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Honors Thesis

A WEE BIT OF CLEANUP: UPDATING SCOTTISH LOCALITY PAGES ON THE
FAMILYSEARCH RESEARCH WIKI

by
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements
for University Honors

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Brigham Young University
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ABSTRACT

A WEE BIT OF CLEANUP: UPDATING SCOTTISH LOCALITY PAGES ON THE
FAMILYSEARCH WIKI

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Bachelor of Arts

While the FamilySearch *Research Wiki* provides a valuable resource for genealogical references for countries across the globe, its potential is bottlenecked by having a small pool of editors compared to sites like *Wikipedia*. The webpages for each Scottish parish have fallen by the wayside, with most not receiving any material update in a decade. This project reflection highlights the choices made and processes taken in order to revitalize the Scottish locality pages of the *Research Wiki* following the verification of civil, ecclesiastical, and probate jurisdictions for each parish in Scotland. This included making an interactive jurisdiction map in ArcGIS Experience Builder, designing an infobox, and reformatting nearly one thousand individual webpages. It also highlights the next steps necessary to ensure that Scottish articles provide accurate and valuable encyclopedic information of genealogical resources for genealogists and historians in the years to come.

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Introduction

When a basic survey of existing information on a topic is needed, often the first step is *Wikipedia*. With tens of millions of articles in hundreds of languages, many aspects of the human experience are covered by the community-maintained encyclopedia. For historians and genealogists, however, much more particular information is necessary. Whether it be the year Texas began requiring statewide birth registration, or the fact a particular French church's records were lost in a fire, the *FamilySearch Research Wiki* fills the niche for information of locations and their genealogical sources.

While the records' creation date is in the past, their access changes constantly as laws on copyright or privacy are altered, different entities acquire new records, or as each new year passes and time-locked records are released. Although the *Research Wiki* serves as an important reference point for the genealogical community, it is sparsely edited beyond limited full-time staff and volunteers at FamilySearch. A lack of editing causes the articles for certain locations to fall behind the times, becoming less helpful as the latest information fails to make its way to the pages. In some cases, this causes issues for researchers by referencing sources that have been moved or giving inaccurate data on record availability.

A particular set of articles which have been marred by a lack of editing over time are the Scottish locality pages, the term for pages which explain record availability for a particular location. In the case of Scotland, locality pages are the unique pages for each of the over 900 civil parishes used for the organization of censuses and vital records. Prior to this project, most locality pages for Scotland had not seen substantial edits since 2014,

and thus gave information which did not provide a full picture of the relevant records for each parish. In many cases, the URLs of sites such as *ScotlandsPeople* or digital copies of important books such as *The Statistical Accounts of Scotland* have changed in recent years, resulting in many broken links throughout the articles. Compared to countries such as England, Wales, and Finland, the *Research Wiki* lacked comprehensive jurisdiction maps for Scotland, making it harder for genealogists to locate bordering jurisdictions for expanded records searches. To ensure that the *Research Wiki* remains a trusted source of information for the genealogical community, these problems must be remedied.

Following an analysis of the *Research Wiki* and existing issues with Scottish articles, this report outlines which jurisdictions were researched and verified for each parish, followed by the infoboxes and ArcGIS map which utilize that jurisdictional research. Next, the other updates to each page are addressed, which are split into two stages. These updates include fixing broken links, updating explanatory text, and reformatting tables. The conclusion presents final editing statistics as well as recommendations for future edits necessary to improve the quality of Scottish locality pages.

The FamilySearch Research Wiki

The *FamilySearch Research Wiki* is a closed wiki run by FamilySearch, a non-profit organization owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which aims to be an online reference for genealogical research. The term wiki simply refers to any online hypertext (digital text with links) website that is collaboratively maintained.¹

Wikipedia is the most notable example of a wiki. As of May 31, 2024, the *Research Wiki* contains over one hundred thousand content pages, including research guides, locality pages, and collection descriptions.²

The *Research Wiki*, set up in 2008, originally mirrored *Wikipedia* in many ways. It utilizes the same “MediaWiki” backbone which powers *Wikipedia*, releasing all content under a Creative Commons³ license and making it available to edit by anyone with a registered account. The *Research Wiki*’s current ‘closed’ status reflects a change made in 2016 to restrict editing access to only those approved by FamilySearch staff.⁴ This was done in response to spamming and other forms of vandalism. With the aim of providing quality content to the public despite having a small moderation team, FamilySearch

¹“Wiki,” *Wikipedia*, last modified 10:25 UTC, 16 May 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wiki&oldid=1224160917>.

²“Statistics,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, accessed 31 May 2024, <https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Special:Statistics>.

³For more information, see <https://creativecommons.org>.

⁴“Help:Wiki Roles of Editor and Pagecreator,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, version published 15:41 UTC, 10 December 2018, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?title=Help:Wiki_Roles_of_Editor_and_Pagecreator&oldid=3454889.

revoked editing privileges of all non-staff users in early 2024, pending each users' completion of a training module.⁵

Well-intentioned but ill-received edits are a serious issue. An example of this is Scotland's own Scots Language *Wikipedia* once being majority written by an American teenager with a loose understanding of Scots.⁶ These policies protect against poor editing, but they also create a barrier to access for would-be editors to make changes to things they are knowledgeable about. Even professors of family history and credentialed genealogists must apply for editing privileges and take a class, in order to correct a typo or improve a page in their area of expertise. This idea of a 'closed' wiki is merely one facet of the gem that is the academic question: "Are wikis reliable?" This thesis does not attempt to answer that question; however, it is necessary to address it to explain why this project was necessary for the future academic use of the *Research Wiki*.

Amy S. Bruckman's book *Should You Believe Wikipedia?* largely delves into wikis as a communal learning space, but aptly addresses the secondary school philosophy of the 2000s and 2010s that a wiki should never be cited, and to some teachers not even consulted.⁷ Whether a wiki is useful and reliable due to the ability of *almost* anyone to

⁵"FamilySearch Wiki:Editing the Wiki," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, version published 21:54 UTC, 23 May 2024, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?title=FamilySearch_Wiki:Editing_the_Wiki&oldid=5752846.

⁶Libby Brooks and Alex Hern, "Shock an aw: US teenager wrote huge slice of Scots Wikipedia," *The Guardian*, 26 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/aug/26/shock-an-aw-us-teenager-wrote-huge-slice-of-scots-wikipedia>.

⁷Amy S. Bruckman, *Should You Believe Wikipedia?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 64, *Google Books*.

edit is a matter of personal and academic debate. However, there are ways for academics to utilize wiki pages with scrutiny. As can be seen within this paper, citations should link to specific versions of a page, not the live and changing page. This allows the reader to identify exactly what text the author was observing at the time of writing, not what it has been updated to days, months, or even years later. As seen with the *Research Wiki*, policies change regularly, and for *Wikipedia*, the fifth of its five policy pillars is “Wikipedia has no firm rules.” This pillar is amended by the policy “If a rule prevents you from improving or maintaining Wikipedia, **ignore it.**”⁸ While the *Research Wiki* is less open ended, it too will change as FamilySearch alters its focuses or goals, requiring academics to cite exactly *when* they utilized a wiki.

Irrespective of when a wiki was consulted, it is also important that the live webpage in question is up to date. One factor of information’s reliability is how recently it was updated. Sites like *Wikipedia* have thousands of people worldwide trying to edit articles when an impactful news report is published, and dedicated TV show-specific wikis on the site *Fandom* often receive updates from groups of fans right after a new episode finishes airing. In this respect, the *Research Wiki* is specifically hampered by its ‘closed wiki’ policy as the pool of potential editors is incredibly shallow. With staff focusing on locations where significant novel record imaging is occurring, the wiki sections for other countries fall by the wayside.⁹

⁸“Wikipedia:Five pillars,” *Wikipedia*, last modified 03:18 UTC, 12 May 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Five_pillars&oldid=1223465990.

“Wikipedia:Ignore all rules,” *Wikipedia*, last modified 06:00 UTC, 6 May 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Ignore_all_rules&oldid=1222516629.

⁹FamilySearch, “What to Expect from FamilySearch in 2024,” *FamilySearch Blog*, 17 January 2024, <https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/whats-new-in-familysearch-2024>.

The *Research Wiki* pages for individual parishes in Scotland (the Scottish locality pages) are a primary victim to the effects of the lack of editors and company-wide prioritization. The editing history for the parish of Knockando in Moray serves as a prime example of the history of Scottish Locality Pages.¹⁰ The page was originally created in 2008 and received significant additions (edits where 500 or more bytes of data were added) in 2012. The final significant edit to the page occurred in June of 2014. In the past decade, only twenty-one edits have been made to the page. Of those, nineteen were marked ‘minor’ by the editor, which indicates the edits were for formatting, grammar, linking, or coding changes, and not content based. The other three, although not marked minor, should have been marked so. Beyond this, fifteen of the edits were made by FamilySearch staff or full-time volunteers, and fourteen were made with bots conducting automatic text replacement for wiki-wide code changes.

With this editing history in mind, it is no surprise that prior to changes made by this project, the page for Knockando did not provide up-to-date and relevant information for genealogists. This page, and almost all other Scottish Locality Pages, presents some of the following major issues:¹¹

¹⁰“Knockando, Moray, Scotland Genealogy: Revision history,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, accessed 4 June 2024, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?title=Knockando,_Moray,_Scotland_Genealogy&action=history.

¹¹“Knockando, Moray, Scotland Genealogy,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, version published 21:11 UTC, 23 October 2023, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?title=Knockando,_Moray,_Scotland_Genealogy&oldid=5503335.

- The History section: The primary portion of the History section is a copy/paste of part of the parish's account in *The New Statistical Account of Scotland* or various topographical dictionaries and gazetteers published in the 1840s. These accounts often have minor formatting and spelling errors due to being obtained with now decades-old Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technologies.
- Tables and Lists: Lists of records, such as censuses and parish registers, are presented in tables without borders or raw text with line breaks after each item. This results in lists that are hard to identify at a glance and difficult or confusing to read when records have long titles.
- Outdated references: References are generally to FamilySearch Library microfilm numbers and book call numbers. While this information was valuable in the 2000s when many records were still accessed in person, nearly all records referenced in Scottish Locality Pages have been digitized by FamilySearch, National Records of Scotland, or other genealogical companies. FamilySearch staff have specifically expressed their desire for these references to be changed to reflect how these records are accessed now.¹² To access these images today, references need to be updated to display Image Group Numbers (IGN), along with direct links to those image collections if possible.
- Extraneous code in headers: Headers sometimes exist for sections with no body text. For example, Knockando had a Land and Property header with no information added below. Headers also frequently have formatting code like bolding or line breaks which cause them to display incorrectly.

¹²Darris Williams and Amber Larsen, video conference with author, 10 January 2024.

- Citations: Both in-text and footnote citations are inconsistent within articles and do not follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, the *Research Wiki's* preferred style and citation manual.
- Lack of geographical references: While England and Wales have an interactive parish boundary map for 1851,¹³ Scotland does not have static or interactive maps available.
- Uninformative Civil Registration sections: Each parish page includes the same copy/paste statement about what registration districts are but does not explain which registration districts a parish was covered by. This is necessary for locating post-1854 vital records.
- Inability to be quickly referenced: In addition to tables blending into the body text, valuable information is either buried in body text or not included at all. For example, it takes time to identify important higher jurisdictions or the years when particular records are available.

The sections that follow highlight specific remedies to these issues and how those fixes were implemented. Due to variations in the frequency of these issues across the locality pages, the differences in time needed to address each issue, and the value that fixing the issue would have on the overall quality of the *Research Wiki*, some fixes were prioritized over others. Due to the additional value to genealogists, quick

¹³This resource can be found at <https://familysearch.org/mapp/>.

reference jurisdictions and jurisdiction maps were addressed first, followed by simple edits to pages fixing major display issues and improving uninformative sections.

Jurisdictions: Infoboxes and Mapping

Before addressing many of the display issues, the correct content for each page had to be identified. ‘Correct’ in this use means both historically accurate and useful for genealogical research. There are plenty of jurisdictions and divisions a parish interacted with throughout history, however not all of them produced records useful for genealogical research. For example, Scotland’s “Regions and Districts” system existed from 1975-1996, however records that would have been organized under that system, such as the 1981 and 1991 censuses, will not be available until the latter quarter of this century due to 100-year privacy laws.¹⁴ As such, the region and district which a parish was located is not useful for genealogical research, as no records held by modern government entities will be organized using those jurisdictions.

The basis for parish pages on the *Research Wiki* is the National Record of Scotland’s (NRS) Old Parish Registers (OPR). This collection reflects all vital record (birth/baptism, marriage, and death/burial) registers in possession of the NRS from each civil parish and some ecclesiastical parishes, which kept separate records from 1553 through 1855.¹⁵ This distinction between parish types is the first important notation in parish jurisdiction, as it generally notes what type of records that parish should have been

¹⁴“Your Privacy,” *Scotland’s Census*, updated 2 September 2022, <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/about/your-privacy/>.

¹⁵“Coverage of the Old Parish Registers,” Old Parish Registers, *National Records of Scotland*, accessed 10 June 2024, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/old-parish-registers/list-of-old-parish-registers>.

keeping. Civil parishes utilized for government record keeping were based upon ecclesiastical parishes but did not always split and merge when the Church of Scotland made adjustments. Officially, the terms used are *quoad omnia*, meaning “of all things” and referring to parishes which were ecclesiastical and civil, and *quoad sacra*, meaning “of sacred things,” denoting solely ecclesiastical parishes. Most parishes covered in the Old Parish Records are *quoad omnia*, but a handful are *quoad sacra* where a minister happened to keep a separate register of vital events. These are often given sub-designations, such as the *quoad omnia* parish being #123a and the *quoad sacra* being #123b, but occasionally they receive a standard integer. These numbers are the second most important identifier, as they are noted in NRS and FamilySearch materials to uniquely label records from each parish.

The next set of important information is the civil jurisdictions. First is the historic county. Parish registers and all pre-1975 records are organized by historic county, with some slight variations for Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, and Aberdeen in the 20th century. Next is the modern council area. These are the current county-level government entity which administers the local archive(s) for the area. After this are the registration districts. These were established in 1855 when responsibility for tracking vital events was transferred to new local registrars away from civil parishes. Registration districts changed immensely over time as population shifted and technology made processes easier, so a full reference of all registration districts through time would be inappropriate for a quick reference section. Thus, the name of the district(s) to which a parish immediately transferred is displayed, with a full chart of changes over time being included in the body of the page. The last record-creating civil jurisdiction is that of the burgh, or town.

However, not all burghs created genealogically relevant records, as parliamentary burghs existed only as voting constituencies, and burghs of barony only organized markets.

Thus, the only burghs referenced will be those identified by NRS as creators of independent land and tax records.¹⁶

The next set of jurisdictions is the ecclesiastical jurisdictions. For the Church of Scotland, these are straightforward, with each parish reporting to a Presbytery, each Presbytery reporting to a Synod, and each Synod reporting to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, also called the Second Statistical Account,¹⁷ was utilized to determine the Presbytery and Synod of each parish. This source reflects the organization as it was in the 19th century, the time period of most genealogical research. Any shifts in jurisdiction are elaborated on in the body text of each page.

The last set of jurisdictions is that of judicial jurisdictions for purposes of probate research. Commissary courts were established after the Scottish Reformation when responsibility of the estate of deceased persons was moved from churches to civil government. Due to the tumultuous period in which they were set up, explicit jurisdictions were not outlined, and heirs could file a testament (will) in any commissariat in the country. As the Edinburgh court was the superior court, many cases were taken there directly rather than a closer court to the residence of the deceased. The

¹⁶“Counties and Burghs,” Valuation Rolls, *National Records of Scotland*, accessed 10 June 2024, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/valuation-rolls/notes-on-burghs>.

¹⁷Digital copies were consulted via the University of Edinburgh’s site about the history of the accounts, <https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/home>.

commissariats displayed for quick reference are not the ones that had jurisdiction over that parish, as there was no formal jurisdiction, but rather the ones where testament for a resident of this parish has been located. This has been done via reviewing Appendix 3 in *Tracing Your Scottish Ancestry* by Kathleen B. Cory, which provides a list of start dates of located records for parishes in commissary courts. To supplement this, place name searches in *ScotlandsPeople* indexes of commissariat records were used to identify recently digitized or indexed records. Sheriff courts, which absorbed the responsibilities of commissary courts in the mid-19th century, are far more organized. Each historic county (and now council area) has at least one sheriff's court, with geographically large areas having multiple. Residents of that county are only permitted to file at any sheriff's office within that county. Unfortunately for genealogists, while jurisdictions are defined, records are organized per office, not per county. For example, a resident of Edinburgh could have their testament filed in the Edinburgh sheriff's court or the Leith sheriff's court, and there is no way to know which without checking each office's record collection separately (or conducting a general search which includes both collections in the search parameters). For this reason, genealogists must be aware of every sheriff's court office within the county of residence.

The last element of importance for quick reference is the start date of major record types. The first record has already been discussed: Old Parish Registers. Start dates for these records are taken per parish as is noted on the NRS coverage guides.¹⁸ The other record set of importance with varying start dates per parish is the Kirk Session Records. The kirk session is the governing body of each parish, and on top of low-level

¹⁸“Coverage of the Old Parish Registers” *National Records of Scotland*.

criminal and civil matters and taxation, occasionally vital events are recorded within kirk session records. The NRS has not produced a coverage guide for kirk session records, so the NRS Online Catalogue was utilized, conducting place name searches for each civil parish to read catalogue notes or view digitized records to determine when records began.

When each of these jurisdictions or record types are referenced in the wiki page, such as in the infobox discussed next, the title of the jurisdiction is hyperlinked to a new Scottish Jurisdictions page.¹⁹ On this page, each jurisdiction and the types of genealogical records they create are explained. Important changes in jurisdiction types over time are highlighted as well, such as when counties were abolished in 1975 for the regions and districts system, and 1996 when that system was converted into the modern council area system.

¹⁹“Scotland Jurisdictions,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, last modified 02:33 UTC, 21 March 2024, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?title=Scotland_Jurisdictions&oldid=5675041.

With each of these jurisdictions researched for about 900 parishes across Scotland, the next piece of the project was to display the information concisely. The first way of doing this is via infoboxes. These are the boxed information in the top right corner of wiki pages which exist to give important information in a standardized and condensed form. *Fig. 1* shows an example from the Whithorn *Wikipedia* page, where the town's population, location, civil jurisdictions, post and dialing codes, emergency service providers, and political constituencies are listed.²⁰ It also includes a photo of a local church and a map of the town's location within the council area. While this conforms to *Wikipedia* standards for a UK location, a slightly different structure and design is necessary for the scope and style of the *Research Wiki*.

In 2011 an infobox was developed for usage for English locations. Shown in *Fig. 2*, an example of this box showcases a basic structure for displaying

Whithorn	
	
St Ninians's Priory Church	
	
Location within Dumfries and Galloway	
Population	750 (2020) ^[1]
OS grid reference	 NX445405
• Edinburgh	97 mi (156 km)
• London	285 mi (459 km)
Council area	Dumfries and Galloway
Lieutenancy area	Wigtownshire
Country	Scotland
Sovereign state	United Kingdom
Post town	NEWTON STEWART
Postcode district	DG8
Dialling code	01988
Police	Scotland
Fire	Scottish
Ambulance	Scottish
UK Parliament	Dumfries and Galloway
Scottish Parliament	Galloway and West Dumfries
List of places: UK · Scotland ·  54°44′08″N 4°24′58″W	

Figure 1 - Whithorn Wikipedia Infobox

²⁰“Whithorn,” *Wikipedia*, last modified, 14:09 UTC, 10 June 2024, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Whithorn&oldid=1228356069>.

necessary information for English parishes.²¹ This displays information useful only for

Appleby, Lincolnshire	
	
Appleby St Bartholomew Lincolnshire	
Type	Ancient Parish
Civil Jurisdictions	
Hundred	Manley
County	Lincolnshire
Poor Law Union	Glanford Brigg ↗
Registration District	Glanford Brigg
Records begin	
Parish registers: 1570	
Bishop's Transcripts: 1599	
Ecclesiastical Jurisdictions	
Rural Deanery	Manlake
Diocese	Lincoln
Province	Canterbury
Legal Jurisdictions	
Probate Court	Pre-1834 - Court of the Archdeaconry of Stow; Post-1833 - Court of the Bishop of Lincoln (Episcopal Consistory)
Location of Archive	
Lincolnshire Record Office	
v	• d • e

Figure 2 - Appleby FS Research Wiki Infobox

England, such as Bishop's Transcripts and Diocese, but serves as a precedent for what infoboxes for British parishes should look like. Most of the necessary changes to format this for Scottish parishes consists of renaming lines, redirecting links to the Scottish versions of pages, and adding and deleting lines in certain sections where necessary. To do this, the code for the English Parish Infobox was copied into a personal sandbox. This is the wiki term for a page which is intended for testing and will not appear in internet or wiki search results. One must have the direct link to the sandbox page to access it. Here, the infobox was re-coded to display jurisdictions of importance for Scotland, while a second sandbox page was used to avoid empty fields by visualizing the infobox in context and testing to ensure that fields would only display when a value was added to them.

Along with the infobox itself, a documentation subpage was added to the infobox.²² Documentation pages are important pieces of wiki structure for editors, as they

²¹"Appleby, Lincolnshire Genealogy," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, last modified 16:57 UTC, 28 November 2023, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?title=Appleby,_Lincolnshire_Genealogy&oldid=5548123.

²²"Template:Infobox Scotland Parishes/doc," *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, last modified 01:37 UTC, 10 June 2024,

explain why a variable template such as an infobox was coded the way it was, what fields are required or optional, and what values are permissible for each field. A blank template is also provided for editors to use when they are making a new page and want to use that infobox. Without appropriate documentation, future editors may become confused about the intent of the original creator, wonder why an infobox breaks when a certain field is left empty, and otherwise become dissuaded from utilizing it.

In addition to much of the earlier part of this section being included in the documentation, such as explaining that Presbytery and Synod information is from *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, a particular data entry rule was noted to avoid confusion with multipart names. Many jurisdiction names have two parts, such as Crathie & Braemar. To avoid confusing a multipart name with two single part names, the documentation suggests future editors should also utilize ampersands (&) for multipart names (e.g. Crathie & Braemar), and the word ‘and’ for referring to two single part names (e.g. Edinburgh and Leith). This rule was established after the compilation of jurisdictions was complete, having


Stirling, Stirlingshire, Scotland	
	
View of Stirling from Shore Road Bridge	
Type	Quoad Omnia Parish
Parish Number	490
Civil Jurisdictions	
Historic County	Stirlingshire
Burgh	Stirling
Council Area	Stirling
Registration District	Stirling
Records begin	
Parish registers: 1585	
Kirk Sessions: 1597	
Ecclesiastical Jurisdictions	
Presbytery	Stirling
Synod	Perth & Stirling
Judicial Jurisdictions	
Sheriff Court	Falkirk and Stirling
Commissary Court	Stirling and Edinburgh
v	*
d	*
e	

Figure 3 - New Stirling FS Research Wiki Infobox

found a significant portion of names of various jurisdictions are multipart, such as the commissary court of Hamilton & Campsie. When creating lists including these multipart names, it became necessary to outline this rule to avoid confusing the readers.

Fig. 3 presents an example of a completed infobox as they now appear on all Scottish parish pages.²³ To differentiate the design from the English infobox, a light blue was chosen as the background color for the section names as a nod to the Saltire. While the English infobox has a Location of Archive section, Scottish local archives are run by council areas, so they are noted in the Civil Jurisdictions section.

²³“Stirling, Stirlingshire, Scotland Genealogy,” *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, last modified 20:56 UTC, 14 June 2024, https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/index.php?title=Stirling,_Stirlingshire,_Scotland_Genealogy&oldid=5767719.

With infoboxes set up, jurisdictional data was also utilized to solve a second problem, that of a lack of parish maps for Scotland. Rather than creating static map images for every parish (similar to the map present in *Fig. 1*), an interactive map for the whole country with embedded jurisdictional data was created. This map was intended to be an analog to the aforementioned 1851 England and Wales parish map, which provides county and parish boundaries and displays jurisdiction data in a popup when a parish is clicked.

A primary consideration in sourcing information for the map was that it must be able to be used and distributed without concern of copyright infringement, as this material would be published for free on the *FamilySearch Research Wiki*. Unlike in the United States, government publications are not in Public Domain by default everywhere. The United Kingdom uses a system called Crown Copyright, wherein any publication by the monarch or their servants (i.e. all government entities) fall under the personal copyright of the Crown. However, in a modern age of government transparency, a blanket usage license has been put in place by The National Archives which applies to most UK Government data intended for public viewing. The Open Government License v3.0 is perpetual and royalty-free, and allows the copying, publishing, distribution, and adaption of the information for commercial or non-commercial purposes. It requires only an attribution statement explaining where the data was obtained and that it is licensed under OGLv3.0.²⁴ This is a variation on the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, being more restrictive in specifying that royal crests or government insignia on published

²⁴“Open Government License version 3,” *The National Archives*, accessed 15 June 2024, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>.

documents do not fall under the license.²⁵ This is fully compliant with the *FamilySearch Research Wiki*, which itself uses the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License, the ‘Share Alike’ portion indicating that additive or derivative work (such as adding to the wiki) falls under the same license.²⁶

The map, displayed in *Figs. 4 & 5*, was built in ArcGIS by Esri, a geographic information systems software suite which is the modern industry standard for digital cartography.²⁷ The basemap, the underlying map which outlines oceans, landmasses, countries, and cities, is GB Background, a basic basemap of Britain published by Esri from UK Ordnance Survey data and licensed under OGLv3.0.²⁸ The next layer of the map, Historical Counties, was adapted from OS Boundary-Line™, which was modified to show only county boundaries and only those in Scotland.²⁹ The last and most important layer, Civil Parish Boundaries 1890, is an adaptation of work done by Dr. Corinne Roughly for the National Records of Scotland. She civil parish boundaries as they were just prior to the 1891 changes of the Boundary Commission of the Local

²⁵“Attribution 4.0 International,” Licenses, *Creative Commons*, accessed 15 June 2024, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

²⁶“Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International,” Licenses, *Creative Commons*, accessed 15 June 2024, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

²⁷This map is available at <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7788091d0cab43c38378c149f46fb8a5/>. This link may become unavailable beyond September 2024.

²⁸Esri UK, “GB Background,” Items, *ArcGIS*, updated 19 February 2024, <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=40465fe2d36148d49eb47e870c227c4c>; contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2023, licensed under OGL v3.0.

²⁹“OS Boundary-Line™,” OpenData, *UK Ordnance Survey*, updated April 2024, <https://osdatahub.os.uk/downloads/open/BoundaryLine>; contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2024.

Government (Scotland) Act 1889.³⁰ This map was modified by removing various uninhabited islands labeled as “???” and renaming various parishes to match their names in NRS records. This helps to avoid confusion that might have been caused by the names on the map not matching the page names on the *Research Wiki*. In cases where a parish was in multiple counties, or where exclaves existed, occasionally the dataset had each piece of the parish as its own unique object. These objects were merged so each parish is one multi-part object, a necessary action so that the map would correctly interface with the underlying jurisdiction data. After these modifications, all jurisdiction data was compiled into a table and correlated with the unique object IDs of each parish object so that the correct data appears when each parish is clicked.

This map was then hosted using ArcGIS Experience Builder, which allows for simple webapp building using maps uploaded to ArcGIS Online. Talks are ongoing to preserve this map longterm, potentially on a website hosted by the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences at Brigham Young University. The underlying data has also been stored offline for redundancy purposes.

³⁰“Historic Civil Parishes (pre-1891),” Other National Records of Scotland (NRS) Geographies Datasets, *National Records of Scotland*, accessed 15 June 2024, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/geography/our-products/other-national-records-of-scotland-nrs-geographies-datasets/historic-civil-parishes-pre-1891>; contains data from National Records of Scotland, Campop - University of Cambridge, EDINA – University of Edinburgh, and National Library of Scotland © Crown Copyright and database right 2022, licensed under OGL v3.0.

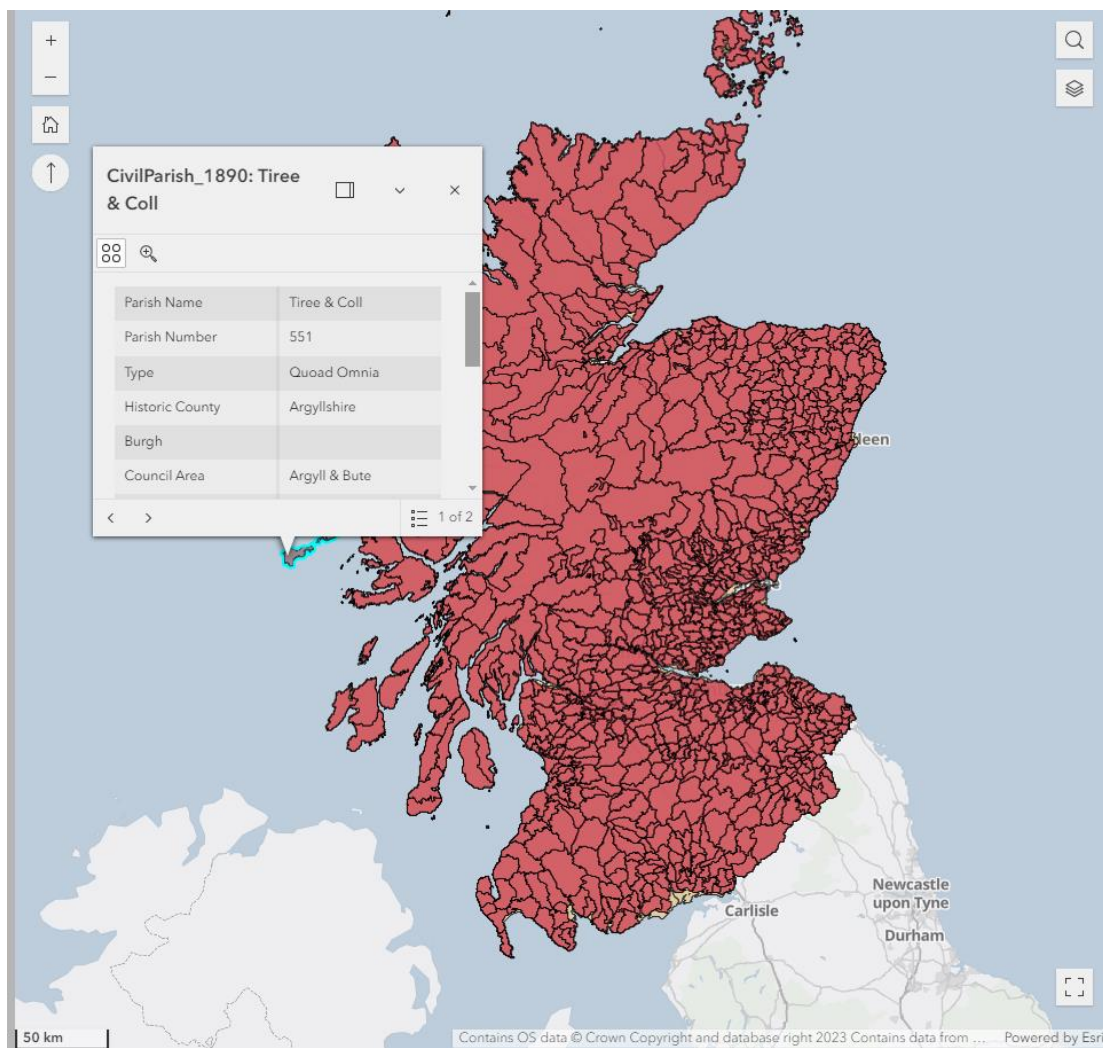


Figure 4 - Right side of online parish map, showing the parish of Tiree & Coll selected with a data popup

CivilParish_1890: Tiree & Coll

Parish Name	Tiree & Coll
Parish Number	551
Type	Quoad Omnia
Historic County	Argyllshire
Burgh	
Council Area	Argyll & Bute
Registration District	Tiree and Coll
Parish Registers Begin	1766
Kirk Session Records Begin	1775
Presbytery	Mull
Synod	Argyll
Sheriff Court	Campbelltown, Dunoon, Fort William, Inveraray, Oban, and Tobermory
Commissary Court	The Isles

Civil Parish Boundaries 1890 ... Find address or place

Historical County Boundaries ...

Figure 5 - Left side of online parish map, showing the full table of jurisdiction data for the selected parish, along with a layer on/off toggle and search bar below

Updating Pages

Upon completion of jurisdictional research and mapping, the next phase of the project was to complete updates to each parish page on the *Research Wiki*. Due to the number of pages requiring updates, this phase was completed in two stages to ensure a minimum update was applied to every page regardless of time constraints. This first stage chiefly consisted of adding the aforementioned infobox to each page, along with various standardization and formatting edits. The second stage, applied to newly-created pages and some pages in the counties of Lanarkshire and Argyllshire, addressed more time-consuming issues such as table design, record references and citations, and the History and Civil Registration sections. As more work is necessary to improve all pages to the same standard, documentation has been left for FamilySearch staff should they appoint volunteers to continue the project. This includes a copy of this report, the aforementioned infobox explanation, and a blank template of a parish page, including examples of generic section text and table designs.

The goal for the first stage of edits was to create a base level of uniformity across all parish pages. In addition to the infoboxes, almost all generic section text, the text explaining what each different type of record is and how it can be accessed, has been updated to more accurately provide information and fix links to websites that have changed since 2014. The only section text that was not updated was the text of the Probate Record section, which includes too much unique jurisdictional information to copy and paste new text. Probate information has been addressed in the second stage.

Along with section text, the first line of text of the page, which appears in search engine results, was updated to read “Guide to [ParishName] ancestry, family history, and genealogy: parish registers, transcripts, census records, birth records, marriage records, and death records.” This statement was decided on in conjunction with FamilySearch staff to optimize the pages’ performance in search engines by adding common keywords related to genealogy. This change will ideally drive more users to the wiki as the page will appear higher up in search results when those keywords are used.

In the first stage of edits, the code of each page was also cleaned up to remove extraneous data and ensure the pages display correctly. The *Research Wiki* is coded in Wikitext, a markup language used by MediaWiki websites, which allows for easy linking of webpages within a wiki. Wikitext has many features that, when used effectively, can allow an editor to manipulate how text is displayed to highlight certain information. However, when these features are placed incorrectly, used accidentally, or misinterpreted, the text the user sees can be at best unprofessional and at worst unreadable. One example is how the bold text feature interacts with section headers. A common feature among modern text editors, text can be bolded, italicized, and underlined. Section header text has static formatting no matter what extra formatting code is applied to them, so the first level of header will always be in twenty-point bold font, the second level always sixteen-point italicized font, and so on. When extra code is added to section headers, that formatting only applies to the content index box at the top of each page. As shown by

Contents <small>[hide]</small>	
1	History
2	Census Records
3	Church Records
3.1	<i>Established Church—Old Parochial Register</i>
3.1.1	Condition of Original Registers
3.2	<i>Established Church—Kirk Session Records</i>
3.2.1	Roll of Male Heads of Families
3.3	<i>Nonconformist Church Records</i>
3.3.1	Auchterless Free Church
4	Civil Registrtion Records

Figure 6 - A content index box shown with some sections bolded or italicized

Fig. 6, this results in non-uniform indexes that may draw attention to any sections that erroneously have formatting code in the header. In each of these cases, this extra formatting code was removed so that the content index is standardized.

A key section of each page is the References, which include direct citations to any of the sources used to inform the data within other sections. On pages where the References area was missing, the appropriate code was added to ensure footnote citations within the article would appear. In many cases, extraneous code like excessive line breaks or bolding was removed from the existing section. If not already present below the References, a link back to the parish list for the respective county and an administrative page category was added. For Scottish parish pages, categories are split by county, which helps staff who conduct statistics and multi-page editing, so the appropriate inclusion of categories is necessary to ensure individual pages are not missed in future projects.

Beyond standard spelling and grammar fixes, the final element for the first stage of page updates was the names of the pages. *Research Wiki* standards dictate that a parish page title should follow the formula: [Standard Parish Name (in English)], [County Name], Scotland Genealogy. The standard name for these purposes is the name given to the parish by the National Records of Scotland, which is used for labeling archival records. A small portion of page names had misspellings, as in some portions of the aforementioned formula was not standard nor an identifiable variation thereof. In some others, an element was a known variation of a name rather than the standard version (such as a name with an -ie ending versus a -y ending). For others that were historically combined and split and known by a combined name (such as the parish of Crathie &

Braemar), occasionally the page name deviated from the standard by either missing or adding a piece of the parish name. In each of these cases, the page name was changed to reflect the standardized name in the formula. This required creating new pages with the correct names, transferring all data, and then redirecting the old page to the new one, to ensure any existing links within the wiki did not break. For parishes where variant names exist, they have been listed within the History section as part of stage two.

Once stage one was complete, the more comprehensive edits of stage two began. Due to each stage two edit requiring two to three hours of work, including background research, finding the links to images of all relevant records, and editing the code, only 35 pages received this stage of editing. As mentioned previously, a template explaining the stage two edits has been given to FamilySearch Staff with the intention of volunteers continuing this stage.

The first piece of stage two edits began with the History section. The previous copy/paste sections of *The Statistical Accounts of Scotland* or various topographical dictionaries and gazetteers were removed in lieu of a link to that source at the end of the section. A short, one-to-two paragraph historical brief was added after consulting the aforementioned sources, as well as archival notes from the NRS, with a focus on boundary and jurisdiction changes. For applicable parishes, an Alternative Names table was added, highlighting the standardized parish name, common variants that may show up in records databases, and the name in Scottish Gaelic and Scots if they differ from the name used in English.

Where present, formerly in-line citations were converted to footnote citations in line with the *Chicago Manual of Style* footnote-bibliography method, which is the

Research Wiki's preferred style and citation system. Along with the standard reference, the *Research Wiki*'s internal style manual requires the addition of a link to WorldCat when citing books, allowing a reader to find the book at a nearby library if the book is not digitized or the digital version is removed. This guideline came along with 2024 revisions to *Wiki* policies, so the WorldCat link was a necessary addition to even existing *Chicago* footnotes.

Table design and links were updated for the Census and OPR sections. These designs, shown in *Fig. 7*, reflect 2024 design changes for the *Research Wiki*. These changes are intended to move away from the colorful but coding-heavy old table design, shown by *Fig. 8*, and the blank background design, shown by *Fig. 9*. Beyond the design, links were updated to go directly to the first image of a record set when freely available, as requested by FamilySearch staff.³¹ When access is restricted due to licensing requirements (as is the case for OPRs), a link to the catalog entry within the FamilySearch Catalog was maintained, with the appropriate code added to let users know that the

Type	Name
Modern	Ardchattan
Gaelic	Àird Chatain ^[1]
Historic	Bailebhaodain ^{[2][3]}
Historic	Bailemhaodain ^{[4][3]}

Figure 9 – An Alternative Names table showcasing new table design

Refer to the ScotlandsPeople Wiki article.		
Images and Indexes Available at ScotlandsPeople Website (\$)		
	Images- Years	Indexes
Births	1855-1921	◊ ScotlandsPeople Website has indexes to 2021.
Marriages	1855-1946	
Deaths	1855-1971	

Figure 8 – An old table using colors and wide borders

<u>Record Type</u>	<u>Years Covered</u>	<u>FS Library Film Number</u>
Births:	1670-1854	0993345
Marriages:	1693-1701	0993345
	1723-1769	0993345
	1771-1854	0993345

Figure 7 – An old table using no borders or background

³¹Darris Williams and Amber Larsen, video conference with author, 10 January 2024.

link will not take them to the images due to restrictions. These changes were only applied to the Census and OPR sections, and not to the Kirk Session or Nonconformist Churches sections due to the large amount of records those sections contain and time constraints of the project. Instead of full tables, short paragraphs at the end of the sections list applicable NRS call numbers and links to FamilySearch catalog entries for the parish, so that the images may still be accessed.

As mentioned, reform of the Probate section was handled in this phase. As probate records are not organized by parish, this section only outlines what probate jurisdictions a researcher should search for residents of the selected parish. The generic section text was rewritten to accurately indicate that Commissary Courts did not have exclusive jurisdiction over any area, and that it is necessary to check all Sheriff's Courts in each county as their jurisdiction was county-wide. This informs researchers that the included jurisdiction list is imperfect. The previous generic text only provided what seemed to be the single most likely Commissary and Sheriff's Courts for a parish, rather than listing all courts where records are known to exist.

The Civil Registration section was drastically improved in this phase by including a table listing all registration districts covering the selected parish. While for many parishes the succeeding registration district kept the same name, a significant number had name changes, splits, and mergers. These tables are an alteration of the *NRS Parishes and Registration Districts of Scotland Guide*, aiming to present that data in an easy-to-view table per parish, rather than PDF export of a large spreadsheet encompassing all

parishes.³² With this information now present, genealogists will be able to easily identify when name changes happened and direct their queries using the new name of the

Name			Years		RD Number
Ardchattan			1855-1909		504
Name	Years	RD Number	Name	Years	RD Number
Ardchattan	1910-1969	504a	Ardgour & Kingairloch	1910-1969	504b
Oban	1970-2006	526	Ardgour	1970-2006	504
Argyll & Bute, Oban	2007-Present	526	Highland, Ardgour	2007-Present	522

registration district. An example is shown below in *Fig. 10*.

Figure 10 – A Registration District table showing a parish that was split into two districts

The final element of phase two is the addition of the Poor Law Records section. Digital images of many records concerning welfare of the poor, as well as other records regarding the taxation of heritors (Scots law term for taxpaying landowners), were acquired by FamilySearch from the NRS over the last few years, making them freely available online. To increase awareness of these records, which include information about the poorest and wealthiest individuals of each parish, this section was added to each page in this phase. It includes generic section text explaining the records and their genealogical value, as well as the same reference paragraph as utilized in the Kirk Session and Nonconformist Churches sections.

³²“Registration Districts,” Statutory Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages, *National Records of Scotland*, accessed 14 July 2024, <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/statutory-registers/registration-districts>.

Conclusion

Over the course of the project, more than 1,600 edits were made on the *Research Wiki*. While most of these were on individual parish pages, a portion were spread across developing the infobox code, creating a Scottish Jurisdictions page for the infobox to reference, testing table designs and formatting code in sandboxes, and fixing typos on other Scotland pages when encountered. A total of 94 new pages were added to the wiki, and a net gain of 665 kilobytes of data was added to the wiki. Out of all edits, 695 were ‘significant’ edits, meaning they changed more than 500 bytes of data, while 228 were ‘minor’ edits, a user added tag indicating something inconsequential was changed like fixing a typo. Adding information is not the sole measure of positive impact on the wiki, as a sizable portion of the project included removing extraneous data from pages, which improved the pages’ quality while decreasing the amount of code they contain. However, even empty infoboxes and tables significantly increased the byte count of a page, contributing heavily to the total increase.

Every Scottish parish page was edited over the course of this project with the stage one level of improvements. A total of 35 pages were improved with stage two edits, including 26 newly-created pages. A small number of second stage updates occurred due to the lengthy time commitment. This stage often required multiple hours per page to update tables and link directly to images. Documentation of this project has been given to FamilySearch staff for the possible future completion of the second stage of improvements as part of a volunteer project. Along with this, GIS files for the interactive

parish map have been saved, and FamilySearch staff have been notified of the resources needed to implement the map into the wiki.

While the work done for this project substantially improved the online information regarding genealogical records, there is certainly more that could be done to make the pages a comprehensive and stylistically unified resource for Scottish records. First, the creation of tables for Kirk Session and Nonconformist Churches sections would display available records for those types. Along with this, a full survey should be conducted of NRS Call Numbers CH2 (Kirk Session Records) and CH3 (Nonconformist Church Records) to ensure each entity listed within those collections is referenced on the correct parish page. In some highly populated parishes, dozens of nonconformist churches were erected over time. When the Nonconformist section gets too long to easily scroll through, the section should be split into a separate subpage to allow for easy reading. This has already been done for a handful of large cities, but in conjunction with FamilySearch staff, a threshold should be set to create a new page after a certain number of churches are listed, and this policy should be implemented across all parish pages.

A few section additions would be useful to convey important information and highlight lesser-used records. A historical population table of each parish, utilizing the *Population dataset for Historic Civil Parishes (pre-1891)* provided by the NRS, can be added alongside the census section.³³ The National Library of Scotland has digitized all held postal directories, which provide addresses and occupations for various burghs.

³³“Historic Civil Parishes (pre-1891),” *National Records of Scotland*.

These directories should be noted in a Directories section for parishes where they are extant.³⁴ Similarly, property tax valuation rolls have been partially digitized by the NRS and should be included in a new Land section on parishes which encompassed burghs with their own valuation rolls. Otherwise, they should be included on the county pages.

Lastly, future endeavors should be made to explain the available records for Probate Courts, Civil & Criminal Courts, and upper-level Ecclesiastical Courts. As these are complex legal records, much thought is needed to design new pages that explain to researchers how to access these records, what information found within them might mean, and what value they give to genealogists. Difficulty in locating and understanding legal records means a simple comment and link to the record will not suffice to adequately provide the education necessary to utilize those records. However, due to this complexity, this should be approached after parish and county pages are otherwise updated.

The *FamilySearch Research Wiki* serves an important role as a modern online reference for genealogical sources and methodology. By providing this information for free, genealogy, family history, and history in general become more accessible to everyone as the barrier to find information is lowered. For experienced genealogists, an accurate wiki means less time searching for records which may not exist, and less time finding previously unknown records which may lead to breakthroughs. When trained individuals contribute to the wiki, knowledge is shared, and future researchers avoid spending hours repeating mistakes of their predecessors. Through working together as a

³⁴“Scottish Post Office Directories,” *National Library of Scotland*, accessed 14 July 2024, <https://digital.nls.uk/directories/>.

community and improving existing resources, the accuracy of genealogical research will increase, more people will be able to gain connection to their ancestors, and grander historical questions will be answered.

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