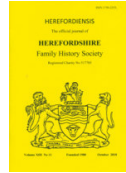


Learning from Newspapers

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In every edition of *Herefordiensis* there are extracts from local newspapers of the past, e.g. the *Hereford Times* and *Hereford Journal*. The British Newspaper Archive (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) now has over 70 million pages digitised and continues to grow. A search of my surname Skyrme four years ago yielded 11,000 results. Today it is over 25,000. So around 40 new articles with my name are added every week. However, many of the most significant articles are syndicated, so appear almost identical in several newspapers across the country. For example, the frauds of solicitor J. H. Skyrme of Ross (see my article in *Herefordiensis* Vol. XV No. 1) was reported in over 80 newspapers everywhere from the *Abergavenny Chronicle* to the *Belfast Telegraph* and *Greenock Advertiser*.

Although I read articles using my FindMyPast subscription, the British Newspaper Archive website has a much more comprehensive advanced search. Every couple of weeks I use the 'date added' filter to see what new articles have been uploaded since I last looked.

When writing up my family history I like to add local context. So although I mostly use the archive when researching a specific person, one of the things I do occasionally is to look up references for my name that were printed on the same month 100, 150 and 200 years ago. Below are three examples of where I have found a story that gives added insight into the way our ancestors lived.

100 Years Ago: A Schoolboy Leaves Too Early

This was a case heard at Bromyard Petty Sessions on Monday 12th February 1923. The case was brought by the school attendance officer against Thomas Skyrme of Acton Beauchamp, Herefordshire, for non-attendance of his son at school. The father was Thomas Herbert Skyrme, born in 1874 at Pudleston and a descendant of the Richard Skyrmes of Weobley and Norton Canon. He had married Agnes JACKSON from Bosbury in 1907. Their son, not named in the article, was Thomas William Skyrme, born 1911 at The Whyle, Pudleston. The family had moved from there around 1915.

The essence of the case was that the school had been open 50 times that term and that Thomas's son had not attended. He was aged 14 and his father admitted keeping him from school once he reached the age of 14. The attendance officer had explained that

since he turned 14 after the start of the term that he could not leave school until the end of that term. Thomas senior admitted the offence and was fined 5/-.

So perhaps Thomas senior was initially ignorant, but after learning the rules was he wilfully negligent? It is possible that Thomas junior was needed to help on the farm which was Pool Farm. The 1921 census shows that Agnes's brother Alfred was an assistant on the farm. Other school records I have seen for the early 20th century show that absenteeism increased at the times of year when help was most needed on farms.

As for the changes in compulsory education over time, Wikipedia notes: "Compulsory education was initially introduced for 5- to 10-year-olds in 1880. The leaving age was increased to 11 in 1893, 12 in 1899, 14 in 1918, 15 in 1947 and 16 in 1972. In England, this was increased to 17 in 2013 and 18 in 2015 though that does not apply in Wales."

150 Years Ago: A Farm Fire at Bodenham

The *Ross Gazette* of 27th Feb 1873 reported a fire at Holbach Farm, Bodenham, where Joseph Skyrme was the tenant. Joseph (1839-1923) was the youngest of nine children of farmer Richard Skyrme of Norton Canon and his wife Ann, née JONES, from Turnastone. Most of Joseph's elder brothers were also farmers (at places like Sarnesfield, Canon Pyon, Almeley, Kinnersley). At the time of the fire Joseph had been married for nearly three years to Harriet, née EVANS, from Kings Pyon). At the time of the fire they had one son, Richard, who later became a farmer at Norton Canon and then Sarnesfield. So very much a family steeped in farming.

Fire was always a hazard on farms. This one started late on the previous Thursday night and just before 1am on the Friday "a mounted messenger brought the news to the Hereford Police Station". Two powerful engines were dispatched and on arrival "they found the whole of the farm buildings adjacent to the dwelling-house on fire, and the roof of the house ignited." After five or six hours, all the firemen could save outside were some hay ricks. All the contents of the buildings and granary were destroyed. The house suffered less damage but some furniture was damaged while being removed to safety. All in all a traumatic experience and one that many of the ancestors of our readers may well have experienced as well.

200 Years Ago: A Desirable Small Compact Farm

This was an advert in the *Hereford Journal* of 2nd Jan 1822. It was "To Be Let And Entered at Candlemas 1822". Candlemas (The Feast of the Presentation or the Festival of Lights) is 2nd February, 40 days after Christmas. It celebrates the time to when Jesus was presented to the Temple in Jerusalem. Villagers would walk in procession with candles that were blessed to be used in church over the following year. The church played a prominent part in village life in the early 19th century. Before the advent of councils, the parish was responsible for many secular matters, such as relief of the poor,

appointment of constables and maintenance of highways. So it was quite natural for a newspaper article to reference Candlemas rather than the specific date.

The "compact small tillage" farm in the advert was Abbey Sheepcott in Clehonger, 4 miles SW of Hereford. The advert explains: "Buildings in excellent repair, and comprising Abbey Sheepcott Mill and Sharkhouse Lands, in all about 150 acres, well stocked with Fruit and Plantation Trees."

And what is the Skyrme connection? Well other than the auctioneer, the other person to contact is T. Skyrme, Esq. of Widemarsh Street, Hereford. He is most likely the owner since an 1810 advert refers to "adjoining lands of T. Skyrme" of Clehonger. Also, after listing his name the advert concludes "The present Tenant will show the Premises." Thomas was born in 1758 the son of Isaac and his wife Jane, née SYMONDS. Isaac was born in Clehonger in 1724 and in 1772 he was Mayor of Hereford. Land tax returns of 1798 shows that Isaac Skyrme, Esq. owned three properties.

There is today a 'Shark House' in the south west of the village. Although the mill at Abbey Sheepcott is listed in mid-19th century directories, there is no reference to it today. Maps of a similar era show the Cagebrook Corn Mill north of Clehonger near the Madley Road. When the Abbey Sheepcott estate was auctioned in 1845, it is described as "adjoining the Turnpike road leading from Hereford to Madley". So was there another mill or did the Abbey Sheepcott Mill change its name to Cagebrook Mill? Herefordshire Archives have papers relating to Abbey Sheepcott Mill but I have no plans to visit in the near future. In the meantime perhaps a reader with local knowledge could identify where it was.

Conclusion

It is often said that you have to be famous or infamous to appear in newspapers. However, apart from the misdemeanours of Thomas Skyrme in 1923, the other two cases show that unexpected events (the fire) and advertisements when property is sold or let, can also add useful insights into how our ancestors lived. In addition to searching by name, I find just searching a village name for a specified period can reveal much about the time and place where our ancestors lived.

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