 1990: 115; Finberg 1972: 184; Kitson forthcoming). However, the area has several names ending in *wīc* (such as Wick Episcopi, Henwick and Rushwick) and as the first element of the place-name Kenswick is now thought to be Brittonic (Coates and Breeze 2000: 342) it seems unlikely that the name Kenswick replaced the OE *Subbingwic*. *Subbingwic* might have been somewhere in the northern part of Hallow between Moseley and the Laughern Brook. Hallow has been associated with *hagan* (Finberg 1972: 194–95; Hooke 1990: 115), but this been disputed (Kitson forthcoming; Hooke 1990: 114).¹⁶ The text of the charter implies that the boundary deviated from the Laughern to touch or encompass the *hagan* before joining the Teme. It must have included part of Hallow, but how much is

¹⁶ Finberg supports the identification. Hooke (114) questions the identification, but then (115) appears to accept it. Kitson (forthcoming) strongly disputes it.

unknown, and it must also have included at least part of the later ecclesiastical parish of St John in Bedwardine. The points at which the boundary joined and left the Laughern are unknown, as is the location of its junction with the Teme. The area enclosed by it could have been wider than the strip of land on the west bank of the Severn. If *Subbingwic* had been in or near to Kenswick the boundary could have joined the Laughern upstream and followed it westwards. This would have meant that the *hagan* was the only landmark for three miles or so from the Laughern southwards to the Teme. It has been suggested that the whole of this stretch of the boundary ran along a substantial hedge or *haga* on the existing tree-line west of Broadwas (Kitson forthcoming), but there is no place-name evidence to support this.

Uncertain as the bounds of the charter of 816 are, they give enough information to show that the land attached to *Weogorena leage* west of the Severn was not extensive enough to be defined as a region. However, the suggestion that *Weogorena leage* was once a region, and the charter's apparent, but questionable, assertion that all of the thirty *manentes* lay west of the Severn, have led to speculation that a district of that name corresponded to lands attached to *Wican*, which was the subject of another authentic charter, dated to 757 x 775 (S 142). The boundary clauses, one in Latin and one in OE, attached to a copy of that charter are thought to be of a much later date, possibly the eleventh century. They are stated to describe lands, in the plural, *adiacentium* 'near' or 'appertaining to' (Latham 1965: 7) *Wican* and include an area measuring approximately seven miles from north to south and four miles from east to west (Hooke 1990: 69–78). The original charter named only *Wican* and the land (in the singular) which belonged (*pertinet*) to it. The eleventh-century boundaries may have reflected a different economic and organizational context from that of the late eighth century, with *Wican* and *Weogorena leage* being separate places around the year 800. There is nothing in the text of the copy of the *Wican* charter and its later boundaries to substantiate the statement (Wareham 2013: 207) that the grant of *Wican* covered a thirty-hide territory.

Ekwall (1931: 97–98) concluded from the boundary points in the charter of 816 that *Weogorena leage* 'was a large district on the western side of the River Severn west and northwest of Worcester' and that it was 'obvious' that *lēah* could not mean 'a clearing' in that name but must refer to a 'forest district'. He argued that as *Weogorena* contains the same element as the names Worcester and Wyre Forest, *Weogorena leage* was 'the old name of the Wyre Forest and that the latter once embraced a very large district west of the Severn'. Gelling (1968–69) summarily dismissed the identification of *Weogorena leage* with 'the area later known as Wyre

Forest’, but remained open to the possibility that *Weogorena* referred to a Celtic district from which a folk-name was derived. More recent scholarship has concluded that this element is regarded as pre-Celtic (Coates and Breeze 2000: 342). The occurrence of this element in names which are several miles apart suggests that it had been used in the name of a region or the people who controlled that region. Other evidence points to a British territory centred on Worcester. A geographically coherent territory, extending for several miles on either side of the River Severn, corresponded to the area served by churches subject to the church of St Helen in the city, that church being of British, or even Romano-British, origin (Bassett 1989b). However, that does not mean that the *lēah* of the *Weogorena* was itself a region or even a district, any more than the city of Worcester was a region as distinct from a central place within a region.

Acknowledgements

Dr Steven Bassett and Dr Jayne Carroll kindly read earlier drafts of this paper and made very helpful comments on it. Comments from two anonymous referees were also helpful. Any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the author.

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