

## 7. SCOTTISH RECORDS BEFORE STATUTORY REGISTRATION IN 1855

### WHY ARE MY ANCESTORS BAPTISMS AND MARRIAGES NOT ON SCOTLANDSPEOPLE OR THE IGI?

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We are all well aware that Statutory Registration was introduced in Scotland in 1855. Prior to this the recording of Baptisms and Marriages was the responsibility of the Church, and in some parishes rather sporadic Death records were also kept. Historically, we can look back to the years following the Scottish Reformation of 1560, when the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was formed, and this became the Established Church of Scotland. After the Reformation, however, Roman Catholicism did not disappear totally from Scotland, but survived especially in the houses of some of the landed gentry. If we want to look at the very early records there are three series in the National Archives of Scotland, all of course in Latin, which give an interesting picture of Pre-Reformation Scotland. Your ancestors may only be mentioned, though, if they were either churchmen or had signed as witnesses; • CH5/ The Act Books of the Pre-Reformation Church 1513-1555 • CH6/ Chartuaries 1443-1594 • CH7/ Papal Bulls 1160-1699. In the years immediately following the Reformation, churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church were not recognised by the state, and although their activities were outside the law, worship was often carried on in private chapels. In general, though, these were just a thorn in the side of the Established Church, and the religious conflicts led to many troublesome events which are well detailed in many histories of Scotland. The religious uncertainties of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms and the Bishop's Wars of the 1640's and the 1650's, the Civil War and the return to Presbyterianism in 1689 were all very disruptive, and many parishes were afraid to keep any written records. Responsibility for the administration of discipline, and the general organisation of life in each parish was devolved downward from the Presbyteries to the Kirk Session, and it was the Session Clerk who was responsible for the maintenance of the records in his parish. In some parishes, such as in Keith in Banffshire illustrated below, the Session had their own meeting room, in this case it was the room in the tower with the two small windows. The small door at the foot of the tower was reputed to be the jail. The Kirk Session did not just record births and marriages, but in many cases kept detailed records of cases of fornication, breaches of Sabbath and other misdemeanours. They also recorded the Minister's Visitations of families, such as in the 'mini-census' of 1675 and 1681 where every individual in the parish was recorded. But despite the Restoration of Presbyterianism in 1689 we begin to see the start of a slow disintegration of the Established Church of Scotland. By 1712 there was an Act of Toleration which allowed the Episcopal Church to preach unmolested, and in the same year the religious group known as the Cameronians had left the Established Church to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church. After the problems associated with the Jacobite cause - the ill-fated Jacobite invasion attempt of 1708, the Rebellion of 1715, the threat of Swedish invasion in 1717 and the events leading up to

Culloden in 1745/6 - the Established Church of Scotland continued to have its problems, and was gradually fragmenting into many smaller factions. The First Secession of 1733 led to the formation of various smaller churches, and their records were often jealously guarded, and are only available by searching the volumes in the archives. 1761 saw the Second Secession, and the formation of the Relief Church, which meant that by this time in Scotland there were now the • Established Church NRS CH2/ • Episcopal Church NRS CH12/ • Catholic Church NRS CH17/ • Reformed Presbyterian Church NRS CH3/ and CH14/ • United Secession Church NRS CH3/ and CH15/ • Relief Church NRS CH2/ • Quakers NRS CH10/ • Wesleyans NRS CH11/ These records are all available, some of them digitised, in the National Records of Scotland, but few of them appear on ScotlandsPeople or other sites at the present time. The major disruption, however, was in 1843, with the formation of the Free Church, which was later to incorporate the United Presbyterian Church in 1900. The events of 1843 saw up to half of the congregations leave the Established Churches. This produced yet another set of records • Free Church NRS CH3/ and CH13/ Some of the Ministers of the Free Church had arrangements with the Ministers of the Established Church, and their Baptisms and Marriages were recorded in the OPR's. Many Free Church Ministers, however, did not have such an arrangement This means that after the Reformation of 1560 the replacement of Latin documents by records now kept in Scots or English (except in the Roman Catholic Church) is certainly a help to the Family Historian. From the time of the Reformation the Established Church of Scotland was keeping records of Baptisms and Marriages, and very occasionally of Deaths. In some parishes these records can go right back to the Reformation, in others they are much later, and in the Gaelic-speaking parts of the West of Scotland, where Gaelic was not a written language, they may not start until the early decades of the 19th century. • The SAFHS Publication "The Parishes, Registers and Registrars of Scotland" gives full details of the dates of all surviving records for each parish in Scotland SO WHO IS RECORDED WHERE? • 1560 Events in the Established Church were beginning to be recorded • 1712 5% went to the Episcopal and Reformed Presbyterian Churches • 1733 Another 10% went to the Secession Churches • 1761 Probably another 5% joined the Relief Church and others • 1843 The Free Church attracted almost 40% of the Congregations of the Established Church • 1855 Due to this fragmentation we find the very necessary introduction of Statutory Registration So the moral of the story is – Make sure you examine ALL of the records, and not just the readily available one. There are many gems amongst the more obscure documents. This article is based on a power-point presentation of the same title given to various FHS.