



The Family of Tosny.

Gonfaloniers of Normandy, Seigneurs of Tosny and Conches.

The opportunities and hazards experienced by the Norman aristocracy from the tenth century to the twelfth are strikingly illustrated by the house of Tosny, thanks to the evidence preserved in the charters of their religious foundations, the testimony of Orderic Vitalis in his *Ecclesiastical History*, and, of course, the evidence contained within Domesday Book.¹

The family which carried the *toponymic* “de Tosny” was of ancient stock. Through the centuries, the name has been written in various forms – *de Tonei, de Tosni, de Tony, Toney*, etc. and this has led to much confusion on the part of historians, but, since the name stems from an estate in Normandy, let us adhere to the commonly accepted spelling of that estate’s name – *Tosny*. It is appropriate to note here that the Tosnys also provide probably the earliest example of a hereditary territorial surname in Normandy.²

The Tosny estate was, anciently, part of the archiepiscopal *demesne* lands of the ecclesiastical province of Rouen. The estate is situated on the southern banks of the River Seine and opposite it lie the lands of [Les Andelys](#), which formed possibly the most profitable part of the demesne of the archbishops. In modern times there is a bridge across the river here and two small communities lie on the north bank – *Grand Andely* and *Petit-Andely* – guarded by what was once the massive castle of [Château Gaillard](#), thought to have been first constructed (c.1196) by Richard the Lionheart when he was simultaneously King of England and Duke of Normandy.³ In his later years, Richard made the castle his chosen residence and many charters were issued bearing “*apud bellum castrum de rupe*” (at the Fair Castle of the Rock). This brooding fortification, once called “one of the finest castles in Europe”,⁴ looks south

¹ Moore, James (2017) ‘The Norman Aristocracy in the Long Eleventh Century: Three Case Studies.’ Unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 64.

² Bates, *Normandy*, 113-14; Lewis, ‘Tosny, Ralph de’, *ODNB*.

³ In the mid-14th century, *Château Gaillard* was the residence of the child-king David II of Scotland while he was in exile following the Battle of Halidon Hill in 1333. The nine-year-old and his twelve-year-old bride Joan of the Tower (daughter of Edward II), lived here until David’s return to Scotland in 1341. It can be said that David’s childhood and youth were spent here, and this must have been a formative factor in his upbringing.

⁴ Allen Brown, R (2004) [1954], *Allen Brown’s English Castles*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 62.

over the waters of the Seine to the lands of Tosny with which we are most concerned.

Taking a 'virtual tour' along the roads and lanes of Tosny today, one cannot help being struck by the flat expanse of rich alluvial soil which is all but encompassed by a large meander of the Seine. Within the village of Tosny itself the remarkable spire of the parish church of Saint-Sulpice stands above it all. This is, and always has been, a prime piece of real estate, as is reflected by the situation of the magnificent palace of the archbishops of Rouen just a few kilometers to the south-west, known as [Château de Gaillon](#), not to be confused with the aforementioned *Château Gaillard*.

The archbishop of Rouen from c.943 - 989 was Hugh de Calvacamp, considered by many to have been the son of Hugues de Calvacamp and Malahule Eysteinson. The family would appear to have been French (Franks) rather than Norman, although they tried to amend their genealogical history in later years in order to appear true Normans.

Archbishop Hugh was not a son to make his parents as proud as they should have been! We are told that he became a monk of St Denis in Paris and, whilst there, came to the attention of William, the son of the Duke of Normandy. William's support resulted in Hugh being promoted to the archbishopric of Rouen and, once installed, he proceeded to rule the province like the 'prince of the church' that he now was. Rumour has it that he fathered a number of children⁵ and all but abandoned the monastic way of life that he had been taught. As archbishop, Hugh had the outright authority to do what he wished with his 'demesne' and, in this, he was answerable to no one - although it was the accepted right of his successors in later years to reverse any actions that he took.

At some point in his episcopate Hugh determined to grant the lands and estates of Tosny to his brother Ralph (Raoul), who thus became "seigneur de Tosny." From that point onwards, Ralph and his successors adopted the cognomen *de Tosny*.

We must pause here and settle a source of confusion. Ralph (*Eng*) or Raoul (*Norman-Fr*) is known in some sources as Raoul (I) de Tosny, since he was the first of the family to be known to the writer. But, in later generations, the numbering system fails us since there was a succession of *de Tosnys* who were recorded using various 'numbers.' Summarizing, we find that the English sources are, very often, one numeral out-of-step with the French. For instance, from before 970 to c.1024, we find references to a Raoul (I) de Tosny, but this is **not** Hugh's brother who first received the Tosny estates. However, in the Norman sources we find the archbishop's brother also noted as Raoul (I). The reason is simple to understand now, but has caused utter confusion in the past - it is that Hugh's brother (Raoul) was followed by another individual who was also called Raoul (we presume he was his son) and the two have been conflated by historians into one. We can see this best if we consider that Raoul (I), the archbishop's brother, was born c.915. The 'second' Raoul (I) died c.1024, over a hundred years later, making it virtually impossible that they were the same person. So, to avoid further complications, I propose to use here the form Raoul (I) to identify names from English sources and Raoul (i) to identify those from

⁵ *Veterum Analectorum*, Tome II, *Acta Archiepiscoporum Rothomagensium*, p. 437.

the French. Consequently, Raoul (I) is Raoul (ii), i.e. the individual known to the English writers as Raoul (I) would be Raoul (ii) in the French/Norman sources. This is illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 1).⁶

The Tosny family, though it became much reduced and many of its branches extinct, was one of the first in wealth and honour, both in Normandy and England. As we shall see the fame of the family became legendary and the deeds and accomplishments of a number of its principal members were recorded in the *chansons* of the time. But the Tosnys were something of a law unto themselves – their relationships with successive Dukes of Normandy were often fractious and they never achieved what many of their inferior neighbours did – elevation to the nobility. Not one of the family became a Count or even a Vicomte, but they accumulated such a vast collection of estates scattered across Normandy that they were always a force to reckon with. This was as true in England as it was in Normandy although in the former, certain members of the family did gain earldoms – most often by marriage.

The genealogy of the Tosny family is complex and not easy to describe on an A4 page! Consequently, I have provided a link to the comprehensive tree that I have created on the Ancestry® Web-site.



'Click' on the image to go to the Tosny Family Tree

⁶ This diagram is taken from the author's "Tosny Family Tree", hosted on Ancestry.com.

[<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/family-tree/tree/167266173/family/familyview?cfpid=212169556678>]

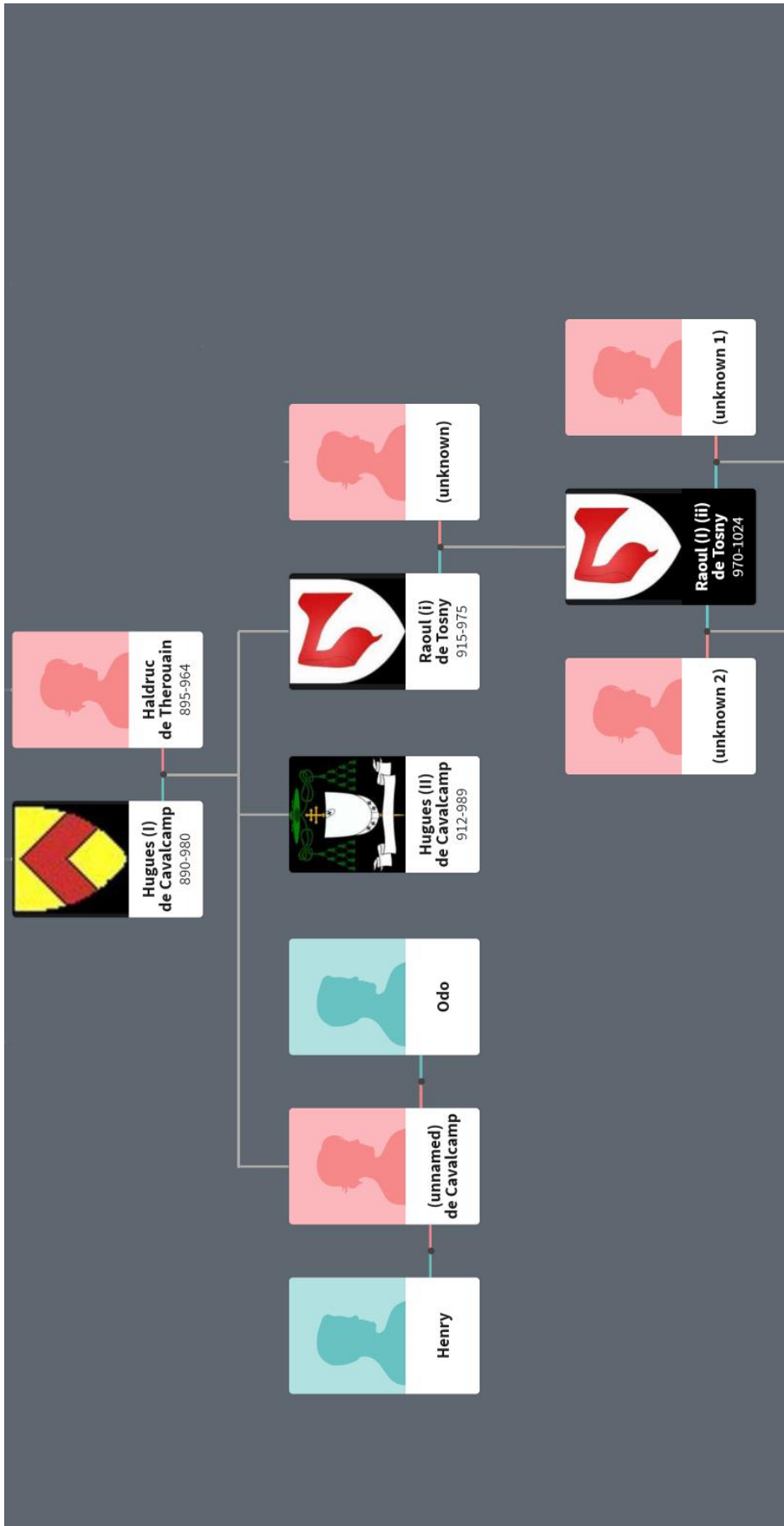


Figure 1: Tosny Family (1st Generation).

The Tosny family became renowned for their 'fighting prowess' as is shown by the biographies of the various generations. Such was this fame that, from before the time of the Battle of Hastings (1066), the Seigneur de Tosny was the hereditary Standard Bearer (*Gonfalonier*) of Normandy, a title which probably led to the heraldic arms that the family carried throughout its history, both in Normandy and England. These arms are blazoned: *Argent, à maunch, gules.* ("On a silver background, a sleeve, in red.")

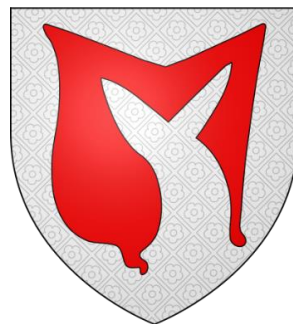


Figure 1: The Arms of Tosny

I would argue that the 'maunch', as illustrated above, probably represents the outstretched arm of a standard-bearer; but it may also denote 'love' and 'devotion' to a female admirer. Ladies frequently gave one of their sleeves to a knight as a 'favour' to wear on his armour.⁷

One member of the Tosny family – Richard de Tosny (d.1252) – was treasurer of Angers (some say he was Treasurer of Angevin). In the Cathedral of Angers, in the Choir, there is a double-lancet window dated to c.1230-1235. The left-hand window is known as the *Becket Window* since it is said to commemorate the life of St Thomas Becket of Canterbury. The right-hand window is known as the *John Baptist Window* and it depicts scenes from John's life. What is most interesting is that, in the margins of this second window, we find the arms of the family of de Tosny repeated a number of times, and it is said that this records that this window was, perhaps, donated by this Richard de Tosny, the treasurer. It is also worth noting that the *Becket Window* has the arms of the 'de Clare' family repeated in its margins, a family which was associated with that of de Tosny when Avice (Alice) de Clare (c.1044 – after.1129) married Robert de Tosny (de Stafford) (1036 – 1088) and gave rise to the powerful family of Stafford in England.

⁷ In the stories told of Sir Lancelot, one describes him setting off to a tournament having borrowed a 'blank' (white) shield so that he might remain anonymous. But a female admirer persuaded him to accept her 'favour' – a red sleeve bordered with pearls.

It should also be noted that the Bishop of Angers from 1203-1240 was Guillaume de Beaumont-au-Maine whose sister, Constance, was married to Raoul (III) (iv) de Tosny (1160-1209) thus creating another link between the cathedral and the Tosny family.



Figure 2: The Becket window (left) and John Baptist window (right) at Angers cathedral (c.1230-1235).



Figure 2: The John Baptist window.



Figure 3: Detail of the lowest panel of the John Baptist window showing the Tosny family arms to left and right.

The Tosny family deserves to be known much more widely and we hope that in publishing these web-pages we can contribute to this ultimate aim.