

Viewpoint

Changing the Framework: Reflections on Records and Archives in Scotland, 2001–12

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It's probably inevitable that after eleven years as Keeper of the Records of Scotland my *Viewpoint* is about what has changed in that time. The short answer is, a great deal. The nature of records has altered of course, as they become increasingly digital, and the way people interact with them continues to change rapidly for the same reason. The nature of our work as archivists in this digital world has been transformed. So too has professional education. We now have two complementary academic courses in Scotland, something I have to admit I thought quite impossible ten years ago. But from my perspective it's changes in the statutory framework for records and in the role, the status and finally the name of our national archives, that have had the most impact.

When I became Keeper, the major concerns of the National Archives of Scotland (NAS) were the need for new legislation to replace the 1937 Public Records (Scotland) Act, and for new accommodation to hold the expected increase in paper records from government and public bodies. By the time I retired, we had sidestepped the accommodation crisis by using our buildings better and drastically reducing the volume of records we accessioned. We had new legislation, though rather different from that which we had planned a decade earlier. In 2001, the Scottish Records Advisory Council (SRAC) provided statutory representation and advice on archives and records to ministers. By 2012 it had been swept away and some of its role taken by the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA). But perhaps the biggest change was that the National Archives and General Register Office had merged to form National Records of Scotland (NRS).

My predecessor, Patrick Cadell, recalled that it was a chance meeting with the then Secretary of State, Donald Dewar, that really gave momentum to archives legislation. Hearing Patrick's plea that the 1937 Public Records (Scotland) Act was seriously out of date, Dewar referred the matter to the SRAC. They did not come to the subject cold. A number of bodies interested in archives had already done substantial work and developed a Scottish national

archives policy, published in 1998.¹ The SRAC set up a working group which consulted fairly widely and produced not a draft Bill but a series of headings for legislation, which were presented to Mr Dewar, by now First Minister of Scotland, in October 1999.²

In the immediate post-devolution period, ministers focused on freedom of information (FoI) legislation, and though the White Paper clearly articulated the connection with good record-keeping, that logic did not transfer to the statute book. The FoI (Scotland) Act passed in 2002 did increase attention to records, and section 61 introduced a code of practice for record-keeping, which was published in November 2003. Although this was not mandatory, the new Scottish Information Commissioner made it clear that compliance with the code was part of the good information practice he expected from public bodies. This attention to record-keeping persuaded some public bodies in Scotland to appoint archivists for the first time; a welcome development. In the meantime, NAS worked with Scottish Executive officials on a strategy for public records, as a first step towards legislating. A number of consultative meetings were held with stakeholders during 2003–04 which pointed to strong support in the record-keeping community. This was not matched within government, however, and it proved impossible to persuade ministers of the desirability, let alone the need, to legislate on public records. Their argument, I remember, was the need to avoid placing a burden on public bodies. To all intents and purposes, the cause of records legislation was dead.

We did not lose sight of the issue, however. When the new minority government took office in 2007 and officials started canvassing for future legislation, we put down a marker for public records, arguing that the 1937 Act was woefully out of date and that it was a logical continuation of FoI; we talked about a ‘suite of legislation’. We had no illusions of course, that public records would be politically attractive; it appeared an obscure administrative issue, with low to zero voter appeal.

At the same time, NAS was moving closer to government, working within a new culture portfolio with direct access to ministers and senior advisers. That would probably not have been enough to gain traction for legislating on public records but for the catalyst of the growing scandal around looked after children, which uncovered the very real human cost of poor record-keeping. Tom Shaw, appointed to review historic and systemic abuse, found his work severely hampered because records either did not exist, or were woefully deficient. The review’s senior research assistant, Nancy Bell, took a particular interest in this area and was responsible for the major section of the final report that laid bare the inadequacies of record-keeping by those public bodies and voluntary organisations looking after children. Survivors of abuse, struggling

¹ Scottish National Archives Policy Working Group, *A National Archives Policy for Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1998).

² Scottish Records Advisory Council, *Proposed Scottish National Archive Legislation* (Edinburgh, 1999).

to come to terms with what had happened, were frustrated by not knowing if there were records of their care, or where they were, or by being refused access to them. When the Shaw Report was published in November 2007, ‘a key recommendation ... was that government should review public records legislation with a view to renewal’.³

Government responded swiftly to Shaw and in February 2008, Adam Ingram MSP, Minister for Children and Early Years, announced to Parliament that they had ‘asked the Keeper of the Records of Scotland, in consultation, to review the legislation on public records in the light of the shortcomings that were exposed by Shaw’.⁴ We carried out the review over the following eighteen months, with the help of a market research consultancy. It was important to amass evidence from a range of sources and organisations including survivors of abuse, but the conclusions were unsurprising: that the existing statute was no longer fit for purpose, that public record-keeping problems went wider than the child care sector, and that there was a clear need for new legislation. Ministers accepted our conclusions and the Public Records (Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament in October 2010. In one sense, the hopes of the previous decade were realised and we had the chance to provide a new framework for public records. On the other hand, the context was now quite different. Our focus was records management rather than archives, we were working in difficult financial conditions and we had, as far as possible, to work within the constraints of existing resources. There was a definite priority to minimise the burden on public authorities and to adopt a light touch. The Act that emerged in 2011 needs to be understood in this light.

We quickly found that we had entered an entirely new territory of demanding requirements set against a tight timetable, with little or no experience. Faced with this challenge, we assembled a small but highly professional team in the Government Records Branch.⁵ We also borrowed some time of a Scottish Government colleague who had worked on a Bill team before. Initially I found her advice more scary than helpful, but her experience was invaluable and the NAS team learned fast.

Part of the task for the Bill team was to consult stakeholders and explain the proposals. Initial contact with the voluntary sector looking after children was constructive, as they welcomed Shaw’s recommendations, though they were concerned about any additional responsibilities. We had support from some public bodies including the police service, which recognised the importance of records and managing them correctly. Local authorities, on the other hand,

³ Scottish Government, *Historical Abuse Systemic Review: Residential Schools and Children’s Homes in Scotland 1950 to 1995* (the Shaw Report) (Edinburgh, 2007), <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/20104729/0>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ For a detailed account of the legislative process, see the article by Bill team leader Bruno Longmore, ‘The Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011: creating a culture that values public records’, *Journal of the Archives and Records Association*, October 2013, 248–62.

were suspicious of new regulations and found our proposals unwelcome and unnecessary. A series of discussions with COSLA and SOLACE⁶ officials produced little meeting of minds. Intervention by the minister, speaking directly to the relevant COSLA chair, was more positive, suggesting that the opposition was a little less than total. This was important because the government, lacking a majority in Parliament, had to build support for the Bill from opposition MSPs.

Just before Christmas 2010, the voluntary sector attitude to the proposals became hostile as they digested the detail. They were convinced they would be left with the responsibility and cost of managing the records. This was worrying, as the voluntary sector organisations were influential and regularly contacted MSPs including members of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee. We called an emergency meeting for the voluntary sector stakeholders over the holiday period to reassure them that the proposals would not impact on their activities, and that responsibility for records management plans would remain with the public body.

We had to frame legislation that would improve record-keeping in the public sector and prevent a recurrence of the problems Shaw had uncovered. The main questions were: how broadly should the new statute apply, what was the minimum requirement to be placed on bodies that would still ensure effective record-keeping, and what would NAS realistically be able to administer, given that an increase in staff numbers was not an option?

The scope had to be greater than the child care sector, as our review had clearly indicated that record-keeping problems were widespread. It also had to cover the work of voluntary and private sector bodies when they were acting as contractors for public authorities. The principle was that record-keeping responsibility should follow the money. We found, surprisingly, that government did not have a comprehensive list of public bodies we could use, and the parliamentary draftsmen told us that we would need to list authorities in a schedule. This allows changes to be made when structures change, as they do fairly often in the public sector – the new single police authority being a recent example. And, of course, we had to ensure that the Keeper and NAS were included. We had to incorporate contracted out services, which Shaw had highlighted as a major issue. We did so by specifying that the public authority commissioning them had to ensure that records relating to the public functions being provided were managed in the same way as the authority's own. This proved to be a vital defence against the charge that we were bearing down on the voluntary sector.

We determined the minimum requirement was for authorities to produce and implement a records management plan, which left them free to develop it based on their own business area without us trying to micromanage. To ensure that the plans were professionally adequate, they had to be approved by the

⁶ Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives.

Keeper. During the committee stages, ‘approval’ changed to ‘agreement’, which amounted to the same thing but sounded far more friendly. We also stressed from the outset that we were not trying to reinvent records management, or to disturb systems that were already working well. Our professional colleagues in the SCA and in authorities rose magnificently to the challenge, developing sectoral guidelines, model plans and a valuable self-assessment tool.⁷ This bore out what our minister said in committee, that the emphasis was on spreading good practice.

The committee discussions also stressed that our approach was light touch. We referred to the 2005 legislation in New Zealand⁸ as an example of a highly prescriptive approach, with stringent requirements for public bodies. We had looked at this with great interest, but concluded that it would not fulfil our ministers’ requirement for minimising the burden on authorities. It would also have been impossible for NAS to take on an enforcement role without a big increase in staff. We tended to emphasise the differences between the New Zealand and Scottish models during the parliamentary process, and the real contrasts may be more modest. My colleague in New Zealand told me, for example, that they had adopted a low-key strategy with regard to enforcement.⁹

At the committee stages our Cabinet Secretary, Fiona Hyslop, faced close questioning from members about the proposals. This was a testing time for us as the supporting officials, and for our colleagues in the drafting team. We had to ensure the minister was properly briefed and could handle difficult questions. We also had to provide arguments that would convince the committee. It was also very important to be able to demonstrate support for the proposals. The SCA gave vital backing and we were also delighted that Tom Shaw was willing and able to give evidence. Although impossible to tell, we all thought at the time that his ringing endorsement of our proposals was a crucial turning point in committee support for the Bill.

Once the Act received royal assent in April 2011, work redoubled to be ready for implementation. The dialogue that had started across the profession with the parliamentary process continued in a stakeholder forum set up in June 2011. Drawing together interested records professionals and responsible officials from public bodies, it gave invaluable help in framing the model records management plan and guidance required under the Act. A series of expert groups tackled detailed issues, such as dealing with record-keeping requirements for contractors. We also began a series of events to explain the Act and the responsibilities on public authorities, the first held just before my retirement.

⁷ SCA has produced a series of guides including the Archives and Records Management Service Quality Improvement Tool (ARMS): see <http://www.scottisharchives.org.uk/projects/toolsstandards>.

⁸ Public Records Act 2005 (New Zealand), available at <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2005/0040/latest/DLM345529.html>.

⁹ Discussion with Greg Goulding, head of Archives New Zealand, September 2012.

The Act that emerged in 2011 is not the measure that was envisaged ten years earlier, but it does contain some of the vital elements. Hector MacQueen, chair of the SRAC, speaking in 2004, said: ‘We had proposed a Keeper, supported by the National Archives [of Scotland], regulating and advising on record-keeping by public bodies, with power to impose sanctions for non-compliance with legislatively imposed standards’.¹⁰ Most of that is in place now, though the only sanction available to the Keeper is to withhold agreement to an authority’s plan and insist on changes, or to ‘name and shame’ authorities who either delay submitting plans or fail to implement them. Time will tell how this works out, but the constructive dialogue developed through the stakeholder forum suggests the future will be positive.

The Act concentrates on record-keeping, and is relatively silent about archives, which led to some criticism within the profession in Scotland. However, the Act does introduce a compulsory element in records management plans to cover the transfer of records to an archive. It also preserves the principle of ‘proper arrangements’ that authorities must make for their archives, while giving the Keeper responsibility for defining such arrangements, something on which NRS are currently working. This will, I believe, create a mechanism for leveraging future improvements to authorities’ archive arrangements.

Tim Ellis in his introduction to the first report of the Keeper on the Act, correctly points to three key elements that contributed to its successful introduction: recognition of the need to legislate, appearance of the Shaw report, and a willingness by ministers to take action.¹¹ I would add a fourth factor, the enthusiastic support and active participation of the archives and records community in Scotland.

If politics is the art of the possible,¹² the Public Records (Scotland) Act of 2011 is perhaps an example. It did not meet the ideals of record-keeping put forward by some, and is less prescriptive about historical archives than others demanded. But it is practical and achievable and will, I am convinced, lead to significant improvements in record-keeping in Scotland’s public sector.

Part of our success with legislation was the relatively close relationship we developed with ministers, allowing us to brief them directly on records issues. That was another change over the period I was Keeper. NAS was, and NRS remains, an executive agency and non-ministerial department. The relationship I inherited was one in which NAS was attached to a part of the Scottish Executive but managed at arm’s length. We had a sponsor unit within the

¹⁰ ‘Reform of archival legislation: a Scots perspective’, speech given at a conference of Scottish and Irish archives councils, Dublin, October 2004, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 26, no. 2 (October 2005), 201–13.

¹¹ Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011: Report of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland, Laid before the Parliament by Scottish Ministers, October 2013, SG/2013/210, p. 2.

¹² This quotation was attributed to R. A. Butler from his 1971 autobiography, *The Art of the Possible*, but was originally by Otto von Bismarck: see http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Otto_von_Bismarck.

Constitution and Parliamentary Secretariat and held quarterly meetings with them to discuss our progress against annual plans. If we needed to raise issues with a minister, they acted as our go-between. This was a familiar arrangement and it worked reasonably well. The preparation of a business case for a new building and the development of the public records strategy were all achieved in this way.

The change came after the 2007 elections, when the incoming minority SNP government announced that they would restructure the cabinet and ministerial portfolios and needed the civil service to adapt also. I think some of the senior officials who assembled at Victoria Quay a few days after the election were cynical about the new approach, but we listened to John Elvidge pointing out that this was a historic occasion, the first time that the Scottish Executive had dealt with a change of government. The new portfolios would also mean changes to the administrative structure. For NAS this meant detaching from the Constitution and Parliamentary Secretariat, and joining the Directorate of Culture and External Affairs supporting new minister Linda Fabiani. Cabinet responsibility for this portfolio was with the First Minister.

This was not a change I had advised or wanted, and it was contrary to the position taken by successive keepers, that archives and records should be grouped with administration or justice. It was also out of step with the view of the SRAC. When Hector MacQueen compared the position of the Scottish and Irish archives in 2004, he noted approvingly that in Scotland the national archives did not consider itself primarily a cultural institution. While historical archives are essentially a cultural asset, the argument runs, record-keeping is an administrative and management issue.

However, this was the position NAS found itself in and we had to make it work. In reality, the perceived disadvantage of being grouped with culture was outweighed by a more favourable position in government. As head of the only agency in the directorate, I was in a unique position being part of the directorate management board, while the heads of the other institutions, namely the library, the museum and the galleries, were answerable to boards of trustees. The result was to bring NAS much closer in to government than previously. We had an inside track in relation to formulating policy, setting budgets and advising ministers. It also gave us access to a new network of colleagues and fresh insights into how decisions were taken inside government. This position strengthened when Culture and External Affairs became a Cabinet portfolio in December 2009.

All of this was important when we came to running a Bill through Parliament. It also brought opportunities to publicise archives. We engaged in cultural diplomacy, using archives to project policy aims: for example, illustrating the long historical connections between Scotland and other countries. We helped ministers by providing high-quality copies of important documents to present when visiting abroad. We exhibited documents to illustrate important anniversaries linked to ministerial priorities. We created media opportunities

for ministers around newly identified documents. Our aim was to keep archives and NAS/NRS in both the public and ministerial consciousness.

One example of this was the so-called Wallace document of 1300, an instruction by Philippe IV of France to his agents at the Papal court to help Sir William Wallace in unspecified business with the Pope. The document was, and remains an enigma: what was the business, why and how did Wallace negotiate the French king's assistance and, perhaps most importantly, did Wallace have the document in his possession when he was captured by the English? It was claimed to be one of the safe conducts that Wallace was known to have in his possession then, but its style and format are not those of a safe conduct. Experts in The National Archives (TNA) in London and in NAS had looked at the matter and failed to come to any conclusion. Consequently, the logical course was for the document to remain where it was, properly looked after, available for study by scholars and in digital form on the TNA website. I had exchanged emails with both Natalie Ceeny and Oliver Morley, successive Keepers at TNA, agreeing that the document should remain where it was, unless any further evidence emerged about its origins.

A well-orchestrated campaign for it to be 'returned' to Scotland developed, culminating in a petition to the Scottish Parliament. My initial instinct was to advise our minister to do nothing and on two occasions I did so. The campaign hit a chord with the more enthusiastic nationalists, however, and the pressure became intense. Emails between NAS and TNA on the subject were made public under Freedom of Information and for the first time I found myself attacked on social media sites, a curiously unsettling experience. I realised the political significance of the issue when the First Minister phoned me to ask about the document. There were no grounds for demanding its return; that it concerned a Scottish hero and was more significant to Scottish than English history was not sufficient. As I pointed out at the time, NAS held many documents such as holograph letters by George Washington, for example, which could be argued to be more significant to the history of the United States than our own, but we would not transfer them on this basis alone.

As a result of the pressure of the campaign we began discussion with TNA about a long-term loan. We also started further research into the document's origins. We set up an expert group with scholars from Scotland, England and France, which met first in London when we were able to examine the document at first hand, and later in Edinburgh when the group produced a short summary of their deliberations. They were able to cast further light on the document: the French palaeography expert in particular was able to confirm that it had been issued by the French royal chancery and that it used letter forms that were only emerging in the late 1280s, a degree of precision that impressed both the historians and archivists in the group. They also came to the conclusion that the document was likely to have been in Wallace's possession at some point, which was something the enthusiasts had long claimed, so expert validation was widely welcomed. Documentary evidence from this period is so limited

that this is only the second original document with a direct connection to Wallace, making it highly symbolic as well as historically important.

We negotiated a long-term agreement with TNA to bring the document to Scotland at the beginning of 2012, to exhibit it in the Scottish Parliament for a month in the summer, and then again in 2014 as part of the Homecoming Scotland celebrations. The restrictions on exhibition are, of course, for preservation reasons; documents of this age can only be shown for a short time to minimise the damaging effects of light. Interest in the document was intense and when our Cabinet Secretary Fiona Hyslop announced its arrival in Scotland, press and TV made a beeline for Register House.¹³ For the summer exhibition, we also borrowed the other original with a direct connection to Wallace, the letter of 1297 to the city of Lübeck, written just after the battle of Stirling Bridge announcing that Scotland was open to trade.¹⁴ The exhibition designers also included a specially commissioned tapestry by Dovecot Studios, featuring words from the Wallace document. The exhibition opened in August 2012 and formed part of the Festival of Politics at the Scottish Parliament, being seen by several thousand people in a four-week period.

I learnt a lot from the saga of the Wallace document. First, it showed the power of the archive. A small piece of parchment – three lines and less than 50 words, stimulated huge public interest. Although the interest was gratifying, it did need to be managed and we worked hard with Scottish Government communications colleagues to achieve that. Secondly, professional standards provided an essential framework. The current lack of information about the document meant that it had to remain the responsibility of TNA. Understandable Scottish interest in it needed to be recognised and managed by agreements between the national archives. Thirdly, archives become important objects of cultural diplomacy. Borrowing the letter from the Hansestadt Lübeck Archives attracted help from the German Consul in Edinburgh and the international dimension of the exhibition meant an invitation for the German culture minister to meet the Cabinet Secretary. The opening ceremony was an opportunity to celebrate Scotland's relations with continental Europe over several centuries.

Late on in my time as Keeper came perhaps the biggest change of all, whose implications continue to affect Scotland's archives: the creation of NRS. The idea of amalgamating the archives with other bodies was not new. I heard of a proposal in the 1980s to merge the legal business of what was then the Scottish Record Office (SRO) with Registers of Scotland (RoS) and to transfer family history work to the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS), though it was not clear what would happen to the remaining parts of SRO. A merger with the National Library was suggested by Scottish Executive colleagues in the early 2000s, and we did look carefully at that, before concluding that the

¹³ The Scottish Government press statement is at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/01/11164957>.

¹⁴ The NRS historical note on the document is at <http://www.nas.gov.uk/about/100604.asp>.

fit between our business models and organisational status was not sufficient to overcome the high costs of merging. A couple of years later, when the idea of merging the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) with Historic Scotland was proposed by government, the Commission suggested that merger with NAS would be a better idea, though that was not something we had planned for!

Given these earlier attempts, the all-party interest in reforming or simplifying the public sector in Scotland, and the pressure waves from the financial crash of 2008, it was not surprising the issue resurfaced. Colleagues in the public sector reform unit in Scottish Government informed us that NAS, GROS and RoS were all likely to be scrutinised. Duncan Macniven, head of GROS, Sheenagh Adams, head of RoS and I decided not to wait for something to happen to us, but to take the initiative and look at closer working. A small group compared our business, financial and technology operations. It concluded that RoS was significantly different as first, it was a trading fund, meaning it receives no government funding but covers its costs through fees. Secondly, it had a quite distinct approach to information technology, contracting it out to a private sector company. And thirdly, while RoS staff were civil servants, they had separate terms and conditions to those of NAS and GROS. These differences, we agreed, would make a three-way merger very difficult.

However, we also concluded that NAS and GROS were similar. Both were involved in information and record handling. We occupied the same business segment in family history and web delivery, we were already sharing finance systems and our staff had identical terms and conditions. We were also geographically close on the Register House site and senior staff knew each other well. All these factors made it logical to work more closely and made a merger possible. We were already making savings from joint working and we could see further economies in the longer term by extending this strategy. We also identified complementary strengths: NAS was good at archive preservation, managing historical records and education services, while GROS was good at data security, large-scale computing and geographic information systems. There was another important factor: small organisations like NAS, already feeling financial pressure, would be particularly vulnerable in the difficult conditions that were unfolding.

All in all, we found a compelling case for merging the two organisations. We reported this to Finance Secretary John Swinney, recommending that we should aim to merge by the beginning of the financial year 2012–13, allowing a year to prepare. His swift reply was that we should go ahead, but he wanted the merger brought forward to April 2011. We responded that we could achieve the initial stages by then, but that it would take longer to integrate all our systems and processes. This proved to be the case. As Duncan and I explained to staff, we would change our name on 1 April but behind the scenes it would be very much business as usual. We both felt it was important to reassure people that their terms and conditions were not changing. In retrospect, this ‘no change’ message may not have been ideal, as it ignored the potential opportunities from

working more closely and from re-engineering work processes. I also seriously underestimated the time it would take to merge IT systems and websites. Indeed, this is still a work in progress at the time of writing.

Opinions were divided at the time on the merger. It had immediate benefits, enabling NAS to get through what would otherwise have been a very tricky period modernising its financial systems while losing some key staff members on retirement. As government cuts took effect, the larger organisation was also able to absorb the required reductions in expenditure, which is a significant and continuing benefit. On the public side, an early win was a single service for adopted persons and later, the addition of new resources to the ScotlandsPeople service. There is potential for much more in future. NRS combines archive skills in managing records, statistical skills in database management and ICT skills in data handling. This is a unique and winning combination which will become even more important as the open government movement takes hold. This international initiative to make government more open and accountable is at the heart of public sector reform.¹⁵

NRS also sits at the centre of personal information gathering in Scotland, operating the NHS Central Register which underlies the Citizen Account, a key resource for local authority services. Irrespective of the outcome of September's referendum, more and more public services will be electronic and delivered at Scottish level. To do this requires a personal ID verification system to which NRS is in a good position to provide or contribute.

If the formation of NRS was one part of the simplification of the public sector, another was the abolition of the Scottish Records Advisory Council. The SRAC, first established under the 1937 Public Records (Scotland) Act, held its last meeting in February 2008. In January that year, the First Minister had announced that 52 advisory bodies were being abolished as part of the simplification process, including the SRAC.¹⁶ Legislation to end the council followed in 2009. This was not something I had argued for, but was the result of a political priority to reduce the number of statutory bodies. Nor was it a cost-saving measure, as the SRAC had a tiny annual budget (in addition, its secretariat was provided by a senior archivist from NAS). Announcing the move, the government statement added: 'Advice on public records and related matters can be more efficiently provided by informal consultation, co-ordinated by the National Archives of Scotland'.¹⁷

One source was the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA), a body set up by archivists in Scotland in 2002. NAS supported the formation of the SCA; I recall speaking at the inaugural meeting in Glasgow City Chambers. As the council developed its lobbying activities, our Scottish Government colleagues

¹⁵ For further details of the movement, of which the UK is a founder member, see the Open Government Partnership website: <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/>.

¹⁶ See <http://www.scottishrecordsadvisorycouncil.info/>.

¹⁷ Quoted on the SRAC website: <http://www.scottishrecordsadvisorycouncil.info/News.asp>.

advised us to maintain a distance from it, on the grounds that we should not be directly involved with a body that sought to influence government policy. We therefore took observer status on the SCA council, rather than being a full member.

The council at first operated on a shoestring without staff or premises. With the change of government in 2007 and increased attention to archives and records, the case for financial support for the SCA grew. Although slightly different organisations, the museum and library equivalents (SMC and SLIC) already had public funding. NAS strongly supported the case within government for funding SCA and in 2009 a three-year plan was agreed. In addition, NAS offered SCA free office premises in Register House. This allowed the council to employ full-time staff, greatly increasing its impact and influence. Oversight of the funding was initially in the hands of our colleagues in the culture division of Scottish Government, but in 2011 this responsibility transferred to NAS/NRS. The council and NRS meet quarterly to review progress against plans and discuss issues of mutual concern.

SCA provided major support and assistance in the passage and implementation of the Public Records (Scotland) Act of 2011. It launched an ambitious learning plan for archives in education 2012–15. It has also run campaigns to raise parliamentary and public awareness of archives, focusing on digital records and the potential for ancestral tourism. The development of the SCA over the last decade has, I believe, been one of the success stories of Scottish archives. Funding from government has not affected its independence or prevented it from maintaining a significant voice on behalf of Scottish archives that is separate from NRS. Although this is not the statutory voice the SRAC called for in its original legislation plan, it does go a long way to meeting that requirement.

Scotland's archives have changed in the past eleven years, but not always in ways that I or the archive community expected. Some may grieve over the loss of the SRAC and of an independent NAS, but most will agree that the Public Records (Scotland) Act and an enhanced, publicly funded SCA are significant steps forward. Together they show an increased attention by government and the public to archives and records, and their significance in society today. Both provide a platform for the records community to build on. And both are a challenge to us as a profession, to maintain the momentum so that records and archives stay prominent in the public mind and continue to play their vital role.