



**SA Genealogy &  
Heraldry  
Society Inc**

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# Scotland

## *How to look for that Scottish ancestor*

Before you start searching for your Scottish ancestor, take some time to look at the books that cover the topic on the library shelves. Apart from the dedicated books, there are some general books. These are full of helpful information and are almost mandatory reading. If you know the place where your ancestor came from, look to see if there are books covering that area. Try and become familiar with the area by looking at Ordnance Survey maps, preferably ones drawn at the appropriate period of your research. Place names, such as individual farms will mean so much more to you.

Your research should include using *FamilySearch* on-line. It has been developed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) to help their members and others trace their family trees.

You can obtain information on Scottish births, marriages and deaths from civil registration records back to 1855 when they started in Scotland. Depending on the date of the event, Scottish certificates have variations in the amount of information they carry. For example from birth certificates you may be lucky and get not only the basics of date, place and parents' names but also the time of birth, father's age, place of birth and occupation, mother's maiden surname, age and place of birth, when and where the parents were married and how many children the mother has had and how many were still living. Marriage certificates have information on the parents including father's occupation and mother's maiden surname. Death certificates have the deceased's parents' names, including mother's maiden surname and whether they are still alive. All these facts often help you back to previous generations. But remember the information does vary depending on the date. Some of the books on Scottish research detail all the information on certificates. If you wish to go back further than 1855 then you may be able to make use of the old parish registers (OPRs). These are the records, which were kept only by the Church of Scotland and usually by the minister of the parish, and so you need to know the parish or at least the county to make the search easier. The type and amount of information the registers contain is variable and there are gaps because many registers have been lost. The best records are generally for baptisms. These give date and usually the father's name and sometimes the mother's name, rarely with maiden surname, and where

the parents lived. Names of witnesses can also give an indication of possible relatives. Each parish register has a number and each entry is on a numbered page. These numbers can help you or others back track if needed. The registers also contain marriage information such as the dates of the marriage contract and/or the actual event, where both parties came from and if you are very lucky other information such as a father's name and residence. Records for deaths or burials are not often found and are sometimes completely missing or never existed. They sometimes refer to the hire of the *mort cloth*.

The other major sources of information are the census records. The earliest useful census was conducted in 1841, and a census has been conducted every ten years since. These give you family groups, age, sex, marital status, occupation and place of birth. The 1841 census is limited as the age of adults is rounded down to the nearest five years and the place of birth is restricted to whether a person was born in the county. When you investigate your ancestors further you may find some earlier local census-like information for particular parishes. These were associated with various statistical accounts of Scotland. You might be lucky and find something useful. There are booklets that list census information and the whereabouts of the records.

### ***Where to find these basic sources***

You can look for useful books in the library using the Society's library catalogue (use the computers and not the cards) which is also available at the web site <[www.saghs.org.au](http://www.saghs.org.au)> by clicking on Library, then catalogue and entering \*Scotland\* \*research\* (with a space between the two middle asterisks) into the search box. You can, using the same entry, search the library catalogue on the Society's computers at the Library.

If you wish to start with the *FamilySearch* web site this can be found at <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>. You can do this using the Society's computers. Guidance on this useful database can be found in the *FamilySearch* fact sheet. But do treat *FamilySearch* as a starting point; it is not always correct or complete. Remember to check all your findings against the actual basic record, e.g. birth certificate, parish register or census.

The Society does not hold the Scottish General Register Office records of births, marriages and deaths but you can access these records to 1876 at FamilySearch. To access records after 1875, you need to use the film-hiring facilities of the LDS or search on the pay-to-use index on the Internet at <[www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk)> (note: SAGHS does not allow this service on its library computers). Once you have located the reference, you can order the appropriate certificate from the front counter or SAGHS office.

Microfiche of the old parish registers are held by the Society. These are arranged in alphabetical surname order within counties. These microfiche are transcriptions of the original and do not contain all the detailed information available on the originals. The parish registers can be searched on-line at <[www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)>. Filmed copies of the original registers can be searched through the facilities of the LDS.

The Society has the complete census for Scotland in 1851 and 1881, the index for 1891 and parts of other censuses for individual places. Census information for 1881, 1891 and 1901 can be searched on the Internet at <[www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk](http://www.scotlandsppeople.gov.uk)> for a fee or you can hire the census films at the LDS.

Remember to always go back to the original record if possible to ensure your findings are correct. And record all the details of what you have done and found.

PS: Don't forget there is a Scottish Interest Group in the Society. You are most welcome to come along to their meetings on the evening of the third Monday of most months. It would be good to see you there! See the Society's web page for details.

Prepared by Gavin Wood, Scottish Group Coordinator. Jan 2004