

Understanding the royal name Plantagenet. How DNA helps.

Dr John S Plant

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Abstract

The second half of the twentieth century saw a revision in the meaning of Plantagenet. The 1950 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica had mentioned only a traditional sprig-wearing story, which can be understood in terms of an archaic sense to the word *plant*; but then an invented story of planting broom was added as a ‘more likely explanation’ by the times of the 1974 edition. Rather than supporting this revision, recent DNA results endorse the traditional story for Plantagenet which is consistent, not only with evidence for other Plantagenet-like names, but also with a DNA-supported meaning for *plant*.

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1 Introduction

For an understanding of the surname Plantagenet, it is relevant to understand the meaning of *plant*. DNA testing has added just one extra piece of evidence. Nonetheless, this tips the balance between competing senses for ‘*plant*-based’ names.

Much controversy has raged without recourse to the full evidence. A nineteenth-century account failed to mention any supporting evidence. An early twentieth-century view added some evidence for Plantagenet-like names; but, then, a mid twentieth-century revision selected only some of it. To rectify these shortcomings, I shall describe the documentary evidence more fully.

In Section 2, I shall briefly outline the nature of the documentary evidence for the Plantagenet name. I then compare competing meanings, in Sections 3 to 5, specifically for the different senses of *plant*, which were assumed before and after the mid twentieth-century revision of ‘*plant*-based names’. I then go on in Sections 6 to 8 to consider the implications of the DNA evidence, which supports a ‘generative’ sense to *plant* – that is, a sense that relates to generating fresh life.

To try to mollify at least some of the controversy, I shall explicitly debunk the nineteenth-century contention that there was a blood relationship between the Plantagenets and the Plants (Section 6). My objective is to clear the way for a less emotive appraisal of the most recent evidence (Section 7) which supports an early twentieth-century view and weakens the case for the mid twentieth-century revision. In Section 8, I summarise the wider implications of these findings.

2 Significance of Plantagenet-like names

The name ‘Plantagenet’ was originally spelt Plante Genest or Plantegenest and later Plauntegenet or Plantaginet. It originated as a nickname for Count Geoffrey of Anjou, father of King Henry II who ascended the English throne in 1154.

There is no contemporary evidence that Geoffrey Plante Genest’s royal descendants used Plantagenet as an hereditary surname before the mid fifteenth century; and so evidence for the development of similar names in the intervening centuries is amongst the best available evidence when seeking onomastic clues for the significance of the Plantagenet name.

For a rational consideration of the evidence, it is important to consider *all* the medieval Plantagenet-like names. This may seem obvious; but, rather remissly, it has hitherto been the custom to pick and choose just *some* of them to suit a particular line of argument.

The trend for selecting just some of the medieval Plantagenet-like names evidently began as a nineteenth-century claim that Plant is a ‘corruption of Plantagenet’. This evidently prompted a particular rebuff, involving two different names. By selecting only the names Plantebene and Planterose, it was asserted in Surname Dictionaries that Plant means a ‘gardener’ or a ‘planter of various plants’.¹ This led on to a revised meaning ‘broom planter’ for Plantagenet.

Possibly initially, in the mid twentieth-century, this revision was intended to distance Plant from Plantagenet; but, the ‘planter’ meaning was then carried over to the Plantagenet name itself. Thus, it came to be maintained that Plantagenet and Plant are both related, not to the archaic meaning ‘sprig’ of *plant*, but to modern meanings inferred from the thirteenth-century by-names Plantebene and Planterose.

However, in a more complete appraisal, the thirteenth-century English names comprise: Plauntegenet; Plantebene; Plantefolie; Plantefene; and Planterose. These do not all construe ‘gardener’. Instead, they can all be related to the medieval concept of ‘generation’ which, in medieval belief, was a power of man’s vegetable soul.²

It is in keeping with this better-informed understanding that there is a sense of ‘fresh generation’ for Plant; and, such a sense was proposed before the fashion for ‘gardener’. Ernest Weekly’s early twentieth-century book on Surnames offered such opinions as ‘sprig’, ‘cudgel’, or ‘young offspring’ for the meaning of the surname Plant;³ and, having studied the matter for many years, I believe that his suggestion ‘sprig’ or ‘young offspring’, which relates back to the medieval concept of

¹P.H. Reaney (1958) *A Dictionary of British Surnames*.

²In Further Reading, see Plant (2007) and the first paragraph of Appendix C of Plant (2009). For example, Plantefolie literally means ‘plant wickedness’ which invokes the archaic meaning ‘procreate’ of the verb *plant* (see, for example Samuel Johnson’s eighteenth-century Dictionary). Clearly, this could refer to a philanderer and Names of Philandering are not uncommon amongst medieval by-names. A similar argument applies to Plantefene, meaning ‘plant eagerly’. It seems rather more a stretch of the imagination that Plantefolie could refer to an incompetent gardener and Plantefene to a happy gardener. Philandering meanings can also be attached to Plantebene and Planterose, though a detailed explanation involves certain obscenities which are described elsewhere.

³Ernest Weekly (1916), *Surnames*, p. 185.

generation, should not be ignored.

The meaning ‘sprig’ for Plant tallies directly with the traditional ‘sprig of broom’ meaning for Plantagenet. The symbolism of a fresh shoot or sprig lies at the heart of ontological beliefs that were held when life’s origins were viewed in a different light, around the times when the Plantagenet and Plant names formed.

3 Context for the traditional meanings

There is evidence for Old Aquitanian Gods and Goddesses, who had the names of plants and animals. This predated the name *Plantapilosa* of a famous ninth-century Aquitanian duke. Early medieval beliefs were beginning to lead on to scholastic writings about man’s vegetable soul with its powers of nutrition, growth and generation when the noble name Plantapilosa led on to the names *Plante Genest* and *de la Planta* in neighbouring Anjou.

It accordingly seems relevant to note that Plantapilosa means ‘hairy shoot’, which symbolised robust growth and regeneration. The name Plantagenet has traditionally been taken to mean ‘sprig of broom’, which is an instance of a ‘hairy shoot’.

The traditional explanation, dating back to 1605, for the Plantagenet surname is that Geoffrey Plante Genest wore a sprig of broom (the *planta genista*) in his bonnet. However, this tradition was broken in the second half of the twentieth century by the ‘gardener’ contention and a claim in the Encyclopedia Britannica that the Plantagenet name ‘more likely’ arose because Geoffrey *supposedly* planted broom to improve his hunting covers.

My contention is that the evidence for the traditional sprig-wearing story should not be overlooked. The sprig of broom was symbolic of an earlier local nobleman and developing scholastic teachings about the vegetable soul.⁴ In particular, the most salient of the vegetable soul’s powers was evidently its power of generation – this could have fired the fashion for some similar names.

Deviation from the pre-revision meanings of Plantagenet and Plant can be laid mostly at the door of late twentieth-century Surname Dictionaries and their partially-evidenced account of the Plant surname. Weekly’s early twentieth-century book on Surnames, had proposed the meaning ‘sprig’ for Plant. The Latin, French and English words *planta/plante/plant* in early times meant a shoot or sprig or scion. The early meanings, including another ‘sole of foot’, can be related back to ancient beliefs about life’s foundations in the emergence of soul from the land. This evidently carried through to late medieval writings about man’s vegetable soul which are consistent with listings in English Dictionaries of the words *sprig* and *scion*, where they have human ‘offshoot’ as well as vegetable meanings.

⁴see Plant (2007) in Further Reading.

4 An embarrassing aspect of the archaic meanings

Unlike the modern idea of a ‘gardener’, medieval understanding is not easily explained to a modern audience. One needs to point out that the medieval mindset was different. An understanding of archaic literature is needed to appreciate how generation was believed to have worked in man’s soul and how plant generation was salient as a metaphor for the human procreation of children. To reveal the extent of evidence for the pre-revision sense of ‘*plant*-based’ names, one might more simply point out, for example, that the Welsh meaning of *planta* is ‘to procreate’ and the Welsh word *plant* means ‘children’.

Around the mid twentieth century, when the ‘gardener/planter’ revision was proposed for Plant and Plantagenet, there was much controversy about whether to lift the censorship on D.H. Lawrence’s novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. The said lover was a gardener/gamekeeper – his passion for generation extended beyond just plants and animals. His full range of activities spanned the scope of medieval belief in the power of generation in the vegetable soul, which extended from plants to animals and man. In keeping with the vegetable power of generation, there are meanings of the Welsh and archaic English word *plant* concerning procreation. Censorship has stood in the way of a full and frank debate of such meaning. It has been ignored that philandering senses can provide a consistent explanation of the full set of the English, thirteenth-century, Plantagenet-like names.

5 Pros and cons of omitting the archaic meanings

Even without the DNA evidence, it can be questioned why Weekly’s pre-revision meaning – ‘sprig’ or ‘young offspring’ – for Plant has been ignored. We might look for excuses for the post-revision fashion of omitting the generative senses of *plant*; why did late twentieth-century Surname Dictionaries omit the ‘sprig’ symbolism whereby man’s vegetable soul held the power of ramifying the fresh shoots of a new generation? The possible excuses for omitting this ‘sprig’ symbolism can be listed as follows.

- Omitting generative senses avoids any possible embarrassment from the ‘hairy shoot’ symbolism for Plantagenet though the ‘sprig’ or ‘young offspring’ meaning for Plant is not particularly offensive in itself.
- Alternatively, the mid twentieth-century revision may have been partly due to an over-zealous determination to overturn the nineteenth-century contention of a royal connection for Plant (Appendix A.1) by emphasising instead the most obvious modern meanings of just the names Plantebene and Planterose. However, there are other ways of debunking the contentious royal claim (Appendix A.2).
- A simpler explanation of the mid twentieth-century dismissal of the pre-revision meanings of Plant and Plantagenet is that their archaic meanings

are not well understood by the majority, who more readily grasp a simple (albeit partial) modern explanation yielding the ‘gardener/planter’ meanings. Rectifying this can be a difficult hurdle to overcome.

It is convenient to choose only the simplest explanation. For the writers of Surname Dictionaries, the idea of a metonym⁵ is simple, albeit linguistically non-linear. Moreover, in their world, the post-revision meanings ‘planter’ or ‘gardener’ for Plantagenet and Plant can be categorised instantly as those of occupational surnames. This might seem elegant to those whose main interest is theoretical onomastics, such as the writers of Surname Dictionaries.

Onomastic theory also states, however, that many surnames do not fit one particular surname category neatly. A more basic truth is that there are other surnames with a similar meaning to the pre-revision meaning ‘sprig’ or ‘young offspring’ of Plant. Examples are Boyce, Boyes, Child, Childers, Children, Jeune, Jevons, Soanes, Son, Vaughan, Young, Younger and Youngson. These only loosely can be categorised, perhaps as names of relationship, perhaps implicit patronymics, or perhaps as nicknames. However, this ambiguity should not be allowed to detract from the fact that the pre-revision meaning ‘young offspring’ of Plant tallies, not only with the Welsh literal meaning ‘children’ of *plant*, but also with the archaic meaning ‘sprig’, ‘scion’ or ‘young person’ of *plant* that is listed in the Oxford English Dictionary.

6 Revisiting the nineteenth-century controversy

Ambiguity about competing senses of *plant* has been partly resolved by some DNA evidence. However, I shall mention the DNA evidence first in the context of the nineteenth-century debate (Appendix A.1), if only with an aim of disproving that there is any genetic evidence for a blood relationship between the Plants and Plantagenets.

The nineteenth-century contention appears, at first sight, to have begun as an unsubstantiated fancy – to wit, that the Plants had royal relatives through male lines, seemingly simply because they had a ‘similar’ name. However, though no evidence is cited in this debate, as recorded in Appendix A.1, it might be relevant to note that in 1835 some circumstantial documentary evidence had been transcribed into

⁵Surname Dictionaries list Plant as a metonym whereby the action (planting) can stand for the person (gardener). However, in another type of metonymy, a part (plant soul) can stand for the whole (child). This latter type of metonymy was reinforced by medieval belief by which a father planted his seed and the child’s soul remained purely vegetative until it received an intellectual component of soul from God. In keeping with the other Plantagenet-like names (Plantefolie and Plantefene), which the Surname Dictionaries conveniently omit, bene can denote a seed (Plantebene) and rose symbolised either the Virgin or female sexuality (Planterose). These and other seedy connotations can help to explain how the particular ancestral nickname *Plante Genest*, which was just one of many for the royal ‘Plantagenets’, could have attained particular currency at times of conflict, albeit impolite. This helps to explain a long delay before this nickname became accepted as an official royal surname – see Plant (2007) in Further Reading.

print. This was for the Angevin landholder Eimeric de la Planta (1202).⁶ We may never know whether he had a direct connection with the Angevin count Geoffrey Plante Genest (1113-51). There are tantalising hints, in that Geoffrey has been tentatively associated with the old French word *plantat* meaning ‘shoot’; add to this that *de la Planta* can mean ‘from the shoot’ (*cf.* offshoot or offspring). Given only such circumstantial evidence (Appendix A.2) however, any claim of a male-line relationship is easily debunked.

- There is no evidence that a connection between the Angevin names *Plante Genest* and *de la Planta* was any more than ‘cultural’ – for example, both names could have derived from developing belief in man’s vegetable soul.
- Nor is it clear that subsequent thirteenth-century names in south-east England, such as *de Plantes* and *Plante* belonged to direct descendants of the Angevin *de la Planta* who was also known as *de Plant’*.
- Also, there is doubt that these in turn were the genetic ancestors of the many Plants evidently emanating from the fourteenth-century Plant homeland in the north-west midlands of England, not far from Wales, where the Welsh sense of the word *plant* along with archaic English senses could have been prevalent.

It is tempting to seek DNA evidence to examine this further. In principle, DNA can throw light on family connections but no clarity has been achieved so far in connection with the nineteenth-century claim of a family connection between Plant and Plantagenet. There is so far just a limited number of Y-DNA results for Plant and these are widely scattered well beyond their main homeland. A significant fraction of these living males have matching Y-signatures, suggesting that they belong to an abnormally large single family. The branches of this large family were quite widely spread from early times, according to the genealogies of those who have been DNA tested. The intrigue of whose children the large Plant family were remains unanswered.

The nineteenth-century contention that the Plants were ‘Plantagenet’ children (Appendix A.1) remains open to intense scepticism and indeed ridicule by some. However, to test it, one might set out to compare the modal Y-DNA signature for the Plants with one for the Plantagenets. Such attempts have not been fruitful so far.

More widely, it would be useful to have a Y-DNA signature for the Plantagenets which could then be compared with those of their possible male-line living

⁶Rotuli Normanniae, 1200-1205 and 1417-1418, ed. T.D.Hardy (1835) p. 62. A translation of the abbreviated Latin of an entry before 21st August 1202 is: It is ordered the Constable of Chinon’ to have William de Ponte put into possession of all the land which was of Eimeric de la Planta, which (land) he (the king) has committed to him in custody. The translation of an entry between 30th August and 9th September is: Land granted - The king has given by his letters close to John Malmorun that land which was of Eimeric de Plant’ in the bailiwick of Loud[un], just as the same Eimeric had it. The same has given the same the land of the said John in the bailiwick of Chin[on] in the same manner.

descendants. However, there is as yet no ‘Plantagenet’ Y-signature in the public domain to enable any such comparison. My initial hope was that some consistent evidence would emerge from amongst those who have variously been offered as *possible* male-line descendants from the Plantagenets. That might allow a hypothesis to be formed whereby some set of matching Y-signatures might be considered to represent a descent from the medieval Plantagenets. However, DNA tests have so far only uncovered various *mismatching* Y-signatures.

It has often been held that the illegitimate male-line descent from the royal ‘Plantagenet’ family is to be found amongst bearers of the surnames Somerset (Beaufort relatives), Cornwall, and Warren. In so far as DNA evidence is yet available, it has been found that there is no known Y-DNA signature shared by the surnames Cornwall and Warren. For the surname Warren, there are already several DNA results; but, so far, they do not indicate that there is an abnormally large family with a particular modal signature (Appendix A.12). At least so far, the surname Warren does not reveal any one Y-DNA signature as an obvious contender for a Y-signature from the ‘Plantagenets’.

There are instances of the surname Plantagenet itself, particularly in France, though these have typically been held to be ‘pretenders’, unrelated to the royal ‘Plantagenet family’. As yet, no Y-DNA result is available for the modern bearers of the Plantagenet surname.

Perhaps the best hope for obtaining a Y-signature for the royal ‘Plantagenet family’ would be to seek that of the Duke of Beaufort and his male-line relatives. Even for this however, the sceptics question whether that would be a true signature of the royal ‘Plantagenet family’ since even that reputed male-line descends through two illegitimacies. I have written to the Duke of Beaufort about the prospects for obtaining such a signature ‘for the Plantagenets’ but I have received no reply.

7 DNA dismissal of the twentieth-century revision

Rather more progress has been made with understanding the meaning of the Plantagenet name. The way in which DNA has helped is subtle but nonetheless significant. Adding a better understanding of the documentary evidence can certainly help with the deliberations of Plantagenet-like names. More particularly, progress with understanding these names has received an extra fillip with recent technological advances.

The scene has changed rapidly this first decade of the new century, with DNA techniques. This is evidenced in, for example, articles by prime popularisers of methods for the DNA testing of surnames.⁷ Here, I shall restrict myself to mentioning just a few details of a relevant DNA approach and readers are referred to Section 9 for further reading about DNA approaches to studying surnames.

A further clue to the contemporary meaning of *plant*, occurring in Plantagenet-like names, relates to how best to explain the large population of the surname Plant.

⁷see Susan Meates (2008) and Chris Pomery (2009) in Further Reading.

This surname was believed to have had very many separate origins. This offered sustenance to the twentieth-century revision of the Plant and Plantagenet names. These names were claimed to have meanings ‘gardener/planter’ instead of ‘sprig’ and, it was believed that the large population of Plants arose because they descended from very many unrelated gardeners, albeit that the documentary evidence gives various other occupations. However, this multi-origin explanation is not confirmed. Instead, the DNA evidence indicates that the Plants mostly belong to an abnormally large single family. This throws the twentieth-century revision into doubt. It can now be said with some conviction that there is an alternative explanation for the large population of the Plant surname and this alternative does not endorse the mid twentieth-century revision.

This turns the spotlight onto the DNA evidence. In Y-DNA testing, different strategies are appropriate for frequent and infrequent surnames. Plant, for example, is particularly frequent amongst the million or more surnames in England and Wales, being the 617th most common. Studying every genealogical tree is a mammoth task for such a populous surname. The most telling approach, at least to start with, is to consider a random sample of males bearing the surname. This DNA approach, which is outlined further in the Appendices, has provided the extra clue to the meanings of ‘*plant*-based’ names: to wit, there is an abnormally large Plant family.

The DNA evidence makes a ‘many children’ hypothesis viable for Plant though the parentage of these children is unknown. The sense ‘children’ of *plant* is largely self-sufficient, not only linguistically, but also for explaining the large fraction matching for the populous Plant surname. This is because polygyny (that is a man taking many women) was practised by some in the early times of surname formation (Appendices A.3 and A.4) and polygyny implies that it is possible for one man to father abnormally many children (Appendices A.7 and A.8).

Computer simulations (Appendix A.6) indicate that monogamous men, remaining faithful their wives, will produce typically around 100 offspring from each medieval male ancestor after 20 generations. Sometimes, the simulations predict, more offspring will result for a ‘single-ancestor’ surname by monogamy but not nearly enough to explain the large population of the main Plant family. By impregnating many women (*i.e.* polygyny), a single ancestor can get a surname off to a much faster start and apply a large multiplier to the whole of the subsequent population of his family. This would be augmented still further if philandering were practised through a few generations.

Returning to the pre-revision sense ‘offspring’ or ‘children’ for Plant, a few additional remarks can now be ventured about how such a surname *might* have arisen. Patronymic surnames usually give the forefather’s forename explicitly though some surnames, such as Son, might be classified as *implicit* patronymics. Omitting the father’s forename might have been held to be adequate if, for example, the father was known only by rumour. For example, there could have been notoriously many children and keeping their paternity clandestine might have been encouraged to avoid any implied challenge to the father’s more legitimate heirs (Appendix A.8).

The Plant surname does not reveal the parentage of the children implied by an

‘offspring’ meaning to this name. Hence, we can do no better than to consider its onomastic relevance to the more important Plantagenet name. Though the meaning ‘children’ of Plant is not precisely synonymous with ‘sprig’, these words are semantically related. One needs to bear in mind that there were medieval concepts of generation, as summed up by the overlapping meanings of the words *sprig*, *offspring* and *children*. The ‘sprig of broom’ meaning of Plantagenet was suggestive of, amongst other things, generating a fresh generation of children. For the sake of the dignity of the Plantagenets however, it can be added that there were also semantic extensions of the generating sense of *plant* to such meanings as ‘establishing’ or ‘founding’.

8 Summary

The contribution of DNA testing so far, in connection with understanding the Plantagenet name, has been indirect. It has cast doubt on a twentieth-century reinterpretation of *plant*-based names – this revision took the view that the Plant surname comprised many separate families descending from many unrelated gardeners. Instead, the very large, widely spread population of this surname can be explained simply as arising from many polygynous children. This does not answer the question of their parentage. However, it shifts the semantic interpretation of ‘*plant*-based’ names back to a generative sense of the word *plant*, involving the generation of ‘sprigs’ or ‘offspring’, albeit that such sense is archaic.

The wealth of information that is available for the royal Plantagenets is relevant for the way in which it provides clear documentary evidence of polygyny (*i.e.* philandering with many women) – this evidence shows that polygynous behaviour was practised by some of the English medieval nobility (Appendix A.3). However, it should not be imagined that this restricts the abnormally large Plant family to being genetic descendants of the Plantagenets. The Laws of Wales and the Welsh Marches (Appendix A.4) suggest that there was a similar philandering behaviour amongst others more native to Britain. Early polygyny is particularly helpful for explaining the initial Y-DNA findings for the Plant surname (Appendices A.5 to A.9) though this should not be confused with less certain lines of argument that are based on ‘clustering’ (Appendix A.10).

More generally, for other names, there has been much confusion in connection with DNA clustering. For example, there have been fallacious claims that several clusters in the DNA results show that there *must have been* multiple origins to a surname. So far, for Plant(t), there is no evidence of an undue number of clusters though the results leave an ambiguity of whether the Plant(t)s had one or several origins (Appendix A.9). In a more extensive *non-random* study of the surname Pomeroy, though unsurprising, rather more clusters have been found. However, an over-simplistic clustering argument (Appendix A.10) should not be used to limit the possibilities for the origins of such a surname, as I outline for the Pomeroy name in Appendix A.11.

It is important to stress that my interpretation of the Plant DNA results does not

rely on the number of clusters of matching Y-DNA signatures (Appendix A.10). Rather, it relies on the finding that the majority of Plant(t)s match. There is a large Y-cluster and, given the large population of Plant(t)s, this indicates that there is an abnormally large single family (Appendix A.9). It is *this* that diminishes the credibility of the ‘gardener’ revision for Plant and this, in turn, makes redundant the ‘broom planter’ revision for Plantagenet. This leaves consistent sense in emblematic ‘sprig generation’.

The sprig of broom represents a fitting generative emblem for Geoffrey Plante Genet. As such a symbol, it echoes evidence for his philandering (Appendix A.3). Salacious sense to its vegetable soul helps to explain the long delay before Plantagenet appears as an official royal surname. The traditional generative ‘sprig’ emblem need not necessarily detract too much from the grandeur of the royal Plantagenet family however, since the Oxford English Dictionary includes evidence for *various* early ‘generative’ senses for the verb *plant*, such as ‘to establish’ or ‘to found’. Eventually, it seems, the nickname *Plantagenet* attained sufficient dignity to become accepted as a royal surname; and, indeed, in this spirit, the Angevin count is most remembered for founding a legitimate royal dynasty and establishing the Angevin Empire.

9 Further Reading

- Susan Meates (2008) *Adding DNA to Your One-name Study*, Journal of One-Name Studies, Vol 9, Issue 12, pp 9-11.⁸
- Chris Pomery (2009) *The Advantages of a Dual DNA/Documentary Approach to Reconstructing the Family Trees of a Surname*, Journal of Genetic Genealogy, 5(2), pp 86-95.⁹

Recent Y-DNA and other evidence has added support to the generative meaning for Plant: ‘offspring’. This is outlined in the academic paper: John S Plant (2005) *Modern methods and a controversial surname: Plant*, Nomina 28, pp. 115-33.¹⁰ This and other evidence suggests that generative and other aspects of man’s vegetable soul could have played a key role in the development of the Plantagenet surname, as outlined further in the academic paper: John S Plant (2007) *The tardy adoption of the Plantagenet surname*, Nomina, Vol. 30, pp. 57-84.¹¹ More recently still, more DNA evidence has accumulated to indicate that the Plants are an abnormally large single family and this reinforces the Welsh meaning: ‘[many] children’. I have discussed the technical background to this in more rigorous detail in the article: John S Plant (2009) *Surname studies with genetics*, Guild of One-Name Studies, DNA Section.¹²

⁸<http://www.one-name.org/journal/9-11-AddingDNA.pdf>

⁹<http://www.jogg.info/52/files/pomery.pdf>

¹⁰<http://cogprints/5985/>

¹¹<http://cogprints/5986/>

¹²<http://cogprints/6595/>

10 Acknowledgement

This article began as a gentle introduction to a role for DNA testing, written mostly for Plants. I have since rewritten it for a wider audience, prompted partly by comments from Chris Pomery and Debbie Kennett, though of course any shortcomings in the article remain as no-one's fault but mine.

A Appendices

A.1 A nineteenth-century debate

The nineteenth-century debate concerned a simplistic view of the connection between the Plant and Plantagenet names. Its repercussions appear to have coloured subsequent interpretations of these names in a rather irrational way.

Though I do not endorse it, an old story is exemplified by M.A. Lower's 1860 Surname Dictionary,¹³ which asserts:

A family in humble circumstances at Kettering bear the ancient royal name Plantagenet, though now it is commonly corrupted to Plant.

This has met scepticism. With a little more caution, an 1862 book¹⁴ noted that the name Plant 'is supposed to be corrupted from Plantagenet'; this book refers to the parish of Leek at the northernmost tip of Staffordshire in the main Plant homeland.

In 1897, some further discussion appeared in a volume of *Notes and Queries* published by Oxford University Press¹⁵:

PLANTAGENET. - Some time ago I read an account of a boy named Plant (residing in Warwickshire, I believe), whose grandfather had borne the royal name Plantagenet, but had changed it to Plant, thinking that the full name too grand for a poor man. The note proceeded to state that this boy, if Salic Law had been in force, would have been king of England. Can anyone tell me more of this, or inform me as to where I should obtain the note in question? ... PELOPS.

There were replies¹⁶:

PLANTAGENET - Some such note as this, of the name Plantagenet shortened to Plant, may be found in Burke's 'Vicissitudes of Families.' But there is no kind of verification, and the statement that the holder of the name would be king by Salic law must be taken with very great caution. ... C.F.S. Warren, M.A., Longford, Coventry.

¹³Mark Anthony Lower (1860) *A Dictionary of the Family Names of the United Kingdom*.

¹⁴John Sleight (1862) *A History of the Ancient Parish of Leek*, p 149, see footnote.

¹⁵Notes and Queries, 8th S., XII, Aug 28, '97, p. 167

¹⁶op. cit., Sept. 25, '97, p. 258

The Rev Anthony Bathe wrote from Paull, Yorks, the account of the boy Plant that PELOPS enquires about. It appeared in one of the daily papers - the *Standard*, I think - and Mr Bathe mentioned that the boy at that time was living at Paull. - R.H., Ely.

A.2 Debunking the nineteenth-century contention

In pursuit of a more level-headed opinion, I shall debunk any claim of a blood relationship between the Plantagenet and Plant names by stressing the limitations of the onomastic evidence, point by point, as follows:

- the ‘Plantagenet’ forefather Geoffrey, Count of Anjou was nicknamed *Plante Genest*; and, following his 1151 death there is a 1202 record of Eimeric *de la Planta* owning land in Anjou;
 - however, as far as I have found, there is no clear genetic or genealogical evidence of a connection between the names *Plante Genest* and *de la Planta* in Anjou – the name *de la Planta* was also written as *de Plant*’ but there is no certainty that there was a genetic connection to subsequent by-names such as *de Plantes* and *Plante* in England, which could have led on to the prolific *Plant* surname;
- the ‘*plant*-based’ name *Plantyn* or *Planteng*’ (ca. 1250) belonged to a servant of the noble ‘Plantagenet’ descent; and, like the place name *la Planteland*, these names can be related to some known illegitimate descendants of Geoffrey *Plante Genest*;
 - however, though this perhaps hints at a cultural tradition for ‘*plant*-based’ names stemming from Anjou and carried through by the Angevin domination of England, there are only sparse references, such as ones to *Plantegenest*, *Planteng*’, *Plauntegenet etc.*, relatable to the *Plantagenet* name around the times when the *Plant* surname was forming in England (ca.1250-1400);
- there is strong evidence that the so-called ‘Plantagenets’ were womanisers (Appendix A.3); and, they presumably had many illegitimate children;
 - however, a ‘putative’, thriving, illegitimate descent from the so-called ‘Plantagenet family’ does not constitute an adequate basis for claiming that descent was the Plants;
- the name *Plante* or *Plont* or *Plant* is found in particular near the illegitimate Warren descent of Geoffrey *Plante Genest* – also, there is an indication of illegitimacy in the *Plant* blazon;
 - however, there may have been many philanderers (Appendix A.4) and illegitimacy in itself implies very little;

- such illegitimacy might have been associated with polygyny (that is a man taking many women) and the DNA evidence shows that the main Plant family is sufficiently large for a hypothesis of *many* polygynous children to be helpful in explaining the origins of the abnormally large family with the *Plant* surname (Appendix A.5);
 - however, though the Welsh meaning of *plant* is ‘children’ and could refer to many polygynous children, we can not simply presume that the name *Plant* referred to the generated (illegitimate) children of a generator of the realm;
- the spelling *Plantt* (a possible abbreviation) is found after the times of the royal House of York (for whom there is definite evidence that they used the surname *Plantagenet*, ca.1450-1500); to this, it can be added that recent DNA evidence shows that *Plantt* belongs to the same male-line family as *Plant*;
 - however, *Plantt* could simply have reflected the pronunciation of the coexisting spelling *Plante*.

A.3 Plantagenet polygyny

A particular point to be made is that along with the Plantagenets there could have been many others, lost to the historical record, who were indulging in similar practices and who may have sired many illegitimate children. According to Laura Betzig¹⁷, rich men throughout the Middle Ages and in modern England *married* monogamously but *mated* polygynously, having sex with as many women as they could afford: they have almost certainly produced more children as a result. She adds that, in the past several hundred years, the tide has turned in England from despotism to democracy, and polygyny started to give way to monogamy. For this view, she depends not least on the following evidence for the Plantagenets.

The best-known bastard son of Geoffrey Plante Genest of Anjou was Hamelin, who became the Warenne earl of Surrey. Plante Genest’s eldest legitimate son, Henry II of England, had two well known, well placed bastards: Geoffrey, Archbishop of York; and, William Longspée, earl of Salisbury. Identifying his other bastards is clothed in mystery though Henry’s reputation for womanising is clear. He is supposed to have coveted the sister of Roger of Clare, earl of Hertford. A little later, Eude de Porhoet, who had been Brittany’s count, complained that Henry held his daughter hostage in 1168 and got her pregnant. Henry presumably fathered another bastard - Morgan, a provost of Berkeley and bishop-elect of Durham. And there were rumours that Henry debauched his own daughter-in-law to-be, Alice who had been meant to marry his legitimate son Richard. There were undoubtedly other concubines of a lower class, of whom we know relatively little, such as ‘fair Rosamund’ Clifford and a ‘Bellebelle’ who is recorded in an 1184 pipe roll. Gerald of Wales said the king ‘became an open violator of the marriage bond.’ Another

¹⁷Laura Betzig, *British polygyny in Biology and History*, ed Malcolm Smith, pp 30-87.

contemporary, Ralph Niger said the king's vassals 'hid their daughters and wives when the king was in other towns' since Henry 'was a corrupter of chastity, and followed his father in committing crimes.' Ranulf de Broc was keeper of the king's whores.

Henry's youngest legitimate son John is even more notorious for his womanising. According to Roger of Wendover, John was very fond of his wife; and, according to Matthew Paris, he was fond of other men's women. According to more than one source, John made his magnates mad: he 'seduced their more attractive daughters and wives.' Among the king's known women were: Suzanne (listed *domicella, amica domini Regis* in a Misac roll); 'queen' Clementia (named by a Tewkesbury monk); Hawise (the widowed countess of Aumale); another Hawise; 'Alpesia, the queen's damoiselle'; and the wife of Hugh Neville, chief forester. John's philandering resulted in bastards, some of whose names are apparent. For example, one, John, was supported by the see of Lincoln; Henry FitzRoy was given lands in Cornwall in 1215; Richard captained troops in a baronial revolt; Geoffrey emerged from obscurity to command troops and mercenaries in 1193; Osbert Giffard's fate is not clear.

A.4 Welsh polygyny

Welsh Law applied in the Welsh Marches as well as areas ruled by Welsh princes. In a dispute, for example, between Gruffydd ap Gwenwynwyn and Roger Mortimer, Gruffydd wanted to apply English Law but, in 1281, the royal justices upheld Roger Mortimer's wish that Welsh Law should apply as the lands concerned lay in Wales. In Welsh property Law, illegitimate sons were entitled to an equal share with the legitimate sons, provided they had been acknowledged by the father. This was the provision which differed most from Canon law. The recognition of polygyny in Wales may have been drawing to a close in the thirteenth century; but there was still recognition of the rights of the male offspring of such relationships. The Iorwerth text (Appendix A.8) is relevant in this regard. Also relevant is the list preserved in several law books of nine sexual unions, *Naw Cynyweddi Deithiog*. The *Naw Cynyweddi* lists nine unions which seem unlikely to have met with Ecclesiastical approval. This is because some of them may plainly coexist with other unions in which either or both parties are involved. In other words, the list (similar to Irish lists) seems to presuppose a society which permitted polygyny.¹⁸

A.5 The large Plant family and polygyny

The new DNA evidence indicates that there is an abnormally large Plant family and this raises the question: how could this have come about? The explanation seems likely to relate to polygyny, that is a man taking many women – this can lead to an unusually large family down the male lines. Many polygynous 'children' in early times can apply a large multiplier to the whole of the subsequent population of a

¹⁸Huw Pryce (1993) *Native law and the church in medieval Wales*, p. 109.

descending family. Surnames generally descend down male lines; and, a surname may, at least in some instances, trace out the descent of an abnormally large family, provided that the same surname adheres to many male-lines stemming from many polygynous ‘children’.

Some recent, relevant, academic publications relate to common Irish surnames, for which several have been found by Y-DNA studies to belong to abnormally large single families. The DNA-inspired line of argument for Ireland can be outlined as follows. Irish Brehon Law allows polygyny (albeit while citing the authority of the Old Testament) and other actions which Canon Law expressly forbid.¹⁹ Brehon Law was effectively outlawed by the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1367 and the policy of Surrender and Regrant. This lends support to a current opinion that very large single-surname families in Ireland may have originated as a result of early polygyny.

A similar line of argument to that for populous Irish single-family surnames can be developed, in connection with late-medieval Welsh law, for the Plant surname in the Welsh Marches. Here, polygyny may have intermingled with the English fashion for hereditary surnames; and, so, the same argument as in Ireland can be carried through to the Plant surname. I have presented numerical evidence to support this ‘polygyny’ hypothesis for the Plants in an article entitled ‘Surname Studies with Genetics’.²⁰

A.6 Including polygyny in a computer simulation

The standard ‘Sturges and Hagget’ computer simulation comes nowhere close to explaining the large size of the main English Plant family. This simulation assumes typical distributions for the numbers of children that might arise in a monogamous family and computes how surviving male offspring can be expected to die out or thrive down the generations.

Slight changes to the distribution of family numbers do not significantly affect the results, which are constrained by the consideration that the total population for all families should not grow any faster than the population of England as a whole, since medieval times. The effects of many children for each family can be expected to be bounded, in the simulation, by not all sons surviving to produce sons of their own.

To explain exceptionally large male-line families, it can be conjectured that a few males fathered families by polygyny and these grew at the expense of other families. This would not break the constraint on the growth of the total population. Including this hypothesis of ‘early polygyny for a few’ in a computer simulation is complicated, however, by the fact that several arbitrary assumptions would need to be made. This makes the predictions rather arbitrary. There is no way of knowing how many families were of polygynous intent, how many more children than other families they fathered, and for exactly how many generations did their polygyny persist.

¹⁹D.A.Binchy, Introduction in *Corpus Iuris Hibernici*, p. ix.

²⁰see Further Reading.

However, though quantitative predictions are difficult in connection with polygyny, there is some evidence to suggest that a small percentage of the medieval families may have had disproportionately many surviving children, either because they were rich and privileged and more likely to survive, or because, near Wales, they adopted the Welsh custom of recognised polygyny together with a developing English custom to transmit surnames down male lines. Such a situation seems to have occurred in the early times of surname history and such early practise can be expected to have greatly enlarged the subsequent populations of their modern male-line descendants. Other possible causes have been considered for abnormally large single male-line families; but, so far, none seems as productive as early polygyny.²¹

It can be expected that, though most male-line families in England would not have seen an effect from polygyny, some families could have become considerably larger than most families, as a result of early polygyny – a few of these exceptionally large male-line families could have retained a single surname. The vast majority of surnames are far rarer than the Plant surname, which has around 15,000 members in the UK and others overseas. Most of the most common English surnames (*e.g.* Smith) seem, according to the emerging DNA evidence, to belong to many different male-line families. The available Y-DNA evidence so far suggests that it is unusual for so common an English surname as Plant to belong largely to a single male-line family. The general picture can be expected to become clearer as more of the frequent English surnames are randomly tested.

A.7 The polygyny hypothesis for Plant

The main concentration of Plants is found near the Welsh Marches and the Welsh meaning of *plant* is ‘children’. This, together with the DNA evidence, can suffice for a ‘many children’ hypothesis.

It is reasonable to suppose that the Plant name could have been coined for the ‘many children’ of a single family. Alternatively, the name could have been coined elsewhere and then circumstances in the Welsh Marches could have led on to its proliferation throughout an abnormally large male-line family. There are other early instances of the Plant name elsewhere; but, there is no need, for this surname, to consider its inheritance by a large number of polygynous children away from the Welsh Marches.

The name could have been coined in Anjou, for example, as *de la Planta* meaning ‘from the shoot’ or ‘offshoot’ or ‘offspring’. It seems likely that there was a coincidence of a shared culture involving man’s *vegetable* soul such that that the meaning ‘from the shoot’ (or ‘offspring’) overlaps with the Welsh meaning ‘children’. We can not be sure that the names *de la Planta* and *Plant* belonged to the same family. The safest assumption is that they didn’t. Even if they did, it could have been that it was when this family reached the polygynous Welsh Marches that Plants sharing the same surname began to proliferate to an unusual extent. This

²¹see Appendix B of Plant (2009) in Further Reading.

would be enough to explain the Plants' surprisingly large single-surname, single-family population, particularly in the Welsh Marches.

A.8 A response to critics of the polygyny hypothesis

For completeness, however, it should be added that there are some people who have disagreed with this explanation, based on polygyny. Their objection potentially applies to other surnames besides my explanation of the abnormally large Plant family. Their objection is that the different polygynous children would have adopted different surnames. I believe that their argument is misguided. Their argument can be questioned on the basis that it is speculative to assert that property laws dictated how surnames had to descend. Quite apart from this, the situation for the property rights of bastards was not as clear-cut as it is often presumed. This is evidenced as follows.

- There is evidence of a practise for the French nobility that was in general disagreement with the Canon Law of the church. The historian, Rodulfus Glaber, was a monk at Cluny in eastern France, who died ca.1046. He approved of the Norman dukes and seems to have accepted the transmission of their office through 'concubines' which he defends by Old Testament precedence and that of the illegitimate birth of Constantine the Great.²²
- In Wales and the Welsh Marches, polygynous children could be treated equally with those who were 'legitimate' in the eyes of the church. The Iorwerth thirteenth-century text states:

The law of the church says that no-one is entitled to patrimony save the father's eldest son by his wedded wife. The law of Hywel adjudges it to the youngest son as to the eldest, and judges that the father's sin and his illegality should not be set against the son for his patrimony.

- English and Canon Law favoured primogeniture whereby the eldest legitimate son had sole rights to inheritance. However, even under English Law, no-one questions that others, besides the eldest legitimate son, could inherit a surname. In Blackstone's 18th century *Commentaries of the Laws of England*²³, it states:

Yet he [a bastard] may gain a surname by reputation though he has none by inheritance. All other children have a settlement in their father's parish; but [for] a bastard [it is] in the parish where born, for he has no father.

²²Rodulfi Glabri *Historium libri quinque*, tr. John France, Oxford Medieval Texts, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, pp. lvii, 164-5, 204-5.

²³Vol. I, ed. W. Morrison (London, 2001) pp. 352-53.

In short, despite *some* customs of property law, there is substantial reason to doubt that there was a universal restriction on bastards inheriting a paternal surname. In particular, a Welsh father could recognise the inheritance rights of his sons by other women, despite the fact that they were ‘illegitimate’ according to Canon Law. It seems misinformed to deny that a surname could descend to polygynous children, particularly in the Welsh Marches, especially when surnames were first forming, particularly for a name that simply meant ‘children’ in Welsh. Polygynous Plant ‘offspring’ could have shared this surname, especially as the general meaning ‘children’ does not identify a father and so could hardly offend the father’s ‘more legitimate’ issue under Canon Law.

A.9 Reliability of the Plant DNA result

At the time of writing, sixteen out of twenty-eight with the surname spelling Plant or Plantt have matched one another (57%).²⁴ Amongst the remainder, there are two matching pairs and eight singletons. In addition, six out of nine French Canadians with the surname spelling Plante have matched one another (67%) though not with any with the spelling Plant or Plantt.

It is important to stress that each of those tested has volunteered independently. There is no bias towards American participants for Plant/Plantt and no evidence of any associated ‘founder effect’ whereby the genetic diversity might be expected to be less than in England. Nor is there any evidence of statistical bias towards volunteers with known genealogical connections. I have discussed this more fully elsewhere.²⁵

It is possible that there is some statistical bias, amongst those who volunteered, towards those who are rich enough to take the test and towards those who have an interest in technical aspects of family history. It might hence be argued that there is a bias towards the middle classes and some people claim that these are likely to have a lower rate of cuckoldry than those in lower socio-economic groups and hence a lower than average rate of the so-called ‘false paternity events’ that affect the fraction of volunteers that are expected to Y-DNA match. However, this argument does not take account of the fact social norms have changed throughout history and, in particular, there is likely to have been considerable ‘social mobility’ down the generations, in most lines of descent, making any statistical skewing of the *long-term* false paternity rate seem questionable even if there is indeed a middle-class bias in the modern volunteers.

Aside from this debatable reservation, it seems reasonable to treat the sample of Plant(t)s tested as ‘random’. Statistical calculations then suggest that there is a likely error of around 10% in the percentage of Plant(t)s found to match, due to the limited sample size. The extent of this error can be expected to reduce as and when more *random* Plant(t)s come forward to take the test. For the particular situation of around half of a sample matching, the sample-size uncertainty on the 50% matching

²⁴<http://www.plant-fhg.org.uk/dna.html> lists the latest data.

²⁵see Appendix C of Plant (2009) in Further Reading.

is 10% for a sample size of 25, falling to 7% for 50 random volunteers, and to 5% for 100 random volunteers. Though this demonstrates that there is a gradual advantage to increasing the number of random volunteers, any advantage would be more than offset if sample bias were introduced by targeting particular Plant(t)s for testing.

When around 50% match, it can not be ruled out that the surname has a single male ancestor for its origins.²⁶ That is not to say that it is proven that the surname has a single origin, since descent from some other origins may have died out or have been swamped in the results by volunteers from the most populous family. Either way, the DNA results indicate that a substantial fraction of Plant(t)s match indicating that there is an unusually large Plant(t) family.

A.10 DNA clustering and a surname's uncertain origins

There has been much discussion about how the number of origins for a surname might relate to the number of clusters of matching Y-DNA signatures that are found for the surname. Much of such discussion is fallacious. There is not a simple correspondence between the number of clusters and the number of origins, for the following reasons. A single origin can give rise to several clusters, due to Y-DNA being introduced from males not bearing that single-origin surname. On the other hand, as already mentioned, several origins can give rise to a dominant single cluster because the descent from the other origins may have died out either almost or entirely.

That is not to say that the extent of Y-matching for a surname might never be taken as a *very rough* indicator of whether it might have had just several, or *very many* (*i.e.* hundreds of) separate origins. This is particularly the case if, for example, the absence of any significant degree of matching helps to confirm a linguistically-based theory. Such a situation arises for the surname Smith, which likely descends from local smiths for whom there was no doubt at least one for each of *very many* localities.

Computer simulations of the number of clusters expected for a surname have been carried out by Turi King and Mark Jobling.²⁷ They define a descent cluster as being at least two matching Y-DNA signatures, in a sample of forty-two volunteer descendants.

King and Jobling do not consider the case of a very large single family due to polygyny. Also, they only consider cases where there are at least one hundred male descendants of a surname after twenty generations though there is no surviving descendant at all in 90% of cases from each single ancestral origin. For the case of a hundred origins for a surname for example, only about ten are expected to produce modern issue and not all of these will appear in a random sample of forty-two volunteers.

²⁶see Appendix A of Plant (2009) in Further Reading.

²⁷T.E.King and M.A.Jobling, *Founders, drift and infidelity: the relationship between Y chromosome diversity and patrilineal surnames*, Molecular Biology and Evolution;
<http://mbe.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/msp022>.

King and Jobling do not consider a larger number than this for the number of origins of a surname. As extremes, they consider surnames with one, or one hundred, origins. Though this has some effect on the expected number of clusters seen, the effect is somewhat limited. For one hundred origins, the computer simulations indicate that the most likely number of clusters to be seen, in a random sample of forty-two, is around three to seven:

<u>number of clusters</u>	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<u>chance of occurring</u>	1%	8%	21%	30%	24%	11%	3%	1%

For a single origin, there are likely to be no more than four clusters:

<u>number of clusters</u>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<u>chance of occurring</u>	22%	37%	25%	13%	2%	1%

A proviso needs to be added, however. The simulation assumes a ‘typical’ modern rate of false paternity events of only 2%. The number of clusters can be expected to be higher for larger assumed values.

A.11 Early times and the surname Pomeroy

There are particular uncertainties for early times. Relatively little is known about social customs in late medieval times and common behaviour could have differed from that ‘typical’ of today. Early practises of surname inheritance could produce a large effect on the ensuing Y-DNA results for a surname. One such result is that an abnormally large male-line family can arise as a result of early polygyny, as has already been discussed in some detail for the Plant surname. There are also particular uncertainties about false paternity rates in early times, particularly for a noble name such as Pomerai.

The scope for comparison with the King and Jobling clustering predictions is limited. For example, Chris Pomeroy’s results for the surname Pomeroy/Pomery are *not* for *forty-two random* volunteers. Some attempt to extract a random sample would be needed before a direct comparison could be made with King and Jobling’s theoretical predictions.

One suggestion is that the surname Pomeroy/Pomery derives from the old French for an apple orchard and some resulting French place names. More particularly however, the name is found concentrated in Devon and can be traced back to Ralph de la Pomerai, a close associate of William the Conqueror, whose family lived for almost 500 years in the castle of Berry Pomeroy, near Totnes, Devon. Chris Pomeroy’s DNA study has found that other bearers of the Pomeroy/Pomery surname do not match with the Viscount Harberton line, which traces back to the noble family, though false paternity events might provide an explanation. The surname shows several clusters.

In particular, King and Jobling’s simple computer model assumes a ‘typical’ false paternity rate of only 2%. The uncertain reliability of this assumption means that the Y-DNA results do not rule out that several of the Pomeroy/Pomery Y-clusters could have descended from an early ‘affinity’ to the noble Pomeroy or,

indeed, through mixed male-and-female lines from a single noble ancestor. Surname transmission could have been more commonly than ‘typical’ through daughters or by polyandry (*i.e.* a woman taking more than one man) in the early history of this name. An early, high false paternity rate for the Pomeroy name could have arisen as a result of female descendants being amenable to holding on to the noble name for progeny who were not genetic *male-line* descendants of the noble family. Such ‘false paternity’ occurrences could have led to extra non-matching clusters of Y-DNA signatures amongst the modern bearers of the Pomeroy/Pomery name.

For the nobility, there is evidence that they did not always adhere to the social custom of inherited male-line surnames but were often inclined to adopt aliases to suit their current prestige.

A.12 Uncertainty for the surname Warren

Turning to the surname Warren, there have been various suggestions for its origins. One is that it could have originated, as many separate families, from the common Norman forename Warin. Another suggestion is that it could have derived from the *de Warenne* earls descended from Geoffrey Plante Genest, though there were earlier *de Warenne* earls of a different male-line stock.

The population of the Warren surname is very large; but, unlike Plant, it displays many different clusters of Y-DNA matches together with other ‘singleton’ y-signatures that do not match any other. This provides no basis for a polygyny explanation, since there is no evidence for an abnormally large single family to suggest that. Instead a ‘many origins’ hypothesis suffices to explain the large population of this surname.

That is not to say that it can be ruled out that a few of the Warrens might have an intact male-line descent from the *de Warenne* earls. For an interesting case, we can consider some comments that Roger Warren has kindly supplied about the Marnhull Warrens:

I am far from clear that we shall regress successfully beyond an ancestor born in Marnhull, Dorset in 1623. Our little group is entirely certain of the documentary trail back to that date and [there are also] four previously unknown cousins who have [Y-DNA matched]. [At that date, we reach] a currently insurmountable obstacle. We are entirely certain that the Marnhull Warrens descended from a strange family which changed its surname over the course of a century or so from Sidling to Sydling alias Warren, to Warren alias Sidling and eventually to plain Warren (of which our proven ancestor Christopher Warren, b ca.1623, was the first to carry the surname Warren without embellishment). Documentation for the period earlier than 1600 is scant and, for the first identifiable Sidling alias Warren in around 1520, lacks any reference to his parentage. Curiously, the surname Sidling seems to have died out. We are left with only speculation that illegitimacy was involved and that the first “errant” mother adopted the surname Sidling

from that of her native village some 20 miles from Marnhull. We can only speculate that the father had a surname homologous to Warren and that the Sidling successors knew of the parentage and assumed the Warren surname when the founding father died without legitimate issue.

There are three possible candidates with Warren-like surnames involved in and around Marnhull in the 1500s/early 1600s: Sir Ivo Fitz-Warine (descended from Fulk de Guarine of Metz); one of the Warrens of Fifehide (descended from King John and his concubine, an illegitimate daughter of the earls of Warren and Surrey); and, Sir John Wareyn (a CANON of Wells Cathedral who appears to have had associations with Marnhull).