Are there any Elves in Anglo-Saxon Place-Names?1

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The prospect of finding evidence for Anglo-Saxon non-Christian beliefs in place-names has long attracted scholars.2 Hitherto, research on ‘pagan place-names’, in parallel to the extensive work done in Scandinavia, has focused on names likely to denote ritual sites or to contain names of individual gods.3 However, in line with Kousgård

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1 The present article arose from a period of study funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council), and completed during a fellowship held at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. It benefitted in its early stages from the comments of Katie Lowe, whom I thank. I am also indebted to David Parsons and his team for kindly supplying me in advance of publication with the Vocabulary of English Place-Names data for elf and elfen (along with some other words; cf. The Vocabulary of English Place-Names, edited by D. Parsons and T. Styles with C. Hough (Nottingham, 1997–)); and to Paul Cullen for his assistances. I have also made extensive use of the free-access online resources afforded by Sean Miller’s online corpus of Anglo-Saxon charters at <http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet> and the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England at <http://www.pase.ac.uk/>.


3 See B. Holmberg, ‘Views on cultic place-names in Denmark: a review of research’, in Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names, Based on Papers Read at the Symposium on Encounters Between Religions in Old Nordic Times and Cultic Place-Names Held at Åbo, Finland, on the 19th–21st August 1987, edited by T. Ahlbäck (Åbo, 1990), pp. 381–93; ‘Recent research into sacral names’, in Developments Around the Baltic and the North Sea in the Viking Age,
Sørensen’s plea for more work on names attesting to ‘den såkalt “lavere” religion’ (‘the so-called “lower” religion’) in Scandinavia, the expansion of research into names attesting to other kinds of supernatural beings seems desirable. But our evidence is problematic. As Cameron commented,

there are some names which reflect a popular mythology, a belief in the supernatural world of dragons, elves, goblins, demons, giants, dwarfs, and monsters. Such creations of the popular imagination lived on long after the introduction of Christianity and traces of these beliefs still exist today, but we really have no idea when the place-names referring to them were given.

The purpose of the present article is to reassess those place-names so far etymologised to contain ælf, the Old English etymon of elf, to establish which if any can reliably be used in research on Anglo-Saxon beliefs. The methodological demands upon researchers seeking to use place-names as evidence for past beliefs are somewhat different from those seeking systematically to etymologise the place-names of a given region, but the remarks here should also help to clarify some more general problems faced by these etymologists. The key challenge to convincingly identifying place-names containing ælf is the possibility that they contain personal names of similar form. No ælf-place-name can be identified for Anglo-Saxon England with complete confidence. If this leads us to conclude that elves (to substitute the modern English

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reflex for the Old English term ælfe) rarely appeared in Anglo-Saxon place-names, we need not be surprised: I have argued elsewhere that elves tended in early Anglo-Saxon language and belief to be linked with ese ‘pagan gods’ (singular os), and since convincing toponymic attestations of os have not been forthcoming, a similar dearth for elf might be expected. Likewise, elf, its later English reflexes, and its West Germanic cognates often occur in collocation (mutatis mutandis) with Old English mare, a word denoting monstrous supernatural females which assailed people in their sleep. Again, mare has not to my knowledge been identified in place-names. However, those names which do seem reasonably likely to contain elf also show patterns in their second elements strong enough that it may still be possible to draw some general conclusions about Anglo-Saxon elves’ topographic associations.

The phonology of elf is rather complex (and often misreported), the etymon *AlBi- being one of the rare Old English words producing masculine nominative and accusative plurals in -e, and potentially affected by all of first fronting, Anglian retraction, breaking, i-mutation and second fronting, producing Kentish elf; Anglian elf and (in second-fronting varieties) elf, and late West Saxon ylf. The phonologically regular West Saxon form, however, also competed with a variant corresponding to the Anglian form elf. This elf-variant was successful enough that Ylf- never occurs in Old English attestations of Anglo-Saxon personal names—only in a few Middle English toponymic reflexes—and elf has become (as here) the usual citation form for the Old English word. The Old English forms produced

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9 The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names, edited by V. Watts
Middle English variants prominently including *elf*, *alf*, *ulf* (for */ylf/*) and *ilf* (with the unrounding of the vowel in */ylf/*)—though otherwise regular sound-changes did not, of course, always affect place-names. Despite this complexity, however, the key problem for identifying *elf* in place-names lies in its phonological similarity to Anglo-Saxon personal names, at three levels: in place-names, etymological dithematic personal names were sometimes reduced to forms which resemble forms of *elf*; there was probably a simplex personal name *Ælff* which can also appear in place-names; and there was likewise possibly a simplex personal name *Ælfa*. Additional difficulties are caused by the possibility that some place-names which might plausibly derive from Anglo-Saxon ones containing *elf* were in fact coined in the Middle English period.

**Non-attestations**

A few previous identifications of *elf* in place-names in the Old English corpus can be dispensed with straightforwardly as misinterpretations of our basic evidence. The suggestion that the *ylfethamm*—undoubtedly ‘swan-meadow’—in charter S820 refers to an ‘elf dwelling’ (implicitly reading *ylf-ham*) can be passed over, as can the association of *Ilffing*, the form taken by the name of the river Elbing in the Old English version of Orosius’s *Historiarum adversum paganos*, with *elf*. More complex is the lost name *elfaledes* (Gloucestershire), uniquely attested in a fifteenth-century copy of an undated Old English boundary clause, of


land belonging, at the time when the clause was composed, to the minster of Deerhurst (S1551). The relevant passage reads *Of scirann more on elfaledes, of elfaleden on hreodan burnan* ‘from the shiny bog to elfaledes, from elfaleden to the reedy stream’.\(^{11}\) Smith etymologised the name as the genitive plural *elfa* plus *hleda* ‘seat’, translating it as ‘elves’ seat’; Hooke, working to relate the clause to present-day topography, commented that ‘one searches for the elfaledes, “elf seat”, in vain’.\(^{12}\) And well one might, since the second element cannot be *hleda*. The language of our surviving text has been influenced by Middle English: the original text was presumably *of sciran more on X-as, of X-um on hreodan burnan*. *Hleda* is a weak noun but, as this reconstruction suggests, the form *elfaledes* is surely underlain by a strong masculine plural. Moreover, Smith offered no secure parallels for *hleda* as a place-name element.\(^{13}\) In view of the fact that the boundary frequently follows water features, *lædas* ‘drains, watercourses’ seems a promising option.\(^{14}\) As for the first element, *elfa* does ostensibly look like the genitive plural of the second-fronted Mercian form *elf*, and it is admittedly hard to suggest a likely alternative if the attestation is to be considered Old English.\(^{15}\) But since the form *elfaledes* is at least partly Middle English in form, it may be more Middle English than Old English, and if so, a range of possibilities arise. *Elfet-lædas* ‘swan watercourses’ is not impossible, but it is hard to see how this would have produced the *æa* spelling in *elfa*. As I discuss below, it seems that we must reconstruct a simplex personal name *Ælfa*, making *Elfa-lædas* or *Elfan lædas* possible. Another option is to reanalyse the word

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\(^{13}\) Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, I, 250, s.v. *hlēda*.

\(^{14}\) These features have often since been drained: Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, pp. 7–8.

\(^{15}\) For second fronting in this region see Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire*, IV, 66.
entirely. Old English *fald, falod* ‘an enclosure for animals’ is well-attested as a second element: we may be dealing with, for example, a partially updated form of *elm-faldodas* ‘elm-folds’, though a search of the boundary-clauses included in the Dictionary of Old English Corpus admittedly produces no parallels for the appearance of *fald* in the plural.\(^{16}\) At any rate, however, the case for the presence of *elf* in this place-name is unreliable. We may proceed now to more ambiguous names.

**Middle English coinings of elf-names**

As I discuss below, a place-name attested in Middle English and ostensibly deriving from *elf-* could have a range of other sources. Still, it is worth noting too that some of these names could also be etymologised as post-Anglo-Saxon, Middle English formations on *elf-* (sometimes perhaps with the inorganic composition vowel \(-e-\)). It is hard to find unambiguous examples of *elf*-names coined after the Anglo-Saxon period, but one is afforded in the trial for witchcraft in 1597 of an Aberdeenshire healer called Andro Man. His surviving indictment says that

> Thow confessis that be the space of threttie twa yeris sensyn or thairby, thow begud to have carnall deall with that devilische spreit, the Quene of Elphen, on quhom thow begat dyveris bairnis, quhom thow hes sene sensyn; and that at hir first cumming, scho causit ane of thy cattell die vpone ane hilok callit the Elphillok, bot promeist to do him gude theireftir.\(^{17}\)

You confess that about thirty-two years previously or so, you began to have carnal dealings with that diabolical spirit, the Queen of Elphen, by whom you begot various children, whom you have seen since; and that at her first coming, she caused one of your cattle to die upon a hillock called the Elphillok, but promised to do good for him [sic] thereafter.

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English came too late to Aberdeenshire for Anglo-Saxon nomenclature to be a possible source here. In theory, Andro’s Elphillock might involve the Anglicisation of some Gaelic name, but in view of its explicit association with the Queen of Elphen (herself associated later in the indictment with elphis ‘elves’), there seems little reason not to etymologise the Elphillock as elf plus hillock, therefore identifying elf as a productive place-name element in Older Scots. Later medieval names like the lost Cumberland field-name Elf-Hills (apparently first attested as Elfhow, 1488) could fit this category.\footnote{Etymologised to contain elf by A. M. Armstrong, A. Mawer, F. M. Stenton and Bruce Dickins, \textit{The Place-Names of Cumberland}, 3 vols, English Place-Name Society, 20–22 (Cambridge, 1950–52), I, 209, III, 459.}

**Dithematic personal names**

Place-names from dithematic personal names, in later sources, can appear misleadingly to derive from ælf. This becomes a major problem in texts from around the thirteenth century: thus Alvescot in Oxfordshire is attested in 1220 and often subsequently as Alfescot’, which looks potentially like *elves cot(u) ‘the elf’s cottage(s)’. But its Domesday form is Elfegescote, demonstrating an etymon *Ælfheahescot(u) ‘Ælfheah’s cottage(s)’.\footnote{The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names, edited by Watts, s.n. Alvescot.} Domesday attestations of place-names are, as here, usually conservative enough to show that a dithematic name is involved, but not always. Thus Alveston in Warwickshire, appearing already in Domesday as Alvestone and looking like *ælftun (putatively ‘the elf’s enclosure’), is earlier attested as (æt) Eanulfestun ‘Eanwulf’s estate’.\footnote{Ibid., s.n. Alveston Warw.} For this reason alone, then, post-Old English forms can offer secure evidence for ælf only in carefully defined circumstances.

An etymology which can probably be revised on these grounds (if no other) is Smith’s etymology of Ailey Hill in Ripon, North Yorkshire, attested in 1228 as Elueshov, Elueshowe, as Old English elf plus
Old Norse *haugr*, ‘the elf’s mound’. The site has a long history as a burial site, and lay beside a Christian religious site from the 650s, making it an appealing candidate for a pre-Conversion ritual site. But the Norse second element would encourage the reconstruction of entirely Norse etyma such as *Eyjólfs haugr* or *Eilafs haugr*.

**The simplex personal name Ælf**

More problematic again, however, is the likelihood that there was a monothematic Old English personal name *Ælf*. This is admittedly somewhat unexpected. I have mentioned that there is evidence associating Anglo-Saxon *ælf* with *ese*, pagan gods. As such, a simplex name Ælf might be thought to break the rule of thumb in Germanic onomastics that although we may expect to find words denoting deities as the first element of dithematic names (e.g. *Godric* in Old English or *Þórkell* in Old Icelandic), we should not expect to see such words as simplex personal names, because this would presumptuously imply the name-bearer to be a god. Moreover, Feilitzen found that there is ‘no safe independent evidence for OE Ælf’ except in place-names. However, as he recognised, Ælf may have been a shortened form of dithematic names in Ælf-, and is at least once attested as such in manuscript. And the place-name evidence for a simplex name Ælf is

26 Edited in M. Förster, ‘Die altenglische Glossenhandschrift Plantinus 32
strong. The least ambiguous evidence is names in *ælfing- such as Alvingham in Lincolnshire (Domesday Aluing(e)ha’). The functions and origins of -ing- in Old English place-names are diverse. However, much the most likely etymon of -ing- in Alvingham-type names is a population name *Ælfingas: the alternatives would not account well for the unstressed vowel e in forms like Aluingeha’. Population-names in -ingas normally take either place-names or masculine personal names as their first element, and as it is hard to see what place-name elements might underlie forms like *ælfing-., at least some of the Alvingham-type names surely contain a personal name. Although the personal name in question might have been Ælfæ, discussed further below, the likelihood that a name Ælφ was involved is great enough to inspire caution in identifying the common noun ælf in a place-name.

The likely existence of Ælφ as a personal name casts doubt upon several putative ælf place-names. Thus although the Dictionary of Old English cited the place-name Ælfestun (putatively ‘the ælf’s enclosure’, now Olveston in Gloucestershire) as evidence for ælf’s use as a place-name element, Smith etymologised it instead as ‘Ælf’s farmstead’, from the OE pers.n. Ælf and tūn’. Smith based his interpretation on a charter purportedly from 955×59 in a twelfth-century manuscript (S664). This is of questionable reliability, but the name also occurs in eleventh-century copies of a diploma of 1089 unknown to Smith, as Alfestune and Ælfestune. Although tūn here might mean ‘enclosure’, it is inordinately more likely to denote a settlement;
meanwhile - *tun* names frequently take personal names as their first element, whereas I know of none which reliably takes a word for a supernatural being as its first element.\textsuperscript{31}

Another name affected by this issue, this time attested in a thirteenth-century copy of a genuine Old English charter of 944 (S501), appears in the boundary clause for Shepherdswell (a.k.a. Sibertswold) in Kent as *flæng Colredinga gemercan oð helfesdene, oð helfesdene oð lectan æcer ‘along the border of the Colredingas as far as helfesdene; from [reading of for oð] helfesdene as far as the lectan field’.\textsuperscript{32}

Although Wallenberg adverted to the Old English word *hielfe* ‘handle’ (Kentish *helfe*) as a possible source for the first element, this is unlikely both because it seems not to appear otherwise in place-names and because, as *helfe* is a weak noun, we would expect **helvan-dene**.\textsuperscript{33} However, although, as Cullen emphasised, we cannot be certain, Wallenberg’s other options, *ælf-* or *Ælf-* with hypercorrect *h-* are plausible.\textsuperscript{34} Reliably choosing between them, however, is impossible.

\textsuperscript{31} Cf. Margaret Gelling’s handling of West Midland *-tun* names in *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 122–24; for other names dismissed on these grounds, if not on the grounds of possible derivation from a dithematic name, see *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names*, edited by Watts, s.n. Alston Reservoir (Lancashire); J. S. M. Macdonald, *The Place-Names of Roxburghshire* (Hawick, 1991), p. 16 (regarding Effledge, Roxburghshire).


\textsuperscript{34} Cullen, ‘The Place-Names of the Lathes of St Augustin and Shipway, Kent’, p. 455.
There are some circumstances where a personal name Ælf can be shown to be unlikely. Although the point cannot be relied on absolutely, genitival -s in Old English personal names which are the first elements of place-names is generally fairly stable, and is usually apparent at least in Middle English attestations of older place-names. Its absence from Middle English attestations of a place-name, then, could militate against identifying Ælfes- as a first element, in favour of the common noun ælf-. This reasoning is not reliable for much of England, as place-names were sometimes formed not with initial personal names in the genitive, but in the nominative (thus Ælf-); but conventional wisdom has it that nominative personal names were rare in Southern place-names. This observation has ramifications for the name ælfruce, in Kent, occurring in a copy (unfortunately a poor one) of what seems to be a genuine charter of 996 from the first half of the fifteenth century (S877). The relevant text runs of At ersce <to> ælfruce, of ealfruige to peallestede ‘from oat-field to ælfruce, from ealfruige to ledge-place’. Wallenburg and Miller have suggested that we probably have here elf + hrycg ‘ridge’, with some post-Anglo-Saxon interference in the spelling. It would admittedly be possible to read elf-, elf- as *healf ‘half’, assuming h- loss and taking æ to be a hypercorrect spelling for ea, but each of Smith’s examples of names in healf- has words for portions of land as its second element (hid ‘hide’, æcer ‘field’, snæd ‘detached area of land’). As Cullen has emphasized, the expected form of Old English ælf in Kent is elf, so we have to

35 For example M. Gelling, The Place-Names of Shropshire, 4 vols so far published, English Place-Name Society, 62/63, 70, 76, 80 (Nottingham, 1990–2004), I, 13–14.
36 On which see K. Lowe, “‘As fre as thou’t?’: some medieval copies and translations of Old English wills’, English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700, 4 (1993), 1–23 (pp. 15–19).
38 Wallenberg, Kentish Place-Names, p. 347; Charters of the New Minster, edited by Miller, p. 156.
39 Smith, English Place-Name Elements, I, 222, s.v. half.
assume influence from Mercian or West Saxon, but this is paralleled. For his part, Wallenberg was disconcerted by the form of the place-name given in a version of the text updated to Middle English, alfryng. But I take this form to be a mistake, frequent in the scribe’s work. In the case of Alfryng, the scribe presumably misread the minims in -ruige as the familiar noun -ringe (which he then spelt -ryng(e)—ironically to spare readers puzzling over minims in the future). Since place-names in the South of England whose first element was a personal name usually formed it in the genitive case, *ælfrycg is reasonably likely to contain the common noun ælf.

Promising for another reason is the form ylfing dene in a boundary clause of a genuine charter of 956 (S622) concerning the bounds at Welford in Berkshire (where it is an addition to a source-text of 949, S552), attested in twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts: of dyran treowe on ylfing dene on ænne elebeam ‘from Deora’s tree to ylfing valley to the lone ?elder tree’. Ylfing here has been taken to attest to the common noun ælf (in its West Saxon form). If it does, then the most likely of the various possible interpretations of the -ing is that it is the place-name-forming suffix: of the alternatives, the nominal suffix used to form words like æðeling ‘noble man’ would find no parallel here; we would tend to expect the patronymic suffix present in names like Alvingham to be in the genitive plural (thus **ylfinga dene); and the connective particle -ing- is usually prefixed by personal names and

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40 Cullen, ‘The Place-Names of the Lathes of St Augustin and Shipway, Kent’, p. 5.
41 Kentish Place-Names, p. 347; Charters of the New Minster, edited by Miller, p. 209.
suffixed by -tun. The place-name-forming suffix is well-attested with first elements denoting beings, and in one literary context we even have the place-name Wælcyrginc, formed from wælcyrige ‘martial supernatural female’ plus -ing as a translation of Gorgoneus (itself formed from Gorgon, denoting a kind of mythological female monster) in chapter 9 of the Old English Wonders of the East. I have argued that ælfe and wælcyrigan were in traditional Anglo-Saxon culture closely connected groups of beings; if this is correct, then Wælcyrginc helps to support the plausibility of reading ylfing to contain ælf. This argument does not, however, reduce the likelihood that ylfing (whatever the significance of the -ing element) contains a personal name. What does is the fact that Ælf-names never otherwise appear in Anglo-Saxon writing in the form Ylf(-) (nor in the inferred earlier form Ielf(-), except on coins as an epigraphic variant of Ælf). As I have mentioned above, post-Old English evidence shows that Ylf-pronunciations did exist in speech alongside Ælf-forms, so ylfing could still have originated as a personal name. But if so, the scribe from whose work our manuscripts derive chose not to write it in the conventional fashion. This may be because the place-name had become delexicalised: hearing ylfing, the original scribe failed to analyse the word as Ylf-ing and to spell it Ælfing even though, had he paused to think about it, he would have. But no other scribe seems to have had this problem, which suggests that ylfing denu was indeed ‘the valley of the elf-place’.

This reasoning might also, in theory, apply to the boundary her is se wuda ðe into tune woerde hyrd. of hylfes hæcce innon sulc up æfter suluc on ða holan rīде lang rīde on ðæt brade wætær þonon lang wætlingan stræte to hylfes hæcce ‘and here is the wood [reading wudu] which belongs to ?Tuna’s farm: from hylfes hæcce into the ?ditch, up along the ?ditch to the sunken stream, along the stream to the broad

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44 Smith, English Place-Name Elements, I, 282–85, s.v. -ing.
pool/river; from there along Watling Street to hylfes hæcce'. Hæcce is straightforward enough, meaning a gate, here probably a wicket leading into the wood. Hylfes could be from ylf or Ylf, with hyper-correct h- probably added by the twelfth-century scribe; in which case the reasoning for ylfing dene would apply and we would infer ylf. But this additional variable makes it hard to be sure here that we do not have the corruption of some other word.

The simplex personal name Ælfa
A further set of place-names unlikely to derive from Ælf- or Ælfes- are those containing a medial vowel but no -s- as in, for example, Alden in Lancashire: this is first attested in 1296 as Alvedene, following an earlier appearance in the name Aldenehevet in 1234. The lack of an -s- makes this fairly unlikely to originate in Ælfes- or ælfes-, and although the reduction of a dithematic name like Ælfheah-, or of *Ælfing-, is possible, it would have to have been dramatic to have produced the 1234 variant Aldene-. Moreover, as I discuss shortly, we have several names like Alvedene, and to explain them all as major reductions of this sort would strain credibility. It is therefore tempting in names like Alvedene to adduce ælf-æ, the genitive plural of ælf; thus Ekwall wrote of Alden that ‘the first el. may be O.E. Ælfa pers. n., or perhaps more likely the gen. pl. of O.E. ælf’. Additionally, in southern and West Midland Middle English, elf was often transferred to the weak declension, thus taking plurals in -en; elf had undergone this development already in at least some Old English varieties by the eleventh century. In some regions, then, medial vowels could also reflect weak inflected forms of ælf. Perhaps because of Ekwall’s evident, albeit tentative, preference, Alden has been accepted since as

48 E. Ekwall, The Place-Names of Lancashire (Manchester, 1922), p. 64.
49 Ibid.
an elf-name. However, his alternative etymology, with an Old English personal name (*Ælfa (thus *Ælfan denu or *Ælfa-denu) deserves serious consideration. There is some manuscript evidence for a name Ælfa, though it is problematic. The will made in 1014 by Æthelstan Æðeling, the son of King Æthelred the Unready, recorded in two early-eleventh-century manuscripts, mentions news brought be Ælfgar, the son of Ælffa. The form Ælffan is odd, since Old English has no /lf/ combinations, and whereas Skeat interpreted it as an ‘ill-spelt’ form of Elfa, other commentators have preferred to read Æffa. Æffa, along with its feminine variant Æffe, is reasonably well-attested; the l in the form Ælffan could easily be a scribal error caused by the preceding Ælf- name; and this interpretation is encouraged by a generally accurate fourteenth-century copy in BL Add. 15350 of a text very similar to the eleventh-century BL Stowe Charter, 37, which gives be Alfgare Æffan suna. More promisingly, however, one Ælua appears in what Keynes has interpreted as a genuine witness-list to a forged charter, first found in thirteenth-century manuscripts (S954); Redin was concerned that this Ælua might be the same as the Æffa who witnessed S962, but even if he was, this would not refute the witness-list’s evidence for a viable variant form Ælfa. There is, at any rate, a good enough chance that there was a personal name Ælfa that we must reckon with that possibility when trying to compile a reliable corpus of place-names attesting to elf.

51 Cameron, English Place-Names, p. 122.
Students of Anglo-Saxon beliefs, then, cannot rely on a Middle English form like Alvedene, which if nothing else could be from *Ælfa-. The same goes for Eldon Hill in Derbyshire, first attested in 1285 as Elvedon, which Cameron etymologised as ‘elves’ hill’; and the Eluehull attested in Cumberland in 1359, also etymologised to contain ælf. More promisingly, because of his access to earlier attestations, Watts has interpreted Elveden in Suffolk, which has the Domesday forms Eluedenā, Heluedana, Heluedona and Haluedona, as ‘Probably “elf valley” ... OE elf, genitive pl. elfa + denu’. Ekwall had previously preferred elfet-denu; certainly the assimilation of the -t- of elfet- to a following -d- is not unlikely even at this early date, and this word too could produce (h)alue- variants. But in any case, *Ælfa-denu or *Ælfan denu are also plausible. Another example again is Elvendon Farm in Oxfordshire, analysed by Gelling as ‘Fairy hill’, with a second element dun. The earliest forms of this name are Middle English, and show an alternation between /y/- (spelt, in the Anglo-Norman fashion, as <u, v>, with Ulvendon’, Vluindone c.1240) and /e/- (as in the next attestations, Elveden’, Elvedune, c.1260) lasting at least into the eighteenth century (with Ilvingden Farm 1797 showing the unrounded reflex /i/ of Old English /yll/ beside the modern form Elvendon). Such reflexes are characteristic in Gelling’s Oxfordshire material of etymological */yll/, which would fit an etymon ylf, the West Saxon form of ælf. These forms could reflect *ylfan dun ‘elf’s hill’ or ‘elves-hill’ or *ylfan(a) dun ‘elves’ hill’, either coined after ælf’s shift to the weak declension or updated with it. But, if we did not wish to reconstruct

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60 Ibid., I, p. xxxii. It is not, therefore, necessary to invoke competition between West Saxon and Anglian forms of ælf.
Conclusions
Circumspection, then, is the order of the day. I have found only two names which are both reliably attested for Anglo-Saxon England and reasonably likely to contain the common noun ælf: ælfrucge in Kent, and ylfing dene in Berkshire. There is, however, something more to be said than this. The names accepted here as possibly deriving from ælf—albeit possibly deriving from personal names or sometimes other sources—generally share with ælfrucge second elements denoting hills (Eldon Hill, Eluehull, Elvendon Farm) or, like ylfing dene, have the second element -denu ‘main valley’ (helfesdene, Alden and Elveden; the exception to these is hylfes hæcce). This is a tiny sample; moreover, it is partly determined by the assumption that place-names in -tun like Olvestun are more likely to contain personal names than the common noun ælf, so the range of second elements accepted is partly predetermined by the methodology. All the same, the consistent association of possible ælf-names with hills and valleys gives pause for thought. This semantic patterning proves no single instance as deriving from ælf, but assuming that some of these names do contain ælf, it does hint that ælfe tended to be associated in Anglo-Saxon thought with hills and valleys.

Though far from conclusive, this evidence is consistent with some other pointers. Place-names containing the names of traditional Anglo-Saxon gods include two in -denu—Wodnesdene (now Hursley Bottom, in Wiltshire) and Frigedene (now Friden, Derbyshire)—while Gelling’s recent opinion has rehabilitated the valley Fryup in Yorkshire as a probable candidate for *Frigehop (‘Frige’s remote, enclosed place’); and although there are no such names in -dun or -hrycg, there seems to be one in -hoh (‘ridge, spur’): Tysoe in Warwickshire, apparently from *Tiwes hoh. How significant this correlation with

potential elf-names is hard to say; god-names are also often associated with feld (in early Old English ‘open, unobstructed space’) and leah (‘forest, wood, glade, clearing’), which contrasts with our potential elf-place-names. That what correlations we have are not merely the product of chance, however, is at least suggested by a survey of etymologically English words for supernatural beings securely attested in Old English boundary clauses. These words all denote monstrous beings, and are generally compounded with place-name elements denoting quite different landscape features from those found with elf and with gods’ names. Leaving aside the problematic pucelancyrce (which resists identification as anything other than ‘little goblin’s church’, S553), we have enta(n), scuccan hlæw (‘hill, burial mound’; S465, S970; S138); enta dic (‘(waterfilled) ditch, dyke’; S962); grendles mere (S416, S579); grendeles, þyrs pyt (‘(waterfilled) pit’; S255, S222); pucan wylle (‘pond, lake, pool, wetland’; S106, S508); and grendeles gate (‘gate’; S1450). The place-names in -hlæw overlap with place-names containing god-names (e.g. Thunoreshlæw, Kent), while the names which seem to contain Grendel, the name of one of the monsters of Beowulf, might rather denote green depressions (cf. the grendel of S669); and needless to say, a thorough and critical investigation of later evidence for such words in place-names would improve this data. But the indications that monsters were associated with different topographic features from gods and elves are clear.

Our Old English textual evidence provides no hint as to the topographical associations of elfe: the Old English illness-name wæter-ælfadl—often understood as ‘water-elf illness’—is almost certainly in fact ‘elf-illness associated with fluids’, while glosses compounding variants on elf with words for topographical features, such as dunælfen and wæterælfen, are doubtless nonce-compounds created to reflect their Latin lemmata. A full investigation of later textual evidence is beyond my present scope, but high medieval English literature

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63 Translations based on Gelling and Cole, The Landscape of Place-Names.
mentioning elves is dominated by works based directly on French or Anglo-Norman literature, which may owe more to French (or at times Welsh or Breton) traditions than to English. Other material might reflect Anglo-Saxon traditions, but does not use the word *elf*, once more making its relevance less assured. One source, however, is impressive: the *Southern English Legendary*, composed in the Worcester/Gloucester area around the 1270s, seems to afford a fairly direct reflection of thirteenth-century elf-beliefs, their place in the text being justified by their identification with angels who neither fought for nor against God and were banished to the earth (and who, the text seems to claim, may yet return to heaven):

Alone in some hidden place
they stand then very quiet/still,
and many a fool lies with them thus,
in woods and in meadows.

And often in form of women
on many a hidden path
men see a great company of them,
both to dance and play,
that are called *eluene*.

And often they come to a settlement,
and by day they are often in woods,
and by night upon high hills.

that are from among the wretched spirits
who/which were taken out of heaven.

And many of them yet
will come to rest on Doomsday.

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Here, then, *eluene* are associated with woods, meadows and high hills. They visit settlements, but it is clear that these are not their native haunts. Admittedly, the associations are not precisely the same as the hills and valleys hinted at by our Old English place-names; and equally, we might simply conclude from the text, as did Robert of Gloucester, that elves inhabited *wilde studes* ‘wild places’. All the same, this traditional-looking text situates *elves* in the landscape in a fashion broadly consistent with those place-names which might plausibly contain *ælf*; and with the toponymic associations of Anglo-Saxon gods, by contrast with the toponymic associations of Anglo-Saxon monsters.

The evidence of place-names for Anglo-Saxon beliefs in elves is vanishingly slight, but what there is is consistent with a wider range of evidence for medieval English elves’ association with lonely hills and valleys.

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