



22 January 2010

Dear Customer

## **PROPOSAL TO REMOVE DUPLICATE MICROFICHE AND MICROFILM**

Thank you for contributing to our consultation about proposals for the future of the microfiche and microfilm currently available to customers in the ScotlandsPeople Centre. It was very helpful to have so many views expressed, and we recognise the strong views held by our customers.

We are very much committed to using modern electronic approaches to storing and presenting our data – because they make them much more easily accessible to family historians - and we will continue to develop these. An example of this is that we have just started a project to modernise the way the indexes are held, as the existing technology, which has been used since the 1980s, is now quite dated. This project will restructure the indexes allowing us to group them by registration district more accurately. It will also allow regular updates to the indexes on the ScotlandsPeople Website and in the ScotlandsPeople Centre, so keeping them more in step with those held in DIGROS. We expect to see the fruits of this work by the late summer 2010.

We aim soon to remove from our electronic search systems the 5-year restriction on searching the statutory registers. Also, in due course, for the "historical" statutory registers we plan to provide a mechanism which will allow customers to consult images of the indexes prepared by the registrars which appear at the end of register volumes. Until that is in place, if a customer has difficulty in finding an entry in the statutory registers that the customer would have expected to find, the customer should report this to a Family History Officer. He or she would then be able to consult the registrar's index for that registration district to check if there is a corresponding entry – and so direct the customer to the appropriate registration district and entry number.

In the meantime, and responding to the points which have been made in the consultation: -

- Many of the comments were about the need for customers to use microfiche and microfilm when the digital image is poor. The microfilm/microfiche image can of course itself be of inferior quality. To address these issues we will introduce a new service to the search rooms. Where an image is found to be too poor to be readable, GROS will make a new digital image directly from the original register entry, and this new image will be provided to the customer on the search systems very quickly. This new service will work by the customer alerting a Family History Officer to the problem image. If the Family History Officer is unable to resolve the problem, he or she will be able to immediately commission a new digital image to be made. In most cases, the new image will appear on the DIGROS system in use in the Dundas Room, and also in the rest of the ScotlandsPeople Centre, within 30 minutes of the Family History Officer making the request, but often it will be quicker. Where we are unable to do this (e.g. because the original register is not available to our imaging team due to use elsewhere within GROS) we will alert the Family History Officer, who will inform the customer. Our intention is to provide a quick service, particularly for statutory registers. An equivalent service is already working well for local registrars, and we will be building on this to provide the same service for the ScotlandsPeople search rooms.

- The second point was about faults in the indexes. We will, therefore, continue to allow access to OPR microfilms (as the death OPR index is not available in the Centre) and to microfilms of the open Census records (1841 - 1901). Also, as at present, there will continue to be access to the microfiche of the Minor Records and the English and Welsh index. We will take the opportunity of the OPR relocation to consolidate all the library materials in one place on the ground floor of New Register House. This should result in reduced retrieval times for publications requested by customers in the Dundas Room.
- We recognise that there are some incorrect links between original register entries and those in the RCEs. This problem exists not just in the digital images but also in the microfiche and paper records. So access to the microfiche would not solve the problem for customers. So, we have in progress a project to improve the links between original statutory entries and the RCEs. Therefore, we are keen for customers to report problem images and incorrect links to the RCEs to us when they come across them; this will allow us to create new images direct from the original paper records.

So, taking account of the points you and others have raised, we will remove the microfiche of the statutory registers (and the RCEs) but retain in New Register House the microfilms of the OPRs and Censuses.

There was a concern expressed in some consultation responses that GROS has plans to destroy the microfiche/microfilm. This is incorrect. Rather, our intention is to remove the microfiche and microfilm to one of our other buildings.

We will introduce the new service described above from **Monday 1 February** starting in the Matheson Dome and then working through to the remainder of the Centre. We will be monitoring this new service closely, and will take the comments of customers on board. This is important to us as we regard the continued development of our digital images, and access to them as an essential component of our strategic direction.

The relocation of the OPRs, removal of microfiche and continued microfilm access will enable GROS to safeguard our precious archive while also creating space for housing the new incoming registers.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul M Parr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**Paul M Parr**  
Deputy Registrar General