

Modern Methods and a Controversial Surname: Plant

John S. Plant
Keele University

In the past few years, DNA testing has begun to contribute to our understanding. It is currently emerging more clearly which surnames are multi-origin, originating with many different forefathers, and which descend from a single male ancestor. For example, in 2000, Bryan Sykes published a pioneering study that had DNA tested several volunteers with his own surname.¹ It had been believed to be a topographical name: the word *sykes* is often used in Yorkshire to describe streams, springs, and boundary ditches. However, some are now arguing that Sykes would better be a locative name, from a single place; for it has single-ancestor origins.² Some entries in surname dictionaries need reconsidering.

As a case study, I shall describe the application of modern, multi-disciplinary methods to the surname Plant, which has been ascribed a different meaning each time an authority has written about it. The recent emergence of a different view about this name's origins has prompted a reassessment of its meaning.

A notable work is *A Dictionary of British Surnames* by P. H. Reaney, who listed many of the earliest forms of by-names.³ He complained that the earlier work of Ernest Weekly rarely gave the etymologies of proposed meanings; though now, in his turn, Reaney is being criticized for early by-name meanings which may not connect through to the hereditary surnames of the modern era. More emphasis is now being placed on the geographical distribution of each developing surname;⁴ this might identify a locality for its origins.

¹ B. Sykes and C. Irven, 'Surnames and the Y-chromosome', *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 66 (2000), 1417–19.

² C. Pomery, *DNA and Family History* (Richmond, 2004), p. 45.

³ P. H. Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames* (London, 1958).

⁴ D. Hey, *Family Names and Family History* (London and New York, 2000), p. 19.

Figure 1: Distribution of the Plant surname: (a) in pre-1700 IGI records; and, (b) in death registration records for 1842–46. The IGI data is taken from the 1984 version of International Genealogical Index and the deaths data is taken from D. Hey, ‘The distinctive surnames of Staffordshire’, *Staffordshire Studies*, 10 (1998), 1–28 (p. 14). The county boundaries are those of 1881 and they are subject to copyright as described in the Acknowledgements.

When discussing the distinctive surnames of Staffordshire, in 1998, David Hey presented some name distribution data, which indicated that Plant was a multi-origin surname.⁵ An indication of this and some other data is shown in Figure 1: for (a) pre-1700; and, for (b) 1842–46. Reaching back earlier, the largest cluster can be traced back to east Cheshire and north Staffordshire in late medieval times. There was also an early Lincolnshire cluster (Figure 1(a)), which can be dated back to 1344;⁶ and this was just across the Wash from medieval evidence for the Plant name in north Norfolk.

In the past three years, DNA evidence has indicated that Plant is a single-family name, despite its being widespread and prolific.⁷ Fourteen adult male Plants, who have diverse genealogies (Table 1), have agreed to be DNA tested and nine have matched exactly or nearly. When half or more of those with a single surname match, the name is said to be ‘modal’ or ‘single-ancestor’, that is to say their male lines converge back to a single male ancestor in a timescale of the past several hundred years. It is not expected that everyone with a single-ancestor surname will match, exactly or nearly, because it can be expected that there will have been false-paternity events, such as infidelities or adoptions, down the centuries. The DNA evidence indicates that Plant has relatively few mismatches and so it can be taken to be a single-ancestor name—this has implications for its origins and early ramification.

Though the situation before the mid-fourteenth century remains less certain, the Plant family in its main homeland can now be taken to track back, fairly straight-forwardly, broadly around a single locality, to the later-fourteenth century in east Cheshire. In east Cheshire,

⁵ The nineteenth Earl lecture, delivered at Keele University, 6 November 1997; published as D. Hey, ‘The distinctive surnames of Staffordshire’, *Staffordshire Studies*, 10 (1998), 1–28 (p. 14).

⁶ Patent Rolls 1344 May 2. Westminster. License for the alienation in mortmain to the prior and convent of Bolyngton [...] by John son of Alan Plant of Burgh, of a messuage in the same town [Burgh by Waynfleet].

⁷ There are an estimated twelve thousand Plants living in England and Wales, where Plant is the 617th most common surname, and there are a further five thousand in the USA.

Honde Plonte was a resident of Lyme,⁸ which adjoined the new de Warenne seat of Poynton; and, by 1383–84, Ranulph Plont was paying rent for a parcel of land, formerly belonging to John Walshe, at Rainow in Macclesfield manor just to the south.⁹ His son John Plont senior had sons William Plont and John Plont junior—it may have been the latter who appears as John Plant junior in a 1445 list of ninety-eight Knights, Gentlemen and Freeholders in Macclesfield hundred.¹⁰ Even by the late-fourteenth century, the Plant name had spread to the northernmost tip of Staffordshire to the south.¹¹

Earlier, there is evidence for Plant and similar names that dates back to the thirteenth century, with several connections to diverse de Warenne lands (Appendix A). It now seems likely, though not proven, that this was a widespread thirteenth-century family which supplied the genetic male-line ancestors of the modern, single family of Plants. There is explicit evidence that the Plonte name was hereditary by 1329: there is reference to ‘Robert Plonte, son of Walter Plonte’ in Bath.¹² The Plant name had evidently arrived at de Warenne lands near Bath in Somerset with a Robert Plonte, by c.1280, from de Warenne lands near Lewes in Sussex. This suggests that, from as early as this, scattered evidence for the Plant name might represent a single, ramifying family.

This outlines the evidence for the name’s origins: for the modern, single family of Plants, the name is single-ancestor. Aided by this and other findings, I shall review opinions for the meaning of Plant.

⁸ A. M. Tonkinson, *Macclesfield in the Later Fourteenth Century: Communities of Town and Forest*, Remains, Historical and Literary Connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancaster and Chester, 3rd series, 42 (Manchester, 1999), pp. 73–74.

⁹ PRO SC11/989.

¹⁰ J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire: Past and Present; or A History of the Hundred of Macclesfield in the County Palatine of Chester*, 2 vols (London, 1877), I, 17.

¹¹ W. K. Plant, *Roots and Branches: the Official Journal of the Plant Family History Group*, 2 (Chelford, 1991), p. 7. Also, E. Tooth, *The Distinctive Surnames of North Staffordshire* vol. 2 *Surnames Derived from Occupations, Trades, Position and Rank* (Leek, Staffordshire, 2002) p. 182.

¹² Ancient Deeds belonging to the Corporation of Bath: 1329 grant ref. BC 151/2/46.

Diverse opinions have been published for the Plant name's meaning. In his *A Dictionary of Family Names of the United Kingdom*, M. A. Lower wrote in 1860:

A family in humble circumstances at Kettering bear the ancient royal name Plantagenet, though now it is commonly corrupted to Plant.¹³

Of course, the controversy did not stop there. Such claims as Lower's were criticized in 1873 by Revd C. W. Bardsley, who regretted that 'English surnames have been made the subject of endless guessings'.¹⁴ In 1916, Ernest Weekly suggested the meaning 'from the plantation' (topographical) for *de la Plaunt*; and he opined that Plant was a nickname with various senses: 'sprig'; or, 'cudgel'; or, 'young offspring'.¹⁵ In 1958, P. H. Reaney set aside these conjectures and proposed the different meaning 'gardener'; and this opinion has been carried through to the third edition, in 1991, of his Dictionary.¹⁶ In 1988, Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges adhered to Reaney's opinion that Plant is a 'metonymic occupational name for a gardener', adding that it was 'perhaps also a nickname for a tender or delicate individual'.¹⁷

Some provisos need to be added to Lower's Plantagenet claim. Eventually, Y-DNA evidence from the skeletal remains of the Plantagenets might disprove a male-line relationship between them and the Plants; in the meantime, a note of caution is needed. The early evidence for the Plantagenet name is less comprehensive than many people imagine. Geoffrey, count of Anjou, is recorded with the name¹⁸ *Plante*

¹³ M. A. Lower, *A Dictionary of Family Names of the United Kingdom* (London and Lewes, 1860), p. 269.

¹⁴ Revd C. W. Bardsley, *English Surnames: Their Sources and Significations* (London, 1873), cited by Hey, *Family Names and Family History*, p. 12.

¹⁵ E. Weekly, *Surnames* (London, 1916), p. 185.

¹⁶ P. H. Reaney, *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, third edn with corrections and additions by R. M. Wilson (London and New York, 1991), p. 354.

¹⁷ P. Hanks and F. Hodges, *A Dictionary of Surnames* (Oxford and New York, 1988), p. 423.

¹⁸ *The Complete Peerage or a History of the House of Lords and all its Members from the Earliest Times*, vol. 11 edited by G. H. White (London, 1949), Appendix

Genest by Wace (1135–74)¹⁹ or *Plantegenest* by Jean de Marmoutier (c.1170–75).²⁰ There is also reference to an unknown Galfrido *Plauntegenet* in the Close Rolls (1266). It is not until 1448, however, that the royal House of York were using Plantagenet as a hereditary surname.²¹

There is insufficient evidence to sustain fully Lower's contention that Plant is a corruption of Plantagenet. I shall return to a weaker version of this claim, but only as an illustration of a wider theme: there could have been a contribution to the Plant name's meaning from a sense that can be ascribed to *Plante Genest*.

Moving on to more recent opinions, I shall argue, in particular, that the 'offspring' meaning of Plant should not be ignored. P. H. Reaney ignored this suggestion of Weekly's, even though he recognised similar meaning for other surnames, such as Child. Weekly opined that 'young offspring' was a nickname. However, the 'offspring' meaning can instead be assigned to the 'surname of relationship' category, as has been adopted for such names as Child, Vaughan, and Younger.²² The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) lists the archaic meaning 'young person' for the word *plant*,²³ and this can be explained as arising from a metaphorical grounding of 'offspring' on the Old English and Ancient French meaning 'offshoot' of *plante*: this grounding is an instance of the timeless 'People are Plants' metaphor,²⁴ involving the

G, pp. 140–41, note (e).

¹⁹ Wace, *Roman de Rou*, edited by H. Andresen, 2 vols (Bonn, 1877–79), II, 437, ll. 10300–02 and 10305.

²⁰ J. de Marmoutier, Preface to *Gesta Consulum Andegavorum* (*Chroniques des Comtes d'Anjou*), p. 170; cited in *The Complete Peerage*, vol. 11 edited by White, Appendix G., p. 140, note (e).

²¹ *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom; Extant, Extinct, or Dormant*, vol. 1, edited by V. Gibbs (London, 1910), p. 183, note (c).

²² R. A. McKinley, *A History of British Surnames* (London and New York, 1990), pp. 170–75.

²³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1989), s.v. *plant*, *n*¹, senses I.1.a and c.

²⁴ G. Lakoff and M. Turner, *Beyond Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago and London, 1989), pp. 6 and 12–14.

Great Chain of Being. ‘Young person’, or ‘offspring’, is the only *OED* definition that fits the Plant name directly.

It is strange that Reaney omitted this opinion, ‘offspring’, for he criticized C. L’Estrange Ewen with ‘Worst of all, he rejects sound etymologies which do not fit his preconceived theories’.²⁵ Why did Reaney lay himself open to his own criticism? Though now overturned by the DNA evidence, there are at least two possible explanations. First, Reaney may have believed that an occupational meaning ‘gardener’ for Plant, rather than ‘offspring’, was more in keeping with a widespread multi-origin name. However, Plant is not multi-origin as had been thought, so this reasoning can be set aside. Alternatively, he may have been mindful of countering Lower’s claim. He introduced an argument which selected *Plantebene* and *Planterose* instead of *Plantagenet*; and, in his zeal to dismiss Lower’s claim, was he over-reacting by dismissing ‘offspring’ also, since it might be used to bolster an exaggerated Plantagenet claim? If so, this reaction is now inappropriate, since the DNA evidence indicates that the Plants are *de facto* offspring of a single ancestor; any *Plante Genest* claim now hinges on the prospects for obtaining adequate Y-DNA from Plantagenet remains. The DNA evidence that Plant is a single-family name strengthens the case for ‘offspring’ as compared to ‘gardener’.

As Reaney’s ‘gardener’ opinion is now being challenged, it is appropriate to raise a further question. Was it politeness that caused Reaney to omit the thirteenth-century by-name *Plantefolie*²⁶ while using *Plantebene* and *Planterose* as key planks in his arguing for a ‘gardener’ meaning for Plant? Omitting *Plantefolie* affects the deliberations. A literal meaning of the thirteenth century English by-name *Plantefolie* is ‘wickedness shoot’, which might either be a metonym (synecdoche) for a ‘male generator of bastards’ or, with the offshoot

²⁵ C. H. L’Estrange Ewen, *A History of Surnames of the British Isles* (1931) and *Guide to the Origins of British Surnames* (1938), cited by Hey, *Family Names and Family History*, p. 13.

²⁶ 1209 *Plantefolie* Gilbert, Leic’, Curia Regis; 1226 *Plantefolie* John, Somerset, Curia Regis; 1263 *Plantefolie* Maud, Weston’, Close Rolls; 1270 *Plantefolie* Adam, Welle Fanerwal’ (co. York), Close Rolls.

sense, it might mean metaphorically a ‘bastard child’. We can compare the metonymic sense, to wit a ‘male generator of offspring’, with other names such as Toplady, Tiplady, Toplass, Topliss, Shakelady, Fullielove, Paramore, Sweetlove, Spendlove, Lemon (‘lover’, ‘sweetheart’), Blandamer (from *Pleyn d’amour*, cf. Fullielove), and perhaps also for example Pullrose, Breakspear, and Whitehorn, not to mention many obscene by-names.²⁷

Though the early names *Plantebene*, *Planterose* and *le Planteur* have been used to propose a gardener meaning for Plant, they may also, like *Plantefolie*, be taken to be names of philandering or be converted to an ‘offshoot’ sense. The thirteenth-century English name *Plantefolie* should be considered at least equally with *Plantebene* (rare) and *Planterose* (mainly French).²⁸ We then have, more than gardening:

Plantefolie: ‘wickedness shoot’ or ‘planter of wickedness’ or ‘bastard offspring’;

Plantebene: ‘hallowed shoot’ or ‘planter of seed’ or ‘pleasant offspring’; and,

Planterose: ‘risen shoot’ or cf. Pullrose or ‘grown or courtly child’.

A ‘generator of offspring’ sense may have been salient for *le Planteur*,²⁹ though sense as ‘the founder’³⁰ can be substituted for ‘the begetter’.

As well as *Plantefolie*, *Plantebene*, and *Planterose*, it seems relevant to consider a possible cultural influence from the name *Plante Genest*. Though evidence is lacking for the early use of the Plantagenet name in the royal line, which descended though Plante Genest’s son,

²⁷ McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, pp. 158–59.

²⁸ The name *Planterose*, which is found mostly in France, may be associated with the early-thirteenth-century poem the *Roman de la Rose* whose rose has been illustrated obscenely as well as with courtly connotations. S. Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 292.

²⁹ Names based on arable occupations were rare, seemingly because such trades were too common to serve as a means of distinguishing one name from another. McKinley, *A History of British Surnames*, p. 133.

³⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *plant*, v, sense 3.a.

Henry II, early Plant-like names can be associated with a cadet line, which descended through Geoffrey Plante Genest's illegitimate son, Hamelin. It was Hamelin who fathered the subsequent de Warenne line; and, since the Plant name is found in proximity to that line (Appendix A), there could have been some cultural influence from the Plante Genest nickname. Plante Genest had been the founder of the Angevin Empire, which included England by marriage. The sprig of broom meaning of his nickname is an instance of a hairy shoot: earlier, the ninth-century founder of a new Duchy of Aquitaine had been Bernard *Plantevelue* (or *Planta Pilus*), which means 'hairy shoot'. Given the 'Creation is Birth' metaphor,³¹ the Plante Genest emblem is apt for a generator of a realm:³² there was a sense of the Lord's planted creation for this name. The *Pearl* poet of the later-fourteenth-century de Warenne and Plant homeland wrote of God's creation with: '*that wyz that al the worlde planted*'.³³

A theme can be associated with Plant-like names: the role of man and God in generation and creation. For a surname, the generation of children is pertinent. The thirteenth-century scholastics taught that a man's offspring was only vegetable and animal until it received an intellectual component of soul from God.³⁴ There is particular reference in Middle and early English texts to receiving the Lord's planted *vertue*³⁵ to grow straight;³⁶ and, for this, one petitioned the Lord.

³¹ G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London, 1980), pp. 74–75.

³² *I wyl speke of the people \& realme/ that I may edifie it/ and that I may plant it.* Erasmus, d 1536, *De immensa dei misericordia: A sermon of excedynge great mercy of god, made by ye moste famous doctour maister Eras. Rot. Translated out of Latine into Englysshe, at the request of the moste honorable and vertuous lady, the lady Margaret countesse of Salisbury* (London, 1526), (Bodleian Library, STC 2nd edn, 10474.5).

³³ *Patience*, line 111. Text in, for example, *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, edited by M. Andrew and R. Waldron, York Medieval Texts, second series (London, 1978), p. 190.

³⁴ J. J. McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford, 1982), p. 314.

³⁵ H. Kurath and S. M. Kuhn, *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor, 1930–2001), s.v. *plaunten*, v, sense 2(c).

This theme is apparent in some variant spellings: there was a sense of generation for the name Plente; and, for Plaint, there was a sense of an appeal to the Lord. The spelling, *Plente*, occurs as early as 1219,³⁷ with William *Plente* in Kent, and Radulphus *Plente* having responsibilities for reparations to the royal palace and for the burbhote of Oxford. As well as being recognised in the *Middle English Dictionary (MED)* as a variant spelling of *plante*, *plente* has meanings generosity, abundant, or fertility. Putting these together with the three powers of man's vegetable soul,³⁸ gives nutritive generosity, abundant growth, and fertile generation. Another spelling is *Plaint*. As well as a lament to God, a *plaint* can mean a petition. In the 1394 Calendar of Inquisitions, there is reference to John *Plaint*, aged 60 years or more, as a principal witness at Lincoln to the proof of age of a son of John of Gaunt's mistress Catherine Swynford formerly Roet.

For *Plantefolie* and *Plantebene*, there is a dichotomy between planting wicked love or hallowed seed, with two kinds of love: carnal; and, divine. Love for the Lord was like the '*plante of pees*', according to William Langland, and this could have various senses alongside those of the 'planting of seeds' or the 'young vine of peas'. In some manuscripts of Langland's text, the spelling is *plente*³⁹ suggesting the 'plenty of peace'; or *planete* suggesting the 'planet of peace' (Mercury) which can represent Jesus,⁴⁰ as does the vine;⁴¹ or *playnt*⁴² suggesting

³⁶ [...] *plant in children conuenable and good aduertisementes and preceptes, wherby the yonng spryng of vertuous maners shall grow streyghte*. Extract from *The education or bringinge vp of chidren, translated oute of Plutarche by syr Thomas Eliot knyght 1490?–1546* (London, 1532), (British Library, STC 2nd edn, 20057).

³⁷ 3 Henry III Pipe Rolls.

³⁸ C. McKeon, *A Study of the Summa Philosophae of the Pseudo-Grosseteste* (New York, 1948), p. 151; also, J. J. McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 291–95 and 314.

³⁹ In various manuscripts, as listed by G. Kane, *Piers Plowman, I, The A Version* (London, 1960), p. 199; such as the Trinity College Dublin Manuscript D.4.12.

⁴⁰ This is discussed in Kane, *Piers Plowman, I, The A Version*, p. 155.

⁴¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. *vine*, n, sense 2.a.

⁴² Manuscript English Poetry a.1 Bodleian Library (S.C.3938–42) the 'Vernon

the ‘ascension of prayer through the vine’. Langland’s texts place love besides the fecundity of peas; or Jesus as the prophesied prince of peace;⁴³ or a courtly equivalent,⁴⁴ a scion of peace:

Loue is the louest thing that oure Lord askith, and ek the plante of pes
[Langland, A-text, c.1362]⁴⁵

For truthe telleth that loue is triacle of heuen: [...] And ek the plante of
pees, most precious of vertues [Langland, B-text]⁴⁶

Love is plonte of pees, most precious of vertues [Langland, C-text]⁴⁷

The following examples serve to illustrate that the word *plant* was associated with a human planting of gentleness or an offshoot of vice:⁴⁸

If gentillness were planted naturelly Vnto a certeyn lynage doun the
lyne [...] They might do no villeyne or vice [Chaucer, c.1395]⁴⁹

if thai were blynded with fire of fraward lufe, the whilk wastie
burionyng of vertue, & norrysches the plantes of all vyce [Misyn,
c.1434]⁵⁰

Manuscript’; as listed by Kane, *Piers Plowman*, I, *The A Version*, p. 199.

⁴³ Isaiah 9:6.

⁴⁴ R. W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992), pp. 225–26.

⁴⁵ W. Langland, *Piers Plowman*, in A-text version, Passus I, ll. 136–37, as listed by Kane, *Piers Plowman*, I, *The A Version*, p. 199.

⁴⁶ W. Langland, B-text, Passus I, ll. 148 and 152, in G. Kane and E. T. Donaldson, *Piers Plowman*, II, *The B Version* (London, 1975), p. 250.

⁴⁷ In the C-text version of *Piers Plowman*, Passus II, l. 149; in the Huntingdon manuscript HM 143, as listed by E. Salter and D. Pearsall, *Piers Plowman* (London, 1967), p. 73.

⁴⁸ In the Lincoln Carmelite Richard Misyn’s 1434 translation of Richard Rolle’s *Fire of Love* (c.1320), he describes carnal love with *norrysches the plantes of all vyce*.

⁴⁹ J. M. Manly and E. Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales Studied on the Basis of All Known Manuscripts* vol. 3 *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale* (Chicago, 1940), 234–67, 270–83 and 1134.

The growth of such plantings was associated with human offspring:

vertuous doctryne In her so dyd water a pure perfyte plante, Which
dayly increased by sufferaunce devyne, Merveylously growynge in her
fresshe and varnaunt [Henry Bradshaw, d 1513]⁵¹

Grete God ws graunt that we have long desirit, A plaunt to spring of thi
successioun [Dunbar, 1500–20]⁵²

his Grandchild [of Sir John Savage], then a young Plant and newly sent
to the Innes of Court, to be trained up answerably to his Birth and
Dignity [...] That hopeful Plant, that is the apparent Heir of all his glory
and this great Discent [Mr William Webb's 1621 account of the
Hundred of Macclesfield]⁵³

With the phrase 'Heir of all his glory and this great Discent', the last of these texts seemingly refers to the inheritance of soul implantations from both God and man. This text, for the main Plant homeland, is in keeping with the plurality of an interpretation of the earlier East Anglian names *Plauntes* (1275) and *de Plantes* (1282) (Appendix A). Given the context of thirteenth-century scholasticism, *de Plantes* can be interpreted as 'from God and man's plantings'. Though a tender young plant might be associated with frailty, a planting of the Lord's *vertue* brought strength to a young offspring of man.

There is also the name *de la Plaunt*. This name seems relevant in as much as it appears amongst some Rouen merchants in 1273: one is called *Plaunt*⁵⁴ and two are called *de la Plaunt*.⁵⁵ Though Weekly's

⁵⁰ R. Misyn, *The Fire of Love*, edited by Rev. R. Harvey, Early English Text Society, original series 106 (London, 1896), p. 5, ll. 2–3.

⁵¹ H. Bradshaw, Book I, *When Phebus had ronne his cours in sagittari*, ll. 603–06, from *The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester*, Early English Text Society, original series 88 (London, 1887), p. 29.

⁵² W. Dunbar, *Poems* (Scottish Text Society, 1893), p. lxxxvii, l. 30.

⁵³ This text appears more fully in J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire: Past and Present* (London, 1877), vol. 1, pp. 9–14, esp. p. 10.

⁵⁴ Geoffrey *Plaunt*. Patent Rolls, June 2, 1273, Westminster.

suggested sense is ‘from the plantation’, an alternative etymology can be outlined for *de la Plaunt*. Generation lies near the prototypical heart⁵⁶ of the early word *plante*: the Latin meaning of *planta* is a ‘shoot for propagation’, and there is reference in early English books to an offshoot being like a child⁵⁷ and to the planting of children in marriage.⁵⁸ In thirteenth-century scholasticism, the generative was joined, in the soul, with the direct creation by God of the intellective.⁵⁹ Generation, with God’s husbandry, seems central to the meaning of Plant-like names. Such sense as ‘from God’s vine’ is possible for *de la Plaunt*, as the Bible represents men as plants in God’s vineyard (Isaiah 5:7), or as the branches of Jesus as the vine (John 15:1–5). In medieval times, there was also a grounding on man’s vegetable soul with its powers of nutrition, augmentation, and generation: contemporary depictions of so-called Green Man heads⁶⁰ show a plant or vines or tree foliage issuing forth from the orifices of a man’s head, and this can be considered to represent his vegetable soul, carrying augmentative and generative powers, within him and beyond. Taking the family tree or vine metaphor, or taking metonymy implying a man with a vege-

⁵⁵ John *de la Plaunt* and Richard *de la Plaunt*. Patent Rolls, May 30, 1273, St Paul’s London.

⁵⁶ D. A. Cruse, *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 135–36.

⁵⁷ *nature hath provided that in our chyldern [...] we may be renewed [...] nature [...] maketh one thyng to yssue out of an other (lyke as a yong plante whiche is cut of, from ye tree springeth freshly vp*. Extract from Erasmus, d 1536, *A right frutefull epystle, deuysed by the moste excellent clerke Erasmns [sic], in laude and prayse of matrymony, translated in to Englyshe*, by Rychard Tauernour (British Library, STC 2nd edn, 10492).

⁵⁸ *haue respect to the condicions of thy spouse, out of whom thou desyrest to plant chydren*. Extract from Henrich Bullinger, 1504–75, *The golde[n] boke of christen matrimonye moost necessary [and] profitable for all the[m], that entend to liue quietly and godlye in the Christen state of holy wedlock newly set forthe in English by Theodor Basil* (London, 1543), (Bodleian Library, STC 2nd edn, 4047).

⁵⁹ McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 314.

⁶⁰ M. Harding, *A Little Book of the Green Man* (London, 1998), p. 14. Also, J. Harte, *The Green Man* (Andover, 2001), p. 3.

table soul or a generative shoot, the sense becomes ‘from the (tree or vine)⁶¹ shoot’ for *de la Plaunt* (rare) which is essentially the same meaning, ‘offshoot/offspring’, as seems likely for Plant.

Though similar meaning is found in archaic English, it is particularly in Wales that *plant* literally means ‘children’ and *planta* means ‘to beget children’.⁶² We might consider that the hereditary Plant surname originated independently in its principal homeland, near the Welsh borders. However, there is also the consideration that the surname may have arrived in its main homeland with the de Warennes in the mid-fourteenth century from a widespread by-name or surname formation for this single Plant family, in places as far away as Norfolk from Wales (Appendix A). The possibility of a Welsh ‘children’ reinforcement to the ‘offshoot’ meaning of *Plante* can then be guided by a reported finding that distance from Wales is not the sole factor in explaining the choices made by Welsh migrants into England.⁶³ Even in the fourteenth century Poll Tax returns for far away Essex, where the spelling *Plaunte* was first recorded in 1262,⁶⁴ there are several names derived from Wales: five Walleys, two Walshs, one Welsche, one Walschman, one Wales, two Gryffins, and one Ewen, as well as several people whose name had been derived from Gough. To this, it can be added that the name William *Plente* (1272–84) coexisted with William *Plauntes* (1275) in Norfolk, though it is not clear how directly the Plant surname related back to the 1219 spelling *Plente* and to a Welsh influence from the 1225 marriage of William de Warenne to Maud Marshall of Pembroke. If we consider a Welsh influence, as well

⁶¹ A Middle English meaning of *plant* is a ‘young plant, or young vine, or young tree’ (*Middle English Dictionary*, s.v.).

⁶² *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru: A Dictionary of the Welsh Language*, edited by G. A. Bevan (Cardiff, 1950–2003).

⁶³ The (incomplete) poll-tax returns (1377–81) indicate that Hereford and Shropshire offered good opportunities for settlers arriving from mid-Wales, but the (full) tax returns of 1381 for Gloucestershire note far fewer Welshmen and women. It is surprising to find that Leicestershire (in 1379) apparently contained far more Welsh settlers than did Gloucestershire or Lancashire. Hey, *Family Names and Family History*, pp. 57–58.

⁶⁴ Pleas of the Forest (PRO).

as an influence from the spelling *Plente*, it would seem that a ‘fertile’ sense to *plente* and a ‘children’ sense to *plant* could have emboldened a metaphorical mapping of the ‘offshoot’ sense for *plante*, up the Great Chain of Being, to give ‘offspring’ for the surname.

The probability that ‘offspring’ was the most salient meaning of the Plant name is increased, it would seem, by the fact that my searches reveal that, as well as a Welsh influence, the Child by-name or surname occurs in proximity to early evidence for the Plant name (Appendices B and C). Given that there were those who understood that *plant* translated to ‘children’ and the surname Child existed locally, it seems reasonable to suppose that the meaning of Plant was ‘offshoot’ (as in Old English and French) implying ‘offspring’ (as in Welsh). This does not reveal whose offspring. The planted *vertues* of the Lord had nurtured a spreading vine of ‘offspring’ from a ‘sprig’ of man’s generation. The founding father of the Plant offspring apparently lived early and his identity is not known: the name was ramifying in the thirteenth century, around de Warenne lands, and Plant is known to have been hereditary by the fourteenth century. Since then, the surname has remained widespread, with a developing distribution; but, the DNA results show that even a widespread name can belong to a single family. The meaning ‘offspring’ is apt for the offspring of this single-family.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDICES

A Early evidence for Plant in association with de Warenne lands

In 1164, Geoffrey Plante Genest's illegitimate son, Hamelin, married Isabel de Warenne and thereby acquired the title of the earldom of Surrey. Their son and heir, William de Warenne, 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 is called Roger *Planteng'* or *Plantyn* or *Plantin* in Norfolk records (1254–68).⁶⁵ Early spellings of the Plant name occur nearby: *Plente* (1272–84)⁶⁶ and *Plautes* (1275)⁶⁷ in Norfolk; *Plante* in Cambridgeshire (1279);⁶⁸ and, *de Plantes* in Huntingdonshire (1282).⁶⁹

The Plant name is found near de Warenne lands in Sussex, Somerset, north Wales, north Norfolk, and east Cheshire. In c.1280, 'Robert Plonte of Saltforde, once bailif of Marsfelde' is mentioned in records for Bath:⁷⁰ 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, was assigned responsibility for the commissariat; and, in 1301, Richard Plant was granted a license to dig coal at Eweloe,⁷¹ near the de Warenne land of Bromfield and Yale near Chester. The last de Warenne 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 complaint⁷² about the removal of goods by James Plant and thirty others from the erstwhile de Warenne hundred of Gallow and Brothercross in north Norfolk; these thirty-one had twenty-six different surnames, seven of which subsequently appear around Macclesfield

⁶⁵ 1254 Close Rolls; 1258 Close Rolls; 1258 Patent Rolls; 1268 Close Rolls.

⁶⁶ Norwich Cathedral Charters.

⁶⁷ *Rotuli Hundrederum* (London, 1812–18).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Patent Rolls.

⁷⁰ Ancient Deeds Belonging to the Corporation of Bath: c.1280 grant ref. BC 151/4/14.

⁷¹ Pipe Rolls, Cheshire, The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 92 (London, 1938), p. 205.

⁷² 1352 Jan 28; Westminster; Patent Rolls.

manor adjoining the new de Warenne seat at Poynton: Plont; Halle; Kent; Knyght; Lovell; Nichol; and Bataille or Batiller.⁷³

There is a little further evidence that is consistent with an early de Warenne connection, though there is no evidence of a genetic connection between this nobility and the Plants. The Plant blazon, 'AR. A LABEL IN BEND AZ. IN CHIEF A ROSE GU.', can be considered alongside the de Warenne context as well as the Lancastrian red rose. The Plant blazon indicates illegitimate cadetship with a subsequent allegiance to the red rose. The de Warenes themselves were in illegitimate cadetship to royalty, and they succumbed to the Lancastrians after having feuded with them *c.*1320. It is possible that the Plants reflected that cultural tradition, though their blazon does not reveal their status within such a setting. The status of the de Warenes themselves was much reduced after the mid-fourteenth century.

B The name Child and a Welsh influence in early proximity to Plant

The meaning 'offspring' seems likely for the Plant surname, in view of its proximity to the name Child and a Welsh influence.

B.1 Early records in East Anglia

As already mentioned, there were Welshmen in Essex, where there is the first evidence for the spelling *Plaunte*; also, in Essex, there is a *Child* in the 1377 returns and two named *Chyld* in the 1381 returns. In the Norfolk Poll Tax returns, for the erstwhile de Warenne hundred of Gallow and Brothecross, there were in 1379 Thomas *Child* and Henricus *atte Childerhous*; and, more widely throughout Norfolk, there are three others with the name *Child*, one *Chyld*, one *Childes* and two more called *Childerhous*. To the south in Suffolk, there is Johannes *Waleys* and Johannes *Child* for Blackbourne hundred in 1377; and, more widely in Suffolk in 1381, there is a *Chyld*, a *Childerhous*, a *Childerston*, two more spelled *Childreston*, and a *Pulrose* in keeping with the metaphor for planting children.

B.2 The Cheshire/Staffordshire Plant cluster

No Child has been found in the (scarce) Poll Tax returns for Staffordshire; but, between Staffordshire and Wales, in the 1381 returns for Shropshire, at Donnington, there are records for a *Johannes Child cult' 2s 0d* and a *Wilelmus Child s' 12d*. There is no surviving fourteenth-century Poll Tax

⁷³ Tonkinson, *Macclesfield in the Later Fourteenth Century*, pp. 71, 73–74, 78, 100, 119, 131, 134, 138, 185, 253, 258, 261 and 263–64.

return for Cheshire; but, in the 1660 Poll Tax and 1664 Hearth Tax returns for Northwich hundred,⁷⁴ there are seventy-two names of Welsh origin,⁷⁵ and nine references to *Child(e)* in the index to accompany the eight references to Plant. There are several references to Welshmen in Macclesfield manor in the later-fourteenth century (Appendix C) where there is the first evidence for the hereditary Plant surname in its main homeland.

C Welshmen in Macclesfield manor in the later-fourteenth century

A. M. Tonkinson mentions various Welshmen in Macclesfield manor in the later-fourteenth century, often in connection with affrays.⁷⁶ Swords were carried by at least two outsiders from Wales.

David Goldbourn also known as 'le Walshemon', servant of Thomas Fitton, and his concubine were described as common breakers of gardens in the borough. In March 1375, he was indicted for an assault on another Welshman and the near amputation of Matthew Walshe's hand with a baslard.

Two homicides in Macclesfield borough involved Welshmen. Ellis of Flintshire killed David ap Gron in 1371 and Arthur Wodehale killed William Walsh in 1380.

In 1371 Robert Coleman, a Welshman drew a knife on Thomas son of William Spycer at Wallgate. In 1388 Griffith the Welshman raised a stick to strike William Slegh in Rainow and was struck with a stick by Reginald Cook. In June 1391 two men, led by Reginald the Welshman of Haddon, lay in wait for Richard Hubart at Marpole, wounded him on his head with a sword and then mutilated all his limbs.

⁷⁴ *Northwich Hundred Poll Tax 1660 and Hearth Tax 1664*, edited by G. O. Lawton, Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, vol. 119 (Bath, 1979).

⁷⁵ Hey, *Family Names and Family History*, p. 113.

⁷⁶ Tonkinson, *Macclesfield in the Later Fourteenth Century*, pp. 59, 152, 159, 160, 169, 170–71 and 209.