

ScotlandsPeople User Group

Tenth Meeting

12.00, 22 May 2006

CBC House, Edinburgh

Present:

Paul Parr, (Chairman), Deputy Registrar General, GROS
Duncan Macniven, Registrar General for Scotland
Raymond Evans, (Secretary), GROS
Eileen Thomson, GROS
Richard Callison, Scotland on Line
Alison Wallace, Scotland on Line
Alan Stewart
John McCurdie
David W Webster
Kenneth Nisbet
Andy Keogh
Jean Pendexter (by teleconference)
Jan Gow (by teleconference)
Sue Macbeth (by teleconference)

1. Apologies for absence

Marie Dougan
George Maxwell

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Item 3.11. The last sentence should include “and victims” after “accused”

3. Matters arising and action points from the previous minutes (item numbers refer to the January minutes).

3.1 *Scottish Family History Service (item 3.3)*

Paul reported that as a result of the contractor involved in the building work going into liquidation, the contract was having to be retendered and the expected opening date has been put back to August 2007. As a result, consideration was being given to re-opening the east search room.

Andy asked if there was a possibility that GROS could be relocated as has happened to other SE Departments. Paul reported that apart from NHSCR, who have moved to Dumfries, GROS would remain where they were.

3.2 *ActiveX problem – current position and plans (item 3.8)*

Richard told the group that the problem remained an on-going one but that some potential improvements were being considered. A Flash viewer was being tested which will be shown to the User Group.

4. GROS Quality Control Procedures

David, who raised this issue, asked if GROS had any doubts about their quality control procedures following the 1851 “Kilmarnock” omission. Paul said that quality control procedures were in place. Alan asked if there was any missing data within the 1841 census. Richard replied that there was a small amount which could be traced by looking in “help”.

Ken asked if there could be a method whereby customers could go to a box to check what data was missing without cluttering the home page. GROS agreed to take this away to look at.

GROS agreed to look at the unavailable images caused by the odd numbering system for Edinburgh and Glasgow RDs with district numbers greater than 99, and the 28000 images that have duplicate reference numbers caused by Registrars issuing books with the same numbers as earlier books.

5. 1851 and 1841 Census now on line

Andy asked if the “blue paper” issue that had resulted in a number of 1851 images being omitted was being resolved. Steve reported that he had hoped that borrowing NAS imaging tools could be utilised, but unfortunately this was not the case and other re-imaging methods were being looked at.

Ken asked when 1841, 1851 and 1861 would be available in New Register House. Steve indicated that there had been some hardware hitches but that there was now a target date of the 2nd week in June.

6. Future Direction of SP

Duncan introduced this topic explaining that the paper produced by John and David had been prompted by discussion between them.

Richard noted that he had not initially seen the document and Paul said that the Secretariat would ensure that, as they had in this case, papers were circulated to all of the User Group.

6.1 OPR's

Steve reported that the data should be returned by the contractor by the end of August and that OPR's should be on-line by the end of 2006. He suggested that they could be rolled out county by county, beginning with the northern counties. This suggestion was looked at favourably by the group.

Andy noted that the quality and presentation of the OPR's varied considerably from Parish to Parish

Ken asked GROS/SoL to ensure that when OPR's do go on line that there is a clear, concise and obvious message to state that the majority of the records contain very limited information, and in the majority of cases, little more than is stated on the index entry. Eileen indicated that despite limited information, customers would still, in many cases, wish to view the image or purchase the extract.

Ken reported that work on the burial index (NBI) had virtually ground to a halt but there were some indexes available in book form. With regard to OPR deaths Duncan said that the lack of an index was an obstacle to making burial images available on-line and, in view of the importance of OPR burials as a source, whether GROS should develop an index. Ken expressed concern about a possible loss of income for the Family History Societies should burials go on-line. It was agreed that a "thin" index could be produced as a compromise. GROS would discuss further with SAFHS.

6.2 *Minor Records*

Steve confirmed that it was hoped that Minor Records would be on-line by the end of the year, and that the whole page of an entry would be shown which would often include non Scottish records.

6.3 *RCE's*

Steve confirmed that RCE's were on course to go on line this year but Richard indicated that this timescale may be tight.

6.4 *RNE's*

Steve said that he understood that those records had been filmed as part of the OPRs but would check.

6.5 *1881 Census*

Steve indicated that the index and images had still to be matched and that other projects would take priority, but Alan and Jan both felt that it should be made available sooner rather than later.

Duncan told the group that the size of the task would be gauged following the introduction of the OPRs.

6.6 *Sessional Records*

It was reported that NAS were currently working on the CH2 and CH3 sessional records and they would be piloted on the Scottish Documents website with a view to being placed on SP.

6.7 *Catholic Church Records*

Negotiations are on-going with the Catholic church. There was no timescale set for those records going on line.

6.8 *High Court Justiciary records*

NAS are keen to progress these records after the work on CH2/CH3 but they are not envisaged to be available for at least 2/3 years.

6.9 *Fatal Accident Enquiries*

NAS are not as enthusiastic about these records due to the small numbers of people involved. This was awarded a low priority.

6.10 *Sasines*

Digitisation is planned in 2 stages. The more recent sasines are taking priority as they are being used by solicitors. The older records will be prepared with the assistance of the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) and will be a long slow process.

6.11 *NAS Catalogue*

It was agreed that there could be a link from SP to the catalogue. David asked about the Register of Deeds, and that would be considered.

6.12 *Adopted Persons Register*

Confidential register. No action here.

6.13 *Register of Divorces*

Indexes only to be considered.

6.14 *BMD Indexes but no images up to modern day*

This is in hand and will be implemented during 2006.

6.15 *Mother's maiden name in birth and death searches*

It was agreed that this would be of great value, but would be a massive time consuming task. For further review.

6.15 *Age at Death*

Although there are only a few years where this is not indexed, it was noted that this would be another mammoth task and would depend on staff availability. The question of recruiting volunteers was raised. However Paul reminded the group that organisations such as the LDS who carried out such tasks voluntarily in the past usually wished to retain those records. For further review.

6.16 *Separation of maiden and other names for female deaths*

The User Group pointed out that although female deaths were indexed under all names, there was no indication as to the maiden name. Steve reported that, again, this would be a huge undertaking. John asked if this could be implemented for future deaths. GROS agreed to look at in greater detail.

6.17 *Wife's name for male deaths*

Steve indicated that this, again, would be a massive re-indexing job which could be looked at in the future.

6.18 *Thick Index for Censuses*

The UG hoped that the 1911 census indexing could be planned to include "thick" indexing, and earlier censuses to have additional fields indexed such as place of birth, occupation and relationship to head. This would be done using the Enumerators Record Books as opposed to census forms.

For further consideration.

6.19 *Collated year Index*

At NRH, the BMD microfiches for a district have an index after the year's data, arranged alphabetically, and the UG would like to have these be made available for browsing. This would aid searches for people indexed under unexpected spellings of a name, or births where an illegitimate child takes on father's name in later years but the mother is unknown.

GROS/Sol will consider the feasibility.

6.20 *Further years for wills*

This is currently to 1901. The UG felt that this should be extended to match the cut-off year for death images. Duncan reported that there were plans to extend the timescale but that those wills were not yet digitised. The current idea was to put a further 10 years on-line in 2011, to coincide with the release of the 1911 Census. The UG asked whether annual releases were possible. Duncan agreed to pursue with NAS.

6.21 *Census street indexes*

The UG reported that street indexes exist for all open censuses. For 1901 this index covers most urban areas, with the coverage decreasing over the decades back to only the four cities in 1841. It is often of great interest to researchers to check who was resident at a particular address.

The 1891 street index was computerised and made available to the User Group a couple of years ago on a beta test basis, but, for reasons not clear, never added to the ScotlandsPeople website.

It is suggested that the available street indexes for all the 7 open censuses should be made available on ScotlandsPeople.

Richard reminded the group that it was the 1901 street index that had been available for testing. He stressed that despite the fact that there were searching issues, this was in hand but required considerable time and effort.

6.22 *Search on forenames only*

Richard reported that this was feasible at some point in the future but would require some code adjustment.

6.23 *Census search using 2 family names*

Richard again reported that this was feasible at some point in the future but would require some code adjustment.

6.24 *OPR's organised by county and district*

Richard told the group that he was investigating the use of maps, to aid this facility and that he was hoping to get a pre 1855 county/district list from GROS. Again a fairly major task.

6.25 *Find all children born to a couple*

The UG reported that this is possible in Census and OPR searches but not in statutory records. The group were told that although this was desirable, it was not yet practical.

6.26 *Searches on Searches*

The UG told the meeting that when a user has many pages of "Previous Searches", checking for previous searches of a particular surname is difficult. This is not helped by the sorting appearing to default to the original sort after a few pages have been scrolled, but the preferred solution is a "search on searches".

Richard said that SoL had been looking at this and he requested some feedback on specifics.

6.27 *Replacement for Soundex*

The group felt that Soundex has severe limitations, which do not make it the ideal tool for searching for surname spelling variations. While the use of wildcards is the ultimate tool for solving this problem, the efficient use of this tool is not easy to learn for a significant proportion of users, so they suggested serious consideration be given to replacing Soundex with the generally accepted leading alternative, NameThesaurus (previously known as Namex).

Richard agreed to look at other options.

6.28 *Disputed Records*

This is intended to contain a list of records, predominantly censuses, where some of the data is in dispute but can not be confirmed or rectified. In particular, census records may not be modified, but a surname may have been recorded wrongly through mis-hearing, or an age is massively out. The suggested cost would be a credit or two to check entries for one surname.

Duncan suggested an alternative database but stressed that we could not change the original source information. David suggested providing sources without changing records. The conclusion was that this was not practicable.

6.29 *MI's*

The paper stated that there are many collections of monumental inscriptions, usually by family history associations, and some sites with images of gravestones. These could be incorporated into the SP site with agreement from the data collator and suitable royalty payments.

Ken said that in an ideal world this would be advantageous but that not all of the MI's were indexed. He also expressed concern about possible income loss by the SAFHS if these were on line. He felt that it would be helpful if there was a message on SP to say that the MI's were with SAFHS.

6.30 *Scottish NBI*

Again Ken felt that it would be helpful if there was a message on SP to say that the National Burial Index was with SAFHS.

6.31 *Other Unique Datasets*

The group said that it is possible that other holders of unique datasets would be prepared to licence access, e.g. ScotsOrigins have a couple of unique datasets that could be of interest, - the York probate records relating to Scots in England (which may be extended to include the equivalent Canterbury records), and Scottish "strays" in at least one English census. A link on SP was considered.

6.32 *Longer Access*

The paper stated that although this has increased from 1 to 7 days over the years, a much longer time (if an expiry time is truly necessary) would be appreciated, of the order of weeks if not months.

Paul acknowledged that this has been raised before, but that we were currently bound by both legislation and our agreement with Scotland on Line.

6.33 *Adjustment to Costs*

The UG proposed that searches should be free instead of the current 1 credit per page of 25, but that images should cost more (say 10 credits). There may need to be a

limit on the search results, e.g. over 1000 (say) should produce a message for the user to narrow the search.

This is worthy of further discussion.

6.34 *Voucher Access*

The paper stated that a number of FHSs, particularly those in New Zealand and Australia, have expressed frustration that it is not possible to buy vouchers for SP access. This most often involves members who don't have a credit card or are extremely nervous about using credit cards on the www. This latter factor, it is known from comments by a number of individuals, applies all over the world. While the reality is that the risk of the secure payment method offered by SP is absolutely minimal, it is near certain that a voucher system would further increase SP usage not only by FHSs but also individuals.

Alison let the group see the vouchers that will be available shortly and SAFHS offered to be a selling agent

7. **AOB**

Paul told the group that Dee Williams had been recently appointed as head of the Scottish Family History Service.

8. **Next Meeting**

Jan and Jean told the group that they would be in Scotland between 12 and 25 September. Raymond to sort out a convenient date.

Raymond Evans
GROS

