

Your Scottish-American Ancestry

Researching your Scottish ancestry from America, with Family History sources, musings on aspects of Scottishness, history, heritage, inheritance, heraldry, migration, land and maps, DNA, hints and tips, and more.

Part I – Musings on Things Scottish

Part II – Researching your Scottish Family History

Bruce Durie

**GATH
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... instruct certain people not to spread false teachings, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations

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James M. Barrie

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Shennachie to COSCA

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Fulbright Senior Scottish Studies Scholar, 2015-16



Dr. Bruce Durie is considered one of Scotland's top genealogists and heraldists, with an international reputation. He is perhaps best known for his BBC radio series, *Digging Up Your Roots* (eight seasons), and *A House With A Past*, and he has authored 30 books, including the best-selling *Scottish Genealogy* now in its 4th edition. His background is in medicine and neuropharmacology, as well as holding a doctoral degree in history.

Bruce founded and ran the much-acclaimed Postgraduate Program in Genealogical Studies at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. He also teaches courses on Genealogy, Documents and Heraldry at the University of Edinburgh.

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In 2017, Bruce was elected Academician of the prestigious *Académie Internationale de Généalogie* and was invited to become a member of the *Instituto Internacional de Genealogía y Heráldica*.

He is also a Freeman and Burgess of the City of Glasgow.

See: www.brucedurie.co.uk/books.html

Preface

This book emerged from courses taught at the universities of Strathclyde and Edinburgh in Scotland, and Guelph in Canada, and from many talks given in Scotland, the USA and elsewhere. It is not a list of sources, although many resources, archive holdings and websites are given in here.

Rather, it is meant to be a brief guide for those interested in Scottish-American heritage and family history. Anyone wishing to pursue these subjects further, or needing a suitable textbook for a preparatory course, is recommended to read *Scottish Genealogy* (4th Edition, 2017) and *Understanding Documents for Genealogy & Local History*, both by Bruce Durie and available from The History Press (www.thehistorypress.co.uk) and most online bookshops.

There is some repetition in the book, because some readers will look at parts of it in isolation, and they shouldn't have to go hunting for, say, a web address or a definition.

Thanks are due to the National Records of Scotland, and to others where indicated, for permission to use certain images, and to the many long-suffering students, university colleagues, friends, family members, attendees at talks and random people in sundry pubs, who put up with the process of authorship.

There is an old Scottish toast, appropriate to the remembrance of those long gone:

*Here's tae us!
Wha's like us?
Dam' few,
And they're a' deid!*

Note on spelling: this book contains British English spellings ('artefact', 'centre', 'colour', 'through', 'tonight', 'baptise') for which the author does not apologise (and there's another one!).

If you spell things differently, blame Noah Webster (1758–1843).

Bruce Durie, Edinburgh, January 2018

Introduction

So. You're Scottish. All your ancestors were Scots, were part of Clan McWhatever, were cleared off their wee Highland croft by the dreadful English, were persecuted for their religion, and proudly supported both the Covenanters and Bonnie Prince Charlie. You have bought the kilt, fly-plaid, bonnet and so on in your clan tartan, you have hung a broadsword over the fireplace next to your family crest, and you enjoy the occasional glass of single malt Scotch (12-year or older, of course, with just a drop of water) while musing on your descent from Kenneth MacAlpine, Robert the Bruce, Mary Queen of Scots and many more luminaries from the history of Old Scotia.

You are proud of your Celtic heritage, have taken a Gaelic class, will make sure your children play in the local Pipe Band, always march with your clan at various games and gatherings bearing the Chief's crest on a banner, and plan to visit the heartland of your forebears at some point in the future, if you ever get a passport.

Or...

You are the usual American admixture of Scots, English, Irish, German, Swedish and more. You don't like whisky, can't stand the noise of bagpipes and wouldn't be seen dead in a skirt. Your Scottish ancestors were of no particular religious sensibility, emigrated of their own accord for reasons of economic betterment, never spoke Gaelic, or wore tartan, nor were they part of any clan, and only went to the Highlands on vacation. But you have visited Scotland a couple of times, and managed to avoid eating haggis.

Both of those are caricatures, of course. But the reality – for everyone – is something between the two.

We have no hand in choosing our ancestors, and little or no influence over their and our descendants' choices of friends and spouses. But the one thing we can be sure of is this: every single one of our forebears lived long enough to breed. And that means... you have a genealogy!

Where genealogy differs from history is that it moves the focus away from the grand sweep of civilisations to the lives and events of individuals. History is best when seen through the life of one family, connected by no more than a shared surname or location, or a half-remembered family story.

Most people led quiet, blameless lives and left very few traces. However, there may be registrations (birth, marriage, death, census, taxes, poor relief etc.) or legal documents (including deeds, wills, divorce, property transfers, inheritances, lawsuits, arrests, trials, executions and witness statements). All of these events generated records, which may still exist in some form, or at least as indexes or abstracts.

Scotland has possibly the most complete, best-kept, most comprehensively digitised and readily-available set of records on Earth – but many people don't know they exist, because they aren't at present on Ancestry.com, FamilySearch, FindMyPast, MyHeritage, Geni and all the others. Yet these records are easy to find online.

- Part I of this book contains short essays on aspects of Scottish heritage and culture – clans and families, chiefs, tartan and the kilt, coats of arms, crests and other armorial bearings, DNA, bits of Scottish history... and more besides.
- Part II will show you where and how to research your own Scottish ancestry.

It was written just for you. So do take it in the spirit intended, and enjoy.

Feel free to visit www.bruceurie.co.uk/books.html

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