

INTRODUCTION

Hello, I'm Lucy la Zouche. Things were a bit quiet until, a few years ago, people started to find me in their family trees on the Internet. It would seem that some people had discovered me, even before computer based genealogy became possible, because I was mentioned in a couple of reference books.

But, recently, it has all been a bit hectic; you would think after nearly 700 years you would be forgotten and left in peace. Then, one of my relatives asked me to write a book about myself and my ancestors.

Living in medieval times, you really knew very little about your relatives because communications were poor and travelling was difficult. But, since being introduced to the wonderful World Wide Web, I am amazed at how much information is now available.

My mother told me that we were related to the Breton nobility and that someone had told her that Charlemagne was an ancestor of my father, Eudo. But, nothing prepared me for the results of my research.

First, though, about me; I was born in 1279 to Eudo la Zouche and Millicent de Cantilupe. Sadly, I never knew my father as he died in the same year. He was a professional soldier and married late in life.

I had two sisters and two brothers; luckily there was only six years between us and so we provided a lot of support to each other and for our mother. For the first few years, if we had any really serious problems, the grown-up sons of my late uncle, Alan, would come over from Ashby in Leicestershire to provide assistance.

I was closest to my brother, Roger, of whom there is no information available today; but, I have my treasured memories of him and the most vivid of those was being a bridesmaid at his wedding to Juliana when I was 18. Sadly, he died 6 years later without having any children; but, in those days, so many people died young.

I was only 10 when I was first a bridesmaid for my sister Eva and 20 when Eleanor asked me to attend her at her wedding.

People kept asking when I would get married but, until she died in 1299, my mother needed someone to keep her company.

By then, my brother William and his wife Maud were well settled in at Harringworth and, although I was useful as a child minder for their children, Eudo and Millicent, William started to introduce me to his friends.

One of them, Sir Thomas de Grene of Boughton, about 30 miles from Harringworth, asked me to marry him, which I did in 1312. The next year our son Henry was born.

We kept busy, with Thomas running the estate and, as lord of the manor, keeping the village of Boughton in order; and, I enjoyed bringing up our son. Henry became a lawyer and I only wish that I had seen his great success when he was made Chief Justice of the King's Bench.

In 1308, everyone was so proud when my brother William was made the 1st Baron Zouche of Haryngworth (that is how it was spelled in those days). He joined my cousin Alan in Parliament because he had been made Baron la Zouche of Ashby in 1299. Alan was a brave soldier who had fought at Falkirk against William Wallace, the Scottish leader.

Skeletons in the cupboard are something every family has and we had a few. William was horrified when his son, Eudo, was accused of murder in 1325; Eudo always was a bit aggressive but, in those days, young men learned to use swords as soon as they could stand on their two feet.

I did not hear what happened to Eudo because I died the following year. Apparently, I find out now, he too died in 1326 having escaped to France.

For the moment, enough of my close family because you can find out much more from Appendix I of this book.

The six chapters of the book are about just some of my ancestors and their lives. Each of the chapters is about a territory that behaved like a country but was actually nothing of the sort.

By the time I was born, the countries of Europe had started to take their final form. England, France and Germany were roughly as they are today. But, only 200 years earlier everything was very different.

Before the Capetians took the throne as Kings of France, there were two dynasties of Frankish Kings; these were the Merovingians and the Carolingians. Notable among the latter was Charlemagne who definitely was my ancestor.

Each dynasty made their mark by creating a country similar in size to the European Union and then each threw it away by squabbling amongst themselves and making bad decisions.

The nobility of Europe took advantage of this. Dukes and Counts often behaved like Kings; and, Kings sometimes had very little power at all. Take France; several Dukes and Counts had much more power than the King of France until Philip Augustus overthrew the Angevins, consolidated the country and took control.

In Britain today, people often talk about the Kings of Wessex as Kings of England but, in those days before 1066, England was fragmented and for a long time the most powerful Kings were the Kings of Mercia, who controlled London until my ancestor Alfred the Great took the City under his wing.

Yes, Alfred was also an ancestor because one of his daughters married one of the Kings of West Francia, the forerunner of France.

I have found that I am descended from both the Merovingian Kings and the Carolingian Kings in Francia, the Dukes of Brittany and Normandy, the Counts of Anjou and Flanders and the Anglo-Saxon Kings of Wessex. There are more Kings and nobles in my family tree than you could ever imagine.

And then, there are the Saints; mind you, in those days, you did not always have to be that good to be made a Saint. An interesting one was Saint Guillaume of Gellone who has been accorded a similar legendary status to the Merovingian Kings in recent successful fiction; but, if these people were descended from Jesus, they did not have much in common with him!

Having lived in medieval times, I am not at all surprised by the amount of violence and sheer cruelty which took place then; such things were talked of around our dinner table regularly and often with relish by my brothers. But, I am sure that readers would find some of it quite horrifying.

Someone has told me that there are probably at least a million people descended from me spread around the world. When you remember that there were only about five million people in England in my day that seems an awful lot of people to me. I hope that this book will help some of them to find their past.

This second edition of my book has been thoroughly revised and corrected. It includes a new Chapter on Flanders because I have now found that I am directly descended from Matilda of Flanders and her husband William the Conqueror.

Also an index has been added to make it easier to find the people described. And, this time, I am only going to make this book available in print as it is very difficult to see the maps and to cross-refer with an electronic book.

In addition, my Ancestry family tree is being made public and the link is given in the Author's Notes at the back of the book.