

Freemantle

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Abstract

I examine the meaning ‘cold cloak’ conventionally given to the place-name Freemantle in Hampshire, and show that it arises from a re-interpretation of a common French place-name originally meaning ‘wheat field’.

There are several places called Freemantle in Hampshire. For three of them, early spellings are given by Gover (1958), Ekwall (DEPN), Coates (1989) and Mills (2001):

- Freemantle (Park, Farm, and Down) near Kingsclere (SU 541 538).
Freitmantell 1181
Frigidum Mantellum 1214
- Freemantle, Godshill, Isle of Wight; not on the modern map, but apparently represented by Freemantle Copse (SZ 537 807); the 1886 OS map (1: 10,560 scale) has Freemantle Lodge at SZ 540 808.
Fremantel 1285
- Freemantle, Millbrook (SU 402 125); now a Southampton suburb.
Fremantel 1336

Also to be found on the 2008 Ordnance Survey map are Freemantle Common, Bitterne (SU 447 126); and Freemantle’s Copse, near Silkstead (SU 449 237). No early forms are available for these.

Two other English place-names have the same form: a lost *Fremantel* in Leicester, and Fairmantle Street in Truro, Cornwall. The first was certainly a tenement, first recorded as *le Fremantel* in 1377 (PN Lei 1: 155). The second was also probably originally a tenement, and has the following early spellings:¹

Frymantel juxta Nyuham 1365

Fremantyl juxta Truru 1410

Great Faire Manter, Little Fayre Manter c. 1617

Faire-Mantell 1634 (copy 1652)

Ekwall (DEPN) says that Freemantle Ha (without specifying which one²) is transferred from a French *Fromentel*, mentioning that one in Pas de Calais was *Froitmantel* in 1279, and was also recorded as *Frigidum Mantellum*. He gives no source for this information, but it almost certainly refers to Fromentel 2km south-east of Auchy-au-Bois, for which these and other early spellings are given in de Loisne (1907: 165). Based on the Latin version of the name, and the French spelling with *-t-*, Ekwall gives the meaning as ‘cold cloak’. Gover (1958), Cameron (1996: 88), Coates (1989) and Mills (2001) all accept this explanation without additional discussion, though Coates does wonder about a possible mistranslation of Caldecote.³

This explanation, if correct, would be extremely odd. We might suspect the interpretation has been made too literally, without consideration of the earlier history of the name. It is thus worth looking further into the French background.

The place-name Fromentel (and variants Fromentaux, Frémentel etc.) is in fact one of the most common in France. The Institut Géographique National has a website search facility by which I located 157 instances (Figure 1). Gendron (2004: 225–6) has a list of over fifty examples in l’Indre alone. At present only Fromentel (Haute-Vienne) is a commune; most other instances are hamlets or farms. A related formation is Fromentières, with examples in Marne and Mayenne.⁴

The problem for the ‘cold cloak’ theory is that all these names are certainly a reference to grain production. The word *fromentel* (from Latin *frūmentum* ‘wheat’, via a derivative *frūmentālis*) is well established as a term for ‘wheat-field’, especially with implications of fertility (see for example FEW, s.v. *frumentum*; Musset 1932, s.vv. *Fromentoû, Frementoux*; DALF, s.v. *fromentel*). Furthermore, Bloch (1960, s.v. *fromental*) gives “autre nom de ray-grass (1760), déjà créé au moyen âge sous la forme *fromentel* [another name for ray grass (*Lolium perenne*), already created in the middle ages in the form *fromentel*].”

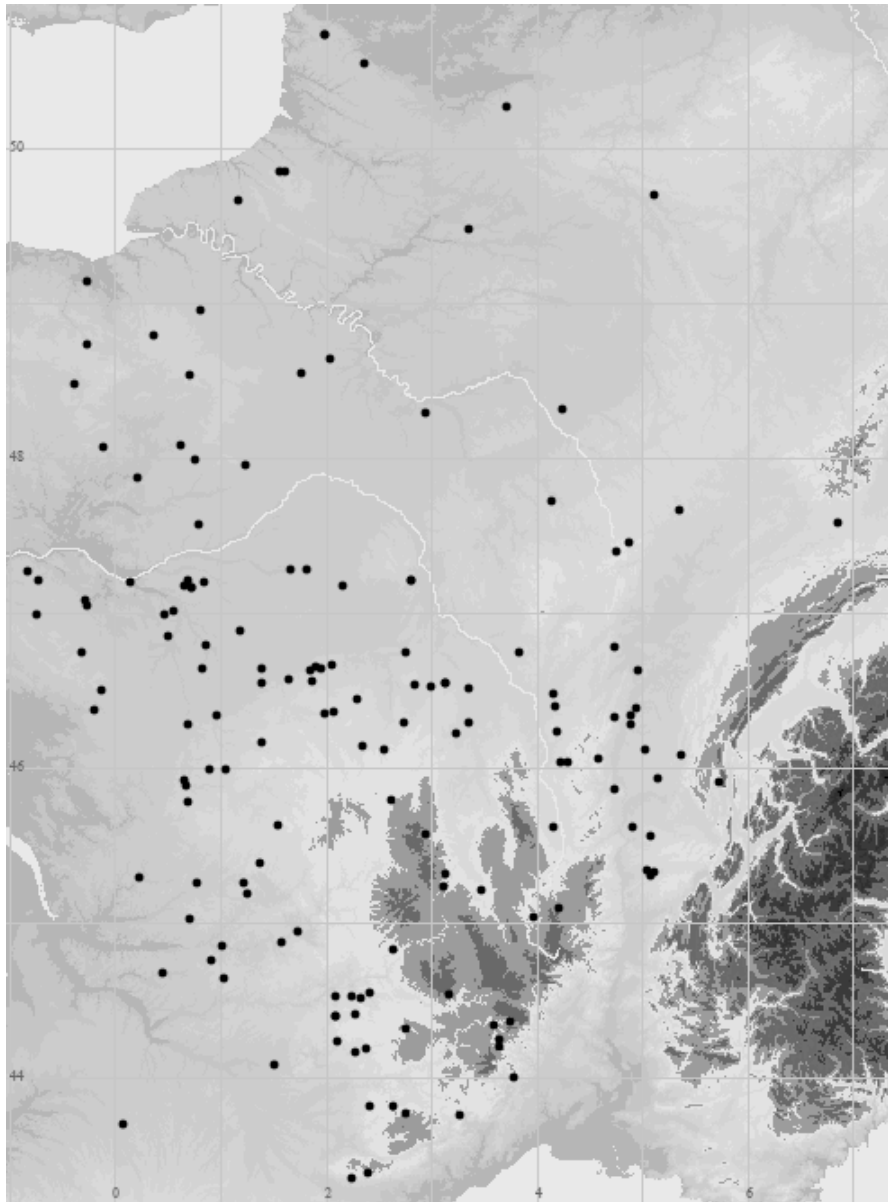


Figure 1: Fromental and variant names from the search facility of the website [www. geoportail.fr](http://www.geoportail.fr) of the Institut Géographique National.

FEW also gives numerous dialect forms (some with loss of initial *f-*), and extended senses, such as ‘a variety of pear’, ‘the name of a bull’, probably arising through an association with the colour of a wheat-crop. Gendron (2004, 225–6) says that the meaning “‘terre de très bonne qualité’ [land of very good quality]” developed. A letter of Voltaire of 1761 (Voltaire, 1891: 353) contains a sentence suggesting that the word to him denoted a crop: “Je sème du tréfle dans les uns, et du fromental dans les autres [I sow clover in some, and fromental in the others]”. The high frequency of the place-name Fromental is consistent with an origin in this ordinary lexical word. A related word, OFr *frumentée*, was borrowed into English, where it

survives as dialectal *frumenty*, *furme(n)ty* etc. and designates ‘a kind of porridge’, and perhaps also ‘a kind of wheat or spelt’. This occurs in a few field-names, such as Near Furmety Meadow in Cotes, Leicestershire (PN Lei 3: 71). This word is apparently never confused with derivatives of *fromental*.

The standard dictionaries of French place-names (Dauzat and Rostaing, 1963, Nègre, 1990–98, Vincent, n.d.) have almost nothing to say on the subject, giving just a few early spellings and no interpretation. I therefore made my own search of early documents, and found several references in charters relating to estates in various parts of France containing the place-name Fromental.⁵ Among them is a definite early appearance of ‘cold cloak’ in 1096, as follows:

- 1096: a charter of Etienne of Blois for the Abbaye de Marmoutier (HDCC, 510–12) states: *Est autem locus ipse inter castrum, quod vocatur Fractavallis, et Frigidum Mantellum, juxta fluvium qui Leda nuncupatur* [‘It is now the place between the castle called Fractavallis, and Frigidum Mantellum, near the river called Leda’]. This refers to Fréteval near Morée, and St Jean Froidmentel and St Claude Froidmantel further up the Loir (Leda) shown on the late 18th century Cassini map (Figure 3). We shall see later an association of this place with Henry II.
- 1155: a charter of the priory of Jully-les-Nonnains (Petit, 1881: 16–17) refers to *apud granchiam Frigidi Mantelli* [‘at the grange of Frigidum Mantellum’]; another in the same cartulary but of no date (Petit 1881: 17) has *Frigidum Mantellum*.
- 1276: a charter of St André de Grenoble (Chevalier, 1871: 69) gives *usque ad sorbaut de Fromental*, somewhere in the Lyon-Grenoble region.⁶
- 1304: a description of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Bonnardot and Longnon, 1878: 1) mentions the pilgrims passing through *la maison de Froit Mantel*. This seems to be now Fromenteau (commune Trouhaut), near St Martin-du-Mont, Bourgogne.
- 1316: a document giving certain rights to the citizens of Albi (Compayré, 1841: 165) refers to *se laora en fromental*.⁷

Other early spellings from *Dictionnaires Topographiques* are recorded for Fromentières (Mayenne; *de Frumentariis* 1100 (Maître, 1878: 138)); Fromentières (Marne; *Fromenteria* 1162 (Longnon, 1891: 113));

Fromental, Fromenteau (Dordogne; *Fromentals* 1247 (de Gournes, 1873: 134, 256)); Fromentaux (Drôme; *Ad fromentals* 1281, and three other cases (Brun-Durand, 1891: 153)); Froimental (Somme; *Froimantel* 1367 (Garnier, 1867: 416)); Fromenteau (Côte-d’Or; *Froitmantel* 1376 (Roserot, 1903a: 179)); Fromental (Haute-Loire; *le Fromentailh* 1600 (Chassaing, 1907: 130)); and Fromentelle (Haute-Marne; *Fromentel* 1759 (Roserot, 1903b)).

The name also appears early as the name of two streets in Paris; both have now vanished. I suspect these may have been amongst the best-known examples in medieval France and England, so they are worth a detailed examination. The two streets in question are one in an area immediately to the west and north of the Vieux Louvre, and another immediately to the east of the Sorbonne, between the Lycée Louis le Grand (formerly the Collège des Jesuites) and St Jean de Latran (Figure 2).

These streets have the following histories.⁸

- Rue Fromental near the Louvre was just outside the 12th-century city walls of Philippe-Auguste (AP, 31). The name is explained by Berty (1885: 2) as coming from the large *fief de Fromental* situated in this area, an ancient possession of the bishop of Paris. By the 15th century, the walls had been rebuilt to include the Louvre (AP, 43), and the region had been divided into several small streets. The oldest map showing this street labelled is the so-called *Plan de Bâle* of 1552. The street disappeared during the 18th-century rebuilding and expansion of the Louvre into the Tuileries area, and its site is now that of the Pyramide du Carrousel.
- Rue Fromental near the Sorbonne (Figure 2) appears in several old maps, but is often not labelled. It is, however, well documented, being mentioned early in the cartulary of the nearby abbey of St Geneviève (on the site of the Panthéon). It survived on the map until the early 20th century, when it disappeared during a development of the buildings of the Collège de France. We may speculate that many of the clerks who wrote our surviving documents were educated in this neighbourhood, and may thus have picked up the idea that *Frigidum Mantellum* is the “correct” Latinization of *Fromental*.



Figure 2: Rue Fromental near the Sorbonne, from the 1900 edition of Baedeker's *Paris and its environs*.

These two streets were frequently commented upon in Parisian topographical writing, without always being clearly distinguished, and with no serious attempt at etymology:

- Jaillot (1774: 64) gives useful citations of early spellings:

Rue Fromental.. . Ce nom est une abbreviation de celui de Froid-mantel: le Cartulaire de Ste Geneviève de 1243 l'indique ainsi, vicus qui dicitur Frigidum Mantellum; & celui de Sorbonne, en 1250, vicus Frigidi Mantelli, Fretmentel. . . . Dans tous les Actes des siècles suivants, on lit Fretmental, Froit-Mantel & Fromental.

[This name is an abbreviation of that of Froid-mantel: the cartulary of Sainte-Geneviève of 1243 indicates it thus, *street which is called 'cold cloak'*; and that of the Sorbonne in 1250 'cold cloak' street, *Fretmentel*. . . . In all the deeds of the following centuries, we read *Fretmental*, *Froit-Mantel* & *Fromental*.]

- de Cessart (1806, section 6): gives a description of the building of the Pont des Arts, which had to take account of a flood drain in the *Rue Froimont* near the Louvre.
- de Laval (1834: 124) gives us an evocative picture of the character of the area near the Sorbonne:

Les rues de la Bibliothèque, de Chantre, Pierre-Lescot, Froidmentel ou Fromanteau, servent de refuge à la classe des malfaiteurs de Paris. Les soirs, on aperçoit de distance, à la façade de maisons souvent suspectes, une lanterne carrée, d'une transparence sale, qui laisse lire, ou à peu près, ces mots, Ici on loge à la nuit. Une nuée de bacchantes sont là, à faire entendre leurs chants obscènes ou à se moquer des provinciaux, quand elles ne peuvent rien de plus.

[(loosely translated) The streets of the Bibliothèque, Chantre, Pierre-Lescot, Froidmentel or Fromanteau, serve as the home of the evildoers of Paris. In the evenings, we perceive in the distance, on the front of often suspicious-looking houses, a square lamp with dirty glass, which lets us read, or almost, these words, *Rooms for rent by the night*. A swarm of bacchantes are there, singing obscene songs or mocking provincials when they've got nothing better to do.]

- Lazare and Lazare (1844: 241) give a description of the street, saying that it was constructed in 1230, repeat the above 1243 quote from the cartulary of Sainte-Geneviève, and then state “Son nom actuel n’est qu’une altération de celui de Froid-Mantel [Its present name is merely an alteration of that of Froid-Mantel].”
- Jacob (1858: 137) gives us unsourced spellings illustrative of the phonetic ambiguity /fre-/, /fro(i)-/, but follows these with an absurd etymology:

La rue Froidmantel, qu’on a nommée alternativement Fremantel, Fresmentel, Fremanteau, etc., en latin Frigidum Mantellum, et qui est devenue la rue Fromentel, au mépris de son étymologie, dut certainement son nom primitif à une comique allusion au ordonances de saint Louis, qui dépouillaient de leur manteau et leur peliçon les femmes convaincues de ribauderies; celles qui habitaient cette rue étaient donc naturellement privées de manteau: de là leur [description?] de dames de Froidmantel.

[Rue Froidmantel, which has also been called Fremantel, Fresmentel, Fremanteau, in Latin Frigidum Mantellum, which has become Rue Fromentel, in denial of its etymology, most probably owes its original name to a jocular allusion to the ordinances of St Louis (king Louis IX, 1226–1270), which deprived women convicted of prostitution of their coat and fur; those living in this street were therefore of course without a coat: thus their description of ‘cold coat ladies’.]

- Alternative spellings are similarly given by Fournier (1878: 111, 272): “rue Frementeau, ... c’est-à-dire Froidmantau ou Fromenteau [Frementeau street, that’s to say Froidmantau or Fromenteau]”.
- Lebeuf (1883: 131) wrote, “on écrivoit autrefois Fromentel pour prononcer Fromenteau, ou Froid-mantel pour prononcer Froid-manteau, de même qu’on rendoit oisel par oiseau ... [One formerly wrote Fromentel in order to say Fromenteau, or Froid-mantel to say Froid-

manteau, just as one rendered oisel by oiseau ...]”, apparently getting the wrong chronological sequence for the interaction of spelling and pronunciation.

There were also Rues Fromentel in Auxerre (*Froit-Manteau* 1503, *Fremantau* 1555⁹); and in St Quentin, for which Gomart (1860) gives undated forms *Froid Manteau*, *Fromentel* and *Froid-Mantel*.

It is very noticeable in many of these examples that the first vowel is unstable at all periods, and fluctuated apparently randomly between /o/, /oi/, and /e/. This indicates uncertainty amongst users of the name as to the ‘correct’ form. If we assume the original vowel of Fromentel was /o:/, we cannot arrive at /oi/ and /e/ by regular phonetic processes. However, once the folk-etymological form *Froidmantel* (with silent *-d-*) had been created, the rest of the fluctuation is understandable. Pope (1961: 127) gives the phonetic evolution of Latin *frīgīdus* ‘cold’ (after Vulgar Latin shortening of the first vowel) as /frīgīdu/ > /freid̥e/. The further development of /ei/ is well understood (Pope 1961: 195–6; Brunot and Bruneau 1937: 138; Ewert 1933: 61; von Wartburg 1971: 124) and proceeded as /ei/ > /qi/ > /oɛ/ > /ʌɛ/ > /we/ > /wa/ from about 1100 to 1800. When following /r/, the glide /ʌ/ or /w/ would tend to be lost in order to simplify the cluster /rw/. As a result we had for a long period a diphthong alternating with simple /e/ in many words. This is seen in examples in the references already cited, such as *il fait fret* ‘it’s cold’, *vee* for *voie* ‘way’, *roe* for *roi* ‘king’, the alternation *français/François/Frances*, and rhymes such as *envoit : ait*. The standardization of /frwa(d)/ rather than /fre(d)/ has perhaps been influenced by the desire to avoid homophonic clashes (such as with *frais*). A parallel case illustrates this point: *rigidus* ‘stiff’ evolved as *rīgid-* > *raide* and also in some usages *roide*. It is this vowel ambiguity which underlies the developments *Frementeau* and *Froidmentel* of the original *Fromentel*. In all cases, the Latinizations in *Frigid-* are artificial; the real name is French.

Why was a French name transferred to Hampshire? The agent was Henry II, who built a house (or perhaps enlarged an existing hunting lodge) near Kingsclere during the years 1180–3. Our best guess is that this instance was the prototype of the other Hampshire names. The building accounts, which survive in the Pipe Rolls, give us a good run of early spellings:

Freitmantell 1180–1 PR, v. 30, p. 136
in operatione domorum Regis de Freit Mantell [‘for work on the king’s house of *Freit Mantell*’] 1181–2 PR, v. 31, p. 146
Freitmantell 1182–3 PR, v. 32, p. 140
in reficiendis domibus Regis de Freitmantell [‘for rebuilding the king’s house of *Freitmantell*’] 1183–4 PR, v. 33, p. 180

The history of this house after the death of Henry II may be followed in:

Apud frigidum mantellum 1189 Jeayes (1892: 18)
domos Regis apud Freitmantell' 1197 PR, v. 46, p. 17
Freytmauntel 1272–9 CR, v. 1, pp. 263–4
Francmantel 13th Page (1911, v. 4, pp. 249ff)

In the last example, the initial syllable seems to have been interpreted as English 'free' and translated back to OFr *franc*. This is probably also the explanation of the lost Cambridgeshire field-name *Frauncmauntel* recorded in 1315 (PN C: 356).

Henry had been at Fréteval already in 1155, his first year as king (Poole, 1955: 213), and it is therefore likely that he knew the nearby St Jean Froidmentel and St Claude Froidmentel at little way up the Loir (Figure 3). If this was a hunting region, it would be very plausible to believe that it inspired the name of his house near Kingsclere (for more on the house, see Shore, 1895 and Page, 1911: v. 4, pp. 249ff). It was probably transferred already in the corrupt 'cold cloak' form, and did not originally denote a forest, as claimed by some authors. Certainly no spellings with *Fro-* are recorded for any of the English instances.

I have given evidence that several French place-names originally from Fromentel 'wheat-field' have been re-interpreted as 'cold cloak' by folk-etymology, or simply as a pun, and this happened probably from about 1100. The corruption of the initial syllable to *Freit-*, *Free-*, *Franc-*, and *Fair-*, and the alteration of the final syllables to *-mantel* from the original *-mentel* are all clear indications that the name was not understood at all in England, and to some extent not in France. It is not clear how many independent instances of reinterpretation have taken place.

A similar case, in which a re-interpretation as 'cold' has been made (in this case of a word meaning 'broken'), is Froidestrées (Aisne), recorded as *Frete Estrei* and *Fracta Strata* in the 13th century (Matton 1872: 121; Piette 1883: 166). Possibly these names have been influenced by other names which really do contain the word *froid*, such as Froideval (*Frigida Vallis* 1154–59, *Froidevallis* 12th (de Loisne, 1907: 165); apparently always feminine) and Froidmont in Pas-de-Calais (de Loisne, 1907: 165), Froide-Rue (the name of several hamlets in Calvados; Hippeau, 1883: 125) and Seine Maritime (de Robillard de Beaurepaire and Laporte, 1982–4: 417), or Rue Froide in Caen and Fécamp.

In about 1180 one of the Fromentel names (quite likely the one near Fréteval) was transferred to Hampshire in the re-interpreted form. Thus, Gover (1958), Ekwall (DEPN), Coates (1989) and Mills (2001) were not

incorrect in their analysis of this name; just incomplete and thus inadvertently misleading.



Figure 3: Freteval (now Fréteval), St Jean Froidmentel and St Claude Froidmentel from the late 18th century map of Cassini (<http://cassini.ehess.fr/cassini/fr/html/index.htm>). The major river is the Loir.

Appendix

In 2005–8 excavations at possible sites of royal houses in Kingsclere have been directed by Kristin Strutt (Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton), with the support of the Kingsclere Heritage Association. The following description of the work has been contributed by David Hinton of the same department.

North Hampshire has an unusual cluster of three royal houses, all within the large medieval parish of Kingsclere. One, Wolverton, had money spent on it between 1158–9 and 1166–7, after which no more is heard of it until its alienation by king John in 1215. Substantial amounts were spent on *Titegrava* between 1171–2 and 1178–9, and then there is silence about that as well. Instead, expenditure was on Freemantle from 1180–1 (as above; see also references in Brown, Colvin, and Taylor (1963)). A park at Freemantle is recorded from 1243–4, and what in the

mid-12th century was the *foreste de Witingelega* came also to be known as the Forest of Freemantle during the thirteenth.

Although some other royal houses were quite close together, and a few were abandoned for a preferred site nearby, nowhere else has the same chronological sequence. Wolverton is presumed to be somewhere within present-day Wolverton Park, in the clay vale east of Kingsclere. *Titegrava* has the same name as a small Domesday manor, thought to be located at Tidgrove Warren Farm, south of Kingsclere and high on the chalk downs. The royal site was unknown until a few years ago when Raleigh Place, farming the land, realised that there were structures in a field in a dry valley east of the present house, and an air photograph revealed an enclosure. Geophysical work demonstrated that there were various features within it, and excavation has now revealed remains that include an aisled hall and a flint-lined cellar.

Freemantle Park is north of Tidgrove, and parts of its surrounding pale can still be seen on what is now called Cottington's Hill, after a country-house built right on the summit of the downs by an eccentric 18th-century owner. No trace of a medieval house remains above ground, but none remains of the later mansion either, and that could have obliterated evidence of an earlier structure. An alternative location for the king's house is where Freemantle Park Farm is today, in a more sheltered position closer to a stream.

The sequence of houses indicated by the documents seemed straightforward, but excavation at Tidgrove in 2005–7 produced a number of issues with it, not least that the pottery so far found (work will continue in 2009) suggests use well beyond the 1170s, and the abandonment of such a well-built place for one only a mile away seems strange. Cottington's Hill also has an enclosure, though in this case quite possibly prehistoric. It too has been surveyed by geophysics, and a small area was excavated in 2008 over some of the anomalies. To confound the picture, what was found was not substantial evidence of the 18th-century mansion, but a ditch that had medieval pottery in it, and the remains of a wall which also seems to be medieval. The summit of such an exposed hill seems an unlikely place for a royal residence – it was never considered a castle – but a theory that was beginning to form in 2007 that *Titegrava* was not abandoned after a decade, but perhaps unprecedentedly had its name changed, certainly did not get substantiation from the 2008 work. Whether this conundrum will be resolved in 2009 remains to be seen.

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Notes

1. The early spellings of Fairmantle Street are 1365, 1410 (Gover 1948: 484, not checked against original MSS); c.1617 Inq.p.m. of Hugh Michell (National Archives, Kew); 1634 Deed (all *ex inf.* O. J. Padel).
2. There is perhaps still a possibility that some of the early forms have been misidentified; the Pipe Rolls just state *Hanton* or *Sudhanton*.
3. There are Freemantle Streets in Walworth (Sr) and in Stockport (Ch); neither name is likely to be old. Bristol has Freemantle Road and Gardens near Eastville Park, and Fremantle Road, Lane and Square, the latter after the former landowner Sir Thomas Fremantle. Fremantle Street in Livingston (West Lothian) is certainly a transfer from Fremantle (Western Australia), which is named after Captain C. H. Fremantle.
4. Another name of this origin is that of the Mediterranean island of Formentera.
5. A charter of the Abbaye de Conques of 997x1031 (Desjardins, 1879: 124, no.139) refers to *De frigido Montilio*, identified by Desjardins as "Fromental, com. d'Aubin". However, this name really does mean 'cold hill', and so has no connection with Fromental. I am grateful to Pierre-Henri Billy for this information.
6. Here *sorbaut* is perhaps related to *sorbus* 'service-tree', or it might be an error for *sorbant*, also of obscure meaning.
7. *laora* is here 'work, plough'.
8. Neither Paris street is mentioned in de Lasteyrie (1887), which might mean that they did not exist before 1180.
9. Information taken 2008 Feb 05 from http://auxerre.historique.free.fr/Ville/quartier_hotel_de_ville/rue_nicolas_maure.htm

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- DT Côte-d'Or = Roserot (1903a).
- DT Dordogne = Gourges (1873).
- DT Drôme = Brun-Durand (1891).
- DT Haute-Loire = Chassaing (1907).
- DT Haute-Marne = Roserot (1903b).
- DT Marne = Longnon (1891).
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