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The place-name Disley

Gillis Kristensson (pp. 7–10)

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ABBREVIATIONS OF COUNTIES AND EPNS COUNTY SURVEYS

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

THE PLACE-NAME *DISLEY*

Disley is the name of a rural district in easternmost Cheshire just on the boundary between Cheshire and Derbyshire. The village from which the district derives its name is about 10 miles south-east of Manchester on the main road between Buxton and Manchester. So far the meaning of the place-name has not been satisfactorily explained. In what follows the etymology of the name will be taken up for renewed discussion, and a suggestion for its derivation will be made.

The Place-Names of Cheshire Part I,¹ pp. 269 f, adduces the following early forms for DISLEY:

Destesleg' c. 1251 *For* (p), *Destlegh* 1394 Orm,² *Destellegh* 1471 *Min Acct*, *Distislegh* 1274 Orm² (p), *-leye* 1285 *Eyre* (p), *Di-*, *Dysteslegh* 1308 *Ipm*, 1354 *Dow et freq* to 1495 ChRR, *-ley* 1337 *Eyre*, *-le(e)* 1345, 1347 *ib*, *Dystysleg* 1337 *ib*,

Di-, *Dysteleg(h)*, *-le(e)*, *-ley(e)* 1286, 1288, 1289 (17) *Court*, Orm² *et freq* to 1533 ChRR, *Distelishethe* 1316 *Pat*, *Distell'* 1288 Orm,² *Distellegh* 1467 *Min Acct*, *Distilegh* 1495 Orm,² *Distilleighe*, *-aghe*, *-eithe* 1560 *Sheaf*,

Distley 15 ChRR, 1487 *Plea*, (*-leg(h)*) 1503 *ChFor*, 1535 *VE*.

DISLEY DENE: *Distesleghdene* 1341 *Eyre*, *Destlegh Deyne* 1394 Orm,² *Distley Deyn* 1535 *VE*, *Disteley Dean* 1548 *Earw*, Orm,² *Disley alias Deane* 1580 *Dep*.

The final el. of Disley is OE *lĕah* 'a clearing, a wood, a woodland glade' etc.; for the first el. different attempts at interpretation have been made. Ekwall (DEPN)² states that 'The forms suggest a pers.n. as first el., but no name is known that shows the form required. Near D ~ is DIGLEY [*Dyghleg(h)* grange 1287 *Court*]. This seems to be OE *dīc-lĕah*. Disley may have been named from the same dyke. *Dis-* might be an OE *dīc-stīg*.' Dodgson,³ however, declares that *Dyghleg'* belongs to Ditchley (in Dodcott cum Wilkesley) and that DEPN is therefore irrelevant. Smith⁴ suggests OE *dȳstig* 'dusty' as a first el., but

¹ J. McN. Dodgson, *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, Part I (EPNS XLIV), Cambridge, 1970.

² DEPN = E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, 4th ed., Oxford, 1960.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 270.

⁴ A. H. Smith, *English Place-Names Elements* (EPNS XXV, XXVI), Cambridge, 1956, s.v. *dȳstig*.

this is ruled out by the -s- at the end of the first el. in the early forms. That *dȳstig* is used as an Old English by-name **Dȳstig* 'Dusty' is improbable, though formally possible. Dodgson⁵ makes the interesting proposal that the first el. of Disley contains a compound with OE *-wist* 'being, existence; home; food, sustenance', the compound being OE **dæg-wist* 'the day's provision or sustenance' or OE **dāge-wist* 'dairy-maid's living'. To reconcile these compounds with the early forms of Disley, we must, however, posit unprecedented (and unlikely) sound-developments and reductions.

The early forms of Disley generally have *Distis-*, *Dystes-* as their first member. The place is situated in the area where OE *ȳ* (<*ǣ + i/j*) became ME *ī*, at least in certain words,⁶ and we may start from an OE word or compound with OE *ȳ* or *ī*. Now, there is a well-evidenced ME verb *dusten*, *desten* which may be connected with *Distis-*, *Dystes-*. MED⁷ assigns the meaning 'fling, thrust, throw, toss' to this verb, and the contexts where the verb occurs confirm that this is correct. OED⁸ (and MED following OED) assumes that the verb goes back to an OE **dystan* (<**dustjan*) on the grounds that *deste* occurs (for instance in Shoreham's *Poems*) beside *duste* and that *Ferumbras* has the rhyme *duste: vuste* 'fist'. Professor d'Ardenne⁹ agrees with OED (and MED) that the verb is native and, though uncertain about the quantity of the vowel,¹⁰ takes it to be 'an independent formation from the stem **dūs* seen in ON *dysja* cairn'. There can be no doubt that ME *dusten*, *desten* is a native word and contains the reflex of OE *ȳ*, though the quantity of the vowel cannot be definitely decided.

⁵ loc. cit.

⁶ Disley is just east of the [y(:)]/[i(:)]-isophone drawn by Moore-Meech-Whitehall, 'Middle English Dialect Characteristics and Dialect Boundaries', *Essays and Studies in English and Comparative Literature* (University of Michigan Publications, Language and Literature, Volume XIII), Ann Arbor, 1935. My forthcoming *A Survey of Middle English Dialects 1290-1350: The West Midland Counties* will present a somewhat different picture of the boundary between [y(:)]- and [i(:)]-areas. Suffice it to state here that Disley is in a district where in the early 14th century OE *ȳ* was retained in certain words (for instance OE *hyll* and *-byr(i)g*) whereas in other words it appeared as *ī*.

⁷ MED = H. Kurath and S. M. Kuhn (ed.), *Middle English Dictionary*, Ann Arbor, 1952-.

⁸ OED = *The Oxford English Dictionary. Being a Corrected Re-Issue . . . of A New English Dictionary*, ed. by J. A. H. Murray, . . . Oxford, 1933.

⁹ S.T.R.O. d'Ardenne, *An Edition of þe Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne*, Liège, 1936, p. 149.

¹⁰ d'Ardenne reckons with Germ **dust-* and **dunst-*, but there also existed a **dūs-* (and **daus-* which is irrelevant in the present case), v. J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern und München, 1948-59, p. 270.

Once OE **dystan* (or less likely **dȳstan*) is so well established, we may assume that from this verb was formed a noun with the well-known suffix *-isla*.¹¹ This suffix is commonly used in Old Germanic languages to form masculine nouns from verbs, especially weak *ia*-verbs of the first class. Old English examples are *bīgels* 'arch' from *būgan*, *tācels* 'boundary mark' from *tācan*, *hȳdels* 'hiding-place, cave' from *hȳdan*, *cnyttels* 'sinew' from *cnyttan*. A PrGerm **dustislaz* would be OE **dystels*, and might be compared with abstract nouns such as *byrgels* 'burial' and *rādel* 'riddle'.¹² An abstract noun meaning 'throwing' would easily come to mean 'something thrown (up)',¹³ 'what is thrown (up)' and thence 'mound' or something similar. d'Ardenne demonstrates¹⁴ that there is a frequent semantic connection between the notions of casting and piling. This is illustrated by the relation of ON *kǫs* 'pile, cairn', *kasa* 'bury', *kǫstr* 'pile', and *kasta* 'throw'. A word-pair OE **dystels* 'mound'—OE **dystan* 'throw' would go well with this pattern.

If OE **dystels* 'mound' is assumed to enter into Disley, the early form would be OE **Dystelslēah*. Here the first *l* would disappear through dissimilation,¹⁵ and *y* would be *i* in Disley.¹⁶ The minority form *Destes-* would be due to Middle English lowering of *i* to *e*,¹⁷ or to Anglo-Norman spelling-influence.¹⁸ A compound of OE **dystels* and *lēah* thus exactly suits the early forms of Disley, and makes good sense.

OE **dystels* is not recorded;¹⁹ nor is there any other evidence

¹¹ F. Kluge, *Nominale Stammbildungslehre der altgermanischen Dialekte*, 3rd ed. Halle, 1926, § 98; J. and E. M. Wright, *Old England Grammar*, 3rd ed., Oxford, 1925, § 598.

¹² Cf. Ekwall, *Selected Papers*, Lund, 1963, p. 34.

¹³ Comparison may be made with OE **wērpels* 'bridle-path', a derivative of *wēorpan* 'to throw' with the primary meaning 'something thrown' (perhaps in allusion to stones thrown down to form the path (e.g. across a marsh)), v. Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire*, Manchester, 1922, p. 123.

¹⁴ loc. cit.

¹⁵ On dissimilatory loss of *l* in place-names, v. Ekwall, *Studia Neophilologica* 17 (1944/45), p. 26.

¹⁶ see above fn. 6.

¹⁷ R. Jordan, *Handbuch der mittlenglischen Grammatik*. 2. Aufl. Bearb. von H. C. Matthes (Heidelberg, 1934), § 36.

¹⁸ R. E. Zachrisson, 'The French Element', *Introduction to the Survey of English Place-Names I* (EPNS I), Cambridge, 1924, pp. 112 f. Olof von Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest Personal Names of Domesday Book*, Uppsala, 1937, pp. 50 f.

¹⁹ The existence of an OE **dystels* is, however, corroborated by the form *Dustlesfeld* 1300 for Dustfield Fm (O). The same p.n. appears as *Dustesfeld* 1298 and *Dustefeld* 1608–9, v. *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, Part II (EPNS XXIV), Cambridge, 1954, p. 416. Dr. Gelling there states that 'the first element is probably the common noun *dust*, in spite of the *-s-* in the earliest forms'. In a compound of OE *dūst* 'dust' and *feld* the first el. would not take the genitive form, and the name is best explained as a compound of OE **dystels* and *feld* (with loss of the first *l* in *Dustesfeld* 1298 through dissimilation).

for a PrGerm **dustislaz*. However, derivatives with *-isla* belong to an early stratum of Germanic word-formation, and many of these derivatives fell into disuse at an early period. OE **fēgels*, **hyppels*, and **wrīdels*,²⁰ for instance, are only attested in isolated place-names and were ousted by more viable synonyms in the spoken language. If, as seems likely, there existed an OE **dystels* with the sense ‘something thrown (up)’, ‘mound’, it had to compete with a number of more common synonyms and could expect to enjoy only a short life. Place- and river-names often preserve words that were superseded in the spoken language (and are not recorded), and it therefore seems reasonable to postulate an OE **dystels* even though there is no other evidence for such a word.

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²⁰ Smith, *op cit.*, s.v. **fēgels*, **hyppels*, **wrīdels*.