



Scottish Records Association Annual Report of the Council for 2020-2021

The prolongation of the Coronavirus restrictions originally imposed by the Scottish and UK Governments in the spring of 2020 has had a significant impact on the Association's activities this year, with all meetings and events moving online. The Council of the Association met three times via Zoom, and the Forty-Third Annual General Meeting of the Association was also held virtually on 27 November 2020. At that meeting, members voted to amend the constitution to explicitly permit all types of meetings and the Annual Conference of the Association to take place either physically or virtually as necessary. The only activities that could not go ahead were the Association's summer visits to archive repositories, which were postponed for the second year running. It is anticipated that these will resume in summer 2022.

There were no changes on Council during 2020-2021, but four Ordinary Members (Lady Coulsfield, Ms Ishbel MacKinnon, Professor Graeme Morton and Ms Veronica Schreuder) will retire at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting in November 2021. We are extremely grateful to each of them for their time, input and commitment to the activities of the Association over the past three years.

Membership

Membership of the Association currently stands at 175. This comprises 135 full individual members; 7 honorary individual members; 10 student/unwaged individual members; 7 reduced (no journal) members; and 40 full institutional members. This represents a modest increase on the total membership figure for 2019-2020 (169). A number of institutional members are in arrears with their subscriptions, apparently due to the difficulties produced by offices remaining closed during the pandemic. There are a few individual members whose subscriptions also remain unpaid. All these have been reminded on at least two occasions and if there is no response to a further reminder their names will be moved to an inactive list. Institutional members continue to comprise a complicated group with subscription payments being made for several through agents who do not seem able to identify the individual institutions for whom they are paying. Repeated approaches have been made to these organisations seeking clarification. Subscriptions are now assigned to a specific calendar year (i.e. 2021 rather than 2020-2021) following queries, particularly from institutional members, about which volume of *Scottish Archives* was covered by their subscription. Thanks to this administrative change and to the Editor's efforts in bringing the journal publication up to date, these queries should cease.

Finance

The Association ended the financial year 2020-2021 with £8,647.35 in the current account and £5,342.84 in the savings account and made a profit of £2,879.44, which is slightly higher than last year's profit (£2,649.57). This is due to an increase in sales of back issues of the journal; the receipt of two years' worth of Gift Aid repayments from HMRC (£310.27 for the year 2019-2020 and £378.88 for the year 2020-2021); and the absence of travel expenditure, all Council meetings having taken place online this year. It is also due to an outstanding invoice for accommodation and

catering costs associated with the 2019 Annual Conference, held in conjunction with the Centre for Scottish Culture (CSC) at the University of Dundee, which has yet to be received and paid by the Association. The CSC has now confirmed that an invoice will be issued to the Association for the sum of £415, representing half of the total accommodation and catering costs for the conference. This payment will be noted in next year's accounts.

The cost of hosting this year's Annual Conference online was £38.40. This covered a one-month subscription to Zoom Webinar to provide additional functionality. No fees were charged to those attending the online conference, but a late payment of £60 in booking fees for the 2019 Annual Conference was received during the year.

As in previous years, the Association's biggest outlay was on publications. Expenditure in this area was higher than usual owing to the publication of a double edition of *Scottish Archives*. Production and distribution of the combined volume 25/26 cost £3,951.93, representing an increase of £736.71 on last year's figure. *Retour* cost £376.21 (this sum includes postage of the spring 2020 issue to institutional members in September, this having been delayed due to the pandemic, and printing of the Annual General Meeting papers for distribution with the autumn 2020 issue). Sales of back issues of the journal increased by £588.12 this year, generating £752.93 overall. The total income and expenditure figures for the journal include the sum of £250 received from Thomas Tunnock Ltd for the annual Tunnock Prize and awarded to the winner.

Conference

Owing to the pandemic, the Annual Conference was postponed from November 2020 to 12 May 2021, when it took place online for the first time. A stimulating programme of 10 presentations on the theme of 'Net profit: sources for the history of Scottish fishing and fishing communities' attracted attendees from as far afield as the Scottish Highlands and Islands and Australia, some of whom could not have participated had the conference been held physically. The Association is indebted to Veronica Schreuder and Robin Urquhart for organising the event, and particularly to Robin for providing digital support; to Chris Whatley, Phil Astley and Ishbel MacKinnon for chairing the conference sessions; to the speakers for their excellent contributions, and to the delegates for their enthusiastic participation.

Palaeography Training Sessions

In February and March 2021, the Association offered three beginners' palaeography workshops, led by Alison Diamond. A more advanced palaeography workshop based on private household records, led by Robin Urquhart and Ingrid Thomson, was also offered in March 2021. The workshops, which were provided free of charge, took place online and were solely for members of the Association. All four sessions were well attended, and both the introductory and the advanced workshops will be offered again this winter.

Publications

During 2020-2021, the Association's website (www.scottishrecordsassociation.org) was viewed 6,763 times, which is a marked increase on the 5,868 visits recorded in 2019-2020. As usual, most visitors accessed the site from within the UK, but there was also some interest from the USA, Canada and Australia. In early 2021, the website was moved to a new hosting provider, VistaPrint, which introduced minor styling changes to the website's theme and improvements to the content management system. The transition to the new provider did not cause any availability issues and the website has otherwise run smoothly. During the year, the homepage was extensively redesigned to make it more visually engaging and improve legibility, a new 'About Us' page and a

'Copyright and Image Details' link were created, and the Association's logo and its OSCR Registration logo were added to all pages. The 'Publications' and 'Events' pages were also updated and improved. Articles from *Scottish Archives* volume 24 were published on the website and made available to all visitors.

Issues 34 and 35 of *Retour*, the Association's newsletter, appeared in autumn 2020 and spring 2021. A combined volume of *Scottish Archives*, volume 25/26, was published and distributed to members in February 2021. This now brings the publication of the journal up to date. Volume 27 is expected early in 2022.

Tunnock Prize

The inaugural winner of the Association's annual essay competition for postgraduate students and early career researchers was Heather Curtis, a PhD candidate at the University of St Andrews. Heather was invited to deliver a short presentation based on her research at the Annual General Meeting in November 2020. Her winning essay, entitled '*Transactiones pro animabus*: rent charges and the economics of salvation in late medieval St Andrews' will be published in *Scottish Archives* volume 27. Three other essays that were entered for the competition will also appear in volume 27.

The closing date for the 2021 Tunnock Prize competition was 1 September, and the winner will be announced at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting in November.

Joint Lecture with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland

On 8 February 2021, the Association held a special joint lecture with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Caroline Brown, University Archivist and Head of Culture and Information at the University of Dundee, spoke on 'The Power of Archives' as part of the Society's 2021 event programme. Examining how archives can hold individuals and organisations to account and how they can also foster a sense of worth, Caroline's fascinating presentation drew an online audience of over 200 on the night. A recording of the event is available on the Society's website (<https://www.socantscot.org/resource/the-power-of-archives-by-caroline-brown/>), and an article based on the lecture will feature in the forthcoming volume of *Scottish Archives*.

Representation on and to outside bodies

The Association continues to represent the interests of its members in the care and custody of records as an Organisational Member of the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA).

Following a discussion at the Annual General Meeting in November 2020, the Association also made written representations to the Keeper of the Records of Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture regarding the continued lack of physical access to historical records at the National Records of Scotland (NRS). At that time, the NRS remained closed to researchers while other local, regional and national repositories were open on a restricted basis under the partial easing of Coronavirus restrictions. The NRS's Historical Search Room eventually reopened on 26 April 2021, though this was not a direct consequence of the approach made by the Association.