

SOURCES of History

Primary sources

A primary source is anything that is not a book; something that is written, drawn, photographed, at the approximate time - for example, photographs, cartoons, diaries, estate papers, drawings, etc. Some of these can be very biased.

Secondary sources

This is a book written after the event, usually when full information is known. The author has not been present at the actual event. The author has the benefit of knowing all the facts; the author can use the work of other writers on the event; the author can provide a balanced opinion. You will know this is a secondary source because its date (at the top of the source(s)) is well after the event that is being described.

Different kinds of Primary Sources and their value to us

Photographs	Usually reliable, because a photograph is usually difficult to forge - pictures are a snapshot in time of the event, person etc. Valuable because a photograph provides us with a reliable, valuable etc. image in time.
Drawings	These can be reliable, though probably they are normally biased because the artist wants to show a particular slant on something. You will have to judge the evidence in the drawings by looking at the picture/drawing and using your knowledge of the event to see if the author has a particular slant on things. Drawings can be propaganda tools. These are valuable because they provide us with opinions biased or otherwise.
Diaries	These can be quite biased. Written by an individual keeping a record of events as these events happen, because the event is explained by the way that person sees the event. If it is a bad event for the person, it will be biased: similarly, it will be biased if the event is good. Diaries are valuable because they provide an actual account of someone's work, actions, whether biased or not.
Estate papers	Probably fairly biased, as they will be a record of the day-to-day life on a large estate. Normally, these will appear in your Scottish/British history work. Valuable because they provide good details of the day-to-day running of a big estate.
The Old Statistical Account (OSA)	In the 1790s, Sir John Sinclair (a landowner in Caithness) persuaded the Church ministers in every parish in Scotland to write a detailed, accurate account of every parish in the country. The information included the size of the parish, the number of people in it, their jobs and all aspects of their life and work. All this information appeared in a series of books called the Old Statistical Account.
The New Statistical Account (NSA)	This was written in the 1840s. This was the update of the Old Statistical Account.
The Third Statistical Account	Written in the 1880s. This was an update of the New Statistical Account but was a much smaller revision of previous accounts. All these accounts are very valuable because they provide us with excellent social history details of 18th and 19th century Scotland.
The Census	The Census is a note of all the people in the country on a certain night every 10th year The information collected includes the names, the ages, occupations, relationships of everyone in the country. The first Scottish Census took place in 1851; the first English one in 1801.
Cartoons	These are drawings of political events. They are usually very sarcastic and quite specific They are usually done as a social commentary and are very critical of

	<p>events and people These are valuable because they give an account of how things are viewed in the country. Usually, politically, Cartoons and posters are designed to get public opinion for or against something. These are a distinct propaganda tool They usually attack one thing at a time</p>
Royal Commission	<p>This is a Government Report; it is usually quite unbiased, as such a report is asked for by the government wanting information on conditions somewhere - like factories, mines, housing, parliamentary conditions etc. The report is normally done by a fairly independent panel. They can accidentally be slanted if the government is trying to "hide" anything. Valuable because it is normally quite objective; it gives us a fairly balanced amount of information about whatever is being reported on.</p>
Maps	<p>These will show you countries; probably they will show you two sides before a fight and you will be asked to describe something. Completely reliable as they are factually correct. They clearly show you whatever the creator of the map is trying to demonstrate.</p>
Letters	<p>Letters and/or notes from a named individual are usually reliable because they will usually be from well known figures; his/her position will also be noted for you; you should know who the person is. Valuable because it describes that person's viewpoint, attitudes, actions etc</p>
Official reports	<p>These can be from any official organisation, like the Police or government. These are normally reliable as they are official documents, and valuable because they give us the official stance. It can be quite biased or relatively unbiased. It depends on who is writing it, when, where.</p>
Graphs, diagrams, tables	<p>These are usually completely factual, as they are based on a set of figures that are supposed to be accurate. Usually, they are not fixed to prove or disprove anything. Only the person talking about them can adjust them, fiddle them; valuable because they provide a factual account of something.</p>
Songs	<p>These are usually written to praise something; would be quite biased. These can be very valuable tools for us because of the bias shown in the songs.</p>