

REVIEW: FINDING SCOTLAND

Graeme Morton

Bibliography of Scotland - CD ROM, National Library of Scotland (1997),
LIBPAC Computer Services Ltd, ISSN 13651781.

Annual Subscription: £95.00 (incl. VAT); Licences: 1-5 users, £40.00; 6-10
users, £60.00; 11+ users, £80.00;

Hardware Requirements: IBM Compatible PC; 4 or 8Mb internal memory; 5Mb
free hard disk, CD-ROM with MS-DOS extensions, Windows 3.1 or Windows
95.

This really must be one of the most user-friendly bibliographical products on the market. It is a joy to use. It's a pity its hardware needs are IBM compatible only which results in the exclusion of the significant minority of Macintosh users who particularly inhabit the education sector. This reviewer is indeed part of that peripheral minority fighting against that larger PC core (how typically Scottish this seems), but with a DOS chip, Windows 3.1, and a little black magic, I was able to successfully install this software on a Power Macintosh 6100/60.

The CD-ROM is produced by the National Library of Scotland and it claims to cover the full range of Scottish life and culture home and abroad. The database contains over 40,000 records (dating from 1988), but obviously each subsequent edition of the CD will carry even more information. Searches can be carried out in all the usual ways: author, title, keyword, subject, publisher, year or place of publication, even by geographical area (e.g. Edinburgh, Burntisland or Orkney). Boolean searches are also possible (i.e. two or more words at the same time). The subscription is annual with an updated CD issued each year.

I suspect the greatest strength of this resource is that it brings together sources on Scotland from some rather wide and varied publications. It is particularly good for journal information, including articles and review essays within, and it will treat second and subsequent authors equally with first-name authors in

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collaborative work. It claims to be the only source to index a number of important Scottish periodicals. This is probably its most significant claim to comprehensiveness in its period of coverage. Once the database is active, searching is straightforward, the title bar is self-explanatory, but a balloon-help system is a useful reminder of the options available. I particularly liked the ease with which records could be called up and, importantly in a PC environment, closed again. With this sort of database it does not take long for one's desktop to get impossibly cluttered. The designers of the software have done much to negate this problem.

The software is easy to use when it is installed, being impressively quick and efficient in its searches. Here it has the speed advantage over the many on-line bibliographical resource tools which are available. But because it is a CD ROM, it costs money, and it takes a year before it is updated. It is at this point that one must question whether this resource, no matter how user-friendly and beneficial it is as an addition to the research process, is worth the cost. It is not expensive, relatively speaking, for this amount of information. It has unique strengths in the ways I have already outlined, but I suspect many will think twice before making an investment in this product when a number of on-line resources exist for no extra cost. Its claim is that no other reference work brings together such a range of material on Scotland in a single information source, which is probably true. Yet once we have discovered that definitive, but long neglected source we have always needed, we will probably then turn to the National Library's own on-line catalogue, or to our own local library, to get its shelf reference. This is clearly a worthwhile resource which should, hopefully, encourage the study of Scotland far and wide, but it remains one to be used in conjunction with what is already available.

April 1998