

## **Extract from Introduction to Living History: A Family's Nineteenth Century - Hugh Gault**

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### **The Perceval family: lives and legacy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Spencer Perceval came from the wealthy Egmont family, but, as the second son of the Earl's second wife, he was not well off himself and frequently relied on his brother Lord Arden for financial assistance. Arden left £700,000 when he died in 1840 - an enormous sum then and the equivalent of nearly £31m today. Spencer Perceval trained as a lawyer, developing his own legal practice and then becoming MP for Northampton in 1796. Addington's Solicitor General from 1801 and then Attorney General from 1802 to 1806, he was Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1807 and Leader of the House of Commons while the Prime Minister Portland sat in the Lords. From October 1809 Perceval was both Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer (after Palmerston had turned the latter post down). He was assassinated on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1812 before his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Perceval was well thought of by his political colleagues, if not necessarily by the general public, and had a happy marriage and family life. He was a prominent evangelical Anglican, but coupled this with very extreme views against Catholics and their emancipation.

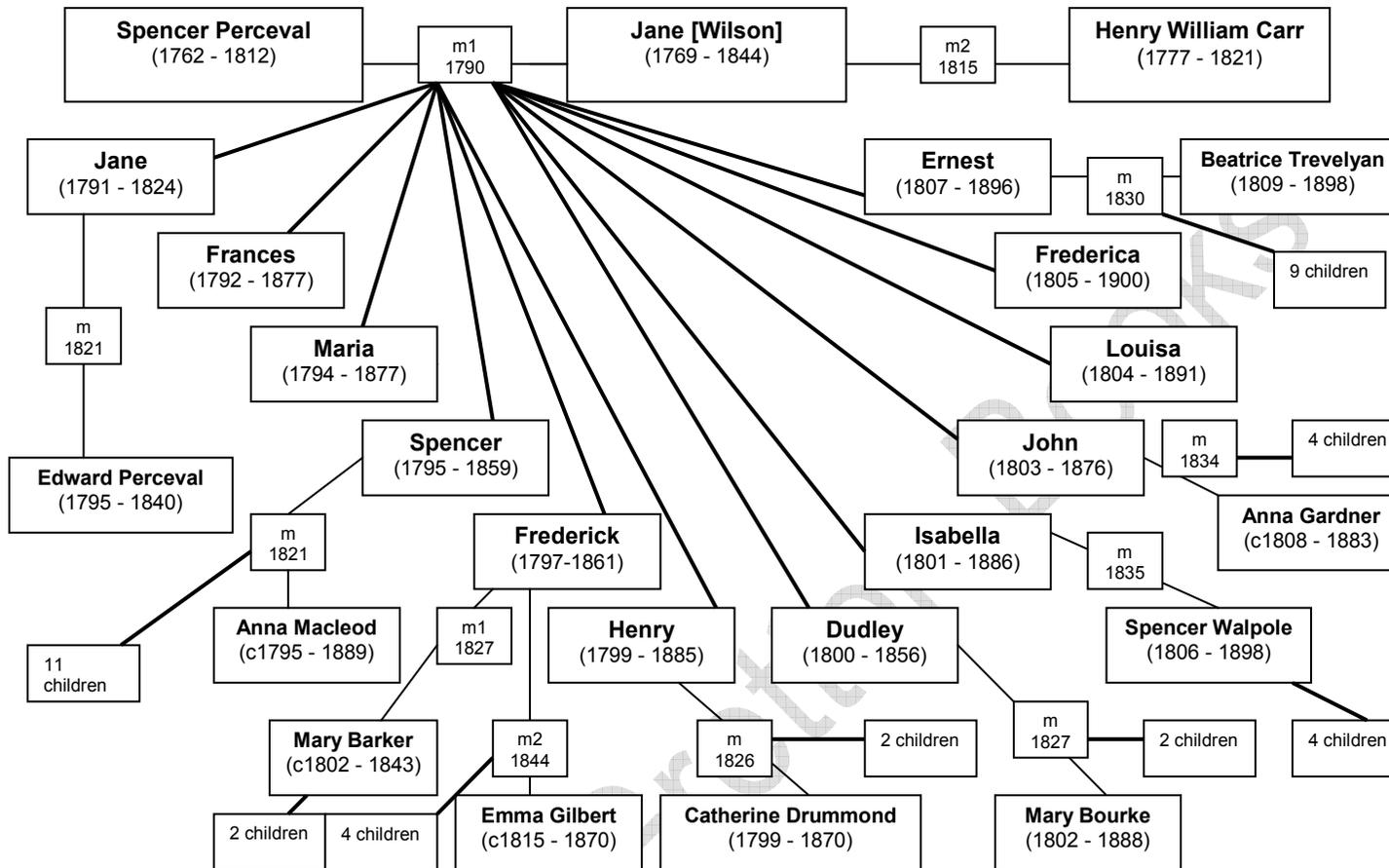
Jane Wilson married Spencer Perceval against her family's wishes when she was 21. In the seventeen years between 1791 and 1807 they had thirteen children, all but one of whom survived infancy. The family lived in several places in London including Lincoln's Inn Fields and Belsize House, Hampstead before settling at Elm Grove, Ealing from 1808. Almost three years after the assassination Jane married again in January 1815, becoming Lady Carr. She was presented to the Queen in May 1815 by her sister Margaretta (who had married Spencer Perceval's brother Baron Arden), but was widowed again from August 1821 when her husband Sir Henry William Carr, an equerry to the Duke of Kent and a mourner at George III's funeral, died in Southampton. He was eight years younger than Jane and had fought throughout the Peninsular War, being knighted in 1815 in recognition of his valour. He had returned from the Peninsula only six months before their wedding, and the nature of their marriage raises many questions.

The immediate family are set out in the diagram on the following page. This shows the twelve Perceval children, the spouses of the eight who married and the number of grandchildren (who lived to become adults). Of the children, only Jane and Spencer junior married before Henry Carr's death - in March and July 1821 respectively - and there was then a gap of almost five years before Henry's marriage in 1826. There were thirty-eight adult Perceval grandchildren, of whom Spencer and Ernest, the oldest and youngest sons, accounted for more than half.

The oldest child Jane was aged 20 when her father was killed, married her cousin Edward Perceval (Lord Arden's son) at the age of 29 and died less than three years later aged 32. All of her sisters lived into their 80s and only one of her siblings (Dudley) died before he was 60. Edward never recovered from her early death, gradually deteriorating over the next fourteen years until he was committed to a lunatic asylum in 1839. He took his own life a few months later.

The oldest son, also called Spencer, received a government sinecure before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and was an MP for seven years in three different constituencies between 1818 and the Reform Act of 1832. The first was in Ireland, the second in the Isle of Wight and the third the rotten borough of Tiverton. He was a Metropolitan Lunacy Commissioner for two years from 1830. By the end of his parliamentary career he was dismissed as "Saint Spencer" by his colleagues in the House of Commons, many of whom had been incensed by his religious mania. He was to become a fervent Irvingite and "apostle" in the Catholic Apostolic Church. He advocated fasting as a cure for cholera. This did not endear him to Londoners whose poverty often led them to starve but who suffered from the cholera outbreak in 1832 nonetheless. At least, unlike Lord Hertford, he did not run "like a rabbit". He had 11 children, at least one of whom Jane was to feature frequently on the social circuit. He lived separately from his family in his final years and may have been contemplating a future in the Catholic Church when he died in Weymouth.

**Extracts from Perceval Family Tree 1762-1900**



Four daughters (Frances, Maria, Louisa and Frederica) remained unmarried and moved to Pitzhanger Manor House in Ealing in 1843 from the family home at Elm Grove when their brother Spencer's family moved back. Pitzhanger had been remodelled by Sir John Soane, a previous owner, and had been bought for them by their sister Isabella's husband. Frances and Maria were to live there for over thirty years, dying in 1877 aged 84 and 82 respectively. (There was a gap of more than ten years between the two older sisters and the two younger ones. This provided another dynamic in their thirty-four years at Pitzhanger.) Louisa died in 1891 aged 87 leaving a large estate, as did her younger sister Frederica, the youngest daughter, who died in 1900 aged 95. She left money for a church to be built in memory of her father and All Saints Church, Ealing was consecrated in 1905.

The second son Frederick is said to have been a semi-invalid and he went to school in Rottingdean rather than Harrow like his father, all his brothers and several cousins. He was nearly thirty before he married Mary Barker in 1827. They had a daughter the following year and a son the year after, both born in Belgium. Mary Barker died in 1843 and he married Emma Gilbert the following year. They had five sons, four of whom survived into adulthood. After moving from Kent to Coleshill and then Warwick in his final years, Frederick died in Solihull in 1861 aged 63 and may have been buried in Birmingham (though he had a family vault in the churchyard at St Luke's Church, Charlton in which his first wife Mary Barker was buried). According to a now defunct Birmingham website, he claimed to be MP for both Westminster and Middlesex in the 1851 Census. However, the Census return shows him as JP for Middlesex and Westminster. His deterioration in the last years of his life was real enough, without the story having to be embellished unnecessarily.

Henry Perceval was Head of School at Harrow and then went to Oxford University. Like his sister Jane before him, he also married a cousin and he and Catherine Drummond had a son and daughter born in Washington, Co. Durham where he was the vicar at Holy Trinity Church, Usworth. The church was built in 1831-1832, opened in 1832 and consecrated in March 1835. He was also the Rector at Elmley Lovett, Worcestershire, England for almost fifty years from 1837, rebuilding most of the church about 1839. He died in 1885 aged 85. He had lived the life of a quiet reclusive country parson in an isolated rural area. Unlike his older brothers Spencer and Frederick, he seems to have deliberately turned his back on society at large and a public life, making his parish and his family his world. But he remained vigilant and could be a vigilante when he thought it necessary.

His brother Dudley was a year younger, was to become a Companion of the Bath (CB) and tried twice unsuccessfully to become a Conservative MP. The first time was in 1837 in Finsbury when he came third of three. The second was in 1853 when he was prevailed upon to stand against Gladstone for Oxford University. Gladstone had just become Chancellor of the Exchequer and was following the precedent of seeking re-election when appointed to Cabinet office, but he had made himself unpopular with some of the Fellows over University reform. Despite this, he was re-elected. Dudley married Mary Jane Bourke in 1827 after they had met in Cape Colony and they had a son and a daughter. He saw it as his filial duty to reiterate Spencer Perceval's religious views, for example repeating his father's stance against extra money for St Patrick's seminary at Maynooth and against Catholic emancipation. Dudley wrote 'Maynooth and the Jew Bill' in 1845 and was at the heart of the protestant backlash against increasing religious tolerance in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Isabella Perceval married the politician Spencer Horatio Walpole, dying at the age of 84 in 1886. Her husband, for whom Isabella was the leading influence, was an MP for over thirty-five years, twenty-five of them for Cambridge University, and was Home Secretary in three governments. Both their sons were civil servants and knighted. The elder one wrote a biography of his grandfather Spencer Perceval and proved a respected and reforming governor of the Isle of Man. The younger one was

assistant under-secretary for India from 1883 to 1907. This was a relatively quiet period in India's history (certainly compared to the Indian mutiny in 1857 and events elsewhere at the time), but the administration of this part of the empire was extremely complex at what was recognised as one of the great offices of state. When Keynes joined it in 1906, before Walpole's retirement, he found the complexity unnecessary, the bureaucracy stultifying and the routine boring. He left in 1908.

John Perceval the fifth son was committed as a lunatic at the age of 28 in 1831. By 1834 he had been discharged and had married. He was to have four daughters, one of whom married his sister Isabella's younger son. John himself published accounts of his experiences and was to become a leading mental health reformer. His self-help approach "sowed the seeds for today's user-survivor and mental health advocacy movements". He helped found the Alleged Lunatic's Friends Society in 1845 (becoming its secretary the following year) and campaigned to increase Parliamentary opposition to the Lunacy and Regulation of Lunatic Asylums Acts.

The youngest child Ernest was aged 4 when his father was murdered. He went on to become a Captain in the 15<sup>th</sup> Hussars and was aged 22 when he married in May 1830. Like Jane and Henry he also married a close relative. He and his wife Beatrice Trevelyan had twelve children in all, six of them in the seven years 1831 to 1838, the other six in the 1840s. He was a prominent civil servant in the Home Office, being private secretary to his brother-in-law Spencer Walpole on the first two occasions he was Home Secretary in the 1850s, and fulfilling the same role for Gathorne Hardy (1814-1906) in 1867-1868. It was Hardy who as Home Secretary set up the Royal Commission in 1868 that led to the major sanitation laws of the following decade. Ernest died in 1896 aged 88.