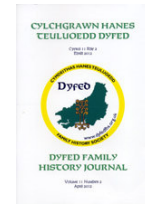


# The Redoubtable Mrs Grimes of Lydstep House

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In the 19<sup>th</sup> century many of our female ancestors were domestic servants, and I always find it fascinating to find out more about where they lived and who they worked for. One Mary Ann Skyrme, born 1840 in Penally, was recorded in the 1861 census at Lydstep House as cook to Mrs Grimes, wife of Major Grimes. On trying to find out more about the Grimes family I came across a report of an attempted burglary in 1860, at a time when Mary was undoubtedly there. The *Pembrokeshire Herald and Advertiser* of 25<sup>th</sup> April 1860 reported that on the previous Saturday night Mrs Grimes "was alarmed by a crashing noise" and "perceived the point of a crow bar under the front door". Since there were no males in the house "her gallant husband being on service in India", she loaded a pistol with powder and shot into the passage. The report continues: "the villains decamped for a time, but later returned .. she was quite prepared for them and discharged another load, which again put them to flight". They even returned the following evening. The report concludes:

"But that for the heroic conduct of Mrs Grimes, they would have effected an entrance, and it is impossible to conjecture what violence would have been done to the inmates, some of whom were hysterical while their mistress defied the scoundrels. Mrs Grimes, nothing daunted, has, we understand, provided herself with a supply of ammunition, which will give them cause to remember how they tamper with a woman, should they pay another visit to Lydstep House."

So there we have an interesting description of my distant cousin as a "hysterical inmate". Thank goodness for having such a formidable lady as her boss.



Lydstep House c1910. Drawing by Geoff Scott, reproduced with kind permission by PLANED from <http://www.experiencepembrokeshire.com>

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