

'There Shall Be a Record Kept'

Tracing Scottish ancestors before 1855

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www.scotsancestors.weebly.com

Below are just some of the record sources you can use to identify pre-1855 Scots ancestors. Associated websites are listed by category at tinyurl.com/before1855

- **Old Parochial Registers**, or OPRs for short, is the term normally given to pre-1855 records of births/christenings, marriages and burials. These are from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.
- **Non-conformist Church records** – these are from other denominations: Baptist, Episcopal, Quaker...the list is quite long. If you know your forebears had a particular religious affiliation, it's well worth checking to see if the local or national archives hold any church records that might mention them.
- **Roman Catholic records** are available at ScotlandsPeople for both before and after 1855. They can also be accessed at National Records of Scotland and at the Catholic Archives in Edinburgh.
- **Monumental Inscriptions** allow you access to graveyards from the comfort of home. They can be found in many public libraries. Usually (but not always – sometimes on index cards or computer) in book format, they are often produced by local family history societies and can be purchased from them. Some counties such as Ross-shire are well represented by volunteer graveyard photographers who share their findings online, and the larger websites like FindaGrave and Billion Graves are starting to become more and more useful for Scotland.
- **Poor Law records** are excellent substitute records and can contain a wealth of detail about your ancestor, their family, work, health, and income. The records in some areas of the country give even more.

- **Kirk session minutes** are the notes kept by Church of Scotland clerks of session meetings. Discipline imposed on unruly parishioners was extremely well documented, and can shed useful and interesting light on matters such as illegitimacy and anti-social behaviour. Watch my RootsTech video to learn more: <https://youtu.be/kf9x1IEJx9U>
- **Testaments** were not made exclusively by the wealthy. Fortunately, Scottish testaments have been indexed and can be searched free of charge at ScotlandsPeople, and downloaded for a fee. They may also be held at the UK National Archives.
- **Newspapers** can be a rich source of genealogical facts. Public libraries are a good place to start for local titles, and they may also have indexes to them. Online electronic collections are an excellent source. It's always worth searching online for your own parish or county of interest as individuals or groups may have indexed local newspapers.
- **Directories** list individuals by trade and/or surname, depending on the publication. They usually give the business and home addresses, helpful when tracking down families in the census returns.
- **Tax records** are freely available on ScotlandsPlaces, largely for the 18th century, and include lists of servants and their employers, as well as those liable for tax on their carriages, watches, and dogs, among other things.
- **Estate papers** such as rentals and tacks, correspondence, and other personal documents that belonged to a landowner can contain references to someone who lived on their land.
- **Palaeography** is an important skill to develop if you plan to search records from the mid-19th century or earlier. It encompasses not only handwriting but also historic measurements and dates.

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