

Minutes of ScotlandsPeople Centre User Group Meeting held on 27th February 2007, room 28, New Register House

Present:

Duncan Macniven (Chair), Gill Amos (GROS), Denise Cowan (GROS), Helen Ewing (GROS), George Mackenzie (NAS), Paul Parr (GROS), Bob Phillips (NAS), Chris Reekie (GROS), Anne Cruickshank (genealogist), Anne Garven (genealogist), Angus Mitchell (genealogist), Lorna Munro (genealogist), Ewan Steed (genealogist), Ken Nisbet (SAFHS).

Apologies:

Ron Bell (GROS), Gordon Munro (GROS), Dave Brownlee (NAS), Alison Horsburgh (NAS), Jean Sanderson (genealogist).

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 Duncan opened the meeting by welcoming everyone. He provided an overview of events that had taken place since the last meeting held on 11th January 2006.

1.2 In summary, the main contractor Peter Walker Construction Ltd., had gone into receivership during spring 2006. The receivership created many complications, for example, the need to let short term contracts to complete work that was deemed a risk for health and safety reasons. Work had taken place to disengage from the original contract to allow a new contract to be tendered for the outstanding work.

1.3 Rok had been appointed as the new contractor in November 2006 and early observations of their performance were encouraging.

1.4 The receivership had resulted in the public purse paying more money to create the Centre but, since the existing service had not been interrupted, the only other penalty was the lost opportunity to open the Centre's enhanced facilities.

1.5 The opening date for the Centre had yet to be finalised though it was hoped that it would be late 2007.

2. Update on the ScotlandsPeople Centre

2.1 Dee showed the Group a presentation covering the proposed layout of the Centre together with refurbishment work that had been completed to date and explained how the Centre would operate once it opened.

2.2 Concerns were raised at the proposal to locate the three Assisted Search places at the far end of the Dundas room with no sound barriers. The genealogists felt that those using the facility could be distractingly noisy.

2.3 Duncan explained that any noise from talking should be localised due to the fact that the Assisted Searches were taking place around the corner of the room. But he agreed to think further about whether there was likely to be a problem and, if so, what might be done to alleviate it.

Action: GROS to consider whether noise from Assisted Searches would be a problem and how to alleviate it.

2.4 The Group queried how refunds would be made once the new charges were commenced. Helen and Denise confirmed that they would be working up a procedure for making refunds to customers with season tickets once the commencement date for the new charges was known. The refunds would be calculated on a sliding scale basis.

Action: Helen and Denise to work up procedure for refunds

2.5 It was hoped that coat stands would be provided in the new search rooms, though this proposal had yet to be approved by GROS. Lockers would be available at the entrance to General Register House.

2.6 Microfiche Readers

2.6.1 The Group was assured that new microfiches were still being created to record new statutory events.

2.6.2 Concerns were raised over the proposal to have only one microfiche and microfilm reader located in the Dundas room. The need to wait for fiches to be retrieved from the New Register House (NRH) Dome area was seen as an obstacle to the working practices of the genealogists.

2.6.3 GROS confirmed that microfiches and microfilms would not be allowed to leave NRH, to ensure that their condition was preserved and to limit staff time needed to fetch them.

2.6.4 The Group believed that the single microfiche reader could be in permanent use due to the number of images that are not legible. The fact that the census records and statutory records for England and Wales are also stored on microfiche would also impact on the amount of demand for use of the microfiche readers. Paul explained how GROS are exploring whether it is possible to have copies of the England and Wales census records and statutory records on a different medium or through appropriate websites. Paul explained how the main thrust of work by GROS was to reduce the number of poor images including the 1932 marriage certificates.

2.6.5 The Group proposed that a microfiche reader should be located in each search room. Duncan agreed to explore whether it would be possible to locate more microfiche readers in NRH.

Action: GROS to consider locating more microfiche readers in NRH

2.7 Café

2.7.1 Currently, customers are able to use the ground floor lunch room to eat their packed lunch. Once the Centre opens, the lunch room would become a cafeteria, probably operated by an external contractor. Customers would no longer be able to eat their packed lunches in the lunch room because of the limited seating area. The National Archives at Kew, London have facilities for both a café and a packed lunch

area. But their café has in excess of 200 seats compared with the small facility in NRH with only 24 seats.

2.7.2 It was envisaged that the new café would provide a simple selection of food in the form of soup, sandwiches, baked potatoes, scones and pastries, etc. Members suggested commercial operators who provided a similar service.

2.7.3 Duncan explained that, if the café was successful, it might be possible to bid for funds for a larger external café between NRH and GRH, which would be a great centrepiece for the Centre.

Action: Dee to continue researching ways of operating the café.

2.8 Interim Arrangements

2.8.1 Once a new electrical supply was available in the Dundas room around the end of March 2007, the south search room would close and customers would search the digitised records through Digros on the original computer terminals re-installed in the Dundas room. Library materials would be moved to the NRH Dome for customers to access.

2.8.2 Once the contractor started working on the redevelopment of the NRH Dome, the break out rooms and the public counter area, noise in the Dundas room would increase but all drilling will take place outwith normal working hours.

2.8.3 When the Centre opens in General Register House, the Dundas room would need to close for a week to allow it to be converted to the new ScotlandsPeople Centre software.

2.8.4 The Group was invited to look around the refurbished Dundas room after the meeting.

3. Demonstration of the ScotlandsPeople Centre Software

3.1 Gill presented the new software for the Centre User group.

3.2 The aim was to have the software complete and fully tested two months prior to the opening of the Centre so that on line seat bookings can commence on the <http://www.ScotlandsPeoplehub.gov.uk> website. On line seat bookings would be available for up to two people together on one day for up to 20 dates. Bookings for larger groups of people and assisted searches would be taken over the telephone.

3.3 When booked on line, 1 place in every 10 places booked would be free, giving a 10% discount.

3.4 Gill explained how the software could be used to signpost information that would be useful for customers using the Centre like opening times for the café, lists of records available in the library area, etc.

3.5 New features on the Centre software like soundex, name variants, picture enhancement functions and the ability to sort the registration districts would improve the service being offered to customers. The system would also allow up to 200 images to be saved by each registered customer. The images could be printed if the customer's account was in credit.

3.6 It would be possible to print or save to CD. Group members asked whether it would be possible to have rewritable CD's so that images can be added to a family's ancestors rather than keep using separate CD's.

Action: Gill to check whether it would be possible to use rewritable CD's

3.7 It would not be possible to search more than one census year at any one time, however, it would be possible to select 5 parishes at a time or browse through books of old records.

3.8 Guidance on the use of the software would be produced at a later date and comments on the training and guidance material would be sought from the User Group.

Action: Guidance material to be drafted for review by the User Group

4. Facilities for People with Special Needs

4.1 Dee presented the facilities proposed for people with special needs.

4.2 Dee confirmed that, following communications with the 'Centre for Accessible Environments', the desk height of 750mm was suitable for wheelchair users because it was lower than 760mm and higher than 700mm. Tables that could be adjusted in height were also being installed in the Dundas room (2 no.) and the Reid room (2 no.).

4.3 Further to the presentation, Bob also confirmed that the two side doors accessing the NRH seminar facility from the Dome would be big enough for wheelchair users.

4.4 It was suggested that, to aid customers who had mobility difficulties, it would be helpful if the shop products could be displayed and purchased on the Centre software and then taken along to the customer.

Action: Gill to ascertain whether shop products could be purchased remotely

4.5 It was confirmed that two disabled parking spaces were being provided at the front of NRH and that more existed along the lane between NRH and Princes Street.

5. Proposed Fees and Charges for the Centre

5.1 Dee presented the proposed fees and charges, which at this stage excluded any proposed charges by the Court of the Lord Lyon for the reproduction of Arms and Heraldry images.

5.2 It was acknowledged that a cross subsidy from the <http://scotlandspeople.gov.uk> website was needed to finance the operation of the Centre.

5.3 It was suggested that refunds should only be given with 24 hours notice and that refunds should be offered if the Centre software failed at specific times of the day.

5.4 The rates for evening visits were being raised, to cover staff costs for supervising evening visits. It was not possible to reduce staff numbers in case there was a need to retrieve microfiches. Concern was raised that the numbers of evening visits might diminish with the increased charges.

5.5 The National Archives of Scotland would continue to offer free access to their records that had not been digitised.

5.6 Season tickets would allow up to five people to be named on a ticket but only one seat would be available on any day.

6. Any Other Business

6.1 The minutes of the meeting to be released with a minimum of size 12 font.

6.2 Angus queried whether the Centre User Group would still meet after the Centre opened. Duncan assured the Group that the User Group would still continue to meet after the opening date.

7. Date of Next Meeting

7.1 The next meeting to be arranged for June 2007.