

**Minutes of the 89th meeting of the
Scottish Records Advisory Council
held in the Edinburgh City Chambers
Friday 4th May 2007**

Present: Professor Hector MacQueen, Chairman; Professor Lynn Abrams; Mr Peter Daniels; Professor Roger Davidson; Mr Hamish Hamill; Sheriff David Smith and Mr Kevin Wilbraham.

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. Also attending as an invited observer was Dr Ken Macdonald the Assistant Information Commissioner in Scotland.

1. Apologies Apologies had been received from Mr Peter Daniels and Mrs Lesley Richmond. Dr Macdonald was welcomed to his first meeting of the Council and introduced to the others present.

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

3. Matters Arising There were no matters arising.

4. Local Authority Archives

Mr Wilbraham gave a brief presentation on Edinburgh City Archives (ECA). The archives were currently open on only two days a week, staffed by one archivist and an administrative assistant. There were 600 search room users per annum, 6000 productions and 600 remote users. The archives had a low profile both within the City Council and outside with the general public. No promotional or outreach activities had been undertaken in the previous 4-5 years and the archives had a very small web presence. There was a large accessioning and cataloguing backlog (c 40%), which included 20 000 plans from the City Architect's office awaiting appraisal. There were also a number of preservation issues which needed to be addressed.

On a more positive note, capital funding of £600 000 was to be made available to improve the facilities and upgrade the IT structure. Two new professional staff would be recruited. The archives also hoped to tap into the reserve of goodwill and public support for the archive by setting up a friends group and working in partnership with libraries and museums, local and family history groups. A Records Management Working Group had been established and a council records policy put in place. A Records Service Centre had been set up and was run by Iron Mountain on the Council's behalf.

The SRAC was encouraged by these developments but expressed concern at ECA's lack of profile and the large cataloguing backlog. This, Mr Wilbraham explained, was due to long term lack of staff and funding. He compared the situation in Edinburgh to that pertaining in Suffolk Record Office in England which had 40 members of staff. Dr Anderson added that although there had been great changes in the profile of archives within local authorities in Scotland over the past 30 years, most were still 1-

3 men operations. The Chairman would highlight this in his forthcoming annual report.

Professor Davidson queried whether the servicing of local solicitors with planning documents was compatible with the use of the archives by other researchers? Mr Wilbraham agreed that the majority of productions were of Dean of Guild plans but they were no longer accessed in the same search room. Additional staff, perhaps para-professionals, would be required to service this area. The funding stream also needed to be addressed as the Council generated a lot of income from this service which was not fed back into the archives.

Mr Macniven, referring to moves to integrate the family history services provided by archivists and registrars within the local authorities, wondered whether a similar arrangement would apply in Edinburgh. Mr Wilbraham said that there were a lot of unique resources in the archives of great value to the family historian and that he was investigating how this could be taken forward.

The Keeper also reported on developments in other local authority archives. Dumfries and Galloway Archives were taking steps to recruit a new archivist but he reported his continuing concern about the situation in Argyll and Bute. There were more positive developments elsewhere in the country. The new Borders archive in Hawick was due to open shortly and he would be attending the official opening of Shetland's new archive on 31st May. The Highland Region hubs and spokes project was moving forward and construction of the new archive building in Bught Park, Inverness, would commence shortly. This building, due to be completed at the beginning of 2009, would combine both the registration and archive services.

The Chairman thanked Mr Wilbraham and Edinburgh City Council for hosting the meeting.

5. Current Developments and their implications for the SRAC

The Keeper opened up the discussion. The SRAC had proved a very valuable organisation in giving an external view on the work of the NAS. NAS' recent change of location within the Scottish Executive had, however, led to a reconsideration of its administrative structure. NAS now sought to recruit external non-executive directors (NEDs) with skills and expertise in the areas of record keeping, finance and administration to strengthen its own management board. Their appointment did not negate the need for the SRAC but did raise issues the Council needed to consider, such as who precisely the Council represented, whether it should have a wider public remit, and to whom it was giving advice. An additional issue was the abandonment of the Public Records Strategy which had had built into it the idea of reviewing the role of the SRAC. Ministers no longer had a dedicated unit to look to for archival advice and therefore turned to the NAS: how did this fit in with the SRAC's statutory role. The SCA was another potential player but would be a lobbying rather than an advisory body. The SRAC on the other hand had a statutory function to make recommendations to the Executive.

The Keeper thought the model of the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) was instructive. Here was a very similar relationship as pertained

with the SRAC and the NAS. Both Historic Scotland and HEACS had an obligation to advise ministers. Historic Scotland also provided the secretariat for HEACS.

Mr Barrie added that the Scottish Executive was giving thought to advisory bodies in general. He thought that the HEACS model was an interesting precedent. The Chairman pointed out that, in contrast to the SRAC, HEACS was a well resourced body with a significant budget and he asked whether a review of advisory councils would take this into consideration. Mr Barrie replied that the Executive's priority thus far had been to identify funding for the Scottish Council on Archives based on the SLIC model.

The Council went on to discuss the make up of the SRAC. The Chairman thought that the emergence of the SCA highlighted the role of the SRAC and its focus on users of archives, which included the government which creates the archives. The Council should seek to involve a wider group of users – this would be crucial in terms of a justification for having archives in the first place. The Chairman asked members to put forward ideas for bodies which should be represented on the Council. Once these had been identified, representatives could be co-opted onto the Council in an informal way. Professor Davidson suggested that a profile of the users of NAS would throw up interest groups which should be represented on the Council. The Keeper said that this was certainly feasible but local authorities might have a different user profile and that little was known about the profile of remote users who were now far more numerous than users of the search rooms. The internal business users of archives and the wider public should also not be overlooked.

Dr Anderson pointed to the experience in Norway where various archival bodies were talking about amalgamating and he wondered whether the SRAC might find it instructive to speak to other bodies such as the SCA, the Business Archives Council for Scotland (BAC(S)) and the Scottish Records Association (SRA) for their thoughts on their respective roles. The SRA for example, had been founded to represent users and owners of archives as well as archivists. The Chairman agreed to approach these organisations.

Sheriff Smith suggested that if the Council were to place more emphasis on public representation it should become more proactive as a body and should hold more than two meetings a year. The Chairman agreed that there could be loss of momentum in between meetings.

6. News from the NAS

NAS Governance

Responsibility for NAS now lay with the Scottish Executive Education Department. Following the example of other agencies, and as reported under section 5, the NAS planned to recruit external non-executive directors (NEDs). NAS would also be represented on the SE Education Department management board by the Keeper.

Accommodation

A submission to ministers on long term storage needs was made at the beginning of 2008, seeking authority to recruit consultants to assist in recasting the business case. In response to the minister's request, NAS would also investigate a new option, to develop on the site at Granton alongside other national collections. The new business

case would be submitted to ministers in October 2007. Expenditure on a new building had been noted for the 2008 Spending Review, but ministerial agreement would still be required.

At General Register House (GRH) building work had restarted with the new contractor, Rok Scotland Ltd. Ducting to allow air conditioning in the rear Matheson Dome had been completed, and landscaping was under way, which would allow the new Garden Entrance (formerly the Sasine Office entrance, but disused for several decades) to be opened shortly for historical and legal search room readers. The front door of GRH closed on Monday 30 April to allow work to start on the Adam Dome and the new reception and shop area. This was due for completion in early 2008. At Thomas Thomson House, the second floor storage area had been shelved and was now in use for large sizes of records.

NAS had offered the Scottish Council on Archives office space in West Register House once it established itself later in the year.

ScotlandsPeople (Scottish Family History Service)

Information on the building works and the internet service was reported on by the Registrar General under section 8. An event to publicise the new centre to representatives of the tourism industry had been held on 3 May.

The Legal Search Room had been moved to the Robertson Wing from 30 April, after well over 100 years in the Adam Dome. At the same time, the electronic search facility for the sasine register had been expanded with the addition of several million images converted from microfiche. Further progress in cleaning the data in the search tool which replaces the paper indexes and abridgements had also been made, leading to much faster searching in the majority of cases.

A further project to provide additional electronic resources for local and family history, known as ScotlandsPeople2, involved a number of other national collections bodies including the National Library and the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments (RCAHMS).

Dalhousie Papers

The Dalhousie collection (GD45) one of the richest and most popular of the private records series in the NAS, had been successfully purchased as a result of joint funding from the Scottish Executive and the National Heritage Memorial Fund. The NAS was indebted to both, as it has no regular funding for this scale of acquisition. The net price of £1.6m, though only a fraction of the cost of the John Murray archive bought by the National Library, was a record for the NAS and for a Scottish archive collection. Had the money not been found, the collection would have been broken up, sold and an export bar would have had to be sought for parts of the collection. The purchase had attracted good media attention. Archive collections were attracting large sums and this would inevitably mean pressure in future on other privately owned papers in public custody.

Digitisation

The digitisation teams had completed over 7 million images, or about 10 million pages of records. This excluded sasine images converted from microfiche. Church

records down to 1901 had been imaged and were available in the NAS search rooms via the Virtual Volumes system. During the summer, selected Presbytery Clerks and local archives would get access to the system for testing. In the autumn it would be made available to all Presbytery Clerks and to other local archives that held church records on charge and superintendence, or that provided services that meet minimum standards set by the Keeper. The paying service on the internet would follow, initially on the *ScottishDocuments.com* website and later on *ScotlandsPeople*. A leaflet on the project, produced for an exhibition at the 2006 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, was circulated to Council members.

NAS Websites

Visits to NAS websites rose again in 2006-7. Excluding visits by search engine robots, the total was just over 1 million, a 12% increase on the previous year. Visits to the main NAS site rose by 20% and accounted for half the total, in part due to increasing use of the electronic catalogue. Around 20% of visits originated as searches in Google or other search engines. The websites also delivered an increasing number of records in image form to customers: 77,500 productions in the year, an increase of 45%.

Professor Abrams raised concerns about the slowness of the online NAS catalogue. The Keeper appreciated that this was an issue and said that the NAS was hoping to address this by using different software for the public facility than for cataloguing.

Exhibitions

The anniversary of the 1707 Union of Parliaments had led to an increased interest in NAS records. The minutes and Treaty documents had featured on several TV and newspaper stories on 16 January, the date the Scottish Parliament voted for union. The minutes had been lent for a reception and exhibition at Dover House in London which also launched the new two pound coin featuring a union motif designed by Yvonne Holton, one of the principal artists at the Court of the Lord Lyon.

Later this year a joint exhibition with the Parliamentary Archives in London and the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh would display the Scottish and English copies of the Articles of Union together again for the first time in over 300 years. Exhibited first at Westminster, from 16 June to 24 August, they would move to Holyrood from 21 September to 18 November. The Edinburgh end would also feature the new edition of the Acts of the Scottish Parliament, produced at St Andrews University.

A Union for a' That, a joint project with RCAHMS and other partners aimed at Scottish schools, would explore the historical significance of the Union by looking at both the events and the architectural expression of democratic decision-making. Booklets and CDs would be distributed free of charge to all schools in Scotland and there would be workshops throughout the year including the schools of the teams qualifying for the regional finals of the annual Donald Dewar debating tournament. The project manager was based in NAS.

ScotlandsImages

Last year work commenced on an image library, an automated system for displaying and licensing the use of selected NAS images in publications and elsewhere. This was aimed at commercial picture buyers rather than the public, and would be launched

early in 2008. A number of other national collections, the NLS, the Royal Museum, RCAHMS and the National Trust for Scotland, had all indicated they wished to take part. As well as formalising the procedures for licensing reuse of images, the library was expected to generate a modest revenue for NAS.

Freedom of Information

Requests for information had averaged between 4 and 5 per month, though staff in Government Records Branch also contributed regularly to enquiries received by the Scottish Executive. Court and Legal Records Branch was advising the Crown Office, which was not covered by the exemption for the courts, on how to handle exempt and non-exempt information in its records.

7. Scottish Council on Archives

The Chairman had been unable to attend the last meeting of the council on 1 March. The main topics on the agenda had been the appointment of an administrator and the development of the business plan.

8. Registrar General.

The Registrar General took the Council through his written report.

There had been 478,000 paid accesses to the *ScotlandsPeople* website during the financial year 2006-07, an increase of 9% on the previous year. The birth/baptism and marriage records from the Old Parish Registers had been added on 25 January. Work was in hand to index the death/burial records which would in due course also be added (greatly improving access to these records, which had not previously been comprehensively indexed). The addition of the Lord Lyon's heraldry archive awaited Parliamentary approval of the access charges.

The replacement main contractor for the creation of the ScotlandsPeople Centre (following the receivership of the previous main contractor) had been appointed in November and work on site restarted after the New Year break. The new contractor was making good progress but opening was likely to be delayed until March 2008 – well over a year late. In the meantime, it had been possible to maintain services to customers although, thanks to delays in installing the new power supply to the Centre, the Dundas Room (formerly the New Register House East Search Room) had only re-opened recently.

Work had also started on digitisation of the 1911, 1921 and 1931 Censuses and the 1939 National Register. This enhanced the safe custody of the records. This also paved the way for the public release in 2011 of the personal records from the 1911 Census and improved the efficiency of the NHS Central Register, which still used the 1939 National Register as a source document. The National Archives at Kew had been obliged to release parts of the 1911 Census in response to FoI requests.

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

Mr Wilbraham gave a verbal report on ASLAWG's meeting held in Perth in January. Two items had been of particular concern to the Group. The first was the decision of Glasgow Council to form a Leisure Trust with responsibility for museums, libraries and archives. A judicial review had not prevented this move. There had been little

consultation of staff and no awareness that to do this, the permission of owners of records would be required. The move would also have ramifications for the management of the City's records and there would undoubtedly be FoI issues. The group was worried that other Councils would look to the Glasgow Leisure Trust as a model as a means of saving money. Shetland had, in fact, already gone down this route.

The Keeper noted his concern about the level of service that would be provided under the new Trust. His responsibility was limited to the question of proper arrangements being made for archives and he was in consultation with Glasgow Council about this. The Chairman also voiced the Council's concern. He would raise this as an issue in his forthcoming Annual Report.

Secondly, ASLAWG had responded to the Draft Culture Scotland Bill, expressing its disappointment at the emphasis in the document on the cultural status of archives. Records management also appeared, bizarrely, under 'Lifelong Learning'. The Group had also made representation about the new name proposed for RCAHMS.

10. Society of Archivists, Scotland

No report was available.

11. AOB

The Chairman drew the Council's attention to the annual statistics for the SRAC website which showed there had been 2 890 unique visitors to the site during the year April 2006-March 2007. The minutes of meetings had been the most popular downloads.

12. Dates of next meetings

The next Council meetings would be held on 29th October and 16th April. The Secretary would investigate whether the October meeting of the Council could be held in Glasgow City Archives.