

University of Strathclyde Centre for Lifelong Learning Family History Research: An Introduction



University of
Strathclyde
Humanities &
Social Sciences

Week 5: Geographical Records

Sources for geographical information

Descriptions of land and towns, & finding people

- Maps
- Gazetteers
- Narrative and statistical descriptions of local areas
- Directories – Post Office, etc.
- Valuation rolls
- Electoral rolls

Information on Land, Villages, Cities, etc.

It is useful to have sources of information on place names, descriptions of parishes/villages, maps, etc. These help fill in the picture of our ancestors' lives...

In addition to maps and gazetteers, these sources include:

- *The Statistical Accounts of Scotland*
- *Victoria County Histories* (for English parishes)

Maps – good online sources

- National Map Library of Scotland (this is physically located in Edinburgh, in the NLS Causewayside building, and well worth a visit): <http://maps.nls.uk/>
- Ordnance Survey and Landmarks historic maps:
<http://www.old-maps.co.uk/>
- British History Online: (maps, gazetteers, historic documents, etc.)
<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/>
- A Vision of Britain Through Time:
<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/>
- Researching Historic Buildings in the British Isles (maps, gazetteers, design info, etc.)
<http://www.buildinghistory.org/>

Gazetteers

Gazetteer for Scotland (University of Edinburgh & Royal Scottish Geographical Society)
'A geographical encyclopaedia, featuring details of towns, villages, bens and glens from the Scottish Borders to the Northern Isles. The first comprehensive gazetteer produced for Scotland since 1885' - <http://www.scottish-places.info/>

UK-wide gazetteers are available through the British History Online & BuildingHistory.org websites noted above.

Statistical Accounts of Scotland

These are detailed descriptions of Scotland's counties and parishes over three time periods and a fabulous source of information on the area(s) your ancestors lived in, highly recommended for local historical background.

They were written by the local parish ministers (usually) and gave detailed parish reports - covering a wide spectrum of subjects including botany, agriculture, education, trades, religion and social customs.

- The *Old (or First) Statistical Account of Scotland* - published 1791-1792.
- The *New (or Second) Statistical Account of Scotland* - published 1834-1845.
- The *Third Statistical Account of Scotland* - published 1951-1992.

The First and Second are available to read for free online at:
<http://edina.ac.uk/stat-acc-scot/> . Look for the link on the page for 'non-subscribers' to 'browse scanned images'.

Larger libraries should have a copy of these as well, in printed format, and also printed volumes of the Third Statistical Account.

Victoria County Histories

These are local histories of the counties and parishes of England, published by Oxford University. Not all parishes have been completed, but most have.

Many are freely available at British History Online, in the local history section of the website.
<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/search?sort=title&order=asc&query&title=%22Victoria%20County%20History%2>

The **VCH Explore** website 'provides free access to reliable local history materials, produced by academics and volunteers. Photographs, paintings, drawings, maps, text, transcribed documents and audio files are organised thematically and by their geographical location.'

This covers many counties that haven't had an updated published volume of the VCH and has some very useful information. Well worth a look!

<http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/>

Scotland's Places website

Allows you to search across different national databases using geographical location. Created by the National Records of Scotland and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

- Maps and plans of cities, towns, villages, farms, roads, canals, harbours, churches, schools, public buildings, private houses, etc.
- Photographs of the built environment
- Archaeological reports on historic and prehistoric sites
- Manuscript records and printed books including tax rolls, owners of land and heritages, and the annual reports of county Medical Officers of Health.

<http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/>

Historic Environment Scotland (a new merger of the formerly Historic Scotland and RCAHMS)

With an official start date of October 2015, Historic Environment Scotland was recently created to merge and continue the former remits of Historic Scotland and of RCAHMS. The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) 'collects, records and interprets information on the architectural, industrial, archaeological and maritime heritage of Scotland.'

They are located in Edinburgh and have a collection of local guides, photographs, maps and more arranged by place. Their website includes 'Canmore' which has photos uploaded by RCAHMS staff and the public.

Much information is available on line at: <http://www.rcahms.gov.uk/> and <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/> (both websites will be likely to change in the near future).

Valuation Rolls

The Lands Valuation (Scotland) Act, 1854 established a uniform valuation of landed property throughout Scotland, with separate rolls compiled for each burgh and county. (This system was replaced with the Community Charge, or 'Poll Tax', in 1989, which only lasted until 1993, when it was replaced in turn by a new property-based local taxation system, Council Tax.)

The rolls from 1854 to 1988 were collected annually, and for each property they record the...

- Name and designation of the proprietor,
- Tenant name
- Occupier name (if different) and
- The annual rateable value.

Accessing Valuation Rolls

These are arranged by property and were compiled annually. Often you need to know your ancestor's address to trace them, although selected years are now indexed, with images, on ScotlandsPeople (see below). See the website of the National Records of Scotland) for guidance on accessing the valuation rolls (<http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/valuation-rolls>). The NRS holds the originals of valuation rolls for all of Scotland, and have made these holdings available on their in-house Virtual Volumes system. Some copies of Valuation Rolls are also held in local archives.

The VRs for 1855, 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, 1920 and 1925 are available on ScotlandsPeople (3 credits to view an entry). These are searchable by name.

The Mitchell Archives also have VRs for Glasgow only for 1913-1989. The Glasgow Story website has images of the 1913-14 Glasgow VRs online, with additional information and a set of ward maps that can be enlarged onscreen: <http://www.theglasgowstory.com/valindex.php>

Electoral Registers

These list the people in an area who could vote. Until relatively recently, the number of people who had the franchise was limited so the registers will obviously not list everyone living in a property. Some registers are in the NRS, but not all. Check with your local library / archive / sheriff court. The Mitchell has Glasgow's registers both on microfilm and in published volumes (these are currently being digitised and will probably be made available on Ancestry).

English/Welsh registers are largely held in local archives, though the British Library has a complete run of registers from 1947. FindMyPast has registers for Cheshire 1842-1900 and some other rolls. FamilySearch and Ancestry have a few electoral rolls as well.

Who could vote when:

Before 1832 – hardly anyone! Representatives of counties were elected by freeholders (land owners above a certain value)

1832 – 1867 – owners, tenants and occupiers (male) of land and houses

1868 – male lodgers paying over £10 annual rent

1882 – unmarried women and married women who were heads of households, if proprietors and tenants – in burgh council elections

1889 – women, as above, in county council elections

1918 – males over 21, women over 30

1929 – almost everyone over 21, except lords and lunatics

Street and Post Office Directories

Street and county directories usually provide a brief description of the places covered as well as lists of residents and tradesmen. They started to appear from about 1800, although some earlier ones do exist. However, these directories are **not** complete lists for each town, as fees charged for entries meant often only prominent and/or business people would be listed.

National Library of Scotland

694 Scottish Post Office directories for the period 1773 to 1911 are now online at the NLS. As well as an alphabetical list of people, these contain street and trades directories and often include other listings, such as local clubs and societies. Search the directories online at <http://digital.nls.uk/directories/> ; background information and a clickable place index are at <http://www.nls.uk/family-history/directories/post-office>

Internet Archive

742 Scottish directories of all types, various directories from the U.S. & England. Search the site using the term 'scottishdirectories' or 'directory'.
<http://www.archive.org/>

UKGDL (www.ukgdl.org.uk/) is a list of links to web sites that have on-line data such as school lists, trade directories, electoral rolls, passenger lists, information on old photographs and more. It is arranged by type of resource and then by county.

Ancestry.co.uk has many directory resources, including a database called 'U.K. City & County directories 1600-1900s'.

Many libraries, archives and family history societies have physical copies of post office and street directories. The Mitchell Library has a wonderful collection of Glasgow directories, for example, and has all the Post Office directories up to 1979.

For English and Welsh directories, consult the University of Leicester's Special Collections website. This includes directories from 1766 to 1919. It is only possible to search individual directories on this site.

<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16445coll4>

Addressing History

A website that combines data from digitised historical Scottish Post Office directories with contemporaneous historical maps. For example, you could do a search on the term 'weaver' and see the areas in a city where that industry was concentrated.

It covers Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Years: 1784, 1865, 1881, 1891 and 1905
<http://addressinghistory.edina.ac.uk>

Local Photograph and Information Resources

Do have a look for small and/or individual websites and databases that may contain useful images and information. Examples are:

- Silver City Vault (Aberdeen) www.silvercityvault.org.uk
- Knapdale People (Argyll) www.knapdalepeople.com
- Port Cities Portal (Bristol, Liverpool, London, Hartlepool, Southampton)
<http://www.portcities.org.uk/>
- Virtual Mitchell (Glasgow) <http://www.mitchelllibrary.org/virtualmitchell/>
- SCRAN <http://www.scran.ac.uk/> - 370,000 images, requires a subscription

That's a good start...

However, there are other sources of information for land including:

- Hearth Tax
- Stent Rolls
- Other gazetteers
- Place name societies
- Surname maps
- And so on...

You'll have all that to look forward to investigating!