

Introduction to Researching Scottish Family History (Chris Paton) 15 SEP 2012

Scottish research resources are often very different to those of the rest of the United Kingdom. Despite the Act of Union of 1707, Scotland retained its own legal and education systems, as well as its own state church, theologically constructed along entirely different lines to that of the Anglican Church established elsewhere in the British Isles. As a result there are major differences in civil registration, church records, land records, and many other types found elsewhere in the UK.

Civil registration:

This commenced in England and Wales in July 1837, but not in Scotland until January 1855. For the background to how the process was established visit www.gla.ac.uk/departments/scottishwayofbirthanddeath. However, Scottish records are considerably more detailed, and have been made available online via the ScotlandsPeople website at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk, but with closure periods. Full birth records over 100 years old can be viewed, marriages over 75 years and deaths over 50 years. More recent records are indexed online, but must be ordered up as official extracts.

- All records list both parents' names for the person born or died, or the couple being married, and included mothers' maiden names.
- All records in 1855, the 'golden year', are considerably more detailed for that year only
- Birth records list date and place of marriage of parents
- Death records from 1855-1860 list place of burial
- Indexes to births & marriages from 1855-1875 are included on FamilySearch.

Subsequent changes to entries were entered in the **Register of Corrected Entries**, also available online, and which follows the standard online closure periods for access.

Decennial Censuses:

- The only site offering images to the censuses from 1841-1911 is ScotlandsPeople. Unlike England, Wales and Ireland, original household schedules for 1911 have not survived.
- Transcripts for 1841-1901 are available on FindmyPast (www.findmypast.co.uk), Ancestry (www.ancestry.co.uk) and FreeCEN (www.freecen.org.uk), the latter for 1841 and 1851 only.
- The census actually commenced in 1801, and some earlier listings are available prior to 1841 in kirk session records and other sources – see Kirsty Wilkinson's guide at http://myainfolk.com/Resources_files/Scottish_Population_Listings_Pre1841.pdf.

Parish records pre-1855:

The Church of Scotland (the 'Kirk') was reformed in 1560. Some of its parish records go back to 1513, but most start in the 17th century.

- Church of Scotland old parish records (OPRs) are indexed on FamilySearch up to 1854 (though there are a few missing entries), and images are available on ScotlandsPeople.
- OPRs are poorer than English equivalents, less standardised (no 1812 Rose's Act, for example), and detail within varies dramatically from parish to parish.
- Burial records particularly poor for most places – no formal requirement to keep them.

Roman Catholic parish records (CPRs) are digitised and on ScotlandsPeople:

- Births and baptisms 1703-1992
- Banns & marriages 1736-1934
- Death & burials 1742-1909
- Other events 1742-1909

The records include material from the **Bishopric of the Forces Collection** sourced from Aldershot, England. These contain services records for all of the armed forces, not just for Scotland, and from bases all around the world.

Wills and Testaments:

The Scottish probate process is called **confirmation**, and unlike England, Wales and Ireland has always been a civil process from the early 16th century. The confirmation process was handled by commissary courts until the 1820s, and local sheriff courts since then. All confirmed documents up to 1901 are available on ScotlandsPeople.

- If a person died testate (with a will), the confirmation document is called a **testament testamentar** (the equivalent of an English 'grant of probate').
- If a person died intestate (without a will), the confirmation document is called a **testament dativ** (the equivalent of an English 'letter of administration').
- Unlike, England and Wales, land could not be bequeathed in a will until 1868.

Coats of Arms:

There is absolutely no such thing as a 'family coat of arms'. A coat of arms (technically known as an 'achievement') belongs to one individual or corporation only. If you use someone else's coat of arms, you are breaking the law in Scotland, and they take it seriously – you can be prosecuted in the Court of the Lord Lyon (www.lyon-court.com), essentially for theft, with arms treated as heritable property.

The **Public Register of all Arms and Bearings** has been digitised from 1672-1908 and made available online at ScotlandsPeople – though payment is separate to the

main records, with each record costing £10 to download. Records prior to 1805 have little genealogical information.

Where people lived:

Some key resources online to provide contemporary context to an environment:

- The Statistical Accounts of Scotland **<http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/sas/sas.asp?action=public&passback=>**
- Samuel Lewis Topographical Dictionary of Scotland from 1846 **www.british-history.ac.uk**
- Frances Groome's Ordnance Gazetteer (1892-1896) **www.electricscotland.com**
- Over 44,000 Scottish maps are freely available for consultation on the National Library of Scotland website at **<http://maps.nls.uk>**.
- The Royal Commission for the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland website at **www.rcahms.gov.uk** has a useful database resource on properties called Canmore, as well as an impressive aerial photographic collection.
- ScotlandsPlaces website at **www.scotlandspplaces.gov.uk** contains many other additional records, such as farm horse and clock tax records, medical officer of health reports and more. Some records now require a subscription.

Newspapers:

- The pay per view British Library 19th century newspaper collection at **<http://newspapers1.bl.uk/blcs/>** is a pay per view resource which contains the *Caledonian Mercury*, *Glasgow Herald* and *Aberdeen Journal*. A more complete version of the database is available by academic subscription and includes *Dundee Courier* also.
- The above database is now incorporated also into the new British Newspaper Archive at **www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**, and contains many more Scottish titles. A ten year digitisation project.
- The *Scotsman* Archive is online at **<http://archive.scotsman.com>** from 1817-1950.
- The *Glasgow Herald* is freely available online at Google's News archive at **<http://news.google.co.uk/newspapers>** from 1806-1990, and also the *Evening Times* from Glasgow for 1914-1990 (with gaps). A few other minor Scottish titles with limited coverage are also available.
- The *Edinburgh Gazette*, the official paper of state, is online at **www.edinburgh-gazette.co.uk** (alongside the London and Belfast editions)
- A useful page on the National Library of Scotland website lists all known online indexes to newspapers collated across the country – see **www.nls.uk/collections/newspapers/indexes/index.cfm**.

Some gateway sites:

Scottish Archive Network (SCAN)	www.scan.org.uk
ScotlandsPlaces	www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk
Scottish Cultural Resources Network	www.scran.ac.uk
Am Baile / The Village	www.ambaile.org.uk
GENUKI	www.genuki.org.uk
Scotland's Family	www.scotlandsfamily.com

Useful archive catalogues:

The National Archives	www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
National Records of Scotland	www.nas.gov.uk/onlinecatalogue
Scottish Archive Network	www.scan.org.uk/catalogue
National Register of Archives for Scotland	www.nas.gov.uk/onlineregister
The National Archives (Kew)	www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Societies:

SAFHS	www.safhs.org.uk
Comainn eachdraidh	www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/gaidhlig/buidhnean/eachdraidh
Scottish Genealogy Society	www.scotsgenealogy.com

Finally, some books I have written, and courses on which I tutor, which may help:

Books:

- *Researching Scottish Family History* (Family History Partnership, 2010)
www.familyhistorypartnership.co.uk/prod141.htm
- *Discover Scottish Church Records* (Unlock the Past, 2011)
www.gould.com.au/Discover-Scottish-Church-Records-p/utp0281.htm
- *Discover Scottish Land Records* (Unlock the Past, 2012)
www.gould.com.au/Discover-Scottish-Land-Records-p/utp0283.htm
- *Tracing Your Family History on the Internet* (Pen and Sword, 2011)
www.pen-and-sword.co.uk/Tracing-Your-Family-History-on-the-Internet/p/2974/

Courses:

- Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd (www.pharostutors.com) 5 week courses:
Scottish Research Online and *Scotland 1750-1850: Beyond the OPRs*
- University of Strathclyde *Genealogical Studies Postgraduate Programme*
www.strath.ac.uk/genealogy/

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www.ScotlandsGreatestStory.co.uk

Scotland's Greatest Story family history research

www.BritishGENES.blogspot.com

British GENES (Genealogy News and EventS)