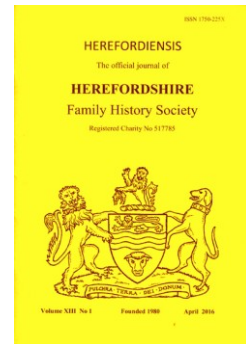


# The Skyrmes of Herefordshire: An Evolving One-Name Study

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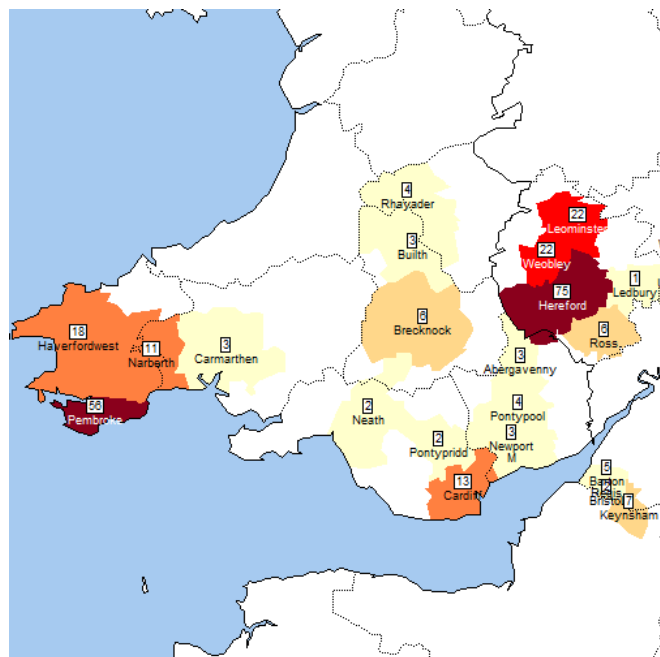
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Many people researching their family history will stumble across some interesting facts that raise more questions than answers. And so it was with me when several decades ago I started researching my family roots in Pembrokeshire. On accessing microfiche transcripts of the International Genealogical Index (IGI), I was surprised to find many more Skyrmes (variously spelt Skirme, and Skyrn), and especially early references (16<sup>th</sup> century) from Herefordshire. So this article is a summary of how I branched out from my own family into a wider One-Name Study (a study of all instances of a family name), about my approach to research and some of the key findings to date.

## The Skyrmes of Pembrokeshire

As I was an early internet adopter I created a Skyrme family website ([www.skyrme.info](http://www.skyrme.info)) which went live on St David's Day (1<sup>st</sup> March) in 1995. Although the initial focus was on the Skyrmes of Pembrokeshire, it listed the locations of several known clusters, including those in Herefordshire. The diagram shows the distribution of Skyrmes in the 1881 census.



Having an unusual name has both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side people who search for it on the internet quickly find my website. As a result I have had over a hundred enquirers and respondents over the years who have contributed useful information and helped to overcome 'brick walls'. The downside is that its unusual spelling means that it is frequently mis-transcribed on records held by the main genealogical websites. As well as near misses like Skyrne or Scurm, there have been some wide shots like Ikyrme, Shyme, Skynne. As a result many records of interest have only been found after laboriously browsing censuses and parish records page by page.

## There are three historic clusters of Skyrme in Pembrokeshire:

1. **Skyrmes of Manorbier and Penally.** This is my branch of the family. Early generations were agricultural labourers. Many moved to Pembroke (Monkton) for work as shipwrights in the Royal

Dockyard in the mid 1800s. Some descendants moved as farmers to Wolferlow in Herefordshire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A 48-page document on this cluster was published on the [skyrme.info](http://skyrme.info) website in 2012.

2. **Skyrms of Llangwm.** These were mostly fishermen and ferrymen, many of whom stayed in the local area throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Details of this cluster were published on the website in May 2015.
3. **Skirmes (later Skyrmes) of Llawhaden.** These were gentry and written about in *The Llawhaden Book* by Mary Houseman. Their line seems to have died out by the early 1800s.

What we do know is that around 1640, Thomas Skirme, an attorney at Ludlow, just across the Herefordshire border in the Welsh Marches, moved to practice in Pembrokeshire and acquired the estate at Llawhaden.

Since early Skyrmes in Herefordshire were also spelt Skirme (e.g. in Lugwardine records from 1539 to 1647 after which is mostly transposed to Skyrme) it is most likely that the Pembrokeshire Skyrmes originated in Herefordshire, and not as family folk lore suggested, Scandinavians landing on the Pembrokeshire coast - after all there is an island called Skomer! So far, despite some claims to the contrary, nobody has definitively determined the connections between each of the three Pembrokeshire clusters and those of Herefordshire.

### ***Developing a One-Name Study***

Once you start looking at families other than your own ancestors and collateral lines you are in effect doing a One-Name Study (ONS). In this you collect any data you can find about the occurrence of the name world-wide. The Guild of One-Name Studies ([www.one-name.org](http://www.one-name.org)) suggests that such a study has seven pillars - data collection, analysis, synthesis, dealing with enquiries, publicising, publishing and preserving (for future generations). I am indebted to Ian Skyrme of Tenbury Wells, who passed over the Guild's ONS of Skyrme(e) in June 2014 and who provided much of the initial data on the Herefordshire Skyrmes.

This has been extensively added to by an increasing number of resources which are coming online. Apart from the usual genealogical websites (Ancestry, FindMyPast, FamilySearch etc.) here are some specific sources that I have found particularly useful:

- **National probate calendar** - this gives the exact date of death, where the person lived and the value of their estate (useful if you don't want to keep forking out £9.25 for every death record)
- **Parish registers** - ideally find images of the originals, rather than (mis-) transcribed records
- **Newspaper family notices and articles** - this has unearthed some unexpected gems (see later); do not overlook overseas newspaper websites (e.g. [trove.nla.gov.au](http://trove.nla.gov.au) for Australian newspapers)
- **School and occupational registers**, e.g. Skyrmes appear on almost every page of the Vowchurch School register
- **Passenger and immigration records** - images of many US immigration forms are now online
- **WW1 (and to some extent WW2) military records** - they give a lot of information about a person's physical attributes and details of their service.

As a result of taking advantage of searching new records as they come on line now have over 1,000 individual records to process. But transforming raw data into branches and trees is only part of the

story. To really understand about your ancestors, you need to set them in their local and historical context. My in-depth work on the Herefordshire Skyrmes includes:

- Visiting the area to understand the topography and possible travel patterns in earlier years
- Taking photos of dwellings mentioned in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century censuses
- Visiting churchyards to see the graves listed in the Society's Monumental Inscriptions
- Researching the history of specific occupations and localities, e.g. the apple growers and cider makers, the history of the Herefordshire cattle breed.
- Researching the owners of the Courts where Skyrmes were servants.

In addition, a visit to the recently re-opened HARC (Herefordshire Archives and Records Centre), gave access to early wills, leases of property and tithe records. All have added greatly to the understanding of Skyrmes, their family connections (e.g. to the SEABORNES) and how they fitted into their local community.

### ***The Skyrmes of Herefordshire***

Although it is relatively early days, I have started mapping out the Herefordshire clusters of Skyrmes. These include:

- **Lugwardine** - there are over 130 parish records from 1539 to 1766. Wills at HARC show that some were yeomen and gentlemen. That this is the original area in which Hereford Skyrmes lived is supported from a short entry in a Patent Roll dated 1310: "Pardon to Roger le Yinge of Lugwardyn for the death of Roger Skrym of the same place".
- **Brockhampton-by-Ross** - here a wealthy family of Skyrmes lived at the Old Court from the 1660s (probably Thomas Skyrme from Lugwardine).
- **Vowchurch** - the largest concentration of Skyrmes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (over 160 parish records from 1768-1886); the ancestor of this cluster probably came from **Abbey Dore**.
- **Hereford City** - Skyrme family (originally from Stretton Court) ran a tannery in Widemarsh Street.
- Smaller clusters at **Canon Pyon, Sarnesfield, Kinnersley, Moccas, Letton, Stretton and Dewsall**.

The work of connecting these clusters, especially before censuses, is difficult. Occasionally a marriage entry gives a clue that connects two places, e.g. Richard Skyrme of Weobley married Elizabeth ECKLEY at Norton Canon in 1763.

I have also tracked migration away from Herefordshire:

- **Australia** - some of this was not voluntary. For example, Richard Skyrme from Eaton Bishop was transported for 7 years in 1826 for stealing two hogs. He was lucky. On one page of Old Bailey records, which includes a John Skyrme who was acquitted, there are eight death sentences out of the 17 entries. The crimes were burglary and stealing. One who migrated by choice, George Skyrme, became a successful vigneron in the gold rush area of Victoria.
- **USA** - The progeny of a William Skyrme from Vowchurch who migrated in 1857 has resulted in over 100 Skyrms, who were initially in Ohio, then Pennsylvania and now in many states.

- **Canada** - There is a group of Skyrmes still living in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. They are descendants of Ernest and Thomas Skyrme, farmers from Pudleston.
- **New Zealand** - Well respected veterinarian Harold Skyrme migrated to Gisborne, New Zealand in 1946. He was the son of Harold, a well known chemist from Hastings whose 'Shurzine' preparations were widely used to heal soldiers' wounds in World War 1. Their ancestor was Edward the tanner from Hereford.

## *Colourful Characters*

Newspaper stories tend to cover people who are either important or infamous. It is some of the latter stories that have caught my eye:

**The infamous solicitor of Ross** - By 1861 John Henry Skyrme had established himself as a solicitor in Ross High Street. He became a "pillar of the community" owning two landed estates in the area. It was only after his death that his life of fraud and forgery was uncovered: "sham mortgages, suppression of deeds, sales of property previously mortgaged, involving ruin to numerous families."

**The disappearing tanner** - Amos Skyrme of the Hereford tanning family was declared bankrupt in March 1930, but then disappeared. An advert after his wife's death in 1851 said "he left the City of Hereford for America; and was last heard of there in 1839...and any person who will give any satisfactory information to the said solicitors as to where the said Amos Jones Skyrme is now, or, if dead, when and where he died, shall be rewarded."

**The deserter and bigamist** - Mark Skyrme was charged with being a deserter. "Capture of a notorious criminal" ran the headline in February 1881 after he was found in Exeter. He had married bigamously in December 1879.

**The "dashing Josephine O'Dare"** - A society girl in the 1920s, living the high life in London. Nicknamed the "Racing Queen" because of her knowledge of the turf. She had claimed to be the daughter of a rich banker from Mayfair in London. In fact she was Theresa Agnes ('Trixie') Skyrme, daughter of a farmer from Canon Pyon. In May 1927 she was sentenced to 4½ years imprisonment for fraud.



You can read about the important Skyrmes - as well as these infamous ones - in more detail in the first edition of *The Skyrmes of Herefordshire* at the [skyrme.info](http://skyrme.info) website. This 36-page document also gives more information on the origins of the name, the various Herefordshire families and their occupations. The website is regularly updated as new and interesting findings are unearthed.

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