

## Chapter 32

# Geoffrey Plantagenet: surname inspirer

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### THE LIKELY TRANSMISSION OF A SURNAME CULTURE FROM MEDIEVAL FRANCE TO ENGLAND

The nickname *Plante Genest* of Geoffrey, count of Anjou is generally taken to have inspired *Plantagenet* even though this is not in evidence as a royal surname until three hundred years after his death. In the intervening years, it seems that the Plant surname could have been influenced by Geoffrey's fame. This Chapter outlines some information for count Geoffrey and his illegitimate descendants who may have helped to transmit the culture of his nickname to the formative Plant surname for which there was also a likely Welsh influence, giving it an 'offspring' meaning. More generally, Plant-like names such as *Plantapilosa*, *Plante Genest*, *Plantefolie*, *Plente* and *Plante* can be related to a 'growing shoot' metaphor, to which a bawdy sense can be attached which, in particular, may have delayed the adoption of *Plantagenet* as an official royal surname. This was eventually overcome, it seems, by a developing philosophy of sacred creation competing with baser generation as is evidenced by Robert Grosseteste's thirteenth-century efforts to elevate the vegetable soul to divine status in opposition to some others' views.

## 32.1 Sense to the Plantagenet surname

Most people who have considered origins for *Plantagenet* have ignored a tradition of similar Plant-like names though that context leads to further insights for the meaning of the *Plantagenet* surname. In the first century AD, Julius *Planta* is recorded in the Italian Alps though it is not until the thirteenth century that there is evidence for the noble Swiss *Planta* family. By that time Bernard *Plantevelu* had founded a new Duchy of Aquitaine in what is now SW France and, just to the north, Geoffrey *Plante Genest* in the twelfth century had germinated the shoots of the Angevin Empire.

The *Plantagenet* name is often incorrectly applied as though it were the surname of all (or many) of the English kings throughout the 350 years from *Plante Genest*'s son Henry II to Richard III. John Gillingham (2001)<sup>1</sup> redresses this with:

But although Henry II's father Count Geoffrey was known as *Plantagenet* it was not until the fifteenth century that this term came to be used as a family name, ...

He then continues:

... and for the story that the name came from the sprig of broom (*Planta Genista*) that he liked to wear in his hat to be put into writing we have to wait until the nineteenth century.

This is wrong in so far as it was not as late as the nineteenth century – two centuries sooner, in 1605, William Camden had written of *Plante Genest* that he was so called because '*he ware commonly a broom-stalk in his bonnet*'. Even so, even though the story of a broom stalk in Geoffrey's bonnet can be traced back to 1605, this is still long after the first evidence in the 1170s for Geoffrey's *Plantegenest* nickname.

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<sup>1</sup>John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, Second Edition (London, 2001), p 3.

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2000 version) makes similar points to those of John Gillingham though it credits a different story of how Geoffrey's nickname could have originated. It mentions the sprig-wearing story but then liberally opines that it considers a hunting explanation to be more likely:

Although well established, the surname Plantagenet has little historical justification. It seems to have originated as a nickname for Count Geoffrey and has been variously explained as referring to his practice of wearing a sprig of broom (Latin *genista*) in his hat or, more probably, to his habit of planting brooms to improve his hunting covers. It was not, however, a hereditary surname, and Geoffrey's descendants in England remained without one for more than 250 years, although surnames became universal outside the royal family. ... The first official use of the surname Plantagenet by any descendant of Count Geoffrey occurred in 1460, when Richard, Duke of York, claimed the throne as "Richard Plantagenet".

A hunting explanation for the name is given short shrift, however, in the Complete Peerage<sup>2</sup>, which favours the traditional story that Geoffrey wore a 'sprig of broom' in his hat:

Mrs Green says that Geoffrey was so called "from his love of hunting over heath and broom" (Henry II, p. 6). This may be deduced from Wace (loc. cit.):

E al contre Geffrei son frere,  
Que l'en clamont Plante Genest,  
Qui mult amout bois e forest.

However, it is more likely that Geoffrey's love of wood and forest was inserted for the purpose of rime than as an explanation of his nickname.

In spite of the opinion of the Encyclopedia Britannica, its hunting explanation seems dubious. Instead, we might consider an elaboration of the more traditional story: by wearing a sprig of broom in his hat Geoffrey could have been reinforcing that his nickname Plantegenest was an echo of his conquering predecessor's name – Plantevelu. Plantevelu means a 'hairy shoot' and a sprig of broom, which is one, could have recalled Plantevelu's tradition of winning a new duchy. Plantevelu had founded a new Duchy of Aquitaine and Plantegenest conquered the Duchy of Normandy. Geoffrey's love of wood and forest, in Wace's contemporary poem, may not have alluded so much to hunting as to a love of augmenting his lands: the sprig of broom in his hat had a vegetable soul which empowered a man with augmentation.

## 32.2 Geoffrey Plante Genest: germinator of an Empire and a surname

There is little doubt that the nickname, Plante Genest, means 'sprig of broom' and this recalls the 'hairy shoot' meaning of the name of the ninth-century founder of a new Duchy of Aquitaine, Bernard Plantevelu. The associated 'renewal metaphor' gives rise to the same semantic system for Plant, though the meaning of the Plant surname is perhaps best narrowed to 'offspring': this is discussed further later in this Chapter. First, this Chapter outlines the role of Geoffrey Plante Genest in germinating an Empire and this is followed by evidence that a cultural influence from his name led on first to the Plant surname and then eventually to the royal Plantagenet surname.

Geoffrey Plante Genest's father, Fulk V, count of Anjou had co-operated with the English-Norman king, Henry I to form a strategy. To prevent a France-Flanders-Anjou alliance against England, the English-Norman king, Henry I, arranged for his only legitimate son William to marry Fulk V's daughter Matilda. However, William was drowned in the White Ship disaster in 1120, so in 1127 Henry arranged instead for his daughter, another Matilda, to marry Fulk's son and heir, Geoffrey Plante Genest. This union led on to a powerful Empire which lasted for three centuries though it became much reduced in extent for most of its history.

In view of his relevance, the next section outlines some detailed information about Geoffrey.

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<sup>2</sup>Complete Peerage, Volume XI Appendices, p. 141.

### 32.2.1 John of Marmoutier's biography of Geoffrey Plante Genest

About 1170, John of Marmoutier wrote a highly laudatory and sometimes florid biography of Geoffrey Plante Genest, with the intention of pleasing Geoffrey's son, Henry II. A translation appears in *The Plantagenet Chronicles*<sup>3</sup>, and the following is a brief précis of some extracts.

Not only was Geoffrey unusually skilled at warfare: it was with outstanding competence that he returned the principality to peace and his people to a quiet life. He was exceptionally well educated, generous to all, tall in stature, handsome and red-headed, the father of his country and the scourge of pride. Gentle and gracious, he had the kindest soul; clement to his citizens, he bore offences and injuries with equanimity. Such was his goodness and generosity that those whom he had subdued by force, he overcame rather by his mercy as I will relate in the following narrative.

When he turned fifteen, in 1128, Geoffrey was ending his boyhood, blooming in the first flower of youth. His celebrated name reached the ears of that most glorious king, Henry I of England. The king was well aware that the young man's forefathers were distinguished and sprung from ancient stock, upright in their customs and skilled in the arts of war. Hearing that the youth was no exception to this, the king decided to join his only daughter Matilda, widow of Emperor Henry V, to the young man in lawful matrimony.

Heralds were therefore dispatched to make petitions to young Geoffrey's father, Fulk V, count of Anjou. On the king's instruction, the count agreed to send his son to be knighted amid regal festivals at Rouen [in Normandy].

The following Whitsun, Geoffrey entered the hall of the royal palace surrounded by his own men and the king's. The king, who was accustomed to stand for nobody, rose and went to meet him and gave him a little kiss as though he were his son. The king, whose profound admiration grew at every moment, was delighted with the youth's sense and his replies and so the whole day was spent in rejoicing and exultation.

The next day, the horses were drawn up. To the Angevin, a Spanish horse was led, marvellously bedecked and reputed to outstrip many birds as it ran. That day, our young soldier, who was to be the new flower of knighthood, was completely devoted to the practice of military games and to attending to the glory of the body. For no less than seven days, the magnificent celebration of the first campaign of knighthood continued at court.

Eight days after Whitsun, King Henry I of England set out from Rouen with Fulk's son and his daughter and arrived in Le Mans [in Maine, belonging to Anjou]. From different quarters, they assembled for the service of nuptial sacrament. Both consented and each promised their faith to the other, and solemn Masses blessing their marriage were celebrated. For three weeks, the marriage was celebrated without a break and, when it was over, no one left without a gift.

Count Fulk of Anjou returned with the couple to Angers. The new lord and lady were received by priest and people with solemn dances.

Once his father had been elevated to the kingdom of Jerusalem, Count Geoffrey devoted his time to feats of arms and strove for honour.

Before long, a day was named for a tournament to be held between the Normans and the Bretons on a sandy hill pasture at Mont-Saint-Michel. When Geoffrey saw that the Breton troops were few, he broke away from the multitude and offered his services to them. The company assembled and the lines joined battle. Saddles were emptied and horsemen flung to the ground. Geoffrey sought out and attacked his enemies and, hurling lances and brandishing his sword, he deprived many of their lives. The Bretons pursued their hope of victory, with the count leading the way. The Angevin pressed on more ferocious than the lion; the Breton phalanx pushed forward. The majority were defeated by the few and the Normans, disheartened by the unexpected confusion, proposed single combat to the Bretons.

When talk of the tournament spread beyond the sea, a Saxon soldier of enormous stature arrived giving the Normans confidence to assume victory. The Saxon taunted the Breton line and dared them to name a man to meet him in individual combat. Geoffrey yelled ferociously and, refusing to suffer the taunts, rode forward on his horse. The fight was hard: that man, whose force was superhuman, had a lance like a beam and when he attacked the Angevin, he pierced the count's shield and cuirass, not without spilling much blood. But our hero remained

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<sup>3</sup>*The Plantagenet Chronicles*, General Editor Elizabeth Hallam, (Tiger Books, London, 1995), pps 43-64.

immovable, as though rooted to his horse, and he transfixed his assailant by hurling his javelin. Then, standing over his impaled adversary, he beheaded him with his sword.

Geffrey enjoyed hunting when he could afford the time. On this particular occasion, the count hurries to anticipate the winding, circling paths of his almost runaway dogs, and although he believes himself to be nearer his companions than to his dogs, he is in fact further away. At last, as the sun was hastening to close the day, he caught sight of a peasant amid the undergrowth of a coppice. Geffrey greeted the man kindly and asked him, 'Can you tell me, my good man, if you know a road which leads to the castle at Loches?' 'Master', said the peasant, 'if I stop work, I perish and my family with me.' Geffrey replied, 'I will pay for the price of your journey.' The peasant agreed and the count gratefully embraced him and bade him sit behind on his horse. The count strikes up a friendly conversation with the peasant and asks, 'What do men say of our count?' The other answered, 'As for the count, we neither say nor feel anything bad of him. But as for us, lord, we suffer many enemies of whom he is unaware.' 'Then', said the count, 'tell me more about these enemies. For, when the time is ripe, I will not be silent before the count.' 'Lord, our oppressors are the reeves, bailiffs and other servants of our lord the count. Whenever he comes to one of his castles, his servants seize goods on credit. Then lord, pitiful to relate, they either totally deny owing anything or they defer payment until their creditors are glad to accept half of what is owed.' Then our wise hero said, smiling to the peasant, 'But they have fertile land for nothing. Peace, peace. But it is not peace when the land is so badly devastated by domestic enemies. Vengeance is mine and I will bring retribution on them before long. Tell me more and keep nothing back. Would that the count (and here he spoke of himself) knew of their misdeeds.'

Meanwhile, in his court, each man asked the others of Geffrey's whereabouts and no one replied with good news. With terrified eyes on the road by which he was accustomed to return from the forest, one and all hung motionless when suddenly the longed for figure arrives.

Then the peasant realised whose guide he had been. Convinced he could no longer cling to the count's back, he suddenly tried to jump off to the ground. The count held him back and said with a smile, 'So, ought I to dispense of my guide through whose assistance I have been brought back to my people? That will not do.' And with the crowd flocking round all sides, the peasant was borne high on the count's horse, whether he liked it or not. The peasant was honoured with the most sumptuous dishes of food. When the count had returned from Mass the next day, he ordered his guide to be summoned and said, 'I free you and your heirs from all exactions and services and I ordain that you be a freeman.' Having said this, the count ordered the man be escorted back to his own parts.

In 1132, in the fourth year since the aforesaid marriage of Geffrey and Matilda, his first son, Henry was born. He was the future King Henry II of England. In the fifth year, Geoffrey was born and in the sixth year William.

John of Marmoutier goes on to give, amongst other things, an idealised account of Geffrey Plante Genest's conquest of Normandy (1142-4) which suggests – inaccurately – that the count's progress was met with more enthusiasm than hostility in the duchy.

### 32.2.2 Plante Genest's conquest of Normandy

The planting of the Angevin Empire began with Geffrey's conquest of Normandy. The two chroniclers best placed to observe the events in Normandy were Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Toringi; both commented on the scale of the invasion and, in Orderic's case the ferocity of the fighting<sup>4</sup>.

In 1128, King Baldwin II of Jerusalem consulted Louis VI of France about a suitor to wed his heiress daughter and to become heir to the kingdom of Jerusalem: they chose Fulk V, count of Anjou.

That same year, Fulk's son – Geffrey Plante Genest – soon to become count of Anjou, married the haughty Empress Matilda, daughter and designated heiress of Henry I, king of England and duke of Normandy. Henry I thereby agreed that Geffrey and Matilda and their heirs should inherit the throne of England. However, he ill-prepared the way for them and

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<sup>4</sup>John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, Second Edition (London, 2001), p. 13.

Matilda's cousin Stephen of Blois seized the crown when Henry I died in 1135. Over the next 19 years, the houses of Anjou and Blois fought for control of England and Normandy.

Upon hearing of Henry I's death (Nov. 1135) Geoffrey Plante Genest sent his wife Matilda from Anjou and Maine to Normandy to take possession of her rights. Geoffrey and his troops followed some distance behind. This gave them a foothold in southern Normandy though Geoffrey had to return to quash a rebellion by Robert of Sablé, the most powerful baron in the north east of Anjou. The impetus was hence lost to Stephen who had taken advantage of his proximity to England to be anointed king on 22 Dec. 1135, thereby giving him leverage also over the Norman barons who typically held lands in both Normandy and England.

It was not until Sep. 1136 that Geoffrey was free to invade Normandy again. Stephen, however, had not taken the opportunity until the summer to restore order in Normandy, leaving Geoffrey with grounds for cautious hope. Geoffrey mustered a large army and had attracted powerful allies including the duke of Aquitaine; and he drove northwards as far as Lisieux; but Stephen was spared defeat by two strokes of good fortune. First, Geoffrey was wounded in the foot and had to be taken back on a litter to Anjou. Secondly, an outbreak of diarrhoea devastated the Angevin army.

By the time Geoffrey was ready to make another attempt, Stephen had arrived in Normandy. The campaign of 1137 ended in a confused stalemate.

Geoffrey's next invasion was in June 1138. By that time, Geoffrey had persuaded Robert of Gloucester to switch to his side from Stephen's, meaning that he had gained such strongholds as Caen and Bayeux without a fight. But Stephen's position remained strong and it became clear that Geoffrey and Matilda would need to challenge Stephen's authority in England, if only to defend Robert of Gloucester's possessions there.

So, in 1139, Matilda and Robert crossed the Channel while Geoffrey stayed to maintain pressure in Normandy. The capture of Stephen at the battle of Lincoln (2 Feb. 1141) was immediately followed by the collapse of his authority in Normandy, and by April 1141 Geoffrey was in control of almost all of the duchy west of the Seine and east of a line between Bayeux and Domfront. Geoffrey held on to his gains in Normandy, but Matilda's arrogance and her inability to be magnanimous in victory meant that by September 1141 she had lost her gains in England.

Geoffrey refused to go to England but sent his 9 year old eldest son Henry in his place. This marked a redefinition of roles, with Geoffrey effectively giving up his right to become king of England. He remained concentrated on Normandy. In 1142 he overran the Avranchin and Mortain. In 1143 he completed the conquest of western Normandy and launched his first attacks across the Seine. In 1144 the traditional ducal capital, Rouen, surrendered and Geoffrey had himself invested as duke. In return for Gisors he obtained the assistance of Louis VII of France and, when Arques fell in 1145, there remained no doubt that Duke Geoffrey was master of Normandy.

Even so, he made no effort to conquer England, remaining a safe distance from his wife's problems there. Instead he concentrated on securing his position around Anjou, quashing a rebellion by his younger brother Helie, who had demanded the right to Maine. After a four year struggle he invoked the fury of Louis VII by capturing and imprisoning Gerald Berlay, lord of Montreuil-Bellay on the southern borders of Anjou.

In this context of overriding concern for Anjou, Geoffrey transferred Normandy to his eldest son Henry in 1150 though, in practice, he continued to play a dominant role in Norman affairs. This nominal transfer was to prepare the way for his heir. A charter of 1145 implies that Geoffrey had envisaged Henry's succession in Anjou as well, though he appears to have been having second thoughts about that by 1150. However, according to a story first told in the 1190s, the dying Geoffrey decided in Sep. 1151 to leave both Normandy and Anjou to his son Henry on condition that Henry transferred Anjou to his younger brother Geoffrey upon having used this strong base to wrest England from Stephen.

### 32.2.3 Plante Genest's demise: a powerful vine

Plante Genest died suddenly on 7 Sep. 1151, aged forty-one. According to John of Marmoutier, he was returning from a royal council when he was stricken with fever. He arrived at Château-du-Loir, collapsed on a couch, made bequests of gifts and charities, and died. He was buried at St Julien's in Le Mans.

A further unexpected twist was the divorce of Louis VII's wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, in March 1152, and her remarriage to Plante Genest's heir Henry.

In January 1153 Henry boldly crossed the channel to England. As a final twist, Stephen's son Eustace died unexpectedly in the August and, in the November, Stephen formally gave up the struggle for his own family at the treaty of Winchester. Henry succeeded to the English crown when Stephen died in October 1154.

To summarise, the aggregation of the Angevin Empire stemmed largely from the marriage and campaigns of Geoffrey Plante Genest (1128-51). Geoffrey's father, Fulk V, had died in 1143 and, by 1144, Geoffrey had added the Duchy of Normandy to his possessions around Anjou. Then in 1152 his eldest son and successor, Henry Fitz Empress, acquired Aquitaine by marriage, also becoming king of England in 1154 in culmination of his parents' battles against Stephen. Henry then failed to honour his oath to his father and kept Anjou to himself as a bridge between his wife's Aquitaine to the south and Normandy and England to the north. An end to this matter was sealed when the counter-claim of Henry's younger brother Geoffrey died with him in 1158.

The scholastics believed that the vegetable soul of a hairy shoot had powers of augmentation and generation – it had given Plante Genest the power not only to augment Angevin lands but also to father the most powerful king in Western Europe, Henry II. This offshoot of Plante Genest's gallantry grew. It led on to a powerful dynasty, albeit that its prestige was diminished in 1202-4 when Henry's youngest son, king John, lost Anjou, Normandy and much of Poitou (the northern part of the Duchy of Aquitaine). Thereafter the dynasty became more firmly based in England, making just occasional visits to Gascony, the southern part of Aquitaine. Plante Genest had seeded a royal vine and, though it soon lost its roots in its Angevin homeland, it ramified anew in England where it clung on to the throne for a further three centuries.

#### **32.2.4 Rise and fall of the Angevin Empire**

The Angevin Empire (Figure 32.1) was not fully realised until the times of Plante Genest's eldest son, Henry II king of England, but it was Plante Genest who had prepared the way. Henry II's empire only lasted in its full extent for fifty years (1154-1204) though English ties to Gascony (the southern part of Aquitaine) survived for another 250 years and were especially strong to the towns of Bordeaux and Bayonne.

The two most closely linked provinces of the Angevin Empire – England and Normandy – were split apart in the débâcle of 1203 which owed most to the personal ambitions and weaknesses of the French and English kings – Philip and John. Philip was the able son and successor of Louis VII of France while king John was the youngest son of king Henry II. Philip, with his base at Paris, was less interested in remote parts and, as a result, the two provinces of the Angevin Empire with the weakest family ties - England and Gascony - stayed together the longest.

The towns tended to remain most loyal longest to the Angevins (*i.e.* to the so-called 'Plantagenet' family) and it was not until the fall of La Rochelle in 1224 that the real end to the Angevin Empire was marked with the removal of all hope of regaining the homeland of Anjou by sea. It was not until 1259, however, that John's son, Henry III, formally relinquished his claims to Normandy, Maine, Anjou and Touraine. The loyalty of Bordeaux and Bayonne in 1224 kept Hugh of Lusignan at bay and so ensured the survival of English Gascony. This loyalty may have stemmed largely from the benefits of business in trade. The Atlantic sea route hugging the western and north-western coasts of France was a vital life-force in that connection.

#### **32.2.5 The Angevin Empire as a cultural context for Plant-like names**

Apart from a communication of ideas by trade and apart from particular family interests, there is little evidence for a common culture to the Angevin Empire. It may well be that a spread of Plant-like names to England was associated with the cultures surrounding Plante Genest's close family

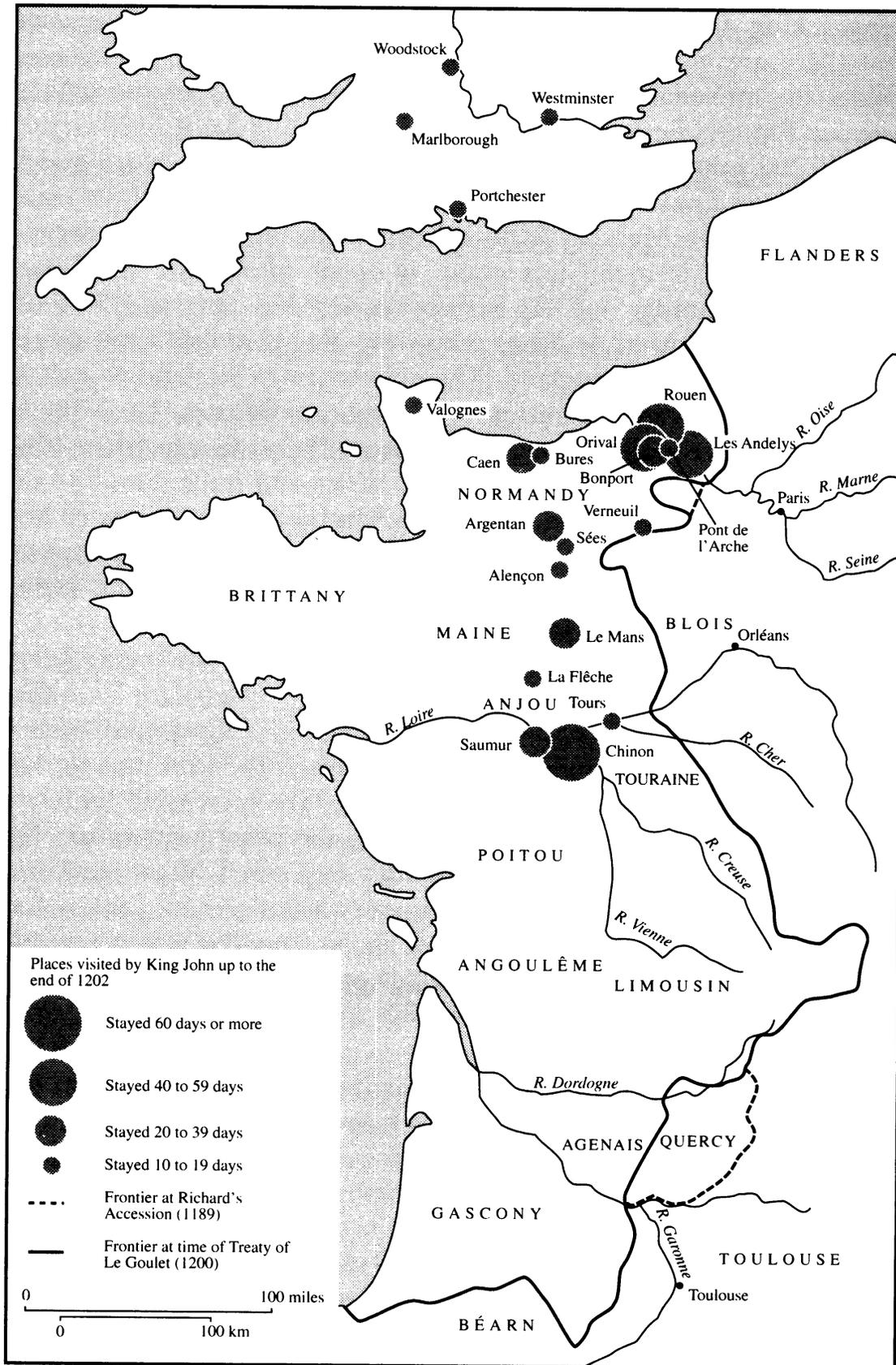


Figure 32.1: Travels of the itinerant royal court before the fall of the Angevin Empire (after John Gillingham, 2001)

members themselves. Though there is little evidence for the Plantagenet name before the mid-fifteenth century, Plant-like names had arisen in England by the thirteenth century close to Plante Genest's illegitimate descendants.

The Plant surname, it would appear, could have formed around the times when most surnames were forming in southern England and East Anglia. Claims of earlier origins of the Plant surname, before the thirteenth century, are just speculation. There have been fictional accounts of an earlier origin to the name *Planta* in England<sup>5</sup> but this may be set aside so that we can restrict ourselves to a narrative that is more credible for being based on well established facts.

Restricting the narrative to surviving evidence throws up a need for a different note of caution however. There may be missing evidence which, if it had been available, would have given a fuller picture than that given by the extant evidence. There are significantly more records for the Angevin Empire after 1199 than before, including new types of evidence; and so there is a danger of incorrectly presuming that similar names to Plant did not exist before then when this may be a false impression arising from the fact that either no record was kept or none has survived. Similarly, the evidence may be misleadingly skewed towards England, since there is significantly more evidence, both chronicle and record evidence, for England than for any other part of the Angevin dominions. That said, the *surviving* evidence indicates that the Plant surname originated in thirteenth-century England in proximity to some illegitimate descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest.

The names Plantevelu, Plante Genest and Plant can be associated with a 'growing shoot of renewal' metaphor. This metaphor fits neatly into the culture of the troubadours at the south of the Angevin Empire, and this influence evidently came particularly to the fore for English royalty with the marriage of Henry II to Eleanor of Aquitaine. The troubadour culture was more widespread than the southern extremities of the Angevin Empire however, and it can be ascribed to a much earlier Moorish influence spreading through the same cultural world as the Angevin Empire's rivals in Toulouse, Marseilles and Barcelona. The French surname Plante is found in that cultural region though it is not as yet clear whether that surname had its roots in the Swiss and Italian name *Planta* transported along the Mediterranean coast or whether it related somehow to the English surname Plant. That said, we might consider a supposition that the English Plant surname derived from a northward spread along the Angevin Empire's Atlantic coast of a culture for such names as Plantevelu and Plante Genest.

The reasoning is hence that there was a development of the 'hairy shoot' metaphor through Plantevelu and then Plante Genest and then to the English Plant surname. It seems that the Angevin Empire played its part in transmitting a troubadour sense of renewing life's flesh by a shoot (*planta*). However, it seems that this 'renewal' metaphor was more widespread than just one region of the Angevin Empire: similar sense is found also in the Welsh word *plant* with its 'offspring' meaning.

Evidence for the development of an 'offspring' meaning for *plant* from its 'shoot' or 'offshoot' meaning is particularly strong in Wales where there is also the verb *planta* with the functional meaning 'to beget children'. Looking at it another way, we can choose between two qualia roles – one of function, the other of origins – and so we can consider either the function of an 'establisher shoot' or the origins of an 'offspring'. Both a tradition of Plant-like names from France and the Welsh literal meanings fit with a 'shoot' metaphor for the renewal of life in connection with the word *plant* and some associated names.

### 32.3 Royal government and early Plant-like names

The fame of Plante Genest, who germinated the Angevin Empire as a family concern, apparently lived on in the culture of his illegitimate offspring. The Warenne earls for example were illegitimate descendants of Plante Genest and they had connections to Wales providing a connection to both the Plante Genest and Welsh traditions – either or both of these could have sprung the sense of a

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln (1996) *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*.

‘growing shoot’ or ‘offspring’ for the nearby Plant surname. A ‘shoot of renewal’ metaphor can ultimately be extended to sense in the germination of offspring or the generation of products as is still evident for the meaning of the word *plant* in its industrial sense. This is an instance of the so-called ‘Creation is Birth’ metaphor, which is found in many cultures, and so we can say for example that Geoffrey Plante Genest ‘planted the seeds of’ or ‘fathered’ a new Empire, rather as an industrial plant creates a product. In particular, a culture from the Plante Genest nickname could have been transmitted to the early by-names Plente, Plantin and Plauntegenet, as will be outlined below.

The legitimate descent of Geoffrey Plante Genest included a dynasty of kings. Since the itinerant king was normally absent from any given province, the work of organising and directing local administration had to be undertaken by somebody else, to check the accounts of the prévôts and baillis. Whenever possible, most rulers seemed to have preferred to use members of their own family for this. For example, Henry II appointed his son Geoffrey as ‘Seneschall of Brittany’.

One of the king’s greatest powers was the right to arrange or sell the marriages of under-age heiresses and widows. In 1164, king Henry II arranged for his illegitimate half-brother Hamelin to marry one of the richest heiresses in England, the widowed Isabel de Warenne. Hamelin and his heirs thereby became the Warenne earls of Surrey with widespread lands in England.

One aspect of the authority of the crown was a special jurisdiction around the itinerant king’s person. Twelve miles around the royal person was the verge, an area where ordinary local courts did not have jurisdiction and where justice was done through the courts of the royal household. The size of the itinerant royal household varied but it was typically around 500. The sizes of the households of the greatest magnates, such as the Warenne earl of Surrey, was unlikely to exceed two or three hundred. The royal household issued instructions to the Chancery and the Exchequer. The Close Rolls and Patent Rolls relate to such matters as land conveyance as recorded by the Chancery; whereas the Pipe Rolls record the annual accounts rendered by the county sheriffs to the Exchequer, which was responsible for collecting royal revenue.

### 32.3.1 Plente, Plantin and Plauntegenet: possible surname precursors

In 1219 [3 Henry III Pipe Rolls] Peter Haliwell’ and Radulphus *Plente* oversaw £23 3s 4d for Oxford castle and 65s for the king’s dwelling [Woodstock palace] outside the town. The role of Radulphus Plente is not clear but he may have been a bailiff under the sheriff of Oxfordshire. Radulphus is mentioned in 1230-1 in *A cartulary of the Hospitals of St John the baptist*<sup>6</sup>. As a bailiff, he could have originated from elsewhere before his appointment: in 1180, English outsiders had been amongst those used for the baillis of Normandy, such as Richard of Cardiff and Geoffrey of Ripon. By 1200, there were about 25 baillis in the Duchy of Normandy at any one time. In England, each county or pair of counties had a sheriff and under sheriff and a number of clerks; there were in addition bailiffs and sub-bailiffs.

In the Close Rolls of 1254, 1258 and 1268, there are records of a Roger *Plantin* or *Plantyn* or *Planteng*’ as well as in the Patent Rolls of 1258. Roger Plantin held lands in Norfolk and was the serjent or butler of Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk making him one of the earl’s senior officials. The earl of Norfolk, Roger Bigod, had family ties to descendants of Plante Genest and he was influential in the king’s council

The king’s council consisted of the land’s greatest magnates: bishops, earls and barons. In 1237, for example, the young Warenne earl of Surrey joined the council. A particularly stormy meeting in 1258 is known as the Provisions of Oxford. The earl of Norfolk took the lead in demanding the removal from favour of the Lusignans and other foreigners though his half-brother, the earl Warenne, had been heartbroken when his wife Alice Lusignan had died in 1256. The earl of Norfolk’s brother, Hugh Bigod, was appointed Justiciar of England and he conducted extensive investigations into allegations of corruption in local and central government. There was animosity between the king’s brother Richard, earl of Cornwall and brother-in-law Simon de Montfort about the inheritance of

<sup>6</sup>ed. H.E. Slater (1914) in Oxford Historical Society Publications, 68, p. 202.

the Pembroke estates. These estates will be mentioned again later. The animosity surrounding them eventually led on to the Battle of Lewes (1264) at which Simon de Montfort captured the king and Richard, earl of Cornwall. The conflict is known as the Barons War. The tables were turned at the Battle of Evesham (1265) at which Simon was obscenely mutilated and killed.

After the Barons War, in 1266 [51 Henry III Close Rolls 20 December], an instruction was given at Woodstock [near Oxford] to two people to carry the king's garderobe. The instruction was given in the name of the king by 35 named people including a Galfrido *Plautegenet*. Though Galfrido's genealogy is unknown, this is rare evidence for the early use of the Plantagenet name. Galfrido was apparently one of the sergeants-at-arms of the itinerant royal household. A list of the king's household in the 1330s includes 26 sergeants-at-arms and 20 carters, for example.

### 32.3.2 The possibility of a Warenne transmission of the Plante Genest culture

Recent evidence suggests that some of the medieval migrations of the Plant family could have been associated with Warenne lands and the culture that engulfed early Plant-like names may have overlapped partly with the culture of Plante Genest's Warenne descendants. There are hints of playfulness with the Warenne name in that the earl's steward in the 1260s was called John la Ware; and, on the fourteenth-century seal of the earl John Warenne, there was a visual pun of rabbits in their warren. There may have been similar playfulness with the Plantegenest nickname: the earl Bigod's butler around the 1260s was called Planteng' or Plantin. There is earlier evidence for another Plant-like name:

**Plente.** As well as the aforementioned evidence for Radulphus Plente in association with the burbhothe of Oxford, there is also in 1219 mention of William Plente in Kent; and, in 1230, Simon Plente at York.

We may consider whether the meaning 'abundant' or 'fertile' of the name *Plente* echoed a sense of fertile growth for the 'hairy broom shoot'. It is not clear whether the Plente name was closely associated with the Warenne earls. However, the possibility can be entertained that the Plente name formed within the range of influence of a Plante Genest culture transmitted by the Warennes.

The DNA evidence indicates that Plant is a single-family name and its early widespread distribution may have derived from the travels of an earlier Plente family. It can be added that the distribution of the early Plente name, whether it belonged to a single family or not, was within range of the travels of the Warenne earls with their Plante Genest ancestry:

**Warenne.** The travels of the Warenne earl William (1166-1240) can be exemplified as follows. On 30 November 1206 he was directed to escort the King of Scots to York – as well as elsewhere, he held substantial lands in south Yorkshire. On 16 May 1216 he was appointed Warden of the Cinque Ports (Kent) and on 24 August 1217 he took part in a naval battle in which Eustace the Monk was defeated and slain. In October 1223 he was in North Wales and in August 1224 with the King at Bedford, prior to his marriage to Matilda Marshal of Pembroke by October 1225.

There were of course also other lines of possible influence for transmitting the culture of the Plante Genest nickname to the Plente by-name, other than the travels of the Warennes. For example, Henry II's mistress 'Fair Rosamund' lived at the royal palace of Woodstock, near Oxford, which the king refurbished for her during the two or three years before she died in 1176. She had been openly acknowledged by the king when he was in his 40s and she in her 30s. Two of Henry's bastard sons, Geoffrey archbishop of York and William Longspée (Long Sword), were given recognition and honours, the latter becoming earl of Salisbury, a title that descended only unofficially to his crusading son William Longspée II (d 1249).

**William Longspée (Longsword)** was an illegitimate son of Henry II. His mother was unknown for many years though she has recently been identified as the subsequent wife Ida of Roger Bigod, second earl of Norfolk (d 1221). William Longspée (c1176-1226) received the honour of Appleby in Lincolnshire in 1188; he received the hand ten years later of the heiress Ela, countess of Salisbury; he was sheriff of Wiltshire, lieutenant of Gascony, constable of Dover in Kent and warden of the Cinque Ports and then, later, he became warden of the Welsh Marches. He commanded the English forces that defeated Philip II of France at the Battle of Damme (1213). He also received the honour of Eye in Suffolk.

Even though a culture for the Plante Genest nickname may have remained close mainly to his family, it seems possible that the travels of his illegitimate and legitimate descendants, including

Longspée and Warenne as well as the royal line, could have played their part in transmitting a culture of the Plante Genest nickname to nearby names such as Plente and Plant. For example, an eponymous descendant of William Longspée held land close to the bailiff Robert Plonte.

### 32.3.3 Robert Plonte of Saltford once bailiff of *Marsfelde*

Robert Plonte (circa 1280) of Saltford near Bath had been the bailiff of *Marsfelde*. There are several records for Bath in Somerset including *explicit* evidence that the Plant family surname was hereditary there by 1328: Plonte is the most usual early spelling of the Plant surname in the west of England.

Somerset is just across the Bristol Channel from the Strigul (Chepstow) estate which was part of the Pembroke estate in south Wales which had featured in the run up to the Barons War. The situation in Somerset also begs mention of Robert Burnell who remained as the king's great chancellor until his death in 1292 though he had become bishop of Bath and Wells. He had built a country house at Acton Burnell in Shropshire and the Statute of Acton Burnell, in 1283, allowed merchants to register debts with the mayors of London, York and Bristol. Bristol is near Saltford near Bath and the role of a bailiff here holds some historical significance.

Often the local lord would appoint the bailiff of a hundred, for example, but it would differ very little from a hundred in royal hands; its officials would act just like a royal one and be answerable to the county sheriff. There is some evidence of corruption in those times and also, quite naturally, of unpopularity. Popular poetry contains complaints about the heavy hand of government.

Justices, sheriffs, mayors, bailiffs, if I read right  
They can make the fair day into the dark night  
...  
And bailiffs and bedels under the sheriff  
Each one finds how best men to grieve.  
The poor men are all summoned to the assize  
And the rich sit at home, and to shine their silver they rise.

However, the evidence does not suggest that the problem of corruption was as extensive or as serious as some of the complaints imply. Though this might be seen as an unnecessarily bureaucratic age, the overriding impression is of men who were doing their best and working very hard to meet the challenges that faced them<sup>7</sup>. As bailiff of *Marsfelde*, Robert Plonte of Saltford may have been such a man.

Since early evidence for the Plant name is widespread and since bailiffs often travelled to take up their appointment, it is appropriate to keep an open mind when considering the location of *Marsfelde*. There is a Maresfield in Sussex and this demense manor is in the Honour of Aquila in the Rape of Pevensey which had been given in 1241 to the Queen's uncle, Peter of Savoy. This adjoined the Warenne honour of Lewes. However, there is no evidence that Maresfield had a bailiff, just a reeve<sup>8</sup>. It is perhaps more likely that Robert Plonte of Saltford had been the bailiff of Marshfield in south Gloucestershire, just 6 miles from Saltford, which is recorded as *Maresfeld* in 1221<sup>9</sup>. In January 1234, this Marshfield was granted a market by the king, which was revoked in the August, and then a document of 1287 cites that the market had been granted again in 1265 by the king to the Abbot and Convent of Keynsham<sup>10</sup>; Keynsham is just 2 miles from Saltford.

It may also be noted that Saltford lies just 8 miles north of Charlton. Charlton manor was said to have been acquired before 1217 by Hubert de Burgh, earl of Kent<sup>11</sup> and overlordship descended with the earldom of Kent on the honour of Camel until 1411 or later. However, the terre tenancy for

<sup>7</sup>Michael Prestwich, in the series The New Oxford History of England, *Plantagenet England 1225-1360*, (Oxford, 2005), pp. 75-77.

<sup>8</sup>I am grateful to Christopher Whittick of the East Sussex Record Office for this information.

<sup>9</sup>Ekwal, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English place-names*, (Oxford, 1960), p. 316.

<sup>10</sup><http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/gaz/gloucs.html>

<sup>11</sup>Rot. Litt. Claus. (Rec. Com.), i, 296b.

Charlton passed from his mother (d 1252) to Geoffrey Plante Genest's illegitimate royal descendant William Longspée III (d 1257). A charter was granted on 20 December 1252 by Henry III to this William *Lungspee*<sup>12</sup> to hold a market at the manor. William's daughter Margaret married Henry de Lacy, earl of Lincoln (d 1311) and their daughter Alice married Thomas, earl of Lancaster (d 1322). In 1317, earl John Warenne helped Alice to elope with her lover, starting a feud with Lancaster who temporarily seized Warenne lands; John Warenne (d 1347) acquired Charlton manor for life in 1319<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, explicit evidence for the hereditary Plonte surname in Bath (1328) dates to the times of the Warenne tenancy (1319-47) of nearby Charlton but there are earlier Plonte records here dating back (circa 1280) to the times of William Longspée III and his descendants (1252-1319). Both Longspée and Warenne were illegitimate descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest and they may have transmitted a culture for his nickname.

The extent of a connection between the bailiff, Robert Plonte of Saltford and the nearby lords of Charlton is uncertain, though we can note a remark of Michael Prestwich (2005)<sup>14</sup>.

There were various ways in which the groupings around magnates were formed. Family and neighbourhood connections were probably as important as formal contracts, and the natural desire to obtain the protection that a great lord could provide was another element. Shared interests led to sensible local alliances and the construction of networks of lordship and influence.

### 32.3.4 Possible connections around the Bristol Channel

Heiresses brought great lordships around the Bristol Channel to men who had had little direct interest in Welsh affairs. Geoffrey Plante Genest's royal grandson John Lackland acquired Glamorgan by his marriage with Isabel of Gloucester. Similarly, William Marshal through the heiress of Richard, earl of Pembroke (Strongbow), became the possessor of that earldom and of the enormous, if scattered, estates of the family of Clare in England (*e.g.* at Clare in Suffolk), Ireland, and south Wales.

As husband of Isabel Marshal (de Clare), who was a daughter of William the Marshal earl of Pembroke (d 1219), Richard earl of Cornwall had a connection to the disputed Pembroke estate in the lead up to the Barons War as so also did, for example, Simon de Montfort who married the widow Eleanor of William Marshal II earl of Pembroke (d 1231). Successive earls of Pembroke died and, after the death of the fifth Marshal brother, Anselm, the estate was divided between the sisters Matilda (Maud) Marshal (Strigul estate), Joan (Pembroke estate) and Eva (Cilgeran estate).

The eldest sister, Maud Marshal in particular features in connection with early Plant-like names:

- she married first Hugh Bigod, earl of Norfolk (d 1225) bearing Roger Bigod whose butler or sergeant was called Roger *Plantin* or *Planteng'*; her husband's evident<sup>15</sup> half-brother was William Longspée who was a grandson through Henry II of Geoffrey *Plante Genest*; William Longspée's grandson of the same name held Charlton manor, which was near the aforementioned Robert *Plonte* of Saltford;
- in 1225, she remarried William earl Warenne, grandson through Hamelin of Geoffrey *Plante Genest*, bearing John who can be connected to the *Plant* surname near Warenne lands; and,
- a manor called *la Planteland* is mentioned in 1310<sup>16</sup> in connection with Maud's inherited estate of Strigul.

Maud (Matilda) was through marriage countess of both Norfolk and Warenne. After her brothers' deaths, she also took the title of Marshal of England. Her father, William the Marshal, had led England out of civil war following the death of king John when Henry III was aged only 9.

The multiple evidence for Plant-like names in association with Maud Marshal connects the early Plant surname both to a likely influence from Plante Genest's noble descendants and to the Welsh

<sup>12</sup>Callendar of Charter Rolls, 1226-57, p. 413.

<sup>13</sup><http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=18740>

<sup>14</sup>Michael Prestwich, *Plantagenet England 1225-1360*, (Oxford, 2005), p. 382.

<sup>15</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_de\\_Longsp%C3%A9e%2C\\_3rd\\_Earl\\_of\\_Salisbury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_de_Longsp%C3%A9e%2C_3rd_Earl_of_Salisbury)

<sup>16</sup>Callendar of Patent Rolls 1310 Oct 10. Carmyle.

meaning *offspring* of plant. In those times, the Welsh language was important. In 1244, the royal justiciar in south Wales was advised by Marcher lords, *'It is not easy in our region to reward or restrain the Welsh, unless this is done by someone of their own tongue.'*

### 32.3.5 A possible Savoyard influence

It may also be relevant to mention Plant-like names in far-away Switzerland while considering the origins of the English Plant-like names. In his youth John, earl Warenne (1231-1305) had been under the wardship of Peter of Savoy. Savoy was near the emerging noble Planta surname in Switzerland.

Savoyard influence can be detected for example in the country house built at Acton Burnell and in the great castles of late thirteenth-century north Wales. This influence can be related back to Henry III's marriage in 1236 to Eleanor of Provence whose mother was Beatrice of Savoy. Rarely did a queen use her influence to advance her compatriots so greatly and her uncle, Peter of Savoy, came to England in 1240 where he and his compatriots received generous gifts. For young and ambitious Savoyards, both laymen and clerics, England must have seemed like the Promised Land<sup>17</sup>. The link between England and Savoy was cemented when the count of Savoy agreed in a treaty of 1246 to become Henry III's vassal for four castles, which controlled major Alpine passes. Earlier, in 1173, Geoffrey Plante Genest's royal grandson, John Lackland, who was Henry III's father, had been intended to marry Alice, daughter of Humbert III, count of Maurienne, though Alice died soon after<sup>18</sup>. Maurienne was on the borders of Germany and Italy and comprised what came to be known as Piedmont and Savoy. Another link to this distant part of Europe arose when John's son Richard, earl of Cornwall was elected king of the Romans (effectively Germany) in 1257. The river Planta and emerging evidence for the noble Swiss Planta family were in the Grisons nearby.

### 32.3.6 Medieval migrations of the Plant surname

Since recent DNA evidence indicates that Plant is a single-ancestor, rather than a multi-origin surname<sup>19</sup>, it is appropriate to consider that early evidence for the Plant name may represent the migrations of a single family.

The early evidence for this hereditary surname near the Bristol Channel is not incompatible with the mention in 1262 of William Plaunte in far away Essex. The local and family historian David Hey<sup>20</sup> remarks that there are many Welsh names in early Essex and wonders whether they arrived by sea. The shortest sea route would be from the Bristol Channel. A similar distance away, across the English Channel at Rouen, there were in 1273 three merchants called *de la Plaunt* or *Plaunt* at a time when compensation was being paid for Flemish piracy. Nearer the Bristol Channel (circa 1280) there was a Robert Plonte of Saltford near the Longspée manor of Charlton (Somerset) which passed to Warenne hands. The earl Warenne also held the hundred of Gallow and Brothercross on the north Norfolk coast and there are several records of Plant-like names nearby: William Plente (Norfolk, 1272-84), William Plauntes (Norfolk, 1275), William Plante (Cambridgeshire, 1279), Henry de Plantes (Huntingdonshire, 1282). It is also in Norfolk that Geoffrey Plante Genest's grandson, the Warenne earl William (1166-1240) is said to have spent much time on his estate at Castle Acre and Plante Genest's royal great grandson, Henry III, is reported as visiting as a guest several times possibly while on pilgrimage to nearby Walsingham<sup>21</sup>.

As well as in Somerset, Essex and Norfolk, there are early Plant records in north Wales and Kent, and sea travel may help to explain this. Early in the second Welsh War, in October 1282, Henry III's son Edward I made a major grant of land at Bromfield and Yale in north Wales to William's son, earl

<sup>17</sup>Michael Prestwich, *Plantagenet England 1225-1360*, (Oxford, 2005), p. 93.

<sup>18</sup>A.L. Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta 1087-1216* in Oxford History of England series, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1993), p. 330.

<sup>19</sup>John S. Plant (2005) *Modern methods and a Controversial Surname: Plant*, Nomina, vol. 28, pp. 115-33.

<sup>20</sup>David Hey, *Family Names and Family History*, (London and New York, 2000), p. 39.

<sup>21</sup><http://www.castles-abbey.co.uk/Castle-Acre-Castle-Priory.html>

John Warenne (1231-1305). The Warenne earl of Surrey and Sussex was evidently concerned with the commissariat and it is from around his sphere of influence in SE England that 1,500 quarters of wheat and 2,000 of oats each were requested from Essex, Surrey, Sussex, Kent and Hampshire: the intention was clearly to bring them by sea. Near the earl's north Wales property of Bromfield and Yale, at Eweloe in 1301, Richard Plant was granted rights to coal. Far away, in Kent, Johannes Plonte is recorded in the Canterbury freeman's rolls of 1303.

There are a dozen records for the hereditary Plonte name at Bath in the first half of the fourteenth century. Another record, on the Bristol Channel is in Gloucestershire in 1386; this is for a chaplain William Plonte and rent in Olveston for land of the prior and convent of Bath. In another neighbouring county of Somerset, in Devon, there is evidence of the spelling Plente which may have been, at least sometimes, a variant spelling of the same name. In modern times<sup>22</sup>, the surname Plenty – likely derived from the spelling Plente – is clustered around Somerset with a secondary cluster on the Essex coast. Between 1364 and 1368 there are several mentions of the merchant and king's minister in Devon, Roger Plente of Exeter, and his ship 'le Ceorge' of Exmouth. That he travelled far is evidenced by his license '*to take 20 packs of large cloth of divers colours from port of Exeter to Gascony, Spain, and other parts beyond seas; and to return with wine and other merchandise to the ports of London, Suthampton, Sandwich or Exeter.*' In 1368 he was the collector of customs in the port of Exeter.

The circumstances of the king's minister in Devon, Roger Plente, can be set in a context of Edward III's consultations with merchants. In 1341, for example, assemblies of merchants had been summoned, one as many as 110 men, to negotiate the contract by which they were allowed to export wool in return for massive loans of £200,000 to the crown. In 1347 seventy-nine merchants received individual summons, while the sheriffs were to select four or six men to accompany them. In 1353 a further merchant assembly took place. The crown eventually abandoned its attempts to negotiate customs directly with mercantile assemblies since the merchants showed insufficient unity and carried insufficient political power and it was acknowledged that customs duties was the business of Parliament.

The early Plant surname may well have ramified through trade (*e.g.* the three Rouen merchants in 1273); this may have carried Plants around the coast of southern England. The Plant name's ramification may also have involved the interests of some itinerant noble households, such the earl Warenne's.

### **32.3.7 Arrival of the Plants in their main homeland**

When the last Warenne earl of Surrey died in 1347 he left no legitimate children and, for example, his north Norfolk lands passed to the Lancastrians. However, his illegitimate son, Sir Edward de Warren and heirs, settled at Poynton in east Cheshire. It is around there that the main homeland of the Plants is subsequently found.

That the Plant name remained also in East Anglia is evidenced by the 1381 Poll tax returns for *agricole Johannes Plante 6d* (Great Finsborough, Suffolk) and *famulus/labor' Walterus Plante ux' 12d* (Pentlow, Essex). That a Plant entered into service with the Lancastrians is indicated by the 1394 testimony at Lincoln of servant John Plaint, aged 60 years or more; he was a senior witness to the proof of age of a son of Katherine Swynford, who was the mistress of the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt; the Duke fathered through her the illegitimate Beaufort line which has living male-line descendants surnamed Somerset. It may have been such a Plant as John Plaint who received the Plant blazon which indicates illegitimate cadetship with a subsequent allegiance to the (Lancastrian) red rose.

It seems that the Plant name may have migrated with the Warennes to east Cheshire. At least six, including a James Plant, of those named in 1352 for removing goods from erstwhile Warenne lands in north Norfolk had a surname (or by-name) that is then found amongst later fourteenth-

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<sup>22</sup><http://cet1.geog.ucl.ac.uk/uclnames/Surnames.aspx>

century residents in Macclesfield manor in east Cheshire. For example, Honde Plonte is mentioned for pannage of pigs at Lyme, adjoining the Warenne seat of Poynton. Nearby, a Ralph Plont is mentioned repeatedly from 1369 to 1374 for his straying animals in Macclesfield forest. Ranulph Plont is mentioned in 1383/4 for renting a parcel of land from John Walshe and he appears further with land at Rainow, sheep, draught beasts, working horses and pigs. His son John Plant senior and then John Plant junior remained at Rainow and this may be the same John Plant junior as he who is listed amongst ninety-eight '*Knights, Gentlemen and Freeholders*' in Macclesfield hundred in 1445. Since those times, the main Plant homeland has migrated slightly to the south into north Staffordshire.

There are now an estimated 12,000 Plants living in England, mainly in the west midlands near Wales, and a further 5,000 in the USA for example. The DNA evidence indicates that this is a single-ancestor name. The identity of the founding father of this prolific family is not known.

## 32.4 Fertility of the Plante Genest metaphor for Plant-like names

There are claims, dating back at least to the nineteenth century, that the Plant surname is a corruption of Plantagenet. There is *some* credibility to this *in so far as* there may have been a *cultural* influence from the Plante Genest nickname on the formative Plant surname. It should be stressed, however, that there is no proof of a genetic connection. Even so, this does not discount the possibility of a cultural connection, as the fame of the Plante Genest nickname could have been transmitted to the early Plant surname given the proximities of early Plants to the lands of the Longspée and Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest.

In this connection, account needs to be taken of the fact that the Plante Genest nickname did not lead on immediately to the royal Plantagenet surname. It is relevant to consider how the fame of the Plante Genest nickname may have spread. Contemporary attitudes seem relevant<sup>23</sup>. A credible explanation is that impolite or frivolous insinuations for the Plante Genest name could not be ignored initially but that this problem was eventually overcome.

An impolite tradition can be traced back to the by-name of Bernard Plantavelu, the ninth-century founder of a new duchy of Aquitaine. In contemporary documents he is called Plantapilosa which, like Plantavelu, means either a 'hairy shoot for propagation' or a 'hairy sole of foot'. There is evidence for the name Plantapilosa in writings of 880 by Hincmar of Rheims<sup>24</sup> and, in her translation, Janet Nelson claims that Plantapilosa means 'hairy paw'. She goes on to suggest that 'hairy paw' has negative connotations of 'foxiness' though we might well ask: "Why associate a hairy sole of foot particularly with a fox?" Why not a wolf or a badger or a bear or a rabbit or a hare? Discussing 'hairy paw' avoids the problem of sounding rude but it does not lead as directly as 'hairy shoot' to a convincing meaning. It can be safely assumed that Bernard Plantapilosa did not literally have a hairy paw but that he did have a 'hairy shoot'. Though politeness is admirable, the veiled blush of a fox's brush has less place on a ninth-century battle field than the direct translation 'hairy shoot' which would have cried out a pertinent sense for Plantapilosa – the 'hairy shoot' translation of Plantapilosa immediately draws attention to his virility or gallantry forming a fitting epithet for a War Lord.

When John of Marmoutier referred to Geoffrey Plantagenest in the 1170s he was writing to please Plante Genest's son Henry II (nicknamed Fitz Empress) and, with the Plantagenest nickname, he

<sup>23</sup>There is a fiction to dispel. Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code* takes ideas from elsewhere. According to *Les Dossiers Secrets*, to which he refers, the Plantards were relatives of the Plantagenets and they had spawned an English family called Planta. In reality of course there is no evidence of a blood-link between Planta, Plantagenet and Plantard. Though Dan Brown's book does not do justice to the true philosophical setting, it features a fertility cult which links man's generation to divine creation.

<sup>24</sup>Hincmar of Rheims in *Annals of Saint-Bertin*, sub anno 880. The original runs: ... *In quo itinere ejectis de castro Matiscano Bosonis hominibus, ipsum castellum ceperunt* [that is, the two kings Louis III and his brother Caroloman, king of Aquitaine], *et ceum comitatum Bernardo cognomento Planta-pilosa dederunt* ... [1871 ed., p. 285]. See also: <http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/GEN-MEDIEVAL/2006-02/1140027441>

may well have been alluding to Geoffrey's gallantry in a tradition of the 'hairy shoot' name. Geoffrey Plante Genest was most famous for his marriage in 1128 to the heiress apparent to the English throne and for his conquest of Normandy in 1144. This may have been to the fore in the mind of the Norman poet Wace (1135-74) when he wrote his poem mentioning Plante Genest with his love of wood and forest which may allude to Geoffrey's love of increasing his lands like his predecessor Plantevelu. His augmentation by marriage and conquest can be taken to be evoked by the Plante Genest metaphor of a germinating shoot. Another contemporary, Ralph de Diceto<sup>25</sup>, used the Plantegenest nickname when writing<sup>26</sup> for the year 1150:

Dum Gaufridus Plantegenest comes Andegavorum rediret Parisius a curia regis Francorum, concessit in fata apud Castrum Lidii, sepultus est autem Cenomannis in ecclesia Sancti Juliani.

The Latin meaning 'shoot for propagation' of *planta* had led on to a 'hairy shoot' symbol of gallantry for Plantapilosa – subsequently, the 'sprig of broom' emblem corresponding to the Plantegenest nickname can be taken to be a more euphemistic depiction of that same symbol.

Then there was the English by-name Plantefolie. *Folie* means wickedness or lewdness in Middle English and the adjective *foli* means wicked or lascivious, so it is quite inescapable that Plantefolie meant 'lewd shoot'. This might be glossed to 'wickedness offshoot' or 'bastard child' but an underlying lewdness remains. This name is found throughout England in the thirteenth century: Leicestershire in 1209; Somerset in 1226; and, Yorkshire in 1270. There seems little doubt that such names as Plantapilosa and Plantefolie had attracted priapic and phallic insinuation.

Impolite sense can be attached also to Plantagenet and that may well have formed an impediment to recording Plantagenet as an official royal surname around that time in England. In Welsh, *planta* means to impregnate, which can be related to the planting of seed or semen<sup>27</sup> or offspring. In his dictionary of archaic English, Samuel Johnson came out and said that *to plant* can mean to procreate and *genet* means a small Spanish horse. Plantagenet hence carried a sense of bestiality, as well as meaning 'sprig of broom' which is a hairy shoot and hence an echo of Plantapilosa. Though not polite images, these may have garnished Plantagenet with a common intrigue bringing prominence to the name. This would have been with a sense that was sufficiently offensive, however, to render the name unsuitable for official royal purposes. Censorship can explain the sparsity of early mentions of Plantagenet though there is a record of Galfrido Plauntegenet in 1266 – this was in connection with a garderobe and, since that lacked gravitas anyway, it may have been deemed that there was little point to cleansing that particular record by removing the offending name Plauntegenet.

That is not to say that there may not have been other, more respectable meanings to Plantagenet. According to Jim Bradbury<sup>28</sup>, the Plantagenet nickname "is commonly found in chronicles and charters of the twelfth *and later* [my emphasis] centuries and was applied to several members of the same family: to Geoffrey le Bel [*i.e.* Plante Genest]; to [his son] Henry II; to Henry II's son Geoffrey [who held high office in Brittany]. A survey of the possibilities for the surname appeared in J. Chartrou, *L'Anjou de 1109 à 1151*, Paris 1928, pp. 83-5 and Bradbury goes on to suggest that the 'sprig of broom' name might have derived from a yellow flower mentioned in a fragment of Angevin history that is ascribed to Fulk of Anjou:

*Urban was led from the church of St Maurice to the church of St Martin. Then he gave me a golden flower, which he carried in his hand. I decided, in commemoration and from love of him, that from then on I and my successors would always carry it on Palm Sunday.*

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<sup>25</sup>Early in his career, Ralph de Diceto was Archdeacon of Middlesex, and afterwards served as Dean of St. Paul's from 1180/1-c1201. Diana Greenway, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066-1300: volume 1: St. Paul's, London* (1968), pp. 4-8.

<sup>26</sup>Stubbs, *Hist. Works of Master Ralph de Diceto, Dean of London*, 1 (Rolls Ser. 68) (1876): 293.

<sup>27</sup>Semen is the Latin word for seed. See also Genesis 38.

<sup>28</sup>Jim Bradbury, *Fulk le Réchin and the Origin of the Plantagenets*, in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown*, (Boydell Press, 1989), pp. 27-41. See also:

<http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/GEN-MEDIEVAL/2006-02/1140112140>

There are some misgivings about this theory however. First, the story applies to Fulk Rechin, who was the grandfather of Geoffrey Plante Genest, whereas the *contemporary* evidence associates the Plantagenest nickname only with Geoffrey. Also, Geoffrey's nickname suggests a young sprig of broom rather than a nonspecific golden flower: though the flowers of the fully-grown common broom are yellow, they are small and tightly attached to each branch making them rather unsuitable to be carried singly in the hand. Though it is likely that there were those who preferred that Plantagenet be more pious than bawdy and though the yellow flower story can be conjectured to relate partly to that wish, this may have been insufficient to quell bawdy rumours - involving procreation with horses - which could have been spread by some of the early English subjects of the royal Plantagenets.

Those who knew of scholastic teachings would have been aware of plant-like aspects to man from the outset. Johannes Scotus Erigena wrote in the ninth century that bone, nail and hair contained only insensitive vegetable life; and so Plantevelu's name may have been intended to reflect that he had a sturdy frame of unflinching vegetable life. Atto, bishop of Vercelli (924-61) complained of the practises of meretriculae in his diocese who baptised turves and branches as coparents, and this suggests that beliefs were prevalent that human conception was akin to vegetable life being placed in receptive soil. Avicenna (c980-1036) maintained that the soul of plants was shared with animals and humans; and Averroes (1126-98) reiterated a scheme for the generation of life from the elements, such as clay, through plants and animals to man. Connotations of generation should be placed in such a context of late medieval metaphysics, rather than allowing biology to distract us with modern concepts, such as that man's seed fertilises the female ovum - rather, his seed was seen as the carrier of man's vegetable soul to her blood.

In early so-called "Plantagenet times", Western European scholastics were developing elaborate schemes for man's soul with its vegetable, animal and intellective components. Robert Grosseteste (c1175-1253) and others wrote significantly about the vegetable soul with its powers of nutrition, augmentation (*cf.* Planterose, Planteporrets) and generation (*cf.* Plantevelu, Plantegenest). The human soul had three components - vegetable, sensory, intellective - and Roger Bacon (c1214-c1294) said modern philosophers taught that only the intellective soul was directly created by God. By later "Plantagenet times", this had led on to more advanced concepts of the *planting* of soul in man by God, though it is not known how this inter-related with an unknown timing for the formation of the Swiss names Plantefoi, Plantamour, and Plantefor.

It is known that names of philandering were popular. That said, with the Queen's uncle Boniface of Savoy as archbishop of Canterbury and his compatriot Peter of Aigueblanche as bishop of Hereford, the Savoyard influence may have been more godly than the 'hairy shoot' tradition suggests. With the mid-thirteenth-century Savoyard connection, there may have been some interchange of influence between English and Swiss Plant-like names:

13th century			undated		
English:	Plantebene	pleasant shoot	Swiss:	Plantefoi	planted faith
	Plantefolie	wickedness shoot		Plantamour	planted love
	Planterose	risen shoot		Planteporrets	porrected shoot
				Plantefor	planted conscience

The name Planterose, in particular, had additional meanings such as an 'establisher of ephemeral life' as is indicated by the symbolism of Alain de Lille (c1115-1202) who wrote "*The rose depicts our station, a fitting explanation of our lot, a reading of our life, which while it blooms in early morning, 'flowers out', the flower deflowered*". The rose was also eternal, however, through regeneration. As a part of his theory of universals, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) wrote "*Once we allow the proposition, 'If there is a rose, there is a flower', it is always true and necessary*", even if the rose no longer exists or has never existed<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup>A.J. Haft, J.G. White and R.J. White, *The Key to 'The Name of the Rose'*, (The University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 29.

As scholastic ideas became better known, a more developed metaphysical explanation for the Plantagenet name may have come more to the fore. Transubstantiation had become an article of Christian faith in 1079 though it had been believed by many earlier. Plantagenet can be associated with transubstantiation through the vegetable (*planta*), animal (*genet* as a civet cat or horse) and human genera. The civet cat is elongated and hairy – this may be compared with the Swiss name Plantaporrets, associated with the elongated leek plant, as well as with the ‘hairy shoot’ meaning of Plantevelu and the ‘Long Sword’ epithet of a bastard line of Plante Genest’s descendants. However, for many, the Plantagenet name may have come to evoke an image of the young Geoffrey, as a scion or establisher shoot (*planta*), at one with his mount in 1128 in his pre-nuptial joustings at Rouen (Marmoutier’s chronicle) in which his Spanish horse (*genet?*) features.

### 32.5 Birth of the Plant and Plantagenet surnames

Gravitas in the face of frivolity<sup>30</sup> may be relevant to answering the question: “Why in the fifteenth century did Richard, duke of York adopt as a surname the nickname of Geoffrey Plantagenet, who was not even a king, instead of the by-name of a more prestigious and recent forefather?” One possible answer is that, some three hundred years earlier, Geoffrey had fathered the Angevin Empire which extended far beyond England and reclaiming dominion over France had remained important in such times as those of Edward III and Henry V. In discussing the royal succession in this connection, it would have been pertinent that an intact male-line of kings dated back to when Plante Genest of Anjou had planted legitimate male issue in Matilda. This suggests that there could have been quasi-continuous mention from one reign to the next of the Plantagenet nickname, rather as though it were a surname, but that leaves unanswered the question of why Plantagenet does not appear earlier in documents as a hereditary royal surname. A likely explanation is that there were salacious connotations for Plantagenet which were not adequately sanitised for official purposes though the name had caught the imagination of some neighbouring commoners long before the mid-fifteenth century.

The Plant surname had formed by the mid-thirteenth century. Irrespective of whether the Plant surname’s origins were with the culture of the Plante Genest nickname or with the ‘abundant’ or ‘fertile’ meaning of *plente* or with the ‘offspring’ meaning of *plaunt*, we can associate it with a ‘growing shoot’ metaphor of life’s renewal. Sense of a ‘growing shoot of renewal’ could apply to either a ‘gallant establisher’, as is appropriate for Plante Genest, or an ‘offspring of renewed life’ as is appropriate to the single-family surname Plant. It seems that sense relating to this metaphoric system of shoot growth, regeneration and abundance developed for the Plant surname before Plantagenet became used as a hereditary royal surname.

Though some family branches with early ‘Plant’ name spellings may have died out, much of the medieval evidence for the formative Plant surname might represent the travels of a single family. Speculations that even the earlier *Plente* spelling could be related to the subsequent Plant surname are not entirely amiss since spellings similar to Plant were widespread a little later and the recent DNA evidence has categorised Plant as a single-ancestor prolific surname – it *could have* originated from an earlier *Plente* ancestor. The distribution of the medieval Plant surname can be explained by a combination of sea travel and an association with Warenne lands. As one possibility, it can be conjectured that the Plants were a family from Wales, with the ‘offspring’ meaning to their name, who migrated around the coast to East Anglia as well as arriving in east Cheshire. For example, they may have originated near the Chepstow estate of Maud Marshal (d 1248) who was countess of both Norfolk and Warenne and their trade and official duties may have become associated with Longspée and Warenne lands; Maud’s first husband was evidently Longspée’s half brother and her second husband was the earl Warenne himself, both descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest.

The following evidence indicates how a cleansing of Plant-like surnames, such as Plant and

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<sup>30</sup><http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/GEN-MEDIEVAL/2006-02/1140003577>

Plantagenet, may have progressed.

The name Plente may have been inspired by noble extravagance and its spelling could have been amended to Plante out of respect for religious austerity. The augmentative and generative powers of a hairy shoot could have been an inspiration for the Plente name with its ‘abundance’ or ‘fertile’ meaning. However, both abundance and sexuality were renounced by the Franciscan ‘spirituals’ as well as the Cistercians. For example, Joachim of Calabria (c1135-1202) had left the austere Cistercian order at Corazzo to found in Fiore and even more rigorous branch of the order; and, though this had resulted in his denunciation as a renegade by the Cistercian General Chapter, he became one of the most respected religious figures by the thirteenth century. Austere sentiments could have led, by the mid-thirteenth century, to an incentive to ameliorate the spelling of Plente to Plante or its dialect equivalent Plonte – by such a revision the name’s meaning was sanitised to ‘offspring’.

There is early evidence for the Plant surname in Somerset, in proximity to the lands of the Longspée (Long Sword) descent of Plante Genest. In particular, Robert Plonte of Saltford (c1280) was betwixt a ‘Long Sword’ insinuation of a ‘hairy shoot’ tradition at Charlton and the Augustinian Abbey at Keynsham. Keynsham Abbey, which had a dependent chapel at Charlton, was visited by Edward I in 1276 on his way from Bath to Bristol<sup>31</sup>; and, Robert Plonte (c1280) had been bailiff of Maresfelde which was apparently Marshfield with its market granted by the king in 1265 to the Abbot and Convent of Keynsham. It is around here that the surname Plenty (a corruption of Plente or Plonte?) is now clustered, though it has not yet been DNA tested whether Plenty belongs to the same male-line family as Plant. Regardless of such detail of possible genetic connections, it seems that there were competing views here relating to phallic insinuation and the sanctity of human creation: there is evidence for the philandering name Plantefolie in Somerset in 1226 followed by Plonte by c1280.

Bawdy sense could have threatened to diminish royal gravitas. It seems likely that sense of bestial generation for Plantagenet was eventually overcome by Grosseteste’s philosophy of godly creation though this suggests that there would have been an understandable delay before Plantagenet became acceptable, not least to the church, as a royal surname.

Robert Grosseteste (c1175-1253) had been at the royal court and at Oxford, and he became bishop of Lincoln. He may have been aware that, regardless of officially-preferred meaning, there were salacious connotations to the Plante Genest name. He became eminent for his scholastic writings and he devised a scheme whereby the vegetable soul was powered by celestial light, raising its power of generation for example to a more godly status. Whereas other scholastics, at Paris and Bologna (*e.g.* St Thomas Aquinas), considered that man’s vegetable soul was baser than his sensory and intellective souls, Grosseteste considered that the three souls were indivisible. Is it a coincidence that he attempted, in the times of a “Plant-like name controversy”, to raise the vegetable soul to a more godly height? It was in Grosseteste’s time that there is the first evidence for the name spelling Plente and, by 1262, there is the spelling Plante. Putting meanings of the word *plente* together with Grosseteste’s three powers of the vegetable soul we get nutritive generosity, abundant growth, and fertile generation. Plente had meanings associated with abundance or fertility and there was a new-life sense to Plant with its meaning ‘offspring’. The name Plantagenet could have attracted gossip about its connotations of impregnating a horse and this may have built its infamy – such gossip could have delayed the name’s adoption for official royal purposes until a cleansed sense of divine creation came more to the fore. Grosseteste’s early thirteenth-century scholasticism had a wide impact eventually. In Middle English by the fourteenth century, there is reference to faith, the Word of God, and gentleness all being planted into man. The word *plant* was evidently becoming more associated with God’s creation instead of just procreation. It seems that the salacious by-name Plantefolie had, by then, died out.

<sup>31</sup><http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.asp?compid=40930> reproduces the article ‘Houses of the Augustian canons: The abbey of Keynsham’, in *A History of the County of Somerset: Volume 2* (Victoria County Histories, 1911), pp. 129-32. In 1272 and 1277 the Abbot is called Robert.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century, there was a scandal when John of Gaunt married his mistress Katherine Swynford, not because he had a mistress but because he married her. Shortly afterwards, the poet laureate, John Gower, wrote to Gaunt's son, the new Lancastrian king, Henry IV:

*My lord, in whom evere yit be founde Pite withoute spot of violence,  
Kep thilke pes alwei withinne bounde, Which god hathe planted in thi conscience;*

The king is cautioned to keep his *pes* (peace or seed?) always within bounds and there is an emphasis on planted conscience. Peas alludes aptly to his seed: the broom plant has hairy pea-like pods. It seems that attempts to cleanse the meaning of *plant*, in connection with Plante Genest's royal descendants, were continuing and it may be for similar reasons that the spelling *Plaint* was used, apparently instead of *Plente* or *Plante*, for a witness relating to a child of Henry IV's step-mother, Katherine Swynford. *Plaint* has the innocent meaning 'petition' which would avoid any embarrassments that might otherwise have arisen from the meanings 'fertile' or 'offspring' of *Plente* or *Plante* in official proceedings surrounding the Swynford scandal.

A few decades later, Richard duke of York adopted "Plantagenet" as a royal surname. By then, it seems that the need to emphasise his centuries-old lineage was more important than avoiding the echoes of an earlier bawdy sense to the name. Moreover, reasserting his virility, in a hairy shoot tradition, may have mattered to Richard: there were rumours that Richard was not the true father of Edward IV and, in 1483, Dominic Marcini alleged that Edward's mother had confessed to this. Edward IV of the "Plantagenet" House of York came to take over the crown in the wake of allegations of the cowardice, weakness and naïvety, and then the madness of the rival Lancastrian king, Henry VI. The Plantagenet name embodied a sense of a more virile generative renewal as well as implying that the House of York had descended, like that of Lancaster, from Geoffrey Plante Genest, an asserted forefather of some three hundred years earlier. There was also by then a growing sense of God's planting of faith and intellect into man to counter an earlier problem of bawdy insinuation.

The Plantagenet surname has since come to be used freely, for the whole dynasty, with little concern as to why there is a lack of evidence for its early official use. A grasp of developing connotations of man's generation and God's creation seems key to understanding why there was a faltering and delayed acceptance of this royal surname; and the early evidence for some similar names – such as *Plantepilosa*, *Plantefolie*, *Plente* and *Plant* – helps to illuminate the explanation.