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Dr Maurice Gleeson

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Dear Maurice,

Following my e-mail of 13 January, the work you commissioned has been completed and I now write to report the results. You supplied a chart of your mother's¹ ancestry headed by Patrick Spierin, a police constable in Tipperary (died in Dublin on 16 January 1872), and his wife Mary Morgan, who were married on 21 January 1828 at Killenaule, Tipperary. You asked whether this family might be descended from George Sperring for whom a pedigree and arms were recorded at the Visitation of London in 1633-34; you also provided a copy of 'From Flanders to Cambridge, London & Limerick' giving information on several men named Spierinck or variants, who were goldsmiths or bookbinders in London in the 16th and early 17th centuries.

It may be of interest if I first give a brief description of the official registers of the College of Arms. These registers, which began about 1530 and continue to the present day, can be divided into the following broad categories: the records of some ten thousand grants and confirmations of arms made by the heralds in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, evidenced by patents, blazons and sketches; pedigrees and arms recorded at the heralds' Visitations of the counties of England and Wales – surveys conducted between 1530 and 1687 to ensure that arms were borne with proper authority; certificates recording the funerals conducted by the heralds in the 16th and 17th centuries; several series of pedigrees voluntarily recorded from the end of the Visitations down to the present day; the full text of every patent granting arms from 1673 onwards; and the Earl Marshal's Books, which contain among other items royal licences and warrants of precedence.

A careful search was made in the registers under every possible version of the surname Spearing or Spierin, beginning with both Spe- and Spi-, but only one entry was found – that made at the heralds' visitation of London in 1633-34. As you know, a pedigree of two generations was recorded, showing George Sperring of London, gentleman, and his wife Elizabeth, daughter of William Hanbury of London. They had (with four daughters) sons Nicholas, William and George. No information was given about either Nicholas or William. The youngest son, George Sperring of London who signed the pedigree, married Rebecca, daughter of Bartholomew Carter,

¹ Actually it was my father's mother's ancestry

but no children were shown for them. As usual with visitation pedigrees, the family's exact place of residence was not given, but they lived in the ward of Lime Street, in the south-eastern quarter of the City. The visiting heralds allowed the younger George Sperring the arms **Vert on a chevron Or between three crosses paty fitchy Argent three roundels Sable**. No crest was entered [College of Arms ms C.24, f. 244b].

At the heralds' visitations a large number of coats of arms were recorded, many of which were never the subject of a formal grant of arms. In order to prove an inherited right to arms, families would supply evidence to the heralds in the form of grants of arms, armorial seals, painted shields and so on. If they were able to prove long use of arms, their entitlement would be confirmed by the heralds, and in these circumstances no new grant of arms would have been necessary. This was the case with the Sperring family.²

Any person named Sperring or variant who wished to establish a right to these arms would have to prove a descent in the direct legitimate male line from George Sperring of London, entered at the visitation of 1633-34. Although he may have had male-line descendants, there is no further pedigree of his family – or indeed of any other family of the name – on official record here.³

The *Dictionary of British Arms: Medieval Ordinary* is a consolidated listing of arms found in medieval sources such as seals, monuments and stained glass. It will consist of four volumes; three have now been issued (in 1992, 1996 and 2009), but none has an entry for Sperring or variant. It is therefore unlikely that the arms recorded at the London visitation of 1633-34 were of very early origin.⁴

I then searched the 'Funerals index' in the College library – an unofficial index to heraldic funerals in the 16th and 17th centuries. One entry for the name is given, 'Mr. Sperring' (no forename given), buried in 1657; eight painted shields of the arms blazoned above were ordered for his funeral [College of Arms ms I.B.7, 40]. The place is given as St Mary Axe, London. The City church of that name was suppressed in 1565 and converted into a warehouse, but the parish was united with that of St Andrew Undershaft, and St Mary Axe remained as a street name. It is likely that 'Mr Sperring' was the younger George Sperring⁵ recorded at the 1633-34 visitation.

With your e-mail of 5 January you sent a black and white illustration of arms and crest, labelled 'Speerin'.⁶ The arms are those recorded in the London visitation of 1633-34, although the shape of the crosses is slightly wrong, as are the tinctures, and the shield should not be accompanied by any crest. The accompanying 'Explanation of the arms' is, I am afraid, highly fanciful.

² So if the Sperrings never received a formal grant of arms, how did they get them? And who would have given it to them? And why? Or did they just start using it themselves? And when would they have started using them? And why?

³ So where did Sir William Betham get his information? And what are the chances that he was wrong?

⁴ So when might they have been granted? Or first used?

⁵ We have his will from 1657 and death register entries indicate he died on 16 Aug 1657.

⁶ This was Pam Hector's document "Heraldic Crest – Speerin".

A Dictionary of British Surnames by P.H. Reaney (2nd edition, revised, 1976), gives information under the heading Spurren. The name is first found as a surname in the middle of the 12th century, with a reference to Hugo Esporun or Spurun in the year 1141-42 in a charter relating to St Paul's Cathedral. The name is found in Essex in 1185, in Yorkshire in 1212, and slightly later in other counties. It comes, of course, from 'spur', and was used to describe a spurrier. The document sent with your e-mail of 5 January refers to Reaney's work, but the second edition has no reference to a Saxon, Norman or Breton origin for the name.

In your enclosure 'From Flanders to Cambridge, London & Limerick', the London visitation family is identified as living in the parish of St Botolph Bishopsgate. The registers of that parish record the baptisms of George, son of George and Rebecca Speering, on 23 December 1646, and of his older sisters Rebecca on 18 October 1638 and Mary on 18 August 1641. The printed index to wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury between 1657 and 1685 has only one reference to the name for a testator living in the City of London – George Speering, gentleman, of the parish of St Stephens, Coleman Street, in 1657. There was no Rebecca Speering (or variant) within these dates. The surname was very frequent in Gloucestershire and Somerset at that period, but it seems to have been rarer in London.

I then turned to Irish records in the College of Arms library, to see if these would provide any assistance. The official heraldic records for Ireland are held at the Genealogical Office in Dublin, but the College possesses black and white photographic copies from their commencement (the very late 16th century) down to 1943. They have no record⁷ of any arms or pedigree for the name, in any likely spelling (looking, as before, under names beginning with Spe- and Spi-). I also examined our photographic copies of the 'Collectanea Genealogica: Pedigrees from Wills' [Irish Genealogical Office ms 247]. Names beginning with Sp- appear on pages 190-266 of volume 25, but there is nothing for Spierin, Spering or any variant. The Burke Collection, among the unofficial manuscripts of the College, was compiled during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and contains a great deal of material on Irish families, but it has no reference to Spierin, Spearing or variant. No individual of the name is given in the *Alumni Dublinenses 1593-1860* edited by G.D. Burtchaell and T.U. Sadleir (1935 edition). The printed *Act and Grant Books and original Wills of the Diocese of Dublin to 1800* (1895) has nothing for the name. The continuation volume, covering 1800 to 1858 (published 1899) has three references, all being marriage licences:

- 1842, George Spearing and Mary Warner
- 1845, John Griffiths and Helen Leycester Spearing⁸
- 1850, Daniel Clarke and Mary Spearing

The name does not appear in the *Index to Prerogative Wills of Ireland, 1536 to 1810* edited by Sir Arthur Vicars (1897). *A Calendar of Wills in the Diocese of Limerick, 1615 to 1800* was edited by Gertrude Thrift (1913); this has only two entries for the name – Mathew Spierin of Rower, co. Limerick, gentleman, 1719; and Luke Spierin

⁷ From where then did Sir WB get his info?? Did it all go up in flames in the Custom House fire of 1922?

⁸ A Cork Spearing

of Cappagh in the same county, gentleman, 1728. You have already sent me full information on these two wills.

The name does not appear in any form in John O'Hart's *Irish Pedigrees*, volumes I and II (4th edition, 1888; 5th edition, 1892), nor in his *Irish Pedigrees: or, The Origins and Stem of the Irish Nation* (1881). In the same author's work *The Irish and Anglo-Irish Landed Gentry when Cromwell came to Ireland* (published 1884) there is a section headed 'Names of Persons in the Grants, under the Acts of Settlement and Explanation' (passed between 1661 and 1665); this refers to a man named Henry Spering,⁹ but no information at all is given about him.

Since your forebear Patrick Spierin died in Dublin, I looked at Pettigrew & Oulton's *Dublin Directory for 1844*;¹⁰ but the alphabetical list of 'the principal inhabitants' has no Spierin, Spearing or any similar name. I have found no evidence of his immediate ancestry, and do not know whether he could have descended from George Spering of London.

I am afraid that, from the results of this search, I can provide no further information about the family entered at the heralds' visitation of London in 1633-34. I wonder what evidence there may be to identify Rebecca, wife of George Spering of London recorded in that visitation, as the Rebecca who was entered in 1680 in the Prerogative Court in Dublin as having died intestate. This is not necessarily proved by the fact that they appeared in the same entry among Sir William Betham's notes.¹¹

I have to say that my own work, and the research detailed in 'From Flanders to Cambridge, London & Limerick', has not revealed proof of the origin of Mathew and Luke Spierin of Limerick, whose wills were proved in the early 18th century; nor have I found any information on the origins or parentage of your mother's forebear Patrick Spierin (died 1872). It is obvious that considerable work has already been carried out, both in London records and in surviving Irish sources, without solving these problems. However, I must conclude by saying that the various families you have identified, named Spering, Spearin, Spierinck and Spierin, may well be entirely unrelated to one another and have no a common origin.

With kind regards,

Tim

Timothy Duke
Chester Herald

⁹ We have his grant of land info ... George snr (1) had a Henry but he died before he was 15.

¹⁰ He may not have moved there until 1845 (birth of William).

¹¹ Interesting. What sources would he have used? Why would he have arrived at his conclusion? Is there any way of retracing his steps?