

# Archive Fever as Genealogical Fever: Coming Home to Scottish Archives\*



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**RÉSUMÉ** Cet article examine le genre d'« archivization<sup>1</sup> » qui est produite par les historiens de la famille. Dans ce processus, la fonction et le sens des archives en Écosse évoluent, et ce texte offre un examen de cette transformation. D'abord, il donne un aperçu de la façon dont l'histoire de la famille s'est développée avec le temps, en traçant sa relation avec l'histoire des archives écossaises. Ensuite, l'article examine plusieurs thèmes reliés à l'histoire de la famille et au tourisme. Ceux-ci incluent un examen de la diaspora écossaise et de l'idée du retour chez-soi; une comparaison de la façon dont le concept de l'authenticité est appliqué dans l'industrie du tourisme et aux archives; et enfin, une discussion du rôle des archives dans la construction de l'identité.

**ABSTRACT** This article explores the kind of “archivization”<sup>2</sup> that is produced by family historians. Within this process, the function and meaning of archives in Scotland is changing and here is offered an examination of this transformation. Firstly, an overview of how family history has developed over time and its relation to the history of Scottish archives is provided. Secondly, the article investigates several themes within family history and tourism. These include an exploration of the Scottish diaspora and the idea of homecoming; a comparison of how the concept of authenticity is used within the tourist industry and archives; and finally a discussion on the role that archives play in the construction of identity.

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1 Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive – une impression freudienne* (Paris, 1995), p. 34.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Eric Prenowitz, trans. (Chicago, 1996), p.17.

## Introduction

In 2001 Sarah Tyacke wrote that the “prime current example of remembering or archive ‘fever’ is the pursuit of genealogy or family history.”<sup>3</sup> The pursuit of genealogy is often described in pathological terms and the metaphor of a fever pervades descriptions of genealogy. The renowned genealogist, Sir Anthony R. Wagner wrote that

...those once bitten are apt to find that the fever of the chase leads them on. Their appetite for pedigree grows with the eating. The detective instinct is stimulated, the collector’s passion for completeness roused.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the distinguished historian J.H. Plumb identified “outbreaks of genealogical fever” during periods when aristocratic identity is in doubt.<sup>5</sup> Like Derrida’s “archive fever,” genealogical fever is driven by the desire for origins, but where does the fever itself come from and what is its relationship to archives and the wider world?

While the quantitative aspects of family history are to some extent monitored by the archive community and its profile in the popular media is self-evident, the theoretical and qualitative aspects of genealogical activity have not been fully explored. Indeed, archivist Rosemary Boyns states that family historians “are almost invisible in archival literature.”<sup>6</sup>

This article seeks to remedy this by outlining the development of genealogy and exploring its relationship to the history of archives in Scotland in particular. By exploring the idea of the Scottish homecoming, we can begin to understand the relationship between Scottish “genealogical fever” and archives. Finally, this article will tackle two themes – authenticity and identity – in order to explore how these concepts are used within the context of tourism, archives, and genealogical practice itself.

## The Development of Genealogy

Genealogy as an oral and literary form is not new.<sup>7</sup> Many cultures have an oral tradition of recording genealogies, the well-known example in the West

3 Sarah Tyacke, “Archives in a Wider World: The Culture and Politics of Archives,” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), p. 16.

4 Anthony Richard Wagner, *English Genealogy* (Oxford, 1960), p. 4.

5 J.H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (London, 1969), pp. 31–34.

6 Rosemary Boyns, “Archivists and Family Historians: Local Authority Record Repositories and the Family History Group,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1999), p. 62.

7 Traditionally, genealogists are concerned with pedigree and the compilation of a genealogical tree. Family history has broader associations and is perhaps more concerned with “fleshing

being those recorded in the Old Testament. In Western Europe, from around the twelfth century onward, oral genealogies began to be written down in order to prove inheritance. However, it was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the origins of “modern scientific genealogy” can be traced.<sup>8</sup> During this period, many genealogies were written from a desire to create a coherent kin identity, and bolster leadership and power. This growth in genealogy was fuelled by economic insecurities and demographic crises. For many families whose line was dying out, a well-documented pedigree “could amount to a fully comprehensive insurance policy against genetic or pathological misfortune.”<sup>9</sup>

In seventeenth-century Scotland, the need to write genealogies was exacerbated by the exposure and expansion of the Scottish nobility to the Stuart British court. In this competitive environment, the older nobility sought to reassure themselves of their innate gentility, while the newly-created nobility sought bogus pedigrees in order to “clothe their social nakedness.”<sup>10</sup> The writing and compilation of genealogies were also tied to a growth in literacy and an interest in history. Some Scottish family histories, like Gordon of Gordonstoun’s *Genealogical History*, composed in the 1620s and inspired by the Roman historian Tacitus, aimed, “in some Measure ... [to] contribute to raise in them a generous emulation of their illustrious Ancestors.”<sup>11</sup> The writing of a family history, whether based on fact or fiction, thus cultivated the twin ideals of good breeding and noble learning.

Heraldic standards were also developed during this period. In 1672 an act authorized the creation of the “Public Register of All Arms and Bearings in Scotland,” which gave nobles three-months grace to record their arms with the Lord Lyon. Some scholars have linked the Lyon’s role with that of the old *Sennachie* who was responsible for reciting the pedigrees of the Scottish

out” the bare genealogical data of names, dates, and relationships through more in-depth research into the social context in which ancestors lived. Indeed it can be argued that from the 1970s onwards, family history has been accompanied by a wider use of different record sources and socio-historical practice in general. However, the meanings of the two terms do overlap; the term family history was widely used before the 1970s and some genealogical practices have contributed to history as a discipline. Thus, while there are some instances of differentiation in practice and usage, the two terms are often used throughout this article as synonyms.

8 Wagner, *English Genealogy*, p. 2.

9 David Allan, “‘What’s in a Name?’: Pedigree and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century Scotland,” in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, ed. Edward J. Cowan and Richard F. Finlay (Edinburgh, 2002), p. 157.

10 Laurence Stone, *The Crisis in Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford, 1965), p. 23.

11 William Gordon, *The History of the Ancient, Noble, and Illustrious Family of Gordon*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1726–1727), I, vi., quoted in Allan, “‘What’s in a Name?’,” p. 162.

kings at their coronation at Scone.<sup>12</sup> This shift from oral recital to recorded arms can be interpreted as mirroring larger changes, as people began to rely less on oral culture and more upon written or recorded visual symbolism. In this way, the development of Scottish genealogy and heraldry contributed to the creation and maintenance of archival records with the formal establishment of the Court of the Lord Lyon.

However, it was not until the eighteenth century that archives in Scotland were established at a national level. The foundation stone for Register House, the home of the Scottish Record Office and forerunner to the National Archives of Scotland, was laid in 1774 and the whole building was completed in the 1820s. The building of Register House was preceded by James Macpherson's "discovery" of Ossian in 1761. This had sparked a Celtic Revival, which in turn contributed to the institutionalization of antiquarianism with the foundation of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries in 1780 and its sister society at Perth in 1782. Thus, the building of Register House coincided with the growth and development of antiquarian interests, and the two developments mutually benefited each other.

Antiquarian societies were not exclusively concerned with genealogy; however, their publications do show evidence that genealogical interests went hand-in-hand with local topographical and Scottish history. For example, many snippets of genealogical information were solicited for, and printed in, *Notes and Queries: A Medium of Inter-Communication for Literary Men, Artists, Antiquaries, Genealogists etc.*, published from 1849 onwards. Antiquarians also paved the way for the establishment of other Scottish national organizations, such as the Scottish Burgh Record Society (1868–1908), whose twenty-two volumes on the history of different Scottish burghs included histories of prominent families; The Scottish History Society (1886); and the Scottish branch of The Record Society (1887), which was founded by the well-known genealogist W.P.W. Phillimore (1853–1913). These societies published transcripts and indexes of archives held in private and public custody, which in turn encouraged their preservation and use.

Before the professionalization of archivists and historians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the skills of the genealogist, the archivist, the historian, and the lawyer were often combined in the service of peerage cases. While treasure hunters gave genealogy a bad name, the legal bent of much genealogical activity placed emphasis on the need for documentary evidence and proof, thereby encouraging the use of diplomatics. One Scottish person who displayed all these professional skills was the eminent archivist Sir William Fraser (1816–1898). Fraser gained a reputation as an expert diplo-

12 L.G. Pine, *Your Family Tree: A Guide to Genealogical Sources* (London, 1962), p. 78.

matist and was called upon to verify historical documents. He also worked as Keeper of Charters at the Scottish Record Office and for the newly formed Historical Manuscripts Commission. He wrote over fifty volumes of genealogical histories on over twenty leading aristocratic and landed Scottish families. The writing of these lavish publications brought him congratulations and patronage from the gentry. On 1 June 1896 Fraser was praised in an anonymous article in the *Dundee Advertiser*:

... there is no living writer who has done so much to put flight the vain imaginings of pseudo-historical writers as Sir William Fraser has done. Family historians, following his example, no longer find their materials in the absurdly romantic traditions of a locality. They search for solid facts amongst the documents in charter-rooms and private repositories.<sup>13</sup>

It is significant that Fraser was praised for his reliance upon “solid facts” within the archive because genealogists were often criticized for their self-interested quest for money and prestige, and for their poor historical methods. Because of the pedigrees featured within them, antiquarian county histories were sometimes discredited as vanity publications for the local aristocratic worthies who paid for them.

Nevertheless, the anonymous writer’s attack against the “vain imaginings” of “pseudo-historicism” can be seen as symptomatic of the view of a new generation of historians, who were influenced by the German school of history led by Leopold von Ranke. History quested after objective truth and was based upon documentary evidence deposited *within* the archive rather than *outside* in the “absurdly romantic traditions of a locality.” Throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, historians began to distinguish their discipline from both genealogists and antiquarians, who were often viewed as amateur dilettantes.

In comparison to the historical profession, genealogy struggled to gain the status of a subject of serious study. However, as social and public history emerged as new disciplines in the 1970s, the gap between genealogists and historians narrowed, although the two remained uneasy bedfellows.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the emergence of “roots fever,” fed by Alex Haley’s popular novel and television series, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), compounded the problem because genealogy was seen by historians as, at

13 Quoted in Gordon Donaldson, *Sir William Fraser* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 61–65.

14 For an example of American and Scottish historians who called for a closer working relationship between historians and genealogists in the mid 1970s, see Samuel P. Hays, who called for a “new genealogy,” *American Political History as Social Analysis* (Knoxville, 1980), p. 406, and Gordon Donaldson, “The Significance of Genealogy to the Scottish Historian,” *The Scottish Genealogist*, vol. XXI, no. 3 (August 1974), pp. 54–64.

best, a hobby and, at worst, as self-aggrandizing egotism, tarnished with the brush of eugenics and Nazism. On the other hand, the popular growth of interest in everyone's roots – no matter how unpalatable – fitted the new interests in social history. In addition, the historian's claim that they were the impartial harbourers of objective truth was challenged by postmodernism; consequently, historians could no longer imply that genealogists' work was inferior because it was self-interested and subjective.

Not only was the notion of the objective historian challenged, but so was the Jenkinsonian view of the impartial archivist. Within the archival community, the charge that archives were biased towards the rich and powerful was made by Howard Zinn in 1970. In 1975, describing archivists as a "weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography," Gerald Ham called for archivists to take a more active stance and for the "uneasy partnership of the archivist and the historian" to be strengthened and broadened to include "other students of society." Notably in his list of other students he included sociologists, economists, psychiatrists, and anthropologists, but not genealogists.<sup>15</sup> In the same year, however, David E. King called for a "bottom up" approach to history and, using the Anonymous Family History Project set up in 1970 as an example, he suggested that archives actively get involved in creating and acquiring family biographies.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between archivists, historians, and genealogists has never been simple, and a full discussion of these professions and disciplines lies outside the scope of this article.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland, antiquarianism provided fertile ground for the development of archives, history, and genealogy, both as disciplines and professions. Antiquarianism also contributed to the development of "Scottishness" itself. Indeed, before going on to discuss Scottish-roots tourism in more detail, what does the claim to "be Scottish" mean?

Scottish family history has its own unique orientation. Within Scotland, the concept of family as all the members of a tribe is expressed in the clan system. Like the term "family," the notion of the clan has changed throughout time. At the point when traditional clans were disintegrating, clan societies were established. The earliest clan society was The Buchanan Society, estab-

15 F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *The American Archivist* 38 (January 1975), pp. 5–13.

16 David E. King, "Family History: New Opportunities for Archivists," *The American Archivist*, vol. 38, no. 4 (1975), pp. 509–19.

17 For a discussion of the attitudinal relationship between archivists, genealogists, and historians, see Susan Tucker, "Visible Enough to Us? Identity, Archivists and Genealogical Researchers," paper presented to 15th International Congress on Archives, (2004), [http://www.wien2004.ica.org/imagesUpload/pres\\_261\\_TUCKER\\_COUpcent2001.pdf](http://www.wien2004.ica.org/imagesUpload/pres_261_TUCKER_COUpcent2001.pdf) (accessed 13 June 2006).

lished in Glasgow in 1725. It was formed to support the poor and to educate people of that clan or name. The Clan Mackay Society was formed with similar purposes. This Protestant society met in the Gaelic church on Duke Street, Glasgow, and gave charitable support to Mackays outside the city and overseas – very often the same Mackays driven from Lord Reay’s lands during the Highland Clearances.<sup>18</sup>

However, it was not until the “invasion of the Celts” during King George IV’s 1822 state visit to Edinburgh that being part of a clan meant something different.<sup>19</sup> This elaborate event was not about charitable support for displaced clans-people, but rather it was about creating a romantic image of Scotland that was unthreatening to the Crown. The pageant was choreographed by Sir Walter Scott who invited different clan chiefs to wear tartan kilts “authenticated” by The Highland Society (established in London in 1778). The wearing of tartan had been banned because of its association with the Jacobite cause, but this law was repealed in 1782. Thus, during the state visit, Highland clans and tartantry were revived as nostalgic heritage. In this climate, the idea of different “setts” of tartans belonging to specific clan families took root (and has been used as a merchandising strategy ever since). In the latter decades of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, clan societies have flourished. During the 1890s more than three times as many clan societies were formed as in the previous 160 years, a growth that may have been stimulated by the 1888 Glasgow International Exhibition, which attracted almost six million visitors. Accordingly, Scottish genealogical fever has developed within the context of the British Empire and arguably has its own unique orientation allied with tourism. It is to an investigation of the current relationship between genealogy, colonialism, and tourism that we shall now turn.

### **The Homecoming**

Clan societies and the Scottish diaspora have been called to visit their Scottish ancestral “homeland” by touristic literature since the World War II. More recently, since 2002, the state agency, VisitScotland (previously the Scottish Tourist Board), in partnership with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, has been working on an “Ancestral Tourism Initiative” to

18 For the history of these developments, see Rolland W. Munro, “The Rise of the Clan Societies,” *The Scottish Genealogist* 1 (1954), pp. 14–20.

19 Hugh Trevor Roper, “The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbaw and Terence Ranger (1983; repr., Cambridge, 1992), pp. 15–41.



encourage those with Scottish ancestry to visit Scotland.<sup>20</sup> It is investing in a project entitled the “Scottish Year of Homecoming,” designed to celebrate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Robert Burns’s birth in 2009. At its launch, project manager Alison McRae stated that, “We will be tapping into the emotions of the 50 million Scottish diaspora market both within the United Kingdom and overseas; encouraging them to come and visit their homeland.”<sup>21</sup> Yet for this homeland to be visited, it first needs to be constructed as a concept. Indeed, the emotions attached to the concept of homecoming “are not raw, pre-cultural materials that constitute a universal, trans-social substrate ... [they are] culturally constructed and socially situated.”<sup>22</sup>

So what is a homecoming? Madan Sarup writes that it is not “the usual, everyday return; it is an arrival that is significant because it is after a long absence, or an arduous or heroic journey.”<sup>23</sup> As far back as 1887, Phillimore predicted that:

The day is probably not far distant when the younger English colonies in America, Africa, and Australasia will display that same anxiety to know something of their past family history and to connect their lineage with the old country, which is so characteristic of the elder English settlements now known as the United States.<sup>24</sup>

Phillimore equated the “old country” with home: while England, and by implication Scotland, is the “old country,” the new colonies are “younger.” This view complies with the Eurocentric notion that American history, or for that matter African and Australian history, began with the arrival of the Anglo-Saxon European white man. Thus, the values implicit within the Western genealogical homecoming are informed by colonialism. The diaspora that is being beckoned home after its heroic journey is a white one.

The discomfort many would feel with such heroic identification in the post-colonial age is overcome by the idea of the diaspora. Primarily used in reference to Jewish, and then Black or African communities since the 1970s, the term diaspora is often used today to stand for a dispersed community who are held together by their common roots and lost homeland (and has been

20 VisitScotland, Scot Exchange website, “Ancestral Tourism,” [http://www.scotexchange.net/businessdevelopment\\_newideas/ancestraltourism.htm](http://www.scotexchange.net/businessdevelopment_newideas/ancestraltourism.htm) (accessed 12 April 2006); Ancestral Scotland website [www.ancestralscotland.com](http://www.ancestralscotland.com) (accessed 12 April 2006).

21 Alison McRae, Scottish Executive News Release, “Year of Homecoming plans to take step forward” (4 November 2005), <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2005/11/04100620> (accessed 7 April 2006).

22 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (1996; repr., Minneapolis, 1997), p. 147.

23 Madan Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World* (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 2.

24 W.P.W. Phillimore, *How to Write the History of a Family* (London, 1887), p. 193.



much used in reference to Scottish roots tourism in recent years).<sup>25</sup> David Lowenthal writes that “the main function of blood ties today is to confirm the identity and boost the solidarity of nations and self-assured ethnic groups.”<sup>26</sup> Within this context, Scottish-roots tourism can be interpreted as part of a “white ethnic movement,” where in today’s “culture of victimization,” the white suburban middle class can claim a lost ethnic inheritance.<sup>27</sup>

These claims can be seen in the language used by some Scottish-roots tourists. Paul Basu has demonstrated that very often they identify with and use victimized diasporan language when talking about the Highland Clearances, even comparing this event with the Jewish Holocaust. He has found cases where roots tourists do this even when their ancestors were not involved in the event.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Celeste Ray describes how an exile myth of forced Highlander expatriation after the battle of Culloden has developed in South Carolina. She traces the myth’s roots to the American Revolution, when Cape Fear Scots both developed nostalgia for home and sought to redress the Highlander’s association with Loyalism.<sup>29</sup> Generally speaking, within this movement, the more politically persecuted one’s ethnic ancestors were the better. Therefore in such a value system, Scottish ancestry is “worth more” than English. By claiming the status of an ethnic lost homeland through the use of the narrative of the Highland Clearances and the Battle of Culloden, Scotland is not only situated as the “old country” but it is differentiated from England. In this way, claiming Scottish ancestry means that to some extent you inherit these romantically heroic ethnic values – irrespective of where you came from or what your ancestors actually experienced.

In 1887, Phillimore also anticipated that “an extended knowledge of ... common descent will tend to lessen local rivalries and to knit more firmly together in one common union all the Anglo-Saxon settlements throughout the world.”<sup>30</sup> In the context of Scotland, this idea of kinship or *communitas*

25 The terms, “roots tourism” and “ancestral tourism” are used interchangeably throughout this article. Within tourism studies, “roots tourists,” “ancestral tourists,” or “cultural heritage tourists” are usually defined as a niche market of tourists who visit a country because they have a diasporic connection. This is different to immigrants visiting their country of origin. For roots tourists, there is a distance of two or more generations and a visit is usually sparked off, or accompanied, by some form of genealogical research.

26 David Lowenthal, “Identity, Heritage and History,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, 1994), p. 44.

27 Paul Basu, “Roots Tourism as Return Movement: Semantics and the Scottish Diaspora,” in *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return of Movement of Emigrants, 1600–2000*, ed. M. Harper (Manchester, 2005), p. 145.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 131–50.

29 Celeste Ray, *Highland Heritage: Scottish Americans in the American South* (Chapel Hill and London, 2001), pp. 42–3.

30 Phillimore, p. 193.

between Anglo-Saxons is translated into a celebration of Celtic identity. Part of the Scottish homecoming is not being an outsider or a tourist – it is about a return to a lost community. Despite the presence of different Scottish and Scots-Ulster ethnic groups in Scotland and indeed in America, today the imagined community of Scotland is united in the image of lost and dispersed Celtic Highland clans people. The concept of this lost community of Scotland is largely a product of “Highland fever,” cultivated by English colonialism and in turn bolstered by the tourist industry.<sup>31</sup> In this way, the nostalgic emotion of *communitas* that the “Year of the Homecoming” project is tapping into, is not only constructed by tourism but is also a product of Anglo-Saxon colonialism.

This “sense of connectedness with Scots of all varieties and time periods when community members are dispersed” has gained momentum since World War II, which in itself encouraged a spirit of co-operation between America and Britain, and forcibly introduced many Americans of varied social backgrounds to Europe.<sup>32</sup> Since the first jet-propelled passenger air service across the Atlantic was launched in 1958, more people have been able to visit the “auld sod” in person. Genealogy has an important part to play in this exchange. In 1945 the Scots Ancestry Research Society was established by the Rt. Hon. Thomas Johnston (then the Labour Secretary for Scotland), in order to bind all those with Scots ancestry together. By 1953, the non-profit society had dealt with over 10,000 enquiries from around the world.<sup>33</sup> In 1953 The Scottish Genealogy Society was also formed with an overseas membership in mind: two of its first objectives were to produce a dictionary of emigrant Scots and set up a college of genealogy for overseas visitors.<sup>34</sup>

Clanship was revived in the post-war period. Part of Scotland’s contribution to the 1951 Festival of Britain was the Gathering of the Clans, which led to the foundation of The Council of Clan Societies in the UK. Since then, in the United States and Canada, the number of organizations and groups celebrating Scottish-clan culture has increased exponentially. Family history is an important activity for these societies and, even though it was never a condition of traditional clanship, very often one has to provide proof of ancestry in order to join.

For some, belonging to a clan is not just about joining a club: it has a spiritual resonance. In 1995, an Orkney Homecoming was conceived between the chief executive of the Orkney Tourist Board and the president of a specialist tour operator in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This millennium project took place in

31 For a description of “Highland fever,” see David McCrone, Angela Morris, and Richard Kiely, *Scotland – The Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh, 1995) p. 201.

32 Ray, p. 13.

33 Scots Ancestry Research Council records, National Archives of Scotland, HH1/2814.

34 “The Scottish Genealogy Society,” *The Scottish Genealogist* 1 (1954), p. 4.

1999 and targeted the Orkney diaspora, whose ancestors had set up home in Western Canada after working for the Hudson's Bay Company in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Orkney Homecoming featured a special church service based on the biblical text of the Prodigal Son.<sup>35</sup> In this way, homecomings for some may have redemptive power and religious significance.

Indeed, the very tradition of homecoming may have particular Scottish-Protestant roots. Gwen Kennedy Neville has investigated Protestant "kin-religious gatherings" in the American South.<sup>36</sup> These tend to be kinship gatherings of descendants from a common pioneer Scots or Scots Ulster family, and are related structurally and historically with Scottish-Protestant gatherings, such as the open-air meetings of the Covenanters. In America, Henry Ford's view that history "is bunk," has been taken as indicative of America's self-image as "a new, future-orientated society of self-made people."<sup>37</sup> However, the view of the self-made man accords with the Protestant view of the pilgrim leaving home to forge his or her own way in the world. But in the family reunion or homecoming, Kennedy Neville argues that the tension between "loyalty to one's family of origin and community of traditions and loyalty to one's self, the impulse to individuality" is temporarily resolved.<sup>38</sup> Thus for some Americans, a homecoming is a type of pilgrimage that has its roots in a particular brand of Scottish Protestantism.

But what is the place of archives in the construction of this Scottish "homecoming"? In the same year as the ancestral tourism marketing initiative was launched, the Scottish Executive agreed to fund a project to provide a Scottish Family History Research Service. The Scottish Family History Centre Project (SFHCP) is a joint project between the Court of the Lord Lyon (CLL), The General Register Office for Scotland (GROS), and the National Archives of Scotland (NAS). The aim of the project is to establish an "enhanced and seamless national service for all who are interested in their Scottish family history" by developing a unified campus website and brand image for visitors. The establishment and promotion of the brand "Scotlandspeople" and its accompanying logo "emphasizes that, between

35 For a description of this homecoming, see Paul Basu, "My Own Island Home: The Orkney Homecoming," *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2004), pp. 29–30.

36 Gwen Kennedy Neville, *Kinship and Pilgrimage: Rituals of Reunion in American Protestant Culture* (New York and Oxford, 1987).

37 Alexander Stille, *The Future of the Past: How the Information Age Threatens to Destroy our Cultural Heritage* (London, 2002), p. 311.

38 Gwen Kennedy Neville, *Kinship and Pilgrimage: Rituals of Reunion in American Protestant Culture*, The Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life, Working Paper No. 22, (April 2003), <http://www.marial.emory.edu/pdfs/Neville023-03.pdf> (accessed 20 August 2006), pp. 2–3.

them, the three organizations hold the core, authentic information for anyone researching family history in Scotland.”<sup>39</sup> Within this statement is the notion that the Scottish Family History Centre will be the central locus of authentic Scottish identity. But what exactly does this mean?

### Authenticity

One concept closely connected to roots tourism and indeed archives themselves, is the notion of authenticity, but there are differences in what “authenticity” means to genealogists and archivists, and indeed among these two communities. In one sense, the genealogist’s quest can be defined as a search for the authentic experience. How does this differ from the archivist’s notion of the authentic record as something that “is what it purports to be and is free from tampering or corruption?”<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, archivists are concerned with the evidential and informational values of records ensured through trusted custodianship, provenance, and the preservation of context. On the other hand, the family historian’s quest to “know” their ancestors, involves the imagination. American historian Samuel Hays writes that the

... archival record is merely an artefact, a momentary product of a given act in time and space, and not a reflection of the context of life itself. It should be used as a window through which the broader ebb and flow of life may be visualized and reconstructed.<sup>41</sup>

In the case of roots tourism, this imaginative visualization and reconstruction is closely tied to consumerism where “imagined nostalgia” abounds and where “consumption is increasingly driven by rummaging through imagined histories.”<sup>42</sup> How is the idea of the document as recorded evidence, as “the glue that holds together ... organizations, governments, communities, and societies,”<sup>43</sup> related to the idea of documents as monuments or memorials – sites of consumption that recall or perpetuate the past in the mind to create the “authentic” personal experience? What is the role of archives (as collections

39 National Archives of Scotland, *Annual Report of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland* (2002–2003), p. 41.

40 InterPARES *Authenticity Task Force Report* (2002), [http://www.interpares.org/book/interpares\\_book\\_d\\_part1.pdf](http://www.interpares.org/book/interpares_book_d_part1.pdf) (accessed 27 January 2006), p. 2. For other definitions and usages of the term “authenticity” among the archival community see, Society of American Archivists, *Glossary*, “Authenticity,” [http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term\\_details.asp?DefinitionKey=9](http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=9) (accessed 14 August 2007).

41 Hays, p. 424.

42 Appadurai, pp. 77–78.

43 Richard J. Cox and David A. Wallace, eds., *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Westport, CT, 2002), p. 1.

of records and as institutions) in this hyper-real world of Scottish heritage?<sup>44</sup>

Ning Wang has identified three different definitions of authenticity in relation to tourism: objective authenticity, constructive authenticity, and existential authenticity. Objective authenticity “refers to authenticity of originals. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism are equated to an epistemological experience (i.e., cognition) of the authenticity of originals.”<sup>45</sup> The epistemological experience comes from the cognition that something is authentic because it meets certain objective criteria. In the world of archival science the objective criteria have been set out by the science of diplomatics.<sup>46</sup> According to the tradition of diplomatics, authenticity is a matter of objective judgement.

This stands in contrast to the second kind of authenticity Wang set out – constructive authenticity. This is an object-related authenticity that refers to “the authenticity projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preferences, beliefs, powers etc.” This is a symbolic authenticity where “various versions of authenticities” can occur regarding the same objects.<sup>47</sup> Thus the Declaration of Arbroath becomes symbolic of democracy, even if it was not. Tartan, an invented Highland tradition, becomes symbolic of Scottishness worldwide.

The third kind of authenticity in tourism is existential authenticity. This refers “to a potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities. Correspondingly, authentic experiences in tourism are to achieve this activated existential state of Being within the liminal process of tourism.” This kind of “authentically good time” has nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects.<sup>48</sup> Authenticity in this case is a process and a struggle, where the tourist attempts to recover their “true self,” and through others, their intersubjective authenticity. This authenticity represents a shift from objects and even objectivity itself, towards a quest for the authentic self. Can this quest or struggle be found within the roots tourist’s homecoming? For the roots tourist, this kind of authenticity is perhaps sought through the process of travelling to Scotland – a land that for many is perceived to be their own past. The very process of pilgrimage is important because it offers a liminal environment that is both familiar and unfamiliar, imagined and real, in which the struggle for

44 The idea of the hyper-real can be seen in the work of J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, S.F. Glaser, trans. (Ann Arbor, 1994).

45 Ning Wang, “Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience,” *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 26, no. 2 (1999), p. 352.

46 For example see, Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (Maryland and London, 1998), pp. 36–40.

47 Wang, p. 352.

48 Ibid.

the “true self” can be entered into. In addition, roots tourists commune with others who share the same clan or family, thereby perhaps recovering an inter-subjective authentic sense of self as a “Mac.”

A BBC report on archives in Scotland interviewed a *Scottish Ancestral Trail* customer, Lynne Rudberg from Illinois, whose ancestors left in the early 1830s to make a new life in the States. She said:

I feel as though what I'm doing is walking in kind of the steps of my ancestors. You can look at all the books and all the photographs and read all ... read all the family tree information but ... coming to the place and seeing ... the land and seeing the views and seeing the buildings ... it's just ... very very special ....<sup>49</sup>

For her, it is not perhaps reading the information (the epistemological authenticity), or the particular objects themselves, a particular farm or piece of land that is most important (constructive or symbolic authenticity): it is perhaps the emotional process of walking in the past, in the footsteps of her ancestors that is the authentic experience for her (existential authenticity).

Wang bases his notion of existential authenticity upon the tradition of ontological authenticity established by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus. There is not enough scope within this article to explore what these different thinkers meant by authenticity and the authentic self. It is also questionable whether Wang should appropriate the existentialist quest for authenticity as an alternative experience within tourism. Nonetheless, one could perhaps say in common-sense terms that within modern Western society there exists a craving for the authentic self that acts to compensate the perceived loss of “true” self in public life.

Certainly, it is the emotional authentic experience that is the biggest selling point for roots tourism. Here, authenticity becomes a widely-used term, not just something that concerns archivists or indeed, philosophers. As part of its research, “authenticity” has been identified by VisitScotland as a “key consumer-driver of the future.” It has identified “*authenti-seeking*” as a marketable activity, where consumers are “searching for authenticity from a range of products, services and experiences, or searching for it within themselves.”<sup>50</sup> In this way, archives and even their definition of authenticity become a part of this market. Archives can now sell copies of verified authentic legal documents through such projects as the Scottish Archive Network

49 *Scottish Ancestral Trail* is a travel company that specializes in family history tours. Kirsten Campbell, BBC Reporting Scotland, “Cuts Fear for Scotland’s Archives” (2 June 2006), [http://www.interpares.org.book/interpares\\_book\\_d\\_part1.pdf](http://www.interpares.org.book/interpares_book_d_part1.pdf) (accessed 16 June 2006).

50 Ian Yeoman and others, *VisitScotland Research: Tomorrow’s World Consumer and Tourist: The Authentic Tourist*, vol. 1, no. 4 (March 2006), [http://www.scotexchange.net/authentic\\_tourist\\_vol\\_1\\_no\\_4.pdf](http://www.scotexchange.net/authentic_tourist_vol_1_no_4.pdf) (accessed 13 June 2006), p. 1.

Project (SCAN).<sup>51</sup> They can offer the experience of access to symbolic authentic objects, for example, a will that an ancestor signed with their own hand. In addition, through genealogical services, archives can offer a new sense of the authentic self by offering a liminal space or environment, in which the struggle for the authentic self can be pursued.

However, aside from the difficulties of conceptualizing the search for authentic self, the role of archives within this marketplace of authenticity is problematic. One difficulty hinges on consumerism itself. Ray writes that “the specialization into family history and name-specific heritage lends the ‘never done before’ feeling.”<sup>52</sup> One part of consumerism is to market the “new” and the “never done before.” But this fetishization of novelty positions archives in an ambivalent space. As Andreas Huyssen states:

Our mnemonic culture rejects the idea of the archive while depending on the archive’s contents for its own sustenance. And it marks its vital difference from the archive by insisting on novelty, the novelty of no longer fetishizing the new.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed the very concept and understanding of “archive” presents challenges. For some it simply means non-existent. It is also tied to the idea of exclusivity, a point made by Lowenthal who likened archives to an exclusive and rare bottle of whisky, only appreciated by a select few with refined tastes.<sup>54</sup> This is perhaps why the National Archives of Scotland is being re-marketed to the general public as “Scotlandspeople.”

Another problem is cost. Authenticity does not come cheap and archives cost money to maintain. While many archives do promote their services to family historians, some are wary of doing so because they do not want to attract an insupportable number of users.<sup>55</sup> Digitization is often presented as an answer to this problem. It has been lauded as simultaneously solving the problems of cost whilst also providing democratized access. The direct and immediate access to the past through the personal computer has led the way

51 Completed in 2003, SCAN digitized and made accessible two and a half million images of Scottish wills before 1901 and was lauded as breaking new ground by applying business techniques to identify a market for the selling of digital images of wills. Rob Mildren, “What has the SCAN Project Achieved?,” *The National Archives of Scotland, Annual Report (2003–2004)*, p. 51; Rob Mildren, ed., *Scottish Archive Network Project Evaluation Report*, (21 April 2004), <http://www.scan.org.uk/aboutus/report.htm#13> (accessed 12 June 2006).

52 Ray, p. 133.

53 Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in Our Culture of Amnesia* (London and New York, 1995), p. 6.

54 David Lowenthal, “Archival Perils, an Historian’s Complaint,” *Archives*, vol. XXXI, no. 114 (April 2006), p. 51.

55 Edinburgh City Archives did not partake in SCAN because of this reason. Mildren, “8.1 Online Catalogues,” in *Scottish Archive Network Project Evaluation Report*.



into the cultural dis-intermediation of history. In this world “cultural brokers” (archivists, historians, and museum curators) are no longer needed, neither are the traditional “hierarchical controls” over access.<sup>56</sup> It is argued, or implicitly taken for granted, that once the initial outlay for digitization has been paid for, savings can be made by not employing archivists or providing physical access to archives.

But in a BBC news report in which Scottish archives called for recognition of their role in supporting tourism, the point was implicitly advanced that digitization does not actually deliver all the “authenticities” that tourists demand. Access to epistemological authenticity is lost when a computer replaces the archivist because arguably archivists can provide more contextual information than a digitized image. Furthermore, a user, Margaret Moffat, describes the constructive and existential authenticities that come from physical access to archival documents: “There’s no joy like the joy you have when you hold in your hand, a letter, a photograph, a diary – something that connects you to your past.”<sup>57</sup> The potential of these kinds of authenticities are not lost on VisitScotland. In recent literature they state that marketing “should tap into visitors’ desire to actually visit a place or see a family document for themselves.”<sup>58</sup> In this way, genealogical tourism can “be a potent argument for archivists at every level, showing a real connection between the care of the documentary heritage and economic growth.”<sup>59</sup>

However, some archivists are reluctant to use economic arguments for maintaining archives, mainly because they feel it is a lost cause. William Maher writes that if archivists

...set utility as the ultimate arbiter of value, we will be ceding the valuable ground of higher purpose at the same time as we attempt to compete in a contest where we are armed with toothpicks and our competitors have industrialized weapons.<sup>60</sup>

He argues that archivists should not describe themselves as information or entertainment providers because in comparison with other services they cannot compete. Instead, he calls on archivists to emphasize their main role as “evidence specialists.” However, as shown in the BBC Scotland report, the

56 Roy Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era,” *The American Historical Review* (June 2003), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/108.3/rosenzweig.html> (accessed on 13 June 2006).

57 Campbell, BBC Reporting Scotland.

58 VisitScotland, Ancestral Tourism, “Market Appraisal and Economic Impact Research,” *Research Summary*, [http://www.scotexchange.net/research\\_summary-3.pdf](http://www.scotexchange.net/research_summary-3.pdf) (accessed 8 August 2006).

59 Mildren, *Scottish Archive Network Project Evaluation Report*, p. 6.

60 William J. Maher, “Archives, Archivists and Society,” *The American Archivist* 61 (1998), p. 263.

archivist's role as "evidence expert" does not mean that archives cannot be marketed, quite the opposite. A dialogue centred upon the value and concept of authenticity, or different kinds of authenticities, is perhaps one way in which archivists can claim the valuable ground of higher purpose whilst also making sure that archives have a position in the marketplace.

But even cast in the role of evidence and authenticity provider, are archives promoting their own position within the entertainment market at the expense of selling out one of their important allies? Increasingly, genealogy is seen as a money-making leisure pursuit. Indeed, the Scottish Family History Centre Project is turning the National Archives of Scotland into what itself and others have described as a "one-stop genealogy shop."<sup>61</sup> Will this compromise the free labour offered by many family history societies and organizations? Certainly, altruistic principles may be compromised by the interests of the marketplace. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties presented by the commoditization of archives through genealogical services, family history is often described as the most "democratic" use of archives because it has power to confer personal and communal identity. It is to this role that we shall now turn.

### Identity

While in the past archives helped to establish aristocratic rights or nation states, they are now used more and more as a vehicle for understanding yourself, whoever "you" may be. The travel involved in roots tourism is both physical and metaphorical – it has become a popular metaphor for discovering one's identity. One of the four main motivations for undertaking ancestral travel, identified in the Ancestral Tourism research, is to "connect with the self."<sup>62</sup> Similarly in Lambert's study of the Ontario Genealogical Society, the statement that received the highest number of responses marked "important" was "to learn about my roots, about who I am" (80.5 percent).<sup>63</sup> In what ways is genealogical research related to this psychological need and to what extent is this need for identity dependent on archives?

From the nineteenth century onward, birth, marriage, and death records have officially recorded the lives of the nation. Katia Malaussena, drawing on

61 Senay Boztas, "Archives Unite for One-stop Genealogy Shop," *Sunday Herald* (9 January 2005), <http://www.sundayherald.com/47044> (accessed 17 April 2006); National Archives of Scotland, *Annual Report of the Keeper of the Records of Scotland* (2002–2003), p. 41.

62 VisitScotland, Ancestral Scotland Research, *Executive Summary* (9 January 2006), [http://www.scotexchange.net/ancestral\\_scotland\\_exec\\_summary.pdf](http://www.scotexchange.net/ancestral_scotland_exec_summary.pdf) (accessed 18 April 2006).

63 Ronald D. Lambert, "The Family Historian and Temporal Orientations Towards the Ancestral Past," *Time & Society*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1996), pp. 115–43.

the writings of Pierre Legendre and anthropologist Gilbert Durand, writes about the parental function of the nation-state in Western society – individuals have a “double birth,” who before being born to parents are “born” to the nation.<sup>64</sup> For some this “double birth” is further complicated by colonialism. In Laura Bear’s study of Anglo-Indian railway families’ interaction with the East Indian Railway Company, she discovered a profound confusion and contradiction inherent in the notion of citizenship “as both a civic, political right and as an ethnic or racial genealogical history grounded in the family and the body.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed genealogical fever may have been induced by shifts in the relationship between the state and the individual, the political body, and the personal body. One reason for keeping records about the vital events of the lives of the nation is to grant genealogical inheritance by proving citizenship. Yet increasingly, perhaps, citizens have demanded a more commemorative role from archives. During World War I ordinary British citizens volunteered to fight in unprecedented numbers, and for the first time grieving families and local communities persuaded the British state to take responsibility for recording the names of the fallen soldiers – regardless of their rank.<sup>66</sup> In a similar need to memorialize, Alfred Mond, in his opening speech of the Imperial War Museum in June 1920 declared the hope that the collection would be made

... so complete that every individual, man or woman, sailor, soldier, airman or civilian who contributed, however obscurely, to the final result, may be able to find in these galleries an example or illustration of the sacrifice he made or the work he did, and in the archives some record of it.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, perhaps since World War I, an argument that draws upon the language of remembrance as justification for the collection and preservation of archives has taken root. This all-encompassing burden to democratically remember everyone, has quasi-religious overtones and charges official

64 Pierre Legendre, *Les enfants du texte*, p. 17 quoted by Katia Malaussena, “The Birth of Modern Commemoration in France: The Tree and the Text,” *French History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2004), p. 155; Gilbert Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l’imaginaire : introduction à l’archétypologie générale* (Grenoble, 1960).

65 Laura Bear, “Public Genealogies: Documents, Bodies and Nations in Anglo-Indian Railway Family Histories,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2001), p. 387.

66 For the history of this development see, Thomas W. Laqueur, “Memory and Naming in the Great War,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, 1994), pp. 150–67 and Bob Bushaway, “Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance,” in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, 1992; repr., 1994), pp. 136–67.

67 Sir Alfred Mond, Chairman’s speech for the opening of the Imperial War Museum in 1920 in *Third Annual Report of the Imperial War Museum, 1919–20: Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty* (London, 1920).

archives with a slightly different mandate – that of being the “complete” memory of the nation and a symbol of the sacrifices that were made for it. It is perhaps this view that is strongly held by genealogists and has partly fuelled campaigns to keep records, such as the battle headed by the *Family Tree* magazine in 2005 to save what Lowenthal describes as the “banal but emotive” four to six million WWI medal index cards.<sup>68</sup>

In the context of family history, today’s right to information has also become tomorrow’s right to be remembered. Hugh Taylor argued that archivists should “try to preserve names attached to case files” because posterity “will not thank us for nameless microbiographies ... They are the ancestors of the future and we should not permit of mass executions by archival decapitation.”<sup>69</sup> Forgetting is not just losing information; it is a violent act of “decapitation,” where the lives represented in records and the potential for remembering them – almost the potential for bringing them back to life – are irrevocably lost. Such a view has huge implications for appraisal because nearly every record can be interpreted as a “micro-biography” – from the humble cash receipt to latest blog. However, the comment is significant because it implies a responsibility on the part of the administrative governing body to collectively remember individuals. Not only should the government seek to protect individuals’ rights to privacy but they should – through the auspices of the national archives – be responsible for preserving records for their future (re)memorial value.

This archival burden of collective memory partly hinges on the troubled concept of identity. “Identity” is a popular buzzword and features heavily in “politically correct” speech. Today, national archives are often marketed as places for “finding” one’s own individual or community identity. In 2002 Liz Forgan, chair of the United Kingdom’s Heritage Lottery Fund,<sup>70</sup> wrote that

... the United Kingdom today is facing big questions – about its role in a global society, about our identity as a nation, as communities, as individuals. Our once rigid social and cultural groupings are dissolving. Our demographic mix is being transformed. ‘Who do we think we are?’ becomes an insistent question for our future which cannot be properly answered without access to the heritage of our past.<sup>71</sup>

68 Garrick Webster, “WWI Medal Index Cards to be Destroyed. Please Act Now!,” Scottish Genealogical Society Website “News and Announcements,” (14 March 2005), <http://www.scotsgenealogy.com> (accessed 1 August 2006); Lowenthal, “Archival Perils,” p. 67.

69 Hugh Taylor, “The Collective Memory: Archives and Libraries as Heritage,” *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83), p. 126.

70 The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was set up by Parliament in 1994 to give grants to a wide range of projects, involving the local, regional, and national heritage of the United Kingdom. It funds many archival projects throughout the UK.

71 Liz Forgan, “Forward,” *Broadening the Horizons of Heritage: The Heritage Lottery Fund Strategic Plan 2002–2007* (Heritage Lottery Fund, 2002), pp. 2–3.

In the context of the Heritage Lottery Fund, family history is a political trump card for the archival community because it demonstrates how archives can show us “who we are.” Indeed, Elizabeth Kaplan writes that archivists “are major players in the business of identity politics” because they “appraise, collect and preserve the props with which notions of identity are built.”<sup>72</sup>

But what is meant by “identity”? In some ways, identity has been pre-defined by geography – who you are has often been determined by where you are. Yet localities are being transformed by globalization: a McDonald’s restaurant in Tokyo is the same as one in London. In response, archives can provide a sense of place by offering documentation of sites that have been changed beyond physical recognition. For roots tourists, genealogical research can link them with a particular locality, to a “lost home.” For example, a customer of *Scottish Ancestral Trail* found his ancestor’s demolished farm on a nineteenth-century map of Glasgow; he was then able to visit the location to find that his family name had been granted to a roundabout built on the site.<sup>73</sup>

Today, technology is transforming public and private space, transforming how identities are constructed. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints showed the archival world how this transformation of archives to a more populist place could begin in their microfilming projects, but scanning and digitization has taken this change to a more global and anonymous space. On the Internet, factors that have traditionally determined identity, such as geography and nomenclature, have become more flexible. Now one’s identity is their log-in name and one’s location in cyberspace could be simultaneously in many places anywhere or nowhere, real and/or imaginary.

Genealogy has been described as “literally the most ‘public’ of all history” but it is also the most personal.<sup>74</sup> Internet chat rooms and websites are a popular locale for the majority of family history research. In 2004, the SCAN website recorded over one million unique visitors, considerably greater than the total of people making physical visits to Scotland’s archives.<sup>75</sup> In this way, knowledge need no longer be produced in publicly demarcated places such as the capital city, the university, or the National Archives of Scotland: it can be accumulated in, and distributed from, heterogeneous personal spaces.

Yet despite these contingencies, genealogy is often perceived as a stabilizing force for identity. Its popularity is often simply explained as compensation for modern rootlessness. The acts of researching and writing genealogical

72 Elizabeth Kaplan, “We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity,” *The American Archivist* 63 (Spring/Summer 2000), p. 126.

73 Director, *Scottish Ancestral Trail*, interview with author, 15 June 2006.

74 Richard J. Cox, “Genealogy and Public History: New Genealogical Guides and their Implications for Public Historians,” *Public Historian* 6 (Spring 1984), p. 92.

75 Mildren, *Scottish Archive Network Project Evaluation Report*, p. 6.

material and travelling to ancestral homelands are interpreted as a way of fending off the “nightmare” of homelessness, which “is to be uprooted, to be without papers, stateless, alone, alienated and adrift in a world of organized others.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, perhaps genealogy, with its pursuit of different authenticities, does offer a way of constructing a “more authentic” and perhaps a more essentialist and existential sense of self.

In what ways can archives contribute to this sense of self? Family history is a fairly open-ended pursuit; the more one researches, the more possibilities and different “identities” there are to follow. The choices that a genealogist makes, therefore, the information that is pursued and ignored, remembered or forgotten, in the course of their “genealogical fever,” is partly “a function of the social and psychological characteristics of the researcher as it is of that which has been researched.” If genealogy – like Freud’s description of legend – is a “product of history attended to by desire,” then as such it perhaps offers practitioners some degree of unconscious gratification that finds form in the construction of narrative.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, genealogy can be seen as a narrative form, as a way of telling a story about the self. Archives, whether a birth certificate, a photograph, or a ruined farmstead, can provide information and act as kernels or nodes around which genealogical practitioners can build their own personal narratives. In this respect, public archives can be interpreted as functioning as a form of social or medical service.<sup>78</sup>

However, the belief that archives or genealogical research can fix identity or can provide an essential selfhood is not inherently benign. Indeed, “history attended to by desire” has led to some of the worst atrocities, namely the belief in racial supremacy at the exclusion of the other. A celebration of individual self-identification can be seen as part of reaction against these atrocities. But such solipsism also has its dangers – if archives are only there for your family’s history, for your psychological needs, for your own version of history, and for your own sense of identity, there may not be any room to learn about or identify with others.

Indeed, Lowenthal writes that the “attrition of historical awareness seems to me the gravest outcome of what is termed the post custodial archive.”<sup>79</sup> But what is historical awareness? Traditionally historians and archivists in their professional quest for objectivity have sought to efface the self. Both have

76 Sarup, p. 11.

77 Sayers, pp. 158–61.

78 For an exploration of this role, see Judith Etherton, “The Role of Archives in the Perception of Self,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2006), pp. 227–46.

79 Lowenthal, “Archival Perils,” p. 71.

sought to place the historical record, on behalf of the Past or the creative body, at the centre of interpretation within the “context of historical patterns, social structures and institutional frameworks.”<sup>80</sup> But no selves are either fully effaced or fully present in the record; all (the creator, the archivist, the institution, the user) leave their fingerprints behind. Even the archivist’s proclamation of a record as evidence is subject to different interpretations as evidential values depend on who is using the record for what purposes after the event. In short, a record can never completely stand for an individual or an event because it, or they, no longer exists. As Brien Brothman writes, “Every recording is an epitaph.”<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps identity is more of a process or continuum that continually includes a loss or forgetting, rather than a fact established in one time and place. Erik H. Erikson defines “identity” as a “process ‘located’ *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*.”<sup>82</sup> This “psychosocial” process involves a meeting between the individual life history and the historical movement. Archives can be seen as the meeting place, or as a “boundary object,”<sup>83</sup> where this encounter between individual life history and historical movement can take place, and there are many meetings and many encounters, not all of them benign. The archival encounter is communal, and in some ways genealogical research verifies this because one person’s life encompasses those lives that have gone before. Brothman writes that “personal *records, records of me* in public archives, attain the status of *evidence* only as ‘evidence of us.’ ‘Evidence of me’ cannot exist in public archives.”<sup>84</sup> The “evidence of us” is important, as Derrida writes:

... there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratisation can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.<sup>85</sup>

Genealogists do participate in archives, in its constitution and interpretation, and it is in this sense that archivists should perhaps understand this user group – not as a demanding market or lobby group but as part of us, part of the shapers and makers of archives themselves.

80 Brien Brothman, “Making Up People: The State, Records and Bureaucracy in José Saramago’s *All the Names*,” *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2002), p. 123.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

82 Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (London, 1968), p. 22.

83 For a description of libraries as boundary objects see, Nancy A. Van House, “Digital Libraries and Collaborative Knowledge Construction,” in *Digital Library Use: Social Practice in Design and Evaluation*, ed. Ann Paterson Bishop, Nancy A. Van House, and Barbara P. Battenfield (London and Massachusetts, 2003), p. 290.

84 Brothman, “Making Up People,” pp. 112–28.

85 Derrida, p. 4.



## Conclusion

This article demonstrates that there is an “other historiography”<sup>86</sup> that has helped to shape and form archives. The family history bubble has not appeared from nowhere: it has a history of its own that has influenced the history and development of archives. Furthermore, the motivations and trends within genealogical research are many and are related to other phenomena such as colonialism, globalization, and tourism.

This article has focused on the genealogical activities of diasporan Scots, the majority of whom reside in America. This brand of “genealogical fever” is generated by an imagined community defined through identification with clans and Scottishness. It is based on a lack and is generated by a desire to regain what is lost – in this case the “lost” romantic Scottish homeland. This loss is fuelled by a climate of mass merchandising and tourism that encourages imagined nostalgia for things that never were.

It is within this context of consumerism, that the Scottish Family History Centre is being developed. The Scottish Family History Centre Project supports the creation of a new breed of tourist information centres that will provide a unified portal to information about Scotland’s people. But the very people of Scotland are also people of Britain. How can a sense of belonging achieved through Scottish genealogical connections and blood ties be tallied with the definition of civic political rights gained through residence? If “being Scottish” means that you have to have been born in Scotland or be related by blood to someone who has, then what exactly will today’s Scottish immigrants be excluded from? Furthermore, do genealogical interests work against or contribute to the celebration of multiculturalism? While in London, The National Archives (TNA UK) has opened up to “other” stories in its web-based Moving Here project,<sup>87</sup> does the National Archives of Scotland’s alignment of genealogical services with tourism focus too much on those who have moved away by contributing to nostalgic image of Scotland as an imaginary “lost home”?

Tourism also illuminates the possibility of different types of authenticity: constructive authenticity and existential authenticity. These authenticities challenge the traditional theoretical foundations upon which archives are built. Yet, while the liminal and imaginative processes of tourism test the

86 Susan Tucker acknowledges her debt for this term to François Menant, “L’Altra Storiografia,” *Quaderni Storici*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1998), pp. 216–26 quoted in “Doors Opening Wider: Library and Archival Services to Family History,” *Archivaria* 62 (Fall 2006), p. 155, <http://journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/article/view/12893> (accessed 28 August 2007).

87 Moving Here website, “Your life is history. Your experiences are history. Your story is history,” <http://www.movinghere.org.uk/stories/default.asp> (accessed 14 September 2006).

traditional definitions of what archives are and what archivists do, they also open up new possibilities. In the face of digitization, how these different authenticities are facilitated through archives needs to be explored, debated, and affirmed.

In addition, archivists should not just consider being the guardians of records as evidence of business transactions, but be more aware of other uses of records beyond the point of creation – their use as memorials, as sites of spiritual value and forgetting, their use in the construction of the self and sense of community, their role in the imagination and consumerism. By attempting to understand these uses and misuses in greater depth, archivists can perhaps begin to understand their role, and the place and changing value of archives in society.