

highland family history society



ISSN 0262-6659

comunn
sloinntearachd
na
Gaidhealtachd

Published by
The Highland Family History Society
Comunn Sloinntearachd na Gaidhealtach

JOURNAL

Vol. 18 No. 4

August 2000

CONTENTS

1
2
7
10
11
14
16
17
20
20
23
24
26

Editorial
 You Always Check Your Sources, Don't You?
 Gone, but not Forgotten
 Pre-Clearance Mobility in Sutherland
 A Highlander in Rutland
 HFHS Projects - Current Status
 Some News from New Register House
 And There's More!
 Renewing your Membership
 An Honest Woman, but Only Just
 E-mail Addresses (an update)
 Members' Research Interests
 Queries (930-934)

© 2000: Highland F.H.S. & contributors

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- CHAIRMAN** Neil Murray
SECRETARY Angus Bethune
TREASURER John Durham
JOURNAL EDITOR Jonathan McCoil
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY John Durham
SYLLABUS SECRETARY Alison Forbes
RESEARCH ENQUIRIES Vacant
PUBLICATIONS Vacant
LIBRARIAN Mary Murray
SAFHS REPRESENTATIVE Neil Murray
STRAYS CO-ORDINATOR Alan Ross

All correspondence - c/o Reference Room,
 Public Library, Farraline Park, Inverness IV1 1NH
 Please mark each item for the attention of the appropriate official

SUBSCRIPTION RATES for year 01/09/2000 - 31/08/2001

Membership Category	United Kingdom	Overseas
Ordinary	£8.00	£11.00
Family	£10.00	£13.00
Pensioner	£5.00	£8.00
Institutional	£12.00	£15.00

Editorial

On *Star Trek Voyager* the other night - I have enjoyed the *Star Trek* TV series ever since the first one appeared when I was in my teens - The 24th-Century captain reminded about an ancestress of hers back in the early 2000s who had been involved in the construction of a major building and was on all the Mars exploration visits so had inspired her to join Starfleet herself and become a starship captain. They investigated their computerised records and found that the earlier woman had done none of those things, peripherally involved in the building and had had nothing to do with the Mars at all. Our captain was disappointed and disillusioned with her heroine, until a colleague said something like: "Don't be too hard on her, she may not have known she was supposed to live up to your expectations!" Occasionally, I am inclined to feel that some people who ask me or write publicly about particular ancestors are really only interested in finding ones who hold up a particular image suitable for the family they wish to know or talk about, and would be very disappointed if the wrong ones popped up in their researches. For me, I would like a complete family portrait with warts and all.

If you have attended our lectures in the Central Primary School on Kenneth Street in Inverness, it is to be hoped that the radio mike we are considering buying (or renting) for the use of the speakers will improve your enjoyment of these. Now you won't need to huddle up close at the front to hear properly!

Two of this month's essays warn us to take care when we read something and instantly believe it. I can add another area: the Internet. Through investigations and help from others I had built up a decent tree of a Connecticut collection of my ancestors. On publishing these on the Belden pages of GenForum another researcher objected that I had skipped a generation, as he had family papers giving all the names of one generation, but all flourishing 20-50 years earlier than I had them. Another chap bounced to my defence with the aid of published IGI and Connecticut records but that poor chap has built a family history on incorrect data - unless of course he is right and I am not!

I am driving my co-editor somewhat wild (although he conceals it behind an excellent façade of patience) with my dilatory production of editorials, book reviews and so on but all I can do is to say that my day-job takes up an enormous part of my energy, and what is left is badly eaten into by the demands of offspring who need looking after, baby sitting, taking to films, feeding, rocking to sleep; and anything remaining is there for rebuilding partitions and cupboarding and furniture. If I pick up a computer to write something, I can guarantee another family member will count this as a perfect time to get me to go shopping or demonstrate how to find something on the internet and when was the last time you wrote to your mother?

We need someone to take over this position, and we need him or her in place soon. My office work is not getting lighter - although for next year who can tell? - and the children are growing with son having just arrived in the Academy which is only just becoming aware of what is hitting them, daughter heading for college and grand-daughter thinking about growing teeth and crawling. This job is not onerous: a quarterly editorial, the canvassing for and selection of suitable articles to keep the overall tone you want for the journal to keep the readers satisfied. I look for illustrations of life as it was and is in the Highlands and in the places to which our people exported themselves. Add to this mix suggestions on sources for records and how we can find them or use them and what we want to do with the mix.

John Durham is the larger even if less noisy half of the editorial pair. This issue contains a great deal of his writing but he too has aspects of his life that will stop him and his wife typing out the articles, building each issue and them organising the printing, enveloping and posting the end results. Please be the first to volunteer to take this magazine into the 21st Century!

You Always Check Your Sources, Don't You?

By John Durham

I have been researching my family history for twenty-two years and during that time have come to realise the importance of thoroughly checking genealogical data, even if at first sight it appears to be genuine. Not all information, particularly from secondary sources, and in some cases even primary sources, is as accurate as it should be. Verifying your findings by checking with a second source is a very sensible habit to develop. The following items culled from my own researches will demonstrate how some errors of fact can easily arise.

In the 1891 census for Latheron on page 7 of enumeration district 15 you will find an entry for the farm of Ballachly. The head of household is John Williamson, he is married, aged 85, a farmer and was born in Latheron. In the 1881 census for Wick on page 23 of enumeration district 2, a John Williamson is a visitor at a house in Shore Lane, a horse dealer, aged 72 and born in Edinburgh. Do both these entries refer to the same man and, if so, where was he actually born? The answer to the first question is yes, but you need to look at his entries in the 1851, 1861 or 1871 censuses to confirm that Edinburgh was his place of birth. In the 1891 census the enumerator may have forgotten to note down his place of birth and assumed it was the same parish as for all the other members of the household. Using that census as the only source could have resulted in wasting valuable research time looking for a birth in Latheron.

In census returns places of birth are usually correct, whereas ages are notoriously inaccurate. I suspect that the main reason for these anomalies is that, particularly in the farming areas in Caithness, where most of my ancestors came from in the 19th century, illiteracy was quite common. The inference being that those whose age was correctly recorded could probably read and write. However I have noticed that women in particular were sometimes reluctant to admit their correct ages. The table below shows the actual and recorded ages for three couples covering consecutive census returns found in Caithness and Orkney.

	Born	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
1	George Durran 7 May 1817	Actual age	33	43	53	63
		On census	32	43	50	66
	Janet Custer 3 Mar 1810	Actual age	41	51	61	71
		On census	40	49	56	74
2	James Pottinger 11 Mar 1839	Actual age			32	42
		On census			31	40
	Janet Durran 14 Jul 1834	Actual age	16	26	36	46
		On census	18	28	30	41
3	James Durran 15 May 1838	Actual age	12	22	32	42
		On census	12	22	32	42
	Elizabeth Robertson 20 Oct 1841	Actual age	9	19	29	39
		On census	9	19	29	39

In the first example, in 1871 and 1881 both George and his wife Janet must have been affected by the "Northern Lights", a natural phenomenon visible quite often in Caithness. In the 10 years since 1861 they had both aged by only 7 years, whereas 10 years later George was claiming to have aged 16 years and Janet an amazing 18 years. In the second example it is Janet Durran who is "being economical with the truth". In 1851 and 1861 she is in service and pretending to be 2 years older than she actually was. When she married in Orkney in 1866 her husband was 27 whereas she was 32, but she stated that she was only 28. Just over 4 years later in the 1871 census she was to make matters worse by taking another two years off her age. In subsequent censuses she added back one year each time. She didn't die until 15th March 1914 and I wonder if, by the 1911 census, she was at last admitting to her real age. Like all family history researchers, I will need to wait 11 years to find out the answer to that question. Her son John, who recorded her death, told the Registrar that she was 80 years old which, after 63 years of inaccuracy was nearly correct, being only 4 months out.

In the third example all the ages were correct for both husband and wife, as were the ages for all their children. This I believe was almost certainly due to the fact that James Durran could both read and write. In 1865 he had unfortunately over-extended himself in his shoemaking business to such an extent that he was declared bankrupt and a trustee was appointed to see how much money could be raised from his assets to compensate the creditors. That James was well educated is shown by the following letter which he wrote to this trustee in the mistaken belief that his gold watch should not be included in the assets of his business: -

Lerwick, 19th Sept 1865

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your note of yesterday's date requesting the delivery of my watch and chain this day before noon. In compliance with such, I do not see myself justified in delivering the same as I hold it as personal property until such time as you produce a Sheriff's Warrant and take it off my person before witnesses. Having spoken to you yesterday on the subject, and you as trustee having granted permission to keep the watch &c in my possession until such time as I would have communication with my Law Agent in Edinburgh, I was rather astonished in receiving your note as I thought you would not vary so much from the point in question. But I rather suspected this hurried offering as I heard you were asking advice on the subject last night going over the street from some party not interested.

*I am Dear Sir
Yours truly
James Durham.*

Discerning readers will have noticed that James Durran, who was my great grandfather, is now calling himself James Durham. I believe that he may have thought himself a cut above the rest of his contemporaries and assumed a more impressive sounding surname. Whatever the reason he still gave accurate answers to the ages of each member of his household at census time.

This bankruptcy of my great grandfather was to result in two of his children entering incorrect information on documents that are currently lodged at the National Nautical Museum in Greenwich in London. In 1869 a bill was passed by which debtors were no longer to be sent to prison. Unfortunately as James was declared bankrupt in 1865 he spent 9 months in Fort Charlotte gaol in Lerwick in the Shetland Isles before he was released early on health grounds.

The family soon moved to Edinburgh and then finally settled in Thurso. Prior to the incarceration two sons had been born in Lerwick and both subsequently became master mariners. When they filled in their application forms to sit the examinations for second mate, first mate and then master, they both entered Thurso as their place of birth and not Lerwick. I suspect that the family decided that a veil should be drawn over what happened in Shetland and the name Lerwick should be expunged from memory.

Minor differences in spelling a surname are a fact of life but sometimes a name can be drastically changed. I was in correspondence with a lady about another Durrans, whose branch has not been connected to my main line. He caused major problems for his eldest son by making up a completely new name between marriages, which was not just a simple Durrans to Durham. The eldest child of William Durrans, master draper and Annie Maria Clayfield, he was named William George Angus Durrans when he was born 27th June 1887 in Ebbw Vale in Wales. In 1910 he married and he and his wife had two children, one of whom died aged 5 months, and his wife died a year later in 1914, probably in childbirth. William George then had a liaison with a young girl that resulted in her becoming pregnant. On being informed that two of her brothers were looking for him and, realising it was probably not in order to congratulate him on his achievement, he went into hiding to allow the situation to cool down a bit.

At this point he decided to make it even more difficult for the avenging brothers to trace him by changing his name to Angus McDarren. In 1918 he remarried using this new assumed name and had a further two children, who of course bear the surname McDarren. My correspondent was a descendant of one of these children and, having decided to research her family history, turned up at the library in Thurso asking if they had any information about the name McDarren. Not surprisingly this request was greeted with surprise and probably some hilarity, but fortunately one of the staff suggested that perhaps she should try the name Durrans. As a result she was given my name as a contact and I was able to help confirm that her grandfather Angus McDarren was in fact William George Angus Durrans.

The sole surviving child from his first marriage was a son called Peter Ronald St Clare Durrans. At Cardiff on 14th March 1936, five months before he was to marry, he changed his name by Deed Poll making the following declaration before Joseph Lewis, a Commissioner of Oaths: -

I, Ronald Sinclair McDarren of Number 68 Hewell Street, Grange town in the City of Cardiff, Able Seaman, solemnly and sincerely declare as follows: -

I. I was born on the 13th day of November 1911 at 73 Gordon Road, Blackwood in the County of Monmouth. The certificate now produced and shewn to me marked "B" is the certified copy of the entry of my birth in the Register of Births for the District of Bedwelly, sub-district of Rock Bedwelly in the said County. I was registered in the names of "Peter Ronald St Clare Durrans" but when I first went to school in Cardiff I was called and known as "Ronald Sinclair McDarren" have been known by that name ever since and I propose and desire to be known in the future only by such last mentioned name.

2. The said Birth Certificate; Seaman's Discharge Book Number R. 39299 and the Examination Certificate Number M. 2034 and dated 4th February 1936 of the Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem (Priory for Wales) refer to me and to no other person.

AND I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the provisions of the Statutory Declarations Act 1835. R S McDarren

The next example concerns what most of us would consider as being a primary source of genealogical information, the Old Parish Records or OPR. I was reminded of a problem I had with the OPR for Dunnet while I was writing the article on the Manson branch of my family tree that appeared in the previous journal. I had accidentally found this branch on Mormon site called Familysearch on the Internet. In the article I printed a family group sheet for Sinclair Manson & Ann Durrans whose children were born up to 1848 and noticed that the dates of birth for the last two were wrong. In 1843 the Disruption within the Established Church of Scotland resulted in the formation of the Free Church. As Sinclair and Ann joined the Free Church it was no longer possible to record the baptism of their children in the OPR.

Ann's brother John Durrans was also a member of the Free Church so five children born to him and his wife Barbara Tait between 1842 and 1854 were not recorded in the OPR at the time. I have underlined those words as in 1854 the baptisms of four of those children appeared in the OPR along with many others born to families who had joined the Free Church. There are two problems with these lists. Firstly they do not include any children who had died in the interim and secondly they are to be found in family groups so I suspect they were entered in the OPR from lists extracted from the baptismal registers that were kept by the Free Church.

The 1851 census returns show that John and Barbara had a daughter called Helen, aged 1 year. It was to find Helen's baptism that I visited the Scottish Record Office, now the National Archive of Scotland, a few years ago. Fortunately the baptismal register for the Free Church in Dunnet had been deposited there (not all of them are). I obtained the birth and baptism dates for all the children, including the two Manson boys born between 1843 and 1854 and I have listed them along with the corresponding entries found in the OPR. You will notice that the birth date of Jane Durrans is the only one that is correct in the OPR. So if any of you have ancestors who were members of the Free Church at this time you should try to locate the Free Church Register to confirm or otherwise if what is entered in the OPR is correct.

Name	Old Parish Records		Free Church Register	
	Born	Baptised	Born	Baptised
William Manson	-	-	7 Dec 1845	4 Jan 1846
James Manson	-	-	2 Dec 1848	11 Feb 1849
Ann Durrans	19 May 1845	-	17 May 1845	17 Jul 1845
John Durrans	19 Sep 1847	-	21 Sep 1847	21 Nov 1847
Helen Durrans	-	-	17 Dec 1849	24 Mar 1850
Margaret Durrans	17 Apr 1852	-	3 Apr 1852	13 Jun 1852
Jane Groat Durrans	19 May 1854	-	19 May 1854	27 Aug 1854

And now for an example of what can happen when assumptions are made without checking the facts. My research interests of Durrans, Robertson, Tait and Nicolson have been placed on the Caithness Surnames Index on the Internet. Some time ago I received e-mail from a lady in Australia who said her ancestor was a Margaret Robertson born in Greyfriars in Edinburgh in 1795 and who had married a Donald Meiklejohn in Dunnet parish in 1815. As I was researching the name Robertson in Dunnet, was there a connection?

