

**Minutes of the 88th meeting of the
Scottish Records Advisory Council
held in the Lord Clerk Register's
Room in General Register House,
Monday 30th October 2006**

Present: Professor Hector MacQueen, Chairman; Professor Lynn Abrams; Professor Roger Davidson; Mr Hamish Hamill; Sheriff David Smith,

In attendance: Mr George Mackenzie, Keeper of the Records of Scotland; Dr Peter Anderson, Deputy Keeper; Mr Duncan Macniven, Registrar General, Mr Gavin Barrie from the Scottish Executive, and Dr Alison Rosie, Secretary.

1. Apologies Apologies had been received from Mr Peter Daniels, Mrs Lesley Richmond and Mr Kevin Wilbraham

2. Minutes The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters Arising

It was noted that most of the matters arising would be discussed in the course of the meeting.

4. SRAC Annual Report

The Chairman had submitted the report to the Minister at the end of September and he understood that a reply was due shortly. He had highlighted the main issues of concern to the Council, namely the uncertain future of the Council and archive legislation in relation to the three local authority archives which were in difficulty. He had worded the report more strongly than previously. He hoped that, as a result, there might be some movement on the future of the Council and its composition and that the issue of archive legislation would not be forgotten. Council members felt that the tenor of the report was fully justified.

Mr Barrie reported that discussions within the Culture Department were ongoing about the position of the NAS and the SRAC. The Culture Bill could not take on board the agenda of the Public Records Strategy, but the Executive is considering what should be said about the archives sector in the Bill and Cultural Policy Division are keen that archives should be brought within the general scheme of entitlements which will be set out in guidance to local authorities. Mr Barrie thought that some funding would be made available to incentivise the provision of services.

As regards the future of the SRAC, the Department was looking at the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEAC) as a possible model. The Chairman queried whether the proposed enhanced NAS Management Board (see item 8) would be similar to the National Library of Scotland's Trustees and would become a substitute body for the SRAC. The Keeper said that discussions were still at an early stage but he thought that the models of the management board of Historic Scotland and HEACS were worth considering and were more suitable models than the Trustee bodies of the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland.

5. Membership and Review of SRAC

Mr Barrie reported that Performance and Financial Management reviews of the National Museums, Galleries and Libraries are due and current thinking was moving away from review of individual bodies to reviews by sector. As the Council was prevented from appointing new members, Mr Barrie agreed that co-opting new members might be possible as an interim measure if this was within the Council's powers. He would speak to the Minister for authority for this approach to go ahead. He also agreed that the Chairman could invite observers to Council meetings, as had been discussed in the June meeting.

6. Local Authority Archives

The Keeper updated the Council on developments in the local authority archives under threat. He welcomed the appointment of Council member Kevin Wilbraham as the new archives and records manager at Edinburgh City Council. Council member Peter Daniels had met informally with the Chief Executive of Dumfries and Galloway, Phil Jones, and had pressed the argument in favour of the archive service there. Mr Mackenzie was due to visit Galloway in a few weeks and was hopeful of good news. There was not such favourable news from Argyll and Bute whose Council had not responded to approaches from the NAS. The Keeper would be redoubling his efforts though his powers to force a change of mind were limited. Professor Abrams suggested that, with the appointment of Mr Wilbraham to Edinburgh, the situation in Stirling Council Archives should be monitored by the Council. On a brighter note Dr Anderson added that Moray Council was about to appoint a records manager.

The Council discussed the 'Guidance on Proper Arrangements' document circulated for comment by the NAS. This had proceeded from the requirements of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. Proper arrangements had not been defined in the Act. The Guidance had been in preparation for some years and was based on work in both Scotland and England. The document would be circulated to local authorities and the Culture Department for their consideration.

The Council felt that in Section 3, on the four key areas, access should feature more strongly. Drawing on his own experience, Professor Davidson thought the issue of cataloguing backlogs in local authority archives should be addressed in the document and should be made a clear responsibility of the local authority. He was also conscious of the dual role the archivists played in dealing with an historic archive but also servicing the local authority planning department. He felt that multi-tasking distracted staff from the former role, the latter always having to take priority.

The Keeper welcomed these points. He agreed that access should be emphasized in section 3.3 and that it would be desirable to be able to make councils address their cataloguing backlog, though there was a limit to how prescriptive the NAS could be. There would always be problems because of the resources involved. With regard to the dual role performed by archives, he pointed to the conflict between the role of archives as evidence and memory: the role of records in protecting the business of the organisation and the long term cultural importance of the record. A balance had to be struck between the two. He accepted that there was a need to build in a statement to draw attention to this issue.

The Council wondered whether the wording of the document should be more emotive, though it was agreed that this depended on who the document was aimed at. The Keeper thought that the more productive approach would be the argument that proper audits required good record keeping. The Chairman felt that there was a need to impress the target audience of the document with the significance of records beyond the need for compliance with legislation, be it FoI, Data Protection or environmental.

In general the Council welcomed the document which it considered to be very lucid, free from jargon and easy to read.

7. Draft National Plan for Gaelic

The Council had been asked to comment on the draft plan. The aims of the document were ones with which the Council could sympathise. Mr Mackenzie pointed out that Gaelic had not been a language of record and there were few documents in that language in the holdings of the NAS. He felt the main issue for the NAS was one of access, eg. the provision of bilingual leaflets where appropriate.

8. News from the NAS

The Keeper updated the Council on issues arising in the NAS.

NAS Governance

In January 2006 responsibility for records and archives had transferred from the Minister of Parliamentary Business (Margaret Curran) to the Minister for Tourism, Culture and Sport (Patricia Ferguson) following the recommendations of the Cultural Commission. Transfer of sponsorship responsibility within the Scottish Executive had followed in September 2006. As a result, the governance arrangements were being reviewed. One option was to expand the Management Board to include external members, as well as finance and human resources advisers from the Executive.

Accommodation

The business case for NAS' long term storage needs was being revised and would be submitted to the minister before the end of the year. The preferred option remained an extension to the Thomas Thomson House building, and the surrender of the lease on West Register House. Work was progressing on the second floor storage room at Thomas Thomson House which would include shelving for the very large volumes of Valuation Rolls. At West Register House the new search room continued to attract favourable comment from customers. The Council agreed that facilities in the search room had been hugely improved and proposed that the Council visit the search room before their next meeting in Spring 2007.

ScotlandsPeople (Scottish Family History Service)

The Registrar General would report separately on progress with the contract for the new centre in General Register House and New Register House, due to open in early 2008. One benefit for NAS of the delay had been to allow the legal search room to continue to operate in its present location in the Adam Dome while work on converting sasines and their finding aid continued. It was expected that the legal search room would relocate to the Robertson Wing by the end of December.

NAS continued to provide answers to the Genealogy Clinic which had been running in *The Scotsman's* weekend supplement for over a year.

Digitisation

Registers Archive Conversion (Digitisation of Sasines)

The electronic index to the sasines, provided by the Registers of Scotland ICT partner, BT Syntegra, had been delayed due to a combination of lack of completeness and slower than anticipated performance. The contractors were working to resolve these in order to be completed in time for the move of the legal search room by the end of the year. The NAS twilight shift at Thomas Thomson House was making good progress with the conversion of paper volumes of the register (pre-1980), and had just completed one million images and 4,000 volumes. They were on target to complete 5,200 volumes from Midlothian by March 2007; 25% of the total. Capture of images from the microfiche register had been outsourced and would be completed by December 2006.

NAS now had three teams working on digitising documents: the digital imaging unit in General Register House legal copying for customers and some background work on sasines; the twilight shift converting recent sasine volumes, and the GSU team, working mainly on church records and early sasines. Earlier in October the six millionth image had been digitised.

Church Records

Work on digitising the church records down to 1901 was on target for completion by the end of March 2007. Images were available in the NAS search rooms the day after digitising. A web browser version was being developed so that the service could be extended outside NAS. In the first phase, from April 2007, Presbytery Clerks and selected local archives would gain access to the system via a password protected site. Thereafter the service would be made available to other local archives holding church records on charge and superintendence, or providing services that met minimum standards set by the Keeper. This would result in a network of places across Scotland where the church records could be consulted free of charge. An internet service would also be provided on a paying basis via the *ScottishDocuments* website until around 2009, when it was expected to transfer to the *ScotlandsPeople* site.

NAS Website

A year after the launch of the new site, the online resources team would be carrying out an evaluation exercise during November, based on customers' feedback. There would be a month long survey of users, both on the website and among readers in the search rooms, and an invitational seminar on 9 November would bring together customers and the people who provide the website. Council members were encouraged to take part in the survey.

A new site for schools was launched on 26 October, at www.scottisharchivesforschools.org with the web version of the award-winning Scottish Archives for Schools resource packs. The initial launch had not been publicised but would be promoted directly to teachers and schools.

Outreach Services

In addition to the new website, NAS' education staff had undertaken workshops for schools on the records, including a pilot project to use video conferencing. The NAS had been successful in a joint bid with RCAHMS for Scottish Executive funding for a schools project to mark the Union of 1707, which would involve a debating competition and the preparation of educational materials for use in schools across the country.

On the exhibitions side, the NAS was working with the Scottish and UK Parliaments to commemorate the Union, with the aim of displaying the two sets of treaty documents side by side for the first time during 2007.

Freedom of Information

Requests for access to information had levelled off in the past 6 months, though NAS staff continued to work with Scottish Executive colleagues in answering enquiries. NAS had dealt with its first request for an internal review of a decision.

9. Scottish Council on Archives

The Chairman had not been able to attend recent meetings and no minutes were available. Mr Barrie had attended the meeting in June and had been able to report then that the Executive was considering funding for the archives sector perhaps in the region of £500,000 per year, with perhaps up to £150,000 going to the SCA. This proposal had yet to be passed by Ministers. The next meeting would be in Glasgow in early December. Professor Abrams volunteered to attend if the date was convenient.

10. Registrar General.

The Registrar General took the Council through his written report.

1. The *ScotlandsPeople* website continued to be developed. All the Victorian Censuses were now available on the website and the Old Parish Registers would be added shortly, completing the collection of GROS records. The addition of the Lord Lyon's heraldry archive awaited Parliamentary approval of access charges.
2. Less progress had been made with the building work at the joint GRH/NRH campus, following the receivership of the main contractor in April. It was hoped that work on the conversion of the New Register House East Search Room and the reinstatement of the lunchroom/café would be completed for opening in December 2006. A new programme for the remaining works - together with a deferred completion date - was likely to be in place by the end of November. Costs were likely to increase significantly, although not unaffordably.
3. Consideration was being given to the future custody of births and marriages recorded at the Edinburgh Roman Catholic Cathedral between 1777 and 1811 which appeared properly to belong to the Scottish Catholic Archives. Subject to further examination, it was proposed that these records should be transferred to their proper owner. At the same time, NAS's work to digitise Church of Scotland Kirk Session records had brought to light a number of records of births/baptisms, deaths/burials and banns/marriages which were incorporated with session minutes and were not therefore transmitted to the Registrar General under the 1854 Registration Act. GROS had index information on most of them, and arrangements were being made to link this to the digital images that NAS was creating and to index the remaining items.

It had been noted that the Family Research Centre in London was due to close. Mr Macniven felt that the Family History Centre would offer a considerably better service: digitised images whereas the former only offered access to indexes. In London visitor figures had been dropping year on year, not the experience of the GROS. Visit Scotland also saw the Centre becoming a visitor attraction in its own right. TNA were hoping to visit to discuss this development.

11. ASLAWG

In his absence, Kevin Wilbraham had tabled a written report summarising the discussions of the last meeting on 28 September.

ASLAWG discussed progress on the revised questionnaire issued by the Systemic Review into Historical Abuse in Children's Residential Homes, and considered that although it was possible to identify surviving records, it would be a huge task to piece together the histories of individual homes. Key archival contacts within each of the pre-1996 regions would meet with the Review later in October to discuss progress.

The Group discussed closure periods on records: ASLAWG had compiled guidance on closure periods for local authority archives a number of years previously, but it was suggested this needed to be revised.

An ASLAWG Sub-Group had met over the summer to discuss electronic records, including records management software, electronic document and records management systems, fileplans and classification, and permanent preservation, as well as suggestions for the seminar on electronic records to be held after the ASLAWG meeting on 28 September. In particular, the issue of permanent preservation of electronic records was raised. ASLAWG was aware of reports of pilot regional digital preservation projects published in English regions, and discussed the need for equivalent work in Scotland.

ASLAWG had been invited to comment on draft guidance on 'proper arrangements' for records prepared by the National Archives of Scotland. The group had welcomed the preparation of guidance to define what was meant by "proper arrangements", and considered the guidance a useful draft.

ASLAWG had congratulated Highland Council on the success of a £4.3m bid for lottery funding for the Highland Archives Centre. Argyll & Bute Council had replied to a letter from ASLAWG stating that the Council had to find savings of £10m, and that this was the first cut to the Archive Service in 10 years. The Council considered there had been no material change in provision of services, but nevertheless had been in discussions with the Keeper. It was reported that Dumfries & Galloway Council had consultants working with them to develop a records management programme, although there was no news on when the post of Archivist would be reinstated.

12. Society of Archivists, Scotland

No report was available. The Keeper noted that he would meet with members of the Society of Archivists shortly.

13. AOB

Nothing to report

14. Dates of next meetings

The next Council meetings would be held on 16th April and 29th October. It was suggested that the next meeting be held at Edinburgh City Archives after viewing the changes at West Register House Search Room.