



The Main Plant Family and the name's most populous homeland

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Introduction

We are the co-administrators of the Plant Y-DNA project, which we describe in a Members Website of the Guild at <http://plant.one-name.net/dna.html>. As of the time of this writing, our project has had 73 volunteers with the surname Plant, Plantt, or Plante who have submitted samples. Of these, 13 have the surname Plante, and they generally trace their ancestry through Quebec to France. Of the 60 with the surname Plant or Plantt, 37 have Y-DNA data that match sufficiently closely that we can say with confidence that they are descended from the same medieval man. We call this group the Main Family. Another 17 volunteers are members of one of eight groups of two or three volunteers each, who are similarly related to each other. We call these Small Families I through VIII. The remaining volunteers have no tested Plant relatives. By combining the records of the volunteers' earliest known ancestors with other historical records associated with the surname, we can begin to create an understanding of how the surname evolved and spread within England in the late Middle Ages.

The majority of the volunteers can trace their roots to the western Midlands of England. Figure 1 shows a map of the locations of the earliest known Plant ancestor of each of these volunteers. The large filled circles show the Main Family, most of whose members fall into one of four branches. The small triangles show six of the small families, and the squares show individuals not in any currently identified matching family. The county of Staffordshire is shown towards the lower left quadrant of the map in Figure 1. In particular, there has been some migration of parts of the Main Family, seemingly from the source of its branches in western Staffordshire (W-Staffs), migrating to the north, south and east in the map; this leaves out others spread much further afield. Specifically, Figure 1 indicates that branch D of the Main Family (purple circles) has migrated north through Cheshire into Lancashire and south east to SE Leicestershire. Branch A (yellow circles) is found to the east around the border of NE Derbyshire with Yorkshire and, as it turns out, this branch is a genetic sub-branch of the older branch D of the Main Family.

Some basic documentary evidence for Staffordshire

The black star labelled A in Figure 1 denotes the first known precise location of a Plant record in the region of their

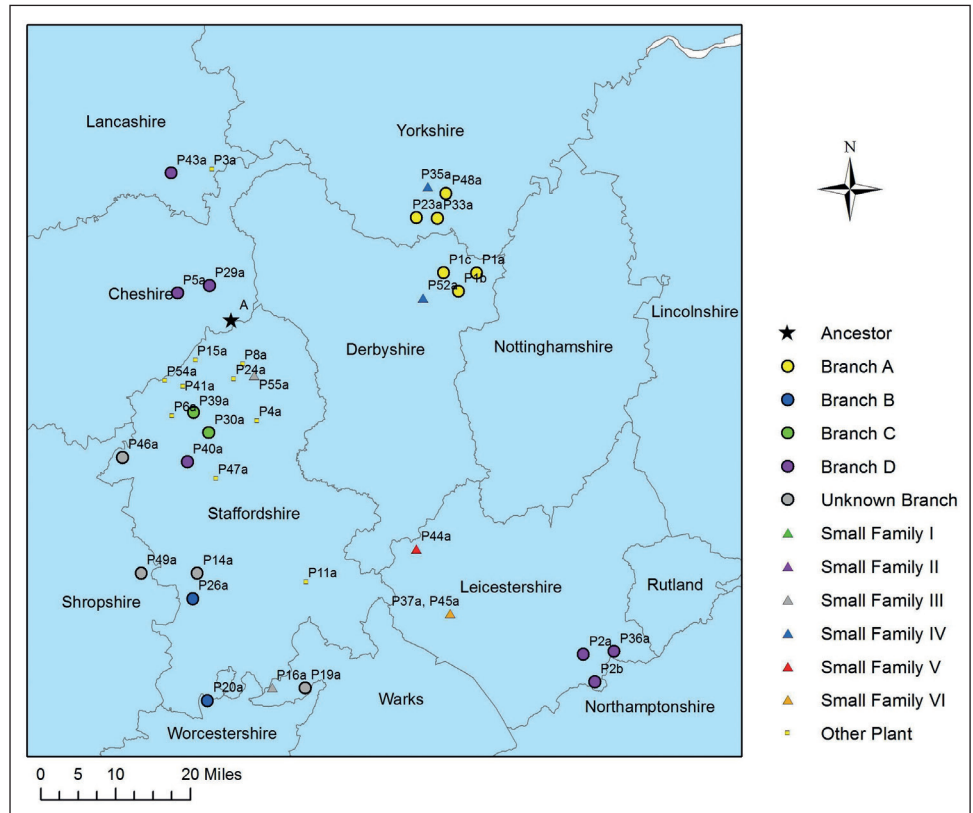


Figure 1: Ancestral locations around Staffordshire of Y-DNA tested Plants

most populous homeland. This record is on the border of NE-Staffs with Cheshire and is for 1373. However, by the 1360s, the time of the earliest suitable medieval evidence for the general area, the Plant name was already present in numbers. Accordingly, we cannot rule out that there might have been other relevant locations for the name nearby despite the absence of any earlier evidence other than an isolated mention as far away as Flintshire near Chester in 1301.

Turning to south Staffordshire, the first known documentary record is in 1401 at Wombourne, which is about 10 miles south of the location of the blue circle labelled P26a in Figure 1. This 'W-Staffs' location for P26a is for the earliest known male ancestor of this Plant volunteer; in this case his specific earliest record is for a Plant baptism at Brewod in 1779.

The DNA testing and results

The circles in Figure 1 represent Plants who have matched into the Main Family. This matching can be determined with relatively simple Y-DNA tests. However, distinguishing slight genetic differences between the distinct branches within this Main Plant Family requires more advanced testing, which not all participants have undertaken. Further detail is given in the website at <http://plant.one-name.net/dna.html>.

Several distinct Main Family branches, namely B, C and D, appear down the western flank of Staffordshire in Figure 1. Also, P19a has been thoroughly tested and is genetically well separated from all other branches yet known for the Main Family, though he is clearly one of its number. He is shown with a grey circle in Figure 1, in Birmingham near south Staffordshire. The volunteer P49a also is similarly well separated from other Main Family branches though there is some uncertainty about whether his documentary ancestry in NE-Staffs was also earlier in W-Staffs.

Why two differing genetic regions?

Moving on to considering possible reasons for the genetic pattern in Figure 1, there are a number of points to consider. For example, there is the large growth of the Main Plant Family which we have identified to have been in W-Staffs in particular.

Generalised growth simulations applicable to the large Main Family have indicated that, when several different families in a surname exist, there is a good chance that at most one will grow comparatively large¹. Hence, the Main Plant Family could be an offshoot from one of the many Plant families of NE-Staffs that are suggested by the genetic evidence. Also of relevance is that, if a family has fortuitously grown fast from a single individual, their already larger number can be expected thereafter to grow at a rate closer to the average for their localities².

The genetics of the Main Family suggest that its branches split early with several branches remaining in W-Staffs. Moreover this family's relatively large number can be considered to have become somewhat higher than is readily to be expected by statistically random chance alone. This raises the question of whether any early Plants enjoyed a favourable circumstance that could have enhanced the chances of a fast early start to their family size.

Were any early Plant families favourably placed?

Among those Plants for whom a status is listed, the majority are either yeomen or husbandmen in surviving wills from the sixteenth century onwards. The wills around Staffordshire for that century are mapped in Figure 2 and further details are given in the website at http://plant.one-name.net/plant_wills.html. The single circle for Leek corresponds to several Plant families making wills. For comparison, approximate locations are shown in Figure 3 for ten families in the relatively large parish of Leek, according to a 1532-3 list of families in Staffordshire³.

Our earliest known evidence for the name is for a certain Durand Plante in western Normandy in 1180. He was fined for fighting 'a duel upon a duel'⁴. In the high medieval period, Normans are associated with a high self perception of their class within an English social order. For early times, such duelling as that of Durand can be associated with a status near the lowest reaches of being 'noble' though, by the 1230s in France, a lower social group - 'squire' - was forming and was considered noble, albeit below common knights or so-called knights bachelors⁵.

A somewhat different concept of 'gentry' was delayed in England until the fourteenth century. An emerging 'proto-gentry' has been discerned in England by the mid-thirteenth century, in the form of families associated with knights though not knights themselves. However, their right to being worthy enough to marry into nobility was being actively opposed⁶.

There are a few sketchy examples of moderately high status Plants who are atypical of the majority with the name. It seems that there might have been a family of suitably privileged Plants whose status helped swell their number in a fast start to their growth through the early generations of the family.

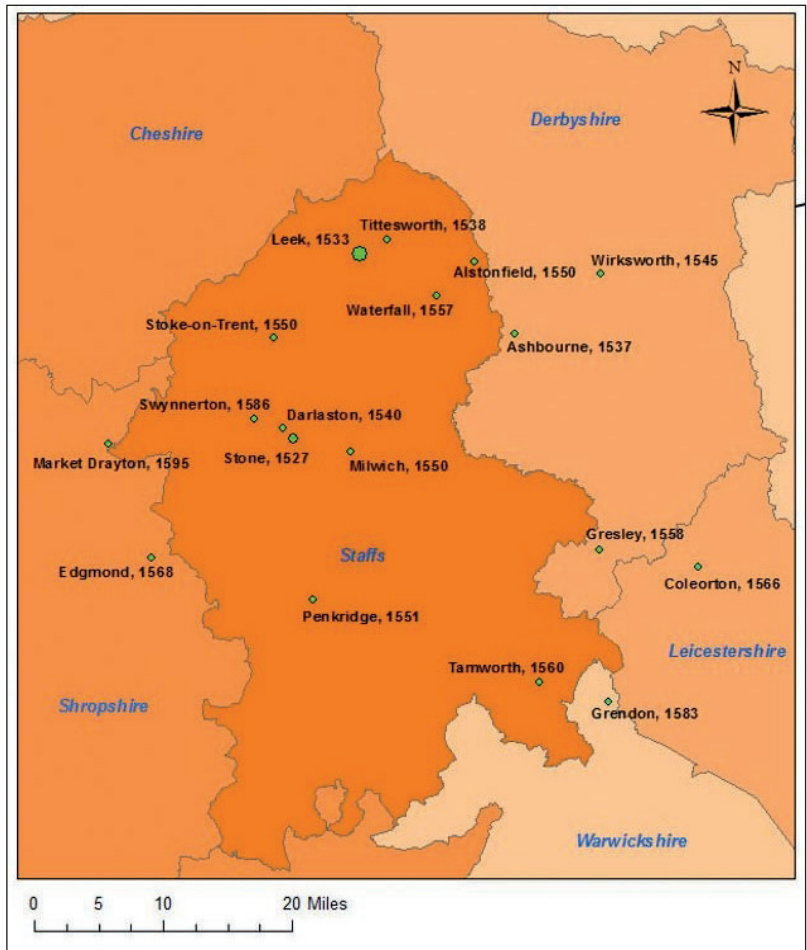


Figure 2: Plant wills around Staffordshire 1501-1600 (counties shaded to reflect name frequency in 1881)

Around Staffordshire

For the most populous county for Plants, namely Staffordshire, there was a John Plant junior who is included in a 1445 list of 98 notables of Macclesfield Hundred⁷; this is just over the border from NE-Staffs in east Cheshire. It is unclear if he relates to a Sir John Plant in Dublin who, around 1479-84, was head of the household of the Archbishop Primate of Ireland⁸. Somewhat later, in 1614, a William Plant bought a half share of Heaton (marked 'W' in Figure 3) before selling it in 1631. Also a majority of the known occupations in Plant wills around Leek parish were for yeoman farmers. Together these serve to suggest a degree of advantageous status for some, albeit distant from a possibly higher status earlier in Normandy.

The locations of the early Staffordshire area Plants fell within a feudal context of the Audleys who were a dominant family

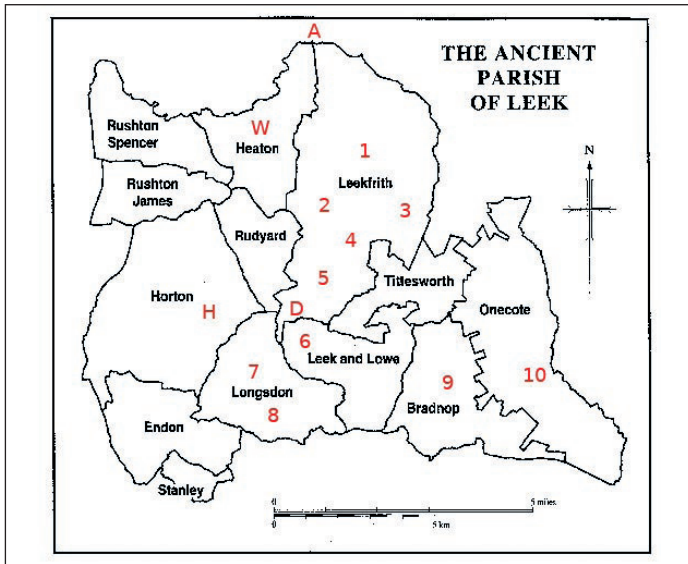


Figure 3: Ten Plant Families in Leek Parish in 1532-3 (background map from reference 9)

with estates across north Staffordshire. They are thought to have been, like most in this region, of pre-Norman English stock. However, they were close to the great earls of Chester who had originated from western Normandy. These earls were granted English lands following their role in the 1066 Norman Conquest of England and they retained this strong link with western Normandy: the sixth earl was still actively campaigning there in 1230-31.

Following England's mostly permanent loss of Normandy lands in 1204, the local nobility in Staffordshire can be exemplified by some holders of the title of sheriff of Staffordshire and Shropshire. This was the earl of Chester during 1216-1222, then William Longspée in 1223, and then Henry de Audley in 1227 and 1229. Longspée was an illegitimate son of the king Henry II and he and his maternal family had been prominent in Normandy before his line married into the Audleys in 1244. Further details of these feudal links, between Normandy and Staffordshire, are given in the website at <http://plant.one-name.net/NormandyLords.html>.

As a further note, deep ancestry Y-DNA testing indicates that the precursor of the Main Family of Plants came from southern Europe, from near the Pyrenees, though this relates to two or three thousand years ago. Unfortunately, there is a lack of comparable Y-DNA evidence for France, where home genetic testing has been banned and this makes it difficult to assess how long the male line of the Main Family might have remained in France before reaching England. This arrival might have been as early as the Bronze Age, perhaps in connection with the Cornish tin trade, or as late as a thirteenth century English exodus from Normandy. This is discussed further in the website at <http://plant.one-name.net/france.html#genandcult>.

Summary

In summary, there might have been a relatively privileged early Plant family whose status helped their growth take off in a relatively fast start, though their large number can be explained at least partly as being just simply fortuitous. Such a Plant family appears to have existed along the western flank of Staffordshire near Shropshire (Figure 1) where the Audley family had their main military bases of Red Castle and Heleigh Castle. In Figure 2, Red Castle is around 11

miles north west from Edgmond and Heleigh Castle is around 8 miles due west of Stoke on Trent. This same family, the Audleys, held considerable pastures across the moorlands of NE Staffordshire where the Plant name became particularly populous: here, there were several male-line Plant families (Figures 1 and 3) that evidently descended from several Plants there since early times.

Various meanings have been proposed for the Plant name and there is, for example, the meaning 'living near a planted place' (from the French planté) as well as such an occupational meaning as a gardener. There is also an Old English usage of the word, as in the 'planting' of a church or a settlement. The name in NE Staffordshire could perhaps have acquired such a sense associated for example with the 'planting' of isolated farmsteads in the moorlands, some seemingly (Figure 3) having involved forest clearance in Leekfrith¹⁰. A more migratory large Plant family in western Staffordshire might have originated from some 'planted place' elsewhere, or in the moorlands perhaps at Dieulacres Abbey (marked 'D' in Figure 3). This abbey was 'planted' at the bottom of the frith by the earl of Chester, often called the last great Norman earl, in his donated lands in 1214-20. Its core lands adjoined the Audley manor of Horton with Gratton ('H' in Figure 3). This is discussed in further detail in the website at <http://plant.one-name.net/LongspeeAudley.html#meaning> and <http://plant.one-name.net/NormandyLords.html#Conclusions>.

Referring back to Figure 1, there are clearly clusters of members of the Main Family in pockets centred roughly on the border of North-East Staffordshire with Cheshire. A central tenet of population genetics is that a population's greatest genetic diversity is in its geographical region of origin. The genetic diversity of Plants in NE Staffordshire is so great however that it must have originated from long before the times of late-medieval surname formation and this indicates that the name was multi-origin here, apparently coined for several different families in keeping with the map in Figure 3; this map is for just the Staffordshire records detailed at <http://plant.one-name.net/1532-3StaffsFamDetails.html> omitting any early Plants in Cheshire to the north. The genetic diversity within the Main Family of Plants is greatest in West Staffordshire suggesting that a precursor of it was here, perhaps originating nearby, or arriving early from a little further such as from amongst the many medieval Plant families of NE Staffordshire. The presence of known precursors of numerous small families in this general region supports the notion that, for some reason perhaps lost to history, the surname Plant was relatively common here in the late Middle Ages and that one of the families with this surname, due to luck or status or some combination, grew to a size well beyond that of the others. ■

Notes and References

1. JSP and REP (Oct 2014) JoONS 11(12), 16-18.
2. JSP and REP (Jan 2014) JoONS 11(9) 10-12; (Apr 2018) 13(12) 13-16.
3. Ann J Kettle, ed., *A List of Families in the Archdeaconry of Stafford, 1522-3*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire (Staffordshire Record Society, 1976), 4th series, Vol 8.
4. <http://plant.one-name.net/earlyRecs.html> and http://plant.one-name.net/plant_docs.html#durand1180
5. David Crouch, *The English Aristocracy 1070-1272 A Social Transformation* (Yale University Press, 2011), loc 232.
6. *ibid*, loc 1540-1564.
7. http://plant.one-name.net/plant_docs.html#1445
8. http://plant.one-name.net/plant_docs.html#1479
9. <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol7/pp78-83>
10. Wagstaff, J M, *The economy of Dieulacres Abbey, 1214-1539*, North Staffordshire Journal of Field Studies, 1970, vol 10, pp83-101, esp p85.