

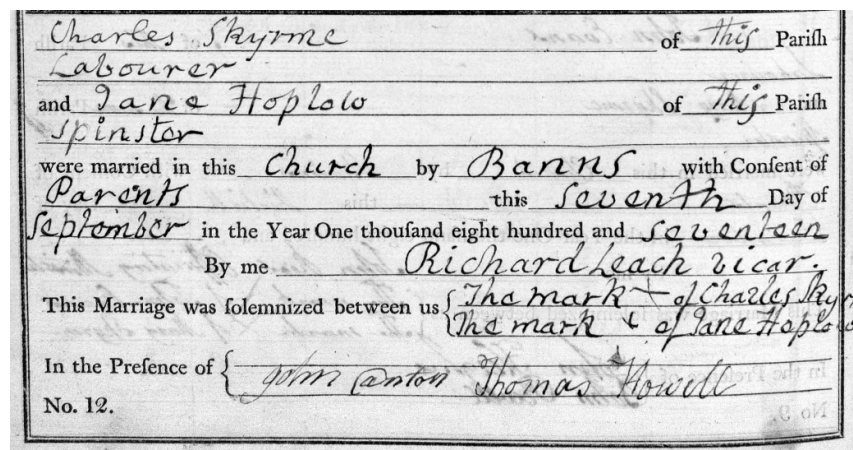
# One Family – Five Surnames

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We've all had problems with the major commercial websites wrongly transcribing and indexing our ancestors' vital records. I give here one example where I broke one of my brick walls by checking for variants of the name HOPLOW, and in the end found five different surname spellings within one family!

For several years I faced a brick wall trying to find the ancestors of my great x3 grandfather Charles SKYRME (1795-1837). He was a quarry labourer born in Manorbier, which is where he married Jane HOPLOW on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1817.

From Jane's death certificate of 1857 I estimated her birth year to be around 1794. The 1851 census gives her birthplace as St Michaels, Pembroke. But even after extending my search to the wider area I could find no records to identify her. So I gave up the challenge of trying to break this brick wall.



I returned to the challenge in 2021, now wiser about the use of wild card searches and with the advantage of more images of Pembrokeshire baptism records now being online. Using the wild card search Hopl\*, I found a whole family of child baptisms whose parents were Stephen HOPLA and Elizabeth (née COSCAR). The children were:

Thomas HOPLA	1787-1838	James HOPLAR	1800-?
John HOPLAR	1789-1840	George HOPLAR	1801-1864
James HOPLY	1791-?	William HOPLAR	1803-1895
Mary HOPLER	1797-1798		

All Stephen and Elizabeth's children were baptised in St Michael's Church Pembroke with the exception of eldest son Thomas who was baptised in Hodgeston. It's true that I haven't found a baptism record for Jane, but since her mother seemed to have children every 1-3 years, Jane's omission would mean a gap of six years and there are no other Hopl\* records that would fit.

So there we have it – all one family but five different surname spellings. When I checked the distribution in surname atlases I found the following number of occurrences:

Variant	1881	2002
Hoplow	0	0
Hopla	45	106
Hoplar	0	0
Hopler	0	0
Hoply	8	0
Hopley	932	1620

This indicates that the spellings HOPLOW, HOPLER and HOPLAR are aberrations and were written just as they sounded. Even HOPLA is a fairly rare surname. Where the children named above are found in census and newspaper records, the spelling is always HOPLA.

Like Charles SKYRME, George HOPLA worked in a quarry. There are several limestone quarries in the area. Youngest son William HOPLA was a shoemaker working in Pembroke's East End (in St Michael's parish). In 1873 he was fined £2 "for being drunk and abusive, and refusing to leave the Red, White and Blue public house when requested to do so".

Having broken this brick wall it was then quite easy to trace both of Jane's parents back a few more generations. For example, the marriage record between Jane's parents Stephen and Elizabeth as written says:

"Stephen Hopla of the Parish of Pwllcrohan and Elizabeth Coscar of the Parish of Mouncton in the Town and County of Pembroke were Married by Banns in the Parish Church of St Nicholas Moncton this 30 Day of November 1786 by me - Thos Woods, Curate". The witnesses were Joseph PRICE and Thomas GWYOTHER.

Again, it needed wild card searches to find Elizabeth's parents, since her father was Edward COSKER who married Anne GWYOTHER in 1761 in Lamphey.

I've taken the HOPLA line back via Rhoscrowther to my great x6 grandfather, another Stephen. This is further back than I have taken my SKYRME direct ancestors. Interestingly there is a farm and small settlement a couple of miles south of Pwllcrochan and Rhoscrowther called Hoplass. So it seems that the name HOPLA is of the locative type, i.e. a surname named after a place, or it could, of course, have been the other way round.

I have also found that taking more time investigating collateral lines in my ancestry also helps break brick walls. Thus, a grandson of Charles SKYRME is my great x2 uncle Charles SKYRME (1840-1908). He married Elizabeth HOPLA, who turns out to be the daughter of William HOPLA the shoemaker mentioned above, and therefore a niece of Jane HOPLA (as she should now be named). So perhaps I would have found Jane's ancestors quicker by tracing Elizabeth's line first.

***David J Skyrme (3924)***

***Email: [davidskyrme@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:davidskyrme@yahoo.co.uk)***

***Website: [www.skyrme.info](http://www.skyrme.info)***