

Different Ways to Demolish 'Brick Walls'

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Too often when tracing ancestors, you come across a 'brick wall' where information about them seems to dry up. However, new sources are coming online all the time. These together with using well known sources in different ways can come to the rescue. This article gives examples of how I have used these and other sources to demolish some brick walls in my Skyrme One Name Study.

The New GRO Index

I am a regular user of FreeBMD (www.freebmd.org.uk) which is an index of registrations for births, marriages and deaths from 1837 to 1983. Sources such as Ancestry.co.uk and FamilySearch.org add more recent references. 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. For deaths, it shows the age at death, again for all dates.

So without forking out £9.25 for a copy of the original certificate, I have been to allocate the right John Skyrme of two Skyrmes born in 1844-5 to the correct parents. Also a 1911 census showed that William and Elizabeth Skyrme of Pembroke Dock had had six children, of whom only five were still living. By putting Elizabeth's maiden name of Wilkins into the search field I discovered a William James Skyrme born 1895 and who died less than a year later.

To access this index, you need to register at www.gro.gov.uk. One note of caution: this index is not as comprehensive as other indexes. Researchers doing One Name Studies estimate that 3-5% of known individuals are not there or have been wrongly transcribed.

Results:

Name:	Mother's Maiden Surname:	Order:
SKYRME, JOHN	BEDDOWS	Certificate
GRO Reference: 1844 J Quarter in PEMBROKE Volume 26 Page 705		PDF
SKYRME, JOHN	GRIFFITHS	Certificate
GRO Reference: 1845 S Quarter in PEMBROKE Volume 26 Page 664		PDF
SKYRME, JOHN BROWN	BROWN	Certificate
GRO Reference: 1845 M Quarter in HAVERFORDWEST Volume 26 Page 652		PDF

GRO Probate Index

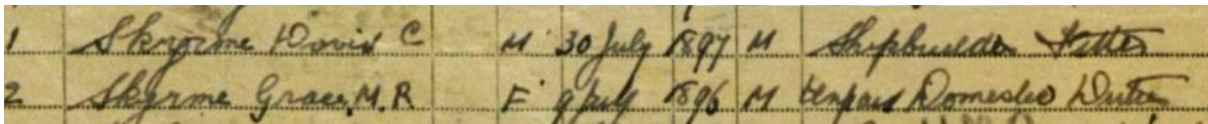
Another fairly recent addition to the GRO website is its probate index. Whereas FindMyPast only has records up to 1959 and Ancestry has a gap between 1967 and 1975, the GRO website has records right up to 2010, although the most recent records have minimal information. After finding a death date, it's worth searching the probate calendar for more information, which often includes precise date of death, address of last residence and information about executors who were often close relatives or friends. Having found the probate information, you can then order a copy of the deceased's will for £10.

NICHOLAS Thomas Henry of 24 Devonshire-avenue Southsea Hampshire died 26 October 1930 Probate **London** 16 December to Louisa Margaret Skyrme spinster and Sedia Eliza Clemens widow. Effects £1034 4s. 10d.

For example, I was searching the probate calendar for Thomas Nicholas, the shipwright husband of Anne Skyrme of Manorbier (1867-1929). An executrix was Sedia Eliza Clemens widow. I knew that my database had a Sedia Skyrme. She was in fact a sister-in-law of Thomas. So this was a quick way to find her spouse, first from BMD records, and then the 1939 Register to identify the right Thomas Clemens, another shipwright. Although in this example I was searching Nicholas as the indexes on commercial sites let you also search for your ancestor in other individual's probate record. So a search on Skyrme for 1930 would also have brought up the above record.

1939 Register

The background to this was well described in the December 2016 issue of the Journal.¹ It is currently accessible online at FindMyPast. My experience is that you often have to use wildcard searches for people you know, due to erroneous transcriptions. It has proved most useful in finding spouses for marriages after 1911 somewhat easier than FreeBMD which just gives a name and usually several possibilities. Knowing the date of birth means that you can check back over census and other records to find out more about them.



David Courtney Skyrme of Pembroke (1897-1977) had an entry for Grace Skyrme of about the same age on the Register at an address in Portsmouth. A search of FreeBMD confirmed her as his wife, but knowing her birth date meant it was easy to find her parents in earlier censuses. Her father, Ernest Philpotts, just like David was a ships fitter who worked at Portsmouth Naval Dockyard. A word of caution: I have often found that the year of birth is one year out compared to baptism, birth and death registration records, though the precise month and day is invariably correct. Since the Register was used by the NHS up to the 1990s, an unmarried woman's surname is often found crossed out with her married name scribble alongside, again helping you find the correct marriage from several possibilities.

Pembroke School Admission Books

One very useful resource, accessible at FindMyPast are school admission registers. They often fill in gaps between censuses. As well as date of birth, they give father's (or guardian's) name occupation and address, as well as when and why they left school.

Thus the admission entry on 26 August 1901 to Upper Meyrick and Albion Square School for Arthur Wilkins Skyrme (born 16 November 1890 in Pembroke Dock) shows his previous school as Albion Junior. Also he and his brother Philip left 12 May 1903 "gone to Ireland", but later entries show that the younger Philip was readmitted on 29 August 1905 but left again for Haulbowline in May 1906. It was not uncommon

¹ 'Mother, Where Were You When The War Broke Out? *Dyfed Family History Journal*, Col 12 No. 7 pp11-13 (Dec 2016). See also

for families of dockyard tradesmen to go to other dockyards. Haulbowline island was the site of the Royal Dockyard in Cork Harbour.

Other entries show that many boys left school at age 15 “after the dockyard exam” or to become apprentices. Having viewed one page it is often worthwhile browsing adjacent pages. You often find other family members which have not been correctly indexed, but also relatives or families into which your ancestors married.

Monumental Inscriptions and Cemetery Records

Headstones on graves often provide useful information on dates of death, residence and close relatives. Volunteers have done transcripts of these and other monumental inscriptions, and some of these are available for purchase from Dyfed FHS. However, I have found less coverage for Pembrokeshire than those for the Herefordshire Skyrmes.



When researching a locality, I make a point of visiting the local graveyards. An indication of the useful information provided is from the grave of James Skyrme, a farmer born in Manorbier in 1823. His grave at Henllan Amgoed (near Whitland in Carmarthenshire) says:

“In loving memory of James Skyrme late of Pantdwn in the parish of Llanfihangel Abercowin who died at Canton, Cardiff November 9, 1886 aged 64... also in loving memory of Eliza Skyrme, widow of the above, who died at her residence Keiffe House, St Clears Sun Dec 12, 1897 aged 79 years.”

For more recent deaths, Pembrokeshire County Council is the first to put their cemetery records online, some dating back to 1869. It covers 11 cemeteries (including Llanion, Pembroke Dock and City Road, Haverfordwest) and also Parc Gwyn Crematorium at Narbeth. The records are accessible at www.deceasedonline.com.

Newspapers Online

The useful Welsh Newspapers Online resource (<http://newspapers.library.wales/>) was featured in the December 2016 Journal (pp36-38). Although you can put a name in quotation marks on simple search, I find it better to use advanced search since often newspaper reports omit the first name. A good approach is to search on surname and

place name. Family notices usually give precise dates for birth, marriages and death, as well as giving insight into particular features of their life.

I was intrigued that two daughters of shoemaker Thomas Skyrme (1809 – 1876) both died at a young age at apparently the same time. A newspaper search soon identified their causes of death. Spittal born Elizabeth (b1839) and Sarah (b 1842) were victims of a tragic accident when they were in a procession on 11th June 1851 in Aberdare. As they crossed the railway line a runaway railway truck loaded with iron smashed through the crossing gate and killed them and also two others.

The main newspaper resource for the whole of the UK is the British Newspaper Archive, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, a joint project between the British Library and FindMyPast to digitise up to 40 million newspaper pages from the library's newspaper collection. Currently over 17 million pages from over 700 titles have been digitised. Since it is being continually added to, it is useful to use the advanced search feature where you can filter by "date added" as well as the usual filters such as publication place and date, and article type. I check almost every week, since for Skyrme over 2,000 articles were added in 2016 alone, though quite a few of these are duplicates through syndication. One of the articles added in 2016 gave more information about the James Skyrme whose grave transcription was given earlier:

"Mr James Skyrme died at his residence, Meirion House, Cowbridge Road, Cardiff. He was for many years chairman of Llanfihangel and Mydrim Board Schools and of the St. Clears Board of Guardians. His son is the Rev F.R.Skyrme of the Rhondda".

As well as British newspapers, there are now many archives around the world available online or for a fee, though searching an index is usually free. One that I have found most useful is Australia's national library Trove website <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/> which has digitised over 500 titles. Since I know that virtually all the Australian Skyrmes were from the Hereford branch, I tried an advanced search using "Skyrme" and "Pembroke", which to my surprise brought up the following:

RICHARDS.—April 23, 1889, at the residence of his son-in-law (Mr. James Skyrme), Pembroke Dock, David Richards, late of Pembroke, South Wales, aged 85 years, father of William Richards, sen., of Lawrenny-terrace, Elisabeth-street South, Sydney.

(Source: Sydney Morning Herald (2 July 1889) accessible at <http://trove.nal.gov.au>)

James Skyrme was born 1842 In Penally. He married Martha Richards, one of about 9 children of David Richards. So James had relatives by marriage in Australia who remembered their Pembrokeshire heritage through the location of their residence (Lawrenny Terrace).






Passenger and Immigration Records

If you lose track of ancestors in the UK censuses, it is well worth widening your search to overseas records. As well as commercial sites, many are free on FamilySearch.org. When you get a large number of results from a search, scroll down to restrict results by location (type in a country) or a type (e.g. immigration and naturalisation). Often you are directed to 'partner sites'. For instance a search on Skyrmes born in Pembrokeshire routed me to the Ellis Island website which gives details of the entry into the USA 26 Feb 1923 of Wilfred Charles Skyrme age 20. However, I could find no such person in my database. As in many such cases, simply use just the person's middle name since often they adopted this as their main name. Sure enough, while still on the Familysearch website, I found an image of the baptism certificate of Wynford Charles Skyrme (my underlining) baptised 16 Oct 1901 at St John, Pembroke Dock. Actually he was the grandson of James Skyrme mentioned in the Australian death notice. Since he died in Portsmouth in 1935 he was only visiting the USA, presumably on the ship's crew as a fitter.

Census Records

Census records are very prone to being wrongly transcribed, especially if you have an unusual name. So, if you cannot find your ancestor through a search, it is well worth searching by last known address, either from the previous census, or from baptism records of their children for dates between censuses. When this does not work, I go through page by page for a village, looking for names that look like Skyrme, and noting down details of them all, even if it does not refer to the specific person I am seeking.

Again, if the records for a given person disappear from UK collections, look overseas. Most fee paying sites let you search and give basic information on whereabouts. For example I could find no UK records after the 1911 census for William Skyrme, born 1883 in Pentre, Glamorgan. A quick search on Ancestry using his birth year gave these results:

Census & Electoral Rolls	15
 California, Voter Registrations, 1900-1968	6
 1920 United States Federal Census	3
 1900 United States Federal Census	2
 New Jersey, State Census, 1895	2
 1930 United States Federal Census	1
See all 15 results...	

So it looked as if he had moved to the USA. On clicking on 1920 results there were three Williams, but comparing this with the Skyrmes in the 1900 USA census and then going to FamilySearch.org and viewing the scanned images, I found the right William and also his marriage certificate to Helen Witbrodt in January 1916 in Bay City, Michigan. William was the son of John Skyrme of Penally (1843-1904) and Ann Garland. He had emigrated with his brother John to the USA in 1912 where both worked as coal miners, like their father had done in the South Wales coalfield.

Also, don't overlook the fact that household members in a census often give clues as to female maiden names. Although terms like mother-in-law or sister-in-law are more obvious, I quite often come across a single Skyrme or a couple listed as "boarders" in a household. The head of household is quite frequently a relative.

Other Sources

After you exhaust the sources above, remember that there are many records not transcribed or indexed on the main genealogical websites. So it's worth looking at various online catalogues:

- The National Archives (TNA)
- County and Local Archives (many have their catalogues also indexed on TNA Discovery website - <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>)
- County and Local Family History Societies
- Historic Trade Directories – in Special Collections at University of Leicester
- US library catalogues (many original texts are at archive.org).

And many more. Obviously, if you can visit such repositories in person you are likely to find material about your ancestors (e.g. in estate records) that are not available online. Doing a search on Google of a name and adding a type of record, e.g. obituary, will usually bring up new online records.

Perhaps the most useful sources of information, however, are other people who share your surname or who live in the locality of your ancestors. Having a blog or website will often encourage people to contact you. I have often received quite big packages in the post from other Skyrmes (or people who have Skyrme ancestors) who want to share what they have, including a DVD recorded by webcam of a meeting with a 93-year old Skyrme recounting her relatives.

In conclusion I hope you have found some of the approaches that have worked for me useful in your own research and inspired you to look beyond the commonly used sources, or to use them in a slightly different way.

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