

Origins and Early History of the Nugent Family

This document, and others in this Internet site, will give you a precise, and (I believe) true history concerning the origins and history of the Nugent Family. We have more than a thousand years of stories to tell ! After nearly 10 years of research, using Latin, French, English and Irish documents, I believe that I have built an honest picture of our story. I will quash several false speculations about the origins of the family which are bandied about on the Internet, with little or no justification. Serious documents state that "The peerage of the Family is obscure", or that "The origins of the Baronry are Obscure" ! This may be perfectly true, but it does not mean that we will not look further than the end of our nose, to delve into the "obscurity" of the 10th Century in medieval France to establish our roots.. It is surprising that several French Internet sites and documents seem to know the origins of the family better than the English-speaking Nugents. Due to several quirks of fate, I am bilingual, and have explored as many references as I can (both French, English and even Latin), to find the truth. I deliver to you, the fruits of my research ! I resolved ([decrevi - our family motto !](#)) to build this site and so I did !

Be warned ! - This document is but the short, short version. Its object is to entice you into the depths of this comprehensive site which explains the origins and the history of the Nugent family.

Where did the Nugents REALLY come from ?

The bearers of the name "De Nogent" whose origins are to be found in Northern France, accompanied William the Conqueror to England in 1066. A branch of the family settled in England, from whence their descendants then moved on to Ireland. The name De Nogent was probably attributed to the family when they settled in England. The name was anglicized to Nugent in Ireland, several centuries later.

At this period in history, the naming conventions for people were rather rudimentary. Family names were not used at this time. Especially in rural areas, the population was relatively low and evenly spread out. A person was given a single "Christian" name, which was enough to refer to him when necessary. If several people in the same area were given the same name, they were differentiated by a simple adjective ("Big" John, "Little" John, etc.). Family names, or surnames, developed later, starting with the use of the trade (John the Smith, etc.). Anybody moving outside of his area would define himself by adding the name of the town/city/area from where he came, to his Christian name (xxx of yyy). If the family was well known, a family or tribal name could be added. Even people who were of importance in their own town or village could be unknown if they travelled to another part of the country. They would also use this naming convention in detriment to their local title, unless of course their title was of a sufficient stature. In French, the preposition "of" (Latin : away from, or out of) is "De".

For more information concerning names and their origins

<http://www.mayrand.org/meaning-e.htm> and <http://www.last-names.net/Articles/Anatomy.asp>

Some examples :

Irish	Rory O'Connor ("O" is from the old Irish "ua" - descended from)
Norman	FitzJohn (Fitz - "son of")

<i>Irish/Scottish</i>	<i>MacDermot (Mac or Mc - "son of")</i>
<i>Dutch</i>	<i>William of Orange (of the house of Orange-Nassau)</i>
<i>English</i>	<i>Robin of Locksley (Robin Hood - supposedly in Nottinghamshire)</i>
<i>French</i>	<i>Rotrou de Nogent (from the town of Nogent)</i>

It is curious to note that today, French names containing "De" are associated with aristocracy, possibly because only the sufficiently rich were in the habit of moving around, and so requiring a more precise naming convention. During the French Revolution, anybody with a name containing "de" usually had his head chopped off, and so many families immediately dropped the use of this term, in order to disappear into the proletariat. Others incorporated the "De" into their family name, sometimes adding an accent on the "e", or adding an "s" to dissimulate their noble name (Décotte, Delanoé, Desmarais, etc.)

Now we understand the naming conventions of that time, we can return to the story, and find out the strange way that the Nugents got their name !

At the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) , some members of William the Conquerors invading army came from an area in the Perche, about 140 km. south-west of Paris, just south of the (then) Normandy border. The thriving town in this area was called Nogent-le-Rotrou, originally founded to act as a bulwark against invading Normans. Nogent-le-Rotrou gets its name from two sources :

- 1 No-Gent means "New Town" or "New Settlement" (Latin " Novogentium"), and there were many such new towns in France around that period. Why the future Nugents were named "De Nogent" is in fact quite surprising, as we can see that it means absolutely nothing. It is probable that the name was **given** to those who later settled in England, and that they were probably referred to as "les guerriers de Nogent" ("The warriors from Nogent"), or something similar, rather than it being a self-attributed name. It is interesting to note that many documents mistakenly give the Nugent name as being derived from several other towns in France (Nogent-sur-Marne, Nogent-le-Roi, Nogent-sur-Oise), when in fact it is **uniquely** derived from Nogent-le-Rotrou ! The family is also quoted as having Norman origins, when in fact they in fact came from an area called "The Perche", which is south of Normandy.

The Nugent ancestors in France, although they were centred in the town of Nogent-le-Rotrou, never actually carried the name "De Nogent", although they have often been quoted in later documents as "de Nogent-le-Rotrou" (from Rotrou's New Town).

- 2 The name Nogent or "New Settlement" was usually associated with the person responsible for the establishment or the development of the original town. In our case, the person responsible was Rotroldus or Rotrou, the founder of the town. (Note : As documents of this time were written in Latin, the name was written in the Latin form of "**Rotrocus**"). Various forms of the name Rotrocus exist, and one of them, Rotrou, is a compound name derived from Germanic naming conventions :

ROT	red or glorious
TROU	promise

In the 10th century, little written information is available. Several hypotheses exist for the lineage of the early De Nogent dynasty. As we have shown above, most historians and genealogists agree that "The origin of the Peerage is obscure" or "The descent of the Baronry is obscure". Christian Settiani (Université de Sorbonne, Paris) in his paper of 1999 clarifies the possible hypotheses and proposes a convincing solution, but his evaluations were certainly not the only propositions to resolve the family history.

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~prosop/prosopeon/prosopeon10.htm>

PDF download - ***Les Vicomtes de Châteaudun et Leurs Alliés.***

Many documents, including two books (again in French) allowed me to examine and clarify the early history of this family:

1 - Histoire des Comtes du Perche de la famille des Rotrous - M. O. des Murs - 1856

2 - Géographie du Perche et ses Comtes - Vicomte de Romanet - 1890

Both of these books are rare, and expensive, but I have a copy of both !

Even counting on the documentation available, the origins of the "De Nogent" family are obscure, to say the least. However, compared to the lack of information concerning the important families of this period, our information can be considered as being quite comprehensive. As we moved into the 11th century, cartulary documents became more and more available, as such families began to use the services of "senechals" ¹, whose job it was to note all important events in the life of these members of nobility. In the last centuries of the first millenium, few people were literate, and information is sparse. Only the clergy could read and write, and so noted historical events, and they were, of course in the service of important people. It was among the high-ranking nobles or the monarchy that historians can access pertinent information. Several propositions have been made concerning the origins of the De Nogent family, each having their own merits. Only fragments of the history of the early beginnings are available. Such fragments make it difficult to build up a complete picture, but we can safely say that the following is true :

- 1 - The "De Nogent" family are descended from a minor family of nobles, living in the Perche, and associated with the house of Châteaudun,
- 2 - They are not of Norman origin, and are not descended from Yves de Bellême, who was not a powerful Norman baron ²,
- 3 - The family appears to have had roots in the Perche for some time, before appearing on the scene in the second half of the 10th century,
- 4 - The family gave allegiance to the counts of Blois/Chartres (the Thibaudians), and used this association in their initial rise to more senior nobility, and later marriage into royalty,

¹ A Sénéchal (Old French : siniskalk) is in charge of the administrative responsibilities of a domaine, and answers directly to his lord.

² The repeated false information copied "in extenso" into many Internet sites and documents, concerning the origins of the de Nogent family, especially that which concerns "Yvas de Bellême", tends to prove the concept "If you read it on the internet, don't necessarily believe that it is true". The ease with which such information is copied, without the least verification, is rather disconcerting ! I will clarify these statements later.

- 5 - The family MAY have descended from Agombert, loosely described as Count of Perche (early 9th century), or even descendants of Rotrude, the daughter of the Emperor Charlemagne (early 9th century), whose illegitimate son Louis was known to be the Abbot of Saint Denis (Perche). However the existence of Agombert is disputed by certain historians.

The "De Nogent" story begins to take shape in the latter half of the 10th century :

There are two stories told about the foundation of Nogent-le-Rotrou, the origins of the family :

- 1 - In about 963 (the exact year is unknown), the King of France, Lothaire IV, ordered Thibault "the Trickster", Count of Blois and Chartres to build a garrison or fortifications on the south side of the Normandy border, with the objective of "keeping an eye on the troublesome neighbours" - that is to say, the Normans ! Thibault ordered a minor lord, local to that region, **Rotrocus** (a Latin name, as the surviving documents are all in Latin), to take charge of the building of these fortifications.
- 2 - In about 963, Thibault "the Trickster", Count of Blois and Chartres waged war on his northern neighbours (the Normans) with the help of his faithful ally (and army commander) **Rotrocus**. Although Thibault's sallies into Normandy were successful, those of Rotrocus were doomed to failure. Rotrocus paid heavily for this lost war, by losing control of the town of Bellême. In order to repay Rotrocus for his loss, and to protect himself from retribution, Thibault later decided to create fortifications close to the border of Normandy³, and allocated this responsibility to Rotrocus who chose the site of these fortifications in the northern part of an area known as the Perche, which has often been (mistakenly) quoted as being in Normandy.

Whichever reason for its creation, the garrison was built very close to a small developing town called Nogent-ès-Château, and Rotrocus (we know him as Rotroldus or Rotrou) became the local potentate. The site of the fortifications was not chosen by chance. It was situated in a sparsely populated area between the land controlled by the Normans (in effect, Normandy), and the land controlled at that time by the French King. Today, the Perche has no administrative definition, but it has a very long history.

³ The Duchy of Normandy at this time (Xth Century), had not yet reached its final borders. Alençon was the southernmost town. Bellême and Nogent-le-Rotrou were to the South-East, across the existing border.

The town eventually became known as Nogent-le-Rotrou (Novogentium Rotroci), after its founder, as it grew in importance. It prospered, and developed into an important town, for several reasons :

- it was strategically placed near to a wide (safe) bend in the river Huisne, (It **may** have been the site of an old Viking fortification)
- it was an armed garrison, sustained (from a distance) by powerful lords, and as such, drew settlers into the area who knew they would always be protected,
- it was a natural crossroads between neighbouring towns, and provided considerable financial benefits in tithes and tolls, (situated on the extreme edge of the high ground, the Château of St. Jean overlooks 5 valleys, the roads to Le Mans, Chartres and Châteaudun, and, as such, is a natural access to Normandy, Maine and L'ile de France)
- the area had been progressively cleared since Roman times, and arable land was plentiful, (there were even fruit orchards in the region),
- the nearby woodland areas provided all the material for building the fortifications,
- Rotrou was very probably from a (minor) noble family of the region, and so had every reason to build and defend his settlement, while benefitting from the support of powerful local lords (and indirectly, the King of France).

The town **may** have originally been referred to as "Nogent **de** Rotrou" (Rotrou's New Settlement). The original fortifications were of wood, but were substantially improved over the next few centuries. The Château at Nogent-le-Rotrou (*Château Saint Jean*), now belonging to the town of Nogent-le-Rotrou, still stands today.

Several descendants of our original **Rotrou** were also called Rotrou ⁴, the continuation of a long line of Rotrou's who were to rise to "princely power" (sic - Kathleen Thompson) over the next two centuries. Rotrou's daughter married into the Châteaudun Family, possibly in recognition of his faithful services. His descendants gained the title of Counts of Châteaudun. By judicious marriages and military success in several local wars, the family grew stronger, and Rotrou I (1026-1079) controlled Châteaudun, Bellême, Gallardon, Nogent and Mortagne, and declared himself Count of Perche (which is "jumping the gun" to say the least, as he barely controlled half of the Perche, at this time). One of his sons, Geoffrey, Count of Mortagne was called upon by William, Duke of Normandy, to give a hand with his invasion of England in 1066 (William had considered that he was not powerful enough to succeed in his conquest, and so bolstered his troops with mercenaries from all fields, with the promise of much booty and land). The decision to side with William was a change in the policy of the house of Rotrou, as previously they had sided with the King of France. Geoffrey, with his brothers Fulke and (yet another) Rotrou, both of whom had no apparent titles, accompanied William to England, where history was written at Hastings in 1066. Geoffrey, as the most titled person of the family, is the only one who is cited in official documents of the day.

History has dubbed all those who came to England with William as "The Norman Barons". However, many of them came from areas that were nowhere near Normandy. Many of the Normans had Danish blood. William the Conqueror had a pure-blooded Danish Grandfather. The "Percherons", or the occupants of the Perche, had no Danish blood, as the Danes could never access that region of France (few waterways). If

⁴ There were more than a dozen Rotrou's associated directly, or indirectly, with the family.

anything, they were of German origin (but I will certainly refuse to get tied up in discussions of this nature !)

Although Count Geoffrey is quoted as having received "much land" and other rewards for his participation in the Conquest, strangely, none of this is recorded in the Domesday book which gave detailed information of who owned what land, and where, in England (around 1086). As the Domesday book data does not include such areas as London and Winchester, areas where the De Nogent descendants were purported to have settled, the period of 100 years from 1066 to 1171 are clouded in mystery.

Geoffrey de Mortagne returned to France, and to his title and heritage, when the Conquest was over. Rotrou also returned to France, and later married into money and power, and set up the "Montfort-le-Rotrou" line of the family. The other brother, Fulke was apparently given possessions in England and his sons settled there, and were the forebears of the Nugent Family, although detailed information concerning the early years in England are not available. As with many of the nobles who took part in the Norman Conquest, Fulke did not spend the rest of his life in England. He returned to France on occasions, and was last seen in 1078 (in a cartulary document). He may have assumed the title of Fulke de Bellême after the siege of Remalard in 1078, when the Rotrou family made more significant inroads into the territory around Bellême. Of Fulke after 1078, we hear no more, but historians have a complete trace of his descendants in England. Why did they make the decision to settle in England ? Several reasons are forthcoming :

- 1 Confiscated lands were freely given to the knights who help to bring victory to Williams' invasion force. Fulke had nothing to return to in France, as the titles and lands of Châteaudun and Mortagne had been attributed to his two brothers (Hugh and Geoffrey). He may even have been illegitimate, a situation which was current in these times.
- 2 The Normans now controlled England and the North of France, and their power was considerable. Although the De Nogent family were not Normans, they benefitted from the aura of respectability given to those who had helped William. A later marriage of their cousin Rotrou II to Mathilda FitzHenry, daughter of Henry I of England (certainly a belated "Thank You" for services rendered), consolidated their reputation.

The name "De Nogent" was used in England for several generations, although we have very little information about the family in England between 1066 and 1171. In the late 1160's, an Irish King, Dairmait Mac Murchada, ousted from his kingdom⁵ by one of his neighbours, requested help from the English King Henry II (he actually travelled to Bristol in England to plead his cause). Henry was too busy to solve Mac Muchada's problem (he was thought to have been indirectly responsible for the murder of Thomas a'Beckett, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and had bigger problems at home), and suggested that Mac Murchada turn to some of the Anglo-Norman families living in England at that time. Henry designated the Earl of Pembroke, known as Strongbow, to

⁵ There were five "kingdoms" in Ireland at this time.

go and help out the Irish King. Strongbow's implication in Ireland initially seems to have been lukewarm, sending small, but successful expeditionary forces to Ireland, but not yet going there himself. Mac Murchada eventually promised him the hand of his daughter, and the throne of his kingdom, upon his death, and Strongbow eventually went to Ireland with a substantial force of men. Strongbow rapidly overcame Irish resistance, and conquered major parts of East Ireland, but rapidly became too big for his boots. At this time, the De Nogent descendants were not having an easy time. Holding on to their land in England (and Wales ?) proved to be quite difficult, and so, in 1171, when Henry II suggested that Hugh de Lacy, a Norman Baron who had also settled in England, accompany him to Ireland to recover control of the situation concerning Strongbow, which was rapidly getting out of control, some of the local barons, including the "De Nogents" went with him, looking for easy pickings. It must be made clear here that this was no "invasion" as suggested in many documents. Later, the consolidation of English power in Ireland became a real invasion. The Irish lived to bitterly regret their request for help, as it resulted, many years after, in the loss of their nation.

Hugh de Lacy was ceded the county of Westmeath for his troubles, but more important, Henry also gave him full power to act in his name (De Lacy had the title "Justiciar" or "Viceroy"). He not only divided Westmeath up between his many barons, but also designated them with official titles. Gilbert de Nogent (1130-1202) and his brother Richard "le Capella" (1140-xxxx) were given considerable tracts of land in Bracklyn, Westmeath and prospered. When Gilbert, the 1st Baron of Delvin died in 1202, the title passed to his brother. For nearly 200 years, following the birth of a daughter to Richard, the De Nogent land and titles were lost to the family Le Tuite. The Barony of Delvin was recovered by the family when Sir William FitzRichard Nugent (1345-1415), apparently, **the first person to use the name "Nugent"**, married Catherine FitzJohn (le Tuite) six generations later, and became 9th Baron of Delvin.

The Nugent family is now on the road to a prosperous but uncertain future ! The Nugents lose and recover their land and titles several times, as they fall out of favour, and are then pardoned. Future Kings and Queens of England, who are Protestant, will confiscate many of the lands belonging to the Catholic descendants of the Anglo-Norman families, provoking the first phases of emigration (before 1700). The potato famines in Ireland (1840-1860) decimate the Irish population, and another phase of emigration takes place, both to England, and to the United States. Only the most successful (and politically correct) Nugents manage to hang on to their titles and their lands.

But that is another story, which I am still developing !

Meanwhile, back in France !

Now, I return to France to follow the French side of "De Nogent" family (who were never called such, as they were Counts and Viscounts in their own right !)

Warning : *Due to the lack of written information available at that time, there are several hypotheses concerning the De Nogent line, and when and how they merged with the Viscounts of Châteaudun and Bellême, and commenced their rise to power. We must wait until the middle of the 12th century before we begin to get confirmed data concerning the nobility of France. The version which follows is only one (but the most likely one) of the hypotheses !!!*

The French power block (because that is what we can call it) from which the Nugents in England and Ireland descend, continued to expand. To return to the beginning :

- 1 Thibault the Trickster's daughter Hildegarde married Hugh I of Châteaudun, thus extending the control of the Châteaudun branch into the Perche area.
- 2 Hugh's son, Geoffrey de Châteaudun married Melisende de Nogent (who was probably the granddaughter of the original **Rotrocus**), thus strengthening the ties. This marriage was probably a little bit of "give and take". The descendants of Rotroldus had done a good job and so they deserved to be rewarded. Secondly, the family had built up a considerable status, and so it was probably best to bring them into the "noble" family of Chartres, Blois, Châteaudun, etc.
- 3 Their son (another Geoffrey I ?) married Helvise de Mortagne, daughter of Foulques de Mortagne thus inheriting the title of Count of Mortagne.
- 4 Geoffrey's son, Hugh continues the good work, but dies quite young. Rotrou I, Hugh's brother inherited all titles upon the death of his brother in about 1044.
- 5 Rotrou I married Adelaide de Bellême, daughter of Warin (Guérin) de Domfront, bringing into the family the Domfront title, and hoping to add title of Bellême to his list (this however, did not happen). At this time, Rotrou I now controls a large part of the Perche, and represents a formidable ally (or opponent). Towards the end of his life, he assumes the title of Count of Perche.
- 6 Rotrou's son Geoffrey (was it II or III ?) married Beatrice de Montdidier, daughter of Hildouin IV de Montdidier. This represents one of the first marriages outside the region of the Perche, showing that the family now has national repute.
- 7 Geoffrey and two of his brothers lend a very important hand to William in his conquest of England. We can see here a change in strategy, as the family forebears originally sided with the King of France.
- 8 Geoffrey's son Rotrou II (The Great) married (3rd wife ?) Mathilda FitzHenry, the illegitimate daughter of Henry I, King of England. This was no doubt a belated "Thank You" for services rendered to the Normans. This marriage heralds the allocation of considerable land and mansions in England that the De Nogent family were to hold until 1217 (see below).

- 9 Geoffrey's brother Fulke settles in England, probably because he had no lands or titles to return to, and more than 100 years later, his great grandsons Richard and Gilbert accompany Hugh de Lacy to Ireland in 1171, with the blessing of Henry II, King of England. *I explain the reasons for this in a separate document, as it is well documented.* The De Nogents were awarded "much" land (some 20,000 acres), and were nominated Barons of Delvin, and herald the long line of Nugents in Ireland, down to the present day.

There are several marriages of the descendants of the French side of the family into royalty, after this time (probably based on the precept "once you are in, you are in !").

The family have now attained the title of "Counts of Perche", as they now control the whole region (but not counting the Perche-Gouet). The family power reaches its apogee with Rotrou III Count of Perche, around 1190.

The decline of the family begins here, as the King of France (Louis VIII) realizes that the family is getting "too big for their boots" and whenever possible confiscates their land and their power (The Law of Reversion).

- 10 The marriage of John Lackland (who becomes King of England on the death of his brother, Richard the Lionheart) to Isabelle de Taillefer (who is the great granddaughter of the niece of Rotrou II), does little to help the family, and it slowly but surely loses status. Thomas, Count of Perche dies at the battle of Lincoln in 1217, while on an expedition to try and maintain/recover the lands and wealth of the family in England. Their land in England is confiscated, and soon after, their land in France meets the same fate ⁶. Their lands are fragmented due to distribution to several sons, or lost due to the lack of male descendants. The Kings of England and France have won, and the Perche Dynasty plunges into oblivion.

This covers the rise and fall of the French side of this famous Perche family.

The rise and fall of the Perche dynasty is superbly recounted by Kathleen Thompson in her book "Power and Border Lordship in Medieval France - The County of the Perche - 1000-1226 - ISBN : 0-86193-254-4 - still available at Amazon.com (£50). I believe that Ms. Thompson originally did her thesis on this subject, and has since become a recognized expert in matters of this period. However, her book does not touch upon the De Nogents that settled in England after the Norman Conquest (1066). Of the hundred

⁶ Strangely enough, the main problems incurred in "handing down" land and titles come from the same root :

- No male descendants in a generation (when daughters married, their land went with them !),
- Too many male descendants in a generation (fragmentation of land and power).

However, the Kings of England and France began to assert their authority in consolidating their kingdoms. In our case, Thomas, Count of Perche (1190-1217), lost his life at Lincoln, trying desperately to maintain his lands in England. Several months after his death, they were handed over to William Longspey, the Earl of Salisbury. As for his lands in France, Thomas left no male heir, and the succession was left for the King of France to determine. The Perche, and its titles were given by Louis VIII to his wife, Blanche de Castille, who became the 7th Countess of Perche. The title passed down through the Kings of France until the suppression of Feudal Rights (17-20 June, 1789). The Perche has been the property of the state since that time.

years that passed concerning the De Nogent family in England, we know practically nothing. Even the Domesday book sheds no light upon the land and manors ceded to the De Nogent family, although it is certainly the most complete account of the distribution of wealth in England around 1086, and a formidable accomplishment by the new King of England. The De Nogent family return to the news during the "invasion" of Ireland in 1171.

But, as I said above, this is another story !

The Nugent family tree diagram that I am building now covers more than 100 pages, and includes quite a few famous people. I have concentrated on the Irish and English part of the family, not yet having time to expand to other countries. I have not yet delved into the Nugents who went to the United States, Australia, New Zealand, etc., but I have already had requests from Nugent descendants from many places, including several South American countries such as Brazil. Although the U.S. Nugent descent is well documented, many of the American Nugents come up against a brick wall when they try to find out where their ancestors came from in Ireland. Irish records (all of them) were destroyed in a fire in Dublin in 1922, and few people can afford to travel to Ireland to do research. Many Americans have only the passenger manifest of the boats (mostly from Liverpool) that their ancestors came on, and this specifies little more than approximate ages and the reference "from Ireland". It is not surprising that they can go no further back. Many of the Irish who went to the United States during the potato famines around 1860 were poor, destitute, even illiterate, and probably kept little information about their family. Nugents who ventured to Canada and the United States as early as the 17th century, went for totally different reasons (adventure in a new land, and/or persecution due to English hegemony), often coming from successful, middle class families, and as a result, have left a clearer trace of their movements. I was lucky, as my family line descends from the Nugents of Drogheda, whose ancestry has been carefully recorded, and passed on.

Precise Census information in England after 1830 helped fill in the blanks of the Nugents who settled in England. On branches of our extensive family tree, we find such names as : Lawrence of Arabia, the Duke of Wellington, Winston Churchill, Diana Spencer, not to mention many Kings and Queens, including the future King of England (*George Alexander Louis Windsor*).....

Now ! If, as I suspect, your curiosity has been tickled by this short introduction, you will want to know more. This Internet site will take many, many hours of reading before you learn the complete story about this famous family.

Francis Nugent Dixon - (Carnac, Morbihan, France - September, 2013)