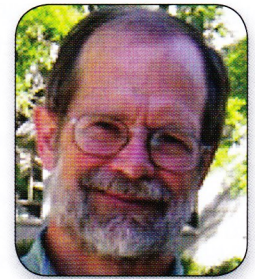


# Royal Name Plantagenet Concepts

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## Introduction

The royal name Plantagenet occurs at only three times in this English royal dynasty's long history (1154-1485).[1] The more common surname Plant occurs much more often. [2] Together with the name Planta,[3] there is continuity through two millennia of locations and contexts.

The names Plant and Plantagenet have been interrelated before. For example, in 1958 P.H.Reaney claimed that Plant meant a planter of various plants[4] and likewise the Encyclopedia Britannica held that Plantagenet meant a broom shrub planter. In the nineteenth century, the names were interrelated in a different way: the Plants were said to be illegitimate descendants of the Plantagenets. As well as disbelief, this has been disconfirmed in the male line, since the Plants' Y-DNA does not match with any other supposed descendant of the Plantagenets,[5] such as ones with the surname Somerset; nor does it match the recently adduced skeleton of Richard III.

One popular story has been that Geoffrey of Anjou (1113-51) wore a sprig of broom in his bonnet and his nickname Plantagenet referred to that sprig. This explanation dates back only to 1605 however, nearly half a millennium after Geoffrey's times. During the intervening five centuries, the story could have changed substantially.

For earlier times, we have pieced together some clues from archaic texts. These reveal some concepts that have since passed into obscurity. In Wittgenstein's prototype approach to semantics,[6] a list of concepts is assembled for a word. Then, for the word in a particular context, some of these concepts become more salient than others. We have accordingly assembled some concepts that can be related to the coining of the Plantagenet nickname.

Helped by recent documentary finds, it has emerged that the feudal lords over the Plants were a particular line of descendants from Geoffrey Plantagenet.[7] Hence, some concepts might have carried over between the names Plantagenet and Plant. However, a high level of learning seems less likely to have influenced the latter name which more simply could have been locative, meaning from some such place as la Planta or la Plaut for example.

## An outline of the early evidence

The Plantagenets came from Anjou in France. Their descending royal English dynasty began in 1154 and the first known occurrence of the Plantagenet name is around 1160-70 in France.

In this nobility's French lands in 1202, Eimeric de la Planta (alias de Plant') held lands at Chinon and Loudon. We might debate whether the name de la Planta refers to someone from la Planta which could refer to the lands of another noble family: the Planta family, which is found in the Engadine of the

Swiss Alps. This name could mean from the garden in as much as Engadine means in Romansh garden source of the River Inn. Near here, at Trento in the Italian Alps, there is a record in 46AD of Julius Planta, a friend and advisor of the Roman Emperor Claudius.[3] Shortly before this in 4BC, the author of De Plantis, Nicholas of Damascus, had arrived in Rome. With De Plantis, we have some clues for discerning some early concepts that can be associated with vegetal names.

Over a millennium later, an illegitimate line began with William Longspée (c.1176-1226), natural son of the English king Henry II and his mistress Ida de Tosnay. William was thereby Geoffrey Plantagenet's grandson. He held such offices as: sheriff of Wiltshire; sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire; lieutenant of Gascony; constable of Dover (Kent); and Keeper of the Coast (Kent and Sussex); he also held Eye in Suffolk.

When combined with the Audley descendants of Longspée, such locations coincide with all but two of the early locations for the Plant name, to the extent of twenty coincident locations. This many seems surely more than just accidental. Hence, a member of the Planta family might have come to serve under William Longspée leading on to a proliferating family under this noble lordship. Or, the name Plant might have been coined for followers or peasants of this feudal Lord's line, with meanings related to the Plantagenet nickname of this William's grandfather.

In particular, there is a triple coincidence in Staffordshire of:

- this illegitimate Longspée line from Geoffrey Plantagenet;
- the main homeland of the Plant family; and,
- the surviving copy of De Plantis.

This triple coincidence arises thus. As well as his offices listed above, William Longspée became high sheriff of Staffordshire and Shropshire by 1224. Then in 1244 the Longspée heiress married into the Audley family of north Staffordshire. As well as in north Staffordshire, these Audleys held land in south Staffordshire by 1271, at Sharesill and Saresdons. This location of Sharesill brings us again to the relevance of De Plantis, in so far as the surviving copy of this work was translated by Alfredus of Sareshel (c.1197-1222) - Sareshel apparently refers to Sharesill in south Staffordshire, near Wolverhampton.

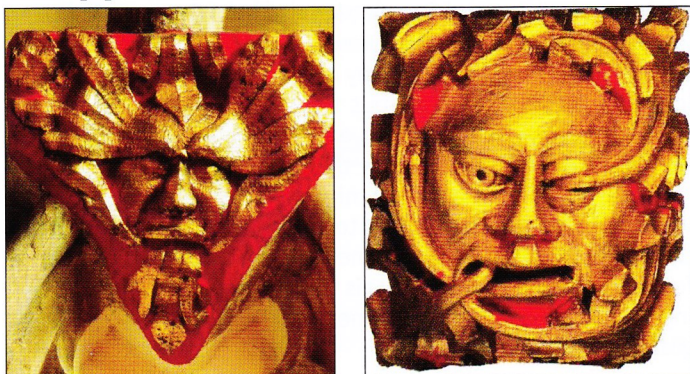
## The significance of De Plantis

Concentrating on the modern meanings of names that originated in the medieval era can be misleading. In the case of the name Plant, we need to rid ourselves of a bias towards modern botany and substitute clues from the medieval Age of Faith. We are fortunate to have De Plantis which points towards some appropriate learning near the vegetal names Plant and Plantagenet.

De Plantis starts by noting that life is found in animals and plants, though it is more hidden in the latter. It summarises the views of some other ancient philosophers, such as Plato (c.425-348BC) who says that whatsoever takes food desires food, and feels pleasure in satiety and pain when it is hungry, adding that these dispositions do not occur without the accompaniment of sensation. It adds that this view of plants, having sensation and pain, is marvellous enough; but, Anaxagoras (c.500-428BC) and Democritus (c.460-370BC) and Empedocles (c.490-430BC) declared that plants possessed intellect and intelligence.

Though the author of De Plantis repudiates this, he highlights these beliefs which others had accepted. In particular, before becoming King of Jerusalem (1131-43AD), Geoffrey Plantagenet's father, Fulk V, had been on crusade (c.1120), perhaps encountering the NeoManichean beliefs of the Paulicians and Bogomils, which are thought to have led on to those of the west European Cathars. Certainly, the belief that plants had both feelings and intellect was held by the fourth century Manicheans and so, perhaps also by the twelfth to fourteenth century Cathars, even though the belief had been renounced in c.388AD by Saint Augustine of Hippo. [De moribus Manichaeorum, Chap.17]

**The vegetative in pain; also, uttering into the eye of the soul...[8]**



Green Man heads at Tewkesbury and Bolton Abbeys, photographs from Mike Harding (1998) *A Little Book of the Green Man*

Whether these beliefs of sensation and intellect are applicable to the Plantagenet nickname is not clear. However, there are some concepts associated with the vegetal, in ancient texts, that reach through with more certainty to the late medieval times of English surname formation and beyond. Though rather odd to a modern mind, these concepts include purity, generation, and education, as we outline more fully in the Appendix.

### The coining of Geoffrey Plantagenet's nickname

From late medieval times, one step backwards is straightforward. The name of Bernard Plantapilosa of Auvergne and Velay (c.869-72) means "hairy shoot". This is relevant in that the most commonly assumed meaning of Plantagenet is a sprig of broom and, as a young shoot, this shrub is hairy. We can accordingly regard Plantagenet as an emblem of a hairy shoot. This then leaves the question of why a hairy shoot had significance for Geoffrey Plantagenet (1113-51).

One possibility of associated sense can be found in some early events in Geoffrey's life. He was count of Anjou by 1129 and by 1132, he had fathered a future king of England. The first known mentions of his Plantagenet nickname (c.1160-70) were intended partly to please Geoffrey's eldest son, crowned king Henry II of England in 1154.

The Jersey poet Wace mentions the nickname Plante Genest (sic). This poet's appointment as Canon of Bayeux was not far from the placename Genêts, near Avranches in Lower Normandy. As a Canon, he might have been aware of vegetal generation as well as of the animation of living things as taught by earlier philosophers. In particular, Anaxagoras (c.500-428BC) had stated that there is nous (mind/intelligence) in all living things and that this is the mover (e.g. of the cosmos), yet also a controller of all things that have soul (including plants).

The Angevin monk, John of Marmoutier also coined this noble nickname. He wrote that Geoffrey Plantegenest (sic) had taken the side of the minority Bretons (c.1131), to even the odds in a fight with the Normans, in sight of Mont-St-Michel (i.e. at or near Genêts). Following victory in battle, Geoffrey had gone on to defeat and behead a giant Anglo Saxon in single combat.

At Genêts, there are the competing motive forces of two river flows, those of the Sée and Sélun. These forces shift courses through the sands near Mont-St-Michel. There were also earlier senses to the word plant, meaning to found or establish,[9] and so we can say that Geoffrey planted (i.e. established) his authority at Genêts in 1131, in the manner of rebalancing forces that shift sands. Teleologically, this might have been seen as an omen for the raison d'être of Geoffrey. It happened early in Geoffrey's life, who later became Duke of Normandy in 1144 in support of the claim to the English throne of his wife Matilda and their eldest son Henry.

Hence, we can regard Genêts as a key place where Geoffrey (1113-51) is credited with some admirable qualities. Still earlier as a teenager in 1128, we can regard him as a vigorously growing young plant or scion[10] when he impressed his future father-in-law Henry I, at his first campaign of knighthood at Rouen, before marrying the widowed Empress Matilda at Le Mans the same year.

Relevance to a sense of plant, as a vigorous young shoot or scion, might lie furthermore in earlier concepts associated with the vegetal soul.[Appendix] The animating force of motion seems to have been pertinent to Geoffrey's nickname: "*This man was an energetic soldier and, as I have said, was most shrewd in his upright dealings, exceptionally well educated ... the father of his country ...*"[11]. As well as the Platonic soul mention of his energy and upright purity and education, there is also reference to the Aristotelian vegetal soul's power of generation in the concept of the fathering of lands.

Geoffrey had died in 1151, just before two major expansions of his eldest son's empire. By the times of the first known mention of the Plantagenet nickname (c.1160-70), Henry had married Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152 and had become king of England in 1154. Through fathering his eldest son, Geoffrey had fathered the so-called Angevin Empire extending fully between the borders of Scotland and Spain.

For a simple pithy meaning for Plantagenet, we might wonder which of the above four vegetal concepts - energy, upright purity, education, and fathering - was most salient for Geoffrey's proclaimed character. Perhaps however, the strength of the "hairy shoot" metaphor was its good fit to all four. This might seem complex to a modern mind. However, these concepts could have been more to the fore of a learned mind in medieval times, such that Wace and Marmoutier could see several hairy shoot qualities as being apt for Geoffrey - they could hence have allocated him the Plantagenet nickname to

highlight these qualities, notwithstanding that these associations with a hairy shoot are not obvious to us with our modern minds.

It is possible that this same tradition might have played some part for the late medieval surname Plant. Their feudal Lords would have looked down on their subjects as basic souls, some of whom were called Plant. The Longspée-Audley family could have aimed to train their followers under, as they saw it, an upright authority that had been fathered by their famed ancestor Geoffrey Plantagenet.

However, the Plant surname could have derived from such thirteenth century by-names as de la Planta or de la Plaunt or de Plantes (cf. from le Plantis in Normandy) and could well have meant simply from some such garden or planted or fertile place as the Engadine for example. As we have pointed out earlier,[12] a locative sense for Plant at least seems to fit the evidence more consistently than an occupational meaning gardener.



(a) A crusader supplicates the Lord for His Light with belief in the creative powers of emanations;[13] and, (b) A surviving inscription beseeching such a planting: Here Doe O Lord Svre Plant Thy Word - Wincle Chapel - in the main Plant homeland.

### Plantings of the Lord's emanations...

### Appendix: Some relevant early concepts

We here outline some ancient concepts that have reached through to the times of English surname formation. Though rather odd to a modern mind, the concepts of purity, generation, and education were all associated with the medieval plant soul. These concepts seem variously relevant to the origins of the Plant and Plantagenet names.

### An untainted vegetal soul

Empedocles (c.490-430BC) and, apparently, Pythagoras (c.570-495BC) thought that plants had souls. Human souls, for instance, can come to animate plants. He claimed indeed to have been a bush in a previous incarnation and urged others to follow a vegetarian lifestyle, since the bodies of animals are the dwelling places of punished souls.

Plato related the word plant to human growth, heightened by reason, reaching upright towards the heavenly one soul:

*inasmuch as we are a plant not of an earthly but of a heavenly growth, [the sovereign part of the human soul .. at the top of the body] raises us from earth to our kindred who are in heaven. ... [Timaeus 90a]*

A similar notion still remains much later in the main Plant homeland. The idea that plants can have pure souls, devoid of any of the original sin of conception, is suggested by Henry

Bradshaw (died 1513) who wrote of the well nurtured plant (soul or unborn child) in the Mercian Princess Ermenylde:[14]

*vertuous doctryne In her so dyd water a pure perfyte plante, Which daily encreased by sufferance devyne, Merveylously growynge in her fresshe an varnaunt,*

### A generative vegetal soul

The teachings of Plotinus (c.205-70AD) largely followed those of Plato. In his NeoPlatonic teachings, there is only an indirect mention of a generative (i.e. reproductive) power in the vegetal. For Plotinus, this power is passed into plants from earth.[Enneads 4:4:27]

*If the earth transmits the generative soul to growing things ... at once the earth is ensouled, as our flesh is, and any generative power possessed by the plant is of [the earth's] bestowing: ...*

On the other hand, St Augustine of Hippo (345-430AD) was one of the Latin fathers of the church. His emphasis was closer to Aristotle's version of the vegetal soul, placing an inherent generative power within the vegetal:[De Libero Arbitrio I.8]

*For we see that we have many characteristics in common not only with animals but even with trees and plants. We know that trees, which are at the lowest level of life, take in nourishment, grow, reproduce, and flourish.*

The teachings of Aristotle came more fully into Western philosophy with the twelfth and thirteenth century Toledo translations from Arabic to Latin. Though the Condemnations of Paris (1210-1277) treated these ongoing translations as heretical, St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) went so far as to decree that the vegetable soul was the first principal of life - moreover, its generative power was more noble than its nutritive or augmentative functions.

### Educating a basic vegetal soul

The vegetal soul is repeatedly mentioned in connection with training or education. For example, Plato identifies the vegetal particularly in connection with cultivated plant life:

*Blending it with other shapes and senses, they [the Gods] engendered a substance akin to that of man, so as to form another living creature: such are the cultivated trees and plants and seeds which have been trained by husbandry and are now domesticated amongst us; but formerly the wild kinds only existed, these being older than the cultivated kinds.[Timaeus 77a,b]*

As pointed out by De Plantis, Plato writes particularly of sensation in the vegetal soul. He adds that plants are infused by wise men with good sensations, and true ones:

*And, O my dear Socrates, I do not call wise men tadpoles: far from it; I say that they are the physicians of the human body, and the husbandmen of plants - for the husbandmen also take away the evil and disordered sensations of plants, and infuse into them good and healthy sensations - aye and true ones:[Theaetetus]*

As late as 1621, in the main Plant homeland of Cheshire (adjoining Audley lands in north Staffordshire), we still have a plant as a basic soul ready for training:[10]

*his Grandchild [of Sir John Savage], 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*

In particular, the verb to plant is associated with training.

There is Middle English reference to planting virtue, the Word, or the grace of noble lineage.[15]

We are grateful to Prof Mick Short for pointing out that the original literal meaning of “train” is very likely to have been related to leading or guiding a climbing plant, such as a runner bean, around a support - hence, the notion of training people is likely originally to have been a conceptual metaphor, analogically based on training climbing plants. More generally, the MAN IS PLANT metaphor[16] is very common in English [e.g. Job 14:1-2 and Macbeth 5.3] which highlights the need to try to identify specific concepts that applied to Plantagenet times.

## References

Note: Website addresses, beginning [http://www.plant-fhg.uk/...](http://www.plant-fhg.uk/) which were used in previous articles, are now cloned at [http://plant.one-name.net/...](http://plant.one-name.net/) with the latter being expected to be preserved longer than the former.

[1] J.S.Plant (2007) *The tardy adoption of the Plantagenet surname*, *Nomina*, Vol. 30, pp. 57-84 [<http://plant.one-name.net/NOMINA30.pdf>].

[2] J.S.Plant (2005) *Modern Methods and a Controversial Surname: Plant*, *Nomina*, Vol. 28, pp. 115-33 [<http://plant.one-name.net/NOMINA28.pdf>].

[3] G.R.de Beer (1952) *Andreas and Joseph Planta*, *FF.R.S., Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, pp. 8-14.

[4] P.H.Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames* (London: Routledge, 1958).

[5] J.S.Plant (2010) *Understanding the royal name Plantagenet - how DNA helps*, *Journal of One-Name Studies*, Volume 10, Issue 8, pp. 14-15

[6] A.Cruse, *Meaning in Language: An introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics* (OUP, 2000) p.101.

[7] <http://plant.one-name.net/LongspeeAudley.html>

[8] Green Man heads at Tewkesbury and Bolton Abbeys, photographs from Mike Harding (1998) *A Little Book of the Green Man* ISBN 978 1 85410 563 9.

[9] OED (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015) plant v 1a, 2a.

[10] Mr William Webb's 1621 account of the Hundred of Macclesfield in J.P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire: Past and Present* (London, 1877), vol. 1, pp. 9-14, esp. p. 10.

[11] *The Plantagenet Chronicles*, ed. Elizabeth Hallam (Tiger, London 1995), p.46.

[12] J.S.Plant and R.E.Plant (2012) *The Plant Controversy*, *Journal of One-Name Studies*, Volume 11, Issue 2, pp. 8-9.

[13] For example, Robert Grossetest (c.1168-1253) devised (in place of modern biochemical photosynthesis) a mechanistic model whereby quanta of God's light (*lux suprema*), along with lower forms of light in the flesh (such as *irradiato spiritualis*), powered the vegetal soul.

[14] Henry Bradshaw in *The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester* [II 603-7].

[15] OED plant v 3a.

[16] G.Lakoff and M.Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago University Press, 1989), pp. 6, 12-14, 27-28, 84. ■

## From the Editor's Desk...

Unfortunately I have very few articles left in 'the bank' so my Christmas wish this year is for members to dig deep and think of an article that they could write for the journal. I did ask via Twitter for ideas and fortunately Liz Jones took up the challenge with the following: *spotlight on a study? One-name study related photos and description of relevance?* So

if you do not want to write an article, have a look at the back page for a general idea of what you can do for the journal. Nothing in depth, just a way of promoting your ONS and showing some family photographs. Remember, it's YOUR journal so why not show off some of your achievements. I've pre-warned my postman! Have a great Christmas everyone. Jean-Marc

## Could you be a Challenger?

The Guild is always looking for Marriage Challengers. If you live fairly close to a county record office and can afford to spend some time there to help other Guild members with their one-name studies by finding marriage entries, then becoming a Challenger could be an option.

Even if Ancestry, Findmypast, or FamilySearch have done some indexing, there are likely to be some parts of the county or some period where a Challenge would still be practicable. You could do a Challenge with a friend or fellow Guild member; a sense of camaraderie is easily achieved.

Peter Copsey MCG (Marriage Challenge Coordinator) will give advice on what is needed and on any aspect of a Challenge that is concerning you. Most Challengers find the Challenge a rewarding and interesting experience. Why not send him an email at [marriage-challenge@one-name.org](mailto:marriage-challenge@one-name.org) if you think you can contribute.