

THE SCUDAMORE STIRRUPS, AND THE FAMILY'S USE OF PERSONAL SEALS DURING THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

by Warren Skidmore

The art of heraldry had its origin in France. By the middle of the 12th century most of the landed families in both France and England had chosen an emblem or device perhaps first used on their shields at the tournaments organized to mimic a battle for aspiring knights.¹ Soon after wax seals, particularly those used by the Crown, became a component part of legal documents that guaranteed their authenticity. Personal seals followed engraved with arbitrary devices that were seldom so distinctive as to identify the owner of the seal. Later this was done by adding a surrounding legend with either the name (or title) of the person to whom it belonged. The shape of seals used by lay persons during this period was generally circular, while the seals of ecclesiastics (or their institutions) were generally oblong and pointed.

The first known use of the Scudamore stirrups on a seal was found on an original charter at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. It belonged to Petri de Escudemor and was used on a charter dated 24 August 1323. My drawing done from a photograph has been widely reproduced.² Decorative uses of the family stirrups can still be seen at a great many ancestral sites pertaining to the Scudamores from the church at Wellow, Somerset (and notably at several places in Herefordshire) which were visited by an American family group in August 2008. This group of Skidmore cousins traveled under the tutelage of Mrs. Velma Skidmore of Manhattan, Kansas, and this piece has been written at her suggestion.

The stirrups, however, were not the first of the shields used by the Scudamores. An early Godfrey “de Escudemore” living in 1148 was said by the herald John Guillim (1565-1621) to have worn a cross patty fitchy as his coat. This was in the time of Henry II according to Guillim, who gave an unspecified Harleian manuscript as his authority. This is apparently the seal found at the British Library on a copy of a charter once at Dore Abbey:

*Walterus de Scudemore dedit quondam terram vocatam foulkes meade Abbatiae de Dore ut pater per cartam datam 14 Regis Stephani cui appendit tale sigillum.*³

¹A entertaining introduction to the many mysteries and terminology in heraldry can be found in *Simple Heraldry Cheerfully Illustrated* by Iain Moncrieffe of that ilk, and Don Pottinger, Edinburg (Nelson, 1978), 50-60.

²Warren Skidmore *The Scudamores of Upton Scudamore, a knightly family in medieval Wiltshire, 1086-1382* (2nd edition, 1989). The second printed edition is now out of print, but a revised and enlarged third edition can be found on the *Scudamore/Skidmore CD* issued in 2006 and still available.

³British Library, *Harleian Manuscript. 4028*, folio 78. There are other manuscripts at the British

The seal appended to this charter is a cross paty fitchy that bears the legend S:WALTERI ESCUDAMORE MILITIS. It is clearly of a much later date than the grant dated 1148 to which it is appended (the fourteenth year of the reign of King Stephen) to Dore Abbey. The seal is perfectly genuine, but belonged to a Sir Walter Scudamore (who was born about 1250 and died in 1318) of Upton Scudamore. Walter's heraldic cross is also found later in the stained glass windows in the church at Upton Scudamore along with the family's familiar stirrups.

Guillim was not the most reliable of the professional heralds of his time. The pedigree where this error was displayed was a part of the genealogical chores that he did for Sir John Scudamore (1542-1623) of Holme Lacy, a Tudor gentleman who was the first of the name to take an interest in his family's history.⁴ After Guillim's account of the family in Wiltshire, Guillim then fraudulently grafted a Thomas Scudamore (and his reputed wife) Clarice de Ewyas of Herefordshire onto the Upton Scudamore family where they most assuredly did not belong.⁵ Clearly Guillim was more anxious to please an important client with an imaginary pedigree than trying to identify a more obscure but correct account of the ancestors of his patron's family in Herefordshire.

Recently Ron Wild has taken a look at the stirrup, which is considered to be medieval technology's greatest achievement which provided a number of real advantages to the horseback rider. Stirrups made it easier to mount a horse when contrasted to earlier methods that involved using a stool or leaping directly onto the animal's back. It also provided a side-to-side stability while mounted making it much easier to strike right or left with a sword without the warrior losing his seat.⁶

The Bayeux tapestry depicts a long tableau of scenes from the Battle of Hastings in 1066 when the Conqueror's army subdued England. His Frenchmen are found fighting on horses using stirrups while Harold's soldiers are shown on foot. The Englishmen may have ridden horses to the battle, but they dismounted then to fight on foot according to Saxon custom. This gave King William's men a huge advantage and they won the day.

We will never know why Peter Escudamor chose to use a stirrup on his seal, but it may very well have been that the stirrup was his inventive choice simply because no one else of his associates had used it.

His grandson, Sir Walter Scudamore, was born a few years previous to 1310. He was of full age before 21 May 1329 and had married by 11 November 1334, since on that day Peter Escudamor gave to his son Walter and Alice, his wife, all of his lands in Warminster and Bishopstrow excepting only those lands there which Peter had already promised to the church of St. Mary's in Upton

Library which appear to have been derived from the original charters of Dore Abbey (*Add. Ms. 5937*, folio 173; *Harl. Ms. 5804*, folios 18, 258-63; and *Cotton Julius C. VII*, folios 252ff). All of these references were looked at several years ago but no other genuine copies of Scudamore seals were found.

⁴John Guillim (1565-1621), the Rouge Croix Pursuivant at Arms, was a native of the city of Hereford. Soon after leaving Oxford University he was made a member of the College of Arms in London, and he later published a popular book called *A display of heraldrie* in 1610.

⁵PRO, *Duchess of Norfolk Deeds*, C.115/Box M18, no. 7514. Another letter from Guillim dated 4 June 1606 to Sir John Scudamore mentions a "Peter de Scudamore who was nominated the first of many witnesses of good note [to a charter] and the seal of the same as your seal" also a confusion.

⁶*History Magazine*, (June/July 2000) 54.

Scudamore to found a chantry there. On 18 February 1350 Walter (now Sir Walter Eskudemore) gave certain of these lands and tenements in Upton Scudamore to Walter de Park. The chief interest of this charter, which also survives in California, is a fine impression of his seal engraved with his shield now differenced with three stirrups. It is small and circular with the shield couchée from the mantled helm surrounded by a panache crest. To the left of the helm is the letter **W** (for Walter himself), and to its right is the letter **A** (for his wife Alice). The circular border reads **S' WALT'IDE SCYDEMOR**.

There are other largely unknown handsome uses of the Scudamore stirrups. One in the church dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin at Clifton Reynes in Buckinghamshire is particularly interesting as it once was thought to offer a clue to the surname of the family of Sir Walter's wife Alice.

When John Hunt and I visited the church several years ago I picked up two copies of an anonymous eight page pamphlet which included some extremely useful genealogical notes about the monuments to the Reynes family in the church. There are elaborately carved effigies there done in Totenhoe stone (now crumbling) of the Sir Thomas Reynes (who died in 1390) and his lady. Certain details suggest it was probably commissioned before his death, probably as early as 1385.⁷ This gentleman was the father-in-law of Katherine Scudamore (who was still alive in 1388) and the tomb was clearly erected by her husband, Sir John Reynes, before Katherine's death and before his later two marriages.⁸

The effigies of Sir Thomas and his wife have been elaborately described. He wears "a pointed bascinet with camail, epaulettes and arm-pieces of plate, a tight jupon of the arms of Reynes, beneath which appears the skirt of the mall haulberk, a richly-studded belt with an elaborate clasp, and cuisses and jams of plate, with sollerets on his feet. On his hands, which are in prayer, are gadded gauntlets. His sword has been broken away. The head rests on the helm and the feet upon a finely sculptured dog wearing a collar bearing the letters **BO**, with a cinquefold flower between them."

The lady "wears a nebuly head-dress, a kirtle, over which is a sideless cote own, cut low at the neck, and decorated with a line of elaborately ornamented buttons extending from the neck to the waist, and a cloak over all fastened by a band with rich clasps. Her head rests upon two pillows and the feet upon on a pair of small dogs."⁹

⁷This Thomas Reynes fought at Crecy in France, and was later a Lieutenant to the Constable of Dover Castle and a Knight of the Shire for Buckingham.

⁸Sir John, who fought at Agincourt, is commemorated by a brass on the floor of the church as a knight in early full-plate armour that bears the date 1428. His brass affords an interesting commentary on the development of plate armor in the time since his father's death. The gorget or standard of plate takes the place of the camail, and the jupon has gone out of use. The breast plate, which appears to be worn over mail is exposed, and the armpits are protected by roundels, and the elbow pieces have fan-shaped terminations. The legs and lower taces have disappeared. Beneath is the inscription: *Hic jacet Johes Reynes Miles qui obiit xxv^o die Marcii anno dn 1 Mill'mo cccc^o xxviii^o Cuius a[n]i[ma]e ppicietur amen*, and the shield of Reynes is at the corner. No monument is found in the church for his first wife Katherine Scudamore, or for his later wives Joan Betby or Alice Hartwell.

⁹Victoria County History, *Buckingham*, IV, 316-23. It does not appear whether this lady was the

Both sides of the tomb are crowned with two cornices of coats of arms for 16 of the known families from whom the Reynes were descended.¹⁰ On the north side, together, are the shields for Broc “a chief with a lion and passat” for the Brook family (from whom Katherine Scudamore was descended) and also the three stirrups for Scudamore. Next to this is a shield with “three crosses fitchy and in chief a demi-lion.” The arrangement of these heraldic shields on the tomb suggested that Alice’s family might have borne these arms which belonged, according to a small modern plaque displayed near the tomb, to a Stokes family of a place which is left unstated. I have since proved to my satisfaction that it belonged to the Stokke family of Rushall in Wiltshire. However the theory about Alice Scudamore’s ancestry was now clearly destroyed as this Stoke family was found to have been themselves early ancestors of the Reynes family, and who had in fact inherited a small estate from them at Rushall.¹¹

However is still quite clear that the Stokes and Scudamores were known to one another, but probably not related, from other evidences as well as the following charter,

I, Walter, son of Richard Bithewood, confirm to Thomas Silvester one messuage of 16 acres and 3 virgates of land in Upton Escudmore, with pertinencies. Witnessed by Reginald Pavely, John le Rouz, John le Turhide, Knts.; and John Bradleigh, Ralph (Rado) le Gros, **Peter Escudmore**, Roger Col[e], Robert Col[e], Thomas de Havenbere, John de Mere, John de Sawhull, John de Babeton, Nicholass de Wilby, **Roger de Stoke**, and John Bikeman. Signed at Upton Escudmore, 19 Edward II (1326). The circular seal shield of Walteri de Bois (a hart’s head caboshed) is still attached.¹²

Lastly it should be noted that about the year 1410 Thomas Jenyns compiled his great Book of Armes in which he arranged the coats of 1595 gentlemen by the subject matter of their designs.

first or second wife of Sir Thomas Reynes.

¹⁰On the south side of the tomb are the shields for the families of PEVEREL; TOLTHORPE of Emberton, Berkshire; SEYTON; MAIDEWLL; DRAYTON of Drayton Northamptonshire; STOKES of Rushall, Wiltshire; SCUDAMORE of Upton Scudamore, Wiltshire; BROC of Northchurch, Hertfordshire. On the north side are found CHAMBERLAIN of Emberton, Berkshire; PAVELLY, TRYINGHAM (first wife of Sir Thomas), MORTEYNE of Masrston Mortaine, Bedfordshire; ARCHES; GREEN (second wife) of Greens-Norton, Northamptonshire; EKENEY, and ZOUCHE of Haringworth, Northamptonshire. John Hunt made rough drawings of the 18 shields with their blazons and tinctures and set them down. They can be found reproduced in a microfilm no. 1598825 9 (pages 5999-6000) from the Family History Library at Salt Lake City. In addition see also the article by Thomas Shepard, *Shields from Clifton Reynes (The Ancestor*, October 1904) XI, 90-96, and other articles found in the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society publications.

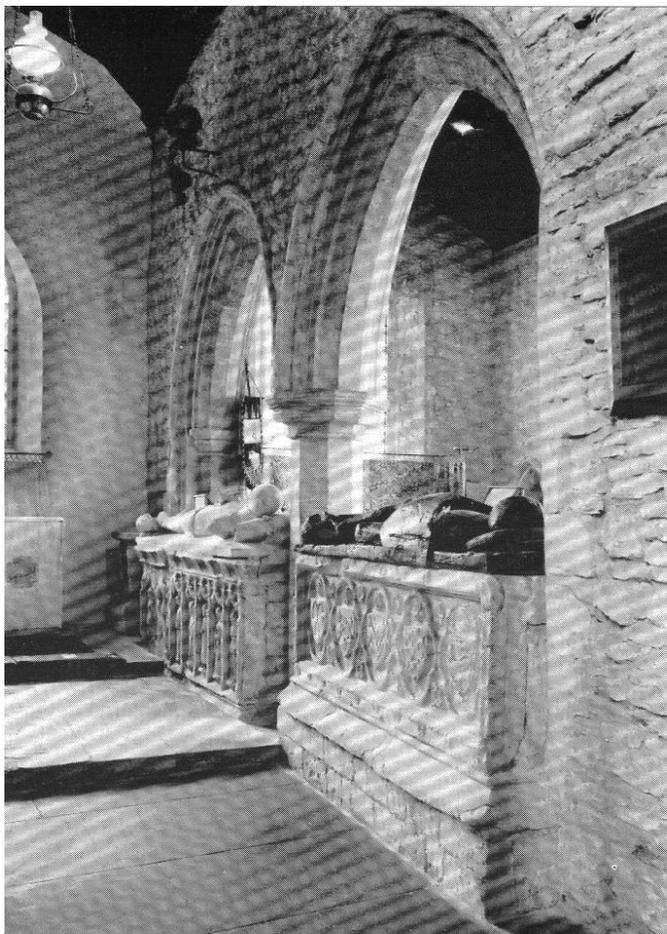
¹¹Victoria County History, *Wiltshire*, X (1975), 138-46.

¹²British Library, Harleian Ms. 6072/44 28 131. I am indebted to George Skidmore of Ilford, Essex who found and copied this charter in 1982. For some further particulars of the Bithewode family see deed number 47 in the appendix to my *Upton Scudamore* where it appears that Walter’s mother in 1334 was Leticia, still the widow of Richard Bithewood.

Number 92, of his 1595 shields, is that of the last Wautier Skydmore who bore “de gours, a trois estepes d’or oue les cuires [with their leathers].”

The only place in the United States where one can find a display of the Scudamore stirrups is at Skidmore College at Saratoga Springs, New York. The college bookstore also has sold from time to time pewter plates, glass tumblers, a large assortment of wearing apparel, jewelry, desk ornaments, stationery supplies, and more, all adorned with the familiar stirrups. The founder (who inherited one fortune and then married another) came from the family once at Westerleigh, Gloucestershire, who may (or may not) be descended from the family anciently at Upton Scudamore.¹³

The arbiter of heraldic taste at the college is vested in the editor of Catalog Production. I once had some friendly correspondence (as a poor relation of the founder) with this office suggesting that a drawing of a medieval stirrup, and without a crest and mantling, would be both more appropriate and more attractive. These changes would have required board approval, and the status quo has prevailed.



The Table Tombs in the Reynes Chapel

¹³The bookstore publishes a catalog of their wares of principal interest to the alumni. I treasure and still use a serviceable brass key-ring I bought on a visit to the shop many years ago.