

## Using historical records to investigate Scotland's rural past

### Ordnance Survey Name Book

The Ordnance Survey Name Books contain the records which Ordnance Survey surveyors collected to verify the spelling of every name on their maps. A short description of each feature is included (eg *'a small farmhouse with suitable offices, one storey, thatched and in poor repair'*), along with the name of the proprietor. In many cases, translations of Scots and Gaelic names are also given – these are not always accurate, but they do provide a very good starting point for place name research and may provide clues to the history of settlements, or their geographical location (e.g. *'Gortan Ban'* *'fair meadow or croft'*).

The Ordnance Survey produced Name Books for the whole of Great Britain. However during the Second World War the Name Books for England and Wales were destroyed in a bombing raid. Archaeologists and historians are very lucky to have Name Books available as a historic resource. The originals are held by the National Archives of Scotland and microfilm copies are available in RCAHMS (from which prints can be made).

A scanned copy of the Name Book entry for Rosal is included in this case study. This Name Book entry dates from around the same time as the first edition Ordnance Survey map of Rosal, 1878. You should look at the Name Book entry alongside the extract of the first edition map in the 'Using Maps' section.

A transcription is provided below

List of Names as written on the Plan	Various modes of Spelling the same Names	Authority for those modes of Spelling	Descriptive Remarks, or other General Observations which may be considered of Interest
Rosal	Rosal	Rev. J. M Joass Mr James McBeath	A number of ruins of Dwelling Houses situated on East side of "Strath Naver" about 1 ½ miles North of "Dail Harraild". Name signifies "Judgement". Property of His Grace the Duke of Sutherland.

### Examples of how to use this source

- Compare the description of Rosal with the depiction of the site on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey map, also provided in this case study. Is the description accurate?
- Who do you think the Rev J.M. Joass and Mr James McBeath were? Why were they asked to verify the spelling?
  - Not everyone could read at the time when the first edition Ordnance Survey maps were being produced. The mapmakers would want to check their spelling with knowledgeable, educated men who knew the area; most often the minister. It should also be borne in mind that the mapmakers were unlikely to have been Gaelic speakers, so they would want to check the spelling with someone who was familiar with Gaelic.
- The Name Book suggests Rosal means "Judgement" in Gaelic. Other sources point towards a Norse origin (hross-völlr meaning 'horse fields'). If Rosal is a Norse name, how much longer does this suggest the site was occupied for? Find out when the Vikings settled in Northern Scotland.
- Locate Dail Harraild on a modern map. Has its name changed?

### Further ideas

- Use this name evidence as a starting point for analysing place names around Scotland. The Ordnance Survey website has several sections with resources for deciphering Gaelic, Scandinavian and Scots place names.  
<http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/oswebsite/freefun/didyouknow/placenames/scan.html>
- In the historic documents within this case study Rosal has variously been spelled as Rossell, Rosshill and Rosal. Investigate why its name has changed through time.
- Try to find out the meaning and origin of your home town's name.

## Statistical Accounts of Scotland

The Statistical Accounts of Scotland are vital sources for researching settlement and landscape change. They contain detailed descriptions of every parish in Scotland during critical periods of change in the Scottish countryside:

The First or 'Old', Statistical Account (1791-1799) was established to investigate what effect the agricultural improving movement was having upon the Scottish countryside. It contains many descriptions of traditional, farming practices, as well as descriptions of improved and experimental methods of agriculture.

The Second or 'New', Statistical Account (1834-1845) was compiled when the improving movement was in full swing and the country was experiencing a period of great economic change – the industrial revolution. As well as information about the progress of agricultural improvements, this account contains descriptions of emigration and famine across many parts of the Highlands.

Looking at the Statistical accounts will give an overview of life in the Parish of Farr, Sutherland, where Rosal is located. Comparisons of each of the accounts will enable you to see how rural life changed for the people in Rosal between 1791 and 1845. Complete versions of the First and Second Statistical Accounts are available to view online at <http://edina.ac.uk/stat-acc-scot/>

### Examples of how to use these resources

- After reading both Statistical Accounts say how the people's livelihoods improved and deteriorated in the intervening time.
- What were the major changes which took place in the parish?
- What kind of hardships did people face?
- Look at the population section of the First statistical Account and describe what each of the trades does. Why would these jobs be important in a farming community?
- Were the writers sympathetic or biased in what they wrote? If so, why?

### Further ideas

- Use the Statistical Accounts of Scotland website to investigate the past in the parish where your school is located.
- Try to find a copy of the Third Statistical Account to see the records for daily life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Find other written sources which document life in your area in the past. Contact your local library, archive or museum for information
- Use an oral history archive to find out more about life in the countryside in the past. Sound recordings can be found at
  - <http://www.tiriodh.ed.ac.uk>
  - <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk>
  - <http://www.nefa.net>
  - <http://www.ambaile.org.uk>
  - <http://www.scran.ac.uk>
- Write an account of life in your neighbourhood today, using the same structure as the Statistical Accounts.

Here is a transcription of a summary of the Statistical Account. The complete version contains even more useful detail about life and society in Farr parish.

## Statistical Account of Scotland (1791-1799)

Parish of Far (County of Sutherland)

By Rev. Mr James Dingwall

See <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Sutherland/Farr/>

**Population** - The population of the parish now, compared to what it was 60 or 70 years ago is supposed to have considerably increased; although the return to Dr Webster, in 1755 was 2800, and the present population in 1790, is only 2600: of these, the males and females are about 1300 each.

Births, from November 1789 to November 1791	60
Marriages last year	18
Number of persons between 50 and 70, about	100
Number of persons between 70 and 80, about	16
Number of persons above 80	8
Died last year a person aged 102	
Families (above 6 ½ in each at an average)	386
Student	1
Mill wrights	4
House carpenters	4
Wrights	12
Weavers	34
Shoemakers	24
Tailors	20
Household servants (40 males and 60 females)	100
Labouring servants	37
Small possessors do the work of labouring servants themselves	

The population is not materially different from what it was 5, 10, or 20 years ago. Each marriage produces, at an average, from 4 to 5 children. In 1772, there were 77 persons who emigrated to North Carolina, and others have been going annually since to the south of Scotland. Some have left the parish for want of employment

**Cattle** – This parish is well adapted for rearing cattle. In good seasons, most of the farms could keep a greater number, but a bad season carries them off. There are generally from 1000 to 1500 black cattle on the meadow of Mudale in a season; and sometimes 2000, betwixt 20<sup>th</sup> June and 20<sup>th</sup> August, besides about 200 horses, 660 sheep, and 200 goats. The meadow is two English miles in length, and half a mile in breadth.

**Agriculture** – There 50 ploughs in the parish; but most of the farmers delve their land. The plough is drawn with 4 horses abreast. They generally sow in April and May, and reap in September and the beginning of October. Very little of the parish is cultivated, compared with what is lying waste and common. It is, therefore, by no means surprising, that it does not supply its inhabitants with provisions. In 1782, there were 1000 bolls imported. The situation of the people, in 1783, was deplorable. They killed the cattle they had, and eat their flesh without bread or salt. Many left the parish, and went to other places for employment

**Rent** – The land rent is about £1255. The fishing of Naver is £100 and upwards. The average rent of farms is about £5. The parish in general is not enclosed; but such as have tried enclosures are convinced of their advantages. There has been no change of property in land here for these many years.

**Character of the people** – The general size of the people, in this parish, is 5 feet 7 inches. They are rather indolent. No manufactures are carried on. They are fond of a military, but not a seafaring life. Some hundreds have enlisted in the army in the course of these last 20 years. Their mode of living is rather expensive for their circumstances. The introduction of manufactures would operate as a spur to industry and meliorate their condition. No person has been put in jail in the course of last year.

**Miscellaneous Observations** - ...The language spoken here is Gaelic. The names in places seem to be derived from it. Some, indeed, near the coast, are said to be of Danish extraction.

Here is a transcription of a summary of the New Statistical account. The complete version contains even more useful detail about life and society in Farr parish.

## **New Statistical Account of Scotland (1834-1845)**

Parish of Farr (Presbytery of Tongue, Synod of Sutherland and Caithness)

The Rev. David Mackenzie, Minister

See <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Sutherland/Farr/>

**Population** -The census of 1831, compared with the return in 1790, shows a decrease of 400 in the population. This was owing to the introduction of the sheep farming system. By its adoption, the farmers and tenants who occupied the straths and glens in the interior were, in 1818 and 1819, all removed from these possessions. Allotments of land were marked out on the sea-coast for such as were thus removed. In these the greater number of the removing tenants settled; but several families quitted the parish altogether, and thus diminished the population.

The number of families in the parish is	418
The number of families chiefly employed in agriculture	314
The number of families chiefly employed in trade, manufactures, or handicrafts	11
The average number of births for the last seven years	55
The average number of marriages for the last seven years	17
No register of deaths is kept	
Average number of persons under fifteen years, about	740
Average number of persons from fifteen to thirty	500

As there was no register of births and baptisms kept previous to the year 1800, it is impossible to classify the ages of persons above thirty years. It is certain, however, there are a number of healthy active people in the parish from fifty to sixty, many from sixty to eighty; and a few vigorous and stout from eighty to ninety. The average number of children in young families, 5.

**Agriculture and Rural Economy** – Except around 600 acres on the sea coast, which are kept in cultivation by the lotters, the whole of the land of this parish, formerly in tillage, is, with the adjacent mountains, hills and glens, laid out in extensive sheep walks. From the great extent of the parish, and the nature of its surface, it is impossible to give its measurement in acres with any degree of accuracy...

.... The lotters use the Highland delving spade in labouring their land. To this they are forced, partly by being unable to rear horses for the plough, and partly by the very uneven surface of their lots. The greater part of the land in their possession is susceptible of considerable improvement by trenching, draining, removing heaps of stones, enclosing their lots, and turning them with the plough.

**Rent of land** – The average rent of the land occupied by the lotters is 16 shillings per acre, including their privilege of hill-common and peat-moss. The rent paid by the sheep farmers is moderate.

**Language, Character etc of the People** – The Gaelic language is spoken in common conversation, and it is in that language that the people receive religious instruction with most advantage. Their language has been rather improved of late by means of Gaelic schools. The English, however, is gaining ground considerably, especially among the younger part of the population. The people are more cleanly in their habits than they were forty years ago. They dress neatly on public occasions, and in the cloths and cottons of south country manufacture, make a more showy appearance than their ancestors in the more homely but more substantial garbs wrought at home. Their ordinary food consists of the produce of their lots, viz. oats and barleymeal, milk, potatoes, and cabbages, - with fish, especially herring. Very

little butcher meat is used by the natives; but a considerable quantity of tea and sugar is consumed in the parish.

The people are social among themselves; kind and hospitable to strangers, according to their circumstances; acute and intelligent, according to their advantages; moral in their general habits; regular in attending on religious ordinances; and many among them decidedly pious. Smuggling is entirely abandoned by them, and poaching is almost unknown.

**Miscellaneous Observations** - When the former Account was written, a considerable number of tacksmen, natives of the parish, occupied extensive farms in different parts of it; and with them a dense population of subtenants resided in the interior straths and glens. Now, however, all the lands, both hill and dale, which they possessed, are held in lease by a few sheep-farmers, all non-resident gentlemen, -some of them living in Caithness, some on the south coast of this county, and some in England; and the straths, in which hundreds of families lived comfortably, are now tenanted by about twenty-four families of herds. In place of the scores of Highland cattle, horses, sheep and goats, which formerly were brought to market, or used for domestic purposes, now thousands of fleeces of Cheviot wool, wedders, and ewes, are annually exported. The people who had been removed from the interior in 1818 and 1819, when these great changes took place, are thickly settled along the sea-coast of the parish, -in some instances about thirty lotters occupying the land formerly in possession of twelve, and some of them placed on ground which had been formerly uncultivated.

List of Names as written on the Plan	Various modes of Spelling the same Names	Authority for those modes of Spelling	Situation		Descriptive Remarks, or other General Observations which may be considered of Interest
			Sheet	Trace	
J Coire Buidhe	Coire Buidhe "	Rev. Mr. Soass Mr. James McBeath	44 Sheet 35	3	A large hollow situated about a mile N.W. of "Drummao t-Saighdeir" the name signifies the "Yellow Coire" property of His Grace the Duke of Sutherland.
J All a' Choire Buidhe	All a' Choire Buidhe "	"	"	"	A small stream collecting on West side of "Coire Buidhe" and flowing East and North. the name signifies "Burn of the Yellow Coire" property as above.
J Creag Bhreac	Creag Bhreac "	"	"	2 & 3	A large hill situated South of and adjacent to "Tòrra Garbh" the name signifies the "Speckled Hill" property as above.
J Rosal	Rosal "	"	"	3	A number of Ruins of Dwelling houses situated on East side of "Strathnaver" about 1 1/2 miles North of "Dail Harraile" name signifies "Judgement" property of His Grace the Duke of Sutherland.

Extract from Ordnance Survey Name Book showing the entry for Rosal