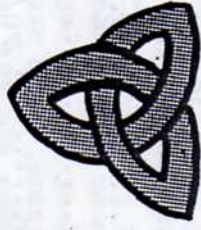


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Jings ! Crivens ! What a stushie ! And it all started with a silly stamp. It was bad enough, you see, the Post Office refusing to mark next year's centenary of the Crofters Act by issuing one of those fancy stamps the collectors go for. Many people in the North were quite huffed about it, and told them so. But then they added insult to injury by explaining that the subject matter was far too controversial. They had consulted no less an authority than the Histrographer Royal in Scotland, and he told them the Act had been a big mistake.

You may have thought the Act was generally accepted as a milestone in the crofters' long struggle for security of tenure, marking the beginning of the end of the Clearances period, and laying out the framework of the crofting system as we have it today. But you would be wrong. H.M. Histrographer, Professor Gordon Donaldson, told the PO that while the 1886 Act was well-intentioned, and "did liberate tenants from the arbitrary power of their landlords", some of its consequences had been "disastrous". Security of tenure meant crofts could pass by inheritance, assignation or bequest. "The result was that crofts fell into the hands of people who had no interest in them, people who lived far away, people who constituted 'absentee tenants' who have made more mischief than ever absentee landlords did." Now, there's an unusual perspective.

"Even a resident tenant was under no obligation to engage in agriculture. Landlords had no power to remove a tenant from a croft he was neglecting and replace him by a tenant who would work it." The crofters were so rich and well-fed, of course, that they could afford to be lazy, unlike their hard-working proprietors. The Prof. also makes the sweeping assertion that the Act "did nothing" to keep people on the land. With the greatest respect, this is all the height of nonsense. There is a germ of truth in what he says about absentee tenants, but to suggest this petty problem out-weighted the major benefits of the Act is stretching the point too far.

His comments were greeted in the North with a mixture of ridicule, contempt and indignation. But whether you agree with him or not, does this little "stushie" not go to show how near the surface of contemporary Highland life remain the social and political arguments of the Clearances period and its aftermath ? Perhaps this is because, even after 100 years, the issues involved have still not been fully resolved, and are still being approached from the same social and political standpoints.

Looking Them up - Inch by Inch

There is a vast amount of information in printed records that too many people tend to overlook. That was the proposition put to the February meeting by our speaker, Mr Gordon D. Richardson. We all tended to gravitate towards New Register House, record offices, etc, and original records had to be consulted ultimately. But we would waste a lot of time if we did not consult what was at first hand.

In this context, printed records meant anything published in multiple form, including microfilm and microfiche. Printed sources were much easier to read and browse through than manuscript sources; copies were available in more than one place; they were usually indexed; and they often contained references to other sources as well.

This saved a great deal of effort, particularly in the pre-1855 period before compulsory registration. The Old Parochial Registers were restricted to one parish (and it was essential to know which one); they were not always accurate or complete; and in general they did not include Episcopalian, Roman Catholic or other non-Established Church records.

The population of Scotland in 1851 totalled 2,890,000; in 1801 it was 1,600,000; and in 1755 it was only 1,260,000. Thus, any printed list of names covering this earlier period was bound to include a much higher proportion of the population than the same number would at the present day. The proportion increases the further back you go, and statistically the chances of you finding the people or information you seek are improved.

Even the humblest will appear in print, especially if they got themselves into trouble. So do not despair of finding published references to your crofter ancestor. The Lairds and gentry got into print more readily, perhaps, but the connection between them and "ordinary folk" was greater in Scotland than in most other countries. Their younger sons or grandsons could easily have been apprenticed to a merchant or a tradesman, and their daughters and grand-daughters could have married a Tacksman.

Mr Richardson illustrated his point by describing the printed sources he used to collect information about JOHN INCHES a surgeon in the Royal Navy, whose tombstone he found in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales. According to the tombstone, he died on February 3 1842, aged 55, and left a wife and children. Subsequent enquiries revealed he was aged 57 at the time of his death on December 2 1841.

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Friends went to the local library and looked up the index to b.d. & m. notices from the Sydney Morning Herald 1831-42, and the Hunter Valley Register for b.d.m.s 1843-84. (Effective newspaper indexes are rare in the UK, the only one of real value being that to the "Times").

The search had some surprising results, and showed there were various other Inches in the same district. At this stage he made a note of all possible relatives to John Inches, for linking into a common ancestry later on.

The Navy List revealed that John Inches was commissioned as a surgeon in August 1805; there was also a Thomas Inches in the Royal Marines and a Charles Inches M.D., who became a Navy surgeon in 1821.

There was no mention of the name in the bibliographies, Scottish Family History (Stuart, 1930), and Scottish Family Histories held in Scottish Libraries (Ferguson, 1960).

Black's Surnames of Scotland and published clan histories indicated the Inches of Perthshire were a sept of the Robertsons, or the name could be linked with the Robertsons of Inches, near Inverness.

Local histories of Perthshire were tried next, and in Chronicles of the Atholl and Tullibardine Families (1908) there was reference to a letter of 1818, from Helen Inches in "Dalbeath, near Dunkeld" to the Duke of Atholl. She was writing out of "anxiety for a Favorite Son, who was Bred a Surgeon & cost much money Bringing him forward in his education, But is Just Now out of a Situation." This turns out to be a reference to Charles Inches, who was a first cousin once removed to John.

Besides Dunkeld and Dalbeathie, Monumental Inscriptions of North Perthshire reveal more Inches in Coupar Angus, Meigle, Blairgowrie and Caputh. Starting from nothing, a "nest of Inches" has been flushed out and we know in which parishes to start searching the OPRs.

But before that, it is worth giving serendipity some wider scope in the library, with a look through some general indexes covering the whole of Scotland.

Official publications include the decennial indexes to the Services of Heirs from 1700 onwards, and these referred to two more Inches. There are also indexes (HMSO, 1966-7) to the Registers of Sasines, for the sheriffdoms of Inverness, Ross & Cromarty, and Sutherland from 1606-8, and 1617-1780.

The Scottish Record Society have also published a tremendous range of documents, indexes, guides to sources and other forms of information.

Among them are Commissariat records, and in the Register of Testaments for St Andrews was found a Jean Inches, relict of George Cargill in Littlebog, 1782. Edinburgh, as the capital city and seat of the Court of Sessions, attracted people from all over the country for various seasons, and many Highland families drifted down to Glasgow from as early as the 17th century. Their records should not be overlooked. More Inches were found in the Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Edinburgh Marriages, both published by the SRS.

Another was found in Pastoralee Scoticanae, a detailed register of Ministers of the Church of Scotland since the Reformation. There is also a Pastoralee for the Free Church of Scotland. University Rolls, lists of matriculants or graduates published by the four "old" universities, are also worth a look. Finally, a check through The Scottish Genealogist revealed a fellow-seeker in Canada, who was able to pass on more useful information.

So, from an inaccurate tombstone 12,000 miles away, a mass of data has been compiled without looking at a single, pre-1855 manuscript source.

But what of the Robertson of Inches connection? There was a family tradition that Arthur Robertson of Inches had a second son John, who went south after the '45 and took the surname of Inches. But the dates show Arthur was only a boy of 10 at the time of the rebellion, and there is evidence of a Jon Inches in Caputh in 1694, so all the Inches could not have originated in the way alleged. Further research was carried out on the Robertsons of Inches, using older editions of Burke's Landed Gentry and Sir Robert Douglas of Glenbervie's The Barons of Scotland (1798), along with local histories among the Fraser-Mackintosh Collection at Inverness library. The result was a provisional, 27-generation summary of the family - but still no connection. If there is truth in the tradition, it must have happened before 1745, or perhaps it was pure invention.

Other printed sources worth considering are the Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness; Antiquarian Notes and Queries: Rolls of Apprentices; The Acts of the Parliament of Scotland (in 10 volumes); and the Registers of the Privy Seal (1488-1584), the Great Seal (1306-1660), and the Privy Council (1545-1691), all of them indexed volume by volume, and all of them extraordinary sources of information.

Faltering in Finlayson

Footsteps

by Angela Finlayson

More and more often these days, overseas enquirers with a Finlayson grandparent or great-grandparent from Caithness ask me (a Finlayson from there, by birth and marriage) if we have any record of their earlier forebears. Sometimes, happily this is easy, thanks to our good fortune in having inherited a 'tree' compiled in the 19th century, tracing our branch and several others to a marriage in Orlrig parish in 1745 between Peter Finlayson and Janet Sinclair.

Spare-time digging among the Old Parochial Registers in New Register House has also made it possible to move back (fairly confidently, because of grandparental naming patterns) to an earlier marriage in Orlrig between Donald Finlayson and Elspeth Sinclair in 1707. (They seem to have had something on their minds other than politics in both those momentous years).

In the course of digging, I have also noted all other births and marriages of Finlaysons and Mackinlays (all spellings of both names, including Peter as Fynlayson, which I almost missed when more recently checking against the microfiche index) in the Caithness OPR. Although, given the varying starting dates for surviving records in different parishes and the many gaps, there seems no sure way of linking any of the other names with our tree, these have occasionally enabled me to help other enquirers. A footnote shows the distribution of both names over the years, suggesting that some Mackinlays changed their name to Finlayson or emigrated earlier.*

The Finlaysons in our tree were, in the early 1700s, moving mainly between collective farmtowns in Orlrig, Bower and Dunnet, and later becoming small tenant farmers in the same parishes, but other Finlaysons and Mackinlays were spread throughout other parishes, and some in Thurso, where records go back furthest, were fishers and sailors. Names of witnesses at Christenings suggest some enduring networks of friendship and intermarriage with neighbouring families. (I wonder if anyone knows whether there was some kind of standard selection pattern for witnesses - women only begin to appear in the later years).

* Mackinley = MacFhionmlaigh = Son of Finlay. Ed.

