

In terms of its primary use it is really rather boring. It just means "in" and is used similarly in English:

ann an taigh	in a house
ann an Dùn Èideann	in Edinburgh
ann an Glaschu	in Glasgow
ann an cana	in a can

Well, I suppose there is something worthwhile mentioning here. Before labials (b, bh, p, m, f) it changes to **ann am** [au^ham] but more importantly (and potentially annoyingly) the -n strengthens to a [n̪] or a [ɲ] in front of vowels depending on whether the next vowel is broad or slender and jumps from the end of [au^ham] to the next word:

ann am Bealach	[au ^h am b̪jaːt̪əx]	in Balloch
ann am muga	[au ^h am muːg̪ə]	in a mug
ann an ubhal	[au ^h ə u.əːt̪]	in an apple
ann an aisling	[au ^h ə aːʃl̪ɪŋ]	in a dream
ann an Éirinn	[au ^h ə neːr̪ːɪŋ]	in Ireland
ann an Ìle	[au ^h ə ɲiːl̪ɪ]	in Islay

Not quite as mad as it may seem ... think of English for a moment. You write "an apple" but if you say it reasonably fast, it comes out as "a napple". That's incidentally exactly what happened to the word nickname: back in the 14th century people had "an ekename" ... but at some point some bright cookie (?!) figured that it must be "a nickname" rather than "an ekename". Or the word "nuncle" which is "an uncle" fused together. Anyway.

In Manx this had led to some amusing (well, from the Gaelic point of view) joined forms. For example, in Manx the word for Ireland is **Nerin** and the word for Scotland is **Nalbyn**.

It gets a bit more interesting when we add the definite article to **ann an**. For starters, there are apparently three different forms that it can take: **anns an**, **san** and **sa**. Well, five if you count **anns an t-** and **san t-** extra:

Before

vowels, f	anns an Òban	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠoːb̪an]	in Oban
	anns an ola	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠoːl̪ə]	in the oil
	anns an iris	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠiːr̪iːʃ]	in the magazine
	anns an fhirinn	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠiːr̪iːn̪]	in the truth
b c g m p	anns a' bhàta	[au̯n̪ˠ ə vaːˠh̪t̪ə]	in the boat
	anns a' choire	[au̯n̪ˠ ə x̪oːr̪iː]	in the kettle
	anns a' phìob	[au̯n̪ˠ ə fiːb̪]	in the pipe
s, sn, sl, sr	anns an t- sròn	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠs̪r̪oːn̪]	in the nose
	anns an t- sùil	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠs̪uːl̪]	in the eye
	anns an t- snàthad	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠs̪naːˠəθ̪]	in the needle
d n t l	anns an taigh	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠt̪aː]	in the house
	anns an dùn	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠd̪uːn̪]	in the fortress
	anns an loch	[au̯n̪ˠ ə n̪ˠl̪ɔːx̪]	in the loch

Meaning? Well ... the Old Irish word **in** fused with the definite article **sind** (=the) to give us the conjoined form **issind** which also happened to lenite (there were actually loads of different form as Old Irish also had a feminine and neuter gender plus a few extra cases but this will do for our purposes). Which ultimately yields Irish **sa(n)** and Gaelic **sa(n)**. Well, take **issind**, drop the **i-** and the **-d** and you get **sin**. Bingo. The **-d** only shows up in front of words which begin with an **s** (don't ask why), well, as a **t-** in modern Gaelic.

First riddle solved ... the weird **t-** that shows up therefore is not random at all, just a remainder of something very old.

But back to **san**. Presumably when Gaelic added the **ann** to **an**, it also did that in front of **san** (just to be consistent). So we would have gotten ***ann san** ... and for the same reason **iss-ind** runs of the tongue better than **i-ssind**, the **s-** crept back to the **ann** > **anns an**.

But because the older **sa(n)** didn't have any competition the way **an** had, there was less pressure to add the **ann** to it, so **san** and **sa** are just as common (at least in spoken Gaelic) as **anns an**. With one exception, they work exactly the same way as **anns an**. The exception is that you can have the short **sa** in front of **s** - so ***sa t-sùil** is not acceptable. It's fine with **san** though, so **san t-sùil** is fine.

Note that in colloquial Gaelic there is a further simplification: **anns an** is often shortened to **[ãʃə]**. Note that in this case the nasalisation of the **[ã]** is very important because otherwise it sounds exactly the same **ás a'** [aʃə] "out of".

What else? Well, in the plurals it shows up as **anns na (h-)** ... just as expected. It behaves just like the plural definite article so you get **anns na beanntan** "in the mountains", **anns na h-ubhlan** "in the apples"...

The only tricky part is that although Gaelic ann an is often used when English uses "in" as well but not always. Unfortunately there doesn't seem to be a regular pattern and these expressions just have to be learned. Here's a few examples:

maol anns a' chlaisneachd	hard of hearing
cuir dàil anns a' chùis	to delay the matter
anns an achlais	under the arms
cuir e anns an t-soitheach	put it into the dish
anns a' bheachd sin	of that opinion
anns a' chamhanaich	at dawn
anns an ám cheudna	at the same time
anns a' chladach	on the shore

What else? Well, (ann) an also provides us with existentials. Or in other words, ways of saying that something exists, for example 's e cù a tha ann "it is a dog". That is the main use for those conjugated forms annam, annad, ann, innte etc. For more on existentials, click [here](#).

Our old friend in is also the source of the following conjoined forms

'nam	'nad	'na	'na (h-)	'nar (n-)	'nur (n-)	'nan/'nam
'na mo	'na do					
in my	in your	in his	in her	in our	in your	in their

For example Tha cù 'nad chàr "there is a dog in your car". All that has happened is that an has merged with the possessive pronouns (mo, do etc) into these forms.

The first two forms 'nam and 'nad occasionally show up as 'na mo and 'na do ... but behave the same way.

That's it really so before I start wittering, I'll say oidhche mhath!

Hang on, there is one more thing we need to talk about but that's best done on a separate page on Stative Verbs and How to run in suspended animation.