

Celtic Connections Conference 2020

Saturday, August 8th, 2020

Question & Answer Log: Chat with Paul Milner and Chris Paton: Scottish / Irish / Internet

Note as of August 11th, 2020: Shortly after the live chat, Paul Milner fell and suffered a fracture of his right forearm. Typing is now painful and slow for him. As a result, we are posting this Q&A log with an occasional unanswered question. We will update later if possible.

We wish Paul a quick recovery!

QUESTION: Were there established (ferry?) routes between Scotland and Ireland in the late 18th century? Might that determine where in Northern Ireland my Scottish-born ancestors settled? (Paton)

ANSWER: The short answer to that is no. Northern Ireland, if you look on a map, half the country is coastal and there are a lot of ports all along the coast of Northern Ireland. You have ports like Derry in the Northwest and Donaghadee in the Southeast. And it really depends on what your closest port was in relation to where you were coming from, suppose Scotland. At the closest point, Scotland is only 13 miles away from the north of Ireland. So, for example, if you were going from the north of Ireland to get married over in Scotland, you might just get the boat from over at Donaghadee to Port Patrick and do a “hit and run” raid for a day and get married using Scotland’s weird marriage rules and then come back home again. But, you might equally sail in from Scotland to Belfast or Larne up on the Antrim coast, so there weren’t any set routes as there are today. Today it tends to be Cairnryan to Belfast or to Larne and that’s predominately the route. If you are coming from the Western isles you might come in through the north of the country like Ballycastle or Derry or places like that. So, it’s one of those things where you can’t really plot a way where somebody existed in Northern Ireland from where they came in Scotland. And bear in mind, wherever you were going to settle in the north of Ireland, you had to arrive at sea anyway, so you had to travel inland. So, it could be anywhere along the coast. Again, the short answer is NO.

QUESTION: My ancestors were miners. Would they be found in valuation rolls as a tenant, if they lived in the miner row-houses?

ANSWER: The Valuation Rolls kicked off in 1855, at least the modern version, and for the first few years from 1855 to 1884, if you lived in a property that had a rental value of less than £4 then a tenant or occupier wouldn’t be listed at all on the valuation roll. It really depends upon what the value of the property was.

Actually, the Valuation Rolls are quite detailed, you will find people there, it just depends on the value of property. You will find in a group of houses, maybe those houses were part of an estate and it might be that they just don't list the individual tenants for that little group, you know the miner's row, but there is a fair chance that you will find them listed. And sometimes one thing you might not be aware of with the Valuation Rolls, if you are looking for a fellow, you might not find him as you would if looking at a census, as the head of household, it might actually be his wife listed on the Valuation Roll rather than him. So, you might want to look at the wife's name as well as an alternative. After 1884 it is a wider catch and you'll probably be able to find them after that as well. (Paton)

Since we are talking about miners a couple of good resources to look at a booklet called *The Coal Miners* in 1983 published by the Scottish Records Office and that does a good job of describing the types of records available in Scotland for dealing with coal miners. And then Stanlake Publishing in Scotland has a series of pictorial historical guides on mining from different regions in Scotland so I would look at theirs. And then for specific mining records, look at the University of Glasgow's business archives and there is a PDF list of the mining companies that they hold records for and you might have to look at the local histories to identify the names of the pits and the companies that owned them. So there's a lot of material there available on the mining. (Milner)

Can I just add one thing? There's a website called Scottishmining.co.uk and it breaks down each of the areas where mining took place. And it is particularly useful to look up accidents which took place within each area in Scotland. It also includes the 1842 Royal Commission on Children and Employment so you get a lot of witness testimonies as well, so that's just another one to add into the mix. (Paton)

QUESTION: Would the courts write testaments for miners, if they left no will themselves?

ANSWER: And I would say the answer to that is "maybe." And the reality is that you've got to check. No matter what their occupation is, no matter your perception of their position in society. I have seen miners and agricultural laborers in those testamentary documents. So don't prejudge. Do the search. They're easy to do. The bulk of them are on Scotland's People. (Milner).

Obviously if they didn't leave a will, which may or may not be the case, their estate can still be confirmed through the courts through an executor. So, there are two different types of testaments at Scotland's People. One is called a 'testament testamentar' which is like a grant of probate elsewhere in the world. Then there is a 'testament dative' which is for those that didn't leave a will. So it may be that if the miner died and he did have some substantial assets, for example, his wife may have gone to the courts and been granted as the executrix. So you might want to look for a testament dative under the wife's name. But the miner is likely to be named in the index as well. You know, it would

probably say “The widow of” So, as Paul says there’s every chance there may be or there may not be. Another thing to be aware of is that not everyone went through the courts. If somebody did not have a lot of property when they died, it may have just been dealt with informally without having to go through the courts and through the confirmation/probate process afterwards. So, it is well worth having a look on Scotland’s People since you just never know. (Paton)

QUESTION: Is it possible a person's death was not recorded? My ancestor was alive in 1851 and recorded as living in Rutherglen. He was dead by 30 Dec 1859 when his daughter married.

ANSWER: Civil registration in Scotland kicked off in 1855. From the outset, if somebody died, their death had to be recorded. And 99.9% of the times that’s the case – there was a high level of registration. I have on occasion found instances of people who, for whatever reason, aren’t in the records. There was one example of a miner who died in 1864 and I couldn’t find what became of him – he was based in Ayrshire. And I looked at the Poor Law Records to see whether his wife may have made a claim at any point on the assumption that maybe her husband had passed away. And yes, it mentions that she had made a claim because two weeks earlier he had died. So at that point with a date know exactly when he died I went back to look on Scotland’s People and still couldn’t find it. At the Scotland’s People Center in Edinburgh, I got the original book out and still couldn’t find it. His death just wasn’t registered. So that, in my experience, is more the exception rather than the rule. I can’t think of other examples off the top of my head where I have seen that. Another thing, you mention that he was alive in 1851 as mentioned in the census and then he is dead by 1859. There is that gap from 1851 to 1855. There may be resources. If there aren’t burial records on Scotland’s People for that period, there may be other resources. It might be worth getting in touch with Lanarkshire Family History Society (www.lanarkshirefhs.org.uk) which would cover that area and see if they’ve got any publications that cover that period. (Paton)

And it is worth pointing out that the Presbyterians weren’t exactly strong on recording deaths and burials in their church registers. So there are a lot of unrecorded deaths in Scotland and the further back in time you go, the worse it gets. But like anything else, track the money! See if a morgue cloth was rented. Often it is the rental and morgue cloth fees that are paid which will give you the record of the death rather than church records in Scotland. (Milner)

QUESTION: Can you suggest any Irish or Scottish records available on The National Archives at Kew?

ANSWER: Yes. The way to find them is to go to the opening screen, pull down Help with Research and look at the online guides. If you do a search for Ireland, 87 guides come up for Irish records or records that contain the Irish. I didn’t do the same search for Scottish records. Basically think about the Irish and Scottish being in any set of records created by the British government. So you’re going to