

THE P^A_E^U_{OI}RR^A_E^U_{OI}TT SOCIETY

Sir John Perrot:

The man and the Myth



*Separating
fact
from
fiction
in
the
life
of
this
legendary
figure.*

by Dr. Roger Turvey PhD

SIR JOHN PERROT: *THE MAN AND THE MYTH*

To students of Welsh and Irish history, studies of the sixteenth century would be incomplete without reference to Sir John Perrot. Besides noting his public offices — those of privy councillor and lord-deputy of Ireland among them — almost without exception they taint him with the stain of illegitimacy, and the oft-quoted myth of his royal origins continues to flourish.¹ The allegations that he was a base son of King Henry VIII engenders far more interest than the fact that he was the heir of a minor marcher family from Pembrokeshire. That said, Perrot was not an inconsequential man which is why students of sixteenth-century English history should take more serious note of this contemporary of Burghley, Leicester, Sidney and Essex. In a career spanning over forty years, Perrot made as deep and lasting an impression on Elizabethan politics and society as several of his more illustrious colleagues. Portrayed as an arrogant, avaricious, dominating bully almost fated to die as a traitor, the traditional image of the man has been sustained by generations of historians.² Despite the pioneering biographical research undertaken by P.C.C. Evans between 1937 and 1940, the enigma that is Sir John Perrot persists.³ After more than four hundred years since his death, this image of the man and his alleged royal paternity deserves to be challenged and resolved if we are to succeed in uncovering the man behind the myth.

The purpose of this publication is two-fold: firstly to provide a succinct biography of Sir John Perrot and, secondly, to investigate the origin and substance of the Perrot myth so as to conclude the debate regarding his supposed bastard origin.

Roger Turvey



King Henry VIII

SIR JOHN PERROT: *THE MAN BEHIND THE MYTH*

On the night of Friday, 3 November 1592, a lonely and bitter old man passed away just a few days short of his 64th birthday. Had he lived those few extra days there would have been little cause for celebration for he died a prisoner in the infamous Tower of London in which he had lodged for over 18 months. The name of this unfortunate man was John Perrot, a knight from Pembrokeshire. According to the Tower chaplain's burial register he was laid to rest within the walls of the prison in the church of St. Peter Ad Vincula, a week later, on the 10th. No special ceremony attended his burial. It was a quiet, almost routine and inconsequential affair as befitted the death of a traitor.

Perrot died believing himself to be an innocent man wronged, forsaken by his queen whom he had served loyally for 34 years, forgotten by his friends and likely to be forgotten by posterity. Far worse was the fact that he believed himself to be a failure, the man to whom his family could justly point and accuse of betraying his, and their, birthright and honour; in short the man responsible for wiping out over 250 years of Perrot history. For a traitor died with nothing to call his own save his soul: his estates, possessions, self-respect and name were all forfeit to the Crown. Fortunately this versatile and volatile Elizabethan gentleman did not forfeit his right to have his life story recounted.

Sir John Perrot was a man of remarkable personality – 'a tempestuous and choleric character of Shakesperian proportions' – whose varied career touched on the sixteenth century at many points. That he has the rarity of having had a near contemporary biography devoted to him, however limited, suggest that he had made his mark and impressed others in his own time. Indeed, others soon put pen to paper but with varying results in terms of the quality of their writings. As time went by the line between fact and opinion, truth and fable became increasingly blurred. Mr. Percy Evans was the first modern historian to investigate the life and career of this son of Pembrokeshire. His thesis, entitled simply 'Sir John Perrot', was rewarded with the degree of Master of Arts in June 1940. Unfortunately, in the half-century since Mr. Evan's research Perrot has been neglected, though not through want of interest for his name and deeds continue to find expression in the pages and footnotes of history.

Sadly, most writers have been content to quote, use and rework unchecked previous published efforts so that errors and a great deal of fanciful exaggeration have solidified into a bogus picture of the man. The activities of Perrot's public and private life deserve comprehensive study. This biography relates in outline the key

features of Perrot's career, his attitudes and values, inferred primarily from his letters and those of his family and contemporaries.

Sir John Perrot was born sometime between the 7th and 11th November 1528 probably at the family's main residence at Haroldston, near Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. His birth was almost immediately attended by misfortune and subsequent myth. John's father, Thomas Perrot, died young, as had his uncle, Robert (d. 1522), and grandfather Sir Owen (d. 1521). Thomas died at the age of 26 in September 1531 after 5 years of marriage, leaving a 21 year old widow, two daughters and a son not yet 3 years old. Thus John was denied a father's love, had the latter been disposed to offer it and denied guidance and instruction in all things pertaining to the Perrot family.

He was brought up by his mother, Mary, a niece of Maurice, Lord Berkeley, a prominent noble family from Gloucestershire and her second husband Sir Thomas Jones. He was 18 years her senior, a cousin of the powerful Sir Rhys ap Thomas of Dinefwr and a man with connections at Court, being a gentleman usher in King Henry VIII's chamber. Apart from the death of his father the real misfortune suffered by Perrot was the fact that as a minor for such a long period his destiny, and that of his family, was controlled by others. Fortunately, the relationship between him and his step-father was a close and warm one. Indeed Perrot became, and remained until the latter's death in 1586, very close to his step-brother Sir Henry Jones. As far as we can tell his early life seems to have been a happy one.

Having completed his secondary education at the Cathedral school at St. David's, where he acquired some skill in languages, French, Spanish and Italian amongst them, Perrot proceeded to London sometime in 1546, aged 18, to begin what turned out to be a rather turbulent 3 year apprenticeship in the household of Sir William Paulet, the Lord Treasurer of England. Here the youthful Perrot soon gained an unenviable reputation for violence. On one occasion he and his fellow page, Henry Neville, Lord Bergavenny, quarrelled, and before either could be separated broke glasses 'about one another's ears' so that 'blood besprinkled the chamber'. No doubt he owed his introduction to Paulet to his step-father Sir Thomas Jones, and in turn owed his introduction to the Court of Edward VI to Paulet, his instructor in social graces, manners and Court etiquette.

In the autumn of 1549, aged 21, Perrot was first introduced into the royal Court; he proved a most durable, if ill at ease, courtier, but remained a familiar figure there for over 40 years. An example of his unease in polite company is given by his son who reported a conversation between Perrot and a friend thus: 'Being once told by a friend of his that he was no courtier, Perrot replied, "Why so, I have lived in and about the Court as long as most of them?" "Aye," but said his

friend, "you cannot flatter." Perrot asked, "Is that the principal part of a courtier?" "Yes," answered the other. "Then I will never be a courtier whilst I live."

Over the next few years he steadily rose to prominence and gained valuable experience at Court where he attached himself to the powerful Dudley faction. Its leader, John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland had by 1549 become the Lord Protector of England and in theory ruled on behalf of, but in reality ruled over the boy King Edward VI. Perrot became a lifelong friend of the Duke's son, Ambrose Dudley, the elder brother of the more famous Robert, future Earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth. No doubt as a result of Dudley influence, Perrot was knighted within a week of achieving his majority in November 1549.

His continued success at Court seemed assured for under Edward VI he served the Crown in local government, becoming sheriff of Pembrokeshire in 1551, whilst in the same year accompanying the Marquis of Northampton on a foreign mission to France to arrange the marriage of Edward VI with a French princess. Yet life was not all plain sailing for the young 25 year old Perrot for he lost his wife, Anne Cheyney in childbirth after only 2 or 3 years of marriage. No doubt the blow of her death was softened somewhat by the birth of a son and heir, Thomas, in September 1553. Unfortunately it seems Perrot was easily dazzled by the bright lights of London, the gaiety of the Court and the spending power of his wealthier friends, for in the effort to keep up he soon plunged himself into debt. In a letter to a friend Perrot wrote of his reckless spending on 'the tilt and such other toys as I am ashamed to tell'.

According to tradition he was saved from penury by the generosity of the boy-king Edward. Needless to say the truth is probably very much more mundane and businesslike. His ever-increasing prominence and influence at Court received a setback with the death of Edward VI, the fall of Dudley and the accession of Queen Mary. Perrot was no Catholic but a firm and committed Protestant, a fact clearly evident from a statement in his Will to the effect that he 'sithence the Beginnings of King Edward the Syxthe his Raynge abhorred the Pope's Idol of the Masse.' He was actively involved in saving fellow Protestant 'heretics' by offering them shelter at his home in Haroldston. In a period when many bent and changed their beliefs to suit the prevailing winds of religious change, to his credit Perrot held firm.

Was this courage or sheer stubbornness? It is a difficult question to answer for a stubborn man he certainly was, for though received at Court by Mary she was unhappy with his Protestant beliefs, as Perrot put it, 'he did smell of the Smoake', but undeterred, he persisted in pursuing his claim for what later became his principal residence, Carew Castle.

He was a most fortunate subject for after 5 years of lobbying he got his wish sometime in 1558. He proved somewhat of a nuisance, a troublesome subject imprisoned on 3 separate occasions for offences ranging from helping heretics, brawling with the Earl of Worcester, and, more seriously, on suspicion of treason. Without doubt he had aligned himself with a group in Parliament, he had himself become a Member of Parliament by this time, opposed to the Queen and her government. Fortunately for him, he was a peripheral figure in the whole affair so while others were executed he was spared. His time in the Tower taught him a salutary lesson and in 1557 he thought it prudent to remove himself from the country. He returned to France, this time on a military rather than a diplomatic mission, taking part in the siege of St. Quentin under the Earl of Pembroke, William Herbert. For above all else, Perrot was a soldier, as one of his earliest biographers, Sir Robert Naunton, calls him, 'a goodly Gentleman and of the sword.'

With Queen Mary's death in 1558 his fortunes rose once more, being conspicuously favoured by the new Queen Elizabeth; for example, he was chosen to be one of the 4 bearers to carry the canopy of state at her coronation; for some this has lent credence to the story of his alleged royal birth. It is under Elizabeth that the career of the now thirty something Perrot really takes off. He was given the opportunity to further his career at Court, in the service of the Crown and to increase his wealth and influence in Pembrokeshire. In 1561 he was given a commission to search for and keep concealed monastic property in the county which enabled him, later in the day, to redress the misfortune which had befallen the family in missing out on the spoils of the dissolution of the monasteries.

In the following year he established himself as the chief magistrate or *Custos Rotularum* in Pembrokeshire. Having been a Justice of the Peace for some years previously, this 'promotion' bolstered his already growing authority in the region. He had already been invested with the stewardship of the manors of Carew, Coedraeth, Narberth, Pembroke and St. Clears and with his constableness of the castles of Narberth and Tenby. Even the chief town of the county, Haverfordwest, did not escape his attention, becoming Mayor there on 3 separate occasions, 1560-1, 1570-1 and 1575-6.

During these years (the 1560's) Perrot divided his time equally between the Court and country and he was able to build a strong powerbase in South West Wales where his faction, a group of supporters drawn from the local gentry, soon gained an enviable reputation for forceful and sharp dealing. Indeed, Perrot himself was soon attracting a host of powerful enemies both at Court and in the country. Some were envious of his local power and access to the Queen, others angry at their treatment by him – some with good reason – while the remainder were drawn to one side or the other against their will. In Pembrokeshire at least it was difficult to remain aloof from faction politics and Perrot influence. It was with

some relief for his enemies that in 1571 the Queen saw fit to employ his talents on a wider stage when he was given the first of his appointments in Ireland. As the first Lord President of Munster his role was rather more military than bureaucratic and most commentators then and now agree that his 2 years of service in southern Ireland was a success. It is in Ireland that we have evidence of his extraordinary, if reckless, courage. In an attempt to put down the rebellion of James Fitzmaurice, the Lord President swore to 'hunt the fox out of the hole' but was drawn into a trap and would certainly have lost his life but for the opportune arrival of reinforcements.

He came back in 1573 far from happy, but he was worn out by the rigours of his experience and felt every part of his 45 years. He vowed never to return; indeed he had been reluctant to go in the first place and he was in fact sent as a second choice. Indeed, 1573 marks a change in Perrot, the youthful exuberance being replaced with a more thoughtful and reflective middle aged man. He wrote to the Queen's chief minister, William Cecil, Lord Burghley 'that he was determined to lead a countryman's life and to keepe out of debt'.

For the next ten years the aging Perrot increasingly turned his back on the court and spent much of his time in Pembrokeshire. Here he turned to extending and developing his estates which often resulted in him treading on the toes of his sensitive neighbours. One such was Thomas Wyrriot, a distant cousin, who became an implacable enemy, pursuing Perrot relentlessly through the courts for nearly 10 years until he (Wyrriot) was ruined. George Owen of Henllys, another opponent, records the names of over a dozen gentlemen who had lost land and money for merely challenging or standing up to Perrot. During this time he was not forgotten by the Queen: in 1574, she approved his appointment to the Council of Wales and the Marches, the supreme governing body of the principality and adjacent 'English' marcher counties. He was also active on a number of royal commissions and in 1579 agreed to command a squadron of ships to patrol off southern Ireland to prevent a possible Spanish landing.

His naval appointment was very much in keeping with his latest preoccupation with the sea. Since 1575 he had been given responsibility for the suppression of pirates along the coast of South Wales and the Bristol Channel. Here again Perrot has fallen victim to myth created by a combination of innuendo, tell-tales and the vitriolic accusations of those determined to destroy him. Almost all of his fellow gentry involved in matters connected with piracy would agree that one would be more likely than not to be tainted with the stain of corruption.

In many cases this was true for the rewards were attractive and even Perrot cannot be declared entirely innocent in this respect, but to the extent to which he has

charge of high treason before the Queen's cousin Lord Hunsdon and others. According to the indictment he was charged with the following: firstly using contemptuous words about the Queen; secondly, helping known traitors and Romish priests; thirdly, encouraging the rebellion of an Irish gentleman, Sir Brian O'Rourke, and lastly, writing treasonable letters to the King of Spain and the traitor Sir William Stanley. The prosecution concentrated on the first charge. The chief witness was an Irish priest of dubious quality and reliability, Dennis O'Roughan. Perrot, who was extremely agitated throughout his trial did not deny that he might have spoken the words attributed to him, but he resented the interpretation put upon them:

'Ah, silly woman, now she shall not curb me, she shall not rule me.'

'God's wounds! This it is to serve a base, bastard, pissing kitchen woman; if I had served any prince in Christendom, I had not been so dealt withal.'

He was found guilty and condemned to death on 26 June 1592. Thereafter he languished in the Tower awaiting his fate. Even towards the end Perrot never believed he would be found guilty, much less executed. His last will and testament is over three pages long and in reality is nothing more than a vindication of his conduct and an appeal for mercy; none came. Fortunately Perrot died before sentence could be carried out though there is evidence that the Queen intended to pardon Perrot but that he died before this could be done. Certainly his son, Sir Thomas, was restored in blood and allowed to resume control of the family estates soon after the death of his father. Despite the long accepted story of his natural death, recent research has suggested that Perrot may in fact have been poisoned, which may lend credence to the idea that his pardon was imminent; certainly his enemies could not afford to risk his wrath upon release.

Contemporaries were not slow to offer reasons why Sir John Perrot fell from grace and died in the ignominious way that he did. Naunton suggested that it was, in part, due to the fact that he was 'a person that loved to stand too much alone, on his own legs'. His son was more direct, stating that he was: 'more apt to give offence unto great ones than to creep or crouch unto them which on the end procured his ruin.'

It is generally agreed that Perrot's choleric nature and haughty pride combined with the envy and competition of others contributed to his downfall. He was too blunt and direct a man 'as far from flattery as from fear' that he did not fit easily into the polite ways and manners of the Court. The final words should perhaps be left to a contemporary friend, Sir Francis Walsingham who said: 'It cannot be doubted that Sir John Perrot's intention and purpose .. were very honourable, but his course has not been agreeable to our humour. He might have lived in better season in the time of King Henry VIII, when princes were resolute to persist in

been credited with becoming involved is exaggerated; history has tended to view Perrot as a royal bastard and a pirate.

In 1584 the call for his services once again echoed within the walls of the Court. The Queen, determined to deal with Ireland effectively but cheaply, was sufficiently impressed by Perrot's treatise (1581) on governing that unhappy island to offer him the opportunity to put his ideas into practice. Service in Ireland, that graveyard of reputations, of which the wise steered clear, called to the ambitious. The Queen flattered, Perrot took the bait and he began that fateful journey that would eventually end in his ruin.

This well illustrates the character of the man, for he was seduced by the prestige which came with the Queen seeking his opinion and service and all that was attached to the position and influence the Lord-Deputyship of Ireland brought. His four years in Ireland proved to be a mixture of great achievements, bitter disappointments, increasing ill health and a growing fear of dying in 'that slimy country'.

Certainly Perrot was displaying signs of a more violent temper resulting in brawling with his ministers and to too much swearing. This has led one Irish historian to suggest that he may have been suffering from insanity but there is no evidence to support this contentious speculation. He was a lonely man, far from home, frustrated at the lack of support and appreciation of his work by his queen and by those he governed, the native Irish. He returned in 1588 with his reputation intact, quite a feat in the Elizabethan period; indeed, the Queen soon after confirmed his appointment to the Privy Council in February 1589; this proved to be the highlight of his career.

However, unbeknown to him the foundations of his position and influence at Court had already begun to crack. As early as March 1589 Thomas Widebank wrote to Walsingham, the Queen's Secretary of State that having had his audience with the Queen immediately after Sir John Perrot had left her, he says 'what passed he knows not, but he found her out of tune.'

His Irish service proved to be a catalyst for his enemies to bring him down. Perrot wrote to a friend 'I do here ... grow to utter contempt and no thing hath so much hurt me as wind whispered in corners.' This whispering campaign soon turned into an avalanche of calls for his head. In March 1591 he was removed to the Tower from Lord Burghley's house in the Strand where he had been under house arrest for some months, whilst the charges against him were investigated.

More than a year elapsed before his trial and in a letter dated 23 December 1591 Perrot complained that his memory was becoming impaired through grief and close confinement. Eventually on 27 April 1592 he was tried at Westminster on a

honourable attempts, whereunto the Lord Deputy (Perrot) must be content to conform himself as other men do.'

Perrot, who never did 'conform as other men do' has never failed to excite and interest those who have come across his life story, tragic though its end may be. He is an attractive and influential figure, who although hardly to be considered among 'the half dozen principal actors on the Elizabethan stage' is certainly to be counted among the dozen or so second rank of supporting actors. In Pembrokeshire and Wales he dominated; in Ireland he ruled; and in England and in Court, he competed, and it was here that he lost. Today it is he who is remembered and not those anonymous few who brought him down.



Carew Castle
near Tenby, South Wales

SIR JOHN PERROT – HENRY VIII’S BASTARD?: THE DESTRUCTION OF A MYTH

‘compare his picture, his qualities, gesture, and voyce, with that of the King’s, which memory retains yet amongst us, they will plead strongly, that he was a subrepticious child of the blond Royall.’⁴

Such is the strength of the Perrot myth, promoted by Sir Robert Naunton (1563-1635) and fostered by subsequent writers, that it has persisted down the centuries and finds expression in historical works of distinction to this day.⁵ The origin of this popular belief in Perrot’s royal paternity can be traced back to Naunton. It was he who first gave wider currency to a story which may have been rumoured towards the end of Perrot’s lifetime.⁶ However, there is no evidence from Perrot himself, his contemporaries or familiars to substantiate this belief or Naunton’s claim. Significantly, even among his contemporaries in the early seventeenth-century, Naunton is alone in weaving a tale apparently ignored or most likely unknown to other writers also engaged on a life of Perrot. Nevertheless, that the Perrot myth has endured whilst challenge to it remains lukewarm owes much to the regard with which Naunton is still held by many.⁷ The value of his short account of Perrot lies in the fact that it is based on the observations of a contemporary who had married Perrot’s grand-daughter -Penelope.

Current estimates suggest that the *Fragmenta Regalia*, essentially notes on the Elizabethan court, its Queen and principal characters, was written sometime between 1628 and 1632, but was not published until 1641, some six years after Naunton’s death.⁸ Nevertheless, the work may have been long in composition and existed in draft manuscript for a number of years before these dates. Certainly, a near-contemporary, Thomas Fuller, was of the opinion that it was ‘a fruit of his younger years’.⁹ Naunton was twenty-nine years old when Perrot ‘fell sick and dyed’ suddenly in the Tower; according to Hatton’s biographer, ‘he was old enough to move in the great world and had acquired some experience of public affairs’.¹⁰ That he was a contemporary witness who may have known some of those of whom he wrote is undeniable; that he had the opportunity to hear what others said of Perrot is quite possible; but how far Naunton’s testimony can be relied upon is debatable. Nevertheless, he cannot, and should not, be entirely dismissed but rather deserves to be re-appraised critically.

If we dismiss Naunton’s somewhat dubious comparison of Perrot’s ‘picture ... qualities, gesture and voyce’ with those of Henry VIII, the substance of his story rests, to use his own words, on ‘tradition, and upon old report’. The most persuasive passage

Loquebar de testimonijs tuis in conspectu Regum et non confundor



*Abbas cathedram vaticanae sedis occupavit
Ipsa vaticanae sedis major pars de. 3^a.*

Sir Robert Naunton

in Naunton's work, and most likely the root from which the myth sprang, concerns the story that on hearing of his condemnation for treason Perrot swore 'in oathes and in fury' to the lieutenant of the Tower, Sir Owen Hopton, '. . . will the Queen suffer her Brother to be offered up as a sacrifice to the envy of my frisking adversaries?'

Naunton is eager to substantiate the truth of this outburst, though he does not reveal the identity of those that 'deliver with assurance' the news of Perrot's indiscreet remark. On one matter we may be assured that Naunton's attention to detail is defective, for Perrot could not have vented his anger on Hopton, who had been dismissed from the lieutenancy of the Tower in the summer of 1590, over six months before Perrot was lodged there.¹¹ Therefore, apart from the strong possibility that the account may have reached Naunton in an abridged or garbled fashion, very much third-hand, it may be untrue. Certainly such a statement bears the hallmark of malicious gossip and a means by which Perrot's enemies might have attempted to discredit him further. Even allowing for Perrot's choleric nature, this would have been an intemperate and unwise expression of his frustration with the Queen, unless a less precise or literate meaning be attached to the 'Brother'.

If we accept the account *verbatim*, as some continue to do without qualification, then this may not have been a claim to be her brother in blood but simply an expression to indicate his close association or friendship with the Queen over some thirty years. Certainly, the Queen's reported refusal to sign his death warrant and the subsequent delay in carrying out his execution need not have been, as Naunton has it, a result of these words being made known to her; her indecision in such matters is well known.¹² In the absence of corroboration there is reason to doubt the validity of Naunton's reported account.

There remains the tradition, which is worth quoting in full, of the favoured status enjoyed by Perrot's parents, Thomas and Mary Berkeley, at the court of King Henry VIII. According to Naunton,

'Sir Thomas Perrot his Father was a Gentleman of the Privy-Chamber to Henry the eight, and in the Court married a Lady of great honour, of the King's familiarity, which are presumptions of some implication.'

The vague presumption is that Perrot's father married a woman impregnated by the king, her lover, and the implication is that the heir to the Perrot estates was 'a subreptitious child of the bloud Royall'. Much has been made of this and, rather than challenge an appealing footnote, some writers have even embellished the tale. How much truth can be ascribed to Naunton's 'tradition' is questionable. Certainly, Naunton was wrong to describe Perrot as a knight and he is suspect in failing to name the lady, his bride. Tempting though it may be summarily to dismiss this account, there is at the

heart of most persistent legends a grain of truth and this one is no exception. In records possibly consulted by, or related to, Naunton, Thomas Perrot is indeed listed as an esquire of the king's body; while a Lady Berkeley, though Naunton never names her (it may be presumed that he knew Perrot's wife was also a Berkeley), is listed as a royal lady-in-waiting and thus in a position to become overfamiliar with the king.¹³ It can be convincingly demonstrated that from such realities has grown the myth related by Naunton: a classic mixture of distortion, magnification and genuine misunderstanding.

Unless he had access to additional records denied modern researchers, Naunton's interpretation of Perrot's position assumes a far closer relationship between him, the king and the court than may in fact have been the case. While there is no doubt that Perrot can be counted among the privileged elite, his position as an esquire of the body was simply a recognition by the Crown of his local pre-eminence. As a result of such appointments the Crown could extend its authority into the counties while the recipients were assured of continued social and political influence. Thus, when first mentioned in this capacity in 1525, Perrot was but one of over 200 county landowners on whom the Crown relied for support and whom it 'attempted to make its own at minimum cost'.¹⁴ If he were, as Professor Guy puts it, a 'supernumerary' then his companionship with the king, which was once thought so intimate as to qualify him to marry the king's former mistress, was more apparent than real. Without the benefits accruing to a gentleman of the Privy Chamber, such as free room and board, his attendance at court was probably no more than occasional.¹⁵

This is not to deny Perrot a place at court or the possibility that he may have encountered his wife-to-be, Mary Berkeley, there. But the extent to which Naunton believed their relationship to have been fashioned by the court and the monarch should not be exaggerated. Indeed, would 'that Naunton were by to explain his own meaning', for much depends on how his phrase 'of the King's familiarity' is interpreted.¹⁶ If we assume it to refer to those Berkeley females with a proven record at court, then the evidence would seem to point to a later date than that which witnessed the birth of Sir John Perrot (b. 1528) and to a very different lady, or even ladies, from the one thought by Naunton to be the expectant wife of one courtier and the discarded mistress of the king. A glance at the Berkeley pedigree will immediately cast doubt on the accuracy of Naunton's account and strongly suggests a reason why it may easily have been founded on mistaken identity.

The wives of Thomas VI, 16th Lord Berkeley, suggest themselves as possible candidates for Naunton's 'Lady'. The fact that two Mary Berkeleys existed contemporaneously increases the possibility of an error of identification. Bearing in mind that over a century had elapsed between the writing of his account and the event it describes, Naunton may be forgiven his error. Of the two, (and it has to be admitted that little

is known of Mary née Hastings), it is Thomas Berkeley's second wife, the Lady Anne Berkeley (née Savage), who is better suited to Naunton's story. A noted court beauty, she took a prominent part in court life whilst her husband was content to remain on the family's estates in Gloucestershire. Married in January 1533, a young widowed mother by March 1534, she had served the Boleyn family for a number of years prior to her appointment as a lady-in-waiting to the new Queen, Anne Boleyn. As a result, Anne Berkeley's attendance at court was obligatory, thereby increasing the opportunities for a young unattached widow to attract the roving eye of a king losing the pre-nuptial infatuation with his Queen.¹⁷ In contrast, there is little evidence to suggest such close links between members of the royal family and Mary Perrot (née Berkeley), certainly not before her son's birth and only tentatively some years after it.

With the aid of evidence recently unearthed among the Berkeley manuscripts, the truth of Thomas Perrot's liaison with, and later marriage to, Mary Berkeley can be revealed. Far from being a grateful recipient of a royal mistress, Perrot was in fact a minor 'purchased' from the Crown by Maurice VI, 14th Lord Berkeley, for the daughter and sole heiress of his deceased younger brother, James. The codicil of Lord Berkeley's last will makes it clear that he had acquired the wardship and marriage of the eighteen year-old Perrot a little before his own death in September 1523.¹⁸

Though not inconsequential, the fortunes of the Berkeleys had suffered something of a decline in the latter half of the fifteenth century, but under Maurice VI's successful stewardship of their estates the family fortunes had seen a notable revival. With no children of his own, he lavished care and cash on his niece Mary from her early age. In his first will of May 1512, the head of the Berkeley household was at pains to provide for the family of his younger brother, James, who received an estate and local office for life, together with an annuity of £20 *per annum*; a hundred marks were set aside for the future marriage of his daughter Mary.¹⁹

In the event, the death of his brother in 1515 and of his sister-in-law in 1521 gave Maurice VI an opportunity to exercise full parental rights over Mary after acquiring her wardship and marriage.²⁰ It may be no coincidence that his search for a suitable match for his niece led him to the offspring of a neighbouring family, the Poyntz of Iron Acton; Thomas Perrot's recently deceased mother was Katherine, daughter of Sir Robert Poyntz.²¹ The codicil of Maurice Berkeley's last will indicates the nature of the arrangement concluded for the marriage of his wards: they included the costs of the wedding and a sum of 500 marks payable on condition of both parties fulfilling an agreement in which they, as minors, played little part.²² Despite this, and following the death of their guardian, Perrot and his even younger bride, though they may have been temporarily returned to the custody of the Crown be-

tween 1523 and 1526, fulfilled their obligation — probably in a ceremony held after Perrot had attained his majority in August 1526.²³ According to recent estimates, their alleged bastard son John was born some two years later in November 1528.²⁴ This evidence is crucial, for it suggests the early part of 1528 as the date of his conception, a time when his parents appear to have been settled in Pembrokeshire and far from a king pre-occupied with an assertive mistress and an impending divorce.

Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence regarding court attendance in the 1520s, the assumption that any over familiarity which Henry VIII may have had with a Berkeley female cannot relate to Mary Perrot (née Berkeley) because the latter did not have a known record at court during those years is, admittedly, conjectural. That she may, following the death of her uncle and guardian Maurice, Lord Berkeley, have attended court as a ward has been conceded. However, it must be remembered that during this brief period before her marriage — 1523-26 — she was a minor less than sixteen-years of age already betrothed to a fellow ward in whose company she may have spent her time at court. Moreover, in view of Sir John Perrot's date of birth it would suggest a post-marital affair between the king and a young woman with no apparent connection at court other than through wardship. To assume that the most probable explanation of Naunton's comment is that he intended it to allude to Mary Perrot (née Berkeley) in the years preceding the birth of Sir John Perrot is rendered implausible by the knowledge that Naunton appears to have been blissfully unaware of the true circumstances surrounding the marriage of his wife's great-grandfather.

This is worthy of note on two counts. Firstly, it further erodes confidence in the accuracy of his account, for the fact that Naunton's wife was a Perrot has tended to impress historians such as Eric St. John Brooks: '... seeing that Naunton was married to his granddaughter . . . [he] . . . presumably had an intimate knowledge of his [Perrot] history'.²⁵ Unfortunately, Penelope Naunton (née Perrot) was less than ten years old when her grandfather died in the Tower and little more than eleven when her father passed away less than sixteen months later.

Raised by her mother Dorothy (née Devereux) and step-father Henry Percy, ninth earl of Northumberland, Penelope had virtually no contact with the remaining members of the Perrot family, with whom her mother was at odds in a protracted property dispute. As a result, she had little opportunity to acquire details of the family's history and traditions other than those imparted by her embittered mother, a Perrot for rather less than a decade. Penelope was as much a stranger to her Perrot heritage and living relatives as was her husband. Secondly — and curiously overlooked by Naunton and all subsequent writers on the subject of Perrot's origins — is John Smyth of Nibley's valuable *Lives of the Berkeleys*,

largely completed in 1618, with some additions up to 1627, but never published in the author's lifetime.²⁶ A contemporary of Naunton, Smyth refers to the purchase of Thomas Perrot's wardship and his happy marriage but there is no mention, or even hint, of the scandal of his wife's alleged impregnation by the king and her son's supposed illegitimacy. Belief in the truth of Smyth's sober account is enhanced by the knowledge that he was in close contact with Sir John Perrot's illegitimate son and heir, Sir James, from whom he obtained information on the descent and immediate history of the family. It is apparent that Mary Berkeley was fondly remembered and held in high regard by a grandson who said of her that;

all the chief gentlemen of most eminency in the three shires of Pembroke-shire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion at this day living are descended of this Mary Berkeley of whose memory in those parts is made most honourable mention to this day.²⁷

There is no corroboration of Naunton's account in either Perrot's correspondence with Smyth or in a manuscript written by Sir James about his father c. 1622 and intended for, but omitted from, his unpublished *Chronicle of Ireland*.²⁸ The latter piece is a most interesting and detailed description of Sir John Perrot's physique, personality and character by a son who had attained his majority on the eve of his father's death in 1592. Sir James Perrot was in a better position than Naunton to gauge the truth of his father's alleged illegitimacy and resemblance to the late king. That no mention is made of an intimate royal connection by someone, a base son himself, who would presumably have known, is significant.

Apart from Sir James Perrot's collection of unpublished manuscripts, the most authentic account of his father's life remains the biography written anonymously in the first half of the seventeenth century. First published in 1728 by Richard Rawlinson, there is evidence to suggest that Sir James was in fact the author.²⁹ The writer was privy to intimate details of the family and emphatic in establishing the legitimacy of its subject's birth and descent:

by his Father's line . . . from an auntient and well knowen Linage and Name which had continued in Pembrockshire above Four hundred years.³⁰

Without a hint of scandal, the author describes Perrot's mother as,

being the Daughter of Maurice, Lord Barckley his Brother. Her prayse I cannot altogether over-passe; she being in her Time a Lady of greate virtue, wisdom and good Government.³¹

Admittedly, the evidence thus far presented has tended towards a sympathetic portrait of Perrot composed by interested parties motivated, with the possible exception of Smyth, by a desire to restore the tarnished image of a man wronged by Queen Elizabeth. Nevertheless, there is no reason to suspect the integrity of the evidence as anything but faithful accounts of their subject. Indeed, in the half-century following Sir John's death in 1592, the theme of his public rehabilitation was pursued and reached its climax in the only published account of Perrot, apart from Naunton's, by a disinterested party. Published anonymously in 1626 (except for the enigmatic signature 'E.C.S'), the *Government of Ireland under . . . Sir John Perrot* pre-dates Naunton's work by some fifteen years but contains nothing to substantiate the latter's assertion.³²

Although not conclusive, the evidence suggests that Naunton's story of Perrot's alleged royal paternity should be rejected. However, the story itself is not so easily disposed of, for there is no satisfactory explanation of its origin and *raison d'être*. A suggestion can be made. It is noteworthy that after five years of marriage and three children, Mary Perrot found herself a young eligible widow after the untimely death of her twenty-six-year-old husband in the autumn of 1531.³³ Within a year she had married a man in such circumstances as to suggest that Naunton's tale may have some substance, for her second husband, Sir Thomas Jones, was all that Perrot was not, but that Naunton thought him to be: a knight, courtier and gentleman usher of the king's chamber.³⁴ The widowhood of Mary Perrot (née Berkeley) lasted a year, during which she was at the mercy of the king and his master of Wards. She could not marry without licence of the king and when she did so it was to a man closer to the monarch than her previous husband had been, and who now became step-father to John Perrot.

After their marriage, the Joneses continued at court until at least the termination of Thomas's office sometime in 1533 and thereafter continued to divide their time between court and country; according to the best estimates, the date of their first son's birth (Perrot's half-brother Henry) is 1532/33.³⁵ The circumstances of Mary's widowhood and marriage may suggest how Naunton's story originated.³⁶ In the final analysis, there is no evidence to substantiate a relationship between her and Henry VIII or indeed between the king and any other Berkeley female, but if Naunton is to be given any credence, such a relationship is more likely to have occurred at this later date, when both Anne Berkeley and Mary Jones were at court, than in the period (the late 1520s) when Sir John Perrot was born. After all, the singular object of Henry's desire at this time, in the late 1520s, was Anne Boleyn, not a teenage girl from an impoverished county family.

There remains the question of motive for, according to Naunton, 'modesty in me forbids the defacement of men departed, whose posterity yet remaining, enjoys the merit of their lives, and doe still live in their Honour'. In view of his intention to avoid scandal 'by trampling upon the graves of persons at rest', it is perhaps surprising that he should pursue such an extraordinary and controversial story of the birth of his wife's grandfather. What motivated Naunton to paint such a portrait? Had he derived his information from his wife or her associates then his motive may simply have been pride in his wife's implied royal descent; however, there is no evidence to support this assertion. He may never, of course, have intended his work to be published.

Although illness and death rapidly overtook this frail 72-year-old in the first quarter of 1635, there is little to indicate that his work was intended to be anything other than a private manuscript for the information of family and friends. On the other hand, Christopher Haigh is of the opinion that Naunton 'wrote to influence events', which presumably means that publication was very much in mind before his death.³⁷ His work was eventually published posthumously by those who saw advantage in doing so, but to what extent they remained faithful to Naunton's original text is impossible to say.³⁸

Variouly described as a 'jaundiced Jacobean' and 'a critical Caroline by the 1630s', historians attach a greater political significance to Naunton's collection of finely crafted biographical sketches.³⁹ His *Fragmenta* is currently considered to have been a veiled attack on the court politics of Elizabeth's Stuart successors, James and Charles. There may be an element of truth in this assertion but how far the biographical sketch of Perrot fits this broader political motive is unclear. Excluding the queen, Perrot was but one of twenty-two principal characters of Elizabeth's reign noted by the author of the *Fragmenta*. If length of notice be taken as an indication of importance, Perrot is certainly among the *Fragmenta*'s biographical elite, commanding as much space as Essex, Burghley, Leicester and Robert Cecil. Naunton's marked antipathy to Leicester contrasts with his obviously sympathetic portrait of Perrot and Essex, in both of whom he had a personal interest through his wife's Perrot father and Devereux mother.⁴⁰

According to Naunton's biographer, the *Fragmenta* was conceived by an author frustrated at the lack of opportunity for advancement in what he saw as the more restrictive Stuart court.⁴¹ Apart from his brief tenure as a secretary of state between 1617 and 1621, Naunton's public career was generally disappointing and he failed to secure and sustain a position of authority at court or in the government. Herein may lie part of the motive for Naunton's treatment of Perrot, for the latter's unfortunate end may have struck a chord with one who viewed the decline of his own career with unconcealed bitterness. This sense of failure was exacerbated by the

demands and expectations of his ambitious younger wife, whom he married late in life in 1619.⁴²

In the opinion of Naunton's modern biographer, Roy Schreiber, their rows were well known to contemporaries and indeed her temperament was typically Perrot, intemperate and choleric, the very antithesis of her husband's older and more placid disposition.⁴³ As unsuited to marriage as they appeared, Naunton's partiality to Perrot is perhaps surprising. The evidence suggests that property lies behind Naunton's motive for marrying the widowed Penelope Lower (née Perrot) and this may in turn have motivated the writing of Sir John Perrot's character sketch.

The extensive Perrot estates in south Wales had been forfeited to the Crown on the attainder of Perrot in 1591 and were only temporarily returned to his son. On the latter's death in February 1594 there followed a decade and more of bitter litigation among related claimants: Sir James Perrot, his cousin Thomas Perrot of Brook, and Dorothy Devereux on behalf of herself and her daughter. Naunton hoped to claim a substantial part of the Perrot patrimony for himself, but succeeded in obtaining only an insignificant share consisting largely of forest near St. Clear's, Carmarthenshire.⁴⁴ How far Naunton expected to influence events or others by scandalous revelations of Perrot's origin is impossible to say. Unfortunately, his wife's reaction and that of her step-uncle, Sir James Perrot, are not known. Although Naunton was at odds with his wife and presumably with Sir James over property, there is little to suggest any intention of embarrassing them or maligning their forbear. Indeed, it is presumably with his widow's consent that those who obtained Naunton's manuscript later published it.

Although it is possible merely to speculate on the elusive issue of Sir Robert Naunton's motives and intentions, it can be said with confidence that from the creative imagination of a seventeenth-century chronicler the malicious gossip of an earlier time found expression in a later age as an enduring and intriguing myth.

NOTES

1. Armed only with her personal disbelief, E. M. Tenison alone dismisses the myth of Perrot's royal illegitimacy. *Elizabethan England* (14 vols., Leamington, 1933-61), IX, 74.
2. More recently by B. E. Howells (ed.), *Early Modern Pembrokeshire 1536-1815* (Haverfordwest, 1987), III, 140.
3. P.C.C. Evans, 'Sir John Perrot' (Unpublished University of Wales M.A. thesis, 1940).
4. Robert Naunton, *Fragmenta Regalia, or Observations on the late Queen Elizabeth, her Times and Favourites* (1653 ed.), ed. Edward Arber (London, 1895), 43. Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, all quotations in the text will be cited from Naunton, *Fragmenta*, sub Perrot, 41-44.
5. Glanmor Williams, *Recovery, Re-orientation and Reformation Wales, 1415-1642* (Oxford, 1987), 466; C. Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London, 1988), 89. Dr. Haigh states that Perrot was appointed lord-deputy of Ireland in 1584 in order 'to prise him away from Elizabeth, whose half-brother he claimed to be'.
6. E. L. Barnwell, 'Notes on the Perrot Family', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, XI, Third Series (1865), 117. The earliest known contemporary reference to Perrot regarding his origins and birth is a sixty-three line poem composed by Dafydd Fynglwyd sometime between 1533 and 1545. The poem makes no mention of the alleged royal connection. NLW, Llanstephan MS 30 ff. 447-50. For a transcription of the poem with a brief though inadequate commentary, see E. J. Evans, 'Noddwyr y Beirdd yn Sir Benfro' (Unpublished University of Wales M.A. thesis, 1973), xi-xii, 1-3. The earliest reference to the circulation of rumours about Perrot publicly claiming to be a son of royal blood can be dated no earlier than April to October 1592. To slander a convicted traitor was no new thing nor was it an offence punishable by law. SP63/167/6(1).
7. Until a new critical edition of the *Fragmenta* appears, there is no alternative but to rely on piecemeal analysis by such historians as J. Guy who regards Naunton's views on faction in the court of Elizabeth I as 'a travesty of Elizabethan politics', *idem*, *Tudor England* (London, 1988), 254.
8. L. Stephens and S. Lee (eds.), *The Dictionary of National Biography* (63 vols., London, 1885-1900), XL, 128.
9. Thomas Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (1662) ed. J. Nichols

(2 vols., London, 1811), II, 336.

10. J. Stow, *Annals or a Generall Chronicle of England*, ed. Edmund Howes (London, 1614), 764; E. St. John Brooks, *Sir Christopher Hatton* (London, 1946), 31.

11. P. W. Hasler (ed.), *The House of Commons, 1558-1603* (3 vols., London, 1981), I, 449; II, 337. Hopton was replaced by Michael Blount, who held the lieutenancy until 1595.

12. W. T. MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 1572-88* (Princeton, 1981), 351-2.

13. P.R.O. E.36/130 f. 212; H. W. Chapman, *Anne Boleyn* (London, 1974), 122; E. Ives, *Anne Boleyn* (Oxford, 1986), 211, 219.

14. J. Guy, *Tudor England*, 167. W.R.B. Robinson, 'Henry VIII's household in the fifteen-twenties: the Welsh connection', *Historical Research*, 68 (1995), 173-90.

15. According to Dr. David Starkey neither Perrot nor Berkeley figures among those notables closely connected with the king and his privy chamber in the late 1520s. I should like to thank Dr. Starkey for his advice and correspondence on this matter.

16. Quoted from E. Arber's editorial introduction to Naunton's *Fragmenta*, 4.

17. E. S. Lindley, 'Some Early Berkeley Ladies', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, LXXXIV (1965), 38-9; L. Stone, *Family and Fortune: Studies in Aristocratic Finance in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth century* (Oxford, 1973), 244; J. Smyth, *Lives of the Berkeleys*, ed. J. Maclean (3 vols., Gloucester, 1883-85), II, 50-52.

18. Smyth, *Lives*, II, 213-14; Gloucester Record Office (hereafter G.R.O.), Berkeley Mss, Charters, 24

19. Smyth, *Lives*, II, 178; G.R.O. Berkeley Mss. Charters, 22.

20. Smyth, *Lives*, II, 201, 203.

21. In the first third of the sixteenth century there was a close relationship between the Poyntz and Perrot families. On the other hand, for much of this time,

until the death of Sir Robert Poyntz in 1520, relations between the Poyntz and Berkeley families was decidedly hostile.

22. Smyth, *Lives*, II, 201: G.R.O., Berkeley Mss, Charters, 24. In addition to his niece, Mary, and Thomas Perrot, Maurice Berkeley had also purchased the wardships of his nephew Richard Berkeley of Stoke and Thomas's younger brother, Edward Perrot.

23. P.R.O., E.150/1215/4; 1216/1, 2; C. McNeill, 'The Perrot Papers', *Anatecta Hibernica*, 12 (1943), 58-9. Best estimates suggest 1510/11 as the date of birth of Mary Berkeley; she was certainly still alive in 1586.

24. For a fuller discussion, see R. Turvey, 'A Note on the Date of Birth of Sir John Perrot', *National Library of Wales Journal*, 30 (1994), 233-8.

25. Brooks, *op. cit.*, 31.

26. Smyth, *cited*.

27. *Ibid.*, II, 178.

28. H. Wood (ed.), *The Chronicle of Ireland, 1584-1608* by Sir James Perrot (Dublin 1933); B.L. Add. Ms, 4819, f. 118b-119.

29. R. Rawlinson (ed.), *The History of that most eminent statesman Sir John Perrot* (London, 1728). I hope to publish a paper on Sir James's 'connection' with the anonymous biography of Sir John Perrot in the near future.

30. *Ibid.*, 13.

31. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, 13.

32. E.C.S., *The Government of Ireland under the Honest, Just, and Wise Governor Sir John Perrot* (London, 1626).

33. P.R.O., E. 150/1215/6; 1216/3; C. 142/89/119.

34. Bindoff, *House of Commons*, II, 453-4. Although Thomas Jones did not receive his knighthood until 1542 it is understandable if Naunton, writing with the benefit of hindsight nearly a century later and having already misattributed a knighthood to Thomas Perrot when none, in fact, had been granted, were to refer to him as a knight at the time of his marriage to Mary Perrot some ten years earlier.

35. *Ibid.*, II, 451. In 1536 Thomas Jones esquire is listed as a gentleman usher extraordinary whilst his next known appearance at court was in 1542 when he was knighted.

36. Ives, *op. cit.*, 21.

37. C. Haigh (ed.), *The Reign of Elizabeth* (London, 1984), 11.

38. The identities of Naunton's publishers are unknown and likely to remain so.

39. Haigh, *op. cit.*, 10.

40. Penelope Naunton's father was Sir Thomas Perrot (c. 1553-94), son and heir of Sir John, and her mother was Dorothy Devereux (c. 1565-1619), daughter of Walter, earl of Essex (d. 1576) and sister of Robert, 2nd earl of Essex (d. 1601).

41. R. Schreiber, *The Political Career of Sir Robert Naunton, 1589-1635* (London, 1981), 114.

42. F. Jones, 'Trefenty', *Carmarthen Historian*, XVI (1979), 52; Schreiber, *op. cit.*, 29. At the time of their marriage Naunton was fifty-six and Penelope around thirty-five or six.

43. Schreiber, *op. cit.*, 114.

44. *Ibid.*, 130. I should like to thank Professor Emeritus Glanmor Williams and Professor Ralph A. Griffiths of University College, Swansea for reading a draft of this article and for their valuable suggestions for its improvement.



Queen Elizabeth the First,
painted while she was still Princess Elizabeth

