South Staffordshire Plant Cluster: current state of the art

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Early presence of the Plant name in North and South Staffordshire

In the mid fourteenth century, the main Plant family appears to have been mostly around North Staffordshire. In particular, it was in Leek parish (northern tip of Staffordshire) and over the border into Macclesfield Hundred to the north, in east Cheshire. However, by 1401, the name was also in South Staffordshire (near Wolverhampton). The association of both Plant clusters with a single family implies a migration, perhaps from north to south, over a distance that seems distant for normal peasants as early as medieval times.

What is to be made of the DNA testing result that reveals that the same large male-line Plant family is in both places? It is possible that they travelled between the two places in relatively recent times, as descendants from a single family that had already grown to dominate the Plants in one place. As an alternative, we can consider that the same Plant family could have dominated the Plants in both places as early as medieval times. For example, some from an initially small North Staffordshire Plant family could have arrived in South Staffordshire as early as the fourteenth century and then they could, as a single family, have gone on to dominate DNA-tested Plants in the South cluster as well as the North. As yet, the Y-DNA results suggest that it could have been a mixture of both schemes, with some arriving in the south earlier than others.

Table 1. First documentary evidence of Plant name in South Staffordshire

John Plonte the Younger (1401) and John Plonte (1403) witnesses at Wombourne (Staffordshire Historical Collections) http://plant-fhg.org.uk/plant_docs.html **Note**. Both these Plonte documents refer to Overton and Wombourne. In the book *A Topographical History of Staffordshire: Including Its Agriculture, Mines* ...By William Pitt (1817), there is on page 187 a mention of *Overton or Orton, a hamlet in Wombourne parish, contains two three good farm-houses and other tenements.*

Possible early migration from North to South Staffordshire

Table 1 and much else can be explained by a Longspee-Audley feudal hypothesis [http://plant-fhg.org.uk/LongspeeAudley.html#LongAud] in which a single illegitimate Plantagenet line held feudal lordship over the early Plants. Plant could have been a popular name for genetically distinct men under this lordship, conceivably because these lords had good access to the contemporary scholastic teachings in which the vegetable or plant soul was important. Also, to an extent at least, a single Plant family could have travelled in the service of these lords.

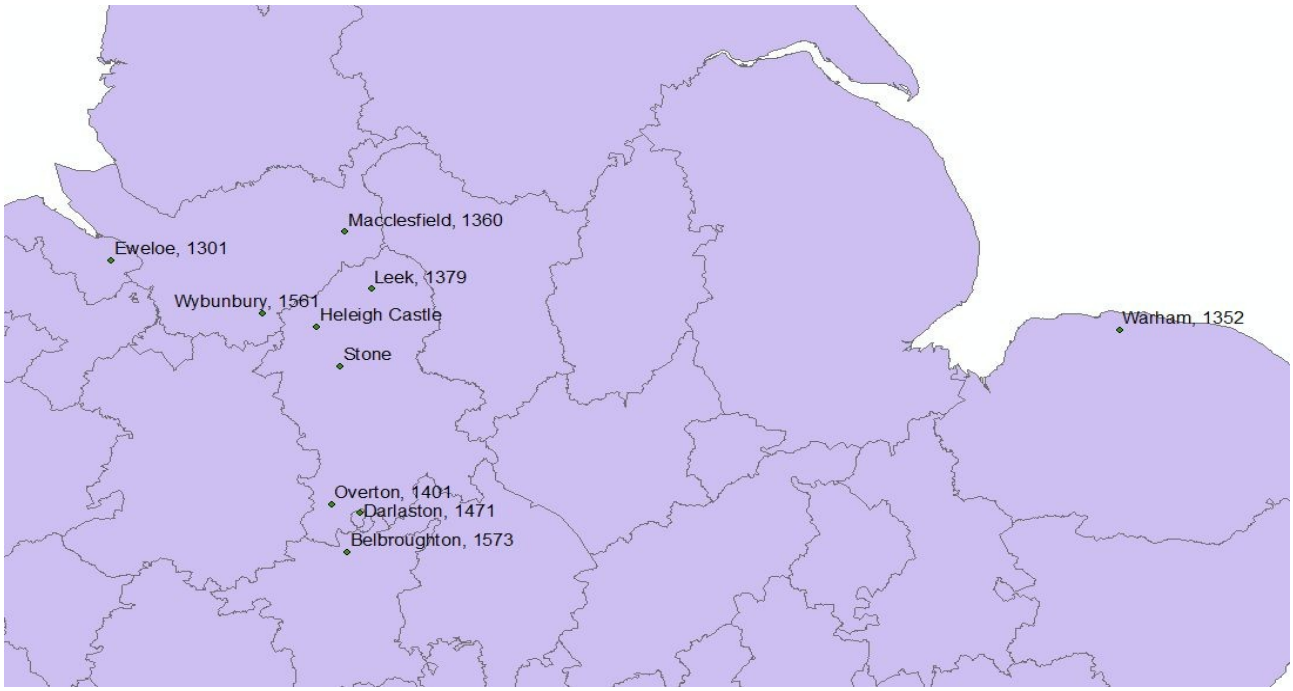
The relevant likely line of feudal lords stems from an illegitimate son of Henry II, who was a stalwart in the authority of the first Plantagenet kings (Henry II, Richard I, John), who followed on from the English Anarchy (1135-54). As well as titles in Ireland and Gascony, the first William Longspee (ca.1176-1226) of this illegitimate Plantagenet descent held titles such as sheriff of various counties in both the South and the Midlands of England. This serves to explain very well, to begin with, a thin thirteenth-century scatter of the Plant name around closely corresponding places. [Amongst other posts such as at the Cinque Ports and at Eye Castle in Suffolk, the first William Longspee of this descent was sheriff variously of Wiltshire, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Lincolnshire, Somerset, Devon, Staffordshire, and Shropshire].

When the Longspee male line died out, their heiress married in 1244 into the Audley family of north Staffordshire. This can then stand as a Longspee-Audley feudal lordship over what became the largest living cluster of the Plant name; to wit, in north Staffordshire. Around a century later in 1357, Katherine de Stafford, daughter of Margaret de Audley, married Sir John de Sutton III (1339-1370 or 76) Master of Dudley Castle which can thereby provide a link from north Staffordshire, in particular, to a secondary Plant cluster in south Staffordshire.

Some fourteenth-century locations of the Plant name

We hence have an early feudal connection between the two largest clusters of the living Plant name, both centered in Staffordshire: to wit, mostly near Leek in the north and also near Wombourne and Wolverhamton in the south.

Figure 1. Some principle places involved in the fourteenth-century origins of the Plant name.



The family home of the Audleys was at Heleigh Castle, near where there are subsequent records for the Plant name at Wybunbury, though that was a little later by when suitable documentation became available. Also in north Staffordshire, the Audleys held the Manor of Gratton in Leek parish, which is the main homeland of the unusually large surviving main Plant family. To the left of the above map (Figure 1), the Plant name is found in at Ewelow in 1301 – this can be explained as a place near where Audley forces could have gathered to join Edward I's 1290 conquest of North Wales.

To the right of the map (Figure 1) is Warham. This also is readily related to the Longspee-Audley feudal hypothesis. The husband Ralph of the aforementioned Margaret de Audley became the first earl of Stafford in 1350 and he was involved in a 1352 dispute at Warham, concerning the removal of goods. Shortly afterwards in 1357, a daughter of this Ralph and Margaret called Katherine de Stafford married John Sutton III, who was Master of Dudley Castle in south Staffordshire. This feudal hypothesis hence gives directly a feudal link between, for example, James Plant, who is mentioned in connection with the 1352 dispute at Warham, and the names John Plonte and John Plonte junior (Table 1) which are found in 1401 and 1403 at Overton in Wombourne near Dudley Castle.

Figure 1 also shows an early location called Darlaston for the Plant name. In fact, there is some ambiguity for this place-name, which is most notably near Wombourne in South Staffordshire but which is also a minor place-name further north in Staffordshire, near Stone shown in Figure 1.

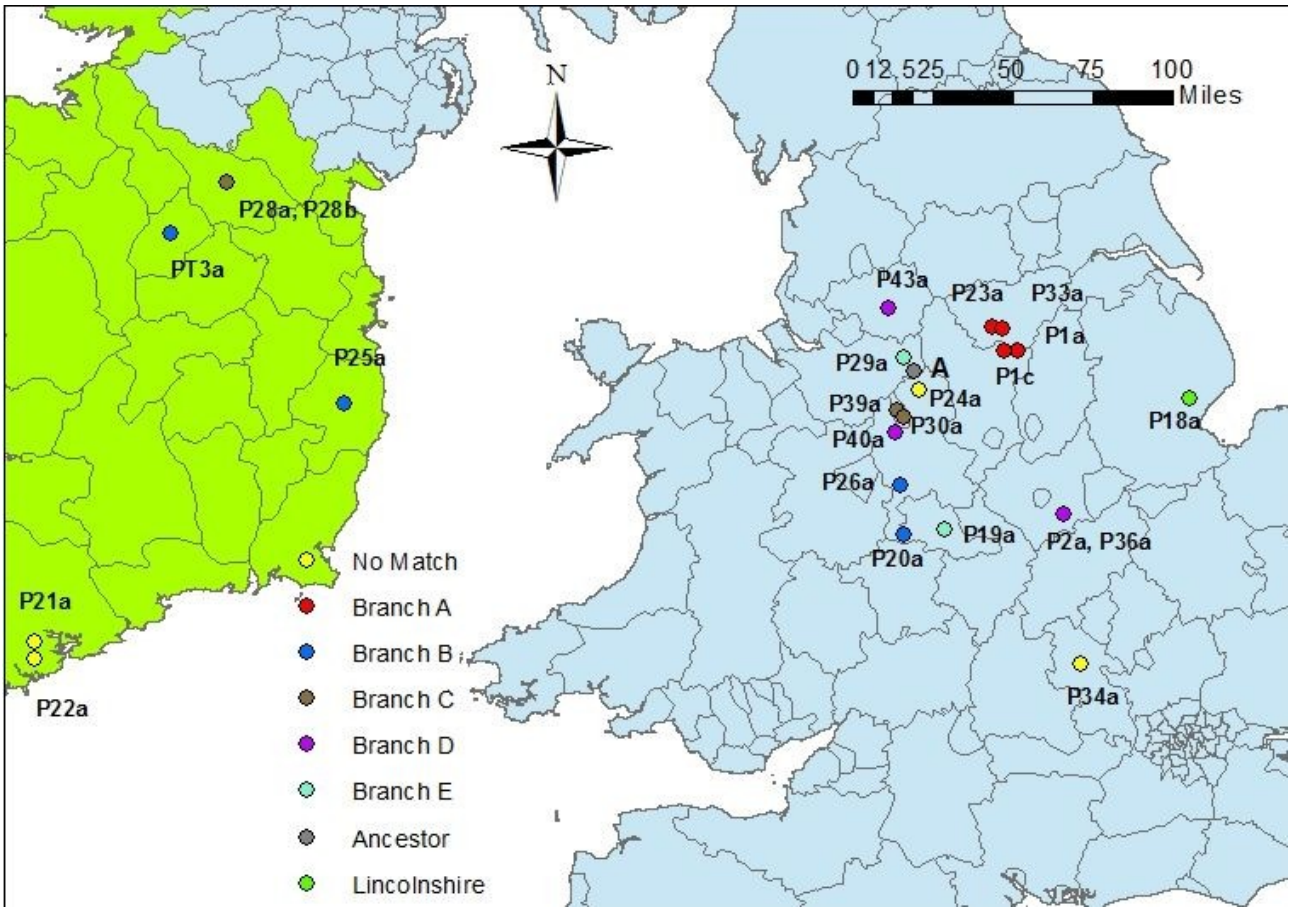
Geographical locations of the major branches of the main Plant family

The male-line ancestries of DNA-tested Plants are typically documented back to only around a couple of hundred years ago. Even so, it is usually considered that early peasants generally migrated little before then. It is hence rather a surprise that Plants with ancestry in each of the North and South clusters are related to the extent that is found by DNA testing of haphazard Plant volunteers (Figure 2).

There is as yet just a slight hint that some of the split between the North and South Staffordshire Plants could have occurred early. Some of those with relatively-recent known ancestries in the North, namely both of the apparently early-split Branches A and C (Figure 2), have so far not been found in the South. On the other hand, in the South (as well as in Ireland), there is Branch B.

The results for the other major branches are more mixed. Branch D is found in the North though also away to the south east in Leicestershire. The tentative Branch E is currently under further consideration though, as it stands, it is found both near the North (P29a) and South (P19a) Staffordshire clusters.

Figure 2. Y-DNA testing results for Plants, in their earliest known ancestral location.



Progress so far with high-number Y-STR DNA testing

So far, the major branches of the main Plant family have been identified by relatively low-number Y-STR testing. DNA testing by NGS (Next Generation Sequencing), such as with an FTDNA BigY test, gives rise to high-number (over 400) Y-STR measurements as well as helping to uncover potentially useful Y-SNPs.

In terms of the high-number Y-STR measurements, we have so far that P26a and PT3a (both in Branch B) have a genetic distance of 0.044 from each other. This is more closely related than to others not in Branch B. The Branch B individuals are respectively 0.069 and 0.074 from P19a (who is also associated with the south Staffordshire cluster). They are still further at 0.096 and 0.094 from P1a (in Branch A to the north east). This provides some additional confidence, at least that P26a and PT3a belong to the same major branch (Branch B) of the main Plant family; and, furthermore, that P1a (Branch A) in particular in the north east is a

quite distant relative of Branch B members in the south.

P40a and P43a of Branch D are as yet at the stage of having their BigY results fully analysed.