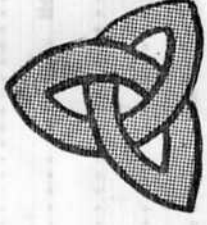


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highland family
history society



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JOURNAL

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COMMITTEE

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One of the most important services a society such as ours can perform is the exchange of information and ideas. To some extent, this can be achieved through our regular meetings, but members are not always able to attend, and this may not always be the best way to raise a research problem, volunteer information, or make a suggestion.

We therefore attach particular importance to the setting up of a lively and stimulating Journal, which we hope will become the vehicle for such exchanges. The first issue is now in your hands - somewhat later than we had planned, but we hope that the finished product is at least a step in the right direction.

In another sense, subsequent issues are in your hands, also. For the Journal can only live up to your expectations if you let us know what those expectations are, and help us to meet them.

Contributions are not only welcome - they are essential if the Journal is to fulfill its role. These may be academic in style; or not, as the case may be. If you don't feel up to a full-length, fully-referenced paper, we still want to hear about your ancestors and your ancestor-hunting. The format is unimportant, but try to mention the source of any information given.

Particular research problems - from members only - will be published in the queries section. Try to keep them as clear, concise and specific as possible.

Otherwise, please feel free to write with your ideas, comments and criticisms. It's your Journal - and it's in your hands.

Standing room only!

The inaugural meeting of the society, which took place on September 21st in Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, was attended by an estimated 120 people - precipitating an acute accommodation crisis, but warming the hearts of an anxious steering committee.

They felt that the available seating capacity for about 60 would have been more than adequate, but in the event it was a case of 'standing room only'.

Commenting that he was greatly encouraged by the strength of the response, the chairman of the steering committee Mr Duncan Ross, opened the meeting by introducing the other members of the committee, and the speaker for the evening, Mr Donald Whyte, chairman of the Scottish Genealogy Society.

Mr Ross went on to outline the role of family history societies in general, pointing out that successful local groups had been established elsewhere in Scotland. He stressed their function was to encourage and assist members in their research, rather than to act as research agencies, and he described a number of ways in which a Highland FHS could fulfill this role in the North. (See p. 4).

After answering one or two questions from the floor, Mr Ross formally moved that the society be established. This was seconded and approved without dissent. It was agreed that the steering committee become the interim committee of the society to manage its affairs until an AGM in March 1982, when proper elections could take place. They would also prepare a draft constitution for presentation to the AGM, copies of which would be circulated to members in advance, along with a notice calling the meeting.

The committee were also given powers to co-opt additional members and, after an appeal for volunteers, two people came forward at the close of the meeting (Mr Gradon and Mr Stewart). A scale of membership fees was also approved.

Mr Whyte then delivered an interesting and wide-ranging talk, illustrated with slides, on "Sources for Scottish Genealogy and Family History". He dealt comprehensively with the whole gamut of sources, from those in the home such as Bibles, letters, telegrams and photographs, to official records, including civil registration, parish registers, and census returns. Monumental inscriptions were also dealt with, as were newspaper files, testaments, sasines, and a wealth of other sources too numerous to list individually. Mr Whyte also touched on the problem of decyphering early handwriting.

The chairman thanked Mr Whyte for his talk, and also for the part he played in drawing the steering committee together, and in helping to establish the society.

Many of the sources mentioned by Mr Whyte are dealt with in his booklet "Introducing Scottish Genealogical Research". Now in a third edition, this booklet is an invaluable beginner's guide, and a useful aid to the more experienced researcher.

Mr Whyte has kindly donated a number of copies for sale in aid of the society's funds. These are available from the Secretary, price £1.20, including postage.

What's it all about?

Just for the record, the broad aims of the society are as follows:

- To promote the study of genealogy, family history and related subjects in the Highlands of Scotland, by means of:
- 1) Regular meetings during the winter, with speakers on topics of interest. Research problems can often be discussed, but the society itself is not a research agency.
 - 2) Publication of a regular Journal, to keep members informed of developments within the society and the field of genealogy in general; to publish articles of interest; and to publish research enquiries from members.
 - 3) Compiling a register of research being carried out on Highland families, to co-ordinate research and avoid duplication of effort.
 - 4) Maintaining a collection of reference material of particular relevance to genealogical research. Donations of books, manuscripts, family histories, pedigree charts, etc, are sought.
 - 5) Striving to establish an Inverness-based collection of primary source material on microform, to permit the study of Highland records in the Highlands (e.g. parish registers and census returns).
- In addition to these objectives, the society have a number of projects in mind, such as the recording of monumental inscriptions and, in due course, the transcription/indexing of archive material.

In all its activities, the society seeks to co-operate with other organisations sharing similar or related interests.

Society News

VENUES: Inverness is not over-endowed with suitable meeting places, but a number of possibilities were explored. One problem was trying to assess how many members are likely to attend meetings on a regular basis. About 50 fitted comfortably into our last meeting in the reference room of Inverness Public Library. If this is the trend, the Library would seem an appropriate "home" for the society, provided this can be arranged.

MEMBERSHIP: Currently stands at 74. Enquiries have come from all over the country, and abroad. Congratulations to the Secretary on coping with the mountainous correspondence.

LIBRARY: A number of acquisitions have been made for our own collection, including Speyside MIs, courtesy of Donald Whyte. A full list will appear in a subsequent issue of the Journal.

CONTACTS: We have affiliated to the Scottish Genealogy Soc., which entitles us to 2 copies of their Journal for our library, and to borrow books from theirs.

We are also associate members of the Federation of Family History Societies, linking us with over 100 similar groups in the UK and overseas and securing valuable publicity. Their chairman, Colin Chapman mentioned us during his recent lecture tour of Canada, resulting in several enquiries. From the Federation we receive "Family History News & Digest" in the Spring and Autumn, and a "NewsFlash" in the Summer and Winter. A discount on their publications can help to boost our funds. Contact has been made with the other FHSs in Scotland, and we hope to swap publications. An exchange of news also with the Clan Sutherland Society in Scotland - very active in family history research (see p 18).

MICROFORM: We are about to lease from the Genealogical Soc. of Utah, the Mormon's Computer File Index (CFI), now known as the International Genealogical Index (IGI), so far as this relates to Scotland. The information is on microfiche and will be available to members at Inverness Library, by arrangement with Peter Reynolds. The input to the IGI is various, and relates to the Mormon practice of baptising the dead by proxy. Individual committee members are also financing the lease of the IGI for Lancashire & Ireland, so these will be available, too. Other members researching furth of Scotland are invited to follow their example - details from the Secretary.

A new index to the OPRs is being compiled, based on the re-microfilming currently in progress by the Mormons. Covering baptisms & marriages, but not deaths or burials, this will eventually form a comprehensive, county-by-county index to the Old Parish Registers, which the IGI is not. Caithness, Sutherland & Nairn have been completed, but do not seem to be available yet. Progress with this new index will be followed closely.

We've been given approximate prices for some of the Highland OPRs and censuses themselves - about £30 per census; OPRs for Inverness burgh, about £130; OPRs for Inverness county, about £360. We may also have to invest in our own microfilm reader eventually, so suggestions for fund-raising & grant aid would be useful.

CRI DE COEUR: The Secretary pleads for a SAE or international reply coupon/s, if a reply is expected to any correspondence. "We'll never buy any microfilm if we spend all our money on stamps", quoth he.

Readers may be wondering about our front-page logo, which was the brain-child (some might say brain-storm) of our Secretary, David Evans, who found it in a book about the Picts. It was not made clear whether the symbol was thought to have had any particular significance, or was merely an expression of the Celtic art form. However, David reckons, at least half-seriously, that the design could be taken to represent "the interwoven and never-ending strands of family history research."

It certainly has the virtue of being simple, yet eye-catching. But what do you think?

An t-ainm Gàidhlig

You will also have noticed that the society has been given a bilingual title, in English and Gaelic. Our Welsh friends might smile that such a decision is thought to require any explanation at all, but the reasons behind it were two-fold.

Firstly, Gaelic is very much a living language in parts of our area, and shows signs of revival in others. A number of our members are Gaelic speakers. In recognition of this, the least we could do was give the society its Gaelic name.

Secondly, in any study of social history in the Highlands, Gaelic simply cannot be ignored.

In the context of family history, Gaelic was the first language of virtually the whole area, just a few generations ago. A Highland ancestor, unless he hailed from Caithness or the town of Inverness, was almost bound to have been bilingual, or a monoglot Gaelic speaker.

BOOKSHELF

Scottish Roots, by Alwyn James. MacDonald Publishers, Edgefield Road, Midlothian EH20 9SY. Price £6.50 hardback, £3.95 paperback.

How does a Welshman, married to an Irish girl, come to write a book about tracing Scottish ancestors? Answer - he begins by searching for one of his wife's Scots forebears by the name of HALBIRNIE, and within hours contracts "That appalling and increasingly common disease of ancestor-hunting ... for which there is no known cure".

His book does much to spread the contagion, and the introduction sums up neatly the fascination of genealogy for many people - "The magnetism of the puzzle, the thrill of the chase, the challenge of the unknown, and the very real sense of exploring territory which has not been surveyed and measured, logged and plotted by all and sundry." Searching for one's forebears, he says, used to be the preserve of those whose families had done great or dastardly deeds, had signed treaties or led armies. Today, there was an intrinsic interest in roots for their own sake, no matter how lowly or unsung the people involved.

The book advises that "genealogy begins at home", and offers the usual advice on chatting to elderly relatives as soon as possible, and locating family documents, photograph albums etc. As a journalist, he even gives some tips on interviewing technique! From here, he moves to New Register House and takes the reader through the procedures for consulting civil registration certificates, the indexes to them, the census returns, and the old parish registers.

Whether your ancestor could speak only Gaelic, or English, or both, is something the Highland Family Historian should know - and this information can be found in the censuses for 1881 and 1891.

At least some knowledge of the language can also be an asset to the researcher when coping with Highland place-names and their phoneticisation or translation into English. Many a crofting township has vanished as a name on the map, but a clue to its location can sometimes be found from the Gaelic name of a nearby hill or burn.

An understanding of Gaelic personal names is also useful, since confusion could arise when a Gaelic-speaking population had their births and baptisms recorded in English.

"Ruairidh", for example, might be translated as "Rory" by the census enumerator, and "Roderick" by the registrar. Similarly, "Morag" might be recorded as "Sarah" by one, and "Marion" by the other.

In some parts of the Highlands, a man called "Eoghan" could come into the world as "Ewen", and leave it as "Hugh".

(An excellent work on Scots names, their Gaelic equivalents, and the way in which they have come in and out of fashion, is "Scottish Christian Names", by Leslie Alan Dunkling. Cassell Ltd, 1978).

Gaelic patronymics, of course, are genealogies in themselves, and merit attention in a separate article.

To his regret, the Editor's grasp of Gaelic is a superficial one, but it is hoped that future issues will contain articles pertaining to Gaelic, or written in Gaelic if contributors can be found.

He includes useful photographs of the documents themselves, to give the uninitiated some idea of what to expect. In fact, the whole book is written with the beginner in mind and, as Mr James himself approached the subject from this angle, he is perhaps better placed to advise the novice than the professional genealogist. Certainly, he takes nothing for granted and assumes that the reader has never seen the inside of a record repository before.

As a guide to what the beginner can expect to achieve in a week at New Register House, he follows the fortunes of two "guinea-pig" researchers, who try with varying degrees of success to trace the names BRYDON and LEITCH.

The author's style is light and humorous, while at the same time presenting the necessary information in a concise and uncluttered fashion. This makes it an easy book to read, and less intimidating for the inexperienced, would-be family historian than some of the "heavier" publications available.

This has led to criticism that the book lacks depth and scholarship. It must be said that the chapter on the Scottish Record Office is so inadequate as to be hardly worth including - dismissing testaments in a paragraph, and sasines in a sentence.

Yet, Mr James did not set out to write a scholarly text-book, more a layman's guide, and in this he has succeeded well. The book also contains chapters on library sources, museums, recording results, and carrying out research "from a distance".

Historic Inverness, by A. Gerald Pollitt. The Melven Press, 176 High Street, Perth. Price £7.95.

This new "history" of Inverness is more of an historical scrapbook than a chronological narrative - an anthology of interesting snippets, rather than a systematic account of the town's past.

This means the book tends to lack cohesion, but on the other hand it is that much easier to "dip into".

Mr Pollitt is a Lancastrian who has spent many years in Inverness, and served on its Town Council from 1954-75. He is still active in public affairs, and his kilted figure is a familiar sight around the town.

In his preface, he makes no claims to literary merit or historical interpretation, but presents the book as "An accumulation of knowledge acquired through extensive and pleasurable reading over many years, and now marshalled into some sort of order ..."

The order he chooses in a thematic one, with chapters on buildings, streets, the locality and its customs, trade and industry. A chapter on names and institutions deals with one or two well-known local names, such as RAILLIE of DOCHFUR, FORBES of CULLODEN, CUTHBERT, INGLIS, GORDON and GRANT. Early town charters are listed in an appendix.

A number of street name derivations are given, but it is a pity more was not made of John Hume's plan of Inverness (1774) and Wood's map of Inverness (1822). They are so small as to be virtually unreadable.

The book is well referenced and indexed, and includes a useful bibliography.

One advantage of the Journal's delayed publication is that it enables the Editor and the rest of the Committee to wish all our members a very happy Christmas, and a good New Year.

The Festive Season is often a time for families to get together, and for visits to elderly or more distant relatives. So don't forget to take your notebook! If Auntie Ina shows signs of wanting to talk about the "old days", pour her another sherry and start asking some searching questions!

Another way to "warm up" your subject is to start going through old family photographs, in which case lightly pencil in the names on the back of each picture, before you forget who's who.

Remember - what you want from Auntie Ina are NAMES, DATES and PLACES.

THANKS

My sincere thanks are due to the following - my fellow committee members for their hard work and support; Mr Donald Whyte, Scottish Genealogy Society, for his help, guidance and generosity; Miss Jean Cowper, Aberdeen FHS, for her friendly and encouraging advice; Mr Richard Higginbottom and the staff at the Museum & Art Gallery, for coping so well at the inaugural stampede; and all of you for confirming my belief that there would be sufficient interest and support to launch a Family History Society in the Highlands.

Duncan Ross

Local Library Sources

Inverness reference librarian and HFHS committee member, Mr Peter Reynolds, was the speaker at our second meeting, which was held in the reference room at the Farraline Park library on November 30th.

He began by pointing out that the Highland library service does not hold any census returns, OPRs or registration certificates, and therefore it was not possible to trace a family tree from library sources. They could, however, guide members in their research and provide background historical information. The main types of material were:

Manuals, or "How to do it" books.

Printed genealogies - a lucky break if you can link in to one of these, but beware of inaccuracies.

Bibliographies and source books.

Background genealogical information - a vast and confusing field requiring some "lateral thinking".

Background historical information - helping to turn names and dates into flesh and blood people, and putting them in their historical context.

Mr Reynolds also touched upon some of the sources to be found "next door" in the regional archive - valuation rolls, sasines, and parish minute books, for example - but we hope to have a detailed talk about this material next year from the archivist himself, Mr Alan Lawson.

For reasons of space and security, most of the reference library's stock - including the vast Fraser-Mackintosh collection - was not kept on the open shelves.

