

## INDEXING THE HADDINGTON COURIER

By Caroline G. Lawrie

Several years ago, when I was doing some family history research, I found information in the obituary notices of my great-great-grandfather and my great-grandfather in *Couriers* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I found it because I knew their dates of death; but there was obviously a lot of information about all sorts of people which would not be found, because those interested did not know that it was there, or where to look for it.

After coming back to live in the area, I suggested to the staff of the Local History section of the Library that I could compile an index to the early issues of the *Courier*. The management of the *Courier* kindly agreed that I could use their bound volumes, and beginning with the first issue, which came out on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1859, I have now, in a little more than two years, worked my way to May 1875. I am hopeful of reaching 1900 in the course of the next four years.

The next stage in the process is to transfer my handwritten notes to the computer in the Library, which is able to rearrange them in alphabetical order. Considerable cross-referencing, to make information easier to find, both in the printed version and through the computer, is also carried out (not by me). We have just completed the printed version, from the first issue to the end of 1870, so this is now available for consultation. The intention is to produce volumes for each succeeding ten years, as soon as we are able.

The *Courier* in its early issues consisted of a single sheet of paper folded once, giving four pages, each with seven columns in small print. By the end of 1861 the pages had been considerably enlarged, and there were eight columns of print. There were, of course, no photographs at this period, but a few advertisements included small engravings. The early *Couriers*, therefore, although they had far fewer pages than their modern successors, contained a very large amount of information.

The *Courier* in its early days aimed to supply all the needs of its readers, to the extent that they would not require to read any other paper. It included not only local news, but reports of national and international affairs, and extracts from debates in the Houses of Parliament. There was, for example, detailed coverage of the American Civil War, and of numerous other conflicts around the world. Disasters, wrecks, railway accidents (which were frequent), strikes, mining accidents; speeches; and lurid murders and breach of promise cases were reported from other parts of the country. These have not, however, been included in the Index unless someone from East Lothian was actually involved. Reviews of books and art exhibitions have also been omitted except where local people are concerned.

Advertisers also were drawn from many parts of Britain. Early issues contained detailed advertisements for insurance companies; shipping companies offering passage to America, Australia and New Zealand; Glasgow shipyards advertised for apprentices and northern English counties for police recruits. Nearer home the Edinburgh Mourning

Warehouse and Jenners of Princes Street were regular advertisers. Patent medicine producers set out their miraculous cures.

At the beginning the Editor complained that people did not tell him about things, and appears to have filled out the Births, Marriages and Deaths with famous people when local notices were few. One which appeared in 31<sup>st</sup> August 1860 read; 'DEATH – At Tweedmouth on the 16<sup>th</sup> instant, aged 90, Jane, widow of Thomas Lewins, fisherman, late of East Ord and formerly Gainslaw. Deceased had been mother of 10 children, grandmother to 91, and great grandmother to 102 – in all 203: the eldest of her great grandchildren is 27 years of age.'

Local announcements were inserted free, so it is not surprising that they soon increased in number, or that the column was not restricted to the upper and middle classes. In later years many announcements were sent home from the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India, and some were noted from less likely places such as Russia and China.

The format of the *Courier* soon settled down to a front page given over entirely to advertisements, which sometimes spilled over onto the first column or so of the second page. These included 'lost & found', where the losers' advertisements often sounded as if theft was suspected; employees, and occasionally employment wanted; goods for sale; houses and shops to rent or buy; farms offered on 19-year leases. Shops advertised their wares in great detail, and the prices make interesting reading! Public notices announced meetings of statutory bodies, concerts and other performances; lists of donors to good causes; particulars of agricultural and horticultural shows. Auctioneers advertised sales of furniture and the stocking of farms, and regular sales at their own premises.

The Editorial and the Births, Marriages and Deaths were regular features of the second page. A *Letter from Edinburgh* was replaced by a *London Letter*. The activities of Presbyteries, Volunteers, Yeomanry and sporting, agricultural and other societies were reported at length. Legal cases sometimes involved large numbers of witnesses, and shows produced long lists of prize-winners.

The rest of the inner pages was occupied by shorter items arranged by the nearest town or village, and Readers' Letters. The inhabitants of Dunbar seem to have been a particularly cantankerous lot, the Councillors in the Town House abusing one another no less enthusiastically than the fishermen and labourers fought in the less salubrious parts of the town. Council meetings were fully reported and make interesting reading on various levels. The final page of the *Courier* was sometimes graced with some verses, often of local origin; here, too, were reports from Parliament and foreign news.,

Entries in the Index give the date of the issue, and the page and column at which the entry is to be found. What has been indexed? Names of people and places, and topics. Regular items are entered for the first year or two only, and should be easy enough to locate in subsequent years.

What can you hope to find in the *Courier* using the Index? If you are interested in Family History, then obviously 'Births, Marriages and Deaths' and through them often addresses, men's occupations, names of the fathers of women and children. If there has been accident, sudden death or suicide, you can expect some comment in the area sections. You may also find obituaries, accounts of wedding celebrations or funerals, involvement in legal

cases, perhaps a conviction for poaching, dangerous driving or illegal parking! One of your ancestors may have been a J.P., gained prizes at university, made speeches, been a crack shot in the Volunteers, played in the local curling team or on the golf course, or served in the lifeboat crew. He may have rented a farm, opened a business, or gone bankrupt. If you are interested in the history of a place, you may find accounts of sales or leases, fires or new buildings. In the case of some farms there are details of rebuilding or improvement of the houses, steadings and cottages. Dispersing sales give indications of how the farm was carried on, and furniture sales present a picture of how particular houses were equipped.

If you are interested in agriculture, you will find much about new developments, such as the steam plough, and new crops (there is even a mention of oil seed rape). The relations between landlords and tenants, the problems arising from the preservation of game, the depredations of pigeons, are all discussed at length.

In the life of towns at that period there was great concern to improve water supplies and drainage, to maintain cleanliness in the streets and closes, and to combat epidemics. How necessary these concerns were is illustrated by the large number of children's deaths from scarlet fever, for example. The foundation and running of poorhouses, lunatic asylums and prisons takes up considerable space, and there are pleasant accounts of picnics, balls and other entertainments organised for the inmates of Haddington asylum.

Young men's mutual improvement societies existed almost everywhere; there were Freemasons, Odd Fellows, Ancient Order of Gardeners and Foresters, Good Templars (who promoted total abstinence), Leek Clubs, Cow Clubs and Hearse Societies, while the ladies organised bazaars to fund good causes.

Compared to present times there were large numbers of both churches and schools. Not all gave satisfaction. There were complaints about ministers who kept sheep in their churchyards, and more protracted complaints about the Rev. Headmaster of Haddington Burgh School, who was so eccentric that he ended up with no pupils at all, but it took the Court of Session to remove him from the school and integral schoolhouse in Church Street and from his emoluments. School Boards were introduced in the early 1870s, and included a few lady members.

Early closing in the 1860s meant shutting up shop at 7.00 p.m. instead of 10 o'clock, but by 1875 a half day holiday was established in Dunbar and being considered in Haddington also.

One major difficulty in indexing is the variation in spelling of surnames. In the case of place names, we have tried to standardise the spelling, but in the case of individuals there is usually no way of knowing which is the 'correct' version, or sometimes, whether one is dealing with a single individual, or two or more. When you consult the Index, be sure to look widely. But remember also that there were often several individuals with exactly the same name.

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