I have been writing and thinking about place-names in thorp in England for about forty-five years. Although I have changed my mind about several points in the course of time, I have mentioned most of these voltes-face more than once before now, first and foremost in the relevant chapters in my studies of Scandinavian settlement names in Yorkshire (Fellows Jensen 1972: 42-79), the East Midlands (Fellows-Jensen 1978: 83-135) and the North-West (Fellows-Jensen 1985: 44-60), an article entitled ‘Place-names in -thorp: in retrospect and in turmoil’, which was expressive of my state of mind at that time (Fellows-Jensen 1991-92), and most recently in an article comparing place-names in thorp in Norfolk with those in the rest of the Danelaw (Fellows-Jensen 2003). References to relevant names in the present paper are normally to the above-mentioned works.

From the very beginning I have accepted Hugh Smith’s definition of the element thorp as denoting ‘a secondary settlement, an outlying farmstead or a small hamlet dependent on a larger place’ (Smith 1956: 2.208). This is not only because of the occurrence of the word in an early twelfth-century insertion in the Peterborough version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 963 of a somewhat dubious grant by King Edgar of freedom from jurisdiction of king and bishop to the monastery of St Peter, using the words ealle þa þorpes þe þærto lin. þæt is. ĆEstfeld and Dodesthorp and Ege and Pastun. The meaning of the word thorp here is supported in a copy of a related charter (Sawyer 1968: no. 787), where the words ealle þa þorpes are translated into Latin as cum suis appendiciis ‘with their appendages’, while in some fourteenth-century memoranda (Sawyer 1968: no. 1448), the relevant Peterborough estates are
referred to in Middle English as *ta berewican* ‘the berewicks’, that is ‘dependent members of a manor’. Even without this illustrative, if slightly uncertain, documentary evidence, however, the content of the place-names themselves often points to the originally dependent nature of the settlements they bear.

Almost a quarter of the *thorp*-names (132 names or 23%) are simplex names, that is the word *thorp* stands quite alone on the occasion of its earliest record. The settlements with these simplex names can hardly have functioned satisfactorily from an administrative point of view in the eleventh century and later unless they had some kind of accepted dependent relationship to the authority which was responsible for receiving the dues and taxes that had to be paid. In later years many of these simplex names became distinguished from each other by the addition of a prefix or affix. The names with prefixed elements occasionally contained the name of an older settlement, for example that of a parish in the case of Burnham Thorpe in Norfolk. This settlement had prospered sufficiently by the time of Domesday Book to be named there with this specific and it had certainly acquired parochial status at an early date. Several of the postulated prefixed names, however, are themselves now lost places, for example a lost *hrōd-fær* ‘reed passage’ in a similarly lost Redfarestorp in Domesday Book for Suffolk.

It is rather more frequent for the prefix in a -thorp-name to be an adjective or adverb of direction. Names incorporating the four points of the compass are of common occurrence. It would seem to have been most frequent for a thorp to have been located in the east, for there are nine thorps containing OE *east* and three containing cognate Scandinavian *aestr*. Unfortunately, no distinction can be drawn linguistically in the place-names between the other three points of the compass. Eight thorps can contain *west* or *vestr*, four *sūð* or *sūdr* and two *nord* or *nordr*.

The problem of distinguishing linguistically between names of English or Danish origin brings me to the main topic of the present paper. This is the question as to whether the *thorp*-names are mainly of Danish or English origin. I was originally convinced by Kenneth Cameron’s argument in his study of the place-names in *thorp* in the territory of the Five Boroughs that the names were a reflection of Danish colonisation in the strict sense, that is of the bringing under cultivation by the Danes of less attractive land that was not being exploited at the time of their arrival in the area (Cameron 1970). It is quite clear from the map in Figure 1, which shows the *thorp*-names whose sites I have been able to locate, that the greatest concentrations of the 576 names (the grey circles) are found in Yorkshire (North Riding 47, West Riding 94, East Riding 83), the East Midlands (Nottinghamshire 36, Lindsey, South Riding 39, Kesteven 41, Leicestershire 40, Northamptonshire 32) and Norfolk in East Anglia (61). These figures certainly support the idea that the *thorp*-names are ultimately a result of the three partitions of land that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recorded as being made by the Danes in Yorkshire in 876, in the East Midlands in 877 and in East Anglia in 880. Most of the thorps can in fact be seen to cluster along or near to the two prominent ridges of high ground that run in the shape of two crescent-moons in broad sweeps from the Yorkshire Moors down towards southwest England – the chalk ridge to the east and the ridge further west of oolitic limestone.

The situation is somewhat complicated by the fact that at least 54 names contain the cognate Old English element *thorp* with its metathesised spelling and most of these form a slightly attenuated tail to the *thorp*-names (the black circles in Figure 1).
These English throps occur most frequently in the limestone Cotswolds (Gloucestershire 15, Oxfordshire 10) and the chalk of the Chilterns (Buckinghamshire 5) and Salisbury Plain (Wiltshire 10). I therefore came to the conclusion that it was on the cretaceous and limestone uplands that secondary settlements were likely to be called thorp by the Danes and throp by the English in the Viking period and later. A possible explanation offered by Karl Luick for the occurrence of metathesis so early in English throp is that it frequently stood in place-names in a comparatively weakly-stressed syllable (1914-40: §693.1). Since the element occurred so frequently as a simplex place-name, however, this explanation is not entirely satisfactory. It should also be noted that thorp spellings do occur in areas such as Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, where the regular spelling is throp. I am inclined to feel that this is because thorp had become the dominant spelling after the arrival of the Danish settlers. It is of somewhat greater significance, on the other hand, when throp-spellings occur in areas where thorp is the regular spelling, for example

Figure 1. English place-names in thorp (grey) and throp (black), whose sites it is possible to locate.
in the West Riding of Yorkshire. I shall return to these forms below.

I have in recent years noted a few more points of interest about the situation of the thorp and the thorns and I intend to discuss these here. Starting at the north of the map in Figure 1, we note that Victor Watts located no fewer than five symbols for thorp in County Durham on his map III (1988-89). None of these thorps is recorded in Domesday Book, which does not of course treat Durham, but Little Thorpe in Easington (NZ 4242) is recorded as Thorp in an eleventh-century copy of a document from c.1050 and as Thorp in the twelfth century, Full-thorpe in Grindon (NZ 4124) as Fultorp in the twelfth century, a now-lost settlement in Castle Eden as Threlthorpe in c.1170, and Thorpe Bulmer (NZ 4535) as Thorpe in 1242 (Watts 1988-89: 26; 2002: 47, 72, 125). These five settlements were all situated in the band of magnesian limestone that runs across the county roughly from South Shields to Darlington and hence in countryside similar to that preferred by the thorp-named settlements elsewhere.

The three simplex names in Durham can equally well be English or Scandinavian formations and the same applies to Fulthorpe, for the specific of this name can be Old English ful or Scandinavian full, both meaning ‘foul, dirty’, while the specific of the lost Threlthorpe is ultimately the Scandinavian word þrōl meaning ‘thrall, slave’. Since this word was one of the early borrowings into English, however, occurring in the tenth-century glosses to the Lindisfarne gospels and the Durham Ritual, as well as Æthelred’s Law Code II of 991 (Hofmann 1955: §§235, 245, 271), the name Threlthorpe may have been coined by an English speaker. It seems altogether most likely, however, that the throrp-names in Durham reflect the spread of a naming fashion from the North Riding of Yorkshire, in much the same way as a few names in -by also spread into County Durham (Watts 1988-89: Map II), although the distribution patterns of the -by’s and thorp-named settlements in Durham are admittedly different from each other.

A comment should also be made in this connection on the possible age of the thorp-names and the settlements bearing the names. Thorpe Bulmer is the one of the five recorded thorps in Durham to have the latest earliest date of occurrence, namely 1242, but there is palaeoecological evidence to show that the land at Thorpe Bulmer must have been cleared for settlement long before the Viking period. The evidence from the analysis of pollen taken from a kettle hole about 100 metres in diameter situated about 800 metres from the farm at Thorpe Bulmer has shown that by about 114 BC there had been considerable pasturing in the area, with some cultivation of cereal and hemp, and that ploughing must have been done there around AD 220. After this date hemp cultivation gradually ceased and there would seem to have been a return to grassland but there must have been continuous and intensive cultivation at or near Thorpe Bulmer from that time on (Bartley 1976: 231-33). It seems likely, therefore, that the settlement at Thorpe Bulmer was of very great age and not a late secondary settlement, although the name must be younger than the settlement. The reason that this did not develop into a flourishing and populous settlement must simply be that the neighbourhood did not offer sufficient opportunities for expansion. Since Thorpe Bulmer and the other four thorps in County Durham are not situated in the neighbourhood of other settlements with Danish names, it seems likely that they must originally have been dependent on settlements with English names but this does not necessarily mean that the throrp-names cannot have been coined by Danish settlers or their descendants.

To the north of County Durham we do not find any names with the generic throrp in the large county of Northumberland but the occasional occurrence of the English word þrop as a
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specific in this county suggests that the generic thorp might also have been in use there at some period. The relevant names are Throp Hill in Mitford (NZ 1385), which is recorded as Trophi 1166 and Throphill c. 1250, while Thropton in Rothbury (NU 0202) is recorded as Tropton 1176 and Thorpton 1334 (CDEPN 614). In the Cambridge dictionary Throphill is explained as ‘hamlet hill’, while Thropton is translated as ‘the estate with a thorp or outlying hamlet’. In DEPN 471 Ekwall suggested that the specific of the latter name should perhaps rather be translated as ‘cross-roads’, probably because Old English throp twice appears as an alternative gloss to tún for the Latin word competum, which has this meaning. Since Old English tún also appears as a gloss to competum, however, it is perhaps unlikely that the meaning ‘cross-roads’ was uppermost in the mind of the glossator.

In North-West England the generic thorp is of comparatively rare occurrence. Since it was earlier considered to be a Danish test-word, its relative absence from the area was taken as an indication that the Scandinavian settlers in that region were mostly of Norwegian origin. Names in thorp occur quite frequently in the Østfold region of Norway (Sandnes 1977), however, so their relative infrequency in North-West England seems more likely to reflect the fact that the term was inappropriate to the kind of settlements found and formed there than that there were no Danes to coin the names. I am in fact most inclined to believe that secondary dependent settlements in the North-West tended to receive either names with elements such as þrōþ, ærgi or sætr, indicating their role in a shieling economy, or names reflecting the local topography, while the scattered thorps reflect Danish influence. This is because the thorp-names in the North-West whose sites can be located are found in the more easterly areas that are most likely to have been influenced by incoming Danes from across the Pennines. There are admittedly six simplex names that are not necessarily of Danish origin, although they all have early forms in Torp or Thorp. One of them, however, appears as Thropp in 1601 and as Throp at the present time. This Throp lies in Upper Denton (NY 5265) in Cumberland and may perhaps be an indication that the English form of the name was also known here earlier. Two compound -thorps seem to show Danish influence, Gawthorpe (SD 8034) in Lancashire, whose name was probably brought there from one of the six places of that name in the West Riding of Yorkshire, while Hackthorpe (NY 5323) in Westmorland, may well have been modelled on Hagthorpe in the East Riding or Ackthorpe in Lindsey, since all three names would seem to contain the Danish personal name Haki or the related appellative. There is just one of the thorp-names in the North-West that may point to the presence in the area of Gaelic-speakers, perhaps originating from the Western Isles. This is Melkinthorpe (NY 5525) in Lowther in Westmorland, whose specific may be the Celtic personal name Mēlician. In addition there are three names in Westmorland containing specifics ultimately of Latin origin, ME clerk < claricus in Clawthorpe, OE myl < Latin molendinum in Milnthorpe and ME spitel < Old French hospital < Latin hospitale in a lost Spittelthorp, as well as three names, two Crackenthorpes in Westmorland and one Cranethorpe in Lancashire, which seem to go back to an Old English gen.pl. cracena 'of the crows' (Fellows-Jensen 1985: 202, 204–05).

In Yorkshire there are two place-names in the West Riding whose present-day forms are Scothorpe and Wilstrop, although in both cases their early forms are either -torn or -thorp and spellings in -thorpe persist until 1592 and 1557 respectively. Scothorpe (SD 9059) lies in West Staincliffe Wapentake, fairly close to the north-western extremity of Yorkshire. The earliest example of a form reflecting -thorp is from 1591. Wilstrop (SE 4845) is a lost township in Ainsty Wapentake whose site is still visible and it is not far from York. The earliest record with a
form reflecting -thorp is Wilstrop 1229. The fact that throp-forms may also be found in two simplex names in the West Riding, however, supports the idea that throp may once have been more widespread in the Danelaw before the Danish settlement. The one possible example, however, Throapham (SK 5387) in Upper Straforth Wapentake, occurs for the first time as Trapun in Domesday Book, a form that would suggest that the name represented a dative plural *þrāpum. Since no satisfactory explanation of this has yet been offered, it is perhaps best to accept Hugh Smith’s explanation that the Domesday spelling is erratic and that Throapham is a rare northern example of OE throp (Smith 1961: 1.144-45). All forms subsequent to Domesday Book suggest that this is so. The other possible occurrence of prop is in Thrope House (SE 1075) in Fountains Earth, Lower Claro Wapentake, which is first recorded as Trapun 1198 (Smith 1961: 5.203).

In the Midlands there are three place-names in thorp in Warwickshire, Eathorpe (SP 3969), Princethorpe (SP 3970) and Stoneythorpe (SP 4062), all of which have forms in both -thorp and -throp. In the south-western part of Northamptonshire on the border of Warwickshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, a considerable number of thorp-forms occur, while the only names in this part of the county which have forms that are exclusively or mainly in thorp are Thorpe Lubenham, Thorpe Malsor, Hothorpe and Thorpe in Harrington (Gover, Mawer & Stenton 1933: 256). The forms occurring in the east of the county, however, are almost exclusively in thorp. The two thorps in Huntingdonshire, bordering on the north-eastern part of Northamptonshire also only have thorp-forms. In Bedfordshire, however, which borders on both Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire and is cut through by the Danelaw boundary, leaving about a third of the county in English territory and two thirds in the Danelaw, the two relevant names, Soulthorp (SP 9861) and Thrup End (SP 984396) both have modern forms reflecting thorp. While Thrup, which is in English territory only has such forms, Soulthorp, which is in Danish territory, does have a few forms in -torp or -thorp, pointing to Danish influence, although the specific of the name is probably English sulh meaning ‘gully or furrow’.

In East Anglia all of the numerous place-names in thorp (61 in Norfolk and 15 in Suffolk) seem to have the Danish form of the word. The situation is more complicated in Essex, however, where the element is not common. Thorpe-le-Soken (TM 1822) in Tendring Hundred is a simplex name. All its forms are Danish ones, from the occurrence in Domesday Book on, and the neighbouring parish also has a Danish name, Kirby-le-Soken. There are two other originally simplex names in Essex, both first occurring in Domesday Book. These are Thorpe Hall and Littlethorpe, in Southchurch in Rockford Hundred, recorded as Thorp and Torpeiam respectively. Southchurch lies on the Thames estuary. All the recorded forms of these two names appear to be ones in thorp. The same applies to a lost Swanthorp in Chelmsford Hundred. The last three names in Essex containing the thorpthorp element are all compound names. Easthorpe (TL 9121) in Lexden Hundred occurs as Estorp in Little Domesday Book. Later forms vary between -thorp and -throp. Gestingthorpe (TL 8138) in Hinchford Hundred is first recorded as æt Gyristangaborpe between 975 and 1016 (Sawyer 1487) and Ghestingetorp in Little Domesday Book, the specific apparently being an Old English tribal name (CDEPN 249). Most of the recorded forms of this name are in -thorpe but there are a few in -thorp. Finally, Westropps, a minor name in Gestingthorpe is recorded as Westorp 1274, Westtorp 1285 and Westhrep 1339.
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Figure 2. The distribution of the *thorp*-names in the East Midlands.
Figure 3. The distribution of the compound -thorp-names in the East Midlands whose specifics are Scandinavian.
This rather tedious and circumstantial examination has finally convinced me that the English form of the element *thorp* must once have been current, even if not particularly common, in much more of England than the south-western regions where *thorp*-names still occur. There is some onomastic evidence for its occurrence as far north as in Northumberland, Cumberland and the West Riding of Yorkshire, as well as in Warwickshire and Bedfordshire in the Midlands and in some parts of Essex.

This takes me right back to 1976, when my good friend and colleague Niels Lund argued with youthful enthusiasm that the distribution map of names in *thorp* might rather reflect the distribution of English names in the related English element *throp* (Lund 1976). Although the suggestion is worthy of consideration, however, I am reluctant to accept Lund’s conclusion. When first discussing the *thorp*-names in the Danelaw, I treated all the names containing *thorp* as being of Scandinavian origin. The main reason why I considered the spelling *thorp* to be Danish and only the metathesised form *throp* to be English was that my own studies of the specifics in the -*thorp*-names had shown that out of 265 personal names contained in names in -*thorp*, 177 were Scandinavian, 52 English and 34 of Norman origin and hence that 66% of these names are Scandinavian, although I have to admit that some few of the personal names that I took to be Scandinavian might equally well be English. Niels Lund comments that the fact that Scandinavian personal names are so predominant among the -*thorp*-names points not to colonisation of unused land but rather to a take-over of existing settlements already called something + -*thorp*. It is undoubtedly an important observation that changes of specific often did take place in the place-names in -*thorp*. As a class, however, I am convinced that the *thorp*-names in England reflect Danish influence, although many of them, and not only those containing Norman elements, must be of a younger date than the original Danish partitions of settlement. It is also, however, true that of the 42 compound names in -*thorp*, there are only seven which seem likely to contain personal names, all of these being of English origin, but this is presumably because the *thorp*-names mainly occur in the south-west, well away from the areas where Danish influence was strongest. More significantly, it is also true that of the 444 compound -*thorps* 114 have appellatives as their specific and that of these 54 are Scandinavian and 58 English, perhaps suggesting that the dominance of the Danish element was, after all, less marked than it would appear to be from the figures presented by the personal names. The obvious comment to these figures, of course, is that the English language was not eventually superseded by Danish and that many of the younger *thorps* can have been coined after the end of the Viking period proper, when the English language was once again dominant.

I am therefore pleased that I had the bright idea when working on the place-names in the East Midlands to publish two distribution maps of the *thorps*, Figure 2 showing the distribution of all the relevant *thorps* and Figure 3 only showing the distribution of the -*thorps* with Scandinavian specifics (Fellows Jensen 1978: 253 and 255). The most striking feature on both the maps is the rarity of occurrence of *thorp* s in the North Riding of Lindsey, where 43% of the total names recorded are -*býs*, while the -*thorps* with Scandinavian specifics occur frequently both in the areas where the *thorps* are generally common, for example in Kesteven, and in some areas where there is little evidence for either English settlements or -*býs* and where settlement can hardly have been established without a good deal of prior work of drainage or embankment, for example the Fen margins with the Soke of Peterborough. It is not that I consider the compound names with Scandinavian specifics to be the only ones coined by the Danes but that it seems likely
that many of the names first recorded after 1150 can have been coined after the English language had regained its hold on the East Midlands. Some of the other names may even antedate the arrival of the Danes in England.

In conclusion I must say that although I certainly still find it unlikely that all or even many of the *thorp*-names in the Danelaw are to be looked upon as containing English generics, it would perhaps be wise to refrain from accepting simplex *Thorpe* and names in -*thorp* whose specifics are English as being of Scandinavian origin. I would now tend to agree with that circumspect scholar Karl Inge Sandred (1994). His research led him to argue that although the numerous place-names in *thorp* in Norfolk must be the result of Danish influence, they can hardly be looked upon as a basis for mapping Danish settlement there. To a certain extent the same may also be true of Yorkshire and the East Midlands. I regret now that I did not also print a map showing only the place-names in -*thorp* which had Scandinavian specifics as a supplement to the distribution map of the *thorps* in general in my study of the Yorkshire settlement names (Fellows Jensen 1972: 178). Although I still feel that the fact that the *thorps* are much commoner in the Danelaw than the English-named *throps* are in the rest of England argues against many of the *thorps* being pre-Viking foundations, it would perhaps be advisable always to separate the -*thorps* containing Scandinavian specifics from the simplex *thorps* and the -*thorps* containing English specifics when mapping Danish settlement in England.
References