services

preservation of historical documents

The Mitchell Library
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Searchroom Opening Hours
Mon / Wed / Thu / Fri 9am-5pm
Tue 9am-8pm
Sat By prior arrangement

Document Productions
Mon / Wed / Thu / Fri 9am-1pm, 2pm-4pm
Tue 9am-1pm, 2pm-7pm
Please check to confirm about Tuesday evening productions.

How to find us:

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Talks and workshops: We are happy to talk to groups, either in the Mitchell or elsewhere.

The Mitchell library has a large number of finding aids, including databases for the family historian, as well as paper catalogues and indexes of most of our holdings. You can access summaries of many of our catalogues online at www.scan.org.uk. The duty archivist is happy to help and will point you towards records which will assist with your enquiry. Those undertaking a research project may wish to make an appointment with an archivist to discuss possible sources. Some records may be closed for 30 to 100 years in line with Data Protection. We can supply photocopies of documents and plans as well as laser and other photographic services.

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Poor Law: Discover vital clues about your family's history and reveal details about their daily lives.
The City’s Archives most important source for the family historian are the records of the poor law authorities. These began in 1845, and ended with the introduction of social security in 1948. Many of the applicants for poor relief were born pre-civil registration and a number as early as the 18th century.

Records
To establish needs and eligibility, Inspectors of Poor recorded large amounts of personal data in prescribed registers of applications or general registers. There have been some notable losses in these records throughout Scotland. However, they largely survive for the Glasgow area, with more than 1 million applications still in existence up to 1948. We also have large numbers for other areas in the west of Scotland.

Who do you think they are?
Difficult personal circumstance may mean that any of our ancestors may be among applicants for poor relief. Prevalent are the aged, sick and disabled. They include many of the unskilled workforce, unable to work because of illness, and their dependents. Also common are: married women with children, widowed or claiming desertion, or women with an illegitimate child; foundlings or separated children; and many Irish and other migrants.

The wide-range of biographical information about so many of the poorer members of society whose lives are rarely recorded elsewhere in such detail, makes these records one of the most important sources for family history in Scotland. The large number of Irish applicants, with details of their place of birth in Ireland, means they are also vital for those with Irish ancestors.

the poor law applications and general registers include:

- name, including maiden name of women
- age, sometimes with actual birth date
- birthplace, including county of birth (made compulsory in 1865)
- religion (from 1865)
- dependents, including children’s names, ages, place of birth
- marital history
- names of applicant’s parents and parents-in-law, confirming where born and if still alive
- previous addresses.

The Glasgow applications sometimes add more detail: living conditions; character comments (usually unflattering); press-cuttings; certificates, letters, and an occasional photograph.