

## **DR. PETER SCUDAMORE, A SURGEON AND APOTHECARY, HANGED AS A PIRATE IN 1722.**

**By Warren Skidmore**

Peter Scudamore is first noticed at the time of his marriage to Elinor Herbert by a licence dated at Bristol on 20 July 1691. He is called there “of Carmarthenshire” and while his wife’s residence is left unstated we know from a chancery suit that she was a daughter of John Herbert, a cordwainer, of Ross-on-Wye in Herefordshire. Thomas Clarke, a gentleman of Bristol, was the bondman for Scudamore.

He was probably born about 1665 but his birth date, his parentage, and where he had his training as a surgeon remains to be found.<sup>1</sup> He did claim in Africa that he was a descendant of the celebrated Owain Glyndwr, which suggests a kinship with an earlier Peter Scudamore (a son of James Skydmore of Kentchurch and his wife Margaret, daughter of Gruffyd ap Nicholas of Newton in Carmarthenshire) as a probable ancestor.<sup>2</sup>

His wife’s family took the young couple immediately to Ross. Her father John Herbert had acquired by leasehold a house and shop near Wilton’s Gate at Ross, which he enlarged and converted to an inn. He died in 1681 and Peter Scudamore arranged for a lease from Jane Herbert, his mother-in-law, of the family premises for 21 years at £3 per annum. He fitted up the shop for what he called “his trade” as a surgeon and apothecary and settled his family there by 1 May 1699 when his lease began. The widow Herbert died in 1701 and Scudamore found himself soon after in difficulties with two of his brothers-in-law. He filed a suit and became an orator in chancery in 1703 with his complaint, to which the brothers responded.<sup>3</sup> The court’s decision is unknown, but he may have won since the Scudamores remained at Ross as their christenings and burials in the parish register testify. Peter and his wife had children:

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<sup>1</sup>He is said to have been aged 35 at his death in 1722 but this is clearly an error.

<sup>2</sup>The elder Peter Skydmore was born about 1450. He was appointed during pleasure as Escheator in both Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire by Prince Arthur on 30 September 1490. He married Joan \_\_\_\_\_ (who survived him) and died at Presteign in Radnorshire in June 1509. He had sons Thomas, his heir, and John, and a daughter Isabel who was betrothed at the time of her father’s death to John ap Richard ap Madocke in 1509. See the notes on the family at Presteign in my *Thirty Generations*. It should be pointed out (once again) that the Skydmores in Herefordshire reverted back to the old “frenchified” spelling of their surname when it became popular in the time of the Tudors to have Norman ancestry.

<sup>3</sup>These particulars are taken from the *Chancery Proceedings*, C5/311/61, at the National Archives. A complete copy of this suit made by the late John Hunt will be found in my British notes, pages 4189-97, on FHL microfilm reel no. 1162461.

- i. Peter, baptized 6 November 1692. He may have ventured overseas as did his father. It seems likely (considering the rarity of his given name and the exact match of dates) that he is the Peter Scudamore who is listed as “1 male aged 23” in the 1715 census of St. Andrew’s Parish, Barbados.<sup>4</sup>
- ii. Jane, baptized 12 August 1694.
- iii. Lucy, baptized 12 July 1696.
- iv. Antisa, a daughter, baptized 5 June 1698, and buried 18 March 1727/8.
- v. *Rudhale*, baptized 26 May 1702.
- vi. William, baptized 29 May 1705.<sup>5</sup>

What motivated Peter Scudamore to desert his family for the Royal Africa Company is unknown. He became the surgeon on the *Cornwall* of Bristol where Captain Rolls was the Master. He was captured on the *Mercy*, a galley, by the pirate Bartholomew Roberts on the Calabar River in modern Nigeria in October 1721. Captain Roberts, a Welshman, known as “Black Bart,” is said to have captured 400 ships during his lifetime.<sup>6</sup> When Scudamore came on board the *Royal Fortune* he insisted on signing the pirate articles, and then boasted that he was the first surgeon to ever to do so. It was a rule that surgeons taken were excused from signing the articles, and most were then given leave to return home when another ship with a surgeon was taken. They. Scudamore remained, however, and said that he hoped to become “as greatest rogue as any of them.”<sup>7</sup>

Peter Scudamore (and 51 other of Robert’s men) were sentenced to be hanged by a court held by the authority of the Admiralty. He was adjudged guilty, as much perhaps for deserting from the Royal Africa Company’s service as for caring for the wounded or dying pirates.<sup>8</sup> The prisoners were held in Cape Coran Castle, and after being sentenced Scudamore asked for two or three days of respite which he was granted. His bravado seems to have deserted him and he spent the whole time in praying and reading the scriptures. Standing alone at the gallows on 13th April 1722 he asked his executioners to be patient while he sang the first part of the 31st Psalm.

He may very well have been characterized by Stevenson in the words of Long John Silver in his novel *Treasure Island* when Long John says “It was a master surgeon what ampytated me - - out of college and all - - Latin by the bucket, and what not. But he was hanged like a dog and sun dried like the rest at Corso Caste. That was Robert’s men that was.”

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<sup>4</sup>However the will of Joane Jeson dated 16 October 1662 (who asked to be buried in the churchyard of St. Peter’s Al Saints, Barbados) mention her kinsman Richard *Skidmore*. See Joanne McCree Sanders, *Barbados Records, Wills and Administrations* (volume one, 1639-1680).

<sup>5</sup>Peter Scudamore (possibly a grandson, or the Peter returned from Barbados) was buried at Ross on 13 August 1735, and an Elinor Scudamore on 31 March 1742. The distinctive names of *Antisa* and *Rudhall* may be a clue to the names of their Scudamore grandparents.

<sup>6</sup>Stanley Richards, *Black Bart* (Landybie, Carmarthenshire, 1966).

<sup>7</sup>Wayne R. McKinney, M.D., *Saber or Scalpel? These Doctors were Pirates* (Medical Opinion, August 1973) 67.

<sup>8</sup>National Archives, *High Court of Admiralty, Criminal Records*, 99/3 (26 March 1722).