

Chapter 22

Plantagenet soul and the Plant of Peace

May 2001. One of a series of Chapters by Dr. John S. Plant, Keele University, England, ST5 5BG.

MEDIEVAL MEANING OF THE PLANT NAME AND ITS SUBSEQUENT DISTRIBUTION

The first known evidence for the Pl(a/e)nte name is in 13th century England in proximity to Robert Grosseteste, whose philosophy is helpful in suggesting a possible meaning to the name. The Plant name appears to have been relatively widely dispersed in the 13th century and, by the 14th century, there is early evidence for clusters in both the SE and NW Midlands before the main homeland of the name became, by the 18th century, more clearly Staffordshire. With a presumed Warren ‘Plant(a/e)genet’ ethos in the early context, the name is consistent with the meaning ‘a planted spirit of the lord’. Such a meaning can be elucidated in the contemporary philosophy, which included for example ideas of a hierarchy of spiritual emanations from bodies, transmitting their *forms* to subordinate bodies, such as in a generative origin to life with virtue transmitted by the lord’s ethos or by semen aided by vegetative operations of the soul which was powered by the lord’s light.

22.1 Contemporary philosophy for the Plant name

The strength of the evidence for a particular meaning to the Plant name depends partly on the strength of the evidence for the name’s historical location. The strong evidence for a proximity of Robert Grosseteste to the first evidence for the name Plente¹ is helpful. Meaning may be sought in the known duties in 1219 of Radulphus Plente to the “Plantagenet” king for the burbhothe of Oxford, with burbhothe meaning ‘upkeep’ or ‘funds for upkeep’. Together with the contemporary philosophy, this suggests a meaning, a ‘generosity (im)plant(er)’. In short, a Middle English meaning of *plente* was generosity (or abundant or fertile) and this could hold sense, in the contemporary philosophy, as a ‘spiritual implant’ of a virtue².

It is instructive to consider some relevant philosophical influences in the teachings of Robert Grosseteste (c1170-1253) and others.

Concepts relating to the meaning of the Plant name can be traced back to early medieval developments in faith. Ideas about the soul, from the Greek, were combined with Hebrew and Christian beliefs. By later medieval times, there was particular activity in Western Europe to amend Christian doctrine by incorporating newly translated ideas from the Arabic, as is indicated in Table 22.1. In particular, the entire process of creation was, for St Augustine, a granting of light and illumination³. For a grasp of intelligible things, the mind must be irradiated with divine light with Augustine stating that God, the Word of God is that true light that lighteth every man⁴.

¹The Middle English Dictionary lists both *plente* and *plante* as variant forms of *plaut*.

²Consistent senses to the early 13th century names *Plantebene*, *Plantefolie*, and *Planterose* can then be considered (*cf.* Chapter 21) respectively to be along the lines of a ‘hallowed (im)plant(er) of virtue’, an ‘(im)plant(er) of contrition (or cudgel) of sin’, or a ‘courtly spirits (im)plant(er)’, as will be considered further in a later Chapter.

³James McEvoy (1982) *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pps 59-60.

⁴The illumination of intelligence by the Word perfected the luminous angelic nature by direct impression as well as by reflection from lower creation.

Origen of Alexandria (185-254AD) was a contemporary of Plotonius (Figure 22.1). He combined Greek philosophy with Hebrew scriptures stating, as Plato had taught, that the souls of men come from elsewhere, having existed even since creation. Similarly as Plotonius, he considered that when *Nous* falls away, it becomes soul; soul, when virtuous, becomes *Nous*.

St Augustine (354-430AD) combined Greek works with the Christian, stating that the soul of man, though it “*bears witness to the light*”, yet itself “*is not that light*”; but God, the Word of God, “*is that true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*”. There was the strict sequence: God is light in a more than metaphorical sense; the essence of light is to be sought in spiritual rather than corporeal being; and, in the visible world, light is the first, subtlest, and most active of material things, and hence closest to immaterial nature^a. Augustine^b added that “*the Word of God was made flesh, by assuming that flesh in which it might be manifested to men’s senses*”.

Aristotle had spoken of *spiritus* as being the active element in reproductive matter and Arab Neoplatonism had synopated with that theme. Moreover, Arabic thinking had evolved a scheme for the origin of life, in which the fixed stars educed life in *all its forms* through the influence of light.

Atto, Bishop of Vercelli in northern Italy (924-61AD)^c complained in a sermon of the custom practised by ‘little trollops’ (meretriculae) in his diocese of baptizing branches and turves (and hence calling them - it is not clear whom - coparents), hanging them in their houses and afterwards guarding them assiduously “*quasi religionis causa*”^d. Avicenna (c980-1036) from Persia maintained that the soul of plants was shared with humans and Averroes (1126-98) reiterated a scheme for the generation of life from the elements, such as earth, through plants and animals to man.

Up through the 12th century, Augustine’s model of the (intellective) soul had been seen as a unity of memory, understanding, and will. By the 13th century (Figure 22.1), the Arab influences of Avicenna and Averroes were coming into force in Western Europe. For Avicenna, the thesis on light as the vehicle of the soul developed in the context of the *complexatio* of animal body and the production of animal spirits. In particular, few in 13th century Western Europe did not broadly accept the teaching of Avicenna that the better the balance between the active (fire and air) and passive (water and earth) elements, with the balance being regulated by light, the better was the body conditioned to receive the higher forms of life. The spirits were of the substance of light and, for Robert Grosseteste in particular in early 13th century England, light formed the bearer of the soul in the body.

There is 13th century reference to Origen in the *Roman de la Rose* poem^e and there is 14th century Middle English reference to *planted* virtue which, in the tradition of Origen, can be considered to elevate soul to ‘mind’. Grosseteste’s early 13th century concepts, in England, of light as an intermediary not only of the Lord and the soul but also of the soul and the body were followed by 14th century evidence of a further Middle English usage of the word *plant* — there is reference to the lordly *planted* Word.

^aJames McEvoy (1982) *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p 280.

^bAugustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 15.11.20.

^cAtto became Grand Chancellor of Lothorire II, king of France, in 933.

^dI am grateful to Barnadette Giguere for this information in a scholarly email discussion group on Medieval Religion and Culture.

^eIn Nature’s Confession of the extended 13th century poem, the *Roman de la Rose*, Jeun de Meun (line #17039) has Nature stating “*Origen, who cut off his testicles, valued me lightly when he cut them off with his own hands so that he could serve the religious ladies with devotion and so that there would be no suspicion that he might ever lie with them.*”

Table 22.1: Greek soul with Hebrew, Christian, and Arabic influences

The applicable philosophy, which is to be associated with the word *plant*, differed markedly in the 13th century from now. An understanding of the contemporary context is crucial for resolving controversies, which have surrounded the meaning of the Pl(a/e)nt(e) name. Clues to understanding can be gleaned from relevant texts and a suitable text for consideration is an extract from the 13th century poem, the *Roman de la Rose*, which is associated with Orléans just south of Paris, upstream and beyond the Loire valley from “Plantagenet” Anjou:-

There is always a single phoenix that lives, up until its end, for five hundred years. At the last it makes a large full fire of spices where it sits down and is burned. Thus it brings about the destruction of its body; but because it keeps its form, another phoenix returns from its ashes ... however it goes with species (cf. the preserved spirits, such as manifested in the pungency of spices), the individuals are changeable into many forms ... Do we not see how those who are masters of glassblowing create from fern ... both ash and glass? ... These are transmuted species, those whose individuals (i.e. manifested instances) are alienated from them in both substance and shape, through Art (i.e. alchemy) in the case of fern, ash, and glass ... He then who knows how to make himself subtle enough to prepare the spirits so that they had the force to enter into bodies and not fly out again ... such a man would have his will with metals (cf. the alchemist’s dream of producing gold from base metals)

From a modern technical standpoint we may see little sense in, for example, glass as a transmutation of fern. The relevant philosophy is clearly not that of modern science. Indeed, facts to be resolved by experiment may even have carried a risk, at that time, of charges of heresy. Instead, the underlying philosophy can be better understood by bearing in mind the spirits and the fern’s vegetative life force. The fern is said to transmute to both ash and glass and, in this same passage of the *Rose* poem, there is explicit mention of preserved *form* in the ashes of the burned phoenix in a (vegetative) fire of spices. Earlier in the *Rose* poem, celestial light, as spiritual emanation from God’s home, the sun, was seen to multiply in crystals images of whatever adorned the garden. In Meun’s continuation of the *Rose* poem, there is then the above question of how the fern (with its ability to sustain the life force) surely participates in the creation of (new living substance as bodily light in) glass. The soul included *vegetative* operations, such as the augmentative and the generative, such that rays of spiritual emanation from the eye could be subject in glass to augmentation and generation producing (renewed life as) a multiplication of form or species, as was seen in crystals or glass as multiple images of ‘whatever (life) adorned the garden’.

It is relevant to consider some aspects of such philosophy in further detail.

Similarly to Augustine, Robert Grosseteste (c1175-1253) considered light to be ‘bodily, but the closest (material) approximation to incorporeal nature, and therefore close to the soul, which is immaterial without qualification’. That is to say, the spirits serve as a principle of continuity between the noble soul and a gross body, preserving the former from direct contact with the more ignoble parts of matter⁵. The fineness of the spirits was the result of the most balanced possible complexion of the elements under the influence of celestial light. With stability and balance of its elements, the body was rendered apt to receive a spiritual soul. In particular, Grosseteste used light, with its ability to move matter that was sufficiently balanced to receive vegetable life, to explain the energy which he refers to as the ‘life force’.

For Grosseteste, spiritual light transmitted the will of the soul to the body and it explained, for example, the vegetative functions of nutrition, growth, and generation. This underlies a concept of ‘planting’, which was not just of plant flesh as generally understood in modern times, but of spirits from the soul. The whole soul, as outlined in Table 22.5, was held by Grosseteste to be entirely separate from the body, though for others there was a *plurality of forms of the soul*, with the vegetative and sensory souls being deemed by some to be intermediate between the intellective soul and the flesh. Such ideas seem to hold pertinence for understanding the 2(c) meaning of *plaunten* in the Middle English Dictionary. There is 14th century reference in this Dictionary to known usage of *plaunten* that seemingly relates to the reception of spirits engendered by the lord from the soul

⁵James McEvoy (1982) *ibid*, pps 282, 349.

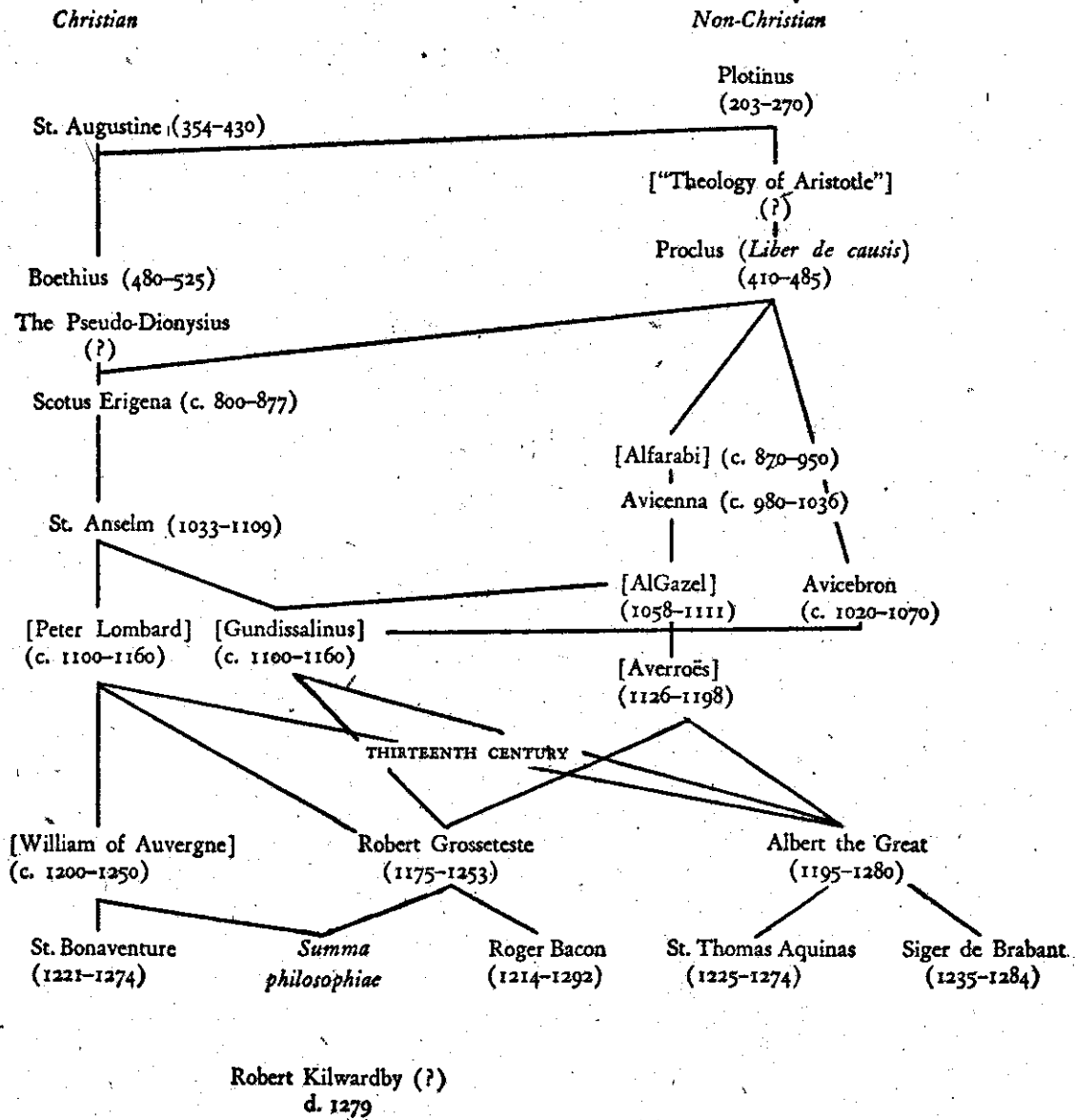


Figure 22.1: Philosophical Influences on the 13th century Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste and the *Summa Philosophiae* (after Charles King McKeon (1948) *A Study of the Summa philosophiae of the Pseudo-Grosseteste*).

into human flesh.

Both the 'vegetative' and 'planted virtue' seem relevant to medieval meaning for the name Plant. As detailed further by Roger Bacon (Table 22.6), light and spiritual emanation were considered to pass form, virtue, or species to the next lower creation or generation, with an emerging framework of geometrical optics. It is in a context of such scholastic philosophy that there is 14th century Middle English reference to *planted* virtue and the *planted* grace of noble lineage which can be associated not only with the preserved *vertue* of the father in the mother but also with the holy ghost as God's light of the *planted* Word.

Middle English reference to '*planted virtue*' can be related furthermore to the tradition of Origen (Table 22.1), whereby virtue promotes soul to mind. Such ideas help in explaining the view held in the *Summa Philosophiae* (Table 22.5) that the human might achieve truth *in his own right*. This might be seen as a particular ability of those elevated with virtue, such as the nobility, to have *Nous*.

In summary, contemporary philosophy was consistent with a notion that a created Plant(a/e)genet nobility could have the finest balance of elements in their transubstantiated flesh (Table 22.1), arising from transubstantiation through the plant and horse genera, so as to render that flesh capable of receiving, *in the noble's own right*, a soul particularly well graced in lordly authority from a particularly elevated form of the image of God's *planted* Word.

In identifying a meaning for the Plant name, standard methodologies may need to be amended to take account of a special influence from a philosophical ethos that surrounded the Plant(e/a)genet name. However, before proceeding with a discussion of *local* literary evidence in support of both such an ethos and an associable meaning to the Plant name, it is appropriate to re-examine the strength of the evidence for locating the name's emerging homeland.

22.2 The historical distribution of the Plant name

The context in which a name formed is generally relevant when deciding its initial meaning. Some degree of uncertainty is usual for the meaning of names. Clarification may arise from the initial context, which is *usually* to be deduced from a detailed examination of the name's subsequent distribution. In a recent appraisal of '*The Distinctive Surnames of Staffordshire*', Professor David Hey (1998)⁶ comments:-

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.

The comments⁷ of David Hey (1998) on the historical distribution of the Plant name are couched in the particular emphases that he adopts for his study of Staffordshire:-

Another north Staffordshire name is Plant, an occupational name for a planter or gardener⁸. The name probably had multiple origins, for it had spread far and wide by 1842-6, when 477 deaths were registered. Nevertheless, 139 of these deaths (*i.e.* 29 per cent) were recorded throughout Staffordshire, but especially in the northern half of the county and most of the rest were from the neighbouring counties and from Lancashire. In 1666 the Staffordshire hearth tax returns list only two Plant households in Offlow hundred, one in Cuttlestone, and none in Seisdon, but 10 in Pirehill and 19 in Totmonslow (*cf.* Figure 22.2). The 1532-3 list of Staffordshire people shows that the Plants were already numerous, with fifteen families in the northern half

⁶David Hey (1998), *Staffordshire Studies*, Volume 10, pps 1-28. (The Nineteenth Earl lecture, delivered at Keele University, 6 November 1997).

⁷He precedes the above comments with:- '*The compilers of dictionaries of surnames are linguists with particular skills in interpreting the earliest forms of surnames in twelfth-, thirteenth-, or fourteenth-century documents. Clearly, such knowledge is necessary and our understanding of the etymologies of surnames has been enormously advanced by this work. But local and family historians are often disappointed by the explanations of surnames on offer in dictionaries; explanations which do not seem to match their own findings.*'

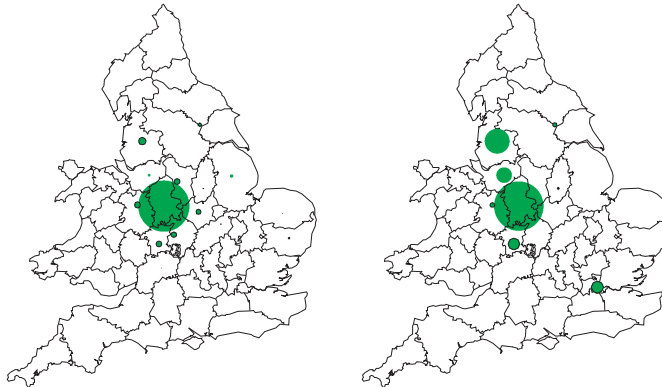
⁸Such a meaning is disputed in the present work.

Plants are found mainly in England and, given estimates for the total population of the United Kingdom (UK of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland), it has been estimated that 1 person in every 3668 in the UK is called Plant.

The estimate that Plants form 1 in 3668 of the the total UK population gives rise to estimates of their changing number, as the UK population grew (W Keith Plant, 1990, *Roots and Branches*, Issue Number 1). This variation can be compared with the changing number of Plant records (mainly baptisms) in the 1984 version of the IGI (International Genealogical Index) (John S Plant, 1999, *Roots and Branches*, Issue Number 17).

Number of IGI Plant records in particular 50 year intervals		Estimated UK Plant population in particular years	
1601-50	229	1630	1526
1651-1700	412	1670	1573
1701-50	1223	1700	1648
1751-1800	2192	1750	1776
1801-50	4196	1801	2423

It is clear from the above table that the number of Plant records in the IGI between 1601 and 1750, for example, changed markedly, though the Plant population can be expected to have grown only slowly over these years. This suggests that there is a substantial undercount of Plant baptisms in the IGI, in the 17th century, though the IGI data becomes more complete by the 18th century. By the mid 19th century, the geographical distribution of Plants, as deduced from the IGI, can be compared with potentially more reliable evidence taken from Civil Registration records and, with still more certainty, from Victorian Census data. The IGI results for 1801-50 can be compared with a map based on David Hey's figures for Plant deaths in 1842-6 taken from the Civil Registration deaths index (David Hey, 1998, *Staffordshire Studies*, Volume 10, pps 1-28.). The results below are for the 1801-50 IGI data (left) and the 1842-6 Plant deaths (right).



The two sets of results show only a limited agreement between the distribution of baptisms (and some marriages) for 1801-50 and the distribution of deaths towards the end of this 50 year interval. The discrepancies might arise partly from such considerations as..

- the significant migrations that were taking place around these times of the Industrial Revolution;
- the possibilities of an untypical outbreak of deaths in a particular locality in the five years considered (1842-6); or,
- the reporting of deaths in an area where baptisms and marriages had not been recorded in a way that is preserved in the 1984 IGI.

A count of Plants in the 1881 Census has been carried out by W Keith Plant, 2001, *Roots and Branches*, Issue Number 21 and this was used for the 1881 Census data map. Further detailed study of 19th century Civil Registration data for births, marriages, and deaths along with counts of people called Plant in other Census years could help to give a more detailed picture of Plant migrations during these relatively mobile times.

Table 22.2: Plant data used for the Distribution Maps

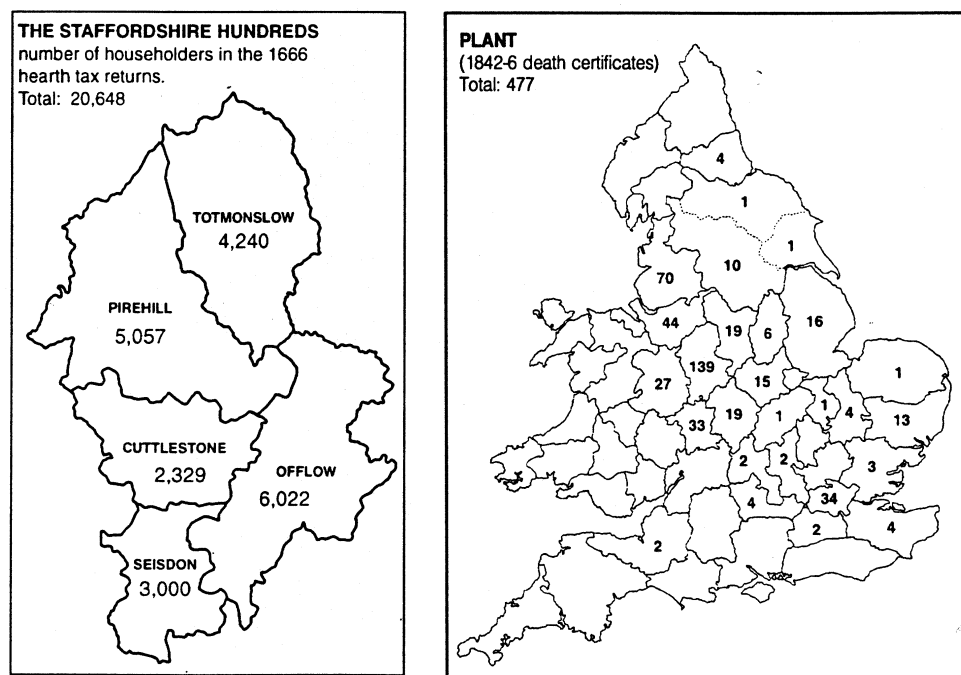


Figure 22.2: David Hey's study of The Distribution of Distinctive Staffordshire Surnames including Plant

of the county. This is a north Staffordshire surname with probably more than one origin, that ramified early in a similar way to Salt.

The methodology⁹ adopted by David Hey is aimed at names that were local to Staffordshire. However, by considering deaths for England and Wales for 1842-6 and then immediately homing in on Staffordshire for 1666 and for 1532-3, his general methodology misses some secondary detail in the particular case of the Plant name.

22.2.1 Some further clues from records in the IGI

It is appropriate to consider some further evidence, which is based on Plant records in the IGI¹⁰ (Table 22.2) and which gives the results shown in Table 22.3. These additional results can be seen to remain consistent with Keith Plant's results based on 1881 Census data¹¹ and they indicate that, for the 19th and 18th centuries, the main Plant homeland was Staffordshire, albeit with some Plants in counties to the north, specifically in the counties of Cheshire and Lancashire. Corresponding 17th century results from the IGI are different, however, and require more detailed attention.

It should be noted first that, for the first half of the 17th century, the IGI contains only a tenth of the Plant records that could be expected from the number found in the IGI for the 19th century. Possible reasons for this 17th century shortfall of Plant baptism records include:-

⁹In attempting to trace the origins of surnames backwards from Victorian times to the times of Henry VIII, David Hey (1998) has considered the distribution of names to be found in death registers during the five years 1842-6 and then he considers, in finer detail, the distribution of particular surnames in the 1666 Hearth Tax returns for Staffordshire and in a 1532-3 list of Staffordshire people.

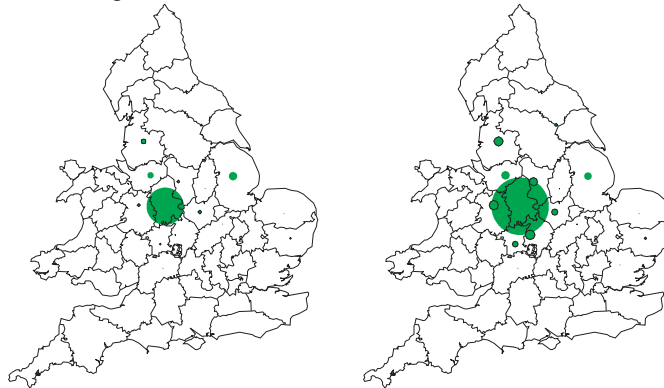
¹⁰International Genealogical Index.

¹¹W Keith Plant (2001) *Roots and Branches*, Issue No. 21.

Though the Plant name's 13th century origins were perhaps quite widely spread, it is found mostly in extant records for the general region around Norfolk. It seems that the name then settled, around the mid 14th century, in two particular places:-

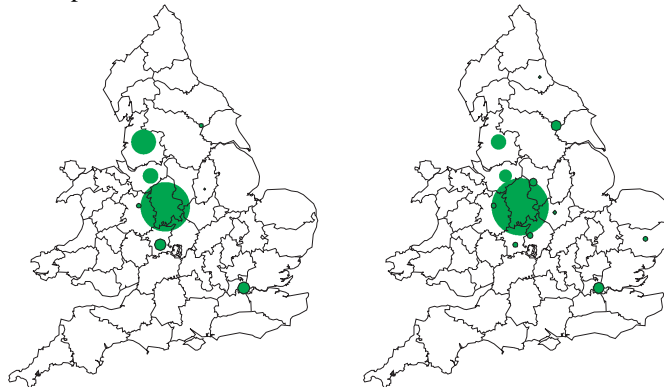
1. across The Wash in east Lincolnshire; and, more especially,
2. in east Cheshire (seemingly with the displacement of the illegitimate Warren 'Plant(a/e)genet' descent from their traditional Norfolk lands to east Cheshire).

IGI results suggest that the main Plant homeland may have shifted south from Cheshire into the adjacent county of Staffordshire, in the 17th century around the times of the English Civil War. The results based on the IGI data can be considered to be more reliable by the 18th century and these give the following results for 1701-50 (left) and 1751-1800 (right).



These results are broadly similar to those for the 17th century but with a continuing migration from rural east Cheshire and rural south Lincolnshire, where the primary and secondary Plant clusters were earlier in evidence, such that the dominant county for IGI Plant records becomes more exclusively Staffordshire. It needs to be noted however that, if there were Plants remaining in Cheshire and Lincolnshire who were predominantly Catholic, for example, they would be under-represented in the IGI baptism data and hence misleadingly absent from these deduced distribution maps.

The distributions of Plant records are shown below, in turn, for 1842-6 deaths (left) and for the 1881 Census data (right). These maps, which are based on different data, are compared in Table 22.2 with maps obtained from the 19th century IGI baptism data.



The above 19th century results show a shift from Cheshire not only further into Staffordshire to its south but also into Lancashire to its north and then to (the three ridings of) Yorkshire to Lancashire's east. There is also a spot of population further south in the east around London.

Around the times of the Industrial Revolution, it seems that there was a migration from the rural areas of north Staffordshire, for example, to such nearby industrial centres as Stoke-on-Trent and Wolverhaston (both in Staffordshire), as well as to Manchester (Lancashire), Birmingham, Sheffield, and London.

Table 22.3: A general scheme for the historical distribution of the Plant name

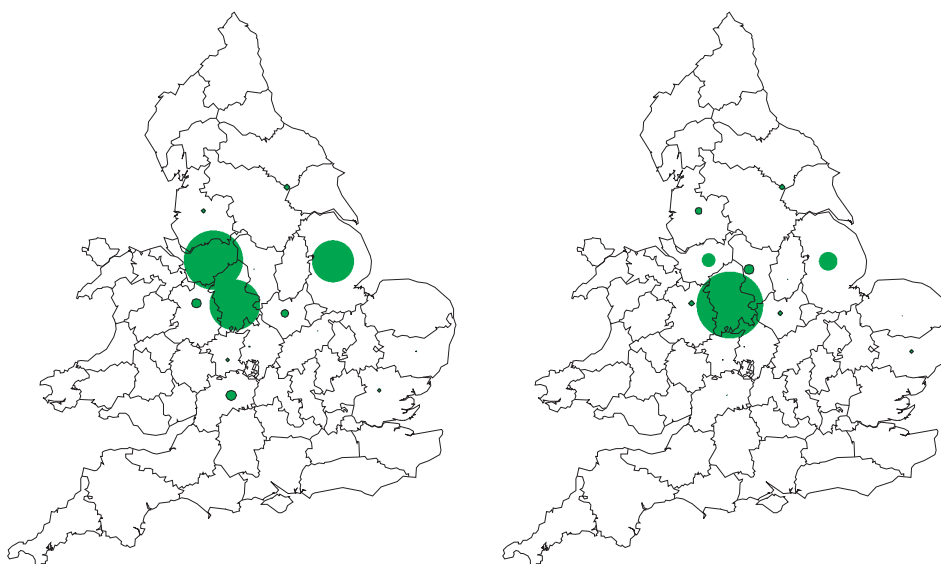
1562, 12 Sep, Wylliam Plant m Esabell Bereyd at Orby
1565, 14 Oct, Thomas Plantt m Jone Pacocke at Wainfleet All Saints
1565, 29 Nov, Margarett Plantt, bap at Wainfleet All Saints
1579, 10 Jun, John Plante m Ellezabethe at Wainfleet Saint Mary
1589, 28 Sep, Anne Plainte, dau of Richarde Plainte, bap at Addlethorpe
1590, 08 Aug, Randoll Plant m Jane Willson at Burwell with Walmsgate
1592, 14 Mar Jone Plant, dau of Richard Plant, bap at Addlethorpe
1592, 15 Jul, Johannes Plante, son of Randeli Plante, bap at Ingoldmells
1592, 22 Sep, Willn. Plante, son of Xpofe. Plante, bap at Calceby
1596, 03 Apr, Merget Plant (female), bap at Orby
1596, 20 May, Ann Plant, bap at Orby
1598, 01 Jun, John Plante, son of Rich. Plante, bap at Addlethorpe
1599, 01 Jul, Richard Plant, son of Randall Plant, bap at Orby

Table 22.4: Some pre-1600 IGI records for Lincolnshire, indicating the secondary cluster for the Plant name near Ingoldmells

- the IGI records are generally less complete for the 17th century, for all names;
- the Plants may have been living at that time in remote areas, near the High Peak, such that they are not generally to be found in surviving parish records; and,
- some may have been Catholic, for example, such that there could have been religious reasons for their absence from the IGI records.

Such uncertainties highlight the need for caution in interpreting the distribution data for the early 17th century. Even so, it seems noteworthy that, before the disruptions of the English Commonwealth period¹², the principal Plant homeland may have been in Cheshire, to the north of Staffordshire, with a secondary cluster just north of the Wash in east Lincolnshire.

The distribution maps are shown below, based on the 1984 IGI data for 1601-50 (left) and 1651-1700 (right).



They indicate a primary cluster of Plants mainly in Cheshire seemingly shifted, by the second half of the century, mainly into Staffordshire to Cheshire's south. There is also a secondary cluster for the Plant population away to the east in Lincolnshire.

The need for caution in interpreting these results can be stressed further as follows. A steady

¹²For example, during the Commonwealth period, many of the King's supporters lost their lands and most did not manage to regain them after the Restoration of the monarchy. Also, some of the common people showed an allegiance that was at odds with their local gentry some of whom, such as the Warrens of Poynton, did regain their lands.

It seems that others in England may have adopted a view rather similar to Grosseteste's though perhaps amended, in part, to other views such as the one outlined below for Phillip the Chancellor. Like his contemporary Philip the Chancellor in Paris, Grosseteste held conviction in Augustine's demand for an intermediary between the rational soul and the body. Unlike Grosseteste however, who chose spiritual light as the intermediary, Philip the Chancellor chose the vegetative and sensory souls to intervene, stating:-

The sensitive (sensory) is simple and incorporeal, but is corruptible; it has two properties in common with the rational soul and one in common with the body. The nutritive (vegetative) soul has only one property in common with the rational soul and one in common with the body.

Grosseteste, in his concern to preserve the soul's nobility and transcendence of the body, appealed not only to this plurality of forms in the soul but also to the mediating presence of the luminous spirits. Unlike Bonaventure (1221-74), Grosseteste^a was not inhibited, by close adherence to Aristotle's teachings, from allowing light^b, as a sort of 'fifth element', to enter the body, which was universally accepted to be composed of the four elements. In his approach, Grosseteste defended the principle of noble vegetative and sensory operations in the soul together with intellectual ones^c.

Somewhat amended views from those of Grosseteste can be glimpsed in the *Summa Philosophiae*, which is associated with England around 1265-75, by when the name spelling Plaunte as well as Plente is in evidence. In connection with the *Summa Philosophiae* it has been noted by Charles King McKeon^d:-

Insofar as the rational soul is similar to the intelligence we will have to do with the same powers commensurate with a spiritual nature, the powers of understanding and willing. But there is also to be taken into account the fact of the soul's conjunction with the body; from this it follows, the author (of the *Summa Philosophiae*) believes, that whereas some powers are natural to the soul as it exists through itself (separately), there are also some powers natural to it solely in virtue of its conjunction with the body, and some mediate between corporeal and incorporeal powers. The powers accruing to the rational soul in virtue of its conjunction with the body are those intrinsic to the sensitive and vegetative souls. These powers, not being powers of the separate rational soul, are powers the operation of which involves corporeal organs In the *Summa (Philosophiae)*, as in Thomas (Aquinas), we find the nutritive, augmentative, and generative powers assigned to the vegetative soul. In the *Summa*, moreover, the nutritive power is presented as admitting of detailed internal differentiation.

The author of the *Summa Philosophiae* seemed furthermore, like Roger Bacon (1214-92), to consider that the history of thought had exhibited the unfolding of a single universal wisdom, for Christians and pagans alike. The author seems to suggest that, though theosophy is essentially the Word of God revealed to man, the philosopher may, nevertheless, achieve some measure of truth *in his own right*.

^aJames McEvoy (1982) *ibid*, pps 283-5.

^bGrosseteste distinguishes between two types of light. Light as the first form of corporeality is taken to be diffuse material energy. Light as the essence of the spirits is taken to be concentrated material energy, with the fineness of the spirits being the result of the most perfect balance of the elements under celestial light, which renders the body apt to receive the spiritual soul.

^cFor Grosseteste, the incorporeal soul, with its desire, moves the spirits as an intermediary between the incorporeal and the body; the spirits in turn command the nerves and the muscles. The spirits share in the nature of light and, through their luminosity and fineness, they are easily set in motion and, through their fineness, they penetrate the entire body and are effective throughout it.

^dCharles King McKeon (1948) *A Study of the Summa philosophiae of the Pseudo-Grosseteste*, pps 143, 146-7, 149, 151.

Table 22.5: The *noble* vegetative soul of Grosseteste, in comparison with the views of his contemporaries, and the lordly Word.

In *Fons Vitae*, the Spanish Jew Avicbron (c1020-70) (Figure 22.1) had described the *'prima forma substantialis'* as something spiritual which becomes corporeal in matter. This could readily be brought into conjunction with Augustine's description of light as a quasi-spiritual substance. Grosseteste identified light as the first form of corporeal existence (*prima corporeitas*)^a. For Grosseteste, light was the first form of corporeality, so the dimensionality of matter followed automatically — the *matter* and *form* of the universe were both geometrically and numerically one prior to this primordial act of creation proceeding directly from the hand of the Creator. This radical system made one physical system out of what for Aristotle had been two separate ones and joined the system of the heavens to those on earth. Grosseteste could thereby affirm^b:-

every higher body, in virtue of the light which proceeds from it, is the form and perfection of the body that comes after it. And just as unity is potentially every number that comes after it, so the first body through multiplication of its light, is every body that comes after it.

Generation of corporeal things are described through the action of a point of created light (created from nothing). In a similar spirit, multiplied images by the action of light could be seen as reproduction.

For Roger Bacon as for Grosseteste, however, there were some differences between heaven and earth with Bacon asking the question^c *'In the medium of heaven where there are no contraries, how can the medium's own nature assert itself against the species?'* to which he answers that there is only contrariety between rare and dense, and light and dark - not, as on earth, between warmth, cold, humidity and dryness. For Grosseteste, these four physical qualities were at the basis of four plant powers. For example, in order to attract nutrient which the plant requires in order to grow to the average size of the species, the expanding and stabilizing chemical qualities of warmth and dryness assured the attractive power of efficacy, while it was the balance of cold and dry that enable the retentive power to coagulate and unify the new matter to the vegetable substance. Such plant powers explained the three 'vegetative' functions of nutrition, growth, and reproduction found in all living things. The augmentative function (growth), for Bacon, involved the multiplication of rays and this growth moderated or extinguished by diminution. Similarly generation (reproduction of bodies, including those of the living) was moderated by corruption (rot or death). Bacon adds^d:-

for Averroes says in book vii, and natural philosophers and physicians agree, that the virtues of the father are in the semen and that they remain during the generation of progeny.

^aJames McEvoy (1982), *ibid*, pps 160, 184.

^bGrosseteste's *De Luce*. See David C Lindberg (1983) *Roger Bacon's Philosophy of Nature*, pps xlvi-xlx.

^cDavid C Lindberg (1982) *ibid*, pps lxix-lxx.

^d*De Multiplicatione Specierum*, Part VI, Chapter 2, line 25-7. Facing Page Translation in David C Lindberg (1983) *ibid*, pps 258-9.

Table 22.6: Some relevant philosophy of Grosseteste and Bacon

fraction of the pre-1700 Leek parish records is for the Plant name — this fraction remains steady back to the times when the Leek parish records begin in 1634¹³ — this suggests that 66% of the Leek data for Plants (*i.e.* that for 1601-34) is missing from the extant data for 1601-50 and this, in itself, would significantly distort the results since about half¹⁴ of the pre-1700 IGI records for Plants in Staffordshire are for Leek. Even so, Leek is at the northern tip of Staffordshire and so there is an apparent finding that the Staffordshire Plants may have migrated mainly from the north, that is from Leek and from Cheshire and this is compatible with the findings of David Hey that, in a 1532-3 list of Staffordshire people, there are Plants just in the northern part of Staffordshire.

The 16th and 17th century evidence of David Hey is helpful but, at those times, there is also evidence of Plants outside Staffordshire. Two addenda need to be added.

Addendum 1. David Hey's assessment misses the existence, indicated by pre-1700 IGI data, of

¹³The number of Plant records (with number per page added in brackets) in the printed parish records for Leek are 30 (0.57 per page) for 1634-43, 13 (0.33) for 1644-53, 20 (0.31) for 1654-63, 21 (0.53) for 1664-73, 15 (0.47) for 1674-83, and 19 (0.51) for 1684-93.

¹⁴There are 124 pre-1700 records for Plants in Leek in the 1984 IGI out of a total of 227 for Staffordshire.

the small *secondary* cluster for the Plant name in east Lincolnshire, which is exemplified by Table 22.4.

Addendum 2. It also misses the fact, suggested for example by pre-1650 IGI data, that the *primary* Plant cluster in north Staffordshire may well have been, in general terms, migrating southwards from east Cheshire.

22.2.2 Before the 16th century

Before then, there is for example evidence of the Plant name in east Cheshire by as early as the late 14th century¹⁵, in the persons of Ralph Plont of Macclesfield Forrest (1370), Ranulph Plont of Rainow (1383) and John, son of Thomas Plont of Sutton (1400). This seemingly takes evidence for the Plant homeland back to the times of the Pearl poet who is associated with that locality at that time.

Evidence for a Plant homeland in the North West Midlands hence extends back to the late 14th century. Before then, it seems that there may have been a link between Plants in the North West and South East Midlands. This is suggested by the following evidence for the South East. In 1351, James Plant was charged with carrying away goods from ex-Warren property at Welles with Warham in north Norfolk suggesting an eviction from Warren lands by the Lancastrian affinity following the death of the last Warren earl of Surrey in 1347. Just across the Wash, in east Lincolnshire, a 1344 record shows that John son of Alan Plant of Burgh obtained a license of *alienation in mortmain* for a messuage to the pryor and convent of Bolyngton, which may be the Bollington that is near Bowdon in Cheshire in the North West Midlands (Chapter 19).

22.3 Cultural links of meaning between NW and SE

Returning to the *meaning* of the Plant name, it may be noted that there are two different published methodologies. In a *Dictionary of British Surnames*, the meaning of Plant is deduced from a few records around the South East of England. By contrast, the authoritative Historian, David Hey, notes that the main Plant homeland is in the North West Midlands and this is supported further, albeit with two addenda, by the evidence outlined in the present work. This leads to specific questions for the meaning of the Plant name:-

1. If there were two unrelated groups of Plants, in the South East and North West Midlands, did both groups have similar meaning to their name?
2. If those 13th century Plants in the South East were just a few from the North West, should the meaning be sought in the culture of the North West?
3. If Plants did not arrive in the North West until the mid 14th century, from the South East with the Warrens, was this accompanied by a change of emphasis in the meaning of their name?

We can perhaps reduce these questions to one. Was there a similar level of esteem, or authority, placed in the word *plant* in the South East and the North West Midlands, bearing in mind that *plant* was a component of the noble name Plant(e/a)genet?

Both of the names (or spellings) Plente and Plante coexist in the South East Midlands of England, in Norfolk c1270, providing a link back to Radulphus Plente who was the “Plant(a/e)genet” king’s auxiliary at Oxford in 1219. While they remained earls of Surrey, the Warren ‘Plant(e/a)genets’ held land in Norfolk, for example, and had widespread links which possibly influenced cultural meaning for *plant* — their known links included ones to the North West dating back almost to the earliest times for the known spelling Plaunte in the South East (Chapter 19).

More widely in England, there is an implication of itinerant Justice in the 13th century name Plantefolie, with its meaning ‘an implanter of contrition (or cudgel) of sin’, and this can be placed in

¹⁵W Keith Plant, private communication.

Langland's *Piers Plowman* is unlike the earlier *Château d'amour* of Grosseteste or the contemporary works of the Peal poet. *Piers Plowman* is satirical of Pride as a principal sin in authority while setting store in the *plonte of pees*, in the Tree of Charity (*plonte of Trewe-love*), and in the sowing of cardinal virtues. With contemporary meaning of *plaunten* relating to the planting of virtues it is fitting to consider this in some detail as a backdrop to the perhaps slightly more pertinent works of Grosseteste and the Pearl poet.

For Grosseteste, Peace (*pees* in Middle English) is one of four daughters of a King (=God) and is also found in the final rule of the Prince of Peace after the Last Judgement. The reconciliation of God's four daughters, as a statement of Psalm 84 verse 10, appears both in Grosseteste's early 13th century *Château d'amour* and in Langland's late 14th century *Piers Plowman*:-

Misericordia et veritas obviaverunt sibi; iusticia et pax osculate sunt. [Mercy and Truth are met together; Justice and Peace have kissed each other.]

The order and moral of the two stories is different however. In *Château d'amour*, the reconciliation of the King's four daughters comes before prophecies of Christ and the story culminates with the final rule of the *Prince of Peace*. In *Piers Plowman*, the *pl(a/e)nte of pe(e)s* appears early in the sequence of visions of Will (Passus II) and Peace kisses Justice at the last Judgement before the final coming of the Antichrist.

Early in *Piers Plowman*, in the Vision of the Holy Church, it is stated (Passus II, lines #147-153):-

*For Treuth telleth that love ys triacle to abate synne
And most soverayne salve for soule and for body.
Love is plonte of pees, most precious of vertues,
For hevene holde hit ne myghte, so hevly hit first semede,
Til hit hadde of erthe ygotten hitsilve.
Was never lef uppon lynde lyhtere ther-after,
As when hit hadde of the folde flesch and blode taken.*

These lines from a C-Text version (Huntington MS HM 143^a) progress from heavenly love as a sovereign salve for soul and for body, to the plant of the most precious *vertue* of peace (or of a generative pea) progressing to love on earth, becoming life on land, and taking the form of flesh and blood. Later in the sequence, in the so-called Vision of the Tree of Charity, the whereabouts of Charity are described with statements that include (Passus XIX, lines #9 .. #25-6 .. #101-2):-

*'The tree hatte Trewe-love,' quod he, 'the trinitie hit sette;
..
'Thise thre shorriares,' quod he, 'that bereth up this plonte,
Bytokeneth trewly the Trinite of hevene,
..
'This is a propre plonte,' quod I, 'and priveliche hit bloweth,
And bringeth forth fruyt, folke of alle nacion,*

This refers to the Tree of True Love as a *plonte* and forms part of a charitable doctrine of universal salvation, including that of Saracens and Jews. Without Charity the cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude) will turn wordly and become as vices, such as with a Pope spilling Christian blood, a lord for whom intellect means casting accounts in his own favour and for whom Fortitude is an excuse for exaction, or a king expressing his own will without conscience. The visions come to a climax with the Crucifixion and with the Harrowing of Hell (Passus XXI and XXII), with the four daughters of God reaching their reconciliation and with the four evangelists ploughing to set the seeds of the cardinal virtues. The poem ends with the coming of the Antichrist - though Conscience has called the *foles* (man's flesh represented as horses) into unity, salvation is impossible without contrition^b.

^aThis is the manuscript version used as the primary source by Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall (1967) *Piers Plowman*.

^bD.W.Robertson and Bernard F. Huppé (1951) *Piers Plowman and Scriptural Tradition*, pps 206, 230, and 233.

Table 22.7: Langland's *plontes* of Peace and True Love

a context of Mercy meeting Truth and Peace kissing Justice on Judgement day. For Grosseteste, the reconciliation of these four daughters of a king, including Peace, culminated in the divine rule of the Prince of Peace. This appears as a particular attempt of Grosseteste¹⁶ to reach, in his own times, a wider audience with his so-called *Château d'amour*¹⁷ which is clearly designed to provide a simple outline of Christian theology, apparently to an audience of knightly retainers and officials in a great household. There is also literary evidence in the work of William Langland, who is associated with Shropshire, near the North West Plant homeland as well as with London in the South East. Following the Black Death, even reference to the *plontes of pees* and *Trewe-love* followed by Justice kissing Peace, as for Grosseteste, could not stave off, for Langland, Will's vision of the coming of the Antichrist (Table 22.7).

Such literary evidence provides a framework for seeking some scheme of consistency in meaning, albeit perhaps with some shift in emphasis in different cultural environments. Grosseteste had described the lord's light as *lux suprema* and this engendered spirits in the flesh (*spiritualis irradiato*). Grosseteste treated this spirit as a sort of fifth element in matter. Plants of Peace and True-Love might hence be seen as the Lord's planted, or engendered, spirits. The Latin word *spiritus* means breath or spirit and, though Grosseteste evidently regarded spirit as 'bodily light', there may have been relatively little distinction made at that time, before modern scientific discoveries, between spirit as 'corporeal light', as a sort of fifth element in flesh, or as breath as the element of ether in fragrance or wind.

As described in earlier Chapters, the evidence suggests a *persistent* general sense to Plant as an 'establisher child' and there is particular reason to suppose early sense in terms of the soul with its mediating spirits in the flesh rather than just as a physically active young person in flesh. It seems that there is initially, for the context of the Plant name, a particular emphasis on spirits planted by the lord, as indicated further in the following extract from Langland's *Piers Plowman* (Table 22.7):-

This tre hatte Trewe-love ... the trinitie .. that bereth up this plonte bytokeneth the Trinitie of hevene [described as the Power of god the father (Potencia-dei-patris), his Wisdom (Sapencia-dei-patris) and the breath of the Holy Ghost (Spiritus Sanctus)] ... This is a propre plonte .. and priveliche hit bloweth ..

This description of a 'proper plant' as a species supported by a Powerful and Wise god with Holy Ghost blowing it privilege can be considered to have arisen, near the Plant homeland, with a 'Plantagenet' sense of divine influence as embodied in creation and the life force.

To summarise, the meaning of the Plant name can be taken to be, most topically, an '*implant(er) of the lord's spirit or vertue*' initially in an ethos, it seems, that was close to the influence of the Warren 'Plant(e/a)genets'. Such a contention will be considered further in a later Chapter in conjunction with evidence from the works (c1360-90) of the Pearl poet of the NW Midlands Plant homeland.

¹⁶R.W.Southern (1992) *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*, Second Edition, pps 80-2. There are reports of a friendship of Grosseteste with Henry III during the years of the young king's minority (1216-23) prior to Grosseteste's pre-eminence at Oxford (c1225-35). Grosseteste's teachings were evidently studied and developed in England by, in particular, Roger Bacon (c1214-92) at Oxford and Paris and, later, by John Wycliffe (c1330-84).

¹⁷R.W.Southern (1992) *ibid*, pps 225-30. Lines #201-484 of Grosseteste's *Château d'amour* are an allegory of a King (= God) with a Son and four daughters Mercy, Truth, Justice and Peace, which is a symbolism that was widely popular in the 13th century. Mercy and Peace were held to be more forgiving of sinners than Truth and Justice. Lines #483-518 are concerned with prophecies about the coming of Christ, particularly that of Isaiah 9:6 where the attributes of the Son are listed as 'Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, Father of the Age to come, Prince of Peace', with each attribute then being considered in turn. Grosseteste's lines #1493-1768 explain the 'Prince of Peace' as the final peace under the rule of Christ following the last Judgement.