

29th November 1990

Dear Mr. Southmayd,

Many thanks for your letter of 10th November and for your cheque

I have had another look at MS 3288/in the British Library Manuscripts Department to try to sort out some of your problems.

Although MS 3288 is entitled Devon Visitations 1574 and certainly contains those documents, it also contains items added considerably after that date, of which the Charlys pedigree was one of many. The volume also includes lists of names of justices and officers added in 1612 and 1622 and an index to the documents which included additions made at least up to 1612. The families in these visitation volumes are not grouped together but added in apparently haphazard order, so that the Charles one was quite on its own. There is no Southmead pedigree at all in this volume, and the mention of Southmead in the Charles pedigree is coincidental to the fact that one of the Charles daughters married a Southmead as we know. The name Southmead does not appear in the BL's own index of the 1574 visitations, but the later indexes by Tuckett and Sims were more detailed and do include some of the married names of the Charles daughters, including Southmead.

While I was at the British Library I decided to look at Burke's General Armory to find the coats of arms of the Southmeads and the Charles which I felt might throw some light on the problem.

The Southmead entry is as follows: Southmead (Wrey in Chagford, co. Devon) Per fess wavy gu. & erm. an eagle displ. in chief or. (Which being translated means the shield is divided in half (in a wavy line), red at the top and ermine at the bottom, with a gold eagle with its wings spread out in the middle at the top.)

The Charles entry is almost exactly similar: Charles (Tavistock) Erm., on a chief wavy gu. an eagle displ. or. The only difference between the two coats of arms is that in the Charles version the top red part is shallower, only taking up about a third of the shield instead of half.

The great similarity makes me think that the Southmeads had acquired their coat of arms from the Charleses following the marriage between the two families. Coats of arms normally descend through the male lines, but if the male line failed then all the surviving daughters became 'joint heraldic heiresses' and had the right to 'impale' their father's coat of arms with those of their husbands, that is to say the arms were put together side by side in one shield. But if an heraldic heiress married a 'non-armigerous' man, i.e. without a coat of arms of his own, then the husband might adopt his wife's coat, presumably with the approval of the College of Arms, with some sort of 'difference' to distinguish the new form from the original. This would account for the small difference between the Charles and the Southmead forms. The descent of arms has nothing to do, of course, with the inheritance of land or property. It is entirely a heraldic matter.

I can confirm that only the first William Southmead on the Charles pedigree is called "gent" but I don't think you should read too much into that. The pedigree is by no means detailed and there would have been no strict rule as to what exactly was included.

We don't know of course exactly when the Southmeads (or the Charleses) obtained their coats of arms. You may like to take the matter up with the College of Arms but be sure to get an estimate of cost before you get them to do any work for you. The address to write to would be: The College of Arms, Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4.

I agree with you - the search is great fun but writing it all up is the hard part. I do hope you get some help from your manorial expert and I have been able to help a bit to sort out the many problems.

All best wishes for your project and also for a Happy Christmas which seems suddenly to be almost upon us. I always manage to be caught unprepared in spite of the fact that Dec. 25 comes round pretty regularly.

Yours sincerely,