



WAS YOUR ANCESTOR A LATE MEDIEVAL SOLDIER?

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It is a good thirty years since I researched my family history. My family hails from Lancashire. One of my forebears founded Congregationalism and his father was Cromwell's Provost Marshal General for Lancashire during the Civil War. One side of the family turned Jacobite after 1688, the other fought against the Jacobites at the Battle of Preston in 1715.

Given my characterful surname, I was able to trace my family genealogy back directly to the late sixteenth century using the usual sources, particularly church registers which abound in the county palatine. However, before 1580, darkness reigned.

Being a linguistic scientist, it was easy enough to trace the history of the surname *Jolly*. Of Anglo-Norman origin, *Jolly* derives from Norman-French *Giolif*; *Giolif* itself being a fusion of the Old Norse *jól* and the Frankish latinized ending *-ivus*. Remember, the Normans were of Viking origin and there was no letter *J* in English before the early C16th.

Jolly is therefore a classic Norman formulation, a personal nickname, later a surname used to describe a lively fellow. The earliest evidence for the surname in northern England is early C13th in what is now the East Riding of Yorkshire. However, the earliest reference I could find in Lancashire lay in an obscure article: D Maltby Verrill's "The Huguenot Family of Joly", *Notes and Queries*, 164: 13 (Jan-July 1933). There, the author cites a Lancashire grant of 1429 featuring one *Nicholas Joly*. Maddeningly, however, Maltby Verrill gave no attribution and it proved impossible to trace the grant in question despite the shaking of innumerable archival trees over many months.

I knew from mapping all the available sources at the Lancashire Archive that the family surname originated in southern Lancashire in and around the town of Standish. With pins on a map, I could track how the family had later moved northwards into the Lancashire Fylde. There was even a placename on the early maps – *Jolly Milne* – marking the site of a C14th water mill on the River Douglas. Yet for all this, Nicholas Joly was nowhere to be seen.

There the matter rested for three decades until last month when I attended an IHGS webinar with Professor Anne Curry, Arundel Herald Extraordinary and Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at the University of Southampton. I was holidaying on the Isle of Wight and out of curiosity decided to attend a talk on the heraldry of the Battle of Agincourt. Anne Curry is the world authority on this most celebrated of English battles.

That Tuesday evening proved momentous. Anne Curry introduced attendees to a database she and her colleagues had created that contains the names of soldiers serving the English Crown between 1369 and 1453, the period historians call the *Hundred Years' War*. On my return from holiday, a week later,

I decided in an idle moment to pop my surname into the search box of <https://www.medievalsoldier.org>.

To my disbelief and delight, Nicholas Joly appeared, a man-at-arms, in Lancastrian Normandy, in 1430. There were other family members too – Perkyn, a man-at-arms, and archers, Thurstan, John, Robert, Tristram, Teviston. The giveaway was that they were all serving under the captaincy of the Standish family, lords of Standish, whose seat lay just four miles north-east of Jolly Milne connected by the Douglas river and its tributary, the Yarrow. I had hit paydirt. The records were at Kew and were late medieval muster rolls. Not a place I or my researchers had ever conceivably thought of looking ...

My knowledge of late medieval soldiery being small, I immediately contacted Anne Curry and she pointed me in the direction of her 2013 study *The Soldier in Later Medieval England*.

This marvellous book tells you everything you would ever wish to know about those who fought for England in northern France in the C14-15th. It explains how soldiers fought frequently in family groups with younger sons, cousins and kinsmen acting as archers in support of heads of house, men-at-arms or more rarely knights. How military service often began in the teenage years and soldiers were expected to provide their own kit, including horses and armour. How military rank mirrored social hierarchy with men-at-arms drawn largely from the gentry. The book also explores the varying definition of a man-at-arms over time – the *scutifer* (shield bearer), the *armiger* (bearer of arms) – as well as the use of the lance and the propensity for all warriors to fight on foot even if it meant dismounting to do so. It also spells out the gradual shift away from *service under arms* to the less strenuous *right to bear arms*.

There was one further boon to my chance discovery: the scribal/palaeographic rendition of my family surname. Already, I understood the process whereby *Jolyf* transitioned to *Joly* under Middle English in the late C14th. However, I was not prepared for the sheer variety of spellings found in these muster rolls. They included not just *Joly* but *Jolye*, *Joley*, *Jollay*, *Jolere*, *Jolys*, *Jolis*, *Joliz*. This was in itself revealing because it took my family history in the western part of the Lancashire Fylde back to 1602 revealing an earlier settlement pattern than I could ever have envisaged thirty years ago.

Sadly, I can't claim any of my forebears fought at Agincourt but they may have fought at Orbec, Chateau Gaillard and Louviers. They were part of the warp

and weft of late medieval England. Thirty years on, I can finally forgive Mr Maltby Verrill for his shoddy research!