

## **Genealogy and Family History – a quick local introduction**

It's a fascinating interest which can be studied at all levels from finding where your ancestors lived and how they worked to a life-long hobby exploring centuries backwards and sideways to other branches. We'll concentrate here on the system in Scotland and particularly Shetland.

First, start with what you do know. Has a close relative done any earlier research? Can you read it or, better still, get a copy? Have you written down your own immediate family, as far back as you remember? The more detail the better – dates and places of births, marriages and deaths are very useful. Don't worry if you can't remember everything, record what you do know. "Great grand mother was called Elizabeth and came from Unst" is still a help. Don't be surprised if you find different versions or dates – note them both but keep a note of where you got your information.

The next stage of homework is usually very enjoyable and social. Start speaking with older relatives – if they're not available, try some of their friends. Discuss what you've found and ask them about the gaps you have. Don't be surprised to learn new versions and details. For example, you may have been told that Great Uncle Andrew's father was a captain in the Merchant Navy but others in the family may say he was a radio officer.

After that, your notes should be taking some shape and suggesting where you can start looking to confirm or find information.

### **A selection of places to look on the internet for family history and genealogy resources**

- Shetland Archives
- Shetland Family History Society
- Local Family History Societies in Shetland
- Bayanne House/Tony Gott
- Scotland's People – for official information
- Ancestry.com and other commercial sites

### **Looking at each in turn**

The ***Shetland Archives*** is within the Shetland Museum & Archives building.

Look at <http://www.shetland-museum.org.uk/archiveCollections>.

- Original local records – not just Births Marriages and Deaths
- Some family and business records
- Microfilm copies of records held elsewhere
- Free to use
- Traditional access – mainly by visiting the building but also by phone, post and email.

The **Shetland Family History Society** is very active and operates from their Hillhead premises in Lerwick and on the internet at <http://www.shetland-fhs.org.uk/> Their search room includes many helpful books, internet resources and their own computerised but off internet databases.

If you're not already a member, look at their "Practical hints and tips". Remember their publications including the quarterly magazine Coontin' Kin. A very sociable way to research and invaluable if you live outside Shetland. You may be lucky and find someone already researching another branch of your family tree.

Their Useful Links page leads to many local or family history societies, Bayanne (see below) and Scotland's People (see below) Also Shetland ForWirlds

### **Local Family History and History groups in Shetland**

We've a wonderful range of local Family History societies in Shetland. Some have great genealogical information and skills, others are more expert at social history – it depends on members interests. . Look for the area you're interested in at <http://www.shetlandheritageassociation.com/> Some have very active internet sites and all welcome new members.

#### **Bayanne House (Tony Gott)**

Best known local site after the SFHS. A commercial site but with much useful free information too. As you'd expect, their professional website is at <http://www.bayanne.co.uk/Genealogy/Gene.html>

**Scotland's People** – Created from and around the official records which involve everyone in Scotland. It combines free information with pay to view access to detailed records. There's a surprising large range of different types of historical records and it keeps growing.

This website is particularly relevant when you explore people who lived outside Shetland and elsewhere in Scotland – for example Aberdeen – where local physical records don't cover their area.

Look at their start page at <http://scotlandspeople.gov.uk/> . Find the Help & resources tab in the middle near the top – it's a good place to start. Some examples of family history include famous historical Scots – take a look to get an impression of what can be found and the look of microfilmed historical records.

The most famous records are the statutory registers of births, marriages and deaths. Preceding them are the Old Parish Registers and in parallel are the Catholic Registers. Each has an introduction explaining what the records hold and why and when they were created. Census records begin in 1841, with 1911 being the most recent available. The census gives a detailed snapshot every ten years to complement individual personal events.

The Free name search on the start page gives you an idea of the quantity of matches in the records. It's a rough guide to the quantity of information about that surname. It's a very quick idea of the quantity of information you'll find about a name.

Beware of spelling variations, more frequent as you go back in time. Note also the forename and surname search boxes. In Shetland, we have some surnames that are very scarce in the rest of Scotland and easily traced outside Shetland; other surnames eg Smith are equally widespread.

The pay to view records are digitised copies of the original records - sometimes very clear to read, sometimes less so. (There's a system to deal with any illegible records you come across). To access these records you need to register, buy credits and then use these credits to "buy" access to specific individual records. You can return through

your account to look at these records at a later date because these views stay in your account. It pays to do your homework first!

### **Commercial Sites**

These are usually subscription based site, often with several different levels of access and cost. Many offer free trial periods of use. Their websites are generally very attractive and professional and keep you up to date with newly added records. A great strength is that they're not based around a specific record series and can combine information from different sources across data collection boundaries. A good example is [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

### **Summary - where Scotland's People fits in/**

Scotland's People has huge resources of records but it's not the only source of information. It has sample famous names to encourage researchers.

Content quality is reliable but much is scanned handwritten originals so the image quality varies.

It's convenient if you live well out of town and have broadband.

It can get expensive but your account keeps the details.

It's useful for non-Shetland family but it's not the best place to start local family history research.

Begin by looking at what is known already before starting with local sites.

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