



CORONATION SERJEANTIES, OR DILLEGROUT REDUX

Robert A. James

SOME MONTHS AGO, I discussed in these pages the vestigial English land allocation system known as the grand serjeanty tenure, and in particular the tenurial service of a bowl of chicken stew (the titular *Mess of Dillegroust*) presented at a crowning of a monarch.¹ I now bring you the real property law report on the May 6, 2023 coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

The first development was a startling revolution in claims administration. For eight centuries the rights to play roles at the coronation were adjudicated by nobles – first by a single noble, and since 1421 by Courts of Claims often inclusive of high jurists. In 2023, however, that function was performed by unidentified persons within the UK Cabinet Office. Claimants were required to fill out a one-page bureaucratic form (see Appendix). No one, from Domesday through 1953, had ever before been asked to supply an electronic mail address. What would John of Gaunt have thought of this?

A second and more predictable development was a severe reduction in traditional coronation roles. All indications for months were that this cer-

Rob James is a partner in Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP, San Francisco and Houston, and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Attenuated Subtleties.

¹ Robert A. James, *The Mess of Dillegroust*, 26 GREEN BAG 2D 41 (2022). A video of the stew being prepared according to the ancient recipe is available at *Tasting History with Max Miller* (youtube.com/watch?v=zK0FUS3Oq8s).

emony would be scaled back and made more inclusive of a modern and diverse Kingdom and Commonwealth. The Cabinet Office report suggested that, from a real property law standpoint, the celebration would indeed be a Red Wedding.² On April 9, the office announced that services would be performed by various persons by virtue of their noble title (e.g., the Earl of Erroll carrying a “silver baton or stick”), their office (e.g., the Bishop of Bath and Wells supporting the sovereign), or their election from a group (the Barons of the Cinque Ports standing where they normally do³). But not a single service deriving from a grand serjeanty land tenure was mentioned.⁴

Just when all realty-based hope appeared lost, an announcement by Buckingham Palace rescued a solitary serjeanty. As reported in my overview article, the manor of Scrivelsby in Lincolnshire has been held since the Conquest by the service of being the King’s (or Queen’s) Champion – riding horseback into Westminster Hall during the formal banquet in full armor, offering to do battle with any who questioned the monarch’s title.⁵ This service was last performed at the elaborate coronation of George IV in 1821. There has not been a formal coronation banquet since, and the Champion’s services have not been needed. The Championship is so notable, however, that the holder of the manor has in lieu been given another role – in 1953, he carried the standard of the Union in the Queen’s procession from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Abbey.

Fortunately for our real property story, in 2023 history repeated itself, or at least rhymed. The Palace announcement of April 27 included several additional participants not mentioned in the April 9 Cabinet Office release. Most roles went to men and women entirely new to the ceremony and were unrelated to real property ownership. But the Palace also announced that Francis Dymoke, as the present landholder of Scrivelsby, would carry the Royal standard in the Abbey procession on May 6.⁶ So he did.

² See *GAME OF THRONES S3E9* (HBO ENTERTAINMENT (2013)).

³ These Barons are selected to serve from the five principal Cinque Ports. There are fourteen ports in the Cinque Ports, arithmetic be scorned and mathematics be darned.

⁴ UK Cabinet Office, *People who will play historic roles at the heart of the Coronation Service announced* (April 9, 2023).

⁵ See SAMUEL LODGE, *SCRIVELSBY, THE HOME OF THE CHAMPIONS* (1893).

⁶ Buckingham Palace, *Roles to be performed at the Coronation Service at Westminster Abbey* (April

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His wife, Gail, tweeted a “like” of the *Dillegrout* article, so I counter-tweeted to congratulate her family; she sur-tweeted, saying how “honoured” Mr. Dymoke was to perform the service.⁷ He said he knew his participation was a matter of discretion, a concession that probably made his invitation easier to issue without opening the door to others claiming some ancient entitlement.⁸

Among the banquet serjeanties dispensed with once again was of course the Mess of Dillegrout, associated with the manor of Addington in Surrey last clearly held by the Archbishop of Canterbury. That service continues to slumber until another coronation.

I see reports in the press that His Grace was called on to mediate the ongoing cold snap between the King’s sons.⁹ If such a session is to be scheduled, I sincerely hope the Archbishop will have the boys patch things up while supping on steaming heaping bowls of dillegrout. After all, only good things can happen when brothers bond over stew.¹⁰

27, 2023) (characterized as “additional details”).

⁷ Twitter exchange April 27, 2023 (I promise).

⁸ *Francis Dymoke to carry the Royal Standard at King Charles III’s Coronation*, LINCOLNSHIRE WORLD (April 28, 2023); *Meet the King’s Hereditary Champion: Retired accountant, 68, must be willing to duel with any challenger to the throne – including to the DEATH – in historic Coronation role that has been carried out by his family since William the Conqueror*, DAILY MAIL (April 28, 2023).

⁹ *King Charles Brings in Archbishop of Canterbury to Broker Peace Deal Between Prince William and Prince Harry*, MARIE CLAIRE (January 29, 2023).

¹⁰ *But see Genesis 25:29-34* (Esau rashly quitclaims his birthright in consideration of “red pottage,” a bowl of stew craftily prepared by his brother, Jacob).

APPENDIX



Coronation Claims Submission Form

To submit a claim to perform a role at His Majesty King Charles III's Coronation please complete the below form. Once completed, please send the form along with your supporting evidence to coronationclaims@cabinetoffice.gov.uk or you can post it to:

Coronation Claims Office
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

The deadline for submitting a claim is **1730hrs Friday 3 February 2023**.

Name:	Email:
	Phone Number:
Are you submitting a claim as an individual or on behalf of an organisation (if the latter please give the name of the organisation):	

Please outline your claim to perform a role at His Majesty King Charles III's Coronation:
Please outline the evidence that your claim has been performed at previous Coronations and show your connection to those who have previously performed the role (additional evidence can be attached to your submission):