

**Minutes of the 81st meeting of the  
Scottish Records Advisory Council  
held in Thomas Thomson House,  
Monday 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002**

**Present:** Professor Hector MacQueen, Chairman; Dr Mike Barfoot; Mr Peter Daniels; Professor Roger Davidson; Mr Hamish Hamill; Mr James McGonigle; Mr Frank Rankin; Sheriff David Smith; Ms Marion Stewart.

**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 and Stephen Bruce from the Public Records Branch of the Scottish Executive.

**1. Membership:** The meeting commenced with a tour of Thomas Thomson House. The Chairman welcomed Stephen Bruce to the meeting. Mr Bruce outlined the remit of the Public Records Branch. In future meetings he hoped to report on what the Scottish Executive was doing on Public Records policy and Freedom of Information.

**2. Apologies:** Apologies were received from Dr Lynn Abrams, Lord Kingarth, Dr Fiona Watson and Ms Vicki Wilkinson.

**3. Minutes:** The minutes of the 80<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved.

**4. Matters Arising:**

*Postgraduate Archive Training*

Mr Mackenzie reported that little progress had been made since the last meeting and there was now little chance that the course would run this or the next academic year. The Council expressed their disappointment. Alan Cameron had written a report for the two bodies involved in the project but there had been no response as yet.

*Sheriff Court records*

The draft revision to the Sheriff Court schedule had been approved by the Sheriffs Principal. It would not be necessary to have a Statutory Instrument but the Lord President was being consulted on the revision and it was hoped to have the document issued by the end of May.

*Heritage Lottery Fund*

The Chairman noted that he had received a copy of the HLF's own submission but otherwise there was little progress to report. Mr Mackenzie reported that the HLF were advertising for new members of the Scottish Committee should any of the Council wish to volunteer their services.

## **5. Scottish Archive Legislation**

The Chairman noted that the Council had advised ministers of the necessity for more comprehensive legislation. The FoI legislation had made the need for this more evident. The case for an Archives Act appeared to have been accepted within the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament. It was a question of whether a slot could be found in the next parliamentary term. Mr Bruce reported that he would not expect the act within the next 2 to 3 years but much useful work could be done in preparation. It was a question of getting back to basics, looking at the roles of all involved and developing a public records strategy. He hoped ministers would sign up to this within 2 - 3 weeks after the election. The Chairman was to submit a report to the Scottish Executive before the end of June. The Scottish Archive Legislation document would be used as a basis for discussion but the report would also include matters not covered in the document: the definition of a document in the electronic age and the preservation of electronic records. There was also the need to define the role of the NAS and the Keeper, and their relationship with local authorities.

Dr Anderson pointed out that the Public Record Office was looking again at the 1958 Act for precisely the same reasons. Mr Hamill suggested that the Keeper should take the opportunity to invite the new minister responsible for this area to a meeting to interest him in this legislation.

Dr Barfoot cautioned the Council against disappointment, reminding members of the optimism that had followed the publication of the SNAP document after which nothing much had happened. Dr Anderson felt, however, that this time the noises from the Scottish Executive were far more upbeat. Mr Bruce felt the legislation could be sold well to the Parliament – it would not be a particularly political bill and would not take up much of the Parliament’s time. There was also the question of its link with the Freedom of Information Act for which the timetable was unclear.

The SRAC was a statutory body under the terms of the 1937 Act and its role would need clarification in the new Act. There was also the question of its relationship with the Information Commissioner. Underlying this was the review of Public Bodies which gave the SRAC five years to prove its usefulness. Mr Daniels felt it was up to the ministers to determine this, and not for the Council to “prove”.

## **6. Freedom of Information**

The first draft Code of Practice was discussed at a seminar in March, attended by the Chairman. The latest draft circulated to the meeting, and available on the Scottish Executive website, incorporated comments made at the meeting. There were two very contrasting concerns expressed at the meeting, from organisations with very little archival experience, and others who were unhappy at the prescriptive sense of the Code of Practice. Mr Bruce commented that the Code of Practice was not intended to be over-prescriptive. It was designed to apply to the public sector as a whole. Model Action Plans were designed to be generic and each sector could adapt and tailor them to their own use.

The NAS had been heavily involved in the preparation of the Code of Practice and was happy with it.

## **7. News from the NAS**

### *a. Family History Service*

The Keeper reported that £1.6 million had been voted towards the development of this project spread over the next three years. 'Scotland's People' would involve the integration of web services through a common portal and a physical presence in Edinburgh, the Register House Campus. Local authorities in particular would be encouraged to provide the same range of resources as in central Edinburgh. The integrated web service was in development. Mr Randall had held a seminar in March with local councils and their reaction to the project had been favourable but had varied across the country according to resources available.

### *b. Late Opening*

A six month trial late opening of the Historical Search Room would begin in June 2003, staffed on a voluntary basis. GRH would remain open up to 7.30pm for productions with the building closing at 8pm. Documents could be ordered in advance, with the exception of the Register House Plans. Meetings were being held to allay the concerns of some staff.

### *c. Accommodation*

General Register House (GRH): The refurbishment of GRH was progressing well. The underspend on last year would be carried forward. An advertisement for John Lewis on the east side of the building had brought in a small amount of money.

Thomas Thomson House (TTH): Consultants were being engaged to help investigate the next stage of the proposal. This would be completed by the end of July 2003. The PPP option was not the best for a specialised building but the Public Private Finance Venture would be investigated.

West Register House (WRH): Limited refurbishment of the building would take place though this was dependent on how long the NAS stayed there.

### *d. Fees and Charges*

These had not been raised for 10 years. A new Statutory Instrument was approved from the beginning of April. This involved some consolidation. There would be a flat fee of £5 charged for legal searches. A modified regime would be introduced into the search rooms at GRH and WRH at a later date.

### *e. SCAN*

The SCAN project would end on 31 October 2003, beyond the original time proposed but within budget. The return of seconded staff to the NAS would cause some financial strain. The success of the project was such that the NAS would be continuing some of its functions – the website and the testaments in particular.

Mr McGonigle noted that the SCAN-funded education project on women's suffrage would be going live shortly and would undoubtedly raise the demand for more. The Keeper replied that this had been a specific lottery-funded project and SCAN was pressing the HLF for money to fund two more packs. Support from SATH on the value the packs would be persuasive. SCAN would also welcome feedback from the education community on future topics and sources.

## **8. UK Archive Issues**

### *a. HMC and PRO*

The union of the two bodies as The National Archives was an exciting venture which was good for archives as a whole. The NAS counterpart of the HMC - the NRAS - had been operating for over 50 years in the way the PRO and the HMC would now be working. The union was a fairly amicable one.

### *b. Resource – Archive Task Force*

The report by the Archive Task Force would be published in the Autumn. Already a number of conclusions were emerging: structures - looking towards 'centres of expertise'; networking - electronic networking was the way forward; user forums; training and continuing professional development were areas requiring attention. The consultation held the previous week had involved a wide range of organisations including the SRAC and had been very valuable.

## **9. Scottish Council on Archives**

The SCA were keen to have the Council represented at their meetings. The Chairman was unable to attend the next meeting in Aberdeen on 8<sup>th</sup> May, and an alternate was being sought. A draft of the minutes of the last meeting was circulated to members.

The report of the HEI User symposium was not yet available. Dr Barfoot, who had attended the symposium, felt that the discussion had been less than helpful. The tenor of the discussion suggested that most of what had been done by archives over the past 20 years was not of use to the user. This, he felt, was because the speakers were all drawn from a generation of historians who were used to handling mass quantities of original material and were largely unaware of recent developments. It revealed the enormous lengths archivists still have to go to make users aware of what they are doing.

## **10. General Register Office for Scotland (GROS)**

The Registrar General reported that more output from the 2001 Census had appeared in February and March including a number of printed reports. Information on these would be found at [www.scrol.gov.uk](http://www.scrol.gov.uk). The GROS was on course to make digitised records available in New Register House and over the web by the end of the year. The number of extracts sold was slightly down on the previous year, though he was surprised the drop was not more pronounced. The Scotland's People site had received over 70,000 users. A

Users Group had been set up and a direct result of this had been the extension of the search period from 6 to 8 hours.

#### **11. ASLAWG**

Mr Rankin noted that a report from ASLAWG on closure periods had been sent to the Information Commissioner.

ASLAWG were concerned about recent events at Glasgow City Archives where the re-arrangement of the search room had reduced levels of security.

#### **12. AOB**

None

#### **13. Date of next meetings**

The next meetings of the SRAC would take place on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2003 and 26<sup>th</sup> April 2004.