

# **A short history of the Perient ancestors of Mary Gill**

## **Introduction**

In his "Antiquities of Hertfordshire" Chauncey mentions that "ancient family the Perients". Yet, even by Chauncey's day they had gone from Hertfordshire, dying out in 1637. Yet the family left a mark that endures.

The first Hertfordshire Perient was quite a man. As a result, the monuments to the family at Digsweil have always created an interest.

Various researchers have quoted a pedigree of the family first prepared in the early 1600s. That pedigree has proved to be poorly researched and false. Subsequent work by a Henry Gray in 1968 appears to be excellent. I have retraced his steps and his work on the family (see "The Peryents of Hertfordshire" in "Hertfordshire Archaeology - 1968") is extremely sound.

In the early 1990s, following on from the work of Gray I devoted a couple of dozen research hours on the the Perient family, fleshing out the bare history of the family set out by Mr Gray. My work is thus, undoubtedly, the most comprehensive work on the family yet produced.

## **The first Perient in England**

The Perients were not originally English - that is a simple fact: they were from Brittany.

In the 1300s what we know as Brittany was a Duchy, independent from France. At that time it has been said that it bore as similar relationship to France as Scotland to England before the Act of Union.

The English aristocracy were obviously still largely Norman and French, and England at the time still had extensive lands in France. The English King thus was often quite "chummy" with the Bretons, to irritate and intimidate the French.

The 1300s was of course the century of the Hundred Years War between England and France. We were originally very successful (at Crecy, Poitiers etc) but by the 1370s our best leaders (Edward the Black Prince etc) were either incapacitated or dead and we started to lose. Eventually, the French had Joan of Arc and, reputedly, God, on their side and we lost entirely. It was not to be until the reign of Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> that our star was to rise again.

Brittany was at the centre of the Hundred Years War. Many Breton troops fought on the English side and many fled to England when the French began to win. Both Gray and a previous researcher believe that the first Perient fled to England in the 1370s. A man called Berry ("County Genealogies) says that the first Perient "came into England with the Black Prince". We cannot state this as a fact, but it seems highly likely given what else we know.

So who was this first Perient ? Well, a man called John Peraunt is mentioned in the Pardon Rolls at about this time. We do not know why he was pardoned by the King, but it seems likely that he was pardoned because he came into the country without leave of the then King, Edward the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

We next hear of this John Peraunt in 1385 when he is made Sergeant at Arms to the then King Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> at a salary of 12d a day. There were 24 Sergeants at Arms, they were men of knightly/esquire class whose role was to enforce the orders of the King "in the King's name".

Peraunt was extremely busy, there are numerous references to him in the Close/Patent/Fine Rolls of the period 1385 to 1408, I researched him in the Guildhall Library. He travelled widely, attending Corfe Castle (now a ruin) in 1394 to take a prisoner into custody. In 1405, now in the service of Henry the 4<sup>th</sup>, he even took charge of the whole of the Channel Islands for a short while.

John Peraunt disappears from the records in about 1409. It is supposed he died or retired from the Kings's service. Logically, John Peraunt must have been born in the period 1335-1345. Andrews (a prior researcher) believes, Gray supposes and I am sure, that the John Perient below is his son

## **John Perient esquire and the Lady Joan**

This man is the first Perient of Hertfordshire. He does not seem to have lived to be 60, but in his short life he put in more incident than many of us could in two. The surprising thing is that much of this appears to have gone unnoticed by previous researchers, so my research adds a lot more biographical detail than previously available.

We know for a fact that John Perient was born in Brittany, probably about 1375. The fact that he took service with Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> adds weight to the argument that he is the son of John Peraunt above.

Perient tells us on his tomb that he was in service to Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> ruled 1377-99 and was the son of the Black Prince. If John Peraunt above came into England with the Black Prince then all this would add up.

Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> was a child when he took the throne. He was to become a little deranged in later life and was deposed in 1399. It seems likely that John Perient entered his service in the 1390s.

Perient was an "Esquire of the Body" to Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup>. That is, he was one of those selected to be the King's bodyguard. It was a paid position of course, in addition to being a great honour. Chauncey tells us that there were only four such esquires, but I would assume that there were more as they obviously could not all have been on duty at once.

Perient was also Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup>'s Standard or Banner bearer, which obviously means he was highly favoured as this was truly a tremendous honour, bestowed on only the finest warriors.

It is sensible to point out at this stage that John Perient was always an esquire, his life long. Some researchers refer to him as "Sir John" but there is no evidence he was actually ever knighted. Esquires were gentry, entitled to a Coat of Arms and entitled to wear armour, they served in the King's army as men at arms with warhorse, lance and full armour and were, in every practical way, the same as knights, but not actually knighted and not as well off.

Perient thus stood quite high in the 1390s, but being close to the King could put one at risk, as well as giving opportunity.

Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> went off his head in the 1390s. He started to confiscate lands from some of the most important families in England, including the Bolinbroke – it was to be the death of him.

In 1399 Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> went to Ireland. He took his personal entourage, presumably including Perient. While he was there, the head of the Bolinbroke clan, the future Henry the 4<sup>th</sup>, invaded England. Richard returned from Ireland to find himself deposed and quickly imprisoned. Many of Richard's "body" knights and esquires were beheaded. Perient escaped, perhaps being a foreigner saved his life.

Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> may have been imprisoned but still had supporters. Over Christmas 1399/1400 these supporters rose up and Henry the 4<sup>th</sup> fled. Henry raised an army and, surprise, surprise, Perient changed sides and joined Henry. John was an astute man.

The rebel army retreated to Cirencester and Henry's army were encamped outside Cirencester castle. A muster was made of Henry's army, which is why we know that John Perient was there.

Richard the 2<sup>nd</sup> lost and the rebels were executed. Henry the 4<sup>th</sup> was King. Rewards for John Perient arrived in February 1400. First, he was taken on as "Esquire to the Body" to Henry the 4<sup>th</sup> at a salary of £40 per year. Second, he was taken as a "sworn man" of Ralph Neville, who was Baron Neville, Earl Marshal (leading soldier) of England. Ralph was also King Henry's brother in law and Perient received £50 a year for the privilege. In a few short months Perient was thus back in the centre of things – he must have been quite a soldier.

In 1402 King Henry the 4<sup>th</sup> married Joan of Navarre, his second wife and widow of the Duke of Brittany. It is known (Wylie- see bibliography below) that when Joan arrived from Brittany she brought her whole entourage, including her "damsels" or ladies in waiting. Many of her household were Bretons.

It is stated by Dora Ward ("Digswell from Domesday to Garden City") that Joan Risan, Perient's future wife came into England with Joan of Navarre. This cannot be proved but seems highly likely as we know that Joan Risain was the Queen's chief damsel, as it says as much on Joan Risain/Perient's tomb.

It seems clear the John Perient married Joan Risain in about 1404. Wylie gives us a clue, as he tells us that in this year the English were obsessed with the wars in France and the fact that we were losing and were furious that the King and Queen had so many foreigners in their household. There were riots. There was a petition to the King and they demanded all be expelled save for "two Breton gentlemen and their wives". This clearly included Perient and Joan.

I have made some slight investigation into Joan Risain's family. Comparing the Coat of arms on her tomb and that Raisen family of Kernault in Brittany is interesting – see Rietbladt – "General Armory". Investigations are in order.

In 1403 King Henry faced another great rebellion. It culminated in a great battle at Shrewsbury. I think we can assume that as one of Henry's bodyguards our friend John was there.

The movement against foreigners at the English court continued. John and Joan were still legally Bretons. John, as a foreigner, could not hold land in England. The anti-Breton feeling in England was so strong that in 1416, after the English victory against the French at Agincourt, there was an Act of Parliament sending them home.

In 1411/12, John Perient and his wife thus set about acquiring citizenship and we find the following in the Patent Rolls:

*December 19<sup>th</sup> 1411 – Grant off Denization to King's Esquire John Peryan born in Brittany and his heirs, for his services to the King and Queen*

*December 28<sup>th</sup> 1412 – Grant of denization to Joan Perrian, born in Brittany one of the damsels of the (King's) Consort the Queen and wife of the King's Esquire John Perian and her heirs*

Perient's marriage to Joan had borne financial dividends by 1411 as he was made Master of Horse to the Queen, Joan of Navarre. This added to his income and was obviously yet another great honour.

Now they were officially English, lands followed swiftly. John received the Honour of Peverell (an honour consisted of several parishes) in the counties of Northants, Beds, Bucks and Leicestershire in 1412. Successive interests were granted to his wife and eldest son Thomas.

We know that Perient was good friends with two other Kings' Body esquires – these were John Derham and John Ludwick. Both men had been MPs and both lived near Hatfield in Hertfordshire. Perient decided to be a neighbour.

The Patent Rolls and other original documents (see Cowper Collection at the HRO and the Additional Manuscripts at the British Museum) give Perient's property dealings in some detail. Basically, he acquired the Manor of Digswell (where he lived and died) on which he built his manor house. He also acquired the manors of Gobions and Lavares in Stapleford and Ludwicks (named after John the MP) in Hatfield. In 1415, he added the manor of Lockleys in Welwyn and by 1428 had added Holwell in Hatfield. By his death, John Perient owned substantial lands in 12 Hertfordshire parishes and owned most of what is today Welwyn Garden City.

Henry the 4<sup>th</sup> died in 1413. His heir was the great Henry the 5<sup>th</sup>. We know from Perient's tomb that Perient was also Esquire to the Body to Henry the 5<sup>th</sup>. I have done quite a bit of work into this phase of John's life.



Drawing of John and Joan's tomb at Digswell

Busby mentions that Perient supplied men for the Agincourt campaign of 1415, but, that apart, nobody seems to have realised that Perient was actually quite heavily involved in the wars in France. I find this quite amazing as Perient was a professional soldier. What follows therefore breaks new ground on what is known of the man.

When Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> came to the throne in 1413, war with France was a certainty. Henry claimed the French throne. The following years of 1413-15 were merely years of preparation.

Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> issued a proclamation in March 1415 for all the soldiers of his army to converge on London (Burne –see below). On 16<sup>th</sup> April a further proclamation called for all units to assemble in the Southampton area by 1<sup>st</sup> July (Burne).

The beginning of 1415 was a tragic time for Perient as we know that his wife Joan died on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, just when Perient was preparing to go to war. To our knowledge, five children survived her. She was probably younger than Perient, perhaps 35.

I have done a tremendous amount of research into the wars in France 1415-21. Indeed, I have consulted all major sources, including original sources at the Public Record Office/National Archives. What follows is therefore a fairly comprehensive study.

All knights, esquires and others who held land direct of the King were obliged to provide men for the army. How many men, and of what category (men at arms, archers etc) depended on the extent of land a man held.

Perient held (we believe) just four manors in 1415. Each of these (according to the Victoria County History of Hertfordshire) was held for half a knight's fee, in other words Perient was obliged to provide two men at arms (men with warhorse, lance and full armour) for the war. Three archers were required to be provided for each man at arms, thus Perient was also obliged to finance 6 archers.

We know a great deal about the Agincourt campaign and more research into has been assembled since I first prepared my own research in 1995. Briefly, there are two accepted sources for detailing the men who took part, namely

1. The list contained in the book "History of the Battle of Agincourt and the expedition of Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> into France" by Sir Harris Nicholas (1832)

2. What Burne (below) Wylie (below) Christopher Hibbert and now more recent historians call "The Agincourt Roll" (ref E/101/51/2 at the National Archives)

At the time that Nicholas compiled his list there was no Public Record Office/National Archives and his work was taken from partial manuscripts from the British Museum. It is a copy of the list of officers of the army and was taken from the Norman Rolls. The Norman Rolls record all of the men who were given a passport (licence to go overseas) by the King to go abroad with the army. Perient and his friend Nicholas Aldwick were both given such licence on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1415, I have seen the original entry. Both were said to be in the "retinue of the King" ie the King's own personal troops. The only point at issue is how many men Perient had, Nicholas believed that he took three men at arms and 9 foot archers. Busby reiterated this but obviously just copied Nicholas.

Now the "Agincourt Roll" is a different thing altogether. It is a vast roll (like a long, long roll of wallpaper) which reputedly lists every man in the army, including each head of each retinue and the men that such a man took along. I have read the original document, of tremendous historical importance of course and it is absolutely fascinating to read, touching history in fact.

The Agincourt Roll tells us everything, it tells us that John Perient went and it even tells us the names of the men Perient took, a number of them mentioned in later records concerning Perient that I have read, including his will. These are the names

Lances:	John Perient Esq
	Richard Hames Esq (mentioned in Perient's will)
Archers	Dick Bassett (in Perient's will)
	Tom Toryton
	John Teringham
	Harry Smith
	Tom Rodhaw
	Dick Walchess (Walsh ?)



The army was mustered by July. War was finally declared and the fleet set sail on 11<sup>th</sup> August. There were sails for as far as the eye could see: ten thousand men sailed with numerous supplies, horses and siege equipment.

The army landed at Harfleur and laid siege. This was the scene of Shakespeare's "once more into the breach" speech by Henry the 5<sup>th</sup>. The English attacked the fortress again and again. We lost men in the attack and disease (the "bloody flux" or dysentery ) spread and severely depleted/incapacitated the army.

Harfleur finally surrendered but it is calculated that we lost some three thousand men to wounds and disease. Many archers deserted and many men were sent home. This included some 400 men at arms or "lances". Whether Perient was amongst them I obviously have no idea, but the fact that he stayed in Henry the 5<sup>th</sup>'s service and fought in later wars (see below) in my view suggests not.

Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> left a garrison at Harfleur before he began the march that eventually led to his glorious encounter with the French at Agincourt. Was Perient left with that garrison? Again, I think not, not least because Perient was an Esquire to the Body to the King and we know from the Norman Rolls was in the personal retinue of the King. It seems unlikely he would therefore discard him. So I think that we can assume that Perient marched with the army.

Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> had arrived in France with some 2000 men at arms it is estimated. Of those, some four hundred had died at Harfleur and another four hundred shipped home, many of those to die of ill health before too long. Another three hundred men at arms were left with the garrison at Harfleur, a hundred of which were in the Earl of Dorset's own retinue. So King Henry had only some nine hundred men at arms left.

Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> now decided to do the most stupid thing of his career. His plan was to march the army overland from Harfleur to Calais, across a good chunk of northern France and across the face of a vast French army. It was raining heavily (it was October), many men were still suffering with dysentery and there was a shortage of food. The English army became a rabble.

On 25<sup>th</sup> October 1415 the English army marched into the French trap. The French had some 40,000 men of which 20,000 were men at arms. We could have surrendered or fought, they decided to fight.

The battle is probably the greatest single victory the English army has ever won. The book "Triumph against the Odds" says it all. It was the feast day St Crispin/Crispianus. The French attacked, there were so many of them that they got into each other's way. In the end they and their horses got exhausted in the mud and the English cut them down in droves. At the end of the day some ten thousand Frenchmen lay dead in the mud. It included most of the nobility of France. The English had some five hundred casualties, mostly wounded. Shakespeare says it all:

*"This story shall the good man teach his son*

*And Crispin/Crispianus shall ne'er go by*

*From this day until the ending of the world*

*But we in it shall be remembered"*

All we know for certain is that John Perient took part in the Agincourt Campaign. Whether he was actually at the Battle of Agincourt is, and will probably always remain, a moot point. Nicholas lists some 500 men at arms whom he says were definitely there, two of them esquires to the body of the King, but Nicholas himself confessed that he was some four hundred names short, and I suspect that John Perient is among those names.

Whatever, at the end of the first war in France Perient returned home to England as a widower. There is no evidence he ever remarried, in fact quite the contrary – the tomb rather tells us he didn't.

He was not to be home for long. Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> was not finished fighting the French or bankrupting the nation in the process. In 1417 Henry the 5<sup>th</sup> again gathered an army, some twelve thousand men. It included Perient and his little band (they are mentioned in the Norman Rolls) but save for Perient we do not have names.

The army first laid siege to Caen in Normandy, eventually taking the castle and carrying out a savage massacre in the process. The army then laid siege to Falaise, and I know Perient was there as after the castle surrendered in February 1418 he was sent through Normandy with letters of attorney from the king (Norman Rolls).

The army was at Louviers in June 1418. A muster was taken and Perient and his little band were listed. Louviers surrendered and the army marched to Rouen, a major fortress. This siege lasted throughout 1418 and into 1419.

Rouen surrendered in 1419. The army marched to Mantes where the King set up his Headquarters. I know Perient was there, but his small band of men had been taken from him, perhaps to garrison the many castles the English had taken. This seems to reinforce what I have said about Agincourt, that the King always kept his "body" knights and esquires personally with him.

By the end of 1419 the English were at the gates of Paris and the French completely surrendered in 1420. The King invited many of his knights and esquires to settle in castles in France, mostly to keep the French subdued, but many Englishmen refused as they were tired of constant war, perhaps Perient was amongst them as he is never again mentioned in the King's service after 1420.

We know that Perient was not involved in Henry's third campaign in France of 1421-2. We know who was there, Perient wasn't, the "old chap" had retired.

From 1421-1432 Perient concentrated on his Hertfordshire estates. He built a manor house at Digswell and doubtless refurbished his other manors. There are surviving photos of the old manor house at Ludwick, a simple timber framed building which likely incorporated elements of Perient's day.

Between 1415 and 1432 we know that Perient's eldest son Thomas died. Perient was thus succeeded by his next eldest son John (who died without issue) and Edmund Perient, in that order. The old man had two daughters, Margaret and Joan, the latter a nun at a Dartford convent.

On 10<sup>th</sup> April 1432 John Perient made his will (National Archives), he was likely about 57. The will is in Latin but was translated and transcribed by Dora Ward.

There were all the usual gifts of household items, including silver and furs. He made many, many gifts to his friends, including two war comrades, Richard Hames and Dick Bassett. Some £200 was left to build a chantry chapel at Digswell, which was built after his death and still stands. There prayers were to be said for him and his old mates the Johns Derham and Ludwick (the latter had died in 1420).

John Perient died (an Inquisition Post Mortem was held into his lands) on the Monday before St George's Day 1432. With this old man passed the first and the greatest of the Perients of Hertfordshire

## **Edmund Perient Esquire**

When John Perient died his second son, John jnr inherited but he (born in circa 1411) died without issue in 1442 (Inquisition Post Mortem) and it was the third son, Edmund Perient who is Mary Gill's ancestor. There is an administration (see early Lincoln wills and administrations) which shows the inheritance.

Edmund Perient was born in circa 1414. Busby calls him a Knight but there is no apparent evidence he was ever knighted. Knighthoods could not be inherited at this time (they were granted for life). If a man was a Knight and his son was considered of sufficient importance to be knighted then he would be, but it was by no means certain.

There is much argument over whom he married and no certainty as to who it was. All we do know (through a church brass which is not his own) is that he had four children, namely Thomas (the heir) and three daughters, Joan, Joyce and Mary. All of these daughters married and left a note of who their father was on their own funeral monuments.

Edmund died in 1473/4 aged approximately 60. There was an Inquisition Post Mortem into his landholdings (see 10 Edward IV 29). He was shown to have held all of his father's holdings save for Lockleys. Nobody knows why this was as it came back into the family later.

The IPM identifies his eldest (and presumably only) son Thomas as the heir in 1474, he was then 30 and so:

### **Thomas Perient Esquire**

Next to nothing is known of this man. The only thing known of note is that he was Sheriff of both Hertfordshire and Essex in 1498.

He is also known to have had three sons: Thomas, John and George, with likely a fourth – Humphrey.

No IPM survives for Thomas, but he was known to have been alive in 1500 when he was then 56 or so. His eldest son and heir was also Thomas, but Mary Gill is known to have been descended from the second son John Perient so:

### **Sir John Perient of Hatfield**

The first Perient after his great-grandfather to make any sort of mark. He was born in about 1470, obtained a number of administrative posts under Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>. These included being the Auditor of the Court of Wards in 1540. For a number of years he served on the Commission of the Peace in Hertfordshire.

In 1545 he achieved what his great grandfather had not – he was knighted, by Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Sir John was the tenant of the Manor of Holwell in Hatfield (held by his elder brother) and also owned land of his own in Essendon.

Sir John married twice, but only had issue by his first wife. She was Dorothy Tendring (see below) of Essex. Dorothy was blood related to some famous Tudor families.\* By her, John had two daughters – Gertrude and Joyce. Dorothy Perient died after 1536 and Sir John Perient remarried Elizabeth Hopton. She survived John Perient as he died in 1550. No will has been traced.

*By a marriage settlement dated 7<sup>th</sup> May 1538 we know that Gertrude Perient (daughter of Sir John) married George Gill of Wyddial in Hertfordshire (see GILL)*

\* Dorothy Tending has been shown by Gray to be the daughter of William Tending of Colchester and Little Birch in Essex. Dorothy's mother was Thomasine Sidney, daughter of William Sidney of Sussex. As such, Dorothy was great aunt to Sir Philip Sidney, the famous Tudor poet, soldier and courtier. She was also great aunt to the wife of the Earl of Leicester (friend and likely lover of Elizabeth the 1<sup>st</sup>) and through her Dorothy was blood related to the later Earls of Leicester.

To make things even more complicated, Sir John Perient was Dorothy's second husband – she had first married a Francis Southwell of Norfolk and had three sons by him whom Sir John acquired as his stepchildren. Two of these sons are in the National Dictionary of Biography. Through one of these sons Dorothy was grandmother to Robert Southwell, the Elizabethan religious Catholic poet, he died for his religion in 1595 and was beatified by the Catholic Church in 1929



*Photo of tomb of John Perient and Joan at Digswell*