

Notes of the Search Room User Group meeting held on Thursday 11 November 2014 in meeting room 2, New Register House at 14:00 Hours

Attendees

Dee Williams (NRS & chair), Alison Lindsay (NRS), Iain Ferguson (NRS), Gill Amos (NRS), Alison Fordyce (NSS), Ken Nisbet (Genealogist), Val Wilson, (ASGRA & Genealogist), Bruce Bishop, SAFHS, Lloyd Pitcairn (Genealogist), Janet Bishop, ASGRA

Apologies:

Dr Irene O'Brien (Chair SCA & senior archivist)

1. Previous Minutes of 7 August 2014

1.1 The content of the minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

2. General Search Room Update

2.1 The search rooms will close at 13:00 on both Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve 2014.

2.2 Staff are aware that the Zoomtext software no longer works following the Windows 7 upgrade and plan to try new versions of the Zoomtext software to establish which is compatible.

2.3 Job Access with Speech (JAWS) software is due to be installed on one computer in the Reid search room for use by blind customers.

2.4 The group had asked for a review of the terms and conditions for refunds to allow customers to receive refunds if an IT system failure prevents access to the statutory indexes *or* images rather than just the images. The terms and conditions have been updated to include this condition and can be viewed at the link below.

<http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/visit-us/scotlandspeople-centre/terms-and-conditions#Refunds>

2.5 Problems with 'websense' blocking full use of websites for customers is on-going. NRS IT staff continue to explore whether this can be prevented.

2.6 The specialist IT consultant together with the NRS IT staff have made headway on the reasons why the system suffers from intermittent slowdowns and believe that they may have solved the problem.

2.7 Work on customer 'getting started' guides is on-going.

2.8 NRS hopes to be able to offer wifi at the Centre during 2015.

2.9 It was agreed that the records accessed by the NHS National Services Scotland would be reviewed to ensure that all forms of records that could help to establish family networks are available to search.

3. Future Proposals for ScotlandsPeople

3.1 Background

3.1.1 The contract for the service provider for the internet website at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk expires on 31st August 2016. NRS plan to have a new arrangement in place thereafter and are in the process of gathering comments from customers on the existing service. All comments will be considered to help shape the future arrangement.

3.1.2 The new arrangement on 1st August 2016 will be only for the internet website but the arrangement for the ScotlandsPeople network (SP network) is expected to change at some point after the internet arrangement is settled.

3.2.3 This meeting was used to discuss the current arrangement and how it could be improved and the following is a summary of the issues discussed:-

3.2 Indexes

3.2.1 The ability to view statutory indexes free would be welcomed. The issue is the different wording in legislative provisions:

- Under Scottish legislation, a person pays a fee to search the statutory indexes and then pays to receive a copy or extract of that entry.
- Under legislation for England and Wales, any person can search the statutory indexes for free and pays a fee to receive a copy or extract of that entry.

3.2.2 The restriction on searching the modern day records in five year intervals at the Centre was deemed frustrating and annoying. The group would like to see the five year rule removed. Particularly when it is possible to search the indexes across all years at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk (the internet).

3.3 Searches at the Centre

3.3.1 The breakdown of county, district, parish, etc., was deemed helpful though the group would prefer to have more search fields to help identify an individual without the need to open the document.

3.3.2 A search field for the mother's maiden name for *all* statutory records and in particular birth rather than death records was requested. Birth records after 1911, the year of the last open census, would be helpful.

3.3.3 Ideally the search criteria available on the internet should be available on the SP network. This includes the ability to search on forename only, no letters or one letter. The SP network only permits surname searches as a minimum with a minimum of three letters.

3.3.4 The option of having soundex or name variants for the mother's maiden name was requested. Currently this is only available for the surname.

3.3.5 The saved searches in the favourites list are useful but customers would like to be able to edit the contents themselves such that they can delete entries or have a column that allows them to add a comment.

3.3.6 Where boundaries changed over time and records are found under different parishes or districts, a means of searching surrounding areas or selected areas for the records would be useful rather than just one selected area or all areas.

3.3.7 The option of searching 'both' male and female for the statutory records was requested, particularly with the five year restriction. NRS are currently assessing whether such a change is possible.

3.3.8 The internet permits customers to search through the pages of historic statutory records. A similar facility should be provided at the Centre if it was possible to differentiate between the modern and historic records.

3.3.9 The ability to search on place or address would be welcomed, in the same manner as the valuation rolls.

3.3.10 Customers should be advised when completing the search fields not to insert too much information to start with because this can lead to the result not being found because the information inserted hasn't been indexed.

3.3.11 Access to records available in the historical search room at the customer computer or at the standalone computers in the Reid room was requested.

3.4 Images

3.4.1 Customers would like the option of receiving any images in pdf format. Detail within the image is lost when the image is converted to pdf format. Currently pdf's are only available for Catholic records or Old Parish Registers at the Centre. On the internet only the soldiers' wills are in pdf format.

3.4.2 Families listed in the open census can exist across two pages in some instances. This anomaly leads to extra costs when viewing the second page on the internet or when buying copies at the Centre. Customers would ideally like to receive the second copy, which lists the same family, for free.

3.4.3 A means of reporting poor images using software when the image is being viewed would be preferable to completing a form. This would save time for the customer and possibly lead to more poor images being reported.

3.4.4 Customers should be made aware of the re-scan service. The group felt that it wasn't well promoted.

3.4.5 Tools similar to Google maps for enlarging, reducing and dragging images would be preferred.

3.4.6 The magnifying tool was deemed extremely helpful and a request was made to make sure it was retained.

3.5 Evening Visits

3.4.1 NRS was asked to organise evening visits that can be booked by individual customers rather than the group visits. Customers would book and pay for their single seat. NRS are willing to trial this arrangement.

3.6 New Collections

3.6.1 NRS are working on the digitisation and indexing of the 1865 and 1855 valuation rolls and the military appeal tribunal records for Midlothian and Lewis.

3.6.2 New records are appreciated but the group would appreciate more at a quicker rate.

3.6.3 The group would like to be able to search burial records but appreciate that these records are not kept by NRS.

3.6.4 NRS are planning to digitise non-conformist churches records and possibly the wills and testaments from 1926-35. The Kirk session records will also be made available but not indexed.

4. Competitor Websites

4.1 Transcriptions of the open Scottish census can be very useful because of the extra search fields. Also, people with poor eyesight can use software to read the transcribed contents.

4.2 Family Search allows the parent's names to be inserted, which helps other searchers.

4.3 Family tree software is extremely useful and customers can copy other family trees. If the tree is linked to their own then it helps build up their knowledge. The group warned that family trees can be built up on hearsay rather than facts, which then become a fact once they appear on the tree.

5. Staff

5.1 Staff on hand who can help and offer advice are an essential part of the service.

6. Access & Charges

6.1 Weekend opening was requested.

6.2 Evening visits that are available for individuals to book rather than be part of a visiting group was requested. NRS to run a trial for a month when there are few group evening visits.

6.3 Subscriptions for internet access was requested. Alternatively, timed access whereby the clock is run down every time the web is accessed rather than subscriptions for a fixed period of time was suggested.

6.4 Different rates for commercial and personal access was suggested.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Alloa Family History Centre is now open.

7.2 JB highlighted the fact that search room staff had not been advised when the minimum length of a password and username had changed and felt embarrassed for them. JB requested that in future as a customer she would like search room staff advised of IT changes that impact on the supervisor system or searching of the records.

7.3 The genealogists requested that the link between the NRS website and the ScotlandsPeople network be changed such that it takes customers to the home page for the ScotlandsPeople Centre.

8. Date of Next Meeting

8.1 The date of the next meeting will take place on Friday 20th February 2015 at 14:00 in meeting room 2, NRH.

Dee Williams
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15 December 2014