

Handout

Scottish Passport Records – What are they and why are they useful?

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What IS a passport anyway?

We need to put our current, 21st century ideas about what a passport is and why we need a passport to one side as these definitions and ideas have changed considerably over the years.

Before 1915 and the legal changes on immigration/emigration brought by the First World War:

- It was not a legal requirement to hold a passport to either leave, or enter, the United Kingdom. Other nations had different rules, which changed over time.
- Having a passport was optional and a matter of personal choice/preference.
- Passports were used to smooth the bureaucracy associated with travelling through various small states and countries.
- Passports were “single-use”, issued for one overseas trip rather than being used for multiple trips over a 10-year period. The passport would state the intended destination of the holder.
- More than one person could be named on a passport such as wife, children, servants on a man’s passport, or a group of colleagues travelling together.
- Before 1858, there was no link between nationality and passport. Foreign nationals could get a British passport, British nationals could get a foreign passport.
- In the mid 19th-century passports did not have a photograph or even description of the bearer.

What Happened in 1858?

1858 saw changes to the laws around passports in Britain and France. An Italian conspirator tried to assassinate the French ruler Napoleon III, and was found in possession of a British passport issued to Thomas Allsop. This event sparked a huge diplomatic row between Britain and France, and caused the resignation of the British Prime Minister.

The changes to passport rules agreed between Britain and France were:

- Requirement for all travellers entering France to have a passport (although they did not need one to leave the UK)
- Restriction of British passports to those who were British subjects only.
- Reduction of price in a British passport to 2 shillings to encourage application.

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- Scotland allowed to carry on issuing their own passports as they had done for centuries.

Scottish Passport Records

Passports for travellers from England and Wales were issued by the Secretary of State (senior government minister) in London. In Glasgow and Edinburgh, the Lord Provost, the most senior member of the city council equivalent to the Mayor, was allowed to issue passports.

- Edinburgh Passport Records were digitised by Ancestry and are available online to subscribers at <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62350/>
- Glasgow Passport Records are not available online and the original registers are available to consult at the Mitchell Library. The names were transcribed by Glasgow and West of Scotland Family History Society and a booklet is available from their website. <https://www.gwsfhs.org.uk/product/passport-applications-at-glasgow-office/> Transcribed data has not been checked for accuracy.

Things To Note...

- These are not the original passport applications, which have not been retained.
- These are not the original passport documents, which were handed to the travellers.
- The registers are not in a standard format. Glasgow registers typically recorded names and occupations or employers of travellers, Edinburgh registers typically recorded names and addresses.

Using Passport Records for Your Own Genealogical Research

- Always try to see the original document rather than relying on a transcription. Many names have been mistranscribed by Ancestry, so fuzzy searching and using wildcards is essential.
- When looking at the original image, look at the names above and below the individual you are interested in, especially if they are applying for a passport on the same day, travelling to the same destination. Could they be other members of the same party?
- Looking at the originals may also give clues about family members – even if not named. Finding someone listed as travelling with “wife and children” tells you that they are married, and that you are probably looking for a marriage over a year ago as the couple has more than one child. Similar conclusions may be drawn about other family members.
- When family members are named, this may help progress your research further back in time, especially as compulsory civil registration of births, deaths and marriages did not start in Scotland until 1855. It may also help confirm which of several possible marriages/births are correct.
- If employers are given, this can assist in research into social history by looking at business records, or reading contemporary newspaper reports about businesses or export deals.

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- People may appear on the passport records several times and this repeated travel might give more clues about either their financial status, or business dealings.

Other Records

There are numerous other records which can be used in conjunction with passport records to understand the lives of our ancestors. These include:

- Birth, death, marriage records – Scottish records are held at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk. From 1855 onwards.
- Parish records for baptisms, marriage and death. (FamilySearch, Ancestry, Scotland's People)
- Post Office and Trade Directories for occupation. National Library for Scotland online at <https://www.nls.uk/family-history/directories/>
- Newspapers – British Newspaper Archive.
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>
- Naturalisation documents for people who naturalised as a British subject and then applied as a passport – often records as NBS on the registers. These are held in the National Archives in Kew, London. Not all are online.
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/naturalisation-british-citizenship/> Search the catalogue using the surname and naturalisation, remembering to use alternative spellings.