

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society



Chorley Branch Education Group

Talk Handout

Next Steps

Next Steps – Interpreting Photographs

Interpreting Photographs

This talk is not just about dating old photographs
It is part of the talk but only a small part.
So I will get this out of the way first of all.

Dating of old Photographs

This is well covered on the Internet now. Several sites offer a service to date a photograph to within +/- 5 years for as little as £4 per photograph.

They will use a variety of techniques

Photographic process

Photographer's name and address/s

Card mount – shape and size

Card design – including graphic artwork, typography, font size and colour

Card manufacturer and printer

Studio props

Clothes and fashion accessories

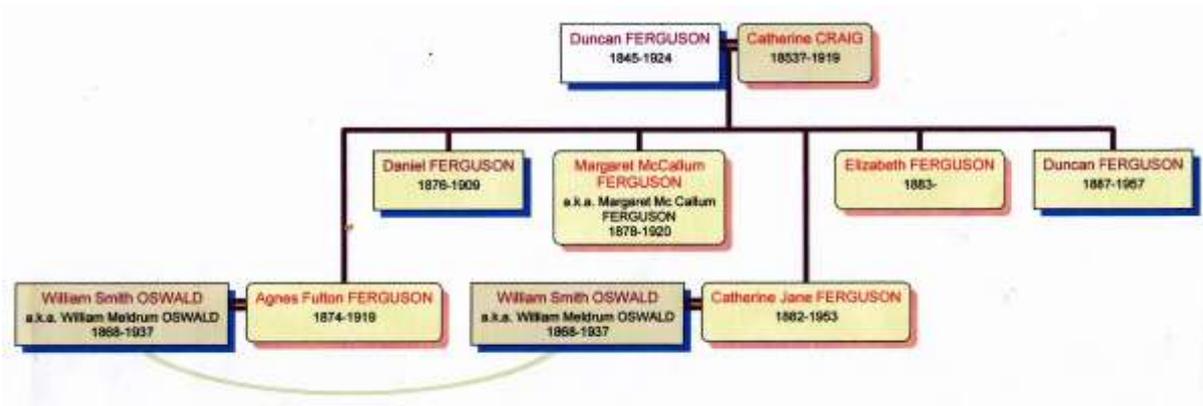
Hairstyles

Medals awarded

etc. etc. etc.

But I will be looking at the photographs themselves and attempting to identify the people in the photo and this will be done by way of example

I will do this by asking a series of questions



Photographs of with already Identified people on them
Photo – Duncan Ferguson and Catherine Craig



As an example let's try and work things out.

- 1 *When was the photograph taken?*
Use photo of Duncan Ferguson and Catherine Craig
Make an estimate
- 2 *How old are the people in the photograph?*
Make an estimate
- 3 *Why was the photograph taken?*
Take a guess
Showing ring
- 4 *Who took the photograph?*
William Wallace
Search internet
This photographer operated at this address between 1911-1914+
- 5 *Compare with the people in your tree.*
In this case I had been told that this was a photograph of Duncan Ferguson and Catherine Craig
Duncan born 25th Nov 1845
Catherine born c1853
Married 12 June 1874

Conclusion

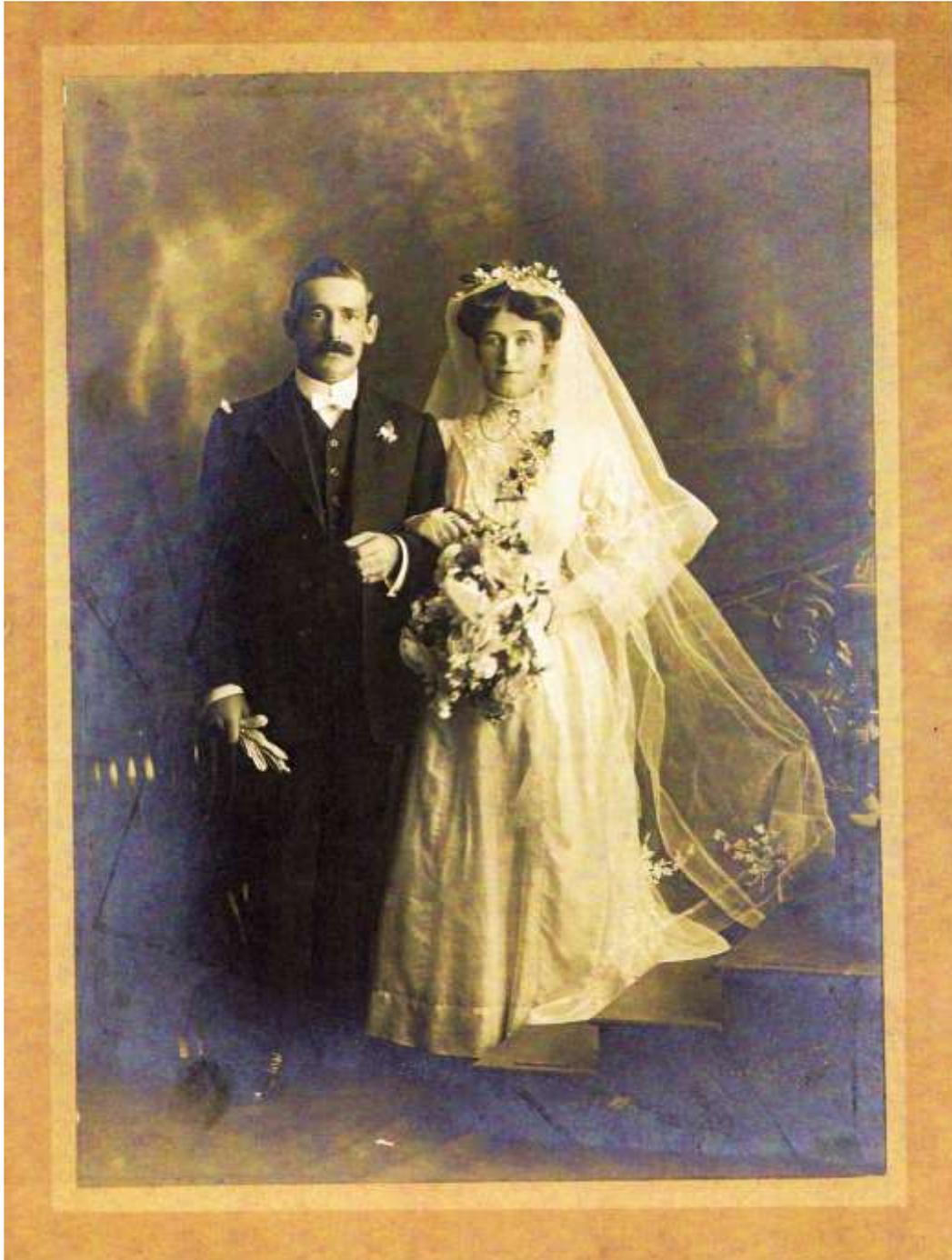
Photograph taken about 12 June 1914
Duncan was 68-69 years old
Catherine was approx. 61 years old
The event was their 40th wedding anniversary
The photograph was taken by a professional photographer Wm Wallace

What else can we see / deduce?

- 6 *Where was photograph taken?*
Photographer's studio 1041 Argyle Street, Finnieston, Glasgow
About 4 miles from where they lived but on the same tram line.
- 7 *Who was the photograph taken for?*

The other known Photos

Photo - Marriage of William Charles Walton and Margaret McCallum Ferguson



We are not examining this photograph in detail but we should be estimating ages, and checking against known facts. Her details are;

Born 25 Feb 1878

First Child, Jeanie Margaret Ferguson Born 25 Jan 1898

Second Child, Jessie Ferguson Born 18 Dec 1902

Emigrated 1909

Married 19 Apr 1913

Three further children

Died 13 Aug 1920

Photograph was probably taken 19 Apr 1913. She would be 35 and he would be 23

Photo - Catherine Jane Ferguson with William Meldrum Oswald & James Smith Oswald & William Duncan Oswald



Catherine Jane Ferguson

Born 1882

Married 18 Feb 1921

Died 1963

William Meldrum Oswald

Born 1868

Died 1937

Marr 1st time before 1910 to Florence Wilson

One child – Name unknown

Marr 2nd time in 1910 to Agnes Fulton Ferguson

Three children Catherine Craig Oswald, James Smith Oswald and

William Duncan Oswald

Marr 3rd time in 18 Feb 1921 to Catherine Jane Ferguson

One Child Duncan Oswald – Born 15 Sep 1921

James Smith Oswald

Born 1912

Died 1990

William Duncan Oswald

Born 1916

Died 1941

It is not known which boy is which?

Estimate ages.

Who took the photo?

Why was photo taken? What about the clothes, can you date them?

Is she showing a ring?

Is this before they married in Feb 1921 or after?

Is she pregnant?

If it was after they married where is the baby?

Both boys are in uniform.

The boy on the left has a badge

What time of year?

Second Chart showing the children of William Smith Oswald

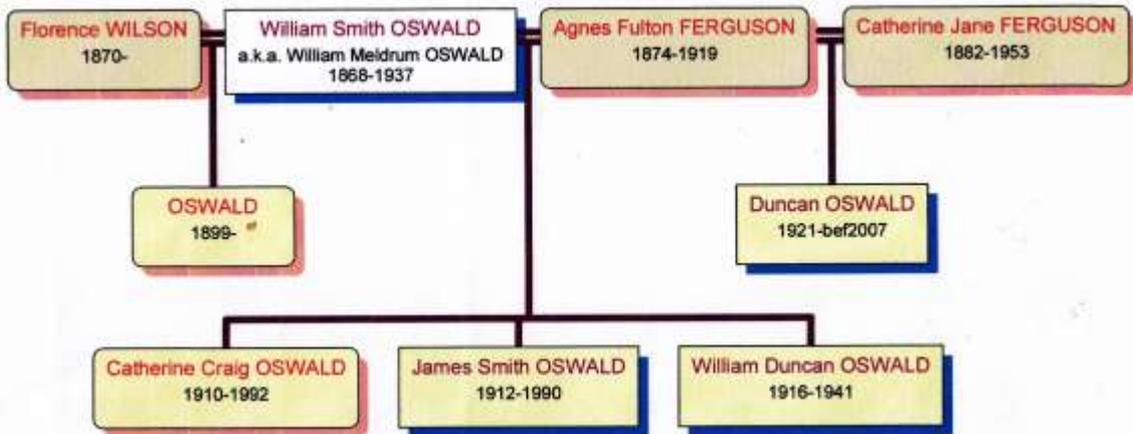


Photo - Catherine Craig Oswald with Cousins Jeanie Catherine Thornton, Elsie Ferguson and Dorothy Margaret Thornton



Again we are not looking at this photo in detail but we might guess their ages; estimate when the photo was taken, where was it taken etc.

Catherine Craig Oswald

Born 1910

Jeanie Catherine Thornton

Born 1922

Elsie Ferguson

Born 1928

Dorothy Margaret Thornton

Born 1929

Estimate Dorothy aged 6 - Photo taken 1935

Therefore

Catherine aged 25

Jeanie aged 13

Elsie aged 7

Dorothy aged 6

Photo - Flight Sgnt William Duncan Oswald



Born 1916

Died 1941 in WW2

Never Married

How old was he in the photo?

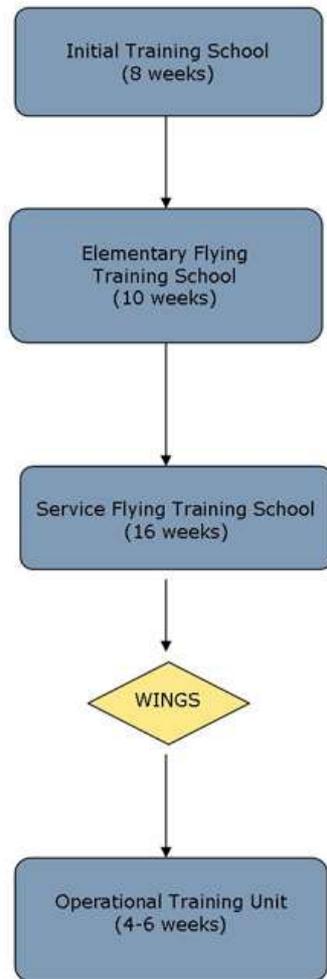
Why was it taken?

Who took it?

What rank?

How quickly did you rise to the rank of Flight Sergeant (Pilot)?

The time taken to qualify as a pilot could vary. At the start of the war it could be as little as six months (150 flying hours). On average it took between 18 months to two years (200-320 flying hours).



When was the photo taken?
He was 25 when he died

Finally the last photo showing a person we can certainly identify.

Photo - Jeanie Margaret Ferguson



Born 1898
Married 1919
Died 1964

When was the photo taken and how old is she?

Why was it taken?

Who was she sending it to?

Who took it?

Hand out unknown Photographs with data

Look at trap photo





Who do I definitely know in the photograph?

Who else do you think is in the photograph?

Can you match any of these to people in the tree?

This is the problem most people will have.

Make a guess of the age of everyone in the photograph

Make a guess as to when the photograph was taken

What time of year was the photograph taken?

What was the event?

Who might have taken the photo?

Where was the photo taken?

The family had a holiday cottage

Fill in what you can but only the things you know are accurate.

Compare with the family tree.

Look at the first garden photo



Who do I definitely know in the photograph?

Who else do you think is in the photograph?

Can you match any of these to people in the tree?

Make a guess of the age of everyone in the photograph

Particularly the boys

Make a guess as to when the photograph was taken

In 1914 grandma was 61. She looks older here

What time of year was the photograph taken?

What plants are out?

What was the event?

Holiday? What were the holiday periods?

Who might have taken the photo?

Where was the photo taken?

I was told the Ferguson had a holiday cottage

Fill in what you can but only the things you know are accurate.

Although you might not know who everyone is, compare them with the family tree and see who the possible ones are

Compare with know people.

Using the known facts can you get a better idea of a date?

Look at the second garden photo



*Who do I definitely know in the photograph?
Who else do you think is in the photograph?
Can you match any of these to people in the tree?*

*Make a guess of the age of everyone in the photograph
Particularly the boys
Are they older or younger than in the last photo?
Are they older or younger in the trap photo?
In all three photos which is James and which is William
Compare with the flight Sergeant*

*Make a guess as to when the photograph was taken.
Can you get the date within a year or two?
What time of year was the photograph taken?
What plants are out?
Are both garden photos taken in the same year?*

*What was the event?
Holiday?*

*Who might have taken the photo?
Who is missing?*

*Where was the photo taken?
I was told the Ferguson had a holiday cottage
Are the two garden photographs taken in the same place?
If not what are the differences?*

Fill in what you can but only the things you know are accurate.
Although you might not know who everyone is, compare with the family tree and see who the possible ones are
Compare with know people.
Using the known facts can you get a better idea of a date?
Can you guess who the two middle aged women are?
*Who is the additional child?
Who is the woman in the white hat?*

Look at the third garden photo



*Is this the same Garden as the second?
Was it taken at the same time as the second?
Is the bench the same?*

Look at the photo of Duncan repairing the chair.



What can you deduce from that?

Go and look at your old photos.

Start with the ages of the people

Work out where the photo was taken

Why was it taken?

When was the photo taken taken?

Who took it?

Who is in the photo?

Then compare with what research has been done and the facts known.

Children are always a good helping in dating the photos.

Look closely at your set of photos and find the story within.

Good luck.

Get searching.

Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society

Chorley Research Centre at Astley Hall Farmhouse

Opening times

Saturday Noon—4:00pm

Monday & Friday 10:00am—4:00pm

Last appointment 3:00pm

Booking advisable—Tel. 01257 231 600 (Answer phone when centre is closed)

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LFHHS

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