

## Chapter 31

# The Plant bloodline: myth and fact

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### PUTTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ABOUT FICTIONAL ORIGINS FOR THE PLANT SURNAME

There is evidence that the Plants had a cultural connection to the Plantagenets though this is less well known than a modern fiction about a blood-link to Plantard.

### 31.1 The Aquitainian tradition of the Plant surname

A line of influence can be traced through the names Plantevelue and Plante Genest, starting in Aquitaine in France and leading on to the Plant surname in England.

After Bernard *Plantevelue*'s 9th century founding of the Duchy of Aquitaine, it passed to William I of Poitiers in 951 and, by 1086-1126, to the troubadour grandfather of Eleanor of Aquitaine. The love poetry of William IX, duke of Aquitaine (1086-1126) was blasphemous, erotic, amoral and sensitive as in: "*To refresh my heart in her/ To renew my flesh in her/ So that I shall never grow old*". His granddaughter, Eleanor, married Geoffrey Plante Genest's son, king Henry II of England, and their sons, including Richard I and king John, continued the troubadour tradition of 'courtly love'.

The name Plantevelue means 'hairy shoot' and the nickname *Plante Genest* means 'sprig of broom' which is an instance of a hairy shoot. This can be set in the troubadour context of 'renewal' by a fresh shoot of the family tree. Even by the times of Desiderius Erasmus (d 1536) 'renewal' was still associated with the word *plante* (meaning 'shoot'): "*By this polecye nature hath provided in our chylderne and newewes we may be renewed and florysh fresh agayne ... she thus maketh one thyng to yssue out of an other (lyke as a yonge plante which is cut off, from ye tree springeth freshly vp)*".

Geoffrey *Plante Genest*, count of Anjou and Maine was the father of king Henry II of England and, amongst others, Hamelin, Warren earl of Surrey – it is near Hamelin's de Warenne descendants that the subsequent English Plant surname is found. In 1200, king John married Isabella of Angouleme in Aquitaine who subsequently married Hugh de Lusignan, the most prominent baron of Aquitaine. In 1247, John de Warenne married Alice Lusignan (de Brien) and English resentments of favouritism towards the 'foreign' Lusignans led on to the Baron's revolt in England, leading to the capture of king Henry III at Lewes (1264), though the king was freed by John de Warenne at Evesham (1265).

There is evidence that the name *Plante Genest* (hence Plantagenet) was used for Geoffrey by the 1160s; but, evidence for subsequent use of the name is weak until the mid 15th century. A rare early mention is in the Close Rolls (1266): this refers to Galfrido *Plauntegenet*, serjent at arms, Wodestock, with garderoode duties to the king. Also at Woodstock, with duties to the royal palace, there is the first evidence for the spelling *Plente* which is found in 1219 just after the times of Henry II's son, the lecherous king John; and this spelling can be associated with the meaning 'abundance' or 'fertile'.

The name spelling *Plante* occurs in England by 1262. In modern France, this spelling is clustered around Aquitaine. Though ‘Plant like’ names may have arrived in England earlier, an Aquitanian influence could relate to possibilities of such names arriving in the times of the Angevin Empire, which comprised three blocks: Anglo-Norman; Angevin; and Aquitanian. There is particular reason to suppose an influence on the formation of the Plant surname in England from Geoffrey Plante Genest’s nickname, which fathered the subsequent royal surname, Plantagenet, as well as evidently influencing more immediately the formation of such names as Plant.

The Plant surname is found in close proximity to various de Warenne lands around England until the mid 14th century; this is when the Plants settled in their principal homeland of east Cheshire which is also where the disinherited de Warenne family settled. It seems likely that there was an influence from the Plante Genest nickname on the English Plant surname, though this may have just been through the popularity around de Warenne lands of the *Plante Genest* metaphor for renewing life’s origins. The possibility of a Welsh influence on the name may also be considered. There was an early Welsh influence on the de Warennes through a 1225 marriage to Maud (Matilda) Marshall of Pembroke; and the subsequent homeland of the de Warennes, along with that of the Plants, was near Wales. In Welsh, plant means children and, in Old Irish, cland means family: both cland and plant are said to come from an early adoption of the Latin word *planta*. Phonetically similar words in modern English are clan and plant, though we now use other words for life’s foundations: land; sole; sprig; scion; and child. Sprig and scion have both human and vegetable meanings, which is appropriate to a medieval view of life’s origins as shoots from the land (man’s vegetable soul) as well as offshoots of the Lord in His kingdom (intellective soul). Man’s vegetable soul can be traced back to primitive beliefs about human life’s emergence from the land.

The DNA evidence is in keeping with the Welsh. Though the meaning may have been *slightly* different in the medieval Welsh Marches and beyond, the meaning of Plant was probably ‘shoot’ or ‘offspring’ and the DNA evidence shows that they were the offspring of a single family. But whose? That the first Plants had a cultural connection to the *Plante Genest* name is better evidenced than the modern myth of a claimed blood-link of the name *Planta* to Plantard.

## 31.2 Modern myth and the fictional Plant bloodline

A popular and controversial myth is circulating about the origins of the Plant bloodline. The plot of the international bestseller, the 2004 book *The Da Vinci Code* (DVC), by Dan Brown, is derived from the pseudo-history contained in the 1982 book *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (commonly abbreviated to HBHG) which was written by the British authors Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln. In turn, much of the plot of HBHG was inspired by the so-called Dossier secrets of the Priory of Sion, which were deposited in 1967 in the National Library of France at Paris. These secrets alleged that living descendants of the Merovingian kings were the Plantard family, with a branch in England called *Planta*.

In the Dossier secrets, the Plantard family was said to include Bernard *Planta-Pilus* (Planteveleu) and it was said to have descended from the Merovingian king Dagobert II. The family is said to have been exiled to Brittany after a failed uprising against Louis II in 881 such that, by the late 9th century, Merovingian blood had flowed into both Aquitaine (now Western France) and Brittany (now NW France). It is true that evidence exists for the Plantard family in Brittany as well for the spelling *Plante* in Brittany in the 16th to 19th centuries. However, most academics consider that the Dossier’s genealogy for Plantard and *Planta* is an elaborate hoax.

It was claimed in the Dossier secrets that an early Grand Master of the guardians of the secrets was married to a de Warenne relative of the Plantagenets. It is the de Warennes in particular who are associated with the English Plant family; and, it was alleged that the fifth Grand Master (1336-51) of the Priory of Sion was Jeanne de Barre (1295-1361), who was Edward I’s grand-daughter and Edward II’s niece, and who was betrothed to the last de Warenne earl of Surrey in 1306. The authors of HBHG went further and made an inept family link between the Plantard genealogy and

the Plantagenets.

The originating Dossier secrets of Merovingian descent have been associated, by many, with right-wing French nationalism. For the benefit of an English audience, this was embellished with a heresy of Christian notions by the authors of HBHG and in the further book *The Messianic Legacy*. Though repudiated by Pierre Plantard (1920-2000) of the Priory of Sion, Plantard descent from the Merovingian kings was elaborated in the book HBHG such that it had stemmed from a covered-up marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. A still wider audience has now been reached with Dan Brown's fiction (DVC), which emphasises the descent to Plantard of the 'sacred feminine' of Jesus' apostle of the apostles, Mary Magdalene.

The HBHG link from Mary Magdalene to the Merovingian kings has provoked particular controversy, though the associated aspect of the 'sacred feminine' in the DVC has attracted some serious attention from female academics in America for example. The link from the Merovingian kings to the Plantard family is also usually treated with extreme scepticism. This descent is claimed, in the Dossier secrets, to be through the son Sigisbert of the last Merovingian king Dagobert II. The HBHG states:

There is no question that Sigisbert existed and that he was Dagobert's heir. According to all sources other than the 'Priuré documents', however, it is unclear what happened to him ... There is no record of Sigisbert's death. Nor is there any record - apart from the evidence in the 'Priuré documents' - of his survival ...

The validity of the claimed Merovingian-Plantard link is even less certain than the HBHG suggests: there is even some dispute about whether this Sigisbert existed at all. The tradition for his existence comes from a record of the tenth-century life of St Arbogast, where it states that Dagobert II married Mathildis and had by her a son Sigisbert; however this source has been questioned as being too late and it has been argued that there could be a confusion with Dagobert I, his wife Nanthildis and son Sigebert. In any event, the tradition is that Sigisbert is the son of Dagobert II and his wife Mathildis, not of his subsequent wife Giselle de Razes; it is from the latter that it is claimed, in the 'secret Priory documents', that the title of the counts of Razes descended through a so-called Plantard family.

An association has been made for Plantard with the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53:2: *For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground*. However, it should be noted that the early meaning of plant is simply 'shoot' and the metaphorical association of 'shoot' or 'offshoot' with 'offspring' is widespread. This metaphorical association is more likely the basis of the early meaning of the surname Plant, rather than there being any allusion to a specifically divine descent for the name Plant or Plantard.

### 31.3 Mary Magdalen down the ages: sacred mother?

For many years, I have been trying to concentrate on the true facts of the origins of the Plant name; and, to this end, I have been trying largely to ignore the myths of the so-called Razes genealogy. However, as this fiction is now more widely known than the academically established facts, I feel obliged to make some comment. I apologise wholeheartedly if the following fiction, not of my making, offends anyone's beliefs.

Dan Brown's fiction *The Da Vinci code* is based on the pseudo-history of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* in which a bloodline descends from Mary Magdalen through the Merovingian kings, the French Plantards, and the English Planta and Plantagenet families. The first link in this chain is particularly controversial; and, to be fair, it is rather more discussed than stated unequivocally in both of the above books. Nonetheless, the possibility, or lack of it, that the Magdalen had a child has attracted some serious debate. For example, in this new age of political correctness, it has been suggested that the harlotisation of Mary Magdalen by the early church fathers was a deliberate

attempt to discredit the role of women in the church; many feel that a more respectful myth for her is overdue. Dan Brown, in this connection, refers often to the ‘sacred feminine’.

In the 1993 book *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*, Susan Haskins comments:

Rabbis were often, if not usually married, so it has often been suggested that Christ must also have been, although there is nothing in the Gospels to suggest this. We have no evidence of a child and the Merovingian link is very unlikely.

In the Nag Hammadi codices, which were discovered in Egypt in 1947, the early Christian Gospel of Phillip 63.34-35 states:

The Saviour loved Mary Magdalen more than the disciples, and kissed her on the mouth often.

However, the same Gospel had stated earlier:

The promise comes from the mouth, for the Word has come from there and has been nourished from the mouth and become perfect. The perfect conceive through a kiss and give birth. Because of this we also kiss one another. We receive conception from the grace which we have among us.

There is some confusion here in connection with the so-called “Creation is Birth” metaphor, whereby *conceive* could be related to physically giving birth, such as is literally believed by many for the Virgin mother of Christ; or, *conception* can be related metaphorically to that of mental creativity. Ester de Boer explains this in her 1996 book *Mary Magdalen: Beyond the Myth* with:

Mary Magdalen is made fruitful through the grace which is in Christ. Receiving his grace makes her born again.

Deidre Good, in Dan Burnstein’s 2004 book *Secrets of the Code*, adds:

In both the *Second* and the *Third Apocalypse of James*, Jesus and James kiss and embrace each other as an indication of their special relationship. In the so-called *Secret Gospel of Mark*, Jesus reveals the mysteries of the kingdom of God to a young man he loves. In the fourth-century Coptic text *Pistis Sophia*, Philip, John, James, and Matthew, along with Mariamme (Mary), are all spoken of as beloved by Jesus. This probably indicates their special capacity for spiritual insight.

In the better known Gospels, which were included in the Roman canonical Bible, Mary Magdalen is apostle to the apostles in as much as she brought word of Christ’s resurrection to the disciples. Hence, as well as conjectures about her being the holy chalice of a blood-line, she has been seen as a source of wisdom. Diane Apostolis-Cappadone of the Centre for Muslim-Christian understanding at Georgetown University considers that the *Santa Maria Sopra Minerva* church in Rome was so-named because of a connection between Mary Magdalen and Minerva as goddesses of wisdom.

Mary Magdalen’s greatest fame has been as a reformed prostitute and this dates back to Pope Gregory the Great, who declared in a sermon in 591:

She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary (of Bethany), we believe to be Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark.

There was then a presumption that the named sinful woman was a prostitute, though her seven devils could have implied a passing mental illness. This conflation of references to (?different) Marys was officially rescinded by the Roman Catholic Church in 1969, so that the Magdalen has lost this aspect of her status as Christianity’s most beloved penitent. A different story was current for the Magdalen in the different times of the first evidence for the Plant name however.

The main empire of Geoffrey Plante Genest, count of Anjou, forefather of the English Plantagenet kings, was the region that is now western France. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, huge pilgrimages grew around the more famous shrines: pilgrims flocked from all over France to touch the tomb of Mary Magdalen in the French town of Vézelay in Burgundy. Some came from as far as England. As Susan Haskins explains in *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*, an excuse for not exposing the remains appears in a late twelfth-century manuscript which told of an occasion when the abbot of Vézelay had decided to remove the Magdalen's relics from the little crypt where they had been found to put them in a precious reliquary. The church had suddenly been plunged into darkness and all those present had suffered. It had henceforth been decided to relinquish all ideas of opening the holy tomb. By the thirteenth century a confusing array of stories existed of how the Magdalen's body had arrived in Provence (SE France) where she had been buried between the years 882 to 884. This has been elaborated into tales of the Black Virgin and the arrival of a bloodline from Mary Magdalen in France.

Most recently, *fiction* has dwelt on a contentious link through the bloodline of the Merovingian kings to the names Plantard, Plantevelue, Plantagenet, and Planta in France and England. Turning more to fact, it seems that the red rose of the Plant blazon relates to the mid-fourteenth-century submission of the de Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest to their distant Lancastrian cousins. The symbolism of the gold rose of young Edward I and the red rose of his brother Edmund of Lancaster, in the mid-thirteenth century, can be debated and it may have related to an earlier Christian symbolism.

Roses were related to a variety of female saints, but Mary Magdalen was not one of them. Dan Brown suggests in his fiction that the rose has always been the premier signal of female sexuality. However, Diane Appostolos-Cappadona notes that the rose was the flower sacred to Venus or Aphrodite who was concerned with romantic love, not just sexual. The rose became a symbol of Mary the Mother's role in human salvation. For early and medieval Christians, there were only four colours of rose: white signified innocent or pure love; pink, first love; red, true love; and yellow spurned love. Some early illustrations of the thirteenth-century epic poem *Roman de la Rose* included sexual and romantic as well as religious scenes, a mix that is often called 'courtly love'; and, such love was a feature of early Plantagenet times: this may have helped to inspire the gold rose of Edward I and the red rose of his brother Edmund of Lancaster, with the latter passing into the Plant blazon.

### 31.4 Debunking the family link between Plantagenet and Plantard

The earliest evidence for the Plant surname in England is found in proximity to the de Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest (1113-51), who was the eldest son of Fulk V, count of Anjou. Fulk V (1092-1143) had married the only daughter of Elias, count of Maine in 1109, thereby uniting Anjou and Maine; but Geoffrey Plante Genest's mother, Eremburge died in 1126; and his subsequent step-mother, Mélisande, married Fulk V in 1129. It is Mélisande who provides the supposed family link to Plantard in the pseudo-history of the book *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (HBHG).

The book HBHG draws heavily on the so-called Razes genealogy of Henri Lobineau, which includes Hughes de Plantard and which ends with Badouin (d 1118), king of Jerusalem as the brother of Godfroi de Bouillon. However, the authors of the HBHG then make a particularly inept family link to "the Plantagenet family", as indicated in the following extract from HBHG:

In 1131, he (Fulk V) married Godfroi de Bouillon's niece, the legendary Melusine, and became King of Jerusalem. According to the 'Prieuré documents', the lords of Anjou - the Plantagenet family - were thus allied to the Merovingian bloodline.

Though there is a linkage through successive kings of Jerusalem, the statement that this involved a niece of Godfroi is erroneous. Godfroi, who became king of Jerusalem in 1099, was succeeded

by his brother Baudoin; but this Baldwin did not father Melusine who married Fulk V. The HBHG linkage is incorrect in two ways:

- it was Mélisande, not Melusine, who married Fulk V; and,
- Mélisande was the daughter of king Baldwin II, not Baldwin I; Baldwin II was a distant cousin<sup>1</sup> of Baldwin I; Mélisande was hence only a distant relative of Godfroi and she became the step-mother of Geoffrey Plante Genest.

The “happy go lucky” approach of the HBHG, which includes only partial truths, can be contrasted with the more meticulous work of serious historians who have scrutinised the contemporary records for Geoffrey Plante Genest and his relatives. For a better appraisal of the evidence, a primary source is the *Chronicles of the Counts of Anjou*, which is the work of several writers including Thomas of Loches, a chaplain of Count Fulk V; and, this work was given its final form in the 1160s by John, a monk of Marmoutier Abbey. A paraphrase of the entries for the years 1128 and 1129 reads:

**1128.** While Fulk was ruling Anjou, Touraine and the county of Maine in prosperity, King Baldwin II of Jerusalem sent envoys who were to consult prudent men and then to persuade a suitable man to wed his daughter and accept the kingdom of Jerusalem. On the advice of King Louis VI of France, the bishops and many distinguished men, they chose Fulk V of Anjou who had lost his wife.

**1129.** Crossing the sea with a large force, Fulk consummated his marriage with the King’s daughter and became King of Jerusalem in 1129.

As already mentioned, the HBHG refers to Melusine, not Mélisande; but Melusine appears in a quite different story from this one about Fulk V and his marriage to Baldwin’s daughter Mélisande. The story of Melusine is by Gerald of Wales who penned hostile and vindictive satire on the fate which overcame the sinful ruler, with particular reference to Geoffrey Plante Genest’s son Henry II. Fuller details are given in, for example, *The Plantagenet Chronicles*, General Editor: Elizabeth Hallam (Tiger Books, 1995):

In Gerald’s story, an early count of Anjou returned from a journey with a woman, Melusine, famous for her beauty, whom he married. There were many strange things about her, the most shocking of which was that she was always absent from Mass at the consecration of the Host. Her true identity was discovered when her husband forced her to stay and see the body of Christ - a sight no evil spirit could contemplate. Melusine flew screaming out of the window and was never seen again. She left behind two sons, from whom the later counts were descended.

This story was associated with the saying “*From the Devil they came and to the Devil they will return*”; this saying was known to king Richard I who joked about the story.

Notwithstanding its shortcomings of credibility, the HBHG continues undaunted with:

The ‘Prieuré documents’ furnished us with the most plausible - perhaps, indeed, the first plausible - genealogy of Godfroi de Bouillon that has yet come to light ... it convincingly bridged a number of perplexing historical gaps. According to the genealogy of the ‘Prieuré documents’, Godfroi de Bouillon - by virtue of his great-grandmother, who married Hughes de Plantard in 1009 - was a lineal descendant of the Plantard family. In other words Godfroi was of Merovingian blood. ... In the ninth century the bloodline of Guillem de Gellone had culminated in the first dukes of Aquitaine. It also became aligned with the ducal house of Brittany. And in the tenth century a certain Hugues de Plantard - nicknamed ‘Long Nose’ and a descendant of the bloodline of

<sup>1</sup><http://genforum.genealogy.com/plantagenet/messages/1285.html>

both Dagobert II and Guillem de Gellone - became the father of Eustache, first count of Boulogne. Eustache's grandson was Godfroi de Bouillon, Duke of Lorraine and conqueror of Jerusalem.

Snippets of this are true; for example, it is generally accepted that Bernard Plantevelu of Aquitaine was a descendant of Guillem de Gellone<sup>2</sup>; but, as the authors of HBHG themselves say, their account controversially bridges "a number of perplexing historical gaps".

There is quite direct evidence to link the Plant surname in England to the de Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest, though caution dictates that the similarity of the Plant and Plante Genest names could well stem from a cultural rather than a genetic connection. On the other hand, the HBHG invokes a long and tenuous family route to link an English bloodline Planta in England with Plantard in France and, in turn, with the Plantagenet family. This latter tenuous linkage of family connections is rightly debunked by serious academics, though perhaps the HBHG could be getting a *little* closer to the mark when it states: "*And the name Plantagenet might even have been intended to echo the name 'Plant-Ard' or Plantard*". Even with this, the book seems to be missing the point however. It is specifically the name Plantevelu that may have come from the same culture as the later name Plante Genest (hence Plantagenet)<sup>3</sup>; but, that involves points of onomastics, semantics, and philosophy; and that is not the stuff of popular fiction.

### 31.5 Putting the record straight

In the Razes genealogy, an English blood line Planta is claimed to have originated in the early tenth century:

In this debunked genealogy of Henri Lobineau of the Dossier secrets, it is claimed that a daughter of the Carolingian king Charles le Chauve married Bernard Plantevelu's nephew, Sigisbert VI Plantard, who became known as Prince Ursus before his rebellion and exile to Brittany in 881AD. Sigisbert's son, Guillaume II Plantard, is then said to have sought refuge in England in 914AD to escape Viking raids and to have established an English blood-line called Planta.

For this same Plantard family, there is also claimed to be a link to the Plantagenet kings of England:

The debunked genealogy claims that, from the Merovingian blood line of Dagobert II, through his son Sigisbert IV, came Godfroi de Bouillon, who captured Jerusalem in 1099 and formed the Knights Templars, as well as the Prieuré de Sion. It is claimed that a niece, Melusine, of Godfroi (1061-1100) married Fulques V, count of Anjou whose son, Geoffrey Plante Genest, fathered the Plantagenet kings of England.

Turning to more serious academic research, I know of no evidence for the Plant family name from as early as the 10th century in England. On the other hand, the DNA evidence indicates that the Plant family descends from a single male-line ancestor and that it was spreading around England from as early as the 13th century after the accession to the English throne in 1154 of Geoffrey Plante Genest's son, Henry II. What can be said with some caution is that, though there is as yet no evidence for a male-line genetic connection, there is some evidence for an association dating back to the 13th century between the English Plant family and the Plantagenets. I have published this in, for example, the academic journal *Nomina*<sup>4</sup>. Though Plantagenet was not used as a royal surname until the mid-15th century, there were several similar names in proximity to Geoffrey Plante Genest's

<sup>2</sup>Nathaniel L Taylor (1997) in *The American Genealogist*, 72 pp. 203-221; see also J S Plant (2003) *Plantevelu and the meaning of Plant* in *Roots and Branches*, 26, pp. 23-41.

<sup>3</sup>John S Plant (2005) *Nomina*, 28, pp. 115-133, esp. pp. 123-24.

<sup>4</sup>John S Plant (2005), *Modern methods and a Controversial Surname: Plant*, *Nomina*, vol. 28, pp. 115-133.

illegitimate offspring, the de Warennes; and these names provide the real evidence for the origins of the English Plant family surname as well as that of the royal Plantagenets.

The real evidence is rather more fragmentary than the usual stuff of popular fiction and pseudo-history. Poetic licence could turn it into a beguiling spectacle; but, I shall stick to a cold description of the facts. The evidence indicates that the Plant surname was associated with the de Warenne descendants of Geffrey Plante Genest; and, I shall outline this evidence in the next few paragraphs.

In 1164, Geffrey Plante Genest's illegitimate son, Hamelin (1130-1202), married Isabel de Warenne and thereby acquired the title of the earldom of Surrey, becoming the 5th earl. Their son and heir William de Warenne (1166-1240), married Maud (Matilda) Marshall of Pembroke in 1225 who was the widow of Hugh le Bigod, earl of Norfolk, whose son and heir had a butler and *serjent* who was called Roger Planteng' or Plantyn or Plantin in Norfolk records (1254-68). Early spellings of the Plant name occur nearby: Plente (1272-84) and Plauntes (1275) in Norfolk; Plante in Cambridgeshire (1279); and, de Plantes in Huntingdonshire (1282).

The Plant name is found near *de Warenne* lands in Sussex, Somerset, north Wales, north Norfolk, and east Cheshire. The many proximities between the early Plant family and de Warenne lands can be taken to be more than just a meaningless coincidence. The proximities may be outlined more fully as follows. In c.1280, 'Robert Plonte of Saltforde, once bailif of Marsfelde' is mentioned in records for Bath: Maresfield adjoins the *de Warenne* honour of Lewes in Sussex, and Saltford adjoins the *de Warenne* manor of Charlton in Somerset. In the late-thirteenth-century Welsh Wars, William's son and heir, John *de Warenne* (1231-1305), who had become the 7th earl in infancy, was assigned responsibility for the commissariat; and, in 1301, Richard Plant was granted a license to dig coal at Eweloe, near the *de Warenne* land of Bromfield and Yale near Chester. The 8th and last *de Warenne* earl, grandson of the 7th earl, died in 1347 without legitimate heirs, and his illegitimate son, Sir Edward *de Warren*, settled at Poynton in east Cheshire. There is a 1352 complaint about the removal of goods by James Plant and thirty others from the erstwhile *de Warenne* hundred of Gallow and Brothecross in north Norfolk; these thirty-one had twenty-six different surnames, seven of which subsequently appear around Macclesfield manor adjoining the new *de Warenne* seat at Poynton: Plont; Halle; Kent; Knyght; Lovell; Nichol; and Bataille or Batiller.

It could be speculated, for example, that the Plants were the illegitimate offspring of the *de Warenne* family; but that would be entering the realms of fantasy. With academic discipline, what can be said is:

- the meaning of Plant was probably 'offspring';
- there is an indication of illegitimacy in their heraldic blazon;
- the DNA evidence shows that they are a single family down the male line;
- an early Plant, Robert Plonte of Saltforde, had been the bailiff of Maresfield, a title which places him in the 'franklin class' of status which would have brought him into contact with a local major land-holder; and,
- the early Plants are found in geographical proximity to the de Warennes who descended from Plante Genest.

With full academic discipline, it might be surmised that there could have been a cultural influence from the name Plante Genest on the subsequent surname of the Plant offspring of a single family; but that does not, of course, prove that the Plants were the de Warennes' lesser offspring. There was a fashion for names of philandering; and, Plante Genest is an instance of a 'hairy shoot', whilst the early meaning of Planta or Plant is a shoot, offshoot, or offspring. Both 'hairy shoot' and 'offshoot' can be associated with a metaphor of life's renewal.

### 31.5.1 The Plants in proximity to the de Warennes

The evidence is consistent with an early de Warenne connection, though there is no evidence of a genetic connection between this nobility and the Plants. There is no evidence that their connection to Plante Genest was through male-line descent, though the Plant family was found in proximity to de Warenne lands and they held a title of moderate status, as might be expected for a lesser descendant of a major landholder.

Robert Plonte had been the bailiff of Maresfield. The Bailiff or Bailey or sergeant was a free man of importance as the mouthpiece of the lord by whom he was appointed<sup>5</sup>. Surviving evidence at Droxford shows that he received £6 per annum as compared with the ploughman's 8s. and the shepherd's 4s. He lived in the manor-house at the lord's expense and was the general supervisor of agricultural policy. It was his duty to see that the services due were not evaded or ill-performed and to direct and determine men's work<sup>6</sup>. Originally meaning 'carrier', later 'manager, administrator', the term was also used of the public administrator of a district, the chief officer of a hundred or of an officer of justice under a sheriff, a warrant officer, pursuivant and a catchpoll (*i.e.* tax collector).

We may also consider the Plant blazon. This indicates illegitimate cadetship with a subsequent allegiance to the red rose of the Lancastrians. The de Warennes themselves were in illegitimate cadetship to royalty, and they succumbed to their distant Lancastrian cousins after having feuded with them c.1320. It seems likely that the Plants reflected that same cultural tradition, though their blazon does not reveal their status within the de Warenne setting. The status of the de Warennes themselves was much reduced after the mid-fourteenth century, apart from a line descending from the 8th earl's uncle which is said to have removed to Ireland and then to France.

### 31.5.2 Hamelin de Warenne, son of Geoffrey Plante Genest

As outlined above, there is circumstantial evidence of a link between the Plant surname and the de Warennes. That there was also a link between the de Warenne progenitor, Hamelin, and Geoffrey Plante Genest has the authority of the *Complete Peerage*, XXI/1 pp. 499-500, where an article begins with:

V. 1164 Hammel illegit s. of Geoffrey V, styled 'Plantagenet'(b) Count of Anjou, Touraine and Maine, sometime Duke of Normandy, by an unknown woman, held lands in Touraine, presumably the gift of his half-br. Henry II, and appears to have been styled vicomte of Touraine(c). He became Earl of Surrey in consequence of his marriage to the Countess Isabel in 1164;(d) in which year he attended the Council of Northampton.(e)

...

The footnotes (b), (c), (d), (e) ... give fuller references: footnote (b) refers to an earlier article in the same volume which details how Geoffrey's nickname was initially spelled *Plante Genest* or *Plantegenest*. The usual explanation of this nickname is that Geoffrey wore a sprig of broom in his cap, though the significance of this sprig or shoot is not elaborated.

The sprig of broom is hairy, and I have conjectured<sup>7</sup> that it may relate to the earlier name Plantevelue which means 'hairy shoot'. A cultural connection between the names Plantevelu and Plantagenet seems more likely than the fiction that is currently circulating that the name Plantard led on to the Plantagenet family name.

The evidence that Hamelin de Warren was Geoffrey Plante Genest's son comes partly from the expression "*Hamelinus Comes de Warren Regis Henrici Frater*" (*i.e.* Count Hamelin de Warren brother of King Henry), which appears in contemporary acta, according to Count Raoul de Warren<sup>8</sup> though he does not specify whether these are acta of the Privy Council of Henry, Richard, or John.

<sup>5</sup>P.H.Reaney, *The Origin of English Surnames*, (London, 1967), p. 160.

<sup>6</sup>H.S.Bennett, *Life on the English Manor*, (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 162-6.

<sup>7</sup>John S Plant (2005) *Nomina*, vol. 28, pp. 115-133.

<sup>8</sup><http://genforum.genealogy.com/plantagenet/messages/1306.html>

## 31.6 A precursor to Plant: Plante Genest and the counts of Anjou

Rather than being associated with the royal Plantagenets, diligent modern research shows that the first Plants were in proximity to the de Warenne descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest, the forefather of the royal Plantagenets. What can be said with caution is that the Plant surname may have originated with a cultural influence from the famous nickname, Plante Genest, though there is (as yet) no proof that the Plants were directly descended from him.

To look towards the future, we may consider an optimistic prospect for further Y-DNA testing. If a Y-DNA signature could be secured for the Plantagenets, or their male-line forebears, it could be compared with that of the Plants: this would help to determine whether the Plants could have been male-line descendants of Geoffrey Plante Genest. It is hence relevant to consider the descent of Geoffrey Plante Genest from his forebears, the eleventh century counts of Anjou. This may be relevant to an ongoing line of enquiry to see how widely tentatively supposed male-line descendants share the same Y-chromosome.

### 31.6.1 The legendary Angevin ancestry of Geoffrey Plante Genest

The counts of Anjou rose from inauspicious beginnings as soldiers on the frontier between Brittany and Anjou where they were recruited by Charles the Bald (840-877) of France to help defend the West of his lands around Paris against incursions by Vikings. There is debated evidence<sup>9</sup>, based on the 12th century document *Gesta Consulum*, which suggests that the beginnings of the male-line of the first Angevin counts was in the persons of Tortulfus and his son Tertullus, father of Ingelgerius.

An early historian of the house of Anjou, Count Fulk Rechin (1068-1109) admitted that he knew nothing of the first three of his line: Ingelgar; his son Fulk the Red; and Fulk the Good who ruled from 941 to 960. Chronicles survive from those times onwards, which suggest that the fortunes of the house of Anjou were founded on the prowess of Ingelgar, a semi-legendary soldier of fortune who carved out an estate for himself in the Loire valley. His son, Fulk the Red, built on these foundations and became count of Anjou by 941. The *Chronicles of the Counts of Anjou*, which was given its final form in the 1160s by John, a monk of Marmoutier Abbey, tells legendary tales of Fulk the Red's descendants, beginning with children of Ingelgar's grandson, Fulk the Good (941-960) under whom the region enjoyed a time of tranquil prosperity.

Fulk the Good had three sons. Geoffrey, the eldest, became count of Anjou; while the second, Guy, became bishop of Le Puy. Drogo the youngest and Fulk's favourite was educated in literature and the liberal arts and, through the kindness of king Hugh Capet of France, he succeeded his brother as bishop of Le Puy.

Fulk the Good's eldest son, Geoffrey, was known as Greygown after a witness to a contest picked him out at the French court. The miller, who had been summoned by the king for this express purpose, said to the king and the rest of those assembled, 'This man, who wears a grey tunic, restored our honour when he slew the Dane and struck fear into their army'. In a single-handed contest Geoffrey Greygown had defeated Ethelulf the Dane, a Goliath-like figure. The *Chronicles of the Counts of Anjou* describe Geoffrey as 'stout hearted and strong and most successful in battle'; he was count of Anjou from 960 until his death in 987.

Geoffrey Greygown was succeeded by his son Count Maurice who was 'wise, virtuous and peace-loving and who ruled in peace more as a result of wisdom than of fighting battles'. On his death in 987 his lands went to his son Fulk Nerra who, although only about 17 years old, had already proved himself as a valiant soldier.

Fulk Nerra (972-1040), by turns a brutal monster and a pious pilgrim, was count of Anjou from 987 to 1040. He started his reign by seizing Chateaudun, to secure himself against his neighbours. In 992, after winning the battle of Conquereuil against the Bretons, he pillaged and devastated the

<sup>9</sup>Bernard S. Bachrach, Introduction to *State-Building in Medieval France: Studies in Early Angevin History*, (Great Yarmouth, 1995).

area. He built many castles in Anjou, earning a reputation as an innovative strategist. He burned his first wife for infidelity, though he also founded two abbeys and went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times (1002-3, c.1008, 1039). Fulk's wife gave birth to Geoffrey Martel and a daughter Adela.

Geoffrey Martel I, count of Anjou (1040-1060), is described by the *Chronicles of the Counts of Anjou* as 'bolder than all the rest of his family'. In 1044 he took Tours and the county of Touraine, using the ring of castles his father had built around them as jumping-off points. He was seized by an unexpected illness, an incurable sickness which grew worse from day to day, and he suffered right up to his death dying in great pain amidst his family.

Geoffrey Martel I had no sons of his own, so he left his lands to his nephews; leaving Anjou and Saintonge to Geoffrey the Bearded, and Touraine and Château-Landon to Fulk Rechin.

### 31.6.2 The male-line forebears of Geoffrey Plante Genest

The mother of Fulk Rechin was Ermengarde (Blanche) d'Anjou (c.1018-76) and his father was Geoffrey II "Ferreol" de Château-Landon, Count of Gatinais (c.1004-c.1044). Here begins the link to the male-line ancestry of Geoffrey Plante Genest.

The title Count of Anjou came into the paternal ancestral line of Plante Genest through Ermengarde, the daughter of Fulk Nerra. The paternal ancestry of her husband, Geoffrey Ferreol, is somewhat contentious<sup>10</sup>. It has been said to descend from the Viscounts of Orleans. According to another view however, Geoffrey Ferreol was the son of Hugh de Perche, Comte de Gatinais and Beatrice; this Hugh was the son of Geoffrey, Vicomte de Chateaudun, who married Melisinde de Rotrou (daughter of Rotrou, lord of Nogent le Rotrou); this Geoffrey was the son of Geoffrey-Hugh de Chateaudun who married Hildegardis de Blois (daughter of Duke Robert); in turn, this Geoffrey was the son of Geoffrey, Viscount of Chartres (who was in possession of Chateaudun, though he didn't use the title).

Geoffrey Ferreol's son, Fulk Rechin, count of Anjou (1066-1109) was the initiator of the *Chronicles of the Counts of Anjou* in the 1090s, which dealt with his mother's line of the Angevin title. Having inherited the right to Touraine and Château-Landon from his uncle, Geoffrey Martel I, Fulk went to war against his own brother, Geoffrey the Bearded, captured and imprisoned him in 1066 and took Anjou and Saintonge into his domains. Fulk Rechin's son, Geoffrey Martel II, later freed his uncle Geoffrey the Bearded but, according to the *Chronicles of the Counts of Anjou*, his wits had become addled in prison and he did not live long after his release. Fulk took several wives: there was the daughter of Lancelin of Beaugency; then Ermengardin, daughter of Archenbaud the Strong of Bourbon, who bore Geoffrey Martel II. The lecherous Fulk fell passionately in love with the sister, Bertrade, of Amaury of Montfont, 'whom no good man ever praised save for her beauty'. For her sake, he divorced the mother of Geoffrey Martel II; and Bertrade gave birth in 1092 to Geoffrey Plante Genest's father, Fulk V. In 1107, Geoffrey Martel II was killed in an ambush at Candé castle, supposedly with the connivance of his father and step-mother, though the *Chronicles of the Counts of Anjou* disputes this. That same year, the lecherous king Philip I of France came to Tours and, having conversed with Fulk Rechin's wife, decided to make her his queen. After the death of Fulk Rechin, in 1109, his son Fulk V is said by the *Chronicles* to have abandoned the ways of his mother and father and led an honourable life, ruling his territory wisely.

Fulk V (1092-1143), Count of Anjou (1109-29), king of Jerusalem (1131-43) married the only daughter of Elias, count of Maine, in 1109, thereby uniting Anjou and Maine. Fulk's wife, Ermengarde, heiress of Maine, bore Geoffrey Plante Genest in 1113 and died in 1126. In 1120, Fulk V went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In 1129, he married Mélisande, daughter of king Baldwin II of Jerusalem; and he succeeded as king of Jerusalem in 1131. To defend the holy city from the Muslim champion, Zengi, Fulk allied with the emir of Damascus and the emperor of Constantinople during the early 1130s. Turkish raiders took him prisoner in 1137, but then freed him.

<sup>10</sup><http://genforum.genealogy.com/plantagenet/messages/1302.html>

### 31.6.3 Geoffrey Plante Genest and his son Hamelin

Geoffrey IV (1113-51), count of Anjou (1129-51), bore the nicknames Plante Genest (cf. 'hairy shoot') and 'the Fair' and was said to be tall, handsome, graceful and strong. In 1128, aged 15, he was married to Matilda, daughter and heiress of king Henry I of England. They disliked each other, but maintained an uneasy political alliance and produced three sons, Henry (the future king Henry II of England), Geoffrey and William.

Geoffrey Plante Genest spent much of his youth imposing order on his unruly vassals, including his own brother Elias, count of Maine, who rebelled against him in 1131. In 1135 Henry I died, and Matilda's cousin Stephen of Blois seized the English throne, together with Normandy, though Geoffrey laid claim to the latter in his wife's right. The Norman barons opposed Geoffrey, not through loyalty to Stephen, but out of hatred to their traditional enemy, Anjou. However, Norman morale was weakened when Matilda captured Stephen at Lincoln in 1141, and Geoffrey was invested as duke of Normandy in 1144.

Geoffrey joined Louis VII of France on the abortive Second Crusade (1147-49). In 1150, he ceded Normandy to his son, Henry, who had inherited his mother's claim to the English throne, becoming king in 1154.

By an unknown woman, though some say it was the concubine Adelaide of Angers, Geoffrey Plante Genest had also fathered Hamelin, who acquired the de Warenne earldom of Surrey through marriage in 1164.

Hamelin<sup>11</sup> accompanied his half-brother Henry to Ireland in 1169. He assisted as bearer of one of the three swords of state in the coronation of his nephew, king Richard I, and he often fought with Richard in Normandy and elsewhere on the continent. He was a Privy Councillor and a commissioner to receive king Richard's ransom, and was later present at the coronation of king John in St Peter's church at Westminster, 27th May 1199, for whom he was also a Privy Councillor. Hamelin received some Angevin family lands in the Touraine from Henry, and was styled Vicomte de Touraine in addition to his other titles.

### 31.6.4 The heritage of the Plante Genest nickname

The second house of the de Warenne earls of Surrey descended from Hamelin, son of Geoffrey Plante Genest. That the 5th earl, Hamelin, was Angevin is evidenced by his twelfth-century seal, which carries the escarbuncle of Anjou<sup>12</sup>; this is still shown on the fourteenth-century crest of the 8th de Warren earl, John, which suggests that the Angevin heritage of the de Warennes' progenitor, Plante Genest, was still influential when the Plant surname formed near their lands in England. The first evidence for the spelling Plente (1219) is in the times of the 6th earl and the spelling Plante (1262) occurs in the times of the 7th earl who had married Alice de Lusignan (1224-55). Alice was from Aquitaine where the name Plante, though perhaps unrelated, is also now found.

It may be more than coincidence that it is near scattered de Warenne lands around England that the (DNA validated) single-family surname, Plant, is first found. In the absence of further evidence, however, it is important to stress that the link between the names Plante Genest and Plant may have been cultural rather than genetic, though some linkage seems evident in as much as there are proximities of both status and geography. Further Y-DNA studies are ongoing; but, even if no genetic connection is found, the Plante Genest nickname can be said to have influenced the formation of the Plant surname as well as the subsequent royal Plantagenet surname. This heritage for the English surname, Plant, is considerable and it can be tracked on to an estimated 12,000 Plants now living in England and a further 5,000 in the USA for example.

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<sup>11</sup><http://genforum.genealogy.com/plantagenet/messages/1300.html>

<sup>12</sup><http://genforum.genealogy.com/plantagenet/messages/1300.html>