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A Good New Year to all our members - I hope that for you individually, and the Society corporately, it is a very happy and successful one, despite all that we are told George Orwell "predicted" for 1984.

In fact, our biggest problem so far this year has not been Big Brother, so much as Bad Weather - at least in this part of the world. Not that there is anything new or surprising about that, of course; although we, the public, continue to register mild astonishment each time the onslaught arrives.

This New Year brought severe flooding in its wake, soon followed by the familiar winter hazards of gales, blizzards, power cuts, blocked roads and stranded motorists - a broad canvas of chaos which, in truth, is the worst we have had to suffer since 1978. But you only have to look through the newspaper files to realise how lucky we are, compared with those who knew nothing of snowblowers and Seaking helicopters.

For family and social historians, of course, the files of local newspapers, in particular, have a significance far beyond a comparative study of weather conditions.

Apart from the obvious genealogical value of the "Hatched, Matched and Dispatched" notices, obituaries, etc., I don't believe any other source can so powerfully evoke a "feeling" for the period. These fusty, yellowed pages chronicle the minutiae of local history, from court cases and council meetings to the talk of the parish pump. The various tragedies which befell some citizens are described under such solemn headlines as "Most Melancholy Occurrence - Grievous Loss of Life". I could spend hour upon hour hunched over those tightly-packed columns of tiny type, soaking up the atmosphere and hoping for a chance reference to "one of my lot". Isn't it ironic that, while nothing is so useless as yesterday's news (unless to wrap your fish supper), few things are so fascinating as the news of 50 or 100 years ago?

This fascination is one reason why I would make a hopeless indexer of newspaper files. Happily, a less easily side-tracked team of workers are currently indexing some of our Inverness newspapers, and this should make the researcher's task less haphazard.

In the future, increasing use will be made of TV and radio archives, I suppose; but for a permanent, detailed and easily-accessible record of local affairs, surely nothing will surpass the newspaper? Speaking as a newspaper-man, I hope not.

# Beyond the O.P.R.s

## A GUIDE TO SOURCE MATERIAL IN THE SCOTTISH RECORD OFFICE

The following lecture was given to the Society in October by Mrs Rosemary Bigwood, Chairman of the Association of Scottish Genealogists and Record Agents.

A friend of mine was once dealing with a difficult genealogical case in which the initial information was rather sparse, and desperate to elicit any details which might provide a clue as to where the family had some ancestral roots, she said to the man who wanted his family history researched: "Tell me anything - anything at all - that you know about your ancestors." The man thought deeply and then said: "Well, I know that my grandfather used a out-throat razor."

This, of course, did not help very much in tracing where his grandfather lived, when he was born or who his parents were, but to the family historian such details are an important contribution to the picture - more or less complete as sources, chance and human endeavour allow - of not only the previous generations of the family, their vital ancestral statistics of names and dates, but of their whole way of life - where they lived, what they did, and their fates and fortunes. Such is the ideal of the family historian. You do not need to be told that it is not usually possible to achieve in full, but the small glimpses of the past that may be gained are rich reward for the time and energy spent on attaining them.

To build up that first skeleton - or perhaps it would be more tactful to call it "bone structure" of the family history, you will consult the "modern" post 1854 registers of births, deaths and marriages, census schedules and the Old Parochial Registers. In the course of this research most of you, with a little luck on your side, will be able to trace your family back into the second half of the 18th century - perhaps earlier - and the material consulted will have provided names of children, occupations, causes of death, places of residence. Many people, in fact, once they have exhausted these documents will call it a day - but this evening I want to talk about some of the other sources which can be used both to lengthen the family tree and to widen the knowledge of their social surroundings and daily lives.

Genealogy is rather like gardening. You have the well-dug and manured top soil, easy to till and productive (weather permitting). The top soil of genealogy is made up of the compulsory, indexed entries of births deaths and marriages, and Census schedules. Next in gardening you may come to some rather less amenable soil which, when dug up and mixed with the top soil, will do well - this is the equivalent of the Old Parochial Registers which, imperfect though they are, are very useful when backed by Census and modern registration. But the layer below in a garden, the real sub-soil, may be poor stuff indeed, needing to be dug with much labour and then cultivated and enriched with care. However, as time passes and something is got out of this land, one feels well rewarded - and it is this genealogical soil about which I want to talk tonight.

Having got to the point of thinking "What on earth can I do next on my family history the best piece of advice I can give you is to assess who your ancestors were, what they did and where they lived, and then take the easiest things first - the source material that is likely to produce the richest information, or which is the most accessible through being indexed or not too bulky to search.

Testaments come in this category, and are a fascinating source of information. They may provide not only direct genealogical information as to relatives and kin of the deceased but also give intimate details of their way of life and surroundings, with instructions as to the care of young children and their education, hints as to the black sheep who are to be omitted from some of their inheritance, inventories of wardrobes and household contents, down to the old ladies in the kitchen and the beasts on the farms. Incidentally, the wills of maiden aunts are particularly valuable to consult, as such ladies often leave their all to a bevy of nephews and nieces, thus providing wide-reaching family information. Up to 1823, testaments recorded in the Commissary Courts (the church courts) are all indexed by locality, which makes searching an easy matter. After this date, the responsibilities of these church courts were taken over by the Sheriff Courts, and indexing is not so complete.

In fact, there is for most areas a gap between 1823 and 1846 - and it is amazing how often one finds an ancestor dies within that period! What must, however, be remembered, is that the Commissary Court Registers are only one of the places where wills are to be found. A testament - or, as it may be called, a disposition - was just a document which required legal registration in some form, and therefore it could be recorded by any court competent to do this - by, for example, the Burgh Court, the Sheriff Court, or in the Books of Council and Session (or Register of Deeds, as it is called). Thus, any of you searching for your family history in Inverness, having failed to find a will in the Inverness Commissary Court, could look in the Inverness Burgh Register of Deeds, which is extant back to 1671, or in the Register of Deeds recorded in the Inverness Sheriff Court, which goes back to 1710, or in the daunting array of volumes making up the Books of Council and Session, which stretch back to the 16th century. And while searching these records, you may find much else that is of interest, since Deeds will include marriage contracts, details of business ventures, leases of land, loans of money, apprentice indentures, and so on.

Some people are far too humble about their antecedents and will say: "Oh, my ancestors were poor people; I'm sure that they never owned land, or would have had a will" ... but you will be surprised. A cottar or labourer may well have a testament recorded - perhaps a small asset, such as an old horse. In the same way, an enormous range of people were involved in ownership of land - coalminers, ploughmen, grocers, masons and small farmers. Land was used as a security for loans, and often you will find someone of modest means lending a small amount of money to a landowner (men who often seem, as a class, to have temporary financial embarrassments) and being infert in land as a security until the loan was repaid. This temporary ownership of land was recorded like any other property deal, in a register of sasines, and from these sasines one can gain an enormous amount of information - names of children inheriting property from a relative, occupations and places of residence.

As with deeds, there are various levels of recording - burgh sasines (in Inverness, these go back to 1602), sasines for the sheriffdom, and the General Register of Sasines covering the whole country. Genealogy is a bit like playing Monopoly: you never quite know whether you will pick up a Chance card which will send you to jail, or tell you to pass go and collect £200. For the genealogist, it is just luck whether your family lived in an area and time of history when the registers were indexed. After 1781, sasines for all the sheriffdoms were indexed by person and place, and are an easily consulted and invaluable source of information; before that time, the indexes are very patchy, though I hasten to add that Inverness-shire is privileged in this respect, with indexes for the sasines for the sheriffdom, and also for the Burgh Register after 1636.

In past centuries, the Church was one of the most vital and influential forces in the lives of the people. It was responsible for the keeping of the Old Parish Registers, and it was instrumental in the recording of testaments in the Commissary Courts - but for the family historian, some of the most interesting church records may be the minutes of the Kirk Sessions, which have been termed "the greatest untapped source of information about social conditions in Scotland since the 16th century". They were the records not just of the wealthy and land-owning classes, but of the whole community; concerned with the welfare of the poor, providing for the destitute and orphans. Many "poor" lists have survived, though the details are usually too bare to be very informative. On the other hand, the function of the Church and Kirk Session as the keeper of moral discipline within the parish had far-reaching implications in social life. You may come across your ancestors involved in profaning the sabbath by hairdressing, digging for sand eels, fighting in church, wetting the kail, or playing bogli round the stacks; or censured for sleeping in time of sermons. The Kirk Session of Monifieth took rather extreme action to discourage sleepers, by providing the Church Officer with "ane pynt of tar to put upon the women that hold plaids about their heads". One writer described the methods of the Kirk Session by saying that "they were not content with scratching the surface of scandals". This has, in fact, resulted in a unique record of the lives of our ancestors, and the proceedings of the Kirk Session often give an account as vivid and detailed as the most sensational of our modern newspapers.

One must remember that in the 16th, 17th and even 18th centuries, windows were often only covered by wooden shutters which had to be left open to let in light and air, and every wooden door seemed likely to have a little hole in it through which the curious or the prosecutors of godliness might peep. Your ancestors, however, I must reassure you, did not need to be offenders to appear before the Kirk Session, since witnesses were also called to give evidence, thus involving both the guilty and innocent alike. Some time ago, I was faced with the problem of tracing the birth of a certain Robert Condie, about 1680, in the parish of Cloackmannan. It was known that he had later married a Mary Wilson. Only one family of Condies was recording the baptisms of their children in the parish in the 1690s. A child named Bessie was born to them, but no Robert, though there was one tantalising entry where the parents' names were inserted and the child's name was left blank. The question was, whether this blank entry referred to the baptism of Robert. It seemed quite likely that it did, but proof was needed. On turning to the Kirk Session records for this parish, which I located still kept in the parish of Cloackmannan, it appeared that Bessie Condie, whose birth entry had been found, had had an affair with a married man, David Hunter. For several years, Bessie was repeatedly summoned to appear before the Kirk Session, and all her family were involved in giving evidence - among them, her brother Robert and his wife Mary Wilson - both of whom disapproved strongly of the disrepute into which Bessie was bringing the family. And so I obtained my proof as to the parentage of Robert Condie. Incidentally, another genealogical bonus of these particular records was that the age was given for every witness cited. Other gleanings from church records may be lists of communicants and other parish lists, testimonials of incomers to the parish, pew-rents and details of ownership of graves which may in themselves provide mini-genealogies.

Presbytery records tend to be of less direct value to the family historian, but can fill in certain details of cases which had been referred to the Presbytery from the Kirk Session. Sometimes, however, they may be of direct value. Last week, I was working on a case trying to find out about a Scottish minister who had emigrated about 1853 with his wife and family. Why had he emigrated? Where had he lived? What was there to know about him and his family? Not a very promising proposition. After much scratching around, I discovered that he was a minister not in the Established Church of Scotland, but in the United Presbyterian Church, and from a printed book giving some biographical notes on ministers in this church, I got a hint that there were some unusual circumstances at the time of his leaving his charge. Turning then to the minutes of the Presbytery, I found no less than 57 closely written pages devoted to the case concerning this minister. He had been accused of fathering the child of his servant, and was said to have acknowledged in writing that he was guilty - but it appeared that the girl's brother was probably blackmailing the minister and, in fact, though the minister did emigrate, he was acquitted of the charge of adultery.

Before leaving the subject of Presbytery records, I should add that they are of great interest in providing general information on conditions in the area, and anyone interested in studying diseases current in previous centuries should note all the ailments cited by ministers as their reasons for not attending the presbytery meetings. When these excuses did not suffice, there was always the weather - though when Mr Robert Irving in Strathgogie explained his absence by a tempest of rain, this was disallowed "by reason the rain was warm".

As a genealogist, one comes to the sad conclusion that virtue does not pay. It may seem unfair that so many sober, industrious and virtuous ancestors have gone to their graves unlauded and unrecorded, except perhaps in the inscriptions on their head-stones - while ancestors who were either disputatious persons or law-breakers may provide a marvellous fund of documentation for future family historians. One good hunting ground for such unruly ancestors in early times is in the Records of the Privy Council, which are published and indexed for the years 1545 - 1690. An enormous number of people of all classes appear in these pages, accused of murder, riot, theft, or attending conventicles.

Court of Session papers covering legal disputes may also provide invaluable information on families. I was once lucky enough to stumble across (and I say stumble advisedly, since the Court of Session papers are enough to daunt all but the bravest, though there are some indexes) an 18th century case concerning a disputed will, which provided much interesting family information.

On the one hand, the widow, wishing to set aside the provisions of a will, gave a description of her husband in his dotage, unable to look after himself and requiring the full-time services of a nurse, needing even to be fed. On the other hand, the man's son, who stood to gain by the will, stated that his father was in full possession of his faculties and walked to church every Sunday up to the time he died.

The Australians have recently discovered that there is more interest than disgrace in being descended from a convict, and any case which can be located in the Justiciary Courts provides a wealth of exact detail and local colour. All the evidence given by witnesses and the accused is retained, and relates to every aspect of the crime, the arrest and other circumstances. The only trouble, genealogically, is that one cannot rely on the original telling the truth about his circumstances, or parentage, or age! Justiciary records also provide fascinating evidence of former ages, from the forays of feuding families (particularly applicable to the Border Lands) to the trials of witches, arsonists, rapists and robbers. The problem is not to be sidetracked by one's curiosity. Recently, I was looking for the report on a trial of someone who was transported about 1850, and saw a note of a prosecution of a man "had up" for speeding, and it took much self-control not to rush off to get the case and find out who had been accused of speeding in what in 1850.

The lesser courts of Baron, Baillie, Regality, Burgh and Sheriff, record a wide variety of cases and business, and name an enormous number of people concerned as plaintiffs defendants, witnesses or members of an assize, in their various concerns with the perpetual wranglings over the up-keep of the mill lade, casting down of feal dykes, prosecutions for murderous attack, theft, service of heirs, and dissension between parishes over who is responsible for the support of widows and children. These cases are particularly rich in genealogical information when they can be located.

It must also be remembered that the work of the courts, the Burgh and Sheriff Courts in particular, was very wide in its remit, and apart from judicial matters, carried many administrative functions. Burgh records may include treasurer's accounts, election poll books, apprenticeship records and burgess rolls (both of which often name the fathers of those admitted), records of various craft guilds and licences for chimney sweeps, pawn-brokers and ale-house keepers. Sheriff Court papers contain madhouse licences, gamekeepers' certificates and police pay bills - to mention a random selection.

Among your own Burgh records, here in Inverness, I noted a fascinating menu of licences, apprentice indentures, town council minutes going back to 1619, criminal processes burgh sasines dating to 1602, jury trials, records of education in the Royal Academy, and an intriguing set of minutes, 1719-61, "of the Trustees for administering the parliamentary grant of 2d. Soots on a pint of ale for defraying town debts and expenses of Church and harbour".

As a student, I used to find it infuriating when lecturers announced that they would lecture on this theme or that, but of course the examination would be on a totally different topic. I am now going to follow the precedent of my lecturers at St. Andrews and give you some examples of the sort of information one can glean from local records - but not those of Inverness, or whichever area may be of particular interest to each one of you. That I shall leave you to explore for yourselves.

I lived for a number of years in Campbelltown, in Kintyre, and became very interested in its history and people. In some ways, it is a difficult area for research since a rather strife-torn early history has resulted in the survival of few records. Sheriff Court records are scanty and even the Register of Deeds only exists in the form of bundles of filthy warrants - the originals, which would have been later copied into a formal register which appears to have been lost. The Particular Register of Sasines is indexed, but no Burgh records have been deposited in the Scottish Record Office and the Kirk Session minutes only seem to go back to 1821 there. One is therefore reduced to a mining operation in an attempt to document further the burgh and its inhabitants.

There are, first of all, various useful printed volumes on the area and it is always worth looking in local libraries for collections of local books and papers which may be of great use to the family historian. For the Campbelltown area there are judicial records of Argyll, Synod records, Lists of Fencible men in 1692, lists of rebels in 1685, and notes of claims made by local householders for depredations inflicted on them by the ravages of the Highland Host in 1685, which include boats and fishing tackle, women's clothing, cattle and household implements.

