

## FROM HOMMEDIEU TO UNDY

by Norman Hidden

One of the problems which confronts family historians, particularly as they go further and further back in time, is an unsuspected and possibly not easily recognisable change in the presentation of the family name. A remarkable case occurs with the Wiltshire family of Hommedieu.

In the 13th and 14th centuries the family were prominent land holders in the area of Little Bedwyn and in that Wiltshire portion of the parish of Hungerford which adjoins it. Feet of fine, inquisitions post mortem and Chancery cases reveal a John Hommedieu born 1241, died 1321. He is called John the elder presumably to distinguish him from a younger John known to be alive in 1322 and 1335. During this period there was also a Robert Hommedieu deceased 1308 and yet another Robert alive in 1322 and 1330. In addition there was a Nicholas Hommedieu who lived during the reigns of Henry III and Edward I.

All of this family were local supporters of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster. Thomas was one of the lords who opposed King Edward II and his involvement in the murder of Edward's favourite, Piers Gaveston, led to his imprisonment and execution in 1322. The Hommedieu family may well have suffered from the repercussions of Thomas's downfall and disgrace for they seem to have virtually died out in Wiltshire or possibly migrated elsewhere in the latter half of the 14th century. Wiltshire inquisitions post mortem in 1370 refer to a John Hommedieu of Charlton and in 1371 another John Hommedieu of Chute.

Since the name is a distinctive one it might be thought that family historians would have little difficulty keeping track of it. This is not so, however, for the very unusualness of the name has given rise to numerous and barely recognisable variants. The name is obviously of Norman French origin and as such it was subjected to more than usual vagaries of pronunciation and, consequently, of spelling. A change to Hommeden occurs in some later transcriptions from an earlier manuscript. This arose no doubt from the similarity in manuscript of the letters u and n, so that the surname appears with increasing frequency in medieval records as Hommeden. The forms Hummeden (c.1280) and Ummeden (*temp.* Edward I) seem to preserve some slight flavour of the original Norman French pronunciation, at least as far as the first syllable is concerned. Another change occurs when the double mm is abbreviated to a single m, giving the name as Homeden. This change is most likely the result of a mark of contraction (m for mm) having been omitted in the manuscript or overlooked in transcription from it.

An unusual variant of the name, Dommoden (*i.e.* d'Ommeden) found in the printed version of the *Rotuli Parliamentorum* of 1321/2, suggests that a place-name derived from the surname may now have also arisen. In a Chancery suit (at a date between 1472 and 1475) John Kirkby, who had married Ann, daughter of William Homadeux, who was the son of Morris Homadeux, presented his claim to a messuage and land in Bedwyn called Homadeux. Deeds relating to property in the parish of Hungerford, in those days partly in Wiltshire and partly in Berkshire, mention land "called Omisdewes" (1458). In 1557 a Chancery suit was begun by John Curr of 'Homedewe, Co. Wilts' concerning messuages and farmland in Charnham Street, Homedewe, and Hungerford. The Public Record Office where the documents relating to this suit are stored has a note in its calendar which suggests that Homedewe (in Wiltshire) may perhaps be Helme (in Berkshire)!

Hommedieu ancestors were connected with this particular piece of land in the early 14th century. Certain unlikely name changes which have occurred since then are well illustrated by reference to this property. By 1565 Homedewe has become written as Undewes; in 1598 it appears as Hundwes and in 1707 it was bequeathed as Undyes farm. The Tithe Award of 1848 lists Undy's Farm and an adjoining Undy's Mead. Undy's Farm may be found on contemporary Ordnance Survey maps, grid reference SU 691 336. This is a welcome correction to the very early Ordnance Survey maps (1817-24) which named it erroneously as Huntly's Farm!

Did the change from Hommedieu to Undy occur not only in the place-name but also in the family name? On the surface the gradual transition of Hommedieu to Undy may seem as though it had been a process slowly taking place over seven centuries. In fact the transition had already been completed in at least one instance by 1543. In *The Third Remembrance Book of Southampton*, vol.1, edited by A.L. Merson, there is a note on page 45 which refers to a Stephen Omedeux, "sometimes," says the editor, "written and no doubt pronounced Undey". This Stephen Omedeux held many civic offices in Southampton, including that of Sheriff in 1544/5. Mr Merson's accurate speculation as to the pronunciation of his name derives from his observation that the lease of a house Stephen Omedeux held in 1543 contained on its dorse a lawyer's note describing the document as 'Mr Undey's indenture for his house'.

This lucky circumstance enables us not only to put *Q.E.D.* to the derivation of the name Undy but also to suggest that if a Hommedieu migration from Wiltshire occurred in the 15th century Southampton might be an area worth investigation.

Although neither Hommedieu nor Undy are common surnames and one can find relatively few instances of their use in Britain today nevertheless they provide an instructive example of how greatly an unusual surname may change through the centuries. This is particularly true for pro-parish register surnames which may seem to have no connection at first sight with their modern descendants. In such circumstances study of the changes in place-names, where the place-name and the surname derive one from the other, may be particularly useful.

'UDEN/IDEN transforming to W(X)DFIELD also appears to be capable of being documented.