

Making The Most of Online Sources for Scottish Family History

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The History of Scotland

- Scotland is a country that has, since 1707, been part of a union of countries with England, Wales and latterly Northern Ireland
- Scotland's legal and administrative frameworks differ from the rest of the UK which means most of the records we need to source for family history are Scotland-specific

Where to Begin

- Always begin by evaluating what you already know and talking to your relatives, especially any older relatives, who may be able to fill in blanks and provide family stories
- Gather together any certificates you or other family members already possess
- Build a basic tree with this information and then pick a starting point for your Scottish research (i.e. choose one line and see how far you can go with it!)

Scottish Civil Registration (1855-present)

- On 1st Jan 1855 the registration of births, marriages and deaths became compulsory irrespective of religious denomination
- This date marked the handover of recordkeeping from the church to the civil realm
- The new records were obliged to follow a standard format for each record type
- Scotland has some of the most detailed BMD records in the world from 1855 onwards
- It should be possible to trace Scottish ancestors back to at least the early-mid 1800s using these records (e.g. someone born in the early 1800s is likely to die post-1855)
- The only place to obtain original images of these records is the official ScotlandsPeople website run by the National Records of Scotland: <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk>

ScotlandsPeople

ScotlandsPeople operates a pay-per-view credits system so there is NO subscription option like other commercial websites

- Credits can be purchased in multiples of 30 with 30 credits costing £7.50
- It costs 6 credits (£1.50) to view a birth, marriage, death or census record, 2 credits (50p) for a valuation roll and 10 credits (£2.50) for wills and testaments
- Always remember, however, that searching the indexes is *FREE*

The ScotlandsPeople website hosts the following record sets:

- Statutory Registers (Births, Marriages and Deaths plus Divorces, Civil Partnerships and Dissolutions)
- Census Returns (1841-1911)
- Church Records (Old Parish Registers, Roman Catholic Registers etc)

- Valuation Rolls
- Legal Records (wills/testaments/soldiers wills)
- Poor Relief and Migration Records (1852-57)
- Kirk Session Records (*BRAND NEW!*)

It is important to understand which records have viewable images and which are index only. You can purchase and instantly view the following images:

- Birth records 100 years or older (1855-1920)
- Marriage records 75 years or older (1855-1945)
- Death records 50 years or older (1855-1970)
- One new year of viewable images is added to the site each year

It is possible to search for events within these closure periods, find basic details on the indexes and order full certificates for £12 each or they are viewable in ScotlandsPeople Centres where you can access as many historic or modern day records as you like for a £15 day pass fee (or at least as many as you can fit into the day!)

Scottish Statutory Birth Records (1855-present)

Here is a list of the information recorded on Scottish birth records from 1855 onwards:

- Forename and surname of child
- Whether the child was illegitimate (1855-1918)
- Date and place of birth
- Time of birth (not just recorded for twins)
- Gender
- Name, surname and occupation of father
- Name and maiden surname of mother
- Date and place of parents' marriage (except 1856-1860)
- Signature and qualification of informant and their residence (if not the place of birth)
- When and where registered and signature of registrar

Scottish Naming Pattern

Many Scottish families followed this traditional naming pattern:

- 1st son named after father's father
- 2nd son named after mother's father
- 3rd son named after father
- 1st daughter named after mother's mother
- 2nd daughter named after father's mother
- 3rd daughter named after mother
- Additional children of both sexes named after aunts/uncles and other family members

Don't expect all families to have followed the naming pattern but keep it in mind as a clue if you find your families were adhering to it. Its use gradually declined during the 19th century.

Scottish Statutory Marriages Records (1855-present)

Here is a list of the information recorded on Scottish marriage records from 1855 onwards:

- Date and place of marriage and how married (church/civil etc)
- Forename and Surname of bride and groom (plus signatures or marks)
- Rank, profession or occupation of both parties (bride often blank)
- Whether single (spinster or bachelor) or widowed
- Age at marriage
- Usual residence of both parties
- Name, surname and occupation of fathers
- Name and maiden surname of mothers
- Signature of officiating minister and witnesses for regular marriages or distinct information for irregular marriages (e.g. sheriff's warrant)
- When and where registered and signature of registrar

Scottish Statutory Death Records (1855-present)

Here is a list of the information recorded on Scottish death records from 1855 onwards:

- Forename and surname
- Rank, profession or occupation
- Whether single, married or widowed
- Date, time and place of death
- Sex and age at death
- Forename, surname and occupation of father
- Forename and maiden surname of mother
- Cause of death and duration of final illness
- Name of medical attendant who certified the death (if there was one)
- Signature and qualification of informant and their residence (if not place of death)
- When and where registered and signature of registrar
- Place of burial, name of undertaker and when the doctor last saw the deceased alive (1855-1860)

Scottish Census Returns (1841-1911)

Here is a list of the information recorded on Scottish census records:

- Address of the house or institution
- Surname and forename of each person
- Relationship to head of household of family members, visitors, lodgers and servants (except 1841)
- Whether single, married or widowed
- Age - in 1841 this was rounded down for persons over 15 years although you will still find some exact ages given as the rounding wasn't uniformly followed by all enumerators

- Occupation
- Birthplace – County and Parish or country of birth from 1851 (for 1841 only whether the person was born in the county (yes or no), in England, Ireland or elsewhere is listed)
- From 1841 whether the person spoke G (Gaelic) or G and E (Gaelic and English) is noted
- Rooms with one or more windows (from 1861)
- Disability - whether blind, deaf, dumb etc
- Fertility of marriage question (1911 only)

The censuses were taken at midnight on:

- 6 June 1841
- 30 March 1851
- 7 April 1861
- 2 April 1871
- 3 April 1881
- 5 April 1891
- 31 March 1901
- 2 April 1911

The 1921 census is coming soon as the 100 year closure period has now passed!

Old Parish Registers (pre-1855)

- The Old Parish Registers (OPRs) contain the records of births (usually in the form of baptisms), marriages (usually as banns) and deaths (usually as burials or mort cloth hires) kept by individual parishes of the Established Church (The Church of Scotland) before the introduction of statutory registration in 1855
- The parish minister or session clerk was usually the person responsible for the maintenance of the registers, but since no uniform format was employed, record keeping varied enormously from parish to parish and record keeper to record keeper
- Be aware that OPRs pertain to the official Church of Scotland so if your family worshipped in a different denomination they will likely not feature in these record sets
- Also be aware that the coverage and condition of the registers varies greatly, some registers have been lost or destroyed and many people did not get recorded as it was not compulsory to do so and was even costly and unpopular at times
- Death records are particularly sparse making it difficult to find death details for a large number of pre-1855 deaths
- The lack of detail, such as the names of parents, can also make it difficult to differentiate between people with the same name in the same area so be careful not to assume a particular person is your ancestor without additional evidence
- It's important to understand the limitations of these registers – they do not provide the same level as detail as post-1855 records and it's fairly common to not be able to locate certain ancestors in them

The Register of Corrected Entries (RCEs)

- Original entries in the Statutory Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages cannot be altered but sometimes errors or additional information must be recorded after the fact
- Since the original cannot be altered, any amendments are recorded in a separate register known as the Register of Corrected Entries (RCE) or The Register of Corrections Etc from 1966
- A cross-reference to the RCE volume and page is added in the left-hand margin of the original statutory register entry to denote there is an RCE for that entry
- RCE references can be found on birth, marriage and death entries
- In the case of births the RCEs often refers to affiliation and aliment cases and pertain to the paternity of the child in question (these generally reveal the reputed father's name)
- In the case of marriages RCE references were inserted in the event of divorces prior to the introduction of the separate statutory register of divorces in 1984
- In the case of deaths RCEs would generally relate to sudden deaths that required the procurator fiscal to investigate
- Images of entries with an RCE include a link to the RCE page which is free to view – always check the side margin for a reference and the top of the page for the link to view the RCE via this wording: *'there have been 1 corrections identified with this entry'*

Valuation Rolls

- Valuation rolls were local tax records which list properties and both the proprietors and tenants of those properties in each Scottish county and burgh between 1855 and 1996
- Indexes and images of the valuation rolls for 1855, 1865, 1875, 1885, 1895, 1905, 1915, 1920, 1925, 1930, 1935 and 1940 are available to search on ScotlandsPeople

Kirk Sessions

- Kirk sessions were local church courts held by the Church of Scotland from 1560 onwards
- They contain some of the richest sources of Scottish family history information from the sixteenth to late nineteenth century
- Read the ScotlandsPeople guide to Church Court Records for further information: <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/guides/church-court-records>
- Many of these amazing records have recently been added to the ScotlandsPeople website and can be accessed using the 'Virtual Volumes' search area

Golden Year Certificates

- The year statutory registration began (1855) is known as the golden year for BMD certificates in Scotland due to the extra detail on records for this one year only
- If you find any BMDs for your family took place in 1855, I would strongly recommend purchasing those records due to all the additional family history information they contain

Here is a list of the extra details which were included solely in 1855:

Births:

- Other children and whether they were living or deceased
- Ages of both parents
- Birthplaces of both parents
- Parents' usual residence
- Baptismal name (if different)

Marriages:

- Birthplaces of both spouses and when and where their births were registered
- Number of former marriages of each spouse
- Number of children by those marriages

Deaths:

- Deceased's place of birth
- How long they've been in the district or parish
- Children in order of birth, their names and ages or age at death if deceased

ScotlandsPeople: My Top Tips!

- Use the 'Advanced Search' screen for BMD and census searching
- Amend your search from within the results page on the left-hand side
- The most important tip is to use wildcards when searching! Surname spellings can vary vastly so employ smart wildcard searching to give yourself the best chance of locating the record you require
- Pay particular attention to vowels for wildcard usage as they are more likely to get transposed and corrupted but don't forget to use wildcards at the end of surnames as well as rogue letters such as an e or s could be added by mistake
- Get in the habit of saving your purchased records to your computer as jpegs
- It's possible to create chronological 'Timelines' using your saved purchased images
- Don't overlook the witnesses on marriage records as they are often relatives
- Always try to obtain civil marriage records first when attempting to build a line further back as Scottish marriage records are so detailed that they provide the next generation back in time via the names of all four parents including the mother's maiden surname
- Use the 'Mother's maiden name' filter to locate post-1974 deaths
- If you wish to find out if any other surnames (e.g. married surnames) are listed on a female death record my top tip is to input the information on where and when she died and at what age into the search boxes and then delete her surname from the surname box before re-running the search – this will locate any additional entries with the same reference number and display all the surnames on the record
- When searching the census, use the reference numbers to locate all members of the same household
- Use 'Forename of other person on that census page' to help with finding a family group especially when there is a common surname involved
- Look out for a household straddling two census pages – you will have to pay another 6 credits for the second page to access it as well

- Don't forget that the LDS transcriptions for the 1881 census are freely available
- When searching OPR births use the parent detail boxes on the left-hand side search after you've obtained the initial results to help narrow things down
- To learn more about the records on the ScotlandsPeople website, check out all of the excellent guides they offer here: <https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/guides>

Don't Forget DNA!

I can't end without extolling the virtues of DNA testing for your family history and Scottish family history is no different!

- DNA can be one of the most valuable tools in a genealogist's arsenal when employed correctly
- It's essential to use DNA results in conjunction with traditional research methods in order to get the most out of it and be successful with both
- It's possible to use DNA to break Scottish brick walls, solve all manner of unknown parentage mysteries, confirm or refute hypotheses and verify your Scottish family tree
- Always remember, however, that it's possible you may find shocks and surprises with DNA testing and some of your genetic ancestors may not match your paper trail
- Investigate your DNA matches with Scottish ancestors on their trees to see if you can identify connections and verify lines on your tree

Additional Links

ScotlandsPlaces: <https://scotlandsplaces.gov.uk>

NLS Maps: <https://maps.nls.uk>

BNA: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

FindMyPast: https://www.findmypast.co.uk/search/historical-records?region=scotland&page=1&order_direction=desc&order_by=relevance

Ancestry: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search>

FamilySearch: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Scotland_Genealogy
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/location/1986318?region=Scotland>

SAFHS: <https://www.safhs.org.uk>

NRS Research Guides: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides>

NRS Catalogue: <https://catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/nrsonlinecatalogue/search.aspx>

Mitchell Library: <https://www.glasgowfamilyhistory.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

Virtual Mitchell: <http://www.mitchelllibrary.org/virtualmitchell>

GENUKI: <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct>

SCAN: <https://scan.org.uk>












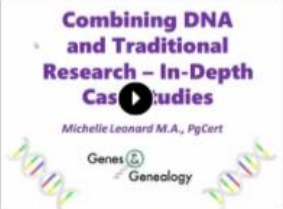
Scottish Indexes: <https://www.scottishindexes.com>

Old Scottish: <https://www.oldscottish.com>

Recommended Reading

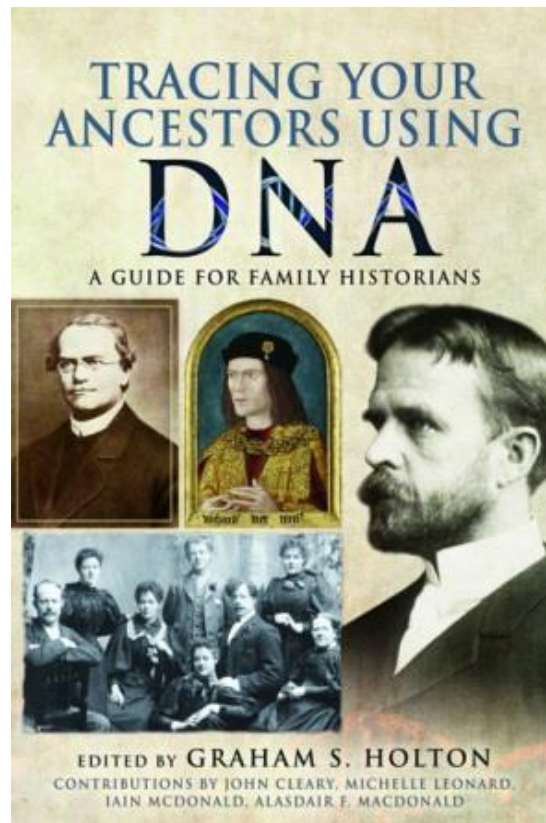
- [Finding Your Scottish Ancestors: Techniques for Solving Genealogy Problems](#) by Kirsty F Wilkinson
- [Tracing Your Scottish Family History on the Internet: A Guide for Family Historians](#) by Chris Paton
- [Tracing Your Scottish Ancestors: The Official Guide](#) by Tristram Clarke (National Records of Scotland)
- [The Scottish Family Tree Detective: Tracing Your Ancestors in Scotland](#) by Rosemary Bigwood

If you enjoyed my presentation and would like to see more from me I have a number of other long-form and TechZone presentations in the Legacy Family Tree Webinars library (subscription required). You can check them all out here:

 <p>Using Chromosome Browsers, Segment Data and Triangulation 18.8K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>Free DAD & MUM How to Use MyHeritage DNA Results to Enhance Your Family Tree 8.6K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>Using DNA to Solve Adoption and Unknown Parentage Mysteries 24.7K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>Understanding DNA Shared Match Lists by Michelle Leonard 2.7K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>
 <p>What are DNA Outliers? 2K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>Triangulation by Michelle Leonard 6.2K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>What is DNA Segment Data? by Michelle Leonard 6.9K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>What is a Chromosome Browser? by Michelle Leonard 1.4K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>
 <p>GEDMatch Segment Search Tool (Tier 1) 2.2K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>The Fromelles Genealogy Project: Reuniting WW1 Soldiers with their 682 views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>GENOME MATE PRO & OTHER TOOLS Using GenomeMate Pro & Other Tools 1.8K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>	 <p>Combining DNA and Traditional Research - In-Depth Case Studies Michelle Leonard M.A., PgCert 23.6K views CC by Michelle Leonard</p>

<https://familytreewebinars.com/michelleleonard>

Additionally the book I co-authored on using DNA for family history, "[Tracing Your Ancestors Using DNA: A Guide For Family Historians](#)", was published by Pen & Sword Books in June 2019:

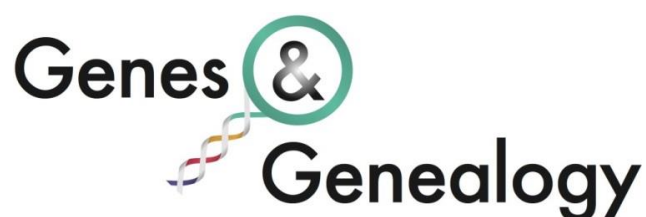


It's available both in paperback and Kindle formats

Finally as the official genetic genealogist of #AncestryHour I am on hand most weeks to answer queries during #AncestryHour's live Twitter chats each Tuesday evening 7-8pm (GMT)

Contact & Social Media Links:

Email: michelle@genesandgenealogy.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/genesandgenealogy
Twitter: www.twitter.com/genealogylass
LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/michelleleonardgenealogist>
APG: <https://www.apgen.org/profiles/michelle-leonard>
Ancestry Hour: <http://www.ancestryhour.co.uk/michelle-leonard.html>



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