

De Nogent Participation in the Conquest

The Norman Conquest was successful. William, Duke of Normandy (previously known as the Bastard, but now known as "the Conqueror") has, with the help of many mercenaries from France, Flanders and even Germany, conquered England and has begun a dynasty which is to last for several hundred years. The French and English cultures, families, destinies, will inevitably become intricately entwined. The upper classes and nobles speak French, and the French culture reaches far into the depths of British society. Williams policy of laying to waste all parts of England which questioned his authority is little remembered. *"With grim determination, William's army set about destroying homes and crops, and extinguishing all human and animal life from the Humber to the Wash. Those that avoided violent death, died from exposure or starvation."*¹

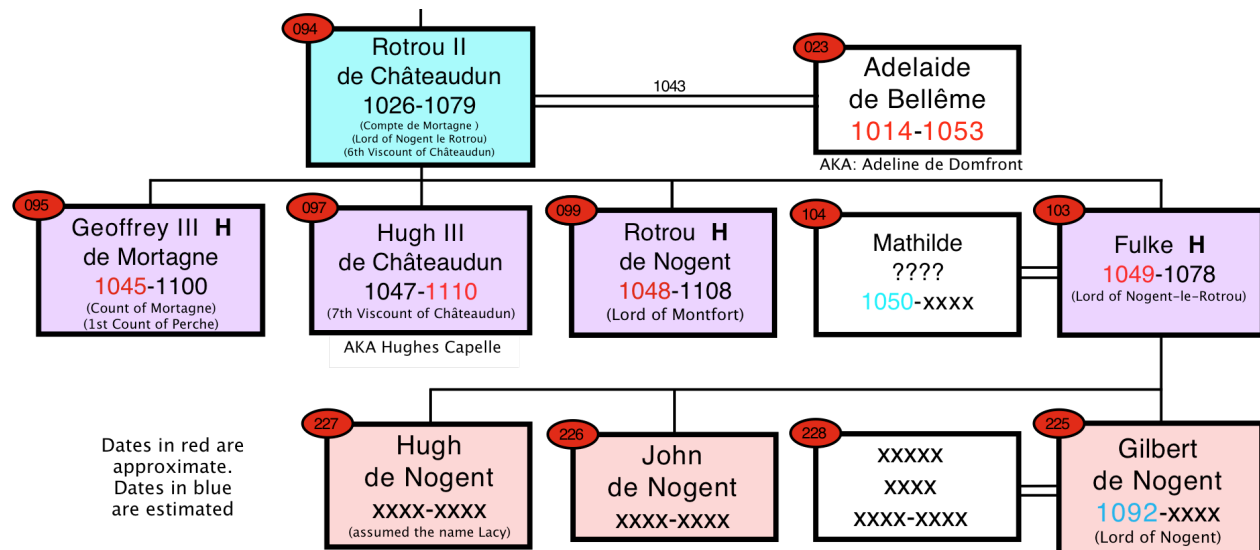
Nearly 20 years later, in 1085, William, anxious to know everything about the lands in England, who occupied them, their value, and all other details, even down to the numbers of livestock, ordered a compilation of all such facts. and the result of this compilation, known as the Domesday book completed in 1086 shows no "rewards" to the De Nogent family for their help in the Conquest. The references by Orderic Vitalis of rich rewards given to Geoffrey III, are thus not visible in this Domesday Book. There is a reference to Geoffrey III de Mortagne, the most important of the three brothers who appear to have assisted William in his venture, but it is believed that Geoffrey spent little time in England, returning to France at the first opportunity, and probably carrying his rewards with him. This would explain why no reference to Geoffrey can be found in the Domesday Book, compiled nearly twenty years after the invasion in 1066. However, the presence of Geoffrey and his brothers at the Battle of Hastings cannot be contested. It is highly probable that Geoffrey was paid in booty confiscated from the English nobles. No lands are shown as being attributed to any of the brothers, as a direct result of their aide given during the Conquest, although we must add, in all fairness, that the Domesday Book is in no way complete. London, Winchester, Northumberland, and Durham are not included in the survey, and unfortunately for us, the descendants of Fulke [*de Nogent*] were reputed to have settled in Winchester. It is also possible that they settled in some of the more unsure² parts, such as Wales, or the North-East. However, much later, from the beginning of the 12th century for more than a hundred years, the Counts of Perche were to hold visible estates in England³, but these estates came as the result of marriages to wealthy brides.

¹ The Effects of the Norman Conquest - Conquest and Resistance - England 1066 to 1088 (Geoff Boxell)

² The Conquest was not complete for many years, Wales and the North of England proved to be rather tough nuts to crack. William deliberately placed his most trusted men in the areas that were the most difficult to overcome. However, the rewards for succeeding in their task were commensurate with the difficulties.

³ "Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France" Chapter 7 (P.164) - The Rotrou Counts and England, 1100-1226. (Kathleen Thompson)

What then do we know about the members of the De Nogent family who went to England with William ?



In the above diagram, the descendants of Geoffrey and Hugh are not shown, as we endeavour to follow the branch of the family who will eventually go to Ireland.

Rotrou II had at least four sons, and we can surmise that any others could be illegitimate (or maybe that there were not enough titles to hand out). Two of his sons Geoffrey and Hugh, born to his wife Adelaide de Bellême, were given titles, Geoffrey will become Count of Mortagne, and Hugh will become Viscount of Châteaudun, on the death of their father in 1079. At first, it may appear that title Viscount of Châteaudun is the most important, which would make Hugh the first born, but in fact, the title of Count of Mortagne (once the Corbonnais), has associations with the Perche which cannot be denied. Geoffrey is thus promised the title of Count of Mortagne. Possibly, then, Geoffrey is the first-born ! It is impossible to say more, except that the birth dates of all the sons are not known with precision. Which of the sons is the eldest, which are born to the mother Adelaide, why do Rotrou and Fulke (not counting the others) receive no part of the family heritage ? Let us start our analysis with Geoffrey III, also known as Geoffrey de Mortagne.

Geoffrey III de Mortagne (1045-1100)

Born about 1045, Geoffrey seems to be the first born of the marriage between his father Rotrou II and Adelaide de Bellême. He was certainly very young when he accompanied his brothers to England, probably near to twenty. He returned to France in great triumph soon after the major battle at Hastings. Leaving William in England, he returned to the Perche, where, crowds lined the route to Nogent to rejoice in the success. Around the time of his return from England, after the Battle of Hastings, he marries Béatrice de Mondidier de Roucy, daughter of Hildouin II, Count of Roucy, whose families lands lie more than 250 km. to the North-East. This is indeed proof of the expanding influence of the De Nogent family, as previous marriages have always been within or close to the

Perche. He will eventually become Count of Mortagne (the most important title), upon the death of his father in 1079. Orderic Vitalis ⁴ describes him thus :

"This Count," he tells us, "was magnanimous, handsome, and strong; he feared God, was a devout friend of the Church, a staunch protector of her clergy and the poor. In peace he was gentle and courteous, and of most obliging manners; in war he was powerful and successful, and became formidable to the neighbouring princes who were his enemies. The nobility of his own birth and that of his wife Beatrice [de Montdidier de Roucy] rendered him illustrious above all his compeers, and he had amongst his subjects, warlike barons and brave governors of castles. He gave his daughters in marriage to men of the rank of counts : Mathilde to Raymond de Turenne [Diana Spencer descends from this line of the de Nogent family], Margaret to Henry, Earl of Warwick, and Juliana to Gilbert de l'Aigle, from whom sprung a noble race of handsome children. The glory of Count Geofirey was exalted by such a progeny, and he maintained it by his valour and courage, his wealth, and alliances. Above all, having the fear of God, he feared no man, but marched boldly with a lion's port. Laying claim to the strong Castle of Domfront, which had belonged to his great-grandfather, Warin de Bellême ⁵, and other domains as his right, he endeavoured to dispossess his cousin Robert (de Bellême) of them. "

Geoffrey is cited by many historians, including Orderic Vitalis, as having been rewarded by William with land, after the Conquest of England. However, the Domesday book, terminated in 1086, contains absolutely no reference of such donations, unless of course, they were disposed of by Geoffrey before the writing of the book. In about 1090, Geoffrey, as a result of his successes (his status, his successful marriage, and his military prowess), begins to style himself as Count of Perche. He dies late in 1100, after wisely putting his affairs in order, and ensuring that his son Rotrou III can safely return to his titles and his land, at the end of the current crusade.

During these troubled times, there appeared to be no rules, and no principles. Even close relations, brothers, cousins, etc. laid their covetous eyes on the lands and titles when the true holder was away. The only limitations to this situation were during a crusade. No land and titles could be appropriated when the "lord" was away on a crusade. It was considered "not done". Apart from this rule, it would appear that there were no holds barred.

⁴ Orderic Vitalis (1075-1142), an English monk who devoted his life to assembling information concerning the lives of the Normans in Europe (Historia Ecclesiastica - 13 volumes). He was sent to Normandy in 1085, probably by Roger de Montgomery (the Earl of Shrewsbury), and spent the rest of his life there.

⁵ Yves de Bellême was certainly his great-grandfather by marriage, but not by parentage. This explains the multitude of references that the Rotrou family were descended from Yves de Bellême, stemming probably from a single source. All of the reputable French Internet sites refer to Rotrou, first seen in 963, as being the earliest known of the male line of the House of Rotrou. Some people don't look further than the end of their nose !

Hugh de Châteaudun (1047-1110)

Here, we will ignore Hugh de Châteaudun, as he had no part in the Norman Conquest, and did not form part of the branch of the family that settled in England. However, as Viscount of Châteaudun, his story is told in Chapter 10.

Rotrou de Nogent (1048-1108)

Rotrou de Nogent seems to have accompanied his brother Geoffrey to England, but we have little proof of this. However, there are references to him "returning from England" after the first successes of the invasion. He probably returned to France with his brother Geoffrey, bathed in an aura of respectability and glory. The De Nogent family are on the road to national and international fame. We know no more about him for about 20 years. Around the year 1090, Geoffrey's daughters will marry into important families, and Rotrou will marry the heiress of Montfort, Lucie de Gennes, daughter of Hughes de Montfort and Agnès de Gennes. The town of Montfort will soon become known as Montfort-le-Rotrou. Four more generations of sons, all called Rotrou will carry the family up to the end of the 13th century, when an only daughter, Jeanne de Montfort will marry into the De Parthenay family. *Diana Spencer and Winston Churchill descend from this line of the de Nogent family.*

Fulke (Foulke) de Nogent (1049-1078)

Unfortunately, the member of the De Nogent family who is the most important to us (as he began the branch who settled in England), is shrouded in mystery. Here again we have no proof that he participated in the battles of the Norman Conquest, and if he did, he must have been little more than 16 years old. We do know that his sons settled in England, but we do not know under which circumstances. We have names of his descendants, and we have information that they went to Ireland and became Counts of Delvin, and the like, but of their history in England, between 1066 and 1171, we have absolutely nothing. I have found a doubtful reference to Fulke having married Mathilda de l'Aigle ⁶, but this information is without a doubt false, as Fulke was born around 1049, and Mathilda de l'Aigle, referred to as the daughter of Gilbert de l'Aigle, seems to have been born around 1100, at least a generation out of sync ! There are far too many unsupported hypotheses in some of the Internet sites to take them on face value. However, we do have references to Fulke as having married an unknown "Mathilde".

We are left to question what little information we possess about the De Nogents who settled in England. Whether the Sir William Betham document "Pedigree of the Nugent Family", made to order by the future wife of Lavallin Nugent (Countess [Riario Sforza](#)), provides a source for our information is unknown, as I have not read the document. The document "A Historical Sketch of the Nugent Family" ⁷ contains totally unsupported data, and it is likely that all other references to this period are based upon this sketch. It may

⁶ Seems totally unfounded.

be recorded as a strange coincidence that both of these documents were apparently produced in 1853. Are they one and the same document ?

However, we may, with a smile, and little malice aforethought, shoot down ⁸ all documents which quote "... descended from the great Norman Baron Yvas de Belleme" and which refer to the many towns of Nogent, without specifying that the Nugent family stemmed uniquely from Nogent-le-Rotrou. Several documents insist that the family is of Norman descent, including the document by Marian Keaney, which is unfortunately only one of the many documents that we meet when searching "the Nugent family" on the Internet.

Fulke is sometimes referred to as being Lord of Nogent, but has also been quoted as "de Bellême" ⁹. It is known that he spent time in England and in France, and that he had at least three sons, Gilbert, John and Hugh ¹⁰. He probably spent some years ferrying from England to France and back, as was done by a multitude of nobles at that time. However, it is not known whether he settled in England or not. His last known appearance in public which was recorded, was in a donation made by his father, in the Perche, in January 1078. He probably lived a relatively comfortable life until his death, living off the "fat of the land" in England, and the reputation of his family. As we have seen above, the Domesday Book makes no reference to the De Nogent awards in England, possibly because they do not include Winchester in their survey, where the De Nogent descendants are recorded as having settled, or simply because these descendants did not merit a reference.

Long-Term repercussions of De Nogent participation in the Conquest

It is likely that the De Nogent participants to the Conquest came into contact with the De Lacy family, during their time in England. Walter de Lacy and his brother Ilbert ¹¹ were richly rewarded for their support to William, and settled in England. The descendants of the De Nogent family will eventually go to Ireland with Hugh de Lacy ¹² and in their turn, receive rich rewards for their participation in this expedition.

As we can see, the members of the family spent time both in England and in France, frequently returning to their "other country" as they saw fit. Certain descendants of the family were born in England, although they appear to have been given names purporting

⁷ Refer to the Chapter "Bellême or not Bellême" in Section 1 of our documents.

⁹ There is absolutely no reason for this sobriquet, as Bellême was not destined to return to the Rotrou Family for many years.

¹⁰ We have absolutely no proof in any source, about these sons. It is nevertheless interesting to note the shift in the Christian names at this time. Richards and Gilberts will be often seen in the descendants of Fulke, certainly due to English influence. The names of Hugh and Fulke continue to be used for several generations, before they too, fall into abeyance.

¹¹ The Conqueror and His Companions - (J.R. Planché, 1874) - Walter De Lacy - "... we find his son and successor, Roger, in possession of ninety-six lordships, sixty-five of which were in Gloucestershire, besides four carucates of land lying within the limits of the Castle of Civia, which King William had bestowed on his father".

¹² The association between the two families appears to be very close, as Gilbert de Nogent, the 1st Baron of Delvin (so nominated by Hugh de Lacy), married Hughs sister, Rosea (no descendants).

to French domains. Although the Domesday book (1086) only shows a minor reference to Geoffrey III de Mortagne (the first self-declared Count of Perche) as having possessions in England, we know that the family only held such possessions much later, and had more and more difficulty holding on to them, as time went by. Some of the major members of the family (for example Rotrou III the Great), were born in England. Several generations of De Nogents remained in England, probably living in minor luxury, as they benefitted from rewards from the new King of England (William) and later from his son (Henry I - Beauclerc). We have a finite trace of the lands in England held by the Counts of Perche (and family) over a period between 1100 and 1220, but these were not directly associated with the Conquest of England. However, the Rotrou Family now had an international "footprint", and benefits from English interests were the result of future marriages. The bond between the Kings of England and the Counts of Perche strengthened considerably over this period of 100 years years, partly due to the De Nogent participation in several Crusades, and of course because of the marriage of the Kings' daughter to Rotrou III. When Henry I, King of England, dies in Lyons-la-Forêt, in December, 1135, Rotrou III, his faithful vassal and close friend, is by his side ¹³.

However, as we have seen, the early years of the other De Nogent descendants in England, are shrouded in mystery, and there is little chance that this veil be lifted.

¹³ "Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France" - Introduction (P.1), (Kathleen Thompson)