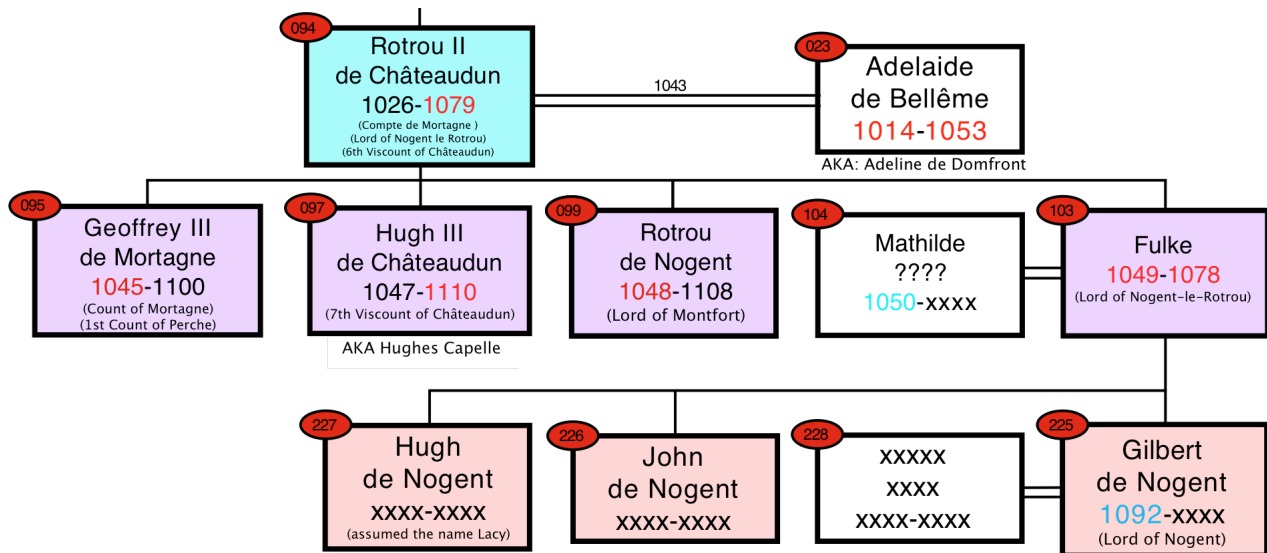


## The Enigma of Fulke de Bellême

Of all the Rotrou descendants, none are more clouded in mystery than Fulke de Bellême. This is rather unfortunate, as he was the De Nogent (Nugent) ancestor who settled in England, and his descendants ventured to Ireland a century later and established the Nugent family in their new home.



In this document, we will attempt to bring Fulke out of the darkness of the 11th century, where he was practically unknown, and to establish him in his rightful place, as an essential element of the Rotrou family, and more specifically, the forebear of the English (and then the Irish) De Nogents.

His sons may have settled in Winchester - England (according to unconfirmed sources).

There are many questions to be answered to try and elucidate this mystery :

- 1 - Who did Rotrou II marry, when did he marry, and who were his children ?
- 2 - Was Fulke illegitimate ?
- 3 - Why is he sometimes named "Fulke de Bellême" ?
- 4 - Who did he marry ?
- 5 - What proven (dated) traces do we have of Fulke, during his life ?
- 6 - Did he settle in England, and if so, where ?
- 7 - Can we give some valid dates of Birth/Death for Rotrou II's children ?
- 8 - Do we have valid information concerning Fulke's children ?
- 9 - Where did his children settle ?

- 10 - What do we know about the life of Fulke's descendants in England (1066-1171) ?

To many of these questions, we have no answers, proof that the brother of Geoffrey III de Mortagne, who was named Fulke, was not an important member of the family, was left with no heritage by his father Rotrou II, and probably found that he was more welcome in England, than in his native country. We know that Rotrou II married Adelaide de Bellême,

but we do not know if all the children were hers. Fulke was born, certainly in Nogent-le-Rotrou, about 1049, and his last known appearance was in France in 1078, as a witness to a donation by the family. Little is known about Fulke and his brother Guérin, and we could hazard a guess that they were illegitimate. However, Fulke was certainly born before the death of his mother, around 1053, and was moreover cited in a charter by his father, which would seem to show that he was not. The same cannot be said about several siblings (Guerin, Jeremie and Robert, and a sister, Helvise) born at unknown dates, and about who we know nothing at all. Although it is likely that Fulke accompanied his brothers Geoffrey and Rotrou to England at the time of the Conquest, we are not sure whether they actually participated. Fulke seems to have settled in England after the Conquest, but may have basked in the aura of his brothers' triumph. We know that he returned to France occasionally, because he has been cited as a witness in certain cartulary documents, the last of which was 1078. We can only estimate the area that he settled, by noting that the Domesday Book, finished by 1086, makes absolutely no mention of the members of the House of Rotrou. Even the senior member, Geoffrey III of Mortagne, although referenced as participant at least at the battle of Hastings, is cited nowhere in the Domesday Book, proof that either he was paid in cash for his association in the Norman Conquest, or that he liquidated any interests in England before 1086, the date at which the Domesday Book was completed.

We do know however that it was standard practice by the French nobles, to take frequent trips from England to France and back to England. Some of them who had benefitted enormously from their participation in the Conquest, were confronted with the same problem, holding on tightly to their domains in England and France, at the same time. It was necessary to make a trip to the "other side of the Channel", to ensure that there was no danger of forfeiture, or attacks from bellicious neighbours. In a future document, we will describe the catastrophe that occurred when a ship containing 350 people of the highest English and French nobility foundered off the coast of Barfleur, with all lives lost, including the future King of England<sup>1</sup>.

We have no proof of where Fulke settled in England, and where his sons were brought up. A suggested reference to Winchester is possible<sup>2</sup>, as Winchester and London were conspicuously absent from the Domesday Book, finished in 1086. We also have no information concerning Fulke's wife (however, we have vague references stating that she was called Mathilde<sup>3</sup>), and no dates of birth/death of his sons, for it is likely that his branch of the family was considered of no consequence. We do not know who compiled the document concerning the descent of the House of Rotrou in England. It may have been William Betham, who compiled a Family Tree for the future husband of Giovanna Riario Sforza, Laval Nugent, as a wedding present (in fact it was probably to check that she was really marrying into nobility). It may also have been compiled by John Burke, whose editions of "Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland" have become recognized references in the Genealogy world. A document entitled "A Historical Sketch of the Nugent Family", published in 1853, gives no indication of the author, and contains no footnotes citing information origins<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sinking of the White Ship - November 20, 1120.

<sup>2</sup> I found such a reference, but it has since been buried under the mountain of documentation that I have amassed. It may surface at some later date !

<sup>3</sup> I have seen a reference suggesting that Fulke's wife was Mathilda de l'Aigle, daughter of Gilbert de l'Aigle, but I find this highly unlikely (generation gap).

<sup>4</sup> The document begins with an absolute falsehood, and is obviously the initial source of an idea bandied about on the Internet with no proof whatsoever. This discussion is expanded in detail in the Chapter "Bellême or not Bellême" of Section 1.

In short, we know very little about Fulke and his sons, and the information we have comes from unsupported sources. This period in the history of the House of Rotrou is most definitely the weakest link in the genealogy of the family.

Fulke must have been little more than 16 if and when he joined his brothers in the Norman Conquest. However no document provides proof of his participation in any part of the conquest of England. The same is true for his brother Rotrou. We know however, that Rotrou was in England at this time, and that he returned to France and much later married into the Monfort family (Lucie de Gennes), creating a descent of five generations of Rotrou de Monforts. Fulke appears to have spent a larger part of his adult life in England, returning to France occasionally for family reasons. He had three sons, Hugh, John and Gilbert, names which were a complete break from family tradition, and certainly influenced by his life in England. Of his sons, absolutely nothing is known, either of their dates of birth (estimated however in the 1080's), their location in England, the names of their wives, and information concerning their children, except their names). We have no indication that any of them returned to France at any time, although Fulkes first son, Hugh, has been referenced as "Lord of Nogent". We must be suspicious concerning this lack of information.

Fulkes last appearance was in France in 1078, as a witness to one of his fathers donations. He has been referenced first as Fulke de Nogent, and later as Fulke de Bellême, but there appears to be no reason for this second sobriquet, as the House of Bellême, and the town of Bellême were still under the control of the descendants of the Talvas family. The date and place of Fulkes death is unknown.

In conclusion, the whole hundred year period after 1066, concerning the Rotrou descendants in England remains a complete mystery. We may even be tempted to question what little information we have, as it is supported by no evidence, cartulary or otherwise. Fulke will forever remain an unknown, albeit essential element of the De Nogent family.