THE SKYDMORES OF CHETTISCOMBE, DEVON

by Warren Skidmore

The Scudamores, lords of Upton Scudamore in Wiltshire, owed their early allegiance in Devon to the patronage of the Courtenay family (Earls of Devon) in Devon and Somerset. It went firstly to Sir Hugh de Courtenay (1250-1292) of Okehampton, who married Eleanor le Despenser, and then to his son of the same name (ca. 1276-1349). The title of Earl of Devon (of the Courtenay creation) was revived for the young Hugh 1335. He was destined to become a great soldier in the Hundred Years War in service to Edward III, and was one of an elite group of knights selected to protect the King’s body. He was, at the personal invitation of the King himself, made the twelfth founding knight of the Order of the Garter in 1348 at Windsor Castle. After a distinguished career he was buried the following year at Exeter Cathedral. The Skydmores in Devon, a few in reduced circumstances, continued to enjoy the patronage of the Courtenays for several generations.

Sir Walter (I) de Skydemore (died 1318), of Upton Skydemore, was the son and heir of Sir Peter (II) Skydemore (died 1293), lord of Upton Scudamore. This Sir Walter de Kydemor (bearing arms Gu. 3 stirrups Ar.) and Sir Philip de Courteney were companions together in 1309 at a great tournament held at Dunstable in Bedfordshire. Their names are together on a roll of the arms which shows that they came to the field in the same retinue. These tournaments were an early precursor of the soccer matches of today and survived until late in the reign of Queen Elizabeth to celebrate her “accession day.”

On 8 March 1315 (in the 8th year of the reign of Edward II) Sir Walter is said to have held Chettiscombe and West Chevithorne, near Tiverton, of the King. This was a clerical error however, as the name of the tenant-in-chief of the king was Sir Hugh de Courtenay. In the following year Courtenay inquest post mortem correctly reported that at “Chettescoube. Two parts of 1 knight's fee held by Walter Skydemor which the said heirs ought to hold of the said Hugh and of the said honour,” that is that it was really held in chief by Hugh de Courtenay of his Honour of Plympton. Later it was worth £10 by the year when Edward II gave it on 18 October 1315 (and certain other

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1This paper has been written with the invaluable assistance of Dr. David Skydmore of Glyndwr University in North Wales.
2For an extended lives of Sir Walter and his father Peter see my Upton Scudamore (2nd ed., 1989), 35-9.
3Sir Philip Courtenay of Ilminster, Devon (who bore arms Or. 3 Torteeaux Ar), was the brother of the Earl of Devon. See the article “Roll of Arms, Tournament at Stepney 2 Edward II,” in Collectanea topographica et genealogica, vol. 4 (London, 1837) where the editor C. E. Long assigned them the numbers 196 and 197 on the list. See also the article by A. Tomlinson’s “Retinues at the Dournament at Dunstable, 1309” The English Historical Review, vol. 24 (Jan. 1959), 70-89.
4William Harding, History of Tiverton in the County of Devon, (Book III, 1847)
lands) to his young half-brother Edmund Plantagenet of Woodstock, the Earl of Kent (1301-1330). Sir Walter died in the summer 1318. He was still living on the octave of St. John the Baptist (1st July) when he made his last important land purchase. For £100 he bought from Nicholas Malemayns two messuages, 108 acres of land, six acres of meadow, and pasturage for eight oxen, two bulls, eight cattle, 25 pigs, and 200 sheep, as well as 13s 4d in rent at Warminster and Bishopstrow in Wiltshire. Several additions were made by his son and grandson to their lands there and by 1372 the estate was known later as the manor of Warminster Scudamore. Sir Walter died shortly before 11 September 1318 doubtless at his seat at Upton Scudamore.

His death was not noticed immediately by the exchequer clerks at Westminster for on 8 June 1319 a writ was addressed to Sir Walter Scudamore commanding him to “cause all estreats of the rolls of himself and his associates, as former justices of assizes, of oyer and terminer, and of gaol delivery” to be delivered to them at London. Sir Walter left a last will and testament, presumably written, which unfortunately is lost to us. In 13 Edward II (1319/20) his son and executor John de Scudemore, clerk (priest), was cited by the king’s court for detaining 40 marks (sic) due from his father’s estate to John de Craule. It appears that his brother-in-law John Beaumont paid the debt owed to Craule, but he had not been repaid by John Scudamore. On 17 August 1329 John de Bello Monte [Beaumont] put in his place Richard de la Hays, another clerk, to prosecute of a recognisance for £40 made to him in chancery by John de Escudemour. Beaufort’s claim still went unpaid and 18 April 1331 he renewed it naming John de Anlaghly, clerk, and Henry Bony to prosecute the execution of the same recognisance for £40 “made to him in chancery by John de Escudemor.”

Nothing is known of Margery, the wife of Sir Walter (I) Scudamore, beyond her name. It is mentioned only once in a suit about a tenement at Clewer in Berkshire brought at the Easter term of 1348 by a grandson after her death.

**Children:**

i. Sir (III) Peter (dead 1342), his heir, lord of Upton Scudamore.

ii. Sir John, a clerk, the Prebend of Hayes, in Exeter, Devon, of whom further.

iii. Walter, of Great Somerford, Wiltshire, noticed elsewhere

iv. Ralph (probably). A Ralph Skydemor is found in 1332 at a tithing (left unstated) in

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5Chettiscombe, about two miles northeast of Tiverton, Devon, had been held earlier by Sir Hugh Courtenay who sold it to Sir Thomas de Pine, who had in turn sold it to Edward I.

6*Cal. of Ancient Deeds*, v, 506 (no. 13410). As Sir Walter died soon after, it was done again by Peter, his son and heir, on the morrow of St. Martin’s, 12 Edward II. See also *Upton Scudamore*, Appendix I, no. 27.

7*Parl. Writs*, (1830). There were similar writs to 157 other men trying to collect old debts owed to the Crown. Still another writ went out to him under the date of 5 June 1320 on the same subject.

8*Close Roll*, 1330-3, 302.

9PRO, CP 40/354 mem. 288d.

10For an account of Sir Peter (III), see *Upton Scudamore*, 2nd ed., 50-54.
Tavistock Hundred where he had paid a tax of 12d in a lay subsidy taken there.\textsuperscript{11} Nothing more is known for certain about him, but he probably was the ancestor to the families at Sheepstor and later Bratton Clovelly in Devonshire, noticed hereafter and elsewhere.

v. Alice, who married Sir John Beamont (1270?-1330) of Shirwell, Devon, noticed below.

v. Eleanor, who was the first wife of Sir Henry Percy of Great Chalfield, Wiltshire.\textsuperscript{12} The Percys had one daughter, Beatrice, a minor in 1359, who married firstly John Belet, but left issue by her third husband Robert Beverly. The Beverlys pressed a claim in 1431 for the possession of Great Chalfield against the posterity of Sir Henry Percy’s second wife, Constance.\textsuperscript{13}

vi. Maud (probably) who married about 1314 Sir Edmund de Plescy (1286-1327) of Barnsley, Gloucestershire. On 16 June 1327 Walter de Skydemor, her presumptive father, and Robert Sawoury of Wiltshire, and William Ayet of Hertfordshire, were mainpernors in chancery for Maud, now a widow, who had a license from the new king to marry whom she wanted.\textsuperscript{14} Her son Nicholas de Plescy was born about 1317 now became a ward of the Crown and is noticed later. Maud Plescy also petitioned the king to restore her dower in the manor of Barnsley, Gloucestershire, which her late husband had granted in 1322 (some eight years after their marriage) to Hugh Despenser, the elder.\textsuperscript{15}

Exeter, Devon

Sir John de Skydemor (or Skodemor), a clerk, was an older son of Sir Walter (I) of Upton Scudamore and Chettiscombe. He was instituted as the Prebend of Hayes in the Castle of Exeter on 5 March 1312/13 with Lady Alianora de Courtenay as his Patron.\textsuperscript{16}

Lady Alianora was the daughter of Sir Hugh Le Despenser of Ryhall, Rutland (the Justiciar of England), and his wife Aline, the daughter and sole heir of Phillip Bassett, lord of Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. Alianora married Sir Hugh (I) de Courtenay of Okehampton, Devon who died on 28 February 1292. He left his widow Alianora (who lived on until 1328) in control of a part of his

\textsuperscript{11}It is at the Public Record Office, but has never been printed.
\textsuperscript{12}Bristol & Glouc. Arch. Soc., xxiii, 206.
\textsuperscript{13}VCH, Wilts., VII, 60.
\textsuperscript{14}Patent Roll, 1327-30, 126; Fine Roll, 1327-37, 49.
\textsuperscript{15}Glos. inq. p. m., (Index Library) V, 203, 236. Edmund de Plescy was a son of John de Plescy. His son Nicholas was 14 and more when the inquest was taken on 18 February 1331 at Cirencester.
\textsuperscript{16}The Register of Walter de Stapeldon, Bishop of Exeter AD 1307-1326, G. Bell and Sons, 1892. There is some confusion in the register as Walter de Wereminstor is also listed as instituted on 6 April 1313. This is likely to have been wrongly transcribed and should have been April 1312 when John de Skydemor succeeded Warminster.
estate until their son Hugh (II) de Courtenay (1276?-1340) was of full age.\textsuperscript{17} The young Hugh, noticed earlier, later was made the first Earl of Devon of the Courtenay creation in 1335.\textsuperscript{18}

It is possible that John Skydemor’s office had the favour of presentation by Lady Alianora because her daughter Aveline Courtenay had married Sir John Giffard (\textit{ca.} 1287-1322) about a year earlier in 1311. Giffard was hanged at Gloucester for treason in 1322, and later two of her Skydmore cousins from Upton Scudamore who had been Giffard’s adherents at his rebellion and who narrowly escaped that fate themselves.\textsuperscript{19}

Prebendaries were important as they looked after the income which came from the estates belonging to the Cathedral. The collegiate chapel of the Holy Trinity at Hayes was founded by King Stephen and was sometimes known as the free chapel of \textit{Heis} which had four prebendaries.\textsuperscript{20} It is not known how well John initially undertook his role but the \textit{Magna Britannia} records that “It was reported to Bishop Stapeldon at his visitation in 1321, that the chapel was ruinous, in part roofless, and that it could not used for divine service. It is likely that after this report that John Skydmore, the prebendary, saw it repaired.”

On 16 May 1328 John de Stonford acknowledges that he owed 100s to John de Escudemore to be levied in default of payment on his lands and chattels in Devon.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1339 the register of Bishop Grandison notes that John, the Prebend of Hayes in the castle of Exeter, also had the custody of the parish church at Okehampton which was the principal seat of Courtenay family.

Sir John Skidemor seems to have had an exceedingly long life at Exeter and must have survived until at least the age of 80. At his death Thomas de Courtenay, clerk, the Prebendary of Cutton, was named to succeed him on 13 November 1369. His father, Sir Hugh (III) de Courtenay (1303-1377), the second Earl of Devon, was his patron which suggests both the importance and the income which Skidmore enjoyed during his time at Okehampton.\textsuperscript{22}

It is interesting to see that John de Skydemore, the Prebend, had John Grandison (who had been made the Bishop of Exeter by the patronage of the Earl of Devon) as his superior after 1327, and that the bishop was after 1335 also the lord of Ewyas Harold in Herefordshire. In 1368 Peter Eskydemore, the lord of Upton Scudamore (which belonged to the honour of Ewyas Harold) paid the 25s in rent that he owed to the honor for Upton Scudamore to John de Gruanson, the Bishop of Exeter.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{17} It appears she had some rights of patronage after that as well.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Patent Roll}, 1321-4, 57. On 20 August 1321 Peter and Walter Skydemore had pardons of all their felonies as followers of Sir John Giffard. See also \textit{Upton Scudamore}, 50-1.
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Magna Britannia}, VI (Devonshire), 1822.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Close Roll}, 1327-30, 388. Elsewhere in the same roll (page 567) it is noticed that Stonford was a witness for Beaumont. He was the same John Stonford was also an attorney for the Skidemores at Great Somerford, Wiltshire in 1330 noticed elsewhere.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The register of John de Grandisson, Bishop of Exeter AD 1327-1369}, II.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Hungerford Cartulary}, no. 389.
Shirwell, Devon

Alice, a daughter of Sir Walter (I) Scudamore and his wife Margery, married Sir John Beaumont (1270?-1330), lord of what is now Youlston Park, then a hamlet in Shirwell parish. He was the son of Sir Phillip Beaumont (died 1272) and Ermengarda Punchardon. It may be taken as certain that Alice came out of Upton Scudamore for the inquest post mortem of Sir Peter de Escudamor in 1293 confused her with Alice Bavant. Some part of the 24 jurors then said collectively (but in error) that “Alice de Beaumont, daughter of the said Peter, is his next heir, and is of full age.” Peter’s next heir was in fact his daughter Alice de Bavant and Alice Beaumont was his sister and not his heir.

It is not known how Alice was introduced to the Beaumonts but it may have been by the Courtenays. Her intended husband had held land that had belonged to Hugh de Courtenay. Her husband John Beaumont was a Member of Parliament for Devon in 1325. He purchased the wardship of Nicholas de Plescy, his wife’s nephew, in 1328 from another Devonshire knight, Sir John de Sully, who had it by a grant from the Crown. The John de Eskidemour, who testified to this purchase, was clearly the Prebend of Hayes. He was previously indebted to Plescy’s estate for £40, a debt that his brother-in-law seems to have assumed, and on 17 August 1329 John de Bello Monte [Beaumont] puts in his place Richard de la Hays, clerk, to prosecute of a recognisance for £40 that had been made to him in chancery by John de Escudemour.

Sir John died in 1330. His widow Alice was owed £300 by John de Chudleigh, a sum that was due at Easter term in 1338. When he failed to pay it she promptly obtained a sheriff’s order of imprisonment against him. None of Alice Beaumont’s children seem to have produced offspring. Her daughter Joan married James Chudleigh and died childless devising her estates elsewhere.

Richard Beaumont, a cousin of Alice’s husband, became the ancestor of a Sir Thomas Beaumont (1401-1450) of this Devonshire family, but was born on 21 September 1401 at Yate, Gloucestershire. He became the eventual heir as lord of Frampton Cotterell in Gloucestershire (next to Westerleigh) and Yate, two manors which he inherited from his mother Isabel Willmington.

Sir Thomas married firstly Phillipa, a daughter of Sir John Dynham, and he will be noticed elsewhere at both Westerleigh in Gloucestershire and Dunkerton in Somerset. Sir Thomas Beaumont maintained his estate back at Shirwell in Barnstaple, Devon but died on 17 November 1450 probably at his house in London where he had spent Christmas in 1449.

Youlston Park in Shirwell passed in the time of Henry VII from a Beaumont heiress to the

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25 Wilts. Inq. p. m., 1242-1327, 194.
27 His father, Walter de Skydmor, had been a mainpernor for the Maud de Plescy, the widowed mother of Nicholas de Plescy, in 1327.
28 Close Rolls, 1337-1339, 268. This may have been due as a settlement at the marriage of her daughter Joan.
Chichester family, later Baronets. The Chichester’s splendid house in the park there is now a popular summer resort.

Sheepstor, Devon

Sheepstor is today a small village on the western side of Dartmoor in Roborough Hundred, seven miles southeast of the early market town of Tavistock. Ralph Skydemor, who was taxed 12d at Tavistock, Devon in a lay subsidy assessed in 1332 was one of the more prosperous residents. Proximity suggests that he was ancestor to the Skydmores found soon after at Sheepstor.

Sheepstor had been held much earlier by the Combe family. Herbertus de Combe held lands at Shytelescomb “called of Tavistock” from Wido (Guy) de Breteville of Tavistock. 31 In 27 Henry III (1242/3) Herbert de Combe held it as a half a knight’s fee of the Honour of Plympton. 32 Sir William Pole, the distinguished historian of Devon, set down the lord of Shcitestor in 24 Edward I (1295/6) as John Herbert “of Combe.” An account for the Scudamores at Sheepstor can be derived from the few deeds that survive for them and the Elford pedigree of 1620.

John de Scudamore, was the first of his name at Sheepstor. In 19 Edward III (1345/6) he held half a knight’s fee there from the Courtenay Honour of Plympton “which John Herbert formerly held.” It can be taken that when John Scudamore married the unnamed daughter and heiress of John Herbert he was clearly of sufficient stature himself to have married into what was an old landed family. He was known to the Courtenays, and this probably meant that he must have come out of the Chettiscombe family.

Marriage was not a romantic affair. There would have been a signed contract, now lost of course, and as John Scudamore seems to have been without land he probably brought a sum of money to his bride and her family. The fees of the Courtenay Honour (of which Sheepstor was a part) were responsible for maintaining the castle of Plympton which enjoyed great privileges and extended over a great many parishes. The tenants were formerly bound “to keep a turret of Plympton Castle in repair.”

He was succeeded by William Skydemore doubtless his eldest son. He held Sheepstor on 5 March 1377 according to the inquest post mortem taken after the death of Hugh (II) de Courtenay (1303-1377), the second Earl of Devon. William had died before 1390 and was succeeded by his son John.

John Scudamore, “lord of Sheepstor,” gave a charter on 2 December 1390 granting land at Sheepstone to Richard Middleworry. A year later on 15 December 1391 he confirmed to a certain John Sanders land which John Herbert (undoubtedly Scudamore’s grandfather) had previously granted to Sanders. He was succeeded by his eldest son John.

John Scudamore, the fourth Scudamore lord of Sheepstor, on 10 October 1483 gave a confirmation of land at Sheepstor which Herbert de Combe, who he called “my kinsman and ancestor,” had once granted to Ralph de Veteriponte (Vipont). He died without male issue leaving two daughters as co-heiresses:

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31 Thomas Westcote, *A view of Devonshire in MDCXXX with a pedigree of most of its gentry*, (Exeter, 1845).
32 The Honour of Plympton was then held by Baldwin (III) Reviers (died 1245) whose eventual heir was Hugh (III) de Courtenay (died 1340), Earl of Devon and lord of Okehampton, Devon.
i. Joan, doubtless the senior daughter took Sheepstor to her husband, John Elford. Their son John Elford succeeded to Sheepstor where he died on 6 February 1517 and was ”buried under a faire stone” in the church which has now disappeared.  

ii. Dionysia. She married _______ Cole, by whom she is said to have had a son John Cole of Addiscombe, Devon.

Towards the end of the 15th century (after 1483) and after only four generations Sheepstor went from the Scudamores to the Elford family. In 1620 Walter Elford (1576-1648) of Sheepstor presented his evidences and muniments to the Clarenceux Herald who set down “by which it appeareth that his ancestors married the co-heir of Scudamore near 200 years since, by which marriage they became possessed of the manor of Shittistore, alias Sheepstor, which they possess and enjoy to this day.”

The Elfords thereafter quartered the arms of the Scudamores of Upton Scudamore, but with a difference (Gules, 3 stirrups silver) in the right of their descent from Joan Scudamore. The church of Widecombe-in-the-Moor, Devon also had the arms of Elford impaling the Scudamore stirrups and leathers. The stirrups were sometimes differenced in the arms when descending through female descendants of the Elfords as argent or sable.

Sheepstor continued with the Elfords until the death of Sir William Elford, a Baronet, of Bickham, Devon who died without issue on 30 November 1837. Their house at Longstone in Sheepstor was built by Walter Elford in 1633, and it is said to have been “mutilated” by Georgian alterations. It was a farmhouse by 1850 and later was ruinous and abandoned. Almost nothing remains of it today.

The fate of the younger sons of the several generations of this family at Sheepstor is not known. A son very probably went to Bratton Clovelly, a parish to be noticed elsewhere. In a lay subsidy taken in 1377 of Exeter a Robert Skydemour, who was a leathemaker, paid a tax of 2d.

Later a John Skydemour is noticed in a roll of the Mayor’s Court of Exeter in 10/11 Henry VI (1432) as apprenticed for eight years of John Cole, deceased. If the young Skydemore was apprenticed at about the usual age of 13 years (and then expected to be admitted as a freeman at 21) this would suggest that he was born about 1419. It seems likely that both Cole and Skydmore came

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33 His arms, a bull passant, on a monument erected later are attributed to Bevill in a heraldic manuscript giving the blazons and shield of the family. Elsewhere he is said to have married a Cole, and his son Roger Elford is said to have married a daughter of Adams.

34 Addiscombe may be the Edgecumbe, largely only a farmstead, in Milton Abbot near Tavistock.

35 Charles Worthy, Ashburton and its neighbourhood, 1875. Also see Worthy’s Devonshire Parishes: or the antiquities, heraldry and family history of twenty-eight parishes in the arch-deaconry of Totnes (2 volumes), Exeter, William Pollard (1887), I, 24-54.


37 White’s Devonshire Directory (1850).

38 James Brooke (1803-1868), the first white Rajah of Sarawak, purchased an estate near Sheepstor after a public subscription, and is buried in the churchyard at Sheepstor.


40 Exeter Freeman (Devon and Cornwall Record Society, J. Townsend & Sons, 1973), 47.
Skydemores certainly became incumbents to churches where the Courtenays had the right of presentation. Others probably learned useful and profitable trades and settled in Courtenay manors or elsewhere. Some may have joined the naval tradition for which the Courtenay family was known and from the ports that they held like Plympton. A certain Thomas Skydemore of Plympton Earls was accused, with others, by the “provost and commonality” of an affray in the market there between 1418 and 1424. Still another John Skydemore was assessed at Totnes in 1414 and he may also have been a seafarer.

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41 PRO, C1/2/7 Court of Chancery