

## Chapter 28

# Plant meaning and some similar names

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ORIGINS OF PLANTA AND PLANTAGENET AND THE SEMANTIC<sup>1</sup> GROUNDING OF PLANT

The name *Planta* dates back to Roman times and *planta* is one of the few Latin words that survived from those times into the first 150 years of Anglo-Saxon English. By the times of the first evidence for the Plant surname, related ideas were flooding into Middle English such as from the French verb *planter*. The role of the Plantagenet name is a fascinating topic in itself though there were other influences for the meaning of Plant. In particular, the different meaning of *planta* from the modern meanings of *plant* allowed a salient metaphor to develop that involved life's origins and, though now archaic, it appears that this dominated the name's initial meaning.

### 28.1 Roman *Planta* and some early semantic clues

Clues to the origins and meaning of Plant have been sought in evidence for similar names. A connection to Plantagenet was supposed in 1862<sup>2</sup> and to Plantebene and Planterose in 1958<sup>3</sup>. More recent investigations have given cause to reassess these claimed connections as has been detailed in earlier Chapters. This can be outlined as follows...

**1862 book** — Though an 1862 book noted that the Plant surname '*was supposed to be corrupted from Plantagenet*' the Plants do not appear to have been their assorted servants since the initial DNA evidence indicates that the Plants are largely a single family. As yet, there are still some impediments to the DNA testing of male-line descent from the Plantagenets though it remains *possible* that there may have been some influence on the Plant name from the famous Geoffrey Plante Genest who founded the 12th century Angevin Empire and who fathered the so-called 'Plantagenet' kings of England.

**1958 Surname Dictionary** — The Dictionary of British Surnames (DBS) deduces from the 'similar' names Plantebene and Planterose that the Plant name means 'gardener'. However the DNA evidence discredits the idea that the Plant name had multiple origins as would be implied if the meaning were 'gardener'. There are other explanations for Plantebene and Planterose and there are other Plant-like names that do not fit a 'gardener' meaning. The cited evidence in the DBS was around East Anglia though the principal Plant homeland is near Wales where there is the alternative meaning 'children'.

The DBS lists the names Child and Children indicating that such meaning is valid for a surname. This is consistent with the DNA evidence which indicates that the Plants were the children of a single family. It is accordingly appropriate to revisit the question of how such a meaning could have arisen for Plant.

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Professor Mick Short of Lancaster University for the gift of a well chosen book on cognitive metaphor theory.

<sup>2</sup>John Sleight (1862) *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek*, p33.

<sup>3</sup>P.H.Reaney (1958) *Dictionary of British Surnames*.

### 28.1.1 The Roman name *Planta*

For the purposes of compiling a background of similar names it may be noted that there is an isolated mention of *Planta* almost two millennia ago. Just 3 years after the Roman invasion of Britain, there is mention of *Julius Planta* in an edict of the Roman Emperor Claudius.

Apart from a brief incursion into Britain by Julius Caesar, the Roman army first launched its attack on Britain in 43AD. Claudius had given orders to his General Plautius not to enter the British capital but to wait until he, the Emperor, arrived<sup>4</sup>. Claudius was away from Rome for 6 months, sailing along the Tiber to Ostia, by Ship to Messalina, then traveling through Gaul to the Channel. Suertorius wrote '*he fought no battle, nor did he suffer any casualties*'. The Romans eventually reached Chester and Flintshire's lead and silver by around 60-70AD.

An edict<sup>5</sup> of the Roman emperor Claudius of 46AD granted citizenship to people living near modern Trento in the Italian Alps and includes..

*I have for the matter under consideration sent Julius Planta, my friend and advisor. And since he has investigated and examined the matter with the utmost care, in consultation with my procurators, both those who were in the vicinity and those in other parts of the region, with regard to all other matters I grant him permission to make decision and render judgment*

As a close advisor to the Roman emperor, Julius Planta could have had links to almost anywhere in the Roman empire.

### 28.1.2 Some similar names in Europe

Over 800 years after the times of Julius Planta, at the end of the reign of Charles le Chauve of France, a new Duchy of Aquitaine was begun with count *Bernard Planta Pilus* (in Latin) or *Plantevelue* (in French), who had exerted his authority first on l'Auvergne and le Velay (869-72AD). According to the IGI for Continental Europe, and other sources of limited reliability<sup>6</sup>, the name Plantard is supposed to date back that far. With this controversial claim, the Plantard family was said to include Bernard Planta-Pilus (Plantevelue) and it was said to have descended from the Merovingian king Dagobert II. This has been substantially questioned and dubbed *The Plantard Subplot*<sup>7</sup> of a popular mystery that is centred on Rennes-le-Chateau. Though disputed, its relevance is that the associated 'so-called Razes genealogy' includes the names Plantard, Plantevelue, Plantamour, and Planta. Certainly, the 9th century existence of Bernard Plantevelue (Planta Pilus) is widely accepted and there is modern evidence for the name Plantamour. In modern France, the name Plantard is found mostly in Brittany and also near Switzerland where there is evidence also for the noble name Planta.

### 28.1.3 The Latin word *planta* in Britain and Old Norse kennings

The Romans left Britain in 410AD and Latin was largely lost. It was not until later that there was a resumed influence of Latin in Britain through the Roman Church in particular. In 491AD the Frisian tribes of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes landed at Pevensey bringing their Germanic dialects which formed the basis of Old English. At that time it is conjectured that most people in Britain were speaking Celtic though this was marginalised and only about 20 Celtic words survived into English. Only about 200 Latin words are found in the first 150 years of Anglo-Saxon rule and one of these is *planta*<sup>8</sup>. The Latin word *planta* relates to life's foundations. It can mean 'shoot for

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.romans-in-britain.org.uk/his\\_claudius\\_the\\_final\\_conquest.htm](http://www.romans-in-britain.org.uk/his_claudius_the_final_conquest.htm)

<sup>5</sup><http://www.personal.kent.edu/~bkharvey/roman/texts/citizen.htm> – I am grateful to Mme. Nanette Pafumi of Switzerland for drawing my attention to this web site.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln (1982) *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*.

<sup>7</sup><http://chuma.cas.usf/~dietch/rennes-summary.html> – I am grateful to Andreas Arduus of Estonia for drawing my attention to this web site.

<sup>8</sup>Melvyn Bragg (2003) *The Adventure of English: the Biography of a Language*, pps 6, 21.

propagation' (*cf.* the emergence of new life) or 'sole of foot' (*cf.* man's contact with the earth). In mythical tradition, life emerged from the earth.

Many early Plant-like names are compounds of two words. A particular linguistic feature around the times of Bernard Planta-Pilus for such compounds was Old Norse kennings which may have held relevance in Old English and Old French. These kennings are typically composites of metonymies and image metaphores. One type of metonymy is where a part stands for the whole. In metaphore the logic of one conceptual domain is mapped onto another. In image metaphore the image of one thing is mapped onto the other. A detailed analysis of the nature of kennings can be complex. Understanding of them in the times they were used could have been aided by the fact that much of the metaphore and metonymy that kennings contain may have been conventionalised, that is made part of an everyday conceptual system and thus used automatically, effortlessly, and without conscious awareness<sup>9</sup>. Lakoff and Turner (1989)<sup>10</sup> remark:-

*Kennings are an extreme example of how metaphor and metonymy can interact to form a unified interpretation. What makes kennings special, from our point of view, is the complexity of composition they show — the sheer density of image-metaphor and metonymy.*

Old English examples are *beadoleoma* (battle-light) meaning 'sword', *hwaelweg* (whale-way) meaning 'sea', and *waeghengest* (wave-steed) meaning 'ship'<sup>11</sup>. In 'whale-way' the two dimensional metaphorical image of a path is mapped onto part of the sea's surface and, with metonymy whereby a part can stand for the whole, this stands for the sea. An Old Norse passage can be translated as '*The bear of the masthead knobs leapt over the peaks of the whale house*' and, in this, the phrase 'masthead knobs' evokes by metonymy a ship's sailing gear such that 'bear' then metaphorically evokes a sailing ship while 'whale house' evokes the sea and 'peaks' evokes its waves.

#### 28.1.4 Origins of the word *plant* and some clues for related names

The OED lists 'young person' as an archaic meaning of the English word *plant*. This is based on the *noun*<sup>1</sup> sense of *plant* which the OED traces back to c825AD. As already indicated, the assimilation of the Latin word *planta* into Anglo-Saxon English, in which it is said to mean 'shoot', can be traced back much earlier. For the etymology of the *noun*<sup>1</sup> sense, the OED lists a number of similar words to *planta* throughout Western and Northern Europe that can be judged to be adoptions of the Latin word *planta*...

*plant noun*<sup>1</sup> — Old English *plante* feminine, adoption of Latin *planta* 'sprout, slip, cutting, graft', whence also Old High German *pflanza*, Old Norse *planta*. Later senses are affected by medieval or modern uses of Latin *planta*, and by French *plante*, or are direct derivatives of the English verb *to plant*, or adoption of French *plant* 'action of planting; plants collectively for planting out', from *planter* 'to plant'.

The OED also traces back the English verb *plant* to c825AD listing for its etymology..

*to plant verb* - Old English *plantian* adoption of Latin *plantare* 'to plant, fix in place' *cf.* *plant noun*<sup>1</sup>. The sense-development agrees in the main with that of the French *planter* (12th century) (: - Latin *plantare*).

Plant-like names in England, such as *Plantebene*, are traceable back to the late 12th and the 13th century. By then Old English was dying out following the 11th century usage of Norman French by the upper classes and the use of Latin by the Church. By then, many Latin based French words were adopted into English. Together these developments mark the beginnings of Middle English which became the dominant language in England in the 14th century<sup>12</sup>. Though the French Plant-like

<sup>9</sup>George Lakoff and Mark Turner (1989) *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, pps 103-4.

<sup>10</sup>Lakoff and Turner (1989) *ibid*, p106.

<sup>11</sup>Simon Winchester (2003) *The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary*, p 8.

<sup>12</sup>There was evidently a sea change from teaching in Grammar Schools in French to English around 1350. In 1362, for the first time in almost 3 centuries, English was acknowledged as a language of official business. Many of the educated

name Plantevelue and the Old English word *plante* date back earlier, late-medieval influences from the Continent on the English language cannot be ignored when considering the earliest evidence for Plant and similar names.

### 28.1.5 A metaphorical basis to the developing meaning of Plant-like names

For the name Sprig we can imagine a direct metaphorical image mapping of a twig onto a thin person. The DBS lists an occurrence of the name Sprig in Norfolk in 1199 and Sprigge in Derbyshire in 1206, noting the Middle English meaning ‘twig’ of *sprigge* and a dialect meaning of *sprig* as ‘a small slender person’.

The meaning of the 9th century name Plantevelue (or *Planta Pilus*) is ‘hairy shoot for propagation’. This seems to imply something more complex than a direct image mapping on to a ‘hairy thin person’. The OED<sup>13</sup> lists for example ‘sprig’ or ‘scion’ or ‘young person’ for *plant* and gives ‘young person’ or ‘young nobleman’ as possible meanings of the words *sprig* and *scion*. Here, the metaphorical mapping can be taken to be on to a part of a person which can then stand by metonymy for the whole person. Though a delicate subject, Plantevelue seems to map, at least subconsciously, as an image metaphore on to a generative part and then by metonymy onto the whole of a man with powers of generation. The same can be said for other names: Plantamour (love-shoot), Planterose (augmented-shoot), Plantard (ardent-shoot or squared timber), Plantaporetts (porrected-shoot), Plantefolie (wickedness-shoot). Applying the Politeness maxim of Consideration (the so-called Pollyanna Principle)<sup>14</sup> these almost-subliminal mappings can be modified by substituting ‘offshoot’ for ‘shoot’.

As well as the ‘shoot’ meaning of Anglo-Saxon English *plante*, French sense can be expected to have come into play for 13th century Plante-like names. The ‘planted’ sense of the French past-participle *planté* and the ‘action of planting’ sense of the French noun *plant* could have suffused the earlier Anglo-Saxon ‘shoot’ meaning. This could have yielded such a meaning as ‘a planting of seed’ or ‘planted seed’ for Plantebene and ‘planted wickedness’ for Plantefolie. Such sense can evoke the outcome of not only vegetable but also human generation.

The Welsh senses of *planta* and *plant* are said to be adaptations from the Latin. The Welsh meanings are ‘to beget children’ for *planta* and ‘children’ for *plant*. These can be understood as arising from senses of the Latin *planta* pertaining to a shoot for propagation, a shoot grafted into parent stock, or the offspring of parent seed. A fuller metaphorical mapping, tacitly involving human generation, can accompany the aforementioned image mapping and metonymy for ‘shoot’. The OED mentions the meaning ‘graft’ for *planta* and this conjoins the senses of ‘shoot’ and ‘offshoot’ in a manner that is also metaphorically applicable to ‘offspring’.

A more modern meaning of *plant* is a fully matured plant. The earlier meanings ‘shoot’, ‘graft’, and ‘offshoot’ are largely lost to modern English and, as a result, so are the aforementioned metaphorical associations. By returning to the earlier meanings it becomes clearer how *plant* could come *literally* to mean ‘children’ in Welsh and how it similarly came *figuratively* to mean ‘a young person’ (now rare) in English<sup>15</sup>. For the early meaning of *plant* it seems that there was a strong metaphorical basis of meaning as ‘young life’ and this will be discussed further later in this Chapter.

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lawyers, like the clergy, had died in the plague. In 1362 Parliament was opened in English though it was another 37 years until the Lancastrian king Henry IV deposed Richard II with speeches (of deposing and of abdication) in English. Latin and French had lost their grip as the languages of official business and the Church. Chaucer was the first great writer of the newly emerged England. Melvyn Bragg (2003) *ibid*, pps 65-8.

<sup>13</sup>Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>14</sup>Alan Cruse (2000) *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*, pps 366-7.

<sup>15</sup>In Cognitive Metaphore theory, Literal Meaning Theory is challenged — there is a metaphorical basis to much which is often divided, sometimes rather arbitrarily, into ‘literal’ or ‘figurative’.

## 28.2 The credibility of the Plantagenet claim

The Plant surname can be associated with a general culture of Plant-like names and their meanings. It does not necessarily relate just to Plantagenet, though the fact that the Plants' principal homeland can be traced back to the times and locality of the 'Plantagenet Palatine of Chester' means that it is not unreasonable to turn some attention to the 1862 claim that the Plant name *'is supposed to be corrupted from Plantagenet'*. There is then a weakness to consider in this approach which is the dearth of evidence that the so-called royal 'Plantagenets' were indeed using the Plantagenet name when the Plant surname originated.

### 28.2.1 Vicary Gibbs' opinion concerning the Plantagenet surname

An opinion concerning the evidence for Plantagenet has been given in *The Complete Peerage*. The Plantagenet name can properly be associated with the last of the 'Plantagenet' kings, namely Edward IV and Richard III. However, before the times of their father Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, the evidence for the Plantagenet name is sparse.

Vicary Gibbs was the editor of Volumes I to IV, and co-editor of Volume V, of *The Complete Peerage* which has appeared in 14 volumes progressively through the 20th century. Its alternative title is *A History of the House of Lords and all its members from the Earliest Times*. Writing around the times of Edward VII's death in 1910, he refers rather oddly to the Plantagenets as the 'Edwardian kings'<sup>16</sup>:-

*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 and their numerous descendants. The fact is, however, as has been pointed out by Sir James Ramsay and other writers of our day, that the name, although a personal emblem of the aforesaid Geoffrey, was never borne by any of his descendants before Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York (father of Edward IV), who assumed it, apparently about 1448. V.G.*

This often quoted passage has been variously interpreted. Some have commented that the statement is fallacious in that we can not know that '[the Plantagenet surname] *was never borne by any of his descendants before ... 1448*'. Others say this is *argumentum ad ignorantum* and V.G. is simply implying that we are ignorant of the fact that the surname was so borne before 1448. In a technical sense<sup>17</sup>, a 'surname' can be deemed 'not to have existed' before such times as those for which we know of contemporary evidence for it over at least three consecutive generations.

In particular some have supposed that V.G. was proclaiming an expert opinion that the Plantagenet 'surname' was *never* used before 1448 as there would be more evidence for it if it had been. If the latter was indeed V.G.'s intended construal, there is a counter-argument.

### 28.2.2 A possible explanation of the gap in the record for Plantagenet

Surviving evidence remains for the 'Plantagenet' name as a name of Geoffrey of Anjou (1113-51), the founder of the so-called "Plantagenet" dynasty. Volume XI of *The Complete Peerage* cites the mention of *Plante Genest* in the works of the Norman poet Wace (1135-74)<sup>18</sup> and *Plantegenest* by Jean de Marmoutier (c1170-75)<sup>19</sup>. There is also mention of an unknown Galfrido *Plauntegenet* in the 1266 Close Rolls. Apart from these scant mentions however, there is a gap in the *primary* evidence for the name until 1448 and this summarises the underlying truth to the above remarks by Vicary Gibbs.

<sup>16</sup>The Complete Peerage, vol I, p 183, note (c), ed. Vicary Gibbs, 1910.

<sup>17</sup>Genealogists do not consider a name useful as a surname unless there is contemporary evidence that it was used over three generations such that it can be used to connect grandfather to grandson.

<sup>18</sup><http://user.itl.net/~geraint/wace.html>

<sup>19</sup><http://www.heraldica.org.topics/le-mans.htm>

Given the Tudors' destruction of evidence however, and their attempts to strengthen just their own claim to the Plantagenet crown, it is uncertain what should be made of this gap in the surviving records. Much of the traditional Catholic documentation was destroyed with the Dissolution of the Monasteries by the Tudor king Henry VIII (reigned 1509-47).

Light on a motive that could have been driving the Tudors has recently attracted attention. There is a longstanding theory that, following the slaughter of the last Plantagenet king at the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, the ensuing Tudor dynasty doctored the evidence to strengthen their claim to the crown. For example, there was evidently a Tudor campaign to discredit Richard III (king 1483-5) who had ascended the throne with the ruling that the children of his eldest brother, Edward IV, were illegitimate. Parliament had confirmed the bastardy of Edward IV's children on 25 June 1483 and Richard was crowned king on 6th July. However, after Henry VII's defeat of Richard at the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, the new Tudor dynasty legitimised Edward IV's children including the new king's wife. The first Tudor king had little claim to the crown except by subsequent marriage to a child of Edward IV (1462-83) and a weak line of descent from the Lancastrians. It is estimated that there were at least 29 others with stronger claims<sup>20</sup>.

At the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries the tomb of Richard III was desecrated and his remains were scattered in the River Soar at that time when untold records were being destroyed. A contentious image of an evil cripple has persisted for Richard III not least because of Shakespeare's version of him in that play of his name written in Tudor times. Recently revealed evidence however has supported a view that Richard III was merely protecting his valid line of Plantagenet succession and that not only the children of Edward IV were illegitimate by the technicality of a predated marital agreement but Edward IV himself was illegitimate by wifely infidelity<sup>21</sup>. It seems that Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York was not Edward IV's genetic father since evidence in the records of Rouen Cathedral show that he was away from his wife, Cecily Neville, at the time of conception. This makes it more difficult to explain away the testimony of Dominic Maccini, an Italian visitor to London in the summer of 1483, who stated that Cecily herself 'fell into a frenzy' and in her frenzy made the accusation that her son Edward IV was illegitimate, adding that she would be prepared to testify before a public enquiry that it was indeed the case<sup>22</sup>.

After the Tudors had swept away Richard III they were apparently intent upon removing alternative claims to the throne. Richard III's nephew, Edward Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick was executed on Tower Hill in 1499 and his sister Margaret Plantagenet, Countess of Salisbury suffered the same fate in 1541.

As V.G. points out it is known that the Plantagenet name was freely used for all descendants of Geoffrey of Anjou from the times of the Stuart king Charles II (reigned 1660-85). We might wonder whether it is a correct construal of Vicary Gibbs to take it that this implies that it was just a fabrication of a convenient terminology, from Stuart times, to start using the Plantagenet surname more freely. This ignores another possibility. It is to the times of an advancement of learning that our knowledge of the fuller use of Plantagenet as a surname is dated. Charles I had been denounced as a Papist by the Puritans for his sub-Catholic ceremonials and then, following the Restoration of the Monarchy, Charles II encouraged the advancement of learning granting a Charter to the Royal Society<sup>23</sup>. The more liberal usage of the Plantagenet name could have been an attempt to put the record straight or, at least, to return more nearly to the Catholic tradition that had pertained before the destruction of records at the Dissolution.

### 28.2.3 Implications for the meaning of Plant

Whether or not there was an early cultural influence on Plant from the Plantagenet name, there is sufficient evidence to suppose that Plantagenet was acceptable as a royal name at least by

<sup>20</sup>Michael S Bennett (1994) *Richard III, On Trial for Murder: The Case for and against England's most notorious King*.


<sup>21</sup><http://channel4.com/history/microsites/H/history/heads/footnotes/monarch.html>

<sup>22</sup><http://www.r3.org/bosworth/texts/jones.html>

<sup>23</sup>Roy Strong (2000) *The Spirit of Britain*, pps 282, 295.

1448. It also seems clear that the name *Plante Genest* remained familiar from earlier times, at least to some. The *Complete Peerage*, Vol. XI<sup>24</sup> describes it as a *famous* nickname for the 12th century Geoffrey, Count of Anjou; that is he who fathered the longest ruling dynasty of English history. The *fame* of this name when the Plant surname was forming *may have been* significant though, to be strict, we can not be sure about the extent of its fame or the extent of its influence on the origins of the Plant name.

## 28.3 How Plant can mean a person

he prolific English name Plant is traceable back to the 14th century and, with different spellings, to the 13th century. There were some similar names, some dating back earlier and some almost as early, and these may have held a baser significance than Plantagenet. Notwithstanding how the detailed influences may have worked, there was a culture supporting several such names around the times of the first evidence for the Plant name. It is relevant to consider how the semantics of such names worked. We may start with the name *Plantebene*.

### 28.3.1 Plantebene

The earliest Plant-like name listed by the DBS is *Plantebene* though there is only an isolated occurrence, in Norfolk dated 1199AD. The OED lists *bene* as traceable back to Old English and Old Norse (also Swedish and Danish) and Old Teutonic, perhaps from the root *ba* meaning ‘cry’. There are French and dialect senses of *plante* pertaining to ‘beaten’<sup>25</sup>. A sense relating to ‘flagellated and lamenting’ can be conjured for *Plantebene*. This was evidently superseded by a religious emphasis of sense, yielding ‘lament or prayer’ and, with examples dating back to c1000AD, the OED lists the meaning of *bene* as ‘prayer, petition, boon; especially prayer to God’. The variant spelling *plaint* also has sense as ‘petition or complaint’ reinforcing this sense to *bene*. However, the further sense ‘boon’ to *bene* can be seen as a response to prayer and this can lead on to a ‘child’ sense as follows. The OED lists *bene* also as an obsolete form of *bean* (noun), *been*, or *ben*; the latter, *ben*, is listed with examples dating back to 1375AD meaning ‘within, towards the inner part, especially inner part of house’. With a presumption that such a meaning for *ben* dated back still earlier, this can give sense to *Plantebene* as a ‘graft within’ or perhaps ‘an offspring within the household’. Surnames often relate to origins and we can extract a basis of sense to *Plantebene* in fetal origins *within*, or the wailing of a child within a household.

Early meanings of *planta* are ‘shoot’, ‘graft’, and ‘offshoot’ and they provide a metaphorical basis whereby these, together with sense to *bene*, can evoke the origins of a child. The way this works involves the so-called ‘Great Chain Metaphore’ and this will be described more fully below.

### 28.3.2 The Great Chain of Being

The Great Chain of Being is a cultural model that concerns kinds of beings and their properties<sup>26</sup>. In particular the *basic* Great Chain, which considers the relation of humans to ‘lower’ forms of existence such as plants, is extremely widespread. It occurs not only in Western culture but throughout a wide range of the world’s cultures.

Generally we think of humans as higher order beings than animals, animals as higher than plants, and plants as higher than inanimate substances. Often the *basic* Chain is subdivided to include further detail such as king over peasants, lion above snail, tree above weed, pearl above soil. In our cultural model of the basic Great Chain it is not our instincts that separate us from beasts,

<sup>24</sup>The *Complete Peerage*, Vol. XI, Appendices, page 141, editor Geoffrey H. White (1949).

<sup>25</sup>This derives from the past participle of the Latin verb *plango*.

<sup>26</sup>Lakoff and Turner (1989) *ibid*, pps 166-8.

because beasts also have instincts. The basic Great Chain makes it sensible for us to speak of our ‘bestial instincts’ and our ‘animal desires’.

In 13th century Western European scholasticism there are explicit descriptions of a similar, though not identical, hierarchical scheme. This made it sensible to speak of man’s ‘sensory soul’ which was shared with animals whereas, in an extended Great Chain, man’s ‘rational soul’ was shared with God. The *extended* Great Chain involves the relation of human beings to such higher beings as society, God, and the universe. The Great Chain is found from ancient times to the present though, at times, some of the implications of ‘higher’ over ‘lower’ have been challenged. For example agricultural fertility, which may be thought to be near the bottom of the Chain, has often been elevated to a deity. The details of the *extended* Great Chain vary more between cultures than those of the *basic* Great Chain. In medieval times spiritual light was involved in the workings of the soul and man’s ‘vegetable soul’ was shared with both animals and plants.

### 28.3.3 Plantagenet and the role of the vegetate

The ‘sprig of broom’ of the ‘Plantagenets’ is claimed to have originated as the emblem of Geoffrey, Count of Anjou. However the choice of this emblem, if that is indeed how the name originated, may not have been arbitrary. There may have been a regenerative basis for the elevation of a sprig of broom to the surname of a royal family.

Though not until two and a half centuries later than Plantevelue, the origins of the Plantagenet name are associated with the same region of France as Plantevelue. For our semantic purposes, this name can be taken to be a stylised restatement of Plantevelue’s ‘hairy-shoot’ meaning since Plantagenet is usually said to mean ‘sprig of broom’ and such a sprig is an instance of a ‘hairy-shoot’. The sprig *planta genista* can stand as autohyponymy for *plante-velue* and moreover, by metonymy, it can evoke a medieval schema relating to the generative powers found in a man’s vegetable soul. Lakoff and Turner (1989) remark<sup>27</sup> ‘One kind of metonymy is the evocation of an entire schema by mention of a part of that schema’. In ‘Plantagenet times’ there was a well developed philosophical scheme for the vegetable soul<sup>28</sup> and this reveals some contemporary concepts that may have been salient at that time for the meaning of Plant-like names.

Ideas about the vegetable operations of the soul were conducive to varying extents of deference towards the Plantagenet name. For Grosseteste in England the vegetable operations were part of a unified human soul physically motivated by spiritual light whereas, elsewhere, it was maintained that humans had a separate vegetable soul that was baser than their more spiritual souls. Ideas about the vegetable operations of the soul inform us of relevant concepts for those times. Contemporary Green Man head carvings seemingly depict this aspect of the soul as a vegetating plant within man. The Plant name can be taken to refer to a vegetating plant within man and it can thereby be regarded as metonymy for a *vegetate* person, that is one who is ‘endowed with life’. Such sense persisted at least from medieval times until the 18th century as can be gleaned for example from ‘*Whether they be Inanimata .. as the Minerals; or Animata, with life, Vegetat, Sensit, & Rational, Growing things, as Hearbes.*’ [J.Jones a1574 translation of Galen, *De Elementis* Ep. Ded. p ii]. The vegetate, sensory, and rational were the prime formal aspects of the soul in 13th century writings.

### 28.3.4 The medieval Great Chain and metaphorical grounding

Higher creatures in the Great Chain of Being had powers that were additional to those of plants. In addition to the vegetable soul, humans had sensory and rational powers of the soul. The vegetable soul had powers of nutrition, augmentation, and generation. The generative power extended down to a level lower than plants, down to the generative power of minerals, as well as extending up the Great Chain to human love. In Richard Rolle’s c1320 work on ‘The Fire of Love’, the elemental

<sup>27</sup>Lakoff and Turner (1989) *ibid*, p 100.

<sup>28</sup>James McEvoy (1982) *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*. Charles McKeon (1948) *A Study of the Summa Philosophiae of the Pseudo-Grosseteste*. See earlier Chapters by JSP for further details and references.



substance *fire* was involved in love which extended all the way up to God's love though this was differentiated as a different kind of love from carnal love. The latter, according to Rolle, augmented vetches (*vicia* or *vice*) though in place of vetches, according to the 14th century Pearl poet, *broom* (sometimes regarded as a type of vetch) nourished beasts.

The higher a distinguishing attribute is on the Great Chain, the less generally accessible it is to our perception and understanding. In other words, a less well understood attribute that is restricted to the higher reaches of the Great Chain is less well suited as a metaphorical grounding. The 14th century poet, William Langland, described love as the *plante* [or *plente*] *of pes*, *most precious of vertues* indicating a metaphorical grounding of human love on the planting of pea seeds or, in the case of divine love, on Jesus as the holy vine. We commonly relate human behaviour to human attributes and, through the Great Chain, we can ground human behaviour metaphorically on animal attributes. In medieval times, plants were ascribed both moral and physical attributes and, with the commonality of man's vegetable soul, man's behaviour could be grounded not only on animal attributes but on plant attributes. This grounding could be on the generic system of plants which were ascribed the powers of generous nutrition, copious growth, and fertile generation (*cf.* the Middle English spellings and meanings of *plante* and *plente*).

### 28.3.5 Metaphore theory and Lionheart

According to cognitive metaphore theory<sup>29</sup>, the structure or image of a source is mapped onto that of its target. Thus in the 'People are Machines' class of metaphore the parts and functions of a machine are mapped on to a person, as in 'The athlete *notched up a gear*'. This is different from the 'Machines are People' class of metaphore in which human attributes of will and desire are mapped down to a machine, as in 'The car did not *want to start*'. The direction of mapping is different between these two classes of metaphore and so is what is mapped.

A specific metaphore such as 'The Greek hero was a lion' is said, in similarity theory, to work by highlighting that a hero, such as Achilles, is similar to a lion with respect to what we take to be a property of the lion, its courage. However Lakoff and Turner (1989)<sup>30</sup> note that the courage of a lion is different from the courage of a man. The metaphore is rather different from simply saying either that 'Achilles is courageous' or 'Achilles has the instincts of a lion'. Rather, 'Achilles is a lion' first makes use of the Great Chain Metaphore by passing down the human attribute of courage to a lion. This is then mapped on to the rigidity of a lion's instincts. The Great Chain metaphore is then used again, this time in the opposite direction, such that a '*steadfast* courage' is mapped back up on to Achilles.

With repeated iteration, down and up the Great Chain, a metaphore can become conventionalised such that the name Lionheart can evoke the 'steadfast courage of a lion'. This attribute is mapped up the Great Chain on to the heart of the bearer of that name and it can then stand, by metonymy, for a 'man with steadfast courage'.

### 28.3.6 Plantebene and salience in the context of Plantefolie

In some medieval sources, *bene* is taken to mean 'hallowed or pleasant' and so Plantebene can mean a 'hallowed shoot' or 'offshoot'. For the name Bean, the DBS notes the Middle English *bene*, meaning 'pleasant, genial, kindly' (a1200 NED<sup>31</sup>). These human attributes can be mapped down to a 'hallowed offshoot' and hence evoke sentiments applying to the early stages of life.

Also, the 'bean' meaning can not be ignored as there is for example 'A *great bolle-full of benen were betere in his wombe*' [Langland c1395, Piers Plowman Crede 762]. With *benen* meaning 'beans' there is a 'gardener' sense for *Plantebene*.

<sup>29</sup>Lakoff and Turner (1989) *ibid*, pps 128-35.

<sup>30</sup>Lakoff and Turner (1989) *ibid*, pps 196-8.

<sup>31</sup>A *New English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1888-1933.

For the more common name *Plantefolie* generative sense is salient with *folie* meaning ‘wickedness’. For *Plantefolie*, a meaning ‘planted wickedness’ can become ‘a bastard child’. In the context of the mainly French name *Planterose*, *Plantebene* has been taken to mean ‘a gardener’. However in the context of *Plantefolie* in England, *Plantebene* can mean ‘a genial child’.

This leaves a question of which sense was the most salient. As well as the nutritive benefit of ‘a great bolle-full of benen’ from the garden, generative origins ‘in the wombe’ [inside the body] can not be ignored. To reinforce a sense of generative origins to *Plantebene*, there is a ‘seed [bean] or graft [plant] within [ben]’. All in all the medieval evidence for *Plantebene* is consistent with a meaning ‘planted seed’ or ‘a pleasant shoot’, either of which can be mapped up the Great Chain to a person bearing the name *Plantebene* yielding such meaning as ‘a genial young person’.

### 28.3.7 The Great Chain Metaphore and the Plant of Peace

A scheme of mapping, down and up the Great Chain, can be applied to the ‘plant of pees’. The details of what is mapped, however, can be different from what we might expect in modern scientific times and there can be some uncertainty about what were the most salient concepts in medieval times.

Typically in late medieval times, love could be mapped down the Chain to a tree or a plant, as in ‘*this tre hatte Trewe-love ... this is a propre plonte*’ [Piers Plowman]. The fuller context of this passage makes it clear that what is involved is not only mapping ‘divine love’ down to a tree but also mapping ‘steadfast love’ back up to a Tree of Virtue, shored up by props representing the Holy Trinity.

An intense scheme of mapping down and up the Great Chain of Being is found for the *plante of pees*. Much of what was involved in this scheme may have been familiar to the medieval reader, in the form of conventionalised metaphore and meaning though we need to guess at which aspects would have been most evident to medieval minds. Though perhaps almost subliminal, the augmenting effect of love on a man could be mapped down to the growth of a pea-shoot, as in ‘*Love is the lovest thing that oure Lord askith and eke the plante of pes*’ [Piers Plowman, Passus B, c1377]. The word *pees* could mean ‘peas’ or human or social ‘peace’. This may have arisen with ‘peace’ being grounded on the integrating vines of ‘pea plants’ – this can be regarded as a peace that integrates men as metaphorically evoked by the intertwining tendrils of pea plants. In Passus C of Piers Plowman there is a development to ‘*Love is the plante of pees*’. Here love is mapped on to the same enduring vine to produce an intertwining love which can be mapped up the Great Chain to the target of a Prince of Peace<sup>32</sup> in the Lord’s kingdom.

A second reading of these passages from *Piers Plowman* can evoke the love and joy in generating the growth of a child. In particular an augmenting pea shoot may be linked to Mary’s ‘*grace of grewe*’ [Pearl, ll 429-31]. A grown shoot becomes an offshoot which can be mapped up the Great Chain to an offspring. The mapping can proceed furthermore to the child Jesus maturing as the Holy Vine. This is a metaphorical reading though it seems likely that much of such meaning was familiar to the medieval reader.

### 28.3.8 Elaboration of the ‘People are Plants’ metaphore

Lakoff and Turner (1989)<sup>33</sup> identify a ‘People are Plants’ metaphore. For example offspring are the seed of parents:-

*Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thy offspring as the grass of the earth*  
[Job 5:25]

<sup>32</sup>Isiah 9:6. See also the 13th century poem of Robert Grosseteste *Château d’amour*, lines 1493-1768, as described by R.W.Southern (1992) *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*, Second Edition, pps 225-30.

<sup>33</sup>Lakoff and Turner (1989) *idid*, pps 12-14, 26-28.

Also in the Bible, there is mention of the specific word *plant* and a particular emphasis on *vines* such as in<sup>34</sup>:-

*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant [Isiah 5:7]*

In the Wycliffe version of the Bible (c1380)<sup>35</sup> the words of Jesus appear as for example:-

*Eueri plauntyng that my fadir of heuen hath not plauntid, shal be drawun up by the roote [Matthew 15:13]*

Similar ideas from countries now associated with Islam were accepted as Christian orthodoxy:-

*As the mighty root sends forth a multitude of plants which it sustains, so created things owe their origin and conservation to the All-Ruling Deity [Dionysius the Pseudo Areopagite of 5th century Syria]*

*By virtue of the animal soul he [man] shares with the animals; his physical soul links him with the plants; his human soul is a link between him and the angels [Avicenna c980-1036 of Persia]*

There is English reference to a plant growing in the person of Princess Ermenylde, reminiscent of belief in the vegetate or depictions of the vegetate as a plant issuing from within a Green Man Head in late medieval carvings:-

*This sayd [aforesaid] Ermenylde, this floure [flower] of vertue,  
...  
Such synguler confort of vertuous doctryne  
In her so dyd water a pure perfyte plante,  
Which dayly encreased by sufferaunce devyne,  
Merveylously growynge in her fresshe and varnaunt,  
[Henry Bradshaw d 1513, The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester, ll 596, 603-7]*

Shakespeare (1564-1616) associates the word *plant* to the growth of young men, though an extension to older life is apparent as the yellowing of leaves and the shaking of man's boughs:-

*When I perceive men as plants increase  
Cheerèd and checked ev'n by the selfsame sky  
Vaunt in their sap at height decrease [Sonnet 15:5-7]*

*That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold [Sonnet 73]*

As arises for fully matured plants, death can be a returning to earth or metaphorically to one's mother's lap:-

*How gladly I would meet  
Mortality, my sentence, and be earth  
Insensible! how glad I would lay me down  
as in my mother's lap! [John Milton (1608-74) Paradise Lost, bk. 10]*

In Welsh (Celtic) tradition, Math could not live unless he kept his feet in the lap of a virgin, which may hold relevance for the 'sole of foot' meaning of *planta*, a word more widely associated with life's origins. Such tradition can be related to the seal of John Plant (1534) of Dieulacress showing Jesus sitting upright in the Virgin's lap<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>34</sup>See also Matthew 21:33; Luke 13:6, 17:28, 20:9.

<sup>35</sup>The New Testament in English according to the version by John Wycliffe c 1380 and revised by John Purvey c1388. Oxford and Clarendon Press (1879).

<sup>36</sup>Figure 23.2 of <http://www.plant-fhg.org.uk/pearlpoet.pdf>

In the Plant homeland, Sleigh (1862)<sup>37</sup> shows the seal of John Plant (1534) as the Virgin in an Arch with the child Jesus sitting upright in her lap. The picture is consistent with Mary's 'grace of grewe that ber a barne [bore a child] of virgyn flour'<sup>38</sup> [Pearl, ll 429-31]. This seal and literature is found near Dieulacress Abbey where Dieulacress means 'God increase it'. There appears to be a metaphorical mapping up to the highest reaches of the Great Chain such that the divine grace of an augmenting offshoot could be mapped up to the child Jesus.

### 28.3.9 The Plant surname

The Plant surname can be considered to involve metaphorical mappings down and up the Great Chain between the bearer of the name and plants. The pragmatic Maxim of Quantity implies that it is the highest ranking properties<sup>39</sup> of plants that are of interest, rather than a particular quality of any particular plant. By the times of the first evidence for the Plant name, there was a long tradition involving the mapping down of 'divine substances' such as in the descent of the Lord's emanation of a creative or regenerating love. When mapped up to a human Plant, the vegetable powers of fertile generation, abundant augmentation, and generous nutrition can be associated with a vital person, though faith could be undermined at such times as the Black Death. Ascending roots from a morbid head are occasionally found for late medieval Green Man head carvings. More often such carvings are robust images with abundant vegetation issuing from the mouth and sometimes from other orifices of the head.

Prototypically the Plant name seems to have related to the vegetative powers in a shoot, offshoot, or child rather than to the withering leaves of old age. This is consistent with the archaic 'young person' meaning of *plant* that is listed in the OED. In particular there are specific early instances of the 'People are Plants' metaphors that relate to young life and birth.

With Gwydion, Math created Blodeuedd meaning 'born of flowers'; she was said to be created from blossoms of oak, broom, and meadowsweet. Similarly the plant in Ermenylde, or indeed the parental descent of Princess Ermenylde herself, was compared with a metaphorical birth from bud and fruit:-

*Every tree or plante is proved evydent  
Whether good or evyll by experyence full sure,  
By the budde and fruyte and pleasaunt descent;  
A swete tree bryngeth forth by cours of nature  
Swete frute and delycyous in taste and verdure:  
Right so Ercombert by his quene moost mylde  
Brought graciously forth the swete Ermenylde.*  
[Henry Bradshaw d 1513, The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester, ll 610-16]

These lines are in a poem about St Werburgh, niece of Ethelred of Mercia (c880) and traditionally the foundress of the church of St John the Baptist at Chester, near the Plant homeland. They relate the vegetable life cycle to the generation of a person. The birth metaphors as a flowering from bud is apparently evident also for the Pearl Poet of the Plant homeland, who described the Virgin's deliverance of a child as *rose reflowr* (?reflowering) from roots:-

*And there watz rose reflowr where rotz hatz ben euer* [Cleanness, l 1079]

In short, People could be Plants in the Plant homeland and this was evidently a *conventionalised* metaphors that could be used with little explanation. This is apparent in the description of Sir John Savage's grandchild:-

<sup>37</sup>John Sleigh (1862) *ibid*.

<sup>38</sup>Flour is a source of bread for transubstantiation to Christ's body and, more particularly, a flower is a source of seed for the growth of a shoot for augmentation up the Great Chain of Being to Christ.

<sup>39</sup>Lakoff and Turner (1989) *ibid*, p 173.

.. *his Grandchild, then a young Plant and newly sent to the Innes of Court, to be trained up answerably to his Birth and Dignity ... That hopeful Plant, that is the apparent Heir of all his glory and this great Discent* [Mr. William Webb's 1621 account of the Hundred of Macclesfield]

It is clear that Plant here applies to a person and the same can be said about Plant as a surname. There seems no need to invent a 'gardener' metonymy since Plant is an early ontological metaphore for a person. In particular Plant may focus on the plant within a person, as was watered by virtuous doctrine in the case of Princess Ermenylde. This may be related to 14th century Middle English reference to 'planted *vertue*', the 'planted Word', and the 'planted grace of noble lineage'<sup>40</sup>. More generally this becomes the *vegetate* or 'life force' within a person, carrying powers of growth and generation. Such 'life force' can be associated in particular with the origins and growth of a young person.

## 28.4 Summary

David Hey (1989)<sup>41</sup> remarks that 'The compilers of dictionaries of surnames are linguists with particular skills in interpreting the earliest forms of surname in twelfth-, thirteenth-, or fourteenth- century documents. ... The linguists offer a general explanation for the name; local and family historians can sometimes point to precise origins. They may confirm the etymology but frequently prove the dictionaries wrong.'

Enough evidence has been gathered to expose the 'gardener' meaning of Plant to serious question if indeed not to lay a claim that it has been 'proved wrong'. In particular, a 'young person' meaning seems more likely.

It seems that the DBS definition that Plant means 'a gardener' should be challenged. It is not necessary to extend the challenge to Planterose and Plantebene though, at least for Plantebene in the context of Plantefolie, there is a significant doubt as to whether *that* name means 'a gardener'. The DBS lists a few 13th century occurrences of the name Planterose though this name is found mainly in France. A commonly found 13th century Plant-like name in England is in fact Plantefolie<sup>42</sup>, though this is not mentioned in the DBS. Though various meanings are possible, a consistent scheme of the medieval 'English' names is 'pleasant child' (Plantebene), 'grown beguiling child' (Planterose), and 'bastard child' (Plantefolie). These can be regarded as being grounded through the Great Chain Metaphore on 'planted seed', 'risen or flowering offshoot', and 'planted wickedness'.

The 'gardener' meaning is derived from the modern salience of a gardener construal of just (the rare) Plantebene and (the French) Planterose. There is also primary source historical evidence of connections between Planteng' and Plantyn and the first known evidence for Plantegenest or Plante Genest. Nearby to Planteng' and Plantyn in East Anglia, there were other Plant-like names. Diminutive names are often taken to represent illegitimacy. Plantefolie and the Plant blazon indicate illegitimacy. It is questionable to which similar names the Plant name should be compared.

After the first evidence for Plant-like names, there is evidence for the principal Plant homeland in east Cheshire, near Wales where there is the 'children' meaning of *plant*. The DNA evidence indicates that the Plants were the children of a single family, not assorted gardeners. There is substantial evidence for an early plant metaphore of human life and, by comparison, there seems little justification for inventing a 'gardener' metonymy for Plant despite such a meaning being possible for Plantebene and Planterose if these names are selected for comparison. 'Child' or 'offspring' as an early metaphoric meaning of plant, which initially meant offshoot, is more in keeping with the evidence for Plant.

<sup>40</sup>*Middle English Dictionary*: *plauten*; *verb*; sense 2(c).

<sup>41</sup>David Hey (1989) *The Distinctive Surnames of Staffordshire*. Staffordshire Studies, Vol 10, pps 1-28 (The Nineteenth Earl lecture, delivered at Keele University, 6 November 1997).

<sup>42</sup><http://www.plant-fhg.org.uk/origins.html#13c>