

## REFLECTIONS ON A WONDERFUL VISIT TO KENTCHURCH AND DORE ABBEY, 22 June 2013

As I sit typing these notes on a damp autumn morning I am reminded of the time of year by the visit of a Jay merrily searching the ground for walnuts at the top of our garden. The jay is known to like acorns, which it stores for a late winter feed but my neighbour has a very large and tall walnut tree which sheds into our garden and it is the only time of year that we see this beautiful bird!

This leads me to the lovely countryside, villages and hamlets where Kentchurch Court and Dore Abbey are to be found. Not being too familiar with South Herefordshire Jean and myself decided to leave our Yorkshire home the evening before the Skidmore/Scudamore meet. Driving from Yorkshire we could only find last minute accommodation at Days Inn on the M5 near Tewksbury and duly arrived on a late Friday evening, being ready for the relatively short one hour drive to our destination for the day at Kentchurch Court.

This being our first time at such a 'family' gathering we wondered how we would integrate with seasoned members but we soon began to talk with other couples and the friendliness as to our common purpose soon consumed us all. It was good to find that there were at least five couples who, like myself, can trace their beginnings to William Skidmore in 1599 or thereabouts. None of that would have been possible for me without all the hard work that Linda has carried out together with others.

But, to the day, we had a leisurely traffic free drive from Tewkesbury along the M50 to our eventual destination at Kentchurch Court via some winding narrow country lanes. A wrong turn here and there on our approaches to the venue had us wondering whether we would arrive on time as we found sporadic grass growing in the centre of at least one lane. However, the delightful drive up to the hall set the visit off as we arrived in the court-yard to be met by Linda's husband Terry. After introductions I took photographs of the exterior of Kentchurch and then joined with others in the dining/meeting room. Here Linda was greeting those who were expected at the meet.

After tea or coffee and biscuits the more formal proceedings began with Linda explaining the format of the day together with introductions around the table. It was interesting that a young Australian couple, working in London, were interested in an ancestor who had emigrated the family to that country. Their current links with the UK had seemingly disappeared when ancestors had emigrated to Australia!

By 11.00 am the group was marshalled for a short two mile drive to Dore Abbey, in the Herefordshire Golden Valley where, once through the lych-gate, we were met by volunteer guides for the occasion. It was hard to believe that such a wonderful large ancient building was once even a much larger twelfth century Cistercian place of worship and living on the edge of the small village of Abbey Dore. This remarkable building is still a place of worship as the local Church of England Parish Church. The guides gave a very detailed account of the Abbey and its Scudamore connection, paintings and architecture which it is not intended to expound on here.

Returning to Kentchurch Court from Dore Abbey we must all have been ready for lunch as we assembled in the dining/meeting room which had been prepared in our absence to Dore Abbey. As we ate we were able to discuss family matters with our fellow members and once replenished Linda took us in hand to look at our Skidmore heritage before a Group Photograph was taken outside. One member of the group, from the Scudamore branch, produced a professionally printed family tree. It was an excellent record which, I am sure, we would all like to reproduce our trees in a similar way.

The main event of the afternoon followed with the introduction of Jan Scudamore - Kentchurch Court has been the home of the Scudamore family for a thousand years. Jan had kindly agreed to give us a conducted tour and explanation of the many paintings adorning the walls and artefacts. Whilst only the lower split level floor was open to the visit the history of Kentchurch was clearly outlined from the family knowledge of Jan and I think we all had such an enjoyable visit that we left exhausted.

I cannot end this appraisal of a fine day without expressing our thanks to Linda Moffatt for all the time and hard work put in to accomplish such a programme and brilliant day. Even the weather was ordered to perfection. The meal and company were such that we can't wait for another such gathering.

**Brian & Jean Skidmore**