

Scotlandspeople user group

Sixth Meeting

19.00, 6 September 2004

Ladywell House, Edinburgh

Present:

Paul Parr (Chairman), Deputy Registrar General, GROS
Martin Tyson, Departmental Records Officer, GROS
Raymond Evans, GROS (Secretary)
Richard Callison, Scotland on Line
Alison Wallace, Scotland on Line
Alan Stewart
John McCurdie
David W Webster
Andy Keogh
George Maxwell
Bruce Irving
Jan Gow
Scott Buie (by teleconference)
Sue McBeth (by teleconference)

1. Apologies

Marie Dougan

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The June minutes were approved.

However Richard only stated later in the meeting that his response in the 5th Meeting's minutes of 1st June 2004, "Item 4.1 Search on married surname and MS (married female death) – HIGH" should be read only in the context as the time period mentioned of the "coming two weeks" meaning a two week period after the addition to the site of the 1871 census.

3. Matters Arising and Action Points from the previous minutes (item numbers refer to June minutes)

3.1 Re-siting and running of FAQ's (item 3.1)

Paul told the group that this would be carried out in tandem with the launch of the integrated website.

3.2 Index Access (item 3.9)

Martin reported that ONS were considering a change (subject to some complex secondary legislation) which would allow birth indexes less than 75 years old and death indexes less than 25 years old, to be viewed. If passed, the precedent set might give GROS room for manoeuvre on this topic who were considering following suit. Paul emphasised that some interest groups would have privacy concerns about any suggestion to expand online access to recent records.

This matter is on-going.

3.3 *Charging Structure (item 6)*

Richard told the group that he was meeting with Scottish Libraries Information Council shortly to discuss the setting up of a pilot scheme to allow bulk access in public libraries. Andy said that he had met with Inverclyde Council who are keen to be included in such a scheme.

3.4 *Issue of Statistics to the Group (item 11)*

Alison tabled a paper which showed a number of statistics relating to the website and she agreed to provide these on a regular basis. She reported that the number of queries had been decreasing steadily in relation to the high level of traffic on the site. With regard to users world wide, it was agreed that the USA market had to be more heavily targeted.

Andy identified a problem with erroneous material in relation to the website appearing in various genealogy magazines with there being a number of references to Scots Origins instead of Scotlandspeople. GROS agreed to take remedial action.

George enquired about what he regarded as the fairly large number of payment problems reflected in the statistics. Alison explained that Worldpay, who collect the income from the website, on occasion have outages which can result in a customer finance query. Richard explained that in terms of numbers the amount was negligible compared to the number of transactions that take place.

3.6 *Website Enhancements (covered separately)*

3.7 *Availability of missing images (covered separately)*

4. **Scottish Family History Service (SFHS)**

Martin gave an update. He referred to a paper that had been issued which gave the background to the forthcoming service.

He explained that as part of this project, early in 2005, online facilities currently provided by the partners will be integrated to provide a service to family historians through a redesigned ScotlandsPeople website at

<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>, which is being provided by Scotland on Line. The new site will offer improved availability and ease of navigation, together with easy access to the records of the project partners.

The new ScotlandsPeople site will give access to indexes and images of statutory registers of births, marriages and deaths, census and old parish registers, but will bring these resources together with the indexes and images of Scottish wills and testaments 1500-1901 currently provided on the Scottish Documents website. The new integrated site will allow customers to search the index of Scottish wills, 1500-1901, view the wills of famous Scots and use the research tools free of charge, as is the case now. The charge for downloading an image of a will also remains the same (at £5.00). The payment structure for access to indexes and images of statutory registers of births, marriages and deaths, census and old parish registers will remain as it is on the current ScotlandsPeople site.

Existing Scottish Documents customers will be able to transfer their customer account to ScotlandsPeople, maintaining access to their previous searches and downloads. In addition the new site would eventually contain the coloured images held by the Court of the Lord Lyon.

The User Group will be invited to test the new site as will representatives selected by NAS.

Paul explained that the website enhancements agreed upon at the June meeting would be deferred until the launch of the new site, with the exception of overlay GROS references and the forename thesaurus which were still being looked at. The 1881 census scroll bar bug had been corrected. User Group members unanimously expressed considerable disappointment at the enhancement delays, not least in the context of the quite clear and explicit programme set out for the implementation of the various upgrades at the 1st June 2004 meeting. User Group members also expressed considerable reservations about the necessity for integrating the two sites, and about the risks entailed for the sites if an unnecessarily close integration was pursued. There was also considerable concern on the part of User Group members over whether there would be sufficient GROS resources to implement the merged site, as well as adding promised content such as earlier censuses. Paul and Martin acknowledged these concerns, but stressed the long-term benefits for searchers, especially those new to Scottish family history and unfamiliar with the sources, and the larger potential for continuing to add new content to the site.

It was noted with the greatest possible concern by the User Group that this could mean that the long-awaited enhancements discussed in detail at the 1st June User Group meeting, will not now take place before the launch of the new site.

The attitude of GROS/SP calls into question the role of the User Group in trying to bring about positive changes.

5. Website Enhancements

This was covered under item 4.

6. Timetable of Coming Events

Martin told the group that a much more realistic timetable had been placed on to the site and that some further alterations would take place. He stressed that the outstanding censuses would be on-line by the turn of the year. It was agreed that as soon as the 1871 census was ready it would be passed to the User Group for testing.

User Group members expressed considerable concern as to the time period that would be allowed to them for test the 1871 and other earlier censuses on the ScotlandOnLine ScotlandsPeople test site, stressing that other commitments in terms of full-time jobs and other factors meant that expectations on the part of GROS/SoL in terms of a response on a 14/21 day basis, as witness the upgrades in 2003, were unrealistic, and that such User Group concerns should not be exploited as a reason for delaying the on-line availability of the 1871, 1861, 1851, and 1841 census indexes and images beyond the end of 2004.

User Group members also expressed concern as to the date when 1861, 1851, and 1841 census indexes and images would become available for test purposes, never mind on the scotlandspeople.gov.uk site via ScotlandOnLine.

7. Correction of incorrect/illegible images

Paul reported following queries raised by John McCurdie and an internal meeting within GROS, a system has been put in place that will streamline and make more secure the process of passing incorrect/illegible images that have been corrected on the GROS system but not on the website, to SoL for implementation.

8. Availability of missing images

Paul reported that GROS had just taken possession of book scanning equipment that will allow the missing marriage years to be re-imaged. He explained that it would be a slow process and that the reprographics team were beginning the exercise with the 1932 marriages. Members of the group queried this, given that some of the earlier missing years are of more relevance to the site. Raymond undertook to query this within GROS.

A number of User Group members expressed concern over the fact that they understood that many of the registration district images for the “missing” years were of perfectly satisfactory quality, and, in that context, were available on the DIGROS system at New Register House in Edinburgh; but that it appeared to have been decided by GROS/SoL that the bad quality of the images for only a small proportion of the registration districts involved had led to the withdrawal of **all** the images for certain years from the images available on-line.

While it was fully appreciated by the User Group that certain registration district images for these few years might be problematic to the point of being unacceptable to put on-line, the User Group expressed a clear opinion that acceptable images for these years should be put on line now.

9. Any other business

Richard was asked about the problem regarding the users credit balance not being updated during some users sessions, specifically when viewing images. Richard reported that the problems were due to a number of issues including the way some browsers implemented javascript and the speed of execution of the javascript on the users PC. However the problem could be overcome by simply hitting the refresh button on the browser of the main window, which would result in the correct balance being displayed. An action to add this to the FAQ's was agreed.

10. Date of next meeting

Raymond to circulate suggested dates to the group.