

## Editorial

Here's the Autumn issue of our Bulletin. It is mostly taken up with an article on adoption papers, in particular Court Process and contains an account of accessing these at the Adoption Unit here in Edinburgh. We hope you find it interesting and informative. Seasons Greetings to all our readers.



**Adults Affected  
by Adoption**

### Adoption in the News

#### National Adoption Week

Praise for PAC-UK, an English agency that provides support to everyone in adoption. In a contribution to National Adoption Week that tends to predominantly focus on adoption of children, the PAC-UK held a 'Voices of birth parents: Loss, hope and change' event in which 250 people attended. During the event 'The forgotten



voices of birth families' short film was premiered. Read more and watch the film at: <https://www.pac-uk.org/pac-uk-national-adoption-week-2021/>

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### **New inquiry: The right to family life: adoption of children of unmarried women 1949-1976**

The inquiry will examine whether adoption processes respected the human rights, as we understand them now, of the mothers and children who experienced them, as well as the lasting consequences on their lives. The inquiry will cover a range of practices that led to the children of unmarried mothers being adopted. The scope of the inquiry will specifically cover issues arising from cases which took place during the time period between the Adoption of Children Act 1949 and the Adoption Act 1976. Launching the inquiry, Committee Chair Harriet Harman QC MP said:

"Everyone has the right to family life. The Joint Committee on Human Rights will look at whether the right to family life of young unmarried mothers and their children was re-

spected in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. We have



launched this inquiry to understand the realities of what the adoption process was like at that time and hear the

experiences of those who went through it. The adoptions took place decades ago, but the pain and suffering remains today.”

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/93/human-rights-joint-committee/news/157722/new-inquiry-the-right-to-family-life-adoption-of-children-of-unmarried-women-19491976/>

An article on the website ‘Who Do You Think You Are?’ titled ‘**How to find adoption records in the UK**’ was published in October. With headings such as ‘Can I use a DNA test to research adoptions?’ and ‘Should I use an intermediary to contact my birth family?’ the article by Gill Rossini, is a short but pretty



comprehensive piece with a number of useful links

to websites such as the General Register Office’s Adoption Contact Register (England and Wales) and a welcome mention of and link to Birthlink. Read more at: <https://www.whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com/tutorials/adoption/>

### **On accessing Court Papers relating to Adoption**

‘There ought to be a blank and impenetrable wall between the identities of natural and adopting parents.’ (1957 book of advice to

adoptive parents)

I have been doing some work for a man who was adopted in 1963 and as part of piecing together his history, I told him about all the various papers that might exist relating to his identity. There are three processes, which taken together have the effect of the ‘blank wall’ that adopted people who start to search for birth information, talk about facing.

**First**, when a child leaves their birth family for an adoptive family, their name is changed officially, their original birth certificate (Original Birth Entry - OBE) is annotated “adopted” and an Adoption Certificate is issued as a replacement. This certificate carries the date of the adoption order and the details of the court that approved this together with the child’s new name and date of birth. Requirements such as this and the Scottish practice of maintaining a private Register of Adoptions create an air of taboo around a basic building block of identity, one’s birth certificate.

**Second**, if an adoption agency (say a Local Council or one of the Scottish charities such as Barnardos, or ourselves here Birthlink – but when active as an adoption agency, known as The Guild of Service or Family Care) was involved, the files are locked away. Adoption files will usually contain records of interviews with the birth mother. These can range from one page to several typed sheets detailing a sequence of office interviews at which the painful decision to relinquish is arrived at. Compounding the sense of secre-

cy, or at least inaccessibility, is the fact that many of the pre-1970s agencies have either closed or been re-named.

**Third**, the **legal** records relating to the adoption are sealed. These records are entitled Court Process and only the adopted adult may see these, or their appointee (In England and Wales spouses and descendants may now gain access to the legal record of a person's adoption – e.g. in the case where the latter has not done so but descendants may need to do so for medical reasons).

Court Process records are probably the least known of adoption records, yet they contain the legal papers relating to the adoption and the signature of the person who relinquishes the child for adoption, and in the earlier adoptions, this is often only the birth mother. We at Birthlink can act as appointees and liaise with the Adoption Unit at the National Records of Scotland here in Edin-



burgh.

The man I was working for had always known he was adopted and had often used the abbreviated version of his adoption certificate as proof of identity – the full adoption certificate is cumbersome and clearly states all the details of adoption, unlike the shorter version which makes no reference to this.

He was unaware of the two other sets of records – the local authority/adoption agency documents and court process. We began with accessing his court process. Records of

adoptions in sheriff courts are generally kept in the local courthouse for up to 25 years after the process closed. So the court process for someone born in 1963 would be held centrally in the Adoption Unit in Edinburgh. Because Robert lives in England he appointed me to act as his representative and after a time on the (Covid-related) waiting list, I was called in to see his papers.

It's a humbling experience to have such an important, nearly sixty year-old, set of papers opened up in front of you. I was only a representative and yet I was very moved by the value and emotional weight contained in such papers. The staff in the Unit are hugely kind and caring and professional. The surroundings are pleasant and plenty time is allotted to scrutiny. You can imagine how much of this care is necessary (the Adoption Unit is also where people might see their original birth certificate for the first time). Robert's papers were in a large manilla envelope and these did contain his mother's permission and signature to his adoption. Also in the Court Process envelope, there are reports and assessment relating to prospective adoptive parents. A local solicitor was appointed to visit Robert's adoptive parents and home to establish their suitability. In these papers there is invariably mention of the adoption agency handling matters (but sometimes in the early days of adoption this might have been a church person or local G.P.). I discovered mention of the adoption agency – the local council and this is now our next port of call. GC

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The following is a poem written by Margaret Yates, a Birth Mother from South London reunited with her adopted son, David, after 47 years.

**Adoption is a lifelong experience**

Our Child, Our Child whom we held within us, close to our heart, for 9 months.  
Our Child who was rocked to sleep by the rhythm of our heartbeat.

No court order or legislation can take away the fact that we gave birth to Our Child.

No one, nothing can take that away from us. We know this in our hearts.

Our Child who connected to our energy as we connected to Our Child's energy.

We are bound together.

Whether Our Child dies or is adopted, that energy, that golden cord, that bond, will always be there.

Forever.

Our Child slips into our thoughts always on Our Child's birthday, at Christmas, and sometimes Our Child will just slip in and catch us unaware.

For a brief moment time stands still, and we acknowledge Our Child's presence within us, around us, we feel their energy, that bond.

We visualise for a moment how they might look, where they might be,  
we trust that all is well with their world.....  
and then we let them go with love.

Adoption is a life-long experience.

More on: <https://adoptlondon.org.uk/news/poem-by-birth-mother-margaret-yates/>

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**Thrift Shop Gets A Plug**

“There certainly seems to be a new energy in the charity shop scene. At the same time, the sector seems to be moving towards greater uniformity. Some may feel that in doing so some of the chaotic charm of charity shop shopping has been lost. One outlier remains Thrift Shop 2 in Lochrin Buildings, Tollcross. Run by the small Birthlink charity (which seeks to enhance the well-being and promote the welfare of all people affected by adoption), Thrift Shop 2 strikes a nice balance between the charity shops of the past and those of today. Like the charity shops of yesteryear, it is groaning with stuff...” read more of this fabulous puff at: <https://www.scottishreview.net/CharlieEllis586a.html>

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