

Chapter 30

Plant name ramification and meaning

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A REVITALIZED INTEREST IN THE PLANT NAME'S ORIGINS AND SURNAME STUDIES

When discussing the distinctive surnames of Staffordshire, in 1998, David Hey presented some distribution data suggesting that Plant was a multi-origin surname; but, still more recently, DNA data has indicated that Plant is a single-ancestor name despite its being widespread and prolific. Hitherto disjointed data can now be regarded as pointers to the ramification of a single Plant family.

This Chapter traces the origins of the Plant name back from its modern principal homeland, which is Staffordshire: it includes evidence to show that, in early modern times, the surname was at Staffordshire's most northerly tip and to the north in east Cheshire. Its lasting arrival in its principal homeland appears to coincide with the mid fourteenth century removal to east Cheshire of the de Warennes from lost lands in far away north Norfolk (East Anglia). Earlier, by c1280, the Plant name appears to have arrived also in Somerset (SW England) from Sussex (SE England) with a proximity to de Warenne lands in both places.

The Plant name's origins are reassessed taking account of the latest evidence. P.H. Reaney, in the mid twentieth century, highlighted the name's thirteenth century origins around Norfolk and in Essex (SE England), where the spelling Plaunte first appears in 1262. Reaney has been criticized for citing by-names which may not connect through to modern hereditary surnames, but such a connection may hold true for the Plants: their early origins can be associated with de Warenne lands and, hence, through to the subsequent de Warenne and Plant homeland in east Cheshire.

It now seems to have been remiss of Reaney to ignore Ernest Weekly's early twentieth century opinion that the Plant name meant 'offspring'. The case for the 'offspring' meaning is discussed in some detail. That established, it seems a step too far, however, to embellish 'offspring' with the name's evident de Warenne (Plante Genest) context to assert that it meant 'Plantegenest offspring'. Though the de Warennes were Plante Genest's descendants and though the name Plaunte may have been influenced by Plante Genest's fame and though it may have implied an allegiance to his realm, there is no evidence of a blood tie between the Plants and Plante Genest. Less presumptuously, it may have been an ordinary mortal, perhaps one in awe of Plante Genest, who fathered offspring with Plant as a surname; Plant may have been considered to be a suitable surname simply because it matched the 'offspring' meaning of the nearby by-name Child.

30.1 Plant and surname categories

The Plant name has been ascribed a different meaning each time an authority has written about it. It is relevant, when attempting to narrow down a meaning for Plant, to consider surname categories. We may start by considering the surname categories used by Richard McKinley (1990)¹: (a) locative; (b) topographical; (c) personal; (d) occupational; (e) nickname; and (f) relationship. These categories will be explained further below, but we may immediately note that the various opinions that have been published for the meaning of Plant belong variously to these categories. Lower (1860)² and Sleigh (1862)³ list Plant as a corruption of Plantagenet; this may be taken to imply that

¹Richard McKinley (1990) *A History of British Surnames*.

²Mark Antony Lower (1860) *A Dictionary of Family Names of the United Kingdom*.

³John Sleigh (1862) *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek*, p 33.

Plant is, like Plantagenet, a nickname (e). However, Weekly (1916)⁴ suggests various other meanings: from the plantation, which is topographical (b); or sprig, which is a nickname (e); or cudgel, which is a nickname (e); or young offspring, which might be taken to be either a nickname (e) or a name of relationship (f). Curiously ignoring these opinions, P.H.Reaney (1958)⁵ suggested that the meaning of Plant was gardener, which is occupational (d). This meaning has been carried through to the third edition, in 1991, of his Dictionary; and, in 1988, Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges⁶ adhered to Reaney's opinion that Plant is a 'metonymic occupational name for a gardener', adding that it was 'perhaps also a nickname for a tender or delicate individual'.

Surnames are often discussed, group by group, but this can give a false impression that every surname can be deciphered, its meaning and origin unraveled, and that it can be assigned to its appropriate pigeon-hole. As we have seen, the main complication that arises, for Plant, is that various opinions have been expressed, and these can be ascribed to various surname categories. In fact, all of the category headings can be related, one way or another, to the Plant surname.

We may consider in further detail how each of McKinley's surname categories relates to possible meanings of Plant. For example, the 'offspring' meaning of Plant belongs to the 'Names of Relationship' category; Richard McKinley describes this as a small category. An outline of McKinley's category (f) is:

(f) Surnames of relationship, such as Cousins, Brothers, Fadder or Ayer, though this is only a small category.

However, P.H.Reaney grouped both of McKinley's categories (c) and (f) together, as parts of *his* rather differently defined 'Surnames of Relationship' category; this then makes Reaney's 'Surnames of Relationship' pigeon-hole the largest. Thus, for example, Reaney groups together the group (f) name *Sone* with group (c) names ending *-son*. An outline of McKinley's category (c) is:

(c) Surnames derived from personal names; such as Paul or Llewellyn; or from first names that have fallen into disuse, such as Godwin or Parnell; including those with *-son* or the possessive *-s* added, such as Parkinson or Williams or Harris; and those beginning Fitz, such as Fitzwilliam or Fitzrobert; and Scots surnames prefixed by Mac; and some surnames of Welsh origin (originally prefixed by Ap), such as Prichard or Probert; and hypocoristic names, derived from pet-forms of personal names, such as Wilkins or Willis or Perkins (from a pet-form of Peter).

In fact, McKinley (1990) does not adopt a radically different opinion from Reaney (1976), and he comments that 'surnames derived from personal names' [his category (c)] began as an indication of a child of the named father, though a few are female first names and presumably indicated a child of the named mother. Some names of relationship [McKinley's category (f)], such as Child, Sone, Dauter, fit particularly well into Reaney's large 'Surnames of Relationship' category. It is reasonable to presume that such a name as Child probably belongs to the patronymic group, since it is generally considered that surnames derived from personal names [McKinley's group (c)] began most often as an indication of the father of a child. This fashion for patronymics (a surname indicating a child's father) may have been inspired by the nature of land inheritance. The mass adoption of surnames in England may have arisen partly as a result of all classes copying the land-owning classes, who used surnames in connection with inherited land; in such a fashion, there was particular significance to descent from the father, or sometimes from the mother. Those names from McKinley's category (f) that can be presumed to be implicit patronymics (names indicating the child's father) can be merged with patronymics from his category (c). In fact, Reaney merged the groups even further: he extended his own over-arching 'Relationship' category, to include also other 'names of relationship' such as Cousins. This illustrates how groups can be merged variously to form categories and how the divisions between surname categories can become blurred.

A particular meaning that is relevant to the Plant name is 'offspring', or 'children', or 'child'. The surname Child can clearly belong to McKinley's category (f), but it can also be associated with

⁴Ernest Weekly (1916) *Surnames*, p 185.

⁵P.H. Reaney (1958) *A Dictionary of British Surnames*, first edition.

⁶P. Hanks and F.Hodges, *A Dictionary of Surnames*, (Oxford and New York, 1988).

McKinley's category (c). Child might be taken to be an *implicit* indication of the Child's father (e.g. a child of the local noble) and, indeed, the name Child is often taken to be the title of a young nobleman, so that there is then also some blurring with a name of status or title, which belongs to category (d). In turn, a name of status or title may be blurred with a nickname [category (e)]. Child might be a nickname meaning 'childish' or a title meaning 'young nobleman'. Thus, as well as being associated with categories (c) and (f), such a name as Child might be a surname of title or status and hence associated also with the categories (d) and (e). More generally, McKinley notes that there is some overlap, for names of status or title, between his categories (d) [*i.e.* occupational] and (e) [*i.e.* nickname]. More completely, the outlines of McKinley's categories (d) and (e) are:

- (d) Occupational names, such as Weaver or Taylor; including surnames of status or title, such as Burgess or Squire; though many, such as King or Archdeacon, seem to have begun as nicknames.
- (e) Surnames derived from nicknames; from physical characteristics, such as Long or Cruickshank; and from moral characteristics, such as Fairmaner or Tiplady; and from habitually used expressions, such as Goodenough or Gadsalve; as well as many others of too varied a type to be discussed briefly.

The broad range of categories – (c), (d), (e), and (f) – that can be associated with a meaning 'child' or 'offspring' can be contrasted with two other contrasting opinions for Plant, to wit 'cudgel' or 'delicate', which seem to belong more narrowly only to category (e). The 'offspring' meaning for Plant can imply a relationship name, associated with categories (c) and (f); and, beyond this, there is Weekly's opinion that the 'young offspring' meaning of Plant is a nickname, though it could also have been an indication of status. An imputation of status might have arisen because the derogatory term 'sprig' or the noble term 'scion' are possible medieval meanings of the word *plante*; putting this together we might wonder if some saw the name as a derogatory parody of an illegitimate young noble.

Turning to another possible meaning for Plant, Weekly's suggestion 'from the plantation' can be taken to belong quite straightforwardly to McKinley's category (b) [*i.e.* topographical], and this then just leaves his category (a) [*i.e.* locative]. Outlines of McKinley's categories (a) and (b) are:

- (a) Locative surnames, derived from a specific place, such as London or Doncaster, though sometimes there may be several places with the same name, as arises for Norton or Kirby.
- (b) Topographical surnames, derived from terms for some feature in the landscape, such as Hill, Brooks, Fields, Bridges, Hillman, Atchurch, or Townsend.

To my knowledge, no-one else has published that the Plant name might belong to category (a), though Weekly states '*Plant itself is generally local, from OF. - plante, enclosure, plantation*'; with the term 'local', he does not distinguish clearly between McKinley's categories (a) and (b). More particularly, there is loosely the possibility that the Plant name could be locative (category (a)) as opposed to topographical (category (b)), as it could be associated with the manor of la Planteland in Monmouthshire or with Plunton (later Plumpton) which is a place name in Cumbria, Lancashire, West Yorkshire, Northamptonshire and Sussex. As well as the place name Plunton, which can be compared with the early by-names Plantan' and Plantin and Planteng', there is also the place name Platt in Lancashire which is the basis of a common surname Platt or Plott in the Plant's principal homeland of north Staffordshire⁷: one might briefly wonder whether Plant or Plonte or Plantt or Plontt could have arisen as a misspelling of Platt or Plott or Plot. However, I shall leave locative names aside for the moment. Even when we discount McKinley's category (a) for Plant, it remains that the published meanings of this name can be associated with any of his other categories.

⁷Michael Paffard (1989-90) *North Staffordshire Names* in *Staffordshire Studies* Volume II, pps 59-89. I am grateful to Mike's widow, Georgina Pritchard, for letting me buy many books about surnames from his collection.

30.2 Trying to distinguish between opinions for Plant

As one means of trying to decide which of the opined meanings for Plant is most likely, we may look to how common each surname category is. If a meaning belongs to one or more categories that are found to be common, we might then judge that meaning to be likely. There is a proviso that we need to add to this approach however: some surname categories are variously common or rare in different regions; and, for the Plant surname, we need to consider more than one region of England.

Early occurrences of the Plante name are around East Anglia, but these may just have been instances of non-hereditary by-names: Plant as a *hereditary* surname may instead have originated independently in its principal homeland of east Cheshire and north Staffordshire around 1370. Many people of all classes acquired surnames around 1250-1350 in the south of England and East Anglia, whereas this trend was about a century later in the north. However, it needs be added that many early surnames died out with the Black Death around 1350⁸. These considerations are consistent with the early evidence for Plant; but, they leave us with the possibility that Plant could have originated as a surname in East Anglia around 1260 and survived and migrated to east Cheshire and north Staffordshire with the de Warennes around 1350, or it could have died out and then originated anew as a more lasting *hereditary* surname around north Staffordshire by about 1370.

For want of more detailed information about the Plant name's origins, we may take Suffolk as a typical region for the name's early East Anglian origins. The name form *de la Plaunt* occurs for two Rouen merchants in 1273. The precise origin of these traders' name is uncertain; but suffice it to note that, by 1327, about 11% of people listed with by-names or surnames in Suffolk had topographical names (*i.e.* category (b) names): the associated meaning 'from the plantation' can hence be associated with a *roughly estimated* likelihood of around 10%. The following data represents the percentage of people with the different categories of surname or by-name at particular dates. For the north Staffordshire region, there is data for Shropshire as well as Staffordshire. The early East Anglian cluster of Plants seems to have been quite widespread, but there is a published summary of the frequency of surname categories in East Anglia for Suffolk only. The following data is taken from R.A.McKinley (1990)⁹ and it uses the surname categories already described, except that (f') is here: names in other categories, or of uncertain origin.

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f')
Shropshire, 1327	40	9	23	5	16	7
Shropshire, 1672	21	13	42	11	9	3
Staffordshire, 1327	30	15	17	18	7	13
Staffordshire, 1666	29	12	25	21	6	7
Suffolk, 1327	15	11	30	23	5	15
Suffolk, 1524	14	7	30	30	3	16

We can use this data to assess the likelihoods of various meanings for Plant. As already suggested, we can associate a value of 10% with 'from the plantation'. The meanings 'cudgel' and 'delicate' quite clearly belong to the nickname category (e), which has a value of only 5% in early Suffolk and 6% in later Staffordshire; we might hence judge that these nickname meanings for Plant are less likely than 'from the plantation'. The meaning 'gardener' is occupational (*i.e.* (d)) and hence it can be associated with a likelihood level of around 20% in early Suffolk and in Staffordshire; on this basis, this meaning is more likely. We can take such meanings as 'sprig', 'scion', or 'offspring' together, as they all have sense as offshoot/offspring; and though, as already outlined, their categorisation is somewhat open to debate, we can associate them with aspects of columns (e) and (c) for example – in particular, column (c) can be associated with a likelihood level of around 30% around Shropshire, Staffordshire and Suffolk. The general lack of detailed evidence for early times means

⁸It is estimated that 30-45% of the general populace dies in the Black Death of 1348-50. The plague also came back in 1361-4, 1368, 1371, 1373-5, 1390, 1405 and continued into the fifteenth century, though death rates may have been fewer.

⁹*ibid.*

It can be noted that a category analysis does not rule out immediately either the topographical meaning ‘from the plantation’ or the occupational meaning ‘gardener’; there is also the meaning ‘offspring’ which is discussed elsewhere in the Chapter. In particular, P.H. Reaney (1976) supposed that the thirteenth century name *le Planteur* was occupational; he so also supposed was Plant. Though an occupational meaning for Plant can be taken to be slightly more likely, according to a category analysis, than a topographical one, we may consider both: that is, both ‘planter/gardener’ and ‘from the plantation’.

We may accordingly digress for a moment about the possibilities of a confusion between the two categories: occupational and topographical. The suffix *-eur* is a French equivalent to *-er*, and McKinley (1990) points out that a suffix *-er* or *-man* to a by-name does not necessarily indicate an occupational name, as it can instead denote someone living near a topographical feature. When such surnames were first formed in the thirteenth- and fourteenth- centuries, there is evidence that the suffixes *-er* and *-man* were added or omitted at will so that, for instance, a single person might be called sometimes *atte Bridge*, sometimes *Bridger*, and sometimes *Bridgeman*. Topographical names, such as *atte Linch* or *Lincher* (at the hillside) and *atte Barre* or *le Barrer* (at the gate) were particularly common in Sussex where there are many examples. We might accordingly consider that thirteenth-century instances of the names *de la Plaunt*, *le Planteur* and *Plante* could all have been interchangeable and could all have meant ‘from the plantation’. The possible meaning ‘from the plantation’ has received less prominence than a meaning ‘planter’ or ‘gardener’, but we should hesitate before ruling it out. We might add that plantations were widespread and this could explain the quite widespread distribution of the Plant surname, just as it could be explained by a supposition that Plant was a widespread term for a gardener.

Table 30.1: Some considerations for a topographical or occupational meaning of Plant

that this analysis has its shortcomings; but we might use it to surmise that the meaning ‘cudgel’ is less likely than ‘from the plantation’ which in turn is less likely than ‘gardener’ or ‘offspring’. The meanings ‘from the plantation’ and ‘gardener’ are discussed further in Table 30.1; and, in particular, ‘offspring’ is discussed further below.

Another way to discriminate between the meanings is to use the DNA evidence. This evidence gives: Plant is a single-ancestor name despite its being widespread and prolific. This seems to discriminate for example against the idea that Plant was a widespread occupational name, meaning ‘gardener’; and, like occupational names, widespread nicknames and topographical names are typically expected to be ‘multi-origin’. The DNA evidence does not support that Plant has multiple-ancestor origins; and, to this extent, it is not well supported that the name should be allocated to a category that has normally been associated with multiple-ancestor origins. It should be added, however, that, more generally, categorization schemes need to be reassessed to take account of how well the DNA-evidence confirms that particular surnames have a modal (single-ancestor) character or not. Traditional assessments of single-ancestor origins have relied on determining how common and widespread a particular surname was. Taking traditional and modern methods together, the Plant name is anomalous: it is moderately common and widespread (suggesting multiple-ancestor origins), but the DNA evidence indicates that it is a single-ancestor name despite this.

Finally, we may add that ‘offspring’ or ‘young person’ is the only Dictionary definition of *plant*¹⁰ that fits the Plant surname directly. Taking this together with the DNA evidence, there is a change of emphasis for the name’s likely meaning. The DNA evidence *highlights* the meaning ‘offspring’, in as much as the Plants are indeed the offspring of a single family; and this meaning remains intact after applying the foregoing category analyses, which indicate that a ‘surname of relationship’ such as ‘offspring’ can be taken to be a patronymic such that it is of a common type. There now seems little reason to look beyond the particular Dictionary definitions of the OED and Weekly: Plant most likely meant a ‘young person’ or ‘offspring’. There is no longer a need

¹⁰OED, *plant*, *n*¹, senses I.1.a and c.

to deliberate other meanings that might be thought to have been more fitting for a multi-origin surname: Plant is a 'single ancestor' name, and 'offspring' seems most appropriate as its meaning.

These analyses of the likelihoods of the various possible meanings for Plant indicate, at least, that the 'offspring' meaning should not be dismissed.

30.3 Nicknames of Philandering and such by-names as Plantefolie

Though we have discriminated against the meanings 'cudgel' and 'delicate' on the basis that they are nicknames, given that nicknames were rather uncommon in the geographical areas of interest, we may note that the meaning 'offshoot/offspring' has the added likelihood that it could have been part of a wider metaphorical scheme which has senses of a nickname *as well as* its being a 'surname of relationship'; in the wider scheme, there is sense relating to the planting of children as well as a planted child. As an implicit patronymic, the main significance could have been that the meaning 'offspring' indicated the children of some implied, though unspecified, progenitor. As a nickname, there could have been a less polite significance to the meaning 'sprig' or 'offshoot' which could have added some extra viability to the name. We may note that the shoot/offspring meaning has connotations of a common type of nickname: many surnames and by-names in the 13th and 14th centuries were nicknames of philandering. This has particular significance in connection with the Plant-like names that were used by Reaney to argue for a 'gardener' meaning to Plant.

The early meaning of *planta* (Latin) or *plante* (Old English) was a 'shoot for propagation'. There is evidence in Middle English and in Early English Books that some people took the 'offshoot' meaning of plant and mapped it up the Great Chain of Being to get 'offspring' for a person. Additionally, there is early English reference to 'planting children in marriage'. With this, we may note that the literal meaning of the 13th century by-name Plantefolie was 'wickedness shoot', which might either be a metonym (synecdoche) for a 'male generator of bastards' or, with the offshoot sense, it might mean metaphorically a 'bastard child'. We can compare the metonymic sense, to wit a 'male generator of offspring', with other names such as Toplady, Tiplady, Toplass, Topliss, Shakelady, Fullielove, Paramore, Sweetlove, Spendlove, Lemon ('lover', 'sweetheart') Blandamer (from *Pleyn d'amour*, cf. Fullielove), and perhaps also for example Pullrose, Breakspear and Whitehorn, not to mention many obscene by-names. Though the early names Plantebene, Planterose and le Planteur have been used to propose a gardener meaning for Plant, they may also, like Plantefolie, be taken to be names of philandering, with such meanings as 'pleasant shoot', 'risen shoot' and 'the begetter'.

The case that these names may be associated with philandering or generating offspring, rather than with agricultural planting, can be argued further. Most commonly, occupational names are for trades widely practiced throughout the country, but for which there were only one or two practitioners in a given village, as we can expect to have been the case for Smith, Taylor, Miller, etc.¹¹ There is a scarcity of evidence to associate by-names and surnames with tasks of arable farming, and we can explain this by noting that there would be too many following such an occupation for it to serve to distinguish one man from another. This casts some doubt on an arable meaning of planter for the by-name le Planteur; perhaps more likely this could mean 'the establisher' or 'the founder'¹² or 'the begetter'.

The 'generator of offspring' sense may have been salient for a surname such as le Planteur, and sense as a 'generated offspring' may have been salient for the Plant name. Similarly, de la Plaunt could mean 'from the generation' and all of the names le Planteur, Plant and de la Plaunt would then relate to the metaphor of planting children. Other names can also be related to this same scheme: Plantefolie ('wickedness shoot' or 'bastard offspring'), Plantebene ('pleasant shoot' or 'planted seed') and Planterose ('risen shoot' or cf. Pullrose).

¹¹Richard McKinley (1990) loc. cit., p 133.

¹²OED, plant, v, sense 3.a.

Weekly's proposed meaning 'from the plantation' for *de la Plaunt* could be substituted by the evident trend for rather impolite by-names and it could mean 'from the act of generation', or it could mean more politely 'from a shoot of the family tree'. To our modern ears, the latter might sound like a more direct metaphorical grounding on vegetable life; but, in medieval times, there was also a metaphorical grounding on man's vegetable soul with its powers of generation and augmentation. Contemporary depictions of so-called Green Man heads show a plant or vines or tree foliage issuing forth from the orifices of a man's head, and this might be considered to represent a man's vegetable soul. Also, the Bible represents men as plants in God's vineyard (Isiah 5:7), or as the branches of Jesus as the vine (John 15:1-5). Taking the family tree or vine metaphor, or taking metonymy implying a man with a vegetable soul or a generative shoot, this gives essentially the same 'from the (tree or vine) shoot' meaning for *de la Plaunt* as 'offshoot/offspring' which seems likely for *Plant* (and variant spellings). There are also the name forms *Plauntes* (1275) and *de Plantes* (1282). The thirteenth century scholastics taught that a child had just a vegetable and animal soul until it received an added intellectual component of soul from God; this provides a possible explanation of the variant by-name *de Plantes*, which might mean 'from man and God's plantings'.

30.4 Distribution and ramification of the Plant name

By the seventeenth century there was a sizable cluster of *Plants* in north Staffordshire and to the north in east Cheshire, where they may have arrived from north Norfolk in the fourteenth century. There is also evidence of a thirteenth-century ramification of the *Plant* name between *de Warrene* lands in SE and SW England. The evidence for this is outlined in the next few subsections.

30.4.1 The evidence for a migration into Staffordshire from east Cheshire

There are now more *Plants* in Staffordshire than in any other county though we should not assume that it was always like that. *Plant* records in the IGI¹³, for example, indicate that their numbers were equally in Cheshire and Staffordshire in the years around 1601 to 1650, but that this then shifted southwards more into Staffordshire.

Around that time, the 1666 hearth tax returns show occurrences of the *Plant* name in the northern Staffordshire hundreds of Totmonslow (19) and Pirehill (10) but hardly any in the southern Staffordshire hundreds of Seisden (0), Cuttleston (1) and Offlow (2)¹⁴. The published figure of ten *Plant* households for Pirehill hundred appears to be in error, however, and the *Plant* name was concentrated even more so than this in Totmonslow hundred, at the northern tip of Staffordshire. I have searched twice through the unindexed Pirehill list¹⁵ of 5,057 households and, each time, I have found only five that belong to a *Plant*; these are (in the Pirehill Hearth Tax returns of 1666):

Newcastle under Lyne:	James Plant, 1 hearth
Swinerton Constablewick:	Widdow Playnt, 2
Beech;	Stephen Playnt, 2
Yarnfield;	John Playnt, 1
<i>ditto</i>	Thomas Playnt, 1

On the other hand, the published figure of nineteen *Plant* households in the 4,240 *Hearth Tax* returns of 1666 for Totmonslow hundred¹⁶ appears to be correct: sixteen of these were in Staffordshire's northernmost parishes of Alstonfield and Leek, including Leek's quarters of Leek and Lowe, Leek-frith, Rushton Spencer, Heaton, Tittesworth, Bradnopp, etc. (Table 30.2). Across Staffordshire's county border, to the west, in the 1672 returns for Shropshire, there is just one *Plant*: William *Plant*

¹³1984 International Genealogical Index.

¹⁴David Hey (1998) *The Distinctive Surname of Staffordshire* in *Staffordshire Studies*, Vol 10, pps 1-28 (The Nineteenth Earl Lecture, delivered at Keele University, 6 November 1997).

¹⁵Collections for a History of Staffordshire, edited by the William Salt Archaeological Society (1921), pps 44-173.

¹⁶Collections for a History of Staffordshire, edited by the William Salt Archaeological Society (1925), pps 157-242.

Wall-grange:	William Plant, not chargeable
Low Hamlet:	Tim. Plant, 3 hearths
Leek Frith:	Thomas Plant, 2
	Thomas Plant, 1
	Laurence Plant, 1
	Thomas Plant, 1
	Widdow Plant, 1
	Robert Plant, 1
	Widowe Plant, 1
Rushton Spencer and Cloudwood:	Francis Plant, 1
Heaton:	Thomas Plant, 1
Tettesworth:	Samuel Plant, 2
Bradnopp Constablewicke:	William Plant, 2
Oakeover, Ilam and Castorne:	Felice Plant, not chargeable
Chedulton Constablewick:	Walter Plant, not chargeable
Astonfeild Constablewicke:	Samuel Plante, not chargeable
<i>ditto</i> , Highfeild [Fawfield Head]:	Richard Plante, 1
	Richard Plant, 1
	Thomas Plant, 1

Table 30.2: Hearth Tax returns (1666) for Plants in Totmonslow hundred of north Staffordshire

Leek	Nicholas Plount, Agnes, uxor eius, †John Swan, sp'us, Ellen, Joan ...
Leek Frith	Robert Plount, Agnew, uxor eius.
	Thomas Plount, Joan, uxor eius, Robert, William, Emma, Richard, Thomas, Edward.
	Richard Plonte, Ellen uxor eius, Elizabeth.
	William Plount, Alice, uxor eius, Margaret, Richard, Agnes, Elizabeth, Ellen ...
	John Plount, Alice, uxor eius, Joan, Agnew, James, Margaret, Margery, Mary ...
Bradnop Side	John Plontt, Ellen, uxor eius, John, Richard.
MorrIDGE Side	... uxor eius, Thomas, William, Agnes, Alice, John, John, Isabel, Alice, Joan, Clement Plont.
	... Plountt, Ellen, uxor eius, John, William, Robert.
Longsdon Side	Roger Plonte, Ellen, uxor eius, Agnes, Joan, Elizabeth, Margaret.
	Richard Holme, Agnes, uxor eius, Alice, uxor eius, Margaret, William, Richard, Roger, John, Nicholas Plount, Margaret, parentes.
Sheen	Robert Plontt, Alice, uxor eius, Joan.
Bearstone	... uxor eius, Ralph, Margaret, Roger Plount.
Milwich	William Plount, Agnes, uxor eius, John, William, Agnes, Hamlet, Margery, Catherine, Ellen, Agnes.
Tillington with Foregate	Thomas Plountt, Margery, Catherine, Agnes, uxores eius, John, Agnes, Agnes, Clemence, John, Margery, Agnes.
Stone, Vylle de Stone	William Plountt, Elizabeth, uxor eius, Margaret, John, Thomas, Agnes, William, Ellen, Humphrey.
Aston	John Plountt, Margaret, uxor eius, Humphrey.
Darlaston	Nicholas Plountt, Alice, Catherine, uxores eius, John, William, Thomas, John, Catherine, Alice Pyper, Thomas Alice, parentes.
Swynnerton	Thomas Plant, Elizabeth, uxor eius, Elizabeth, Margaret, Alice, Joan, Thomas, Hugh, Christopher, Agnes, parentes.

Table 30.3: Distribution of the Plant name in Staffordshire in 1532-3.

paid 2s. for one hearth at Bearston in Bradford hundred north. Just to the north of Staffordshire in Cheshire, there are four references to Plant in the index of the Northwich hundred Poll Tax 1660; and, for the 1664 Hearth Tax, there are four in the index and these refer to three records¹⁷. Taken together, the seven records appear to apply to five different Plant households in Northwich hundred:

Lawton:	Edward Plant; 2 hearths charged in 1664
Congleton:	James Plant & Margaret his w; charged 1s 0d in 1660 James Plant; 1 hearth charged in 1664
Newbold Astbury:	Thomas Plant husb £5 pa; charged 2s 0d in 1660 Margaret Plant wid; charged 1s 0d in 1660 Thomas Plant; 1 hearth charged in 1664
Odd Rode:	Thomas Plant husb; charged 1s 0d in 1660

Immediately to the east, still in Cheshire, lies Macclesfield hundred which is just to the north of the numerous Plant records for Staffordshire's Totmonslow hundred. A 1663 List of Habitants¹⁸ in Macclesfield hundred includes ten Plants:

Bosley:	John Plant	Sutton:	John Plant
Gawsworth:	Widdow Plant Robert Plant John Plant was Constable		Henry Plant Ralph Plant
Butley:	Edward Plant	Prestbury:	Lawrence Plant
		Tytherington	Edward Plant

To the east of Staffordshire's northern tip, in the county of Derbyshire, there are three Plants in the nearby High Peak hundred in 1670, and three more further afield:

High Peak 1670:	Longson (Great Longston);	Robert Plant, 1 hearth
	Backwell (Bakewell);	Roger Plant, 2
	Chelmorton;	Tho. Plant, 1
Wirksworth hundred 1670:	Thorpe & Mapleton;	Thomas Plant, 1
	<i>ditto</i>	Willm Plant, 1 Ret
Repton and Gresley 1662:	Swatlincote (Swadlincote);	Geo. Plant, 1

Together, these seventeenth-century findings indicate that the Plants were clustered mainly around the northern tip of Staffordshire, especially around Leek and to the north in Cheshire's Macclesfield hundred.

Rather earlier, a 1532-3 list of Staffordshire people¹⁹ shows that the Plants were already numerous, with 15 families in the northern half of that county²⁰. It is exceptional that a county should have such a complete list of over 50,000 names in the early sixteenth century, though the list included some people who were dead and some are listed twice: again, in this data, the Plants are clustered especially at the northernmost tip of Staffordshire (Table 30.3).

For still earlier, however, there is no fully clear evidence for the Plant name in the 1377-81 Poll Tax returns²¹ for Staffordshire. Unfortunately, there is no surviving fourteenth century Poll Tax return for Cheshire, and we have to look to less complete lists.

As well as the IGI and other evidence, specifically for the name Plant, there is evidence of an early migration of names, in general, from Lancashire and Cheshire into north Staffordshire (Table 30.4). It seems likely that the origins of the Plant name in its principal homeland were in east Cheshire, or perhaps just to the south.

¹⁷The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol CXIX.

¹⁸W.K.Plant (1992) *Roots and Branches*, 4, p 9.

¹⁹Ann J Kettle, ed., *A List of Families in the Archdeaconry of Stafford, 1522-3*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire (Staffordshire Record Society, 1976), 4th series, Vol 8.

²⁰David Hey (1998) *ibid*.

²¹Carolyn C. Fenwick, Ed., *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*; Part 1 (1998) Bedfordshire-Leicestershire; Part 2 (2001) Lincolnshire-Westmorland.

Staffordshire was exceptional in having absorbed a significant group from beyond its borders, but even there the immigrants formed only a small proportion of the total number of families. The contrast between the small numbers of people who migrated to Staffordshire from the west and the south of the county and the number who entered from the north is striking. Forty-two householders in the Staffordshire hearth tax returns of 1666 bore surnames derived from Yorkshire place-names and a handful, including two Kendalls, came from further north. These numbers pale into insignificance when they are compared with the 339 Staffordshire householders whose surnames derive from forty-two settlements in Cheshire and the 210 householders with locative surnames that can be identified with forty-eight different places in Lancashire. When we add those householders whose surnames arose in north-west Derbyshire, near the Lancashire and Cheshire borders, the total rises to well over 600 Staffordshire families who possess distinctive locative surnames which were coined in or from places north of the county border. This is a large number, though we have to bear in mind that a total of 20,648 householders were taxed in Staffordshire in 1666. We have no way of judging how many other surnames, in different categories, came from the same direction. Nor can we say when they came. This drift of the population in a southerly direction occurred over a long period of time.

The drift of the population into north Staffordshire from Cheshire and Lancashire began long before these names were recorded in 1666. Thirty-eight locative surnames from Lancashire, shared by ninety-nine families, appeared in a long list of Staffordshire families in 1532-33. Some of these surnames had gone by 1666 but they had been replaced by twenty-six new locative surnames from Lancashire. Twenty-two surnames from Lancashire were recorded both in the hearth tax returns and in the list that had been drawn up 134 years earlier. We are left wondering just how long some of these Lancashire migrants had been settled in Staffordshire before 1532-33.

The hearth tax returns for 1666 for Staffordshire recorded only three men with the *ap*- form of surname, a marked contrast with neighbouring Shropshire. Even if we include the forty Joneses, only 253 of the 20,648 Staffordshire householders had surnames which originated in Wales. On the whole, the Welsh people who had settled in the county were poor; nearly half of them were exempt from payment of the tax and only 16 per cent were taxed on more than one hearth. Hearth tax returns have been printed for only parts of ... Cheshire. ... In Cheshire the Northwich hundred contained seventy-two surnames with a Welsh or Welsh borders origin.

Table 30.4: A general trend of migration from Lancashire and Cheshire into Staffordshire (after David Hey (2000) loc. cit, pps 109-111, 113.)

30.4.2 A possible migration to east Cheshire from East Anglia

There is evidence that the Plant surname was at Staffordshire's most northerly tip by 1381²² and that it was already, by then, further to the north in east Cheshire. We may consider whether it arrived in east Cheshire from East Anglia.

East Anglia is some distance removed from the Cheshire/Staffordshire Plant cluster; but, early records for the Plante name are found there. In thirteenth century documents, there is particular mention of Plant-like names in East Anglia: Plantan' in Suffolk (1220); Roger Plantyn (1254-68) who was the butler and serjent to the earl of Norfolk; Plaunte in Essex (1262); Plente (1272-84) and Plauntes (1275) in Norfolk; Plante in Cambridgeshire (1279); and, de Plantes in Huntingdonshire (1282). There is a *Johannes Plantyng carpent' (6d)* at Shropham in the 1379 Poll Tax returns for Norfolk, who might perhaps have been related to the said Roger Plantyn (or Plantin or Planteng'). A rather similar name appears in the 1381 returns for Staffordshire, with a *Willelmus Pauntyng cult' Alicia ux' 2s 4d* at Gnossal; and, also in Staffordshire, for the Offlow Hundred in 1377, there is mention of *Ricardus Pant' PH*. We might wonder if there was some migration from East Anglia to Staffordshire, with some confusion of the names Plantyn (or Planteng') and Pauntyng and Pant' and Plante and Plonte. More particularly however, we may consider evidence that there may have been a migration from Norfolk to east Cheshire; though, since many families and early surnames died out with the Black Death, there is in general some difficulty in linking through convincingly from before the mid fourteenth century to the early modern period.

A rather unfortunate situation arises in the case of Plant, because the Black Death coincides with the times when the de Warenne affinity migrated from Norfolk (and other lands) to Poynton in east Cheshire. This leaves the question "Did the Plant name die out with the Black Death in Norfolk and appear anew in east Cheshire, or did it migrate with the de Warennes?". In a 1347 Inquest, the north Norfolk lands (Gallow and Brothercross hundred) of the last de Warenne earl of Surrey were to pass to Henry, earl of Lancaster and, soon afterwards, there was a complaint which included one made against a James Plant, in 1352, for removing goods from there²³. Was this a part of the de Warren removal to Poynton, in east Cheshire? This, or the Black Death, could explain why I have been unable to find any Plant in the extensive Poll Tax returns for Norfolk, though at least a few instances of the name survived in East Anglia: the 1381 Suffolk returns for Great Finborough in Stow hundred include an entry *agricole Johanannes Plante 6d*; and, the 1381 Essex returns for Pentlow in Hinckford hundred include, within a group headed *famuli & labor'*, an entry *Walterus Plante ux' 12d*. Earlier, for Haughley in Suffolk, a deed dated 2 Oct 1350 mentions a *cottage of William Plante*²⁴.

As already mentioned, no late fourteenth century Poll Tax return survives for Cheshire. However, A.M. Tonkinson (1999)²⁵ has described some evidence for the east Cheshire hundred of Macclesfield, though his work concentrates mainly on the borough of Macclesfield itself and the surrounding manor of Macclesfield forest, rather than on the whole of Macclesfield hundred²⁶.

There is some evidence to suggest that the Plant name came to east Cheshire with a de Warenne migration from north Norfolk lands: at least six of the thirty-one named, for removing goods in 1352 from erstwhile de Warenne lands in north Norfolk, had a surname (or by-name) that is then found amongst the later fourteenth century residents around the borough and manor of Macclesfield. Participants in the removal of goods from north Norfolk included James Plant, Alan de Hall, Richard de Kent, Thomas Knyght, Alan Lovel, John Nichol, and John Bataille. It then seems noteworthy

²²W.K.Plante (1991) *Roots and Branches*, 2, p 7.

²³Patent Polls: 1352 Jan 28 Westminster.

²⁴The Iveagh (Phillips) Suffolk Manuscripts. Catalogue Ref. HD 1538/250.

²⁵A.M.Tonkinson (1999) *Macclesfield in the Later Fourteenth Century* in the series *Remains Historical and Literary connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancashire and Chester* Vol XLII, Third Series.

²⁶Out of 1,921 names in the Halmote court rolls for the manor, 422 (30%) were tenants; a further 1,712 names appear in the Portmote rolls for the borough, though many of these may have been visitors. Just under half of the names in the Halmote were locative and 13% occupational; while, in the Portmote, 35% were locative and 20% occupational. Two with the name Gardener appear in the Halmote rolls, for the manor, but none in the Portmote rolls for the borough.

that, around Macclesfield manor in the later fourteenth century, the following names may have arrived from north Norfolk:

1. the name Plont(e) is found at Rainow and Lymme;
2. the name Halle at Rainow, Sutton, Eddisbury (Rainow) and Somerford;
3. the name Kent²⁷ as a temporary borough resident from 1352 to 1358;
4. the name Knyght or Knight at Macclesfield borough;
5. the name Lovell at Gawsworth;
6. the name Nichol at Rainow; and,
7. the name Batiller at Eaton.

Each year from 1349 to 1391 between 89 and 154 people paid fines, or received licenses, to graze their pigs in Lyme, which is a parish adjoining the new de Warenne seat at Poynton towards the north of east Cheshire. The rolls listing such payments survive for only twelve years²⁸ and only ten males appear in three or more years indicating that they were resident tenants: one of these was Honde²⁹ Plonte (this was the local spelling of the name Hand Plant). Other Plants are found a little further to the south at Rainow.

The Rainow Plants might be taken to be a prominent group amongst those who represent the origins of the principal Plant cluster of Cheshire and Staffordshire. The Halmote Court and other records for Macclesfield manor³⁰ indicate that the Black Death hit Rainow hard; unless some other event such as the arrival of the de Warenne affinity changed the tenancies: 62% of its land tenancies changed hands between 1349 and 1353. In the later fourteenth century, there was a general consolidation of holdings in Macclesfield forest, but this trend is not found in Rainow where there were as many people holding land in 1383/4 as in 1352: there were thirty-two such people in Rainow in 1383/4 with just two holdings in decay. The majority of the tenants of Macclesfield manor held between three and nine *Cheshire acres*³¹ (Tonkinson categorizes this as a level 4 land holding, based on a rent of 2*s.* up to 6*s.*), with more than half holding under nine acres and only one in eight holding 22 or more. These are more sizable holdings than those of local tenants in other parts of the country. Ranulph Plont and then his son John Plont senior are listed with a level 4 land holding at Rainow. Judging by his appearances in the court records, Ranulph has been allocated a status 3/10; he might fairly be described as a moderately wealthy peasant. He had sheep, draught-beasts (such as oxen, bullocks, steers, or heifers), working horses and pigs; though he appeared only under five times in connection with fines for or purchases of wood. W.K.Plant (1994)³² mentions that the records show John Plont junior by 1410 independently of his father John Plont senior, but still at Rainow. This may be the same John Plant junior as he who is listed amongst ninety-eight '*Knights, Gentlemen and Freeholders*' in Macclesfield hundred in 1445³³.

²⁷Without this evidence we might wonder how the name Kent (a locative name from the far south east of England) got to the borough of Macclesfield – the evidence provides a plausible explanation: it seems feasible that 'a man from Kent' arrived in the de Warenne north Norfolk hundred from Kent, a county with which the de Warennes had associations, and then one of his descendants removed with the de Warennes to Macclesfield near their new Poynton seat in east Cheshire.

²⁸Public Record Office, Special Collections, Court Rolls. SC 2/253/4 mm 9-10, SC 2/253/5 m 5, SC 2/253/8 m 9, SC 2/253/0 mm 11-12, SC 2/253/10 m 6, SC 2/253/12 m 5, SC 2/254/1 m 9, SC 2/254/2 m 5, SC 2/254/3 m 8, SC 2/254/4 m 13, SC 2/254/5 m 4, SC 2/254/8 mm 5-7.

²⁹Though here used as a forename, Honde was also a local by-name or surname; Hugh Honde appears six times in the same records as Honde Plonte.

³⁰A.M.Tonkinson (1999) loc. cit., esp. p 76 n 138, p 79 nns 146-7, p 7, p 84, pps 263-4.

³¹The customary Cheshire acre was more than double the size of the statute measure (10,240 sq.yds.).

³²W.K.Plant (Feb.1994) *Roots and Branches*, Issue Number 7, pps 4-7.

³³J.P.Earwaker (1877) *East Cheshire: Past and Present; or A History of the hundred of Macclesfield in the County Palatine of Chester*, Vol I, p 17.

30.4.3 An early ramification of the name from SE England to Somerset

It seems that the de Warenne connection may have been relevant to the arrival of the Plant name in east Cheshire from East Anglia around 1350. A de Warenne connection would also appear to have been relevant to the arrival, by c1280, of a branch of the Plant family in Somerset (SW England) from Sussex (SE England). As well as in north Norfolk (East Anglia), the de Warenne earls of Surrey and Sussex held various lands. For example, they held the honour of Lewes in Sussex. Just eight miles to the north of the centre of Lewes is Maresfield (spelled, in the Close Rolls, Mersfeld in 1234 and Meresfeld in 1293); and, in c1280, *Robert Plonte of Saltforde, once bailif of Marsfelde*, is mentioned in Bath records (Table 30.5) as having a tenement in Stall St. This Plant was by then of Saltford in Somerset, which is four miles west of Bath and thirteen miles north of the centre of Charlton: the de Warennes held the manor of Charlton.

As well as mention of this Robert Plonte in c1280, there is mention of Robert Plonte in a document dated 1295-1301 in connection with the same tenement in Stall St. (Table 30.5). There is also clear evidence that the Plonte name was hereditary in Bath, as there is mention of the transfer of shop and stall and tenement from Thomas Plonte to Robert, his son in 1328; and, also, mention of a Robert Plonte son of Walter Plonte in 1329. Mentions of the Plonte name continue: Robert, son of Thomas Plonte 1340; tenement of Robert Plonte 1340; witness Robert Plonte 1341; Robert Plonte 1342/3; witness Robert Plonte 1342; summons to distain Robert Plont (sic) 1346; tenement of John Plonte 1349; witness Robert Plonte 1349; land of Walter Plonte c1360; though it is not clear whether the said Walter Plonte was still alive by c1360, leaving it open to consider whether the name had died out near Bath in the Black Death, or whether it had migrated.

I have found no reference to the Plant name in the 1379/81 Poll Tax returns for Somerset, though it might be wondered if the early fourteenth century Bath Plants led on to instances of the name spelling Plente nearby. There is mention of: Roger Plente of Exeter in Devon 1364, 1365, 1368; and, Reynold Plente in Cornwall 1386, 1393. More particularly, there is: John Plonte(?) in Wiltshire³⁴ in 1376; and, chaplain William Plonte³⁵ at Olveston in Gloucestershire (land of prior and convent of Bath) in 1386. The counties of Devon, Wiltshire, and Gloucestershire adjoined Somerset.

30.5 Implications for the meaning of Plant

It seems clear that *many* modern Plants have descended from the principal Plant homeland and, given the DNA evidence, there is little doubt that they are the descendants of a single ancestor. To consider the meaning of the surname of most modern Plants, we need to consider origins in east Cheshire, as well as possible earlier origins away to the south east. It seems clear that Plant was an *hereditary* surname in east Cheshire by 1380, and that these were the forefathers of most Plants in the main Plant homeland. It is less clear, however, whether other modern Plants may have descended from an earlier Plant ancestor; and whether this single ancestor of the single family of Plants predated the thirteenth century occurrences of the Plant name in East Anglia, SE England, and Somerset. If the descendants of those earlier Plants had largely died out, it would provide one possible explanation of why they do not show up as separate families in the DNA results, but there is also the possibility that the descendants of those early Plants are amongst those with matching DNA as would be expected if they belonged to the same single family from the earliest times.

A Ralph Plont is mentioned repeatedly from 1369 to 1374³⁶ for straying animals in Macclesfield forest. It is then clear that the name was hereditary through three generations: Ranulph Plont, John Plont snr, John Plont jnr. We may also note that Ranulph Plont is mentioned 1383/4³⁷ for renting

³⁴The Money-Ktyle family of Whetham, Calne, Wiltshire; Estate Title Deed, Catalogue Ref. 1720/175: *Witd.: John Plonte(?)*, *William Martyn*, *John Mokolham*.

³⁵Patent Rolls.

³⁶PRO SC2/253/4, 5, 6, and 7.

³⁷PRO SC11/984.

c1280	Grant - ref. BC 151/4/14 - date: Circa 1280. By Gilbert Tayllur, for 20 marks, to Robert Plonte, of Saltforde, once bailiff of Marsfelde, of his tenement in Stall street, situate between that of John Daniel, on the south, and that which was Richard Legat's, on the north. Rendering yearly a rose at Midsummer in respect of the same fee (feodum), and 3s. to the Bishop of Bath at two terms, viz., at Hokeday and Michaelmas, for all customs, etc.
1295-1303	Grant - ref. BC 151/4/15 - date: 1295-1303. By Robert Plonte, of Saltforde, to Benedict de Stoke, for 10 marks and 10 shillings, of his tenement in Stall street, which lies between the tenement of the Commonalty, which formerly was John Daniel's, on the south, and the tenement of the aforesaid Benedict, on the north. Rendering yearly 3s. at the two terms viz., at Hokeday and Michaelmas, and to Gilbert le Tayllur, etc., a rose at Midsummer.
1328	Grant - ref. BC 151/3/55 - date: 26 May, 1328. By Thomas Plonte, of Bath, to Robert, his son, of a shop (scopam), within the South gate, adjoining to the said gate, on the west; and a stall which belonged to John de Welyngton, between the tenement of Alexander le Dighere, on the south, and that of John Cole, on the north; and a tenement which extends from the South gate to the tenement which formerly belonged to Nicholas le Lavender, on the west, and it contains in length 77 feet and in breadth 22 feet.
1329	Grant - ref. BC 151/2/46 - date: 21 December, 1329. By Robert Plonte, son of Walter Plonte, of Bath, to William de Heywaye and to Roger, son of John Marmyon, and the heirs of the said William, of a messuage in the suburb by the North gate, between the tenement of Thomas le Kynt, on the south, and the lane called Froggemerelane, on the north; which said messuage Robert had of the feoffment of the aforesaid Thomas le Kynyt.
1329	Release - ref. BC 151/2/47 - date: 22 December, 1329. By William de Heyweye, to Roger, son of John Marmyon, of Button, of all right in a messuage granted to him by Robert, son of Walter Plonte, of Bath.
1340	Release - ref. BC 151/3/56 - date: 1340. By Robert, son of Thomas Plonte, of Bath, to Roger le Tannere, and to Alice, his wife, sister of Robert, of all his right in the shop outside and adjoining the South gate on the west, and in the stall which formerly belonged to John de Welyngton, which is situate between the tenement of Alexander le Deyare, on the south, and that of John Cole, on the north; and in all that tenement from the said South gate to that which belonged to Nicholas le Lavender, on the west, and which contained 77 feet in length and 22 feet in breadth; and also he agrees that he is bound in one hundred shillings to Roger and in 60 shillings to the fabric of the Cathedral of Bath, to be paid to the monk of the work of the said church, and in forty shillings to the proctors and collectors of the goods of the work of the cathedral church of Wells, for which payment he binds himself, his heir, executors and all his lands, etc.
1340	Deed - ref. BC 151/2/44 - date: 22 August, 1340. By which John de Farlegh, Thomas de Saltforde and Alice de Farlegh, his wife, acknowledge that they are bound to William le Bost, of Wroxhale, in twelve pence of yearly rent from their tenement in the town (villa) of Bath, in North street; which tenement William de Farlegh had of the gift of Thomas of Lavington, in Bath, and which tenement is situate between the tenement of Robert Plonte on one side, and the tenement of William Oteley on the other side. The rent to be paid at four terms, and for which they charge their heirs and all their goods movable and immovable, under a penalty of twenty shillings to be paid to the Holy Land. For this grant William gave them sixteen shillings. ... Witnesses: Roger Cryst, Mayor; Adam le Miulleward; Robert Plonte; John atte Halle; Roger de Berleghe; Richard Poyntz; William Freman; John atte Putte; John atte Forde, and others.
1341	Release - ref. BC 151/2/27 - date: 31 December, 1341. Witnesses: Alexander le Dyeghere, Mayor; Adam Wytesone; William Swayn; William Kubbel; Robert Plonte, and others.
1342-43	Release - ref. BC 151/2/48 - date: 13 Jan 1342-43. Witnesses: William Cubbel, Mayor; Adam Whytesone; Robert Plonte; Robert Wysdom; William de Kymenton, and others.
1343	Release - ref. BC 151/2/25 - date: 21 June, 1343. Witnesses: Adam Whyteson, Mayor, William Swayn; Roger Cryst; Thomas Fontel; Thomas Stote; Robert Plonte; John Gynelegh.
1346	Order - ref. BC 151/6/70 - date: 1346. I, Cary, sheriff of Somerset, by command of the King, dated at Westminster, 6 July, 20 Edward III. (1346), order the bailiff of the City of Bath, to distrain Richard le Gynour, John Hus, Nicholas le Degher, John de Alyngton, Robert Plont, Walter Saundres, Richard le Venour, Robert le Deghere, Nicholas Basse, Adam le Barber, Robert de Natton, and Eustace de Button, by all their lands in his bailiwick, and to have them before the justices at Westminster, in 15 days from Michaelmas or before William de Shareshull at the assizes on Friday the Morrow of St. Lawrence, at Wells, to recognise on their oath whether 15 acres of land and 3 acres of meadow in Walcote and Bath are the free alms pertaining to the chapel of St. Werburg by Bath, whereof William de Kelleseye is parson or the lay fee of Thomas State, citizen of Bath, and Matilda, his wife, Bathin le Deghare and Cristina, his wife, Edmund Farlegh and Margery, his wife, and the Prior of Bath.
1349	Grant - ref. BC 151/5/90 - date: 1349. Witnesses: William cubbel, Mayor; John de Halle; Nicholas Coppe; Robert Plonte; Thomas Stote.
1349	Grant - ref. BC 151/2/43 - date: 29 June, 1349. By John de Dunsterre, tailor, to Robert of Dunsterre, citizen, of two shillings yearly rent payable at Midsummer and Christmas arising from the tenement which Richard Golde holds for ever in North street, on the west side, which tenement is situate between the tenement of the Prior and Convent of Bath, on the north, and that of John Plonte, on the south.
c1360	Grant - ref. BC 151/2/38 - date: Circa 1360. By Richard, son of Richard le Knyt, of Bath, for five marks, to Richard Hunderwode, of all his land in the suburb of Bath, to wit, that which is outside the North gate between the land of Walter Plonte and the land which formerly belonged to Richard Witfare, extending from the plot (placea) into the Avon. Rendering a rose at the Nativity of St. John the Baptist for all service, etc., except five pence at Hokeday to the Lord Bishop for land gabel, and three shillings and four pence to the Abbey of St. Augustine of Bristol.

Table 30.5: Plont(e) mentions in Ancient Deeds belonging to the Corporation of Bath

There are various mentions of Welshmen in Macclesfield manor in the later fourteenth century, often in connection with affrays. There is mention of swords carried by at least two outsiders from Wales. David Goldbourn aka 'le Walshemon', servant of Thomas Fitton, and his concubine were described as common breakers of gardens in the borough. In March 1375, he was indicted for an assault on another Welshman and the near amputation of Matthew Walshe's hand with a baslard. Two homicides in Macclesfield borough involved Welshmen. Ellis of Flintshire killed David ap Gron in 1371 and Arthur Wodehale killed William Walsh in 1380. In 1371 Robert Coleman, a Welshman drew a knife on Thomas son of William Spycer at Wallgate. In 1388 Griffith the Welshman raised a stick to strike William Sleg in Rainow and was struck with a stick by Reginald Cook. In June 1391 two men, led by Reginald the Welshman of Haddon, lay in wait for Richard Hubart at Marpole, wounded him on his head with a sword and then mutilated all his limbs.

Table 30.6: Mentions of Welshmen in Macclesfield Manor in the later fourteenth century (After A.M.Tonkinson (1999) loc. cit., pps 59, 152, 159, 160 169, 170-1, 209.)

a parcel of land from John Walshe, whose name in itself suggests an early association of the Plant name with a Welsh influence.

We may consider some more general points that relate to Welsh names. In Staffordshire³⁸, a county fairly accessible from Wales, Welsh personal names such as Craddock, Griffin, Meredith, and Oweyn occur in the fourteenth century as surnames or by-names, and these were probably though not certainly hereditary. It is hence clear that there could have been some Welsh influence on the formation of surnames in the principal Plant homeland. It seems likely that, here, there were many people who were bilingual and that there would be a widespread understanding of the 'children' meaning of Plant.

Though similar meaning is found throughout England in late medieval and early modern times, we may note that it is particularly in Wales that *plant* literally means 'children' and *planta* means 'to beget children'. It might be more than mere coincidence that the principal Plant homeland is near the Welsh borders. This leaves the early East Anglian occurrences of the name, which might be explained by the fact that similar meaning is found for the word *plante* more widely than near Wales.

It seems that a simple model based on distance from Wales is inadequate for explaining the choices made by Welsh migrants into England³⁹. Near the Welsh borders, there is more evidence of Welsh names in some English counties than others; and some Welsh names are found far from Wales. The (incomplete) poll-tax returns (1377-81) indicate that Hereford and Shropshire offered good opportunities for settlers arriving from mid-Wales, but the tax returns of 1381 for Gloucestershire note far fewer Welshmen and women. It is surprising to find that Leicestershire (in 1379) apparently contained far more Welsh settlers than did Gloucestershire or Lancashire. Even in the fourteenth-century Poll Tax returns for far away Essex (where the Plaunte name was recorded in 1262), there are several names derived from Wales: five Walleys, two Walshs, one Welsche, one Walschman, one Wales, two Gryffins, and one Ewen, as well as several people whose name had been derived from Gough.

Regardless of the detail of the migration patterns of the medieval Plants, we can attempt to review the likelihood of an 'offspring' meaning for the name. Besides the Welsh meaning 'children' of *plant*, the Oxford *English Dictionary* recognizes an archaic 'young person' meaning to the word. Though 'offspring' can be accepted as a widespread meaning throughout England, the probability that it was indeed the predominant meaning of the Plant name is increased, it would seem, by the fact that my searches reveal that both the Child name and a Welsh influence occur in proximity to early evidence for the Plant name:

³⁸Richard McKinley (1990) loc. cit., p 42.

³⁹David Hey (2000) loc. cit., p 58.

We should distinguish between a Welsh influence on surname formation in England and the formation of surnames in Wales:

Genealogical names in Wales: in general, surnames formed much later in Welsh speaking areas, and the naming convention used, there, before then, was mostly that called the genealogical type: this set out a man's ancestry for perhaps two or three generations back. This is exemplified by Gruffydd ap Rhys ap Hywel (or to Anglicise the names in a way perhaps horrifying to Welshmen, Griffith son of Rice son of Howel). There was some tradition of Anglo-Norman land holding in Wales, and it is perhaps not surprising that some non-Welsh first names are sometimes found mixed into this scheme, such as in a 1292 instance of a name: Madoc ap Phelip.

Welsh influence on surnames in England: as well as introducing Welsh words and names into English surnames, we can add that a Welsh influence may have reinforced a local custom in England for patronymics, or for surnames of *male* relationship. This can be associated with the meaning 'children' or 'offspring' for Plant. For the Welsh, names of *male* relationship were particularly important. As outlined already, the Welsh had a tradition of detailing the male line of descent, with such name components as Ap Rhys (later becoming Price in regions influenced by the English fashion for forming surnames). The genealogical naming convention probably related to Welsh laws about land tenure, which made relationships in the male line important in respect of property inheritance. In particular, if a person holding land died without direct male heirs (females and persons descended through females being excluded), his land was partitioned between a group of male relatives who might include distant cousins.

Table 30.7: Welsh surnames and Welsh influence on English surnames

Early records in East Anglia: in the Norfolk Poll Tax returns, in the erstwhile de Warenne hundred of Gallow and Brothecross in 1379, there were Thomas Child and Henricus atte Childerhous; and, more widely throughout Norfolk, there are three others with the name Child, one Chyld, one Childes and two more called Childerhous. To the south in Suffolk, there is Johannes Waleys and Johannes Child for Blackbourne hundred in 1377; and, more widely in Suffolk in 1381, there is a Chyld, a Childerhous, a Childerston', two more spelled Childreston', and a Pulrose' in keeping with the metaphor for planting children. As already mentioned, there were Welshmen in Essex, where there is the first evidence for the spelling Plaunte (as commented by David Hey, did these Welshmen migrate over land or by sea?); also, in Essex, there is a Child in the 1377 returns and two named Chyld in the 1381 returns.

The Cheshire/Staffordshire Plant cluster: no Child has been found in the (scarce) Poll Tax returns for Staffordshire; but, between Staffordshire and Wales, in the 1381 returns for Shropshire, at Donnington (between Shrewsbury and Telford), there are records for a *Johannes Child cult' 2s 0d* and a *Wilelmus Child s' 12d*. As already mentioned, there is no surviving 14th century Poll Tax return for Cheshire; but, in the 1660 Poll Tax and 1664 Hearth Tax returns for Northwich hundred, there are seventy-two names of Welsh origin, and nine references to Child(e) in the index to accompany the eight references to Plant. There are several references to Welshmen in Macclesfield manor, including at Rainow, in the later fourteenth century (Table 30.6).

This provides sufficient evidence to lend support to an 'offspring' meaning for Plant, irrespective of whether it migrated to east Cheshire from East Anglia or not. It seems likely that that the name did migrate to east Cheshire from elsewhere, and that the evidence in East Anglia for an 'offshoot/child' meaning is relevant; but, if not, there is plenty of evidence to support much the same meaning 'offspring/children' in east Cheshire. Given that there were those who understood that *plant* translated to 'children' and the surname Child existed locally, it seems reasonable to suppose that the meaning of Plant was 'offshoot' (as in Old English and French) implying 'offspring' (as in Welsh).

30.6 Conjectures about such a meaning as ‘offspring’

Some names in McKinley’s category (f), ‘names of relationship’, may have originated with an influence from the traditions of male land inheritance (*cf.* Table 30.7). Some other such names might have related more to morals and gossip, and some, such as Senior or Younger, may have originated merely for the practical purpose of distinguishing two people with the same forename. In general, there is little by the way of direct evidence about how and why names of relationship formed, and we are largely left to guess. Such names include the following:

Cousins, Brothers (*cf.* the possessive *-s* of such names as Roberts, Williams); words for nephew (Neave or Neeve); words for uncle (Uncle, Eames, Heames, Hemes, Neame); words for a relative by marriage (Odam, Odams, Odhams); possible other names for a relative by marriage, such as derived from Wat for Walter (Watmaugh, Watmugh, Watmuff, Watmore, Whatmoor) or from Richard (Hitchmough, Hickmott) or from Robert (Robertsmaugh); words for son (Soane, Sone, Soanes); words for daughter (Daughters, Dauter, and perhaps also Darter, Dafter, Doctor); words for parents (Fathers, Fader, Fadder, Mothers, Bairnsfather); words for heir (Ayer, Ayr, Ayres, Eyre, Hair, Hayer, Heyer); words to distinguish by age (Senior, Senior, Seanor, Sayner, Sinyard, Younger); names to distinguish the son from the father (Young, Younghusband, Vaughan, Ogg, Child), or to distinguish the father from the son (Senior, Henn, and possibly Old, Oldman, Childsfader); as well as Milnerstepson, le Wogherbrother (brother of the wooer), le Pristesbrother (priest’s brother), and Johanesleman (John’s sweetheart).

Some of these can be compared with the ‘offspring’ meaning for Plant. For example, Vaughan is the Welsh word for *Younger* and it was widely used in Wales when a son had the same first name as his father⁴⁰. Vaughan, like Plant, was evidently an English surname showing a Welsh influence. The Herefordshire militia assessment of 1663 contains 56 occurrences of the name Vaughan, and a list of taxpayers in medieval Shrewsbury (in Shropshire) contains a William Vaughan (1309) and Thomas Vaughan (1316)⁴¹.

With such a variety of names of relationship, one is left to guess how precisely the name Plant, if it means ‘offspring’ or ‘children’, as seems likely, may have arisen. It seems relevant to stress, however, that this particular meaning is more in keeping with the usual patronymic naming convention than names of distant relationship, such as ‘brother of the wooer’; and Plant may simply mean ‘offspring of some implied father’, as is in keeping with the DNA evidence.

In connection with a Welsh reinforcement of the ‘children’ meaning of Plant, we might point furthermore to an early connection of the de Warennes with Wales as well as with East Anglia – for example, William de Warenne married Maud (Matilda) Marshall of Pembroke in 1225, and the de Warennes were involved in the Welsh Wars near Chester in the late thirteenth century. This suggests one way in which there could have been a Welsh influence on the Plant name, as there was an ongoing proximity of Plant-like names to the de Warennes – an affinity that ended up in fourteenth-century east Cheshire.

30.7 The ramification of a single-family name and its possible status

The DNA evidence indicates that Plant originated as a single-ancestor name: we can consider Plant as a prolific, single-family name. McKinley (1990) considers the question of whether there are any common characteristics to prolific surnames, specifically those that are relatively numerous as a result of a single family ramifying. He writes⁴²:

Though the limitations of the existing sources of information and especially the gaps in the genealogical evidence, make it difficult to be certain of the position in respect of some surnames, it seems that most of the names in question did have some common factors in their history.

⁴⁰T.J.Morgan and P.Morgan (1985) *Welsh Surnames*, pps 58-60.

⁴¹David Hey (2000) *Family Names and Family History*, pps 112, 117.

⁴²*loc. cit.*, pps 65-6.

It can immediately be interjected that DNA testing is currently revolutionizing our understanding of which names have single-ancestor and which have multiple ancestor origins; but we can do little better, so far, than to value McKinley's comments about single-ancestor names; he continues:

Hardly any [well ramified single-ancestor surnames] were the names of major landowning families, and few seem to have been the names of peasant farmers in origin. Most of them, where the facts can be discovered, seem to have been the names of either landowners of moderate wealth, belonging to what would have been called at a later date the lesser gentry, or the names of substantial free tenants of the franklin or yeoman class. Families so placed would be in a better economic position than bondmen, minor free tenants, or landless labourers, and would be rather more likely to have numbers of children who survived into adult life. Another common characteristic of families with surnames which ramified is that most of them had already begun to develop into several different branches by about 1400. Families whose names ramified greatly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were already showing signs of such a development considerably earlier. Besides this, it is likely that genetic factors had some influence, though it is impossible to be certain about that now. Whatever the precise causes, there is over a long period a marked contrast between a minority of surnames, many of them locative, which have proliferated considerably, often in areas where they originated, and the much larger number of names which have not multiplied significantly at all.

If we apply these comments to the Plant name, it would seem that this single-ancestor family could likely have come from the most successful of the lower classes, or, perhaps, from the lesser offspring of the land-owning classes. We might consider other clues as to where the early Plant family may have been placed in the class structure. First, we need to stress that the forms of names in documents can arise from the preferred spelling used by their writers, though we may comment, even so, that most early Plant-like names can be associated with French words and French name forms. For example, the names Plantyn (possibly a pet form of Plante, bearing the Continental suffix -in), le Planteur and de la Plaunt are all French forms, and so we might be tempted to a conjecture that they might be associated with the land-owning classes and higher clergy, in as much as French was the language most used by those classes from the Conquest until at least 1300. On the other hand however, many by-names based on French phrases are found for medieval serfs who can be expected to have understood a few French phrases; and, in particular, the word *plante* itself existed in Old English as well as Ancient French.

We might note that the Plant name has some similarity to the famous twelfth century name Plante Genest. Some other names are known to have had close proximities to noble namesakes. McKinley comments that it is quite common to find at fairly late dates, say after about 1600, families which have the same surname as that of prominent landholding families in the same part of the country, but which are not themselves families of any great wealth or standing. In many cases this results from families descended from younger sons who have come down the social scale. Even in earlier records, for the Middle Ages, there are a good many instances of people of very low status, such as serfs or labourers, with names which are those of well-known landed families in the same area. How this situation arises is not clear. Such people may have been illegitimate children; or, possibly, they may have adopted the names of well-known families because of the prestige such names carried.

The existence of a Devon land-owning family called Bastard indicates that illegitimacy can lead to a surname, and Plantefolie can mean 'bastard child', though that does not necessarily mean that the Plant name itself arose in that way. There is little evidence to associate most of those with the Plant name with the highest classes of landowners, though for example Roger Plantyn (sometimes spelled Plantin or Planteng' between 1254 and 1268) was the serjent or butler of the earl of Norfolk, who had a family connection to the de Warenne earl of Surrey: Plantyn's title was relatively high status. Landholders of any real wealth or standing generally favoured locative names; there is only slight reason to suppose that the Plant name could have been locative. However, it is also relevant to Plant-like names that the Norman landholding class had a tendency to employ nicknames of a grotesque or droll character, which perhaps reflected the contemporary sense of humour. We should not necessarily assume that a nickname such as Plantefolie (wickedness shoot or bastard offshoot)

could not have belonged to the highest strata of medieval society; and, indeed, a sense of ‘hairy generative shoot’ for the Plantegenest name itself should not be dismissed as untypical of that class; though, of course, if they were indeed lesser offspring, the Plants would no doubt have belonged to a much lower social strata.

Though we are left to guess at how the Plant name first came about, *one possibility could be* that the Plants *could have been* the scattered bastards or lesser offspring of a family with widespread lands. The de Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest were such a family. With guarded comments, we might venture to recall that it is not new to suppose that the origins of the Plant name may be connected the Plantagenet name. However, to avoid ridicule, it is better that we adhere to a stricter attention to detail than is usual amongst those making claims of an association between their name and the nobility.

30.8 A contentious embellishment of the ‘offspring’ meaning

In my opinion, there is insufficient evidence to make it anything better than contentious to advance an embellished version of the ‘offspring’ meaning: to wit, that Plant could mean an ‘illegitimate Plantegenest offspring’, though this is in keeping with the claim of Lower (1860)⁴³ and Sleight (1862)⁴⁴ that Plant was a corruption of Plantagenet. That is not to say that this would not provide a tidy explanation of some clues:

- the Plant blazon indicates illegitimate cadetship, without indicating illegitimate cadetship to whom;
- the name Plantyn or Planteng’ can be related to the de Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plantegenest, and the early by-name Plante was nearby around Norfolk, and near other de Warenne lands; and then Plant was evidently a part of the de Warenne (Plante Genest) removal to east Cheshire; and,
- following the later fifteenth-century times of the House of York, by when Plantagenet was used as a surname by the English royal descendants of Plantegenest, the spelling Plantt is found, which could be an abbreviation: this is relevant in as much as there is initial DNA evidence to confirm that Plantt belongs to the same male-line family as Plant.

It can be said that it seems likely that the Plant name was a part of a de Warenne (Plante Genest) context, but that does not prove that the Plants were Plantegenest’s male-line descendants as were the de Warennes. It should be added that:

- the embellished meaning (Plantegenest offspring) would represent a substantial claim, and that would deserve a high standard of proof, whereas, in fact, the evidence outlined above may be dismissed as flimsy: we can not simply presume that the Plants, as ‘generated offspring’, were the offspring of Plantegenest, who was the ‘generator of the realm’ of the Angevin Empire; also,
- there were many other males, perhaps ones in awe of Plantegenest, who could have been the forefather of the Plant offspring; and,
- contrary to popular belief, there is little direct evidence that the Plantegenest or Plantagenet name was much in use when the Plant surname was first forming, around 1250-1400.

This last point can be discussed in some detail.

There are references to Geoffrey, count of Anjou, with the name *Plante Genest* by Wace (1135-74)⁴⁵ or *Plantegenest* by Jean de Marmoutier (c1170-75)⁴⁶. There is also a reference to an unknown Galfrido *Plauntegenet*, with duties to the king, in the Close Rolls (1266). However, in the earliest known compendium of British Surnames, William Camden (1605)⁴⁷ pointed to the difficulties in understanding the early use of the Plantagenet name:

⁴³ibid.

⁴⁴ibid.

⁴⁵Roman de Rou.

⁴⁶Preface to *Genst Consulium Andegavorum (Chroniques des Comtes d’Anjou)*.

⁴⁷William Camden (1605) *Remains Concerning Britain* contains a Chapter headed *Surnames*. This book, with a new introduction by Leslie Dunkling, has been reprinted in 1974, and relevant comments about Plantagenet appear of pages 111-112. The father of William Camden (1551-1623) lived at Lichfield in Staffordshire.

So in the house of Anjou, which obtained the Crown of England, Geffrey, the first Earl of Anjou, was surnamed Grisogonel, that is, Grey-cloak; Fulco his son, Nerra; his grandchild, Rechin, for his extortion. Again, his grandchild, Plantagenet, for that he ware commonly a broom-stalk in his bonnet; his son Henry the second, King of England, Fitz-Empresse, because his mother was Empress; his son King Richard had for surname Coeur de Lion, for his Lion-like courage; as John was called Sans-terre, that is Without land : so that whereas these names were never taken up by the son, I know not why any should think Plantagenet to be the surname of the Royal House of England, albeit in late years many have so accounted it.

Vicary Gibbs (1910)⁴⁸ makes a similar point. Picking up on a few points of detail, it is rather curious that he implies that the practice of using the Plantagenet name for the early royal descendants of Plantegenest was not adopted until the times of Charles II (b 1630, reigned 1660-85), despite the evidence in Camden (1605) that the practice occurred earlier; also, rather curiously, he refers to the early Plantagenets as the Edwardian kings (he was writing around the time of the death of Edward VII in 1910):

It is much to be wished that the surname "Plantagenet", which since the times of Charles II, has been freely given to all descendants of Geoffrey of Anjou, had some historical basis which would justify its use, for it forms a most convenient method of referring to the Edwardian kings.

He then goes on to point out that the Plantagenet surname was used from circa 1448 by the royal House of York.

The fifteenth-century bearers of the Plantagenet surname descended from Plantegenest (1113-51). Someone was using the name Plauntegenet in 1266, but it is otherwise unclear how much the Plantagenet name was in use when the Plant name was forming, between 1250 and 1400. Though it is an old claim that Plant is corrupted from Plantagenet (or, more correctly, from Plante Genest), many have come to regard it as disreputable to make a claim of noble descent without a high standard of genealogical proof. A lack of complete documentation back to the twelfth century could well be because there always were gaps in what was recorded, or it could be because telling records were destroyed, sometimes for political reasons. However, it should fairly be commented that, if there is insufficient surviving documentation, we should doubt family stories which could be grounded on inflated claims.

M.A. Lower (1860), who recorded the Plantagenet claim for Plant, was implicitly criticized by Revd C.W. Bradsley (1873)⁴⁹ who regretted that '*English surnames have been made the subject of endless guessings*', and he humorously dismissed some of the wilder speculations with:

talk to a very large number of people about their surname and you will find that the family came in with the Conqueror ... William evidently had a very easy time of it. It is clear that he had only a handful of opponents to meet, and that the story of the Battle of Hastings is a gross historical fraud.

This parody of misguided folklore has its place. Any such claim as one of Plantagenet descent needs strict objective assessment. On the other hand, it may be that when surnames first formed, a bearer of the name was the subject, then as now, of gossip about noble associations; also, the victorious nobility may truly have borne a disproportionate number of descendants: the Plantagenets, such as Edward IV, are said to have had many bastards⁵⁰.

We may venture to point to a de Warenne association, whereby the single-ancestor Plant family name can be taken to have originated close to Plante Genest; but we still need to heed the remarks

⁴⁸Complete Peerage, vol I, p183, note (c).

⁴⁹C.W. Bradsley (1873) *English Surnames: Their Sources and Significations*.

⁵⁰Sheppard *Royal Bye Blows* (NEHGR 121:181) states that Edward IV, son of Richard, Duke of York, is said to have had many bastards, but only two have been identified by the writer. These two were Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle and Elizabeth, married Sir Thomas Lumley. That there were many others is ascribed to Francis Sandford (1630-1694) *The Genealogical Dictionary of the kings of England*.

<http://www.genforum.genealogy.com/plantagenet/messages/1250.html>

of David Hey (2000)⁵¹:

Present-day bearers of surnames that are known to have been used by the Norman aristocracy need to be wary of claiming a shared descent, though this may prove to be true in some cases. Many surnames originated with a single individual and downward social mobility was commonplace. Some of the poor farmers and craftsmen who paid a groat (4d.) when taxed by Richard II may perhaps have been descended from a succession of younger sons who had slipped down the social scale, or from those who had fought on the wrong side, or had been unfortunate or just downright stupid. But when we find poor men in places far removed from the sphere of influence of a mighty lord we need to wonder whether or not their surnames reflect a later, independent origin Genealogical methods are unlikely to solve the problem for us, for the records are thin and unsatisfactory at this early period. Sometimes they may point to a feudal context which makes a family connection possible, but such hints must be treated with the greatest caution.

DNA testing is changing the situation to some extent; and, more generally, we can look to mathematical assessments of what is most likely. A simple statistical calculation indicates that everyone is probably related, one way or another, over the time since when the Plantagenets reigned, though far fewer can be expected to be descended from the Plantagenets down male lines. Since the Plantagenet dynasty reigned for some 350 years, it is reasonable to suppose that a healthy body of lesser male-line descendants *could have* built up, even though there is a lack of documentary evidence to prove that. The aristocracy survived through a combination of the rules of primogeniture and with victory at times of war, but that does not mean that there may not have been many lesser offspring who survived in less celebrated circumstances. Within the context of the surviving documentation, it is not unreasonable to consider that the Plants *could have been* lesser offspring of some major medieval land owning family; and, one might add that the de Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest provide the medieval context for the Plants: this was an affinity that had fought on the wrong side in its feud with the Lancastrians; and so, irrespective of the initial legitimacy of the Plants, a downwards social mobility can be expected for them by the later fourteenth century. In my opinion, it is a step too far however to make an unqualified assertion that the Plants were amongst the male-line descendants of the said Geoffrey Plante Genest – more evidence is needed: more evidence may or may not eventually emerge from ongoing Y-DNA investigations.

30.9 Claims and counter-claims about the Plant name's meaning

Some surnames have had long agreed meanings. However, the Plant name has been ascribed a different meaning each time an authority has written about it: Lower (1860) pointed to Plantagenet; Weekly (1916) suggested 'from the plantation' or 'cudgel' or 'sprig/offspring'; Reaney (1958) chose 'planter/gardener'; Hanks and Hodges (1988) added 'delicate'. We may, in particular, consider Weekly's 'sprig/offspring' meaning which seems to be a meaning well in keeping with the latest evidence. Weekly was criticized by P.H.Reaney for seldom giving the evidence on which his etymologies were based⁵². This criticism is misplaced for his 'young offspring' opinion however – the Oxford English Dictionary outlines the medieval evidence for a 'young person' meaning for the English word *plant*, and this (and other literary evidence) can be cited in support of Weekly's 'young offspring' opinion. It is strange that Reaney ignored this etymology, for he criticized C.L'Estrange Ewen⁵³ with '*Worst of all, he rejects sound etymologies which do not fit his preconceived theories*'.

Reaney's Surname Dictionary was a remarkable mid-twentieth-century achievement. He performed a necessary task, by searching all the available (at the time) sources in order to establish the earliest forms of surnames. One of the greatest criticisms now being leveled at him, however,

⁵¹David Hey (2000) *Family Names and Family History*, p 49.

⁵²David Hey (2000) loc. cit., p 13.

⁵³C.L'Estrange Ewen (1931) *A History of Surnames of the British Isles* and (1938) *Guide to the Origins of British Surnames*.

is that he failed to link thirteenth- and fourteenth-century examples of names with surnames of the early modern and modern eras. This does not matter too much for Plant, as there is in fact some evidence to link Plant through from fourteenth-century east Cheshire both forwards to the Staffordshire homeland and back to an earlier surname (or by-name) formation in East Anglia. However, Reaney may well have chosen wrongly when he ignored the ‘offspring’ meaning for Plant, since it is now clear that there is some evidence to link this name to a Welsh influence and hence to the ‘children’ meaning of *plant*; also, there are some early proximities to the surname Child, which has a similar meaning.

There seems little reason to doubt Weekly’s contention that a likely meaning for Plant is ‘offspring’, and indeed this may have been the name’s most salient meaning.

There is reason to suppose that the Plant name may have originated in the thirteenth century as a single-ancestor name, unless all but one of those early name instances died out, perhaps partly because the earliest instances were just by-names that were not passed down to surviving families. It is tempting to suppose early origins for Plant as an hereditary name, as surnames generally became hereditary from around 1250 in East Anglia, and the spelling Plaunte exists in Essex in 1262. Such early origins would help to explain why the subsequent ramification of this single-family name is so widespread and so substantial; though, more strictly, there is no evidence to prove that the name was hereditary before 1328 and not in the principal Plant homeland until the mid fourteenth century.

Finally, it can be added that there is some considerable interest in exactly how the early Plant offspring related to their evident de Warenne (Plante Genest) context. However, for the time being at least, it has to be stressed that it is open to criticism to embellish the ‘offspring’ meaning, such that the significance of ‘offspring’ is claimed to be that it implies ‘Plante Genest’s offspring’. This could be attacked as a presumptuous claim. That claim is, in fact, an amendment of Lower’s Plantagenet claim; and, as such, it is based on an old tradition; but the claim is backed up, so far, by no more than circumstantial evidence. The evidence for a de Warrene circumstance to the early Plant name would need to be embellished with speculation about a genetic connection; and such speculation, of course, can be disputed unless there is DNA evidence to prove it.