

**Minutes of the Seventy-ninth meeting of the
Scottish Records Advisory Council held in
General Register House, Monday 29th April
2002.**

Present: Professor Hector MacQueen, Chairman; Dr Lynn Abrams, Dr Mike Barfoot, Dr Roger Davidson; Dr David Ditchburn; Mr Hamish Hamill; Mr James McGonigle, Mr Frank Rankin; Sheriff David Smith, Ms Vicki Wilkinson.

In attendance: Mr G P Mackenzie, Keeper of the Records of Scotland; Dr Peter Anderson, Deputy Keeper, National Archives of Scotland; Mr John Randall, Registrar General; Dr Alison Rosie, Secretary.

1. Membership: The Chairman welcomed Dr Abrams and Ms Wilkinson to their first meeting. He also thanked Dr Ditchburn, whose last meeting it was, for his contribution to the council over the previous 6 years. The council were shown the new person and role specifications which would henceforward be sent to all new members.

2. Apologies: Apologies were received from Mr Peter Daniels, Ms Marion Stewart and Lord Kingarth.

3. Minutes: The Minutes of the 78th meeting were approved.

4. Matters Arising:

NAS website: It was hoped that the new NAS website manager would be able to make the changes to the SRAC section on the NAS website.

Postgraduate Training: The interim report had been circulated and the working group were grateful for comments received from the SRAC. The group had met with higher education bodies interested in hosting the course. The final report would be made public at the end of May.

Re:source: Progress had come to a halt with the departure of Neville Mackay in February. The appointment of his replacement would provide an opportunity to reintroduce the subject of the role of Re:source in Scotland. The Scottish Executive's concordat with the DCMS had made no mention of Re:source.

5. National Archives of Scotland

The Keeper noted that the NAS' sponsoring department, the Constitutional and Parliamentary Secretariat, had recently been moved to Legal and Parliamentary Services (LPS). This would not affect the day to day running of the NAS. The SRAC remained unaffected and would still report to the First Minister.

a) *Family History Service.*

The GROS, the Lord Lyon and the NAS are in the process of discussing a central service for genealogy. The first stage envisaged was a virtual service over the internet involving

a closer integration of the three bodies. This would be followed by a physical presence on the 'Register House campus'. The final stage would be to replicate this service at a local level involving registrars offices and local archives. The GROS has submitted a bid on behalf of the three departments for finance to undertake the initial planning. Visit Scotland would be represented on the Project Board because of the implications for tourism.

b. Accommodation

The contract for the next phase of the refurbishment of General Register House would begin shortly. The business case for the extension to Thomas Thomson House had been submitted to ministers. To make the project more affordable, ministerial approval for planning and design had been sought with the major expenditure falling in 2008-9. The project would be completed by 2010. There remained the problem of public transport to the South Gyle and how this might affect the proposal to have a public search room there.

West Register House would eventually be returned to the city council. For this reason the NAS was reluctant to fund major maintenance work. Dr Davidson pointed out that, from a users perspective, the seating in the search room at WRH was very poor in terms of physical comfort. Also, the area for computer searching was very restricted, particularly for the left-handed, and was not an incentive to use the search facilities. The Keeper stated that the NAS was looking into new work stations at GRH and it might be possible to extend these to WRH.

c. Staffing

A new webmaster and a new ICT professional had been appointed. Ms Laura Mitchell had replaced Dr Frances Shaw as Head of Government Records Branch.

d. SCAN

The project was on schedule and well within the budget. SCAN had recently digitised its one millionth page from the wills and testaments. It was hoped that the contract expiry date could be pushed into 2003 to allow the project greater flexibility. The SCAN project had sent two representatives to Ellis Island on Tartan Day, along with colleagues from the National Museums of Scotland, where they had launched the prototype wills site: www.scottishdocuments.com

The future development of the SCAN project is currently under discussion. The Heritage Lottery Fund are in favour of extending the coverage of the on-line catalogues. A 12 month post to examine options of how to develop this would be advertised shortly.

The Chairman had taken over as SRAC representative on the SCAN board from former council member Mrs Janice Webster.

e. Readers Survey

The Readers Survey would be distributed as widely as possible in June. As well as questions about individuals and their use of the search rooms, their satisfaction with facilities, the clarity and ease of use of the finding aids, there would be specific questions

about opening hours. A copy of the finalised survey would be sent out to all of the SRAC in due course.

6. Freedom of Information (FoI)

At the beginning of the year it had become clear that the bill was making faster progress than had been anticipated. It made its final passage through parliament on the 24th April and only awaited Royal assent. The bill is available on the parliamentary website (www.scottish.parliament.uk/parl_bus/bills/b36bs1.pdf). The act would not come into force until c. 2005. Delays in the implementation of the UK act may mean that the Scottish act comes into force earlier than the UK one.

All the issues and points that the SRAC had discussed at the last meeting had survived into the new bill. The functions of the SRAC had been extended:

The matters on which the aforesaid council may advise the Scottish ministers include matters relating to the application of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2001 to information contained in records held by the Keeper. (Section 68)

As the Scottish Executive felt it would be inappropriate to hold a conference so close to the passing of the bill, the April conference had been cancelled. A new provisional date had been set for Monday 23rd September. A number of the speakers had yet to confirm their attendance.

7. Public Record Policy

The Keeper circulated a document drawn up by the NAS and colleagues in the Scottish Executive summarising the current position on public records and suggesting the way forward. Donald Dewar had taken a close interest in the proposed archive legislation and the NAS sponsors had now challenged the NAS to present a case for legislation: was it essential, what could be done within the existing framework? Archive legislation was being considered at a UK level but it was desirable that Scotland had its own views to reflect the different constitutional position and different record making and keeping traditions.

Dr Davidson asked if there could be more consultation over disposal policies? The Keeper was happy to have a dialogue with the potential user community but was resistant to giving an outside group a veto. The NAS suffered from pressure on its accommodation and appraisal needed to be more stringent if the archive was to survive the paper avalanche. Until the full effect of the electronic revolution reduced the physical bulk, the NAS had to look at appraisal very closely.

Ms Wilkinson suggested that the slant of the document, which talked of 'record keeping' and 'managing the record', should be altered to reflect the need to create and capture the correct record.

The Council felt that the growing alarm about the consequences of the Freedom of Information Act, the risks resultant from not having legislation in place and the lower cost of the archive legislation as opposed to FoI and Data Protection, would all help the case for legislation. Dr Barfoot also stressed two points that were worth repeating to the Executive:

1. the need to update the meaning of a Public Record Body which had altered since the 1937 Act and
2. the need to redefine 'a record' to accord with FoI, Data Protection and human rights. The meaning given in the 1937 Act was too narrow for modern purposes and Scotland had fallen behind England on this.

9. Registrar General

The 2001 Census

The first statistical results from the census would appear in August.

Historic Records

The website for the 1901 census records had been launched on 24th January. Microfilm copies were available in New Register House. The January launch had had an immediate impact on statistics. The number of hits on the website had increased ten fold; the number of registered users was up by a factor of four; requests for paper extracts had doubled.

The GROS were midway through their digitisation project. The next tranche to go on-line would be the statutory registers beginning with the birth records to 1901 and followed by the death and marriage records by the end of the year.

The contract with OMS Services Ltd to run the Origins website would cease in September when a website with a new name will be run by Online Scotland.

10. The Scottish Council on Archives (SCA) and the SRAC

The council welcomed the creation of the SCA, replacing the Scottish Archives Forum, which would be formally launched in Glasgow City Chambers on 2 May. A voluntary organisation with no statutory basis, it would involve archivists as well as user groups and creators of archives and aimed to act as a single voice for archives. Mr McGonigle had been approached to represent SATH and the Chairman would represent the SRAC. The two bodies had quite separate functions but the Keeper hoped they could work together particularly on archive legislation.

11. Archivists in Scottish Local Authorities Working Group (ASLAWG)

ASLAWG were particularly concerned about developments in two local authorities:

- a) Argyll and Bute had introduced de facto charging and ASLAWG were monitoring the situation. The Keeper had written to the council for details but had received no response.
- b) The archivist's post in Borders region remained vacant while, paradoxically, the council were campaigning to raise funds to acquire a private collection.

Mr Rankin would keep the council informed of any new developments.

12. Any Outstanding Business

The dates of the next two meetings would be 28th October 2002 and 28th April 2003.