

THE WHITLOCK SILVER

In the past twenty years of One Name research many people have written to me from all over the world. They have asked all sorts of questions about Whitlock ancestors, Whitlock businesses, Whitelock neighbours and Whitelock friends but a letter I received last March was something completely different. Mrs. Suzanne Gilbert, 44 Green Lane, Salsey, West Sussex, England PO20 0AG wrote asking if I could help her trace the ancestry of her "Whitlock spoon"!!

I was intrigued but was not sure I would be able to do much. Mrs. Gilbert explained the spoon had been given to her father's mother at her birth, possibly by a friend or a godmother. At the time the additional inscription "S.S." had been added to the spoon. The arms engraved on the handle were those of the Whitlocks of Wokingham and because they were without a helm or crest they would have been the arms of a Spinster. In a subsequent letter Mrs. Gilbert gave me a rough drawing of the arms and the hallmark date of 1745.

This was not a lot to go on but I thought I would give it a try. I knew where to start because of the arms but the Whitlocks of Wokingham family is a very large one so I tried to narrow things down a bit. Assuming the arms were engraved onto new silverware the person we were looking for was born before 1745. As the arms were for a spinster I felt it was unlikely she was young at the time as silver is a rather permanent item to buy a young girl. Therefore I felt we were looking for someone born before 1715. This still left a lot of options as the family tree starts in 1400's.

The next step was how to narrow the field some more. I went through the 24 pages of the Whitlocks of Wokingham chart to see which parts of the family would likely have had engraved silver and decided the most likely candidates were the descendants of Samuel Whitelocke (1651-1690). This part of the family seemed to have been able to retain their portion of the wealth built up by James Whitlock (1570-1632) and his son Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605-1675).

Lastly, I figured that if a spinster was going to splurge on engraved silver she must have come into some money recently. On a hunch I had a look through my death records to see if anyone had died around 1745 and possibly left some money to a spinster daughter. I was in luck there were two candidates, Gilbert Whitelocke (d.1744) and his father Samuel Whitelocke (1675-1743). This Samuel was the son of the one I mentioned earlier so both my candidates fitted the possibilities I had defined. In addition Samuel Whitelocke (1675-1743) left several spinster daughters who remained so - there is a plaque in the parish church at Hungerford, Wiltshire commemorating their unusual longevity.

This is of course all speculation but not without possibility and hopefully Mrs. Gilbert is quite a bit closer to tracing the origins of her "Whitlock spoon" than before she wrote. You never know what the post will bring!!

SOURCES: X705/4; X722; X723; X724