Tracing
Your Scottish Ancestors



General Register House (Crown copyright).

Tracing Your Scottish Ancestors

A Guide to Ancestry Research in the National Records of Scotland and Scotland's People

National Records of Scotland







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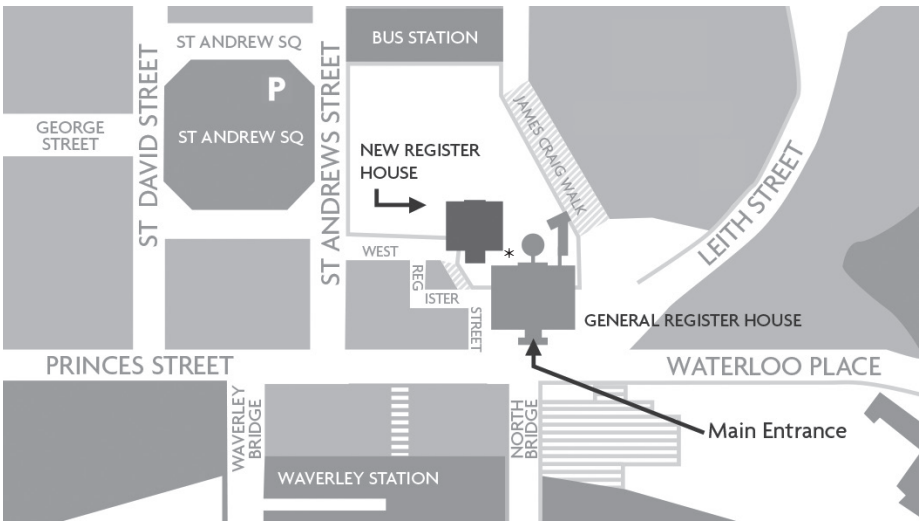
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Map of General Register House and New Register House



** Ramped entrance from the Archivists' Garden*
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Preface

I am delighted to introduce the eighth edition of National Records of Scotland's (NRS) handbook *Tracing Your Scottish Ancestors*.

Our national archives belong to everyone, and our aim is to make the wide variety of records we hold, both in paper and digital form, available in-person and, increasingly, online. In whatever way you choose to access our material, this book will be your guide to understanding more about what the records contain, and how they can help you in your research.

Our Scotland's People service, the official Scottish Government site for searching government records and archives, allows users from all over the world to order copies of certificates, research their Scottish ancestry and view digital images of records. These can be accessed online or in our Scotland's People Centre. Since the last edition was published in 2020, we have continued to provide, and expand upon, this worldwide access. Multiple additions have been made to the Scotland's People website (*http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk*) in this time, including: census returns from 1921; church court records; crofters and cottars returns for the 1883 Napier Commission; lightkeepers' registers; maps and plans; Ordnance Survey records; Pensions Appeal Tribunal records for First World War servicemen; prison registers; Scottish Women's Land Army personnel index cards, and tax records from the 17th–19th centuries. Find out more about them within in the subsequent chapters.

Whilst there is a wealth of information at our digital fingertips, there are still countless historical records available in their original paper form to be consulted and explored. Archives provide us with evidence of the past and they can help to tell us how society operated, why certain decisions were made and the struggles and celebrations felt and lived by real people. You can investigate these records further on a visit to the Historical and Digital Archive Search Rooms in General Register House, Edinburgh, To see what we hold, search our online catalogue at *www.nrscotland.gov.uk/catalogue*, and find out more about how to access these in chapter 7 of this book, or on our website at *www.nrscotland.gov.uk/records-and-archives/accessing-our-search-rooms*. In 2024–25 we hosted nearly 5,000 visits to our Historical Search Room and produced over 15,000 physical items to our readers. We hope you will be able to visit us soon to see some of these records for yourself.

It is great to see our Scotland's People Facebook community growing. This is a place where members can discuss their genealogical research or interests together

and where we share interesting examples of records from our archives and news of recent online record releases.

Stay in touch by following us on X and Facebook @NatRecordsScot and @ScotlandsPeople. You can find out about our corporate news on LinkedIn at *www.linkedin.com/company/national-records-of-Scotland*.

Our website also contains details of our current programme of public talks and events, as well as helpful information about registration, the latest statistics and data we produce, and the ways in which we conserve our material, decide which records to bring into our archive, and provide advice on how to look after your own records.

There has never been a better time to begin or expand your family history research, made even easier with the help of this updated handbook.

I wish you all the best with your research.

ALISON BYRNE
Registrar General for Scotland and Keeper of the Records of Scotland

Tracing
Your Scottish Ancestors

1
Introduction

They trace his steps till they can tell
His pedigree as weel's himsell
Robert Fergusson

1.1 You want to find your Scottish ancestors. This book is written specifically to help you to trace those ancestors who are mentioned in the documents preserved in the National Records of Scotland or available through Scotland's People, the two primary resources for Scottish family research.

The National Records of Scotland

1.2 The National Records of Scotland (NRS) is the government department responsible for the creation, custody and preservation of many of the official records of the government of Scotland from medieval times right up to the present day. It was formed in April 2011 by the merger of the National



Family group, 1910, private collection.

Archives of Scotland (NAS) and the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS), and it carries on the functions of two bodies.

1.3 The National Archives of Scotland, under the Keeper of the Records of Scotland, looked after official records of the government and law of Scotland, dating from before 1707, as well as the devolved administration since then. It was responsible for the records of many non-government concerns, including church records and the records of many private families and businesses. Many of them are useful for family history, and most are open to the public.

1.4 GROS, under the Registrar General for Scotland, administered the official records of births, marriages and deaths and census records. These records are of paramount importance to the family historian, and are available through ScotlandsPeople. They are described in Chapters 4–6.

1.5 The NRS occupies two adjacent public buildings in the centre of Edinburgh, close to the railway and bus stations and to the tram stop in St Andrew Square: General Register House (GRH) and New Register House (NRH). GRH stands at the east end of Princes Street, opposite the Balmoral Hotel. The main entrance of GRH is at the (south) front of the building, behind the statue of the Duke of Wellington ('the man on the horse'), opposite the Balmoral Hotel.

1.6 In addition to the Scotland's People Centre (see **1.9**), GRH contains the Historical and Digital Archive Search Rooms, located upstairs on the first floor. You may consult original records without charge for purposes of historical research provided that you hold a current reader's ticket and adhere to our Historical and Digital Archive Search Room Regulations. The staff will advise you and try to answer all reasonable questions, but the rest is up to you. Hence this book!

1.7 The Historical Search Room is open from Monday to Friday, 09.00–16.00 hours, apart from certain public holidays. Please check the NRS website or phone for details (see **1.18**). If you want to see any of the records for a legal purpose, then you will need to use the Legal Search Room and pay a fee for the records to be produced. The opening hours are the same.

1.8 Early in 2011 public access to records that were previously consulted

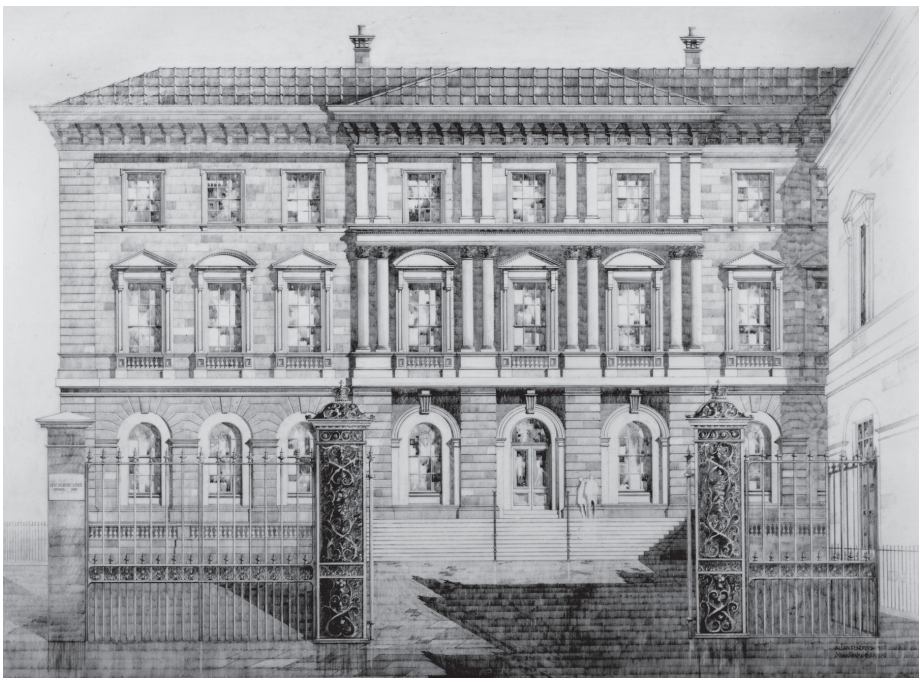
in the West Search Room, West Register House, Charlotte Square, was transferred to GRH. This means that, as with other records not stored in GRH, you need to order them in advance. Special arrangements apply to certain records, especially plans. Please check the catalogue and website.

Scotland's People

1.9 Scotland's People is the official government resource for family history, biography, local and social history. It is run in partnership by the NRS and the Court and Office of the Lord Lyon which regulates heraldry in Scotland.

1.10 You can visit the Scotland's People Centre or use the website for remote access. Read more about its services and the records that you can search in Chapters 3–6, 8–11 and 38.

1.11 NRH is also home to the Lyon Court (see Chapter 38).



New Register House (Crown copyright).

About This Book

1.12 Chapters 2–7 are designed to introduce you to some of the main family history records before you plan your visit or contact NRS or Scotland'sPeople. The remaining chapters describe records in NRS that might be useful in your search for your ancestors. In a sense, all records which name individuals may provide genealogical information, but we have tried to select and describe those which will be most useful. Chapters 8–14 concern records which should be of interest to all ancestor hunters: records of baptism, marriage, death, inheritance, land-owning and tenancy. The remaining chapters describe records which concern particular activities or professions or situations; records which, even if they do not always specify relationships, will add foliage to your family tree.

1.13 The records described in this book are almost entirely in the care of the NRS. Notable exceptions are those in the care of the Scottish Catholic Archives (see chapter 9) and those in the care of the Lord Lyon (see chapter 38).

1.14 An attempt has been made to lead the reader step-by-step into the records, particularly those records described in the earlier chapters which should prove the most profitable. The intention is to enable you to do your own research with increasing confidence. Descriptions of procedures in later chapters will assume that you have become familiar with the techniques of searching records.

1.15 As this book is intended specifically to help genealogical researchers, it does not cover all the records in the NRS, or deal with all aspects of those records described. Legal concepts may be simplified in their description.

1.16 Do bear in mind that you will be using records which were drawn up for particular administrative or legal purposes, and not for researching family history. You will be using them for a different purpose, so do not be disappointed if the information you are seeking is not available in the form in which you would like to find it. Perhaps we should warn you that any sort of historical research can be addictive and after a little practice you will find yourself becoming familiar with words and concepts from the world of your ancestors.

1.17 While reading this book, you may encounter unusual words. There will also be unfamiliar words in the records which you are going to search. It is useful get into the habit of using a dictionary, such as *The Concise Scots*

Dictionary (Edinburgh University Press, 2017) or the online Dictionary of the Scots Language at *https://dsl.ac.uk/*. Please note that terms and language are present in the records, which reflects the attitudes and biases of the time. Transcriptions of the manuscript or printed text in the original records may contain historical language which is no longer considered accurate or acceptable.

1.18 Most of the published works we mention in this book should be available in the United Kingdom through libraries, perhaps by inter-library loan, or online in the case of works out of copyright. The names of publishers are given for recent books.

1.19 In our use of personal pronouns, we have described your ancestors as if they were all male. This is a matter of convenience and we apologise to those who are rightly offended. We appreciate that you may find this unacceptable.

1.20 Throughout the rest of this book, the National Records of Scotland will usually be represented by the initials NRS. All paragraphs in the book are numbered, and cross-references to other paragraphs are by number, e.g. this paragraph would be simply **1.20**.

Enquiries from a Distance

1.21 This book is designed to help people to do their own research in the NRS and the Scotland's People Centre, and to get the most from using our online resources in advance of a visit. The NRS website contains guidance on researching remotely. You will find help with searching our online catalogue as well as guides to help you discover more about our different series of records. We hope that this book will also help and guide those who are unable to come to Edinburgh, but who wish to trace their Scottish ancestry. NRS staff will provide advice and will answer specific enquiries, but cannot carry out research on behalf of enquirers. If you are unable to carry out your research yourself, you may wish to consider employing a professional searcher. You can find information about them by contacting the Association of Scottish Genealogists and Researchers in Archives (ASGRA) – see Appendix A.

1.22 The NRS provides lists of helpful websites for family history research at *www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/visit-us/scotlandspeople-centre/useful-websites-for-family-history-research*.

1.23 All enquiries for records accessed through the Historical Search Room of NRS should be emailed to *LSRHE@scotlandspeople.gov.uk* in the first instance. We are also able to receive written correspondence at the address below, however email is the preferred form of contact.

National Records of Scotland
c/o The Historical Search Room
H M General Register House
2 Princes Street
Edinburgh EHI 3YY
Scotland

Please note that the up-to-date enquiry address will always be found on the current website.

1.24 All types of enquiries about the Scotland's People website or the Centre should be made by using the 'Contact us' form on the Scotland's People website at *www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/contact-us*. Seat bookings for the Scotland's People search room, which must be pre-paid, should also be made through the website. If you are unable to access the website, an email should be sent to *customerservices@scotlandspeople.gov.uk*. Postal enquiries can be sent to

Scotland's People Centre
New Register House
3 West Register Street
Edinburgh EHI 3YT
Scotland

For general telephone enquiries regarding the Scotland's People Centre the phone number is +44 131 202 0451. Please note that the telephone lines are only open Monday to Friday from 9am-4pm. Please note that it is not possible to make seat booking(s) over the phone.

2
First Steps: the Internet and Other Resources

2.1 When you decide to find out who your ancestors were, Scotland's People, the NRS or the internet should not be your starting point. First ask your Aunt Jessie. In other words, begin with your own living family. There is usually at least one relative who is interested in the family and acts as the family memory, though that memory may be reliable for only a couple of generations back. Be wary of romantic family traditions that claim descent from the disinherited child of a nobleman, the owner of a castle or Robert the Bruce. Note names, dates and places on old family letters, photographs, and documents, such as birth certificates and wills, which relatives may have preserved.

2.2 From this information, you will have a basis on which to build. You will probably now want to consider the resources available to the genealogist on the internet. Later chapters describe how to use the resources of Scotland's People and the NRS. In this chapter we provide pointers to some useful resources you can find on the internet and in paper format. If you do not have the internet, try visiting your local library or family history society. It is still possible to carry out research in the traditional manner using published reference books and other material. As your research progresses and you have more lines of enquiry to pursue, you will probably want to return to the many useful internet resources that exist. As with reliable published sources, you may not exhaust them on your first trawl.

2.3 A useful research habit is to note the source of your facts as you go. Although it may seem an unnecessary chore, it invariably saves time in the long run. Even a bare reference number can be sufficient to pinpoint an image or document, and avoid a duplicate search when your memory of the original source fades.



Wedding photograph 1930, private collection.

2.4 When sending your enquiry to archives or libraries, keep your e-mail or letter brief and focus on the key points in order to give yourself the best chance of getting good advice. The help offered online to genealogists by archives, libraries and others serving different parts of Scotland and different specialist interests, varies widely. While some places may offer an ancestral search service that you can commission, other hard-pressed organisations may only be able to provide standard information and invite you to undertake the research yourself or use a record agent to do so.

Libraries and Research Centres

2.5 Wherever you live, a visit to your local library is recommended, for advice in finding useful books, or obtaining them through inter-library loan. You may also get access to the ever-increasing range of online versions of older or out-of-copyright publications. Thirdly, you may also be able to benefit from any subscriptions the library may have to genealogical websites, for example Scotland's People, or other pay-per-view sites.

2.6 In addition, many public and specialist libraries hold a range of useful resources, such as Scottish census records on microfilm, or even original archive material.

Archival Collections across Scotland – Your Scottish Archives

2.7 Turning to other archives in Scotland, the most convenient way to get an idea of their holdings is to search the catalogue on the 'Your Scottish Archive' website (*www.yourscottisharchives.com*). The website displays catalogue entries from over 60 Scottish repositories, including local authority, universities, heritage organisations and community groups.

2.8 The 'Your Scottish Archive' website also contains a 'knowledge base' with with information to help you find and use records which are usually held in local and community archives in Scotland. It is arranged into three sections: record types, record creators and topics. There is also a glossary which defines archaic words and phrases, mostly Scots law terminology, commonly found in documents and records in Scotland's archives. Guides are also available on the website which help you locate the information you are looking for and can support you in understanding the records you find.

2.9 If you are looking for an overview of archives in Scotland and across the United Kingdom, The National Archives 'Find an archive' page allows you to search by location or keyword specifically for archives themselves, as opposed to the records they hold. Search results will show you contact information for the archive, brief information about the archive's collection and a map showing the location of the archive. You can search for over 2,500 archives across the UK and some abroad, but only those overseas archives that hold a significant collection of records relating to the UK are included. Visit *www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/discovery-help/find-an-archive/* to find out more.

University Archives

2.10 Scottish University archives often contain not only corporate records of potential genealogical use, but also extensive deposited and gifted collections, such as estate and business records, similar to those in local archives and NRS that are described in later chapters. The Archives Hub website provides a gateway to descriptions of archive collections held by UK universities and colleges – *https://www.jisc.ac.uk/archives-hub*. Expect to find at the least a brief description of a collection, but there is often a link to a complete catalogue.

National Library of Scotland

2.11 The NLS's website *www.nls.uk* features online catalogue descriptions of some collections, as well as several specialist resources on the activities of Scots abroad, for example in India. The NLS has an excellent array of digital resources including the searchable Post Office directories for 28 Scottish towns and counties spanning the period 1773–1911, British military lists, rolls of honour for casualties or those who died during the First World War, newspapers and much more. For more information, see their website *https://auth.nls.uk/eresources/* and for specific family history related resources *https://www.nls.uk/tools-for-research/family-history/*.

Printed Sources

2.12 If you know or suspect an ancestor was genuinely a product of a noble or landed family, or married into one, you should look at *The Scots Peerage* 9 vols (1904–1911) or various editions of *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage* or *Burke's Landed Gentry.* Still useful as guides to printed sources on particular families are *Scottish Family History* by Margaret Stuart and J Balfour Paul (1930), and *Scottish Family Histories* by Joan P S Ferguson (1986).

Newspapers

2.13 Local papers often cover court cases, whether fatal accident inquiries or even the more colourful of the small debt actions, and list bankrupts, so they are a useful supplement to the court records, or a substitute where there are gaps. If an ancestor was a local dignitary, there may be an obituary, however brief.

2.14 Some historic Scottish newspapers are available online through subscription sites such as the British Newspaper Archive *www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk* which makes available over 100 million pages dating back to the 1700s. It is also possible to get free access to them via some archives and libraries who subscribe to them. Local libraries usually hold microfilm of local newspapers, and may provide free access to commercial digital resources, for example, Gale. Gale is a Cengage company, which partnered with the British Library to create a rich collection of newspaper publishing across the U.K., including Scottish newspapers. NRS holds a selection of copies of the *Illustrated London News* which can be accessed in records of the British Railways Board (ref. BR).

2.15 The National Library of Scotland's website contains a handy guide to the availability and location of indexes of Scottish newspapers at *https://www.nls.uk/tools-for-research/family-history/newspapers/*. The NLS's newspaper collection is one of the biggest in the UK.; they are able to request a copy of every newspaper printed in Scotland. Items range from the earliest newspaper printed to online titles running to thousands of pages.

Places

2.16 If your family lived in the same locality for some generations, it is worth checking the evidence of gravestones in the local kirkyard or cemetery. Members of the Scottish Association of Family History Socities at *www.safhs.org.uk* can access an inventory of over 3,500 known burial grounds in Scotland and discover whether there are published or unpublished monumental inscriptions available. Local libraries usually hold copies of the resulting surveys of local graveyards, and many can also be consulted in NRS and the Scotland's People Centre.

2.17 You can also use maps and plans to familiarise yourself with a locality. This type of local history research can provide context and insight into the places your ancestors lived and worked. NRS holds around 170,000 topographical plans, marine charts and architectural and engineering drawings which

may be helpful to your research. For more information about how to access these records, please see the guide on the NRS website at *www.nrscotland.gov.uk/learning-and-events/research-guides/maps-and-plans/*. A large number of maps and plans held by NRS have been digitally imaged and can be viewed in the Digital Archive Search Room. Over 15,000 of these digital images can also be searched and viewed online for free on Scotland's People.

National Library of Scotland (NLS) hold a vast online collection of Ordnance Survey (OS) and other county and town plans, available on the NLS website at *https://maps.nls.uk/*. This includes the 1st edition of the six-inch to the mile OS maps, which were created from the OS name books held by NRS. Digital images of the name books can be viewed in the Digital Archive Search Room, and are available to search online on Scotland's People.

2.18 To find out information about an ancestor, you must know in what part of Scotland he lived. It helps to know a little about the administrative areas into which Scotland has been divided historically. For centuries, the basic units were the parish, burgh, county and sheriffdom, and you should try to find out in which of these your ancestors may have lived. As the boundaries of parishes and other administrative areas did not remain the same throughout the centuries and human beings are often mobile, you should note the names of adjacent parishes and other areas in case you need to extend your search to them. There was a particularly significant alteration of county and parish boundaries in 1891. For more information about parishes and districts in Scotland please see the Scotland's People website at *www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/help-and-support/guides/parishes-and-districts*. Further details of the changes within these districts since civil registration began in Scotland in 1855 can be found at *www.nrscotland.gov.uk/learning-and-events/research-guides/statutory-registers-of-births-deaths-and-marriages/*.

2.19 Fortunately, much of the genealogical information you will find online is organised, or is searchable, by place. The Scotland's People website, for example, allows you to narrow your searches by county and district, and the website gazetteer at *www.genuki.org.uk/* allows you to search by place name or Ordnance Survey Grid Reference. Published indexes include a useful *Index of Scottish Place Names* by the General Register Office (GROS) (various editions), which lists the then inhabited places in Scotland, showing the county and civil parish in which each was located. Copies are available for consultation in the NRS library and Scotland's People search room. In

addition to old county directories the most useful of the historic gazetteers is Francis H Groome (ed), *Ordnance Gazetteer for Scotland* (1896 edition). It contains helpful information for each parish, such as whether it was affected by boundary changes in the 1890s, which religious denominations had churches there, and who the major landowners were. Among the online editions of 'Groome' are *www.gazetteerofscotland.org.uk/* and *www.electricscotland.com/history/gazetteer/*. The British History Online website has a range of free resources to use for Scottish research, including Samuel Lewis' *A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland* first published in 1846. It provides detailed descriptions of every settlement in the country in the mid-nineteenth century in alphabetical order.

2.20 A useful table of parishes and corresponding counties, sheriffdoms, commissary courts (see Chapter 10) and burghs can be found in *The Scottish Family Tree Detective: Tracing Your Ancestors in Scotland* by Rosemary Bigwood. Earlier alphabetical lists of parishes and the corresponding sheriffdom, diocese, presbytery and commissariot may be found in *An Historical Catalogue of the Scottish Bishops* by Robert Keith (1824) and in *In Search of Scottish Ancestry* by Gerald Hamilton-Edwards (1986). Copies are available to consult in the NRS library.

2.21 The Old and New Statistical Accounts of Scotland (published in the 1790s and 1840s respectively) provide detailed descriptions of the economic and social conditions in each of the Scottish parishes. Written by the local parish minister, they often include references to contemporary educational provision. Copies are available online at *https://stataccscot.ed.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/home*.

Personal Names

2.22 If you want to find out about the history of your surname, look at *The Surnames of Scotland* by George F Black (New York Public Library). This is available to view for free online via the Hathi Trust Digital Library and includes over 8,000 names. Beware, however, that names can be a snare sometimes, as it is only in comparatively recent times that we have spelled names consistently.

2.23 An ancestor may have had the same surname as you, but spelled it differently. Clerks writing this surname down in official documents might spell it in yet other ways. Census enumerators might spell a name differently or a person's nickname may have been given rather than their official name.

Even with forenames, you have to be canny: for example, Patrick and Peter, and Janet, Jane and Jeanie, used to be interchangeable names. But with forenames, you have a marvellous advantage in the Scottish practice of naming almost every child after a relative. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that an eldest son is named after his father's father, the second after his mother's father, the third after his own father, an eldest daughter after her mother's mother, the second after her father's mother, and the third after her own mother, and younger children after available uncles and aunts. A practice less convenient for us, however, was the naming of infants after elder brothers and sisters who had died: another snare for the genealogist. Another consideration is the use of 'tee names'. These were most prevalent in fishing communities and hamlets in the north east of Scotland, whereby families of fishermen could be known by their boat's name, rather than their surname. You may find a fisherman's boat name captured as part of his surname, for example John Brown 'Beauty' or George Cowie-Helldom. In some circumstances, only the boat name may have been captured as the surname by the Census enumerator or valuation assessor for example John Beauty, George Helldom.

Occupations and Social Groups

2.24 A big challenge in ancestry research is locating records for particular occupations and social groups, such as paupers, prisoners, fishwives, members of craft incorporations and guilds, handloom weavers, miners and steelworkers. It is possible to find information online, especially in websites or online catalogues connected to specialist collections, such as university archives (**2.10**), local or family history websites. The Scotland's People website has a helpful guide to occupations and designations in our records. See *https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/help-and-support/guides/occupations-and-designations*. Explore *www.museums.co.uk* to find museums that may specialise in your ancestor's line of work or which may tell you more about the area that they worked in. The commercial and free sites usually offer some records relating to occupations, or links to useful sites. For a helpful glossary of occupations visit the ScotlandsPeople website at *www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/glossary*. Post Office or other commercial directories can be very helpful in locating businesses and those who owned them, but less so for employees. Over 700 directories from 1773 to 1911 can be viewed for free at the National Library of Scotland website *https://digital.nls.uk/directories/index.html*. The Vision of Britain Online Atlas at *www.visionofbritain.org.uk* provides free access to colour-coded online maps of England, Wales and Scotland. By selecting an area of Scotland you will

discover more about the local industry and numbers of each gender in specific roles of employment through a variety of statistical graphs. Later chapters describe sources in NRS for various occupations, trades and social groups.

Internet Resources

2.25 As already mentioned, searching the internet has become a natural starting point for genealogy.

2.26 The internet has revolutionised the search for ancestry by creating searchable indexes or databases, often with related images of original documents. This has led to expectations that information can be found almost instantaneously, but this is not always the case, and it may help you to be aware of possible reasons why. Firstly, not all catalogues and databases are searchable online. Although there is an enormous amount of information already accessible, the complexity and size of some catalogues and indexes in archives mean that they have yet to appear online. Family history is an important area for archive bodies, but not the only one to which scarce resources may be directed. As efforts go into creating new resources for tracing Scottish ancestors, the picture changes frequently, so you need to use the tools described above to establish what is available and what is not. Look out for announcements of completed projects, and perhaps subscribe to e-mail newsletters or updates issued by some archives. NRS and Scotland's People both announce new family history developments online through their websites, and Scotland's People issues a newsletter to users who sign up for free through the website.

2.27 Secondly, not all original records are available on the internet. This may be because the documents are difficult to index or to scan, or because data protection or other restrictions apply. Bear in mind that not all series of records are complete. Losses over the centuries have reduced what is available for searching, and some records, such as local or central government administrative papers, registers of the poor or court cases, may have been partly or wholly destroyed. Websites which list what records are available can help you locate alternative sources to fill in gaps. Some ideas can also be found in this book.

2.28 Some internet sites offer information copied from older published lists and indexes, which have been superseded by more reliable and complete online information. For example, all the indexes to Scottish testaments before

1800, published by the Scottish Record Society, have been replaced by the official online index to the actual records available through Scotland's People (Chapter 10). Official catalogue descriptions of such records may indicate how the content is most easily accessible, whether in print or otherwise.

2.29 Beware the quality of transcripts from original documents which are available online. They may have been made with more enthusiasm than accuracy, so try to check the original source whenever you can. One indicator of reliability is whether the source material is correctly identified and referenced. You may also encounter duplication of information in different versions of the same material. Trusting one site rather than another is largely a matter of judgement and experience.

2.30 For in-depth family history research there is no substitute for visiting Scotland to search out the sources for yourself. If you cannot do so you can visit the NRS and Scotland's People websites, or use the contact details at **1.23–24**. One option is to employ a professional record searcher to do the work for you (**1.21**).

Public Registers, Census and Government Records in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

2.31 These may be of relevance if you are searching for ancestors who have moved to or from Scotland, even temporarily, and therefore may be recorded in the registers of births, deaths and marriages, and census returns, outside Scotland. Also, official records of government and public bodies may contain material relating to the whole of the United Kingdom, for example War Office records of Scottish servicemen in The National Archives (TNA) located in Kew in London.

2.32 The General Register Office for England and Wales is part of His Majesty's Passport Office and access to the records of births, deaths and marriages for England and Wales from 1837 is via the online General Register Office (GRO) website *www.gov.uk/research-family-history.* The registers are not open to public inspection, but entries can be bought online in the form of certificates. PDFs of historical digitised civil registration records held by the GRO (birth entries 1837–those registered over 100 years ago and death entries 1837–1957) are also available for purchase. Indexes which identify relevant entries in the registers can be found for free at *www.freebmd.org.uk*, however these are not complete as the project relies on volunteers to transcribe the indexes.

2.33 TNA's website, *www.nationalarchives.gov.uk*, takes you into its own vast online catalogue, 'Discovery', and related guidance. An example of records held include military records and registered wills and administrations provided in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1384–1858. A growing number of searchable databases linked to images of the records can be explored through TNA's website or related pay-per-view or subscription websites. They include the 1921 census for England and Wales.

2.34 TNA's online catalogue of its own archive holdings forms part of the Discovery resource *https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/*. Discovery is also a good place to find collections containing Scottish-related records elsewhere in the UK, and it links to the Scottish Archive Network (**2.7–9**). Using the advanced search option, you can search by corporate or place names, and also by personal names, but these are often of landowners, military officers, and people in the professions, industry, commerce and academic life. Discovery also provides access to catalogues of archives in about 400 archives in England and Wales.

2.35 The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) is the main source for family history records in Northern Ireland. It is the official place of deposit for public records there, and like the NRS it also holds many privately-deposited archives. For family history and other guidance see *www.proni.gov.uk*. RASCAL (Research And Special Collections Available Locally) is a gateway to research resources in libraries, museums and archives in Northern Ireland – *www.rascal.ac.uk*. Information on statutory registers of births, marriages and deaths held by the General Register Office (Northern Ireland) – GRONI – can be found at *geni.nidirect.gov.uk/*. Almost no nineteenth-century Irish census records have survived (aside from those for a few counties between the years 1821-1851), but census returns for 1901 and 1911 are available for free at the National Archives of Ireland site. Due to the Irish War of Independence and the political division of Ireland, no census was taken in 1921.

The Republic of Ireland

2.36 If you are searching for ancestors who lived in what is now the Republic of Ireland, visit the National Archives of Ireland at *www.nationalarchives.ie.* The censuses of 1901 and 1911 are available on this website. The General Register Office for Ireland at *www.irishgenealogy.ie/en* has an online service for birth and death certificates from 1864 and marriages from 1845.

Genealogy Websites

2.37 The family history resources of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) contains the largest collection of genealogical materials in the world. These include copies or information drawn from the Scottish statutory registers, Old Parish Registers (OPRs) and censuses (Chapter 3 and later chapters). Go to *www.familysearch.org* or visit your local LDS family history centre to get access to the resources of this genealogical service. Family Search details the location of these centres. Among the commercial genealogy websites offering varying ranges of resources for the UK, often including open Scottish census records, are *Ancestry.co.uk*, and *FindMyPast.co.uk.* If you are lucky enough to trace any of your Scottish family lines back to a time before the Reformation, the People of Medieval Scotland project at *poms.ac.uk* may help to find earlier records of your family from the period 1093–1314, as sourced from 22,500 contemporary documents.

Family and Local History Societies

2.38 Family and local history societies across Scotland have been very active in creating indexes and other helpful tools for ancestral research in local and national records. This work is therefore often useful for research in those archives. An impressive range of transcripts or lists drawn from original records is available in print or online. The most active in publishing its members' work has been the Scottish Genealogy Society – *www.scotsgenealogy.com.* It also runs a Library and Family History Centre in Edinburgh. Among the other active societies are the Aberdeen & N.E. Scotland Family History Society, *www.anesfhs.org.uk*, the Glasgow & West of Scotland Family History Society, whose projects include the indexing of poor law records for Glasgow, Lanarkshire and Dunbartonshire – see *www.gwsfhs.org.uk,* and Friends of Dundee City Archives, with a range of searchable resources, including transcriptions of the use of the mortcloth in Dundee from 1655 to 1817, at *www.fdca.org.uk*.

2.39 Membership of family history societies may help you in obtaining or exchanging information, benefiting from advice and tuition, or discovering work already done by fellow members via a society's register of members' interests. For information about family history societies visit the 'useful websites' section of the NRS website or see the Scottish Association of Family History Societies, *www.safhs.org.uk*.

Clan Societies and Associations

2.40 Clan links are not always a reliable starting point for family history research. Clan genealogies that can be found in print, online or in manuscript form often relate to the grander families in the clan. Shared family names of clan members do not mean that they are related, although some may be. Common territorial links in the past can be helpful in making a start, as particular clan names are locally common in relatively small areas of the Highlands and Islands. Joining a clan society or association may help you discover rewarding information and contacts. Many societies are active or have links to fellow societies in other countries where Scots have settled. The Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs is the authoritative body for information on the Scottish Clan System at *www.clanchiefs.org.uk*. Within the site you will find information relating to the Standing Council, the name of the Chief or Representative for each clan and links to their website. The VisitScotland website also has some useful information about Scottish clans, *https://www.visitscotland.com/things-to-do/research-your-ancestry*.

2.41 Your next step in creating your family tree can be to make use of the registers and censuses in Scotland's People. These are described in chapters 3–6. You may also wish to read the family history guidance on the NRS and Scotland's People websites, or try searching our online catalogue. How to do this is described in Chapter 7. Although this book may not answer all the questions you have about your ancestors, it is hoped it will make your search a rewarding one.