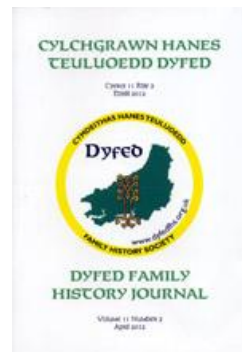


The Skyrmes of Manorbier and Penally

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You would think that with a relatively unusual name like Skyrme (sometimes spelt Skyrme or Skyrmes), tracing one's Pembrokeshire ancestors would be easy – far from it! This article gives an overview of the descendants of John Skyrme 1749-1845 (yes he lived to the age of 96 at a time when average male life expectancy was in the 40s) alongside my trials and tribulations in developing a tree that includes over 200 of his descendants.

In the 19th century Skyrmes were found in two counties. The first was Herefordshire in and around Lugwardine. Sir Thomas Skirme who was born there practiced law in Ludlow, Shropshire and moved in the 17th century to Llawhaden. The family built up considerable assets in the area, including a manor house in Vaynor in 1656¹. At the turn of the 18th century there were also Skyrmes in Llangwm, mostly fishermen and ferrymen. The third family group was John's in Manorbier. Although undoubtedly related, researchers have not convincingly identified the links between these three main Pembrokeshire groups.

John was not born in Pembrokeshire – Herefordshire perhaps? His first appearance in Pembrokeshire records was his marriage in Ludchurch to Elizabeth Maurice in 1774. Their first son William was born there but by 1778 the family were in Manorbier where they had four additional sons and a daughter. I've traced descendants of four of the five sons through to the early 20th century. The third son James moved to Penally about 1813 followed a few years later by William. The second son John and the youngest Charles remained in Manorbier. The eldest three sons had 21 children between them while we now think that Charles was father to just one, my great grandfather George (b 12 Dec 1819). William and John were farmers at Penally and Green Grove, Manorbier which remained in the family for most of the 19th century.

My research into my family tree started in the mid-1990s culminating in the launch of the skyrme.info website on St. David's Day 1995. At that time Skyrme researchers were greatly helped by the transcripts of parish registers by Clive Pinch who published several of the Skyrme branches in GED format.² Since then online genealogy sites like Ancestry.co.uk and Findmypast.co.uk have transformed the nature of research, not

¹ The Skyrmes of Vaynor are well described in *The Llawhaden Book*, Mary Houseman, Llan Aiden Press (2004)

² Still available on the Internet's Way Back Machine at

<http://web.archive.org/web/20030406035428/http://www.btinternet.com/~clive.pinch/skyrm.htm>

just through availability of many types of records, but also the contributions of individual researchers, including complete family trees. I resumed my researches in late 2010 by drawing together information from many sources and contributors. Pulling all this material together has uncovered anomalies and downright errors in my early research as well as those of other contributors. It has even identified some wrong relationships and dates in the highly regarded work of Clive Pinch.

In genealogy research having a fairly unusual name has its pros and cons. On the plus side, when finding a Skyrme (as opposed to a Williams or an Evans), you are not faced with scrutinising scores of records to find the right one. On the other hand, being an unfamiliar surname it is frequently mis-read by transcribers, meaning that you struggle to find a record that you are sure should be there. Painstaking trawling through census records page by page has revealed Skgrme, Skyrine, Shryme, Skyrene, Scarin, Ikyrme and more besides. Also being an early internet user with the email address of david@skyrme.com has attracted many unsolicited emails from other Skyrmes, sharing their family stories and transcripts of various documents, such as a piece of paper found in a farmhouse attic near Bristol!



A useful source for my own branch of Skyrmes has been the Family Bible (left), which my father kept updated. As well as the obligatory recording of births, marriages and deaths, he filled the family portrait panels, not with photos but little anecdotes that give tantalising glimpses of the times of my forebears:

“George Thomas married at Carmarthen 14/11/1871. At 14 yrs old bound for 5 years apprenticeship. Went to Portsmouth 1/5/1879.”

“George Skyrme (my Great Grandfather) was a Shipwright. He saw that his sons had a skilled Trade. He died on 7th April 1876 age 56. During the Crimea War he was one of the civilian guards patrolling the Dockyard.”

“Ellen my Grandmother and baby George went to Barrow on 3/11/1882 when Grandad went to get a job in the Shipyards.”

“Francis John known as Frank known as Frank was a good horticulturalist. We had his medallions at Merchants Park where my grandfather lived. He was a Freeman of Pembroke.”

“My Dad [James Thomas Skyrme 1184-1937] was shipwrecked during the WW. He was in the sea for 36 hours before being rescued. He was on a hospital ship conveying wounded ships from France and his ship the ‘Rohilla’ sank off Whitby in 1914”³

As can be seen George Skyrme, who was son of an agricultural labourer in Manorbier, became a shipwright, a trade in which seven of his eight sons apprenticed (Frank was a tailor). Around 1848 the family moved to Monkton.

Thereafter various family members moved between several Royal Dockyards, including Chatham, Sheerness, Barrow, Jarrow and mostly ending up in Portsmouth.

Returning to the three eldest sons of John and Elizabeth, several became farmers in their own right. John Skyrme (1778-1856), then his son Joseph (1805-1882) farmed at Green Grove. Joseph’s son James (1847-1931) farmed 95 acres in Manorbier before moving to Lower Sapey in Herefordshire with his wife Frances (nee Beddoe) around 1882. At about the same time a distant cousin Francis, also a farmer, moved to nearby Wolferlow . John Skyrme (1850-1943) farmed 40 acres at Llangan in Carmarthenshire before moving to Angle. Perhaps the most prosperous was James Skyrme (1823-1886) who married Eliza Scourfield and farmed initially 134 acres at Henllan, Llanddewi Velfrey (1851) and later 350 acres in Llanfihangel Abercowin near St. Clears, Carmarthenshire “employing 5 men and 2 boys” (1871).

As well as farming, the latter part of the 19th century found these branches of Skyrmes in a variety of occupations and places. Several worked on the railways, whilst others became coal miners in the Rhondda. We also find some doing clerical work, such as an insurance agent in Pembroke Dock. There was a shopman and pharmacist



James Thomas Skyrme (1884-1937) and his wife Ellen Harrison (1882-1959) at the time of their marriage in 1908

³ In actual fact it was 50 hours. The whole ordeal as it unfolded is written up in Colin Brittain’s book *Into the Maelstrom: The Wreck of HMHS Rohilla*, Tempus Publishing (2002).

in Cardiff, an innkeeper in Tenby , a teacher at Otterhampton in Somerset, and a sergeant in the Army Medical Corps in Clifton, near Bristol.

Tracing all branches of the Manorbier Skyrmes reveals an interesting pattern of migration that accelerated in the 1880s and 1890s, mostly into towns. The table below, compiled from census returns, shows the number of Skyrme households in each location.

	1791	1821	1841	1861	1881	1901
Manorbier	1	2	5	4	3	
Penally		4	5	3		
Pembroke/Monkton				2	5	6
Pembrokeshire (other)				1	4	3
Carmarthenshire				1	2	
Cardiff					2	1
Glamorgan					1	6
Wales (other)						1
Portsmouth					2	5
England (other)					2	5

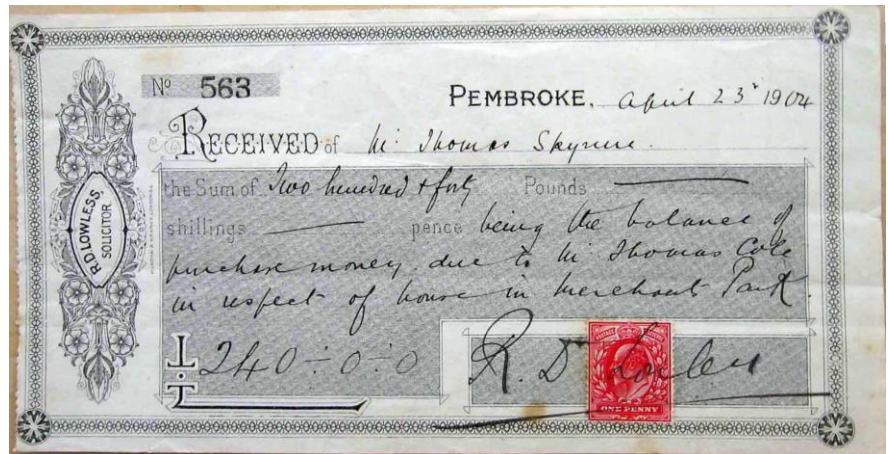
By the time of the 1901 census no descendants of the Skyrmes of Manorbier and Penally were living there! Another analysis of census returns from 1841 to 1901 reveals the frequency of boys and girls given (first) names. Although there were fewer girls than boys there was a much greater variety of given names (see table).

Boy's Names	No
.	.
1= James	17
1= William	17
3. John	16
4. Thomas	11
5. George	10
6. Francis / Frank	7
7= Frederick	4
7= Ernest	4
9. David	4
Others	30
Total people	120
Total names	31

Girl's names	No
.	.
1. Eliza(beth)	13
2= Jane	6
2= Mary	6
4. Ann(e)	5
5= Edith	4
5= Margaret	4
5= Sarah	4
8= Alice	3
8= Louisa	3
Others	46
Total people	94
Total names	46

Family history research has its moments of despair alongside unexpected discoveries. Here are some of mine:

- A newspaper snippet about Ernest Skyrme who was found semi-conscious in the road at Clifton-on-Teme (Herefordshire) after being injured by a restive colt
- A Skyrme who went from Pembroke to Barrow with the name Francis, but returned using the name Thomas
- A Skyrme who dropped his surname and used a variant of his middle name as his surname after he joined the Royal Marines (Ernest Scofield, born Ernest Scourfield Skyrme)
- Evan Skyrme who was the alleged victim of an attempted murder by fellow railway porter John Bufton at Ferndale Station in May 1894 (reported in the Western Mail).
- Trying to understand why my grandmother's father, a Londoner, married a Pembroke girl Ellen Thomas. The answer is that under an Act of Parliament of 1860, the Metropolitan Police were responsible for policing Naval Shipyards around the country and he was living with 20 other policeman at No. 2 Police Station in Pembroke Dockyard.
- Losing track in census returns of my great granduncle Charles Skyrme (1840-1908), after he moved from Pembroke Dockyard to Sheerness and then Poplar. I discovered him in the records of the Poplar workhouse, where he apparently lived the rest of his life after becoming widowed.
- Finding a receipt among my father's papers from Pembroke solicitor R. D. Lowless⁴ for a payment of £240 made in April 1904 "being the balance of purchase money due to Mr Thomas Cole in respect of house in Merchant[s] Park" [Pembroke].



One key lesson I have learnt from my research is the value of recording things as they happen and also making notes on the back of photographs. My father left a set of

⁴ Of Solicitors Lowless and Lowless, founded 1898 now Red Kite Law. The office papers of Lowless and Lowless (1556-1962) are now at Pembrokeshire Record Office.

12 diaries written in exercise books. The first one, for example, gives a lot of information about his career in the RAF, much of which is not readily apparent from his formal service record. I have now scanned all these diaries - over 850 pages! In due course I hope, though using Windows built-in voiced recognition software, to create and make available transcripts of the most interesting parts. I find that because I have not been as meticulous as my father, that I am referring to his diaries to find out things about my own past that I vaguely remember, but where I have forgotten the detail.

What I have done, though, is to write up a more detailed account of the Skyrmes of Manorbier and Penally than space allows me to do here. The 48-page document is freely available on the Skyrme family website at www.skyrme.info. Its publication has already solicited additional information from other researchers, so it will be updated in the future. In the meantime, my next Skyrme project is to write up the Skyrmes of Llangwm. I would be happy to hear from any readers who share my interests in the Skyrmes of Pembrokeshire.

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