

## **The Skyrmes of Vowchurch by David J Skyrme**

The surname Skyrme is relatively rare. There are only 954 instances in an analysis of UK surnames in a 2002 database, ranking it 6,881 in terms of popularity.<sup>1</sup> My own ancestors came from Manorbier and Penally in Pembrokeshire, later migrating to Pembroke and Pembroke Dock (two distinct towns) for work in the Royal Dockyard. Family folklore had it that the name derived from Scandinavia and that it originated in Pembrokeshire following Viking raids on the Pembrokeshire coast. The name of an island off the Pembrokeshire coast – Skomer – gave some credence to this.

However, as this article shows, the earliest references to Skyrmes are from Herefordshire, and it is Vowchurch in particular that had the largest number of Skyrmes for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in all of England and Wales. This article is a progress report about my research into the Skyrmes of Vowchurch.

I am indebted to several other family history researchers from around the world, who have researched their Vowchurch ancestors and contributed information. In particular, I acknowledge the contribution of Cynthia Comyn who encouraged me to write this article and who also provided me with new information, such as early parish record transcripts not readily available from other sources.

### **From Family History to a One-Name Study**

I had done some work on my own family tree using information in a family bible. With some extra research I traced back my ancestors to a John Skyrme born around 1780, with an 1841 census reference indicating his birthplace as “not in Pembrokeshire”. My interest in the surname piqued when on a family visit to Hereford Cathedral, my wife came out of the toilet, looked down at the tombstone at her feet and shrieked “it’s mine!” It had her name – Jane Skyrme – though it did say “died March 17, 1778.” That’s when I first realised that the name was not confined to Pembrokeshire. A visit to a local record office yielded a set of photocopies of IGI indexes which showed many Skirme, Skyrme, and Skyrme entries in Herefordshire, notably over 140 parish records from Lugwardine, going back to 1539.<sup>2</sup>

I launched the Skyrme family website ([www.skyrme.info](http://www.skyrme.info)) on St. David’s Day 1996 (1 March), initially about the Pembrokeshire Skyrmes but knowing that longer term I would research the Skyrme families of Herefordshire. Having an unusual name meant that many other Skyrmes or Skyrme descendants found my website and started providing information on their families. One correspondent referred me to Ian Skyrme of Tenbury Wells who “had a lot of information on Skyrmes.” Unbeknown to me, Ian had been conducting a so-called

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<sup>1</sup> Surnames of England & Wales, The Office of National Statistics database. Accessible at [www.taliesin-arleyn.net/names/](http://www.taliesin-arleyn.net/names/)

<sup>2</sup> IGI is the International Genealogical Index, a computer index of parish records compiled by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, initially available on microfiche from 1973 and now accessible at [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org).

One-Name Study on the surname Skyrme and its variants. A One-Name Study (ONS) is “a project researching **all occurrences** of a surname, as opposed to a particular pedigree”. The Guild of One-Name Studies ([www.one-name.org](http://www.one-name.org)) registers such studies and provides a wealth of information on methods. In 2013 Ian passed on the Skyrme(e) registration to me and I am grateful to him for providing a wealth of information on the Herefordshire Skyrmes including parish record transcripts, details of wills, and some outline trees.

## Skyrme Clusters In Herefordshire

As noted above, the earliest cluster of Skyrmes was from Lugwardine, just a few miles east of Hereford. The earliest 115 parish records, up to 1636, used the spelling Skirme, with Richard being the most predominant name. The spelling Skyrme was then used until the last recorded entry in 1736. One of my most exciting discoveries on one of my visits to the Herefordshire Archive and Record Centre, was when I casually browsing the indexes of books of transcripts of medieval Patent Rolls. In Patent Roll, Vol 1 of the 4th year of Edward II (1310) I found this entry:

<b>Oct. 28.</b>	<b>Henry le Mouner of Brouham for the death of Simon le Cupere</b>	
<b>Linalithgow.</b>	<b>of Penereth and for other offences.</b>	<b>By p.s.</b>
	<b>Roger le Yinge of Lugwardyn for the death of Roger Skrym of the</b>	
	<b>same place.</b>	<b>By p.s.</b>

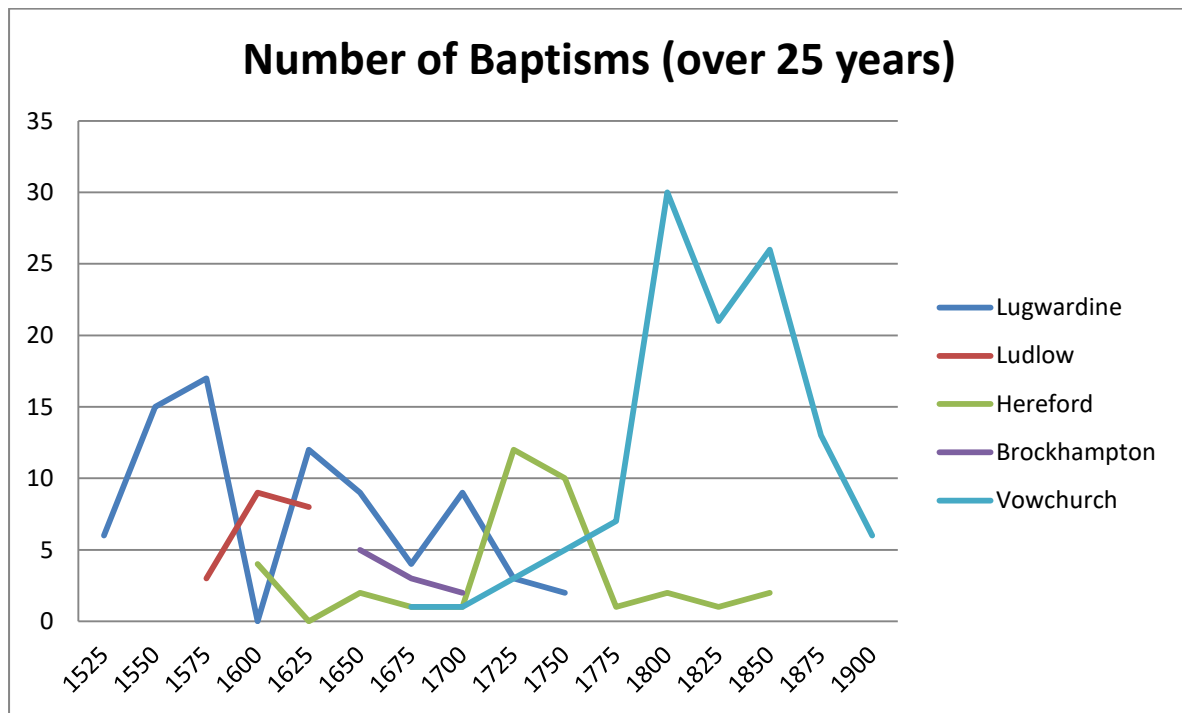
This confirms that Lugwardine was indeed the earliest location of later Herefordshire Skyrmes. Other locations in Herefordshire and nearby where there are early references to Skyrme include:

- Ludlow, Shropshire – 50 parish records dating from 1583-1697. Richard, William and Francis are the boys’ names that dominate. It was from here in the 1640s that lawyers Thomas Skyrme and his son William moved to Llawhaden in Pembrokeshire and is believed to be the start of the Pembrokeshire branch, though no definitive links to my ancestors have been traced.<sup>3</sup>
- Brockhampton-by-Ross – A wealthy Skyrme family lived at Upper House (later Brockhampton Court) from the 1660s. One of the daughters married into the Protheroe family, wealthy shipowners and merchants of Bristol.
- Hereford – The first Skyrme entries were recorded in 1620 and peaked in the 1720s and 1730s. As county town it attracted Skyrmes from other places, notably Lugwardine, Norton Canon, Staunton-on-Wye, and Dewsall. One particular Skyrme, Amos Jones Skyrme born in Dewsall in 1783, trained as a surgeon in Staffordshire but then set up a tannery in Widemarsh Street, before absconding to America and starting one of the Hereford branches there.

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<sup>3</sup> This was a wealthy family, owning substantial properties of Llawhaden House and Vaynor. The story of this branch of the Skyrmes can be found in *The Llawhaden Book: A Parish and Its Place in History*, Mary Houseman, Llan Aidan Press (2004).

The chart below shows the number of baptisms for each 25-year period (1525-49 etc.) for these places as well as Vowchurch. To avoid overcrowding, the chart omits places where Skyrme featured prominently later. These places included Canon Pyon, Norton Canon, Madley, Sarnesfield, Kinnersley, Eaton Bishop, Stretton Sugwas and Bromyard. But from 1800-1875 none of these had even half the Skyrmes that populated Vowchurch. Censuses show that they mostly had two or three Skyrme households at most, whereas there were typically 10 Skyrme households in Vowchurch.



### Arrival in Vowchurch

One of the problems pre-census records (1841), is that with common first names it is difficult to attribute specific individuals to specific parents, particularly if the parents moved. One looks for clues like names of first children, ages of mothers and so on, and hope that early censuses (1851 in particular) will help you link individuals to particular families. Thus one early researcher of the Skyrmes of Vowchurch attributed James Skyrme who married Eleanor Seaborne in 1780 to a James Skyrme born in 1751 in Hereford whose father was John. The consensus of others is that it was James Skyrme, baptised 1757, whose parents were Thomas and Mary Skyrme of Vowchurch. But the parish records show children of Thomas and Mary being baptised at dates from 1722 to 1759. So, even if Mary had her first child when aged 15, she would have had six more between the ages of 43 and 52! The conclusion – based on a gap in the dates of baptisms – is that Thomas married twice, even only though one marriage record has been found. His first marriage was on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1722 to Mary Thomas. James was the third child of his yet undiscovered second marriage to an unknown Mary around 1750.

It is this Thomas's mother who seems to be the first Skyrme to arrive in Vowchurch. But the Vowchurch Skyrmes might never have existed but for a quirk. Thomas's baptism record reveals all. He was baptised on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1699 in Vowchurch. The details describe him as a "base child" (i.e. illegitimate) whose father was Thomas Cook and mother Mary Skyrme. Both are listed as "of Allensmore". So had not Thomas kept his mother's name of Skyrme, we might have had a cluster of Cooks rather than Skyrmes in Vowchurch!

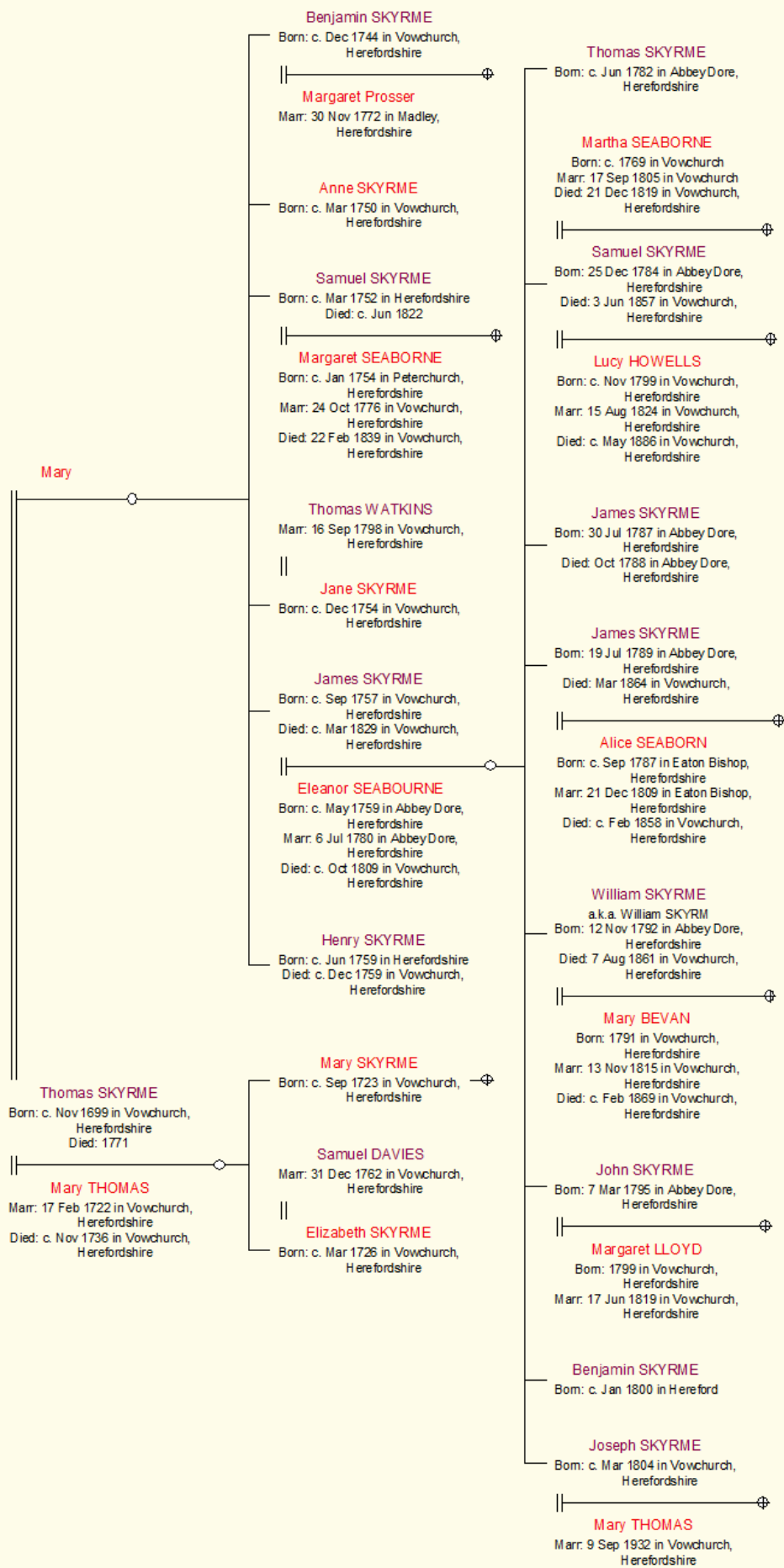
But there the trail goes cold – at least for now. Mary would have been born around 1670. The earliest time a Skyrme appears in a parish record for Allensmore is in 1723 and that is for the marriage of an Isaac Skyrme to Martha Sharman. Their son Isaac was mayor of Hereford in 1772.

One of the challenges of a One Name Study is that you start with clusters based in particular villages. You then start to construct trees, but these remain as distinct branches until you can make a connection, and this can be elusive. We can be fairly certain that the Skyrmes of Vowchurch had ancestors living in Lugwardine, but who was the connection and when? Looking beyond Allensmore for a Mary Skyrme born around 1670 we find nothing – Elizabeth, Joan, Ann and Margaret seemed to be the favourite girls' names, the first and only Mary appearing in 1709. However, there is a Mary Skyrme, daughter of Richard and Mary, baptised at Hereford St John the Baptist on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1671. And we do find a Richard earlier whose father was Edmond, a common name for the boys of Lugwardine. It's conjecture at this stage, and needs further research, but the Skyrmes of Vowchurch (other than a few incomers from nearby places) could have arrived from Lugwardine via Hereford and Allensmore.

### Descendants of Thomas and Mary

Thomas's children included four boys, all from his first marriage. Three of his boys married and carried on the Skyrme name:

Husband	Married	Wife	Children
Benjamin bap 23 Dec 1744	30 Nov 1772 Madley	Margaret Prosser bap 29 Dec 1754 (probably)	William, James, Richard, Ann, Mary, Thomas, Edward, Hannah (born 1772-1794)
Samuel bap 5 Apr 1752	24 Oct 1776 Vowchurch	Margaret Seaborne bap 1 Feb 1754 Peterchurch	John, Margaret, Samuel, Elizabeth, Alice, Ann, Lucretia (born 1777-1797)
James bap 25 Sep 1757	6 Jul 1780	Eleanor Seabourne bap 20 May 1759 Abbey Dore	See chart on next page



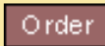
Of these marriages, it was Samuel and James's children that have given rise to most of the Skyrmes of Vowchurch. Benjamin lived in Madley after his marriage which is where their children were born, and so far none have been traced back to Vowchurch.

It is interesting to note that both James and Samuel married Seabornes, There were several Seabourne (or Seaborne) families around the Golden Valley and there were some other Skyrme-Seaborne marriages of Thomas's and Mary's descendants (e.g. James Skyrme to Alice Seaborne in 1809 and Mary Ann Skyrme to John Seaborne in 1830).<sup>4</sup>

Samuel was quite a well off tailor, since his 1818 will (the only Vowchurch Skyrme will prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century) describes him as "Samuel Skyrme of Vowchurch Common, yeoman". Quite a few of Samuel's descendants carried on the family tradition as tailors, though others were shoemakers and the ubiquitous 'agricultural labourer'. Virtually all the male descendants remained in Vowchurch through the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We do not know of James's occupation but most of his sons were agricultural labourers, though one (Samuel b. 1784) was a mason and another (John b. 1795), a joiner. His first six children were born in Abbey Dore but he had moved back to Vowchurch by 1804. Although many descendants stayed in Vowchurch, others moved to Hereford or Australia (involuntary, see later!).<sup>5</sup>

With the arrival of the census it becomes much easier to trace descendants with more certainty. Even then it is easy to miss children who were born and died in between censuses. Fortunately, there is a now a new resource for family historians that helps find these children. The General Register Office (GRO) has created a new index for birth records for 1837-1916 and death records from 1837 - 1912. It adds two features not available on previous indexes. For births you see the mother's maiden name for all dates. Previously this was not available for births before 1911.<sup>6</sup> For deaths, it shows the age at death, again for all dates. It adds more precision than the censuses to birth dates as well. Below is an example of one search result for Noah, the son of Stephen and Elizabeth:

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Mother's Maiden Surname:</b>
<b>SKYRME, NOAH</b>	<b>JOHNSON</b>
<i>GRO Reference: 1862 S Quarter in HEREFORD &amp; DORE Volume 06A Page 455</i>	
	

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<sup>4</sup> Skyrme and Seaborne, remained common names in Vowchurch into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Inside the church is the page of the burial index (1917-19) that covers the death of the then vicar Skeffington Dodgson (Charles Dodgson's brother). Of the other 7 entries, three are Skyrmes and two are Seabornes.

<sup>5</sup> There was a William Skyrme born around 1814 in Vowchurch who married in Clodock, moved to Blaenavon and then emigrated to Ohio with his family (now spelt Skyrm). He has many descendants living in the USA today. His parents cannot be identified with any certainty.

<sup>6</sup> The index is accessible at [www.gro.gov.uk](http://www.gro.gov.uk). You need to register as if you were about to buy a certificate (click on "Order Certificates Online").

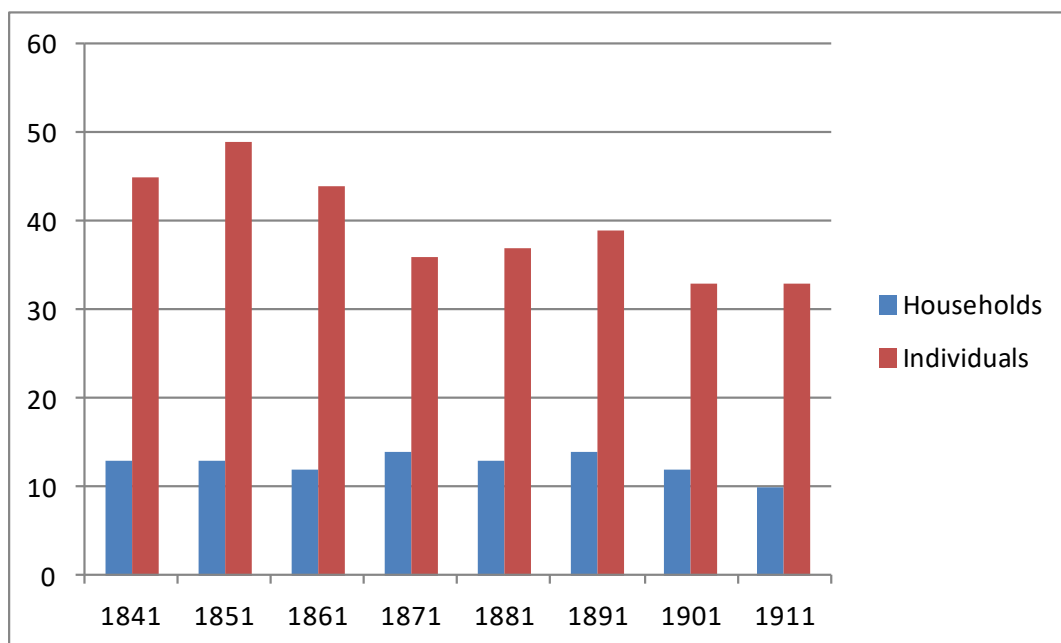
The table below shows the number of Skyrme descendants of Samuel and James that have so far been identified up to the 1911 census (this is ‘work in progress’).

Ancestor	1st Gen	2 <sup>nd</sup> Gen	3 <sup>rd</sup> Gen	4 <sup>th</sup> Gen	Total
Samuel	7	11	13	12	<b>43</b>
James	8	28	48	67	<b>151</b>

So it was James’s descendants who were the majority of Skyrmes in Vowchurch in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,

### 19<sup>th</sup> Century Skyrmes

Census returns provide a lot of useful information about Skyrme families – the relationships, where they lived and their occupations. The chart below shows a) the number of households with someone named Skyrme, and b) the number of individuals. Most households have a Skyrme as head of household, but a few in each census are unmarried individuals who are servants in someone else’s household. The individuals include wives who became Skyrmes after marriage.



It can be seen how the numbers were relatively stable over the time of the censuses. Many of the earlier entries for Vowchurch simply say “Common”. It was fairly usual to find several Skyrme households on the same census page, sometimes in adjacent properties. Later censuses often give more information on specific dwelling names as shown below. Although several families remained on Vowchurch Common, others had migrated down to near the river, such as The Tump (near Chanstone).

Census	Dwellings
1841	Common (9 households); Little Poston (William Skyrme, aged tailor); Servants at Monnington (Weeb family), Ponty pinna (Badham), The White House (Wood)

1851	Common (12 households)
1861	Common ( 9 households); Holstry; servants at Hill Farm (Hancorn Family), Vowchurch Court (Jones)
1871	Common (10 households Nr Bartley Hosue, In the village (Mary Skyrme, age 63, from Weston, nurse to the Hancorn family) and a servant at Holstry (Smith family;), Also two Skyrme households in Turnastone
1881	Common (7 households), Prospect Cottage (William Skyrme aged 46 from Kings Caple), The Tump (John Skyrme b1823), Stall House (Arthur, 30) Chapel House (Stephen age 37). Servants at Whitehouse (Wood family), Chanstone Court (Fowler)
1891	Common (3 households), The Tump (3 households), Kaenowley, The Firs, Park House, Hancorn Villa (Charles Skyrme, 26, waggoner), Stall House. Servants at School House (Addis family), Whitehouse (Wood), Monnington Court (Jones), Also a Skyrme family at Snodhill, Peterchurch.
1901	Common (2 households), The Tump, Kaenowley, The Firs, Park Gate, Prospect House, Stall House. Two servants at Vowchurch Court, Turnastone Farm. Other servants at Ponty Pinna (Badham family), Chanstone (Fowler) and The Croft (home of surgeon Arthur McMichael, coincidentally born where I once lived – Bourton-in-the-Water, Gloucestershire).
1911	The Tump (3 households), Kaenowley, The Firs, Birch Cottage, Holsty Cottage. Servants at The Croft (McMichael family), Highcroft (Mary Jones) and Stokley Hill, Peterchurch (Vaughan)

One recurring feature is that servants in the large houses or farms (e.g. Chanstone Court, Ponty Pinna) were often replaced by relatives when they left.

In terms of occupation, “agricultural labourer” predominates. There are other farm servants (e.g. plough boy) and domestic servants, In terms of trades, there are the tailor descendants of Samuel Skyrme (three in the 1861 census), a woodman (Stephen Skyrme b1827), a mason (Samuel Skyrme 1817) and that’s about it except for Francis (Frank) Skyrme. He was the son of John Skyrme (b1823) and Elizabeth Christopher from Tiberton. This family lived at The Tump and in 1891 there was only himself and his widowed mother. His occupation is listed as railway clerk. Kelly’s 1896 directory lists him as the stationmaster at Vowchurch. This was on the Golden Valley Railway (GVR) that closed in 1898 and was taken over by the Great Western Railway (GWR).<sup>7</sup> No doubt there proved better opportunities elsewhere with GWR for Frank, since by 1907 he had married Vowchurch girl Rose Davies in Bristol and moved to Tredegar, and in the 1911 census he is listed as a railway porter.

In general the Skyrmes of Vowchurch were not wealthy compared with Skyrme families elsewhere in Herefordshire, such as Norton Canon, Canon Pyon, Kinnersley and Sarnesfield. At any one census or in any given Kelly’s directory you could find 6-10 Skyrme families in Herefordshire who were farmers, often with farms exceeding 200 acres.

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<sup>7</sup> A short history of the GVR can be seen at [http://www.ewyaslacy.org.uk/-/The-rise-and-fall-of-the-Golden-Valley-Railway/1875-1953/rs\\_gdv\\_0001](http://www.ewyaslacy.org.uk/-/The-rise-and-fall-of-the-Golden-Valley-Railway/1875-1953/rs_gdv_0001)



## Skyrmes in the News

Since the Skyrmes of Vowchurch were not nobility and lived very ordinary lives if you read about them in newspapers it is usually family notices or news about their misbehaviours. Here are two examples of the former which add a little more information to the otherwise bland data of registration indexes and parish records:

### Deaths.

“Lately (Nov 1849), at Llanon, Vowchurch-common, in the parish of Vowchurch, after a very short illness, Mr Samuel Skyrme, aged 76 years. He was a quiet, honest, industrious man, a tender parent, and a kind husband; and his death is much lamented by his relatives and friends.” (*Hereford Journal* 14 Nov 1849).

“SKYRME – August 6 (1861) at Caenowly<sup>8</sup>, Vowchurch, age 67, Mr. Wm. Skyrme, in the employ of Messrs. Moore and Badham, of Pontypinna, for more than 30 years.” (*Hereford Times*, 24 Aug 1861).

As for misdemeanours, most of the Skyrmes who made the Herefordshire newspapers were from Madley or Canon Norton. One arresting headline was “Capture of a Notorious Character by the Exeter Police”. This referred to a Mark Skyrme of Madley (a descendant of James Skyrme and Eleanor Seaborne) who absconded from the Army, married bigamously and committed crimes in Abbey Dore and Vowchurch before being apprehended.

As for the unremarkable Vowchurch Skyrmes, the only significant case I have found so far is the following.

**Benjamin Skyrme (1827-1897)** was the son of William Skyrme (1792-1861) and Mary Bevan, and grandson of James Skyrme and Eleanor Seaborne. His name first appears in the Hereford press in October 1843 when aged 16 he was charged with larceny and acquitted. A year later he was found guilty of stealing two rabbits, the property of James Davis and John Berrington, and sentenced to three months imprisonment and whipped twice. Finally, at Herefordshire Lent Assizes in March 1846 (aged 20) he was charged with shooting at a William Hughes on the Queen’s highway with intent to do grievous bodily harm. He was sentenced to 15 years transportation to Australia.<sup>9</sup> He appears on the convict transportation register, and we can trace his ongoing history from Australian records. A carpenter, he married Mary Duckworth at Green Ponds (now Kempton), Tasmania in 1866, who bore him 7 children, relatives of whom live in Australia (mostly New South Wales) today. Even in Australia, Benjamin still had brushes with the law. He was accused alongside Edward Duckworth (no doubt an in-law) of possessing 7lbs of mutton at Edward's premises. Edward was fined £20 but Benjamin acquitted.

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<sup>8</sup> This is the place that was spelt Kaenowley in census records. I have not yet found it on old maps, so would appreciate it if anyone reading this can tell me where it is.

<sup>9</sup> The full story is in the *Hereford Times*, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1846.

## Conclusion

I have attempted in this article to convey the flavour of a One-Name Study with reference to the Skyrmes of Vowchurch, the locality in the whole of England and Wales which was home to the most Skyrme families throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I have been researching the Skyrmes of Vowchurch for about 3 years, with inputs from several other family historians. The project is still very much “work in progress”, with several hundred records of Vowchurch Skyrmes still to process. The bigger – and possibly impossible – challenge is to find the relationships that will connect the several Herefordshire Skyrme clusters (Lugwardine, Brockhampton, Hereford, Norton Canon etc.) into a single tree. You can read regular updates on how the Skyrme ONS is progressing on the Skyrme Family website at [www.skyrme.info](http://www.skyrme.info).

Just as I am working on a One-Name Study, it seems to me that you have done something akin to a One-Place Study (OPS): “The history of a place in relation to all those people who have lived there through time”<sup>10</sup>. The Society of One Place Studies (<http://one-place-studies.org>) encourages this particular genre and invites people to register their studies. I would encourage you to register your Turnastone work with this organisation and consider Vowchurch for a future OPS.

Since I do not live locally, I would appreciate any feedback from readers, since you will have more detailed knowledge than me and may well have further insights into the Skyrmes of Vowchurch. I am happy to respond to enquiries about the pedigree of any specific Skyrme family.

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<sup>10</sup> This definition is from Celia Heritage, the creator of the Pharos distance learning course on One-Place Studies.