

**Summary of the Seventy-sixth meeting of the
Scottish Records Advisory Council held in
General Register House, Monday 2nd
October 2000.**

Present: Professor Anne Crowther, Chairman; Dr M Barfoot; Mr A Cameron; Dr David Ditchburn; the Rt Hon the Earl of Dundonald; Mr A Jackson; Professor H MacQueen; Mr J McGonigle; Mr F Rankin; Mr W W Scott; Sheriff D Smith.

In attendance: Mr P Cadell, Keeper of the Records of Scotland; Mr G P MacKenzie; Mr John Randall, Registrar General; Dr A Rosie, Secretary.

1. Apologies: Apologies were received from Dr P Anderson, Mr P Daniels, the Hon. Lord Kingarth and Mrs J Webster.

The council welcomed the new member of the council, Sheriff David Smith, and congratulated Mr George MacKenzie on his recent appointment as Keeper of the National Archives of Scotland. She also thanked the retiring Keeper, Mr Cadell, for his help and advice to the Council and wished him well in his retirement.

2. NAS move to the Executive Secretariat

The Council discussed the proposed move of the NAS and the SRAC from the remit of the Justice Department to the Executive Secretariat. The potential for closer connection with the Commission for Freedom of Information was viewed as a positive move. It was hoped that the link with FoI would mean that the NAS and the state of archives generally would receive more direct attention.

3. Freedom of Information

The council discussed a suggestion that the new FoI Commissioner might also act as Chairman of the SRAC. The Council felt that it could not make firm proposals on this matter until the nature of the Commissioner's brief was made clear. There would be advantages in having a chairman who was a Commissioner with full-time responsibilities and a dedicated secretariat, but the Council was also anxious to ensure that the Chairman should be familiar with Scottish archives, and also that the independence of the SRAC should be maintained. It should continue to represent a wide range of groups with an interest in archives. The relationship between the proposed Bill on Freedom of Information, currently being drafted, and the Council's proposal for legislation on Scottish archives, would be carefully monitored.

4. Report of the Registrar General

The Registrar General drew the Council's attention to three new developments at the GROS:

the pilot telephone ordering of extracts begun in April. The figures for the first five months was over 3000 orders. Because of the high demand, the GROS were reassessing the number of staff to deal with this service.

the launch of the 1891 census digital imaging service

the publication of Jock Tamson's Bairns, a layman's guide to records in the department by Cecil Sinclair launched in July.

Among other developments was the increase in level of business: overall searches are up 8%, extracts by telephone up 12% and orders over the internet up 31%. The GROS are also in the process of microfilming the 1901 census records with a view to their becoming available by January 2002. The preparations for the 2001 census are well under way. The recruitment of field officers had begun, with 22 Census Area Managers already in place and 7000 enumerators shortly to be appointed.

5. Accommodation

The Keeper of the Records updated the meeting on the refurbishment of GRH. There had been further finance forthcoming from the Scottish Executive to continue this project. The business case for Thomas Thomson House Stage 2 would go to the Executive at the end of October. If the project did not go ahead the NAS would have no option but to out-house records.

The arrival of electronic records should make a difference to the amount of records the NAS took in but there would still be a need to cut back on what is kept. Appraisal of records will have to be stricter to reduce the bulk, but co-operation with local archives might make retention easier.

6. Association of Scottish Authority Archivists Working Group (ASLAWG)

The group was working with the Data Protection special interest group SOLAR to develop retention schedules to be applied across local authorities and this was proving a substantial task. The Mapping Report was launched in the Scottish Parliament in June and contacts had been established with more MSPs. The launch prompted one MSP to table a number of questions in Parliament concerning the state of local archives.

7. New Opportunities Fund:

The lottery money from the NOF would be used to digitise a large body of material. It was hoped to digitise runs of material rather than single selected item. Whether this project would go beyond the first stage was unclear. A large number of projects had been submitted and the first stage of the bidding completed. The next stage would take place towards the end of the year. The project would involve all Scottish archives.

The Chairman pointed out that this was her penultimate meeting, and that she had already written to the Justice Department concerning her successor. The post is the responsibility of the First Minister. The Keeper expressed his appreciation of her contribution and the Council endorsed his comments.