

THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND RESEARCH GROUP

Newsletter

FRA BIRT TO GRAIF



NA REST WE HAIF - 1571

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(Currently published twice a year)

Buried Tombstone Total (Keith Mitchell – Chairman)

While preparing a Leaflet handout for the October Meeting of SAFHS to offer training advice about recording Buried Tombstones to other potentially interested groups, I totted up the total number that members of our own Group have found so far here in Moray. The answer was indeed quite surprising I thought. Since publishing vol. 1 of our *Forgotten Tombstones of Moray* series in 2003 (Dipple, Essil and Kirkhill Churchyards), we have to date successfully recorded in excess of 600 buried or publicly inaccessible stones. Of course many of these have turned out to be quite useless from the Family History point of view, being blank or extremely worn. (*D**n, that's another blank one, the MBGRG excavator was heard to say!*). On the plus side, however, many of these exciting discoveries have led to the details of over 900 people being added to our published archive as well as our well-used website indices. Indeed, our prized 1571 discovery at Alves Churchyard is now incorporated into our official logo. Believe it or not, all this information comes from only 13 sites, so it must be assumed there are many more *goodies* just waiting to be discovered.

Fundraising Appeal (Ruth McIntosh – Group Fundraiser)

On behalf of the Group I would like to appeal to all readers of this newsletter to give serious thought to the present fund-raising effort which has been ongoing for the last six months, to secure monies to publish the information we hold on Elgin Cathedral.

As many of you will know there are in excess of 1200 memorials dating from as far back as 1470.

We would like the publication to reflect the importance of this historic site. To do this we need to collect in the region of £6,000.

Members have been actively fund-raising since early this year and to date have secured donations from the Elgin Rotary Club, Dewar's and The Macallan distilleries, the Gordon and Ena Baxter Foundation, as well as several contributions from members. The total so far raised is now in excess of £1,300.

I am appealing to you all to consider whether you are in a position to make a donation no matter how small, as every penny is a step nearer our target. All donations will be acknowledged in the publication.

Donations may be given to any of the office bearers, or to

MBGRG Treasurer, Irene Black
15, Reiket Lane, Elgin
IV30 6HT

MBGRG Fund-raiser, Ruth McIntosh
17, Thornhill Road, Elgin
IV30 6DY

Funding in Progress

Postage Stamps & Other Collectables

It is now quite a while since we held one of our entertaining "Stamp Nights" which proved to be great fun. Members have still been collecting stamps for us, but the overall amount collected still needs to be added to considerably before we can hold another sorting evening. If you have any stamps lurking about in any dusty or forgotten corner, why not think about donating them to the Group. They will certainly find a good home! Other collectables, such as old postcards, coins, old books, etc. will make a useful addition to our fund-raising, and anything of this type can be handed in to any member of the Committee for processing.

Ink Jet Cartridges

Although the money we get from re-cycling these items is quite small, a few shoe boxes full can raise a reasonable sum of money. Depending on condition, the price we get per cartridge ranges from about 10p to about £1.50, so please keep them coming. However, please contact Helen first before delivering them, as well as ensuring that the items you give us are undamaged as broken ones are either worth nothing or only a few pence each.

Car Boot Sales

Over the last year Janet Campbell and family have held several "Booties" on behalf of the Group, although the weather has not been particularly kind to these volunteers during some of these events. Since September 2007 sales at these events have raised about £130. Additional volunteers have recently come forward, so it may be possible to hold more of these events in the future. If you have any unwanted household goods which you think might help the cause, please contact Keith or Helen in the first instance as storage can present a problem.

Key Rings and Fridge Magnets

New member Derek Page has hit on the idea of making Key Rings and Fridge Magnets which include the MBGRG logo. Prices still have to worked out, but if you are interested in this idea, we may be able to put images of them on-line, or you can see samples at any Group meeting.

Paperweights

Helen Mitchell has a limited selection of clear, blank paperweights which can be customised for personal use. These are unused blanks into which any kind of image can be inserted. Helen is selling these off at the cost price of £1.50 each, with 50p being donated towards Group funds.

And That's The Truth (So Says The Internet) via Sue Rennison in Vancouver - modified by Keith Mitchell

Apparently life during the 16th century was not only hard for ordinary folk, but quite dangerous as well when it came to death and burial. One cause for concern was drinking ale or whisky out of lead cups. This mixture quite often led to the drinker being sent unconscious for perhaps longer than might otherwise be the case. Quite often the imbiber could be mistaken for dead, and they might get to the stage of even be prepared for burial. They might, for example, be laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days, where the family would eat, drink and watch to see if the person would wake up. This is reportedly how the saying "holding a wake" came into being.

It would appear that the practice of recycling graves is not a new idea, as quite often the bones of one person could be dug up and taken to the charnel house, so that the grave site could be reused. When these coffins were opened, it was found that something in the region of one out of twenty-five coffins had scratch marks on the inside, indicating that the people concerned had been buried alive. One way of trying to alleviate this problem was to tie a piece of string on to the wrist of the corpse, and leading it up through the coffin lid and several feet of soil, when it would then be tied at the other end to a bell. If anyone heard the bell ringing it could truly be said that the victim had been saved by the bell

Annual Summer Outing (by Lindsay Robertson – Webmaster)

The first MBGRG annual Summer Outing was designed to meet three particular issues. Primarily to be a 'fun day out' for members, but also to be productive as regards the general work of the Group. With the latter in mind, it was decided to pick a graveyard, of a size that could hopefully be fully recorded during a one-day visit, and sufficiently far from Elgin, that travelling costs could be minimised, by a one-visit working session. With these points in mind, the outing was planned for Sunday 3rd August, and the site chosen was Chapeltown churchyard and the adjacent Roman Catholic Church, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Braes of Glenlivet, some 35 miles south of Elgin. Particular thanks are due to Helen, for preliminary work in organising the visit, and to Mr and Mrs



Toovey, the church caretakers who were extremely helpful and welcoming, in a variety of ways. A rather overcast and damp Sunday morning in Elgin was cause for some concern, but on phoning Mr Toovey, we were advised that there was a blink of sun showing 'over the hill' and it would remain dry! Local knowledge is always best! A few more confirmation phone calls to members, and we set off. I personally travelled in style, as a passenger in Keith's car. Not being very familiar with that part of the country it was nice to look at the scenery, rather than the road.

Some fourteen members took part in the visit, and as promised, the weather remained dry, mild and with reasonable lighting. While most members paired up and began detailed recording of MIs, I acted as 'flour boy' to Keith, dusting some of the less legible stones to enhance the photographic imagery. On this particular occasion, the photography was done twice, both by Keith and myself, as an exercise to compare image quality using different cameras. The overall outcome of the day's fieldwork was excellent, and all members should be congratulated on their efforts. Some 166, inscriptions were recorded, including various plaques within the church. The photography was fully completed, and all members exchanged their recordings which were then double checked. There were several visitors to the churchyard throughout the day, who seemed surprised to find such abnormal activity, but all seemed impressed by the work we were doing, and were both interested and supportive. Details about the Group activities and website were given out, and hopefully might result in new members.

The Group had planned to make a short visit to the 18th century Roman Catholic Seminary at *Scalan*, after completing work at Chapeltown, but unfortunately there was insufficient time, as we had a scheduled 'meal' booked at the nearby Hotel at Delnashaugh. It was amusing to note that after leaving Chapeltown, it was apparent there had been considerable rainfall, and on arriving at Delnashaugh Hotel, the manager apologised for not having one large table for us. He assumed, as the weather had been so bad, that we had cancelled our visit. Just goes to show that the sun does shine upon the righteous! However, we were made most welcome, and an excellent meal, very efficient service, and the typical Group 'banter' made a very enjoyable end to a very successful day! It is hoped that the results of the work done at Chapeltown, together with that from Tombae will be in print before the end of the year.

** On checking of the inscriptions back home against Keith and Lindsay's photographs, it was noted that not even the amount of double-checking which was done on site, had eradicated all potential recording errors. This resulted in another visit from Keith and Helen while photographing Tomnavoulin War Memorial.*

The Swiss Connection (Keith Mitchell – Chairman)

During the last week in September, Keith and Helen took a little break from the delights of tombstone recording to visit friends in Germany and Switzerland. While planning our holiday, we spoke to Dr Jeff Russel, one of our Associate members who lives in Zollikon on the outskirts of Zurich, with the idea of meeting up with him. Part of Jeff's ancestral family come from the area round Elgin, and he has relations buried in Elgin Cathedral as well as Lhanbryde.

And so it was that on a rather dull and overcast morning Jeff arrived to meet us on the old paddle steamer *Stadt Rapperswil* at our pick up point by the Horgen landing stage on the Zürisee (Lake Zurich). This grand old lady of the lake puffed her way sedately up to Rapperswil-Jona, the town after which she is named. Jeff's well planned idea was to give us a complete day out on the lake, which overall, is some 25 miles in length. Having disembarked we took a leisurely stroll up to the castle – saw a few deer and the usual assortment of modern tombstones, and finally ended up in a rather plush hotel on the lake front called Hotel Schwanen (Swan Hotel). After a truly excellent meal, we



then boarded the relatively new lake boat *Panta Rhei* of Austrian make which, although very comfortable, did not have quite the romantic flavour of the old steamboat. This part of the trip took us down to Zurich itself where we quickly transferred onto another vessel this time named *Helvetia*. All very clean and efficient the Swiss transport system. I reckon UK politicians and local councils might do well to take a leaf out of the Swiss way of doing things, including adopting their incredibly well-organized train and tramway system! Our last part of the boat trip took us back to our starting point at Horgen, where we met Jeff's wife Erika on the

landing stage. Our day out was most enjoyably completed with an extremely delicious meal served to complete perfection at a Horgen waterfront restaurant called L'o. Upon the conclusion of this, we waved Jeff and Erika a fond farewell and made our way back home up hill on foot, feeling more than well satisfied.

Intriguing Gravestone

(by **Jacqueline Burvill & Alan Wills** — Members)

This gravestone can be seen in St. Mary's Church, Saltford, near Bath. Thankfully the gravestone was moved from the grave yard to the sanctity of the church where it is protected from the weather. Someone had the foresight to have the unfortunate woman write her story before she passed on and yes she was eventually reunited with her feet.

Frances Flood, was born in Gitson near Honiton in Devonshire. On the 22nd of January 1723 aged 32

*Stop Reader, and a Wonder see
As strange as e'er was known,
My Feet drop'd off from my Body
In the Middle of the Bone:
I had no Surgeon for my Help,
But God Almighty's Aid,
In whom I ever will rely.
And never be afraid
Tho' here beneath they lie
Corruption for to see;
Yet they shall one Day re-unite
To all Eternity*

years she went from Philips Norton to the town of Saltford. She paid for lodging at an Inn and the next day discovered she had contracted smallpox. No one was willing to help her at first. On the 18th March at 8pm she was visited by a woman and Frances showed the woman her legs and how the flesh had parted from the bone. Leaning a little harder on the left leg than usual, she wrote:

“it broke off as though it were a rotten stick, a little below the Calf; On the 25th, about 6 in the morning, when I arose and opened the cloths, I found my legs were fallen from me, and the pains I then suffered not worthy to be called pains, so I dressed it with the same medicine I made use of before; within two hours after came several people to visit me. I unbound the cloths and the flesh was closed over the bone, the blood was stopped, so I had great reason to praise the Lord for all his mercies and favours I had received from time to time”.

Her full story can be found using the following link: <http://www.stmaryssaltford.org.uk/FFlood.html>

And Now A Word From Our Controller (by **Helen Mitchell** - Fieldwork Co-ordinator)

This year has been mixed as regards numbers on outings but we have still achieved a considerable amount of work. We have also gained a few new ‘field workers’. Progress report as follows;

Dallas, buried stones have now been completed with the exception of one which is partly covered by the remains of a tree-trunk.

Dundurcas, buried and MI’s are completed and ready for publication.

Macallan MI’s completed with one buried stone, ready for publication with Dundurcas.

Chapelton MI’s completed and hopefully should be ready for publication by the end of the year along with Tombae. See also Lindsay’s summer outing report.

Elgin Cathedral is progressing slowly but it is a long process. All our transcriptions have been checked against the Cathedral records and any discrepancies where possible, have been re-checked with the photos or on site, resulting in deleting quite a few question marks. Bruce and I spent three days working on some difficult problems (*including an excuse to go to Johnstons for lunch*). There is a possibility that we have to return to the Cathedral as there are still some queries to iron out, but we hope to work on them very soon weather permitting. The final checks have now started, with Keith and I checking the photo indices, which Lindsay provides with Bruce filling in some information using his ‘The Burgh of Elgin’ books.

St Peters is proving a labour of love, with excitement and disappointment going hand in hand. There are quite a number of stones very worn or blank but when one is cleaned and reveals text and emblems, it causes quite a buzz. We have had emblems of a tiller, anchor and even a fishing boat. The stones have so much moss on them that it is like opening Pandora’s Box.

Kinloss Abbey was a one off due to the fact that members of The Kinloss Abbey Trust had cleaned a number of stones that we decided to record now before we had to clean them all again next year. Next spring should see us back in earnest to work there, along with the help of members from The Kinloss Abbey Trust. The lighting was poor that day, but Keith and I took the opportunity to return and photo the stones.

War Memorials from Mulben (Boharm), Mosstodloch, Fochabers and Tomnavoulin will be included in forthcoming publications.

Last year we stopped work for two months over December and January and it turned out that January was quite dry and bright. This year I think we will play it by ear as regards outings.

If any one wishes to order a badge, sweatshirt or polo shirt, please contact me A.S.A.P.

Birnie Churchyard Open Day

On Sunday 7th September, MBGRG held a very successful Open Day in the old section of Birnie Churchyard. It had been suggested that an event of this type might be a way of attracting new members to the Group, and to that end we certainly succeeded. Using something of a "Cunning Plan" as the saying goes; we opted for a date that coincided with the other Open Day, a few hundred yards away at Fraser Hunter's Iron Age dig, as well as one that had suitable car parking arrangements. As this is always a crowd puller, we hoped for something of a spin off to our benefit. Our publicity venture of course could not have happened without the very kind co-operation of the Rev. Julie Woods and the helpful assistance of Isobel and Jill Garrow. On arrival we opened up three Buried Tombstones, including that of Mr Alexander Spens, minister of Birnie who died in 1658. This was the very first tombstone we uncovered during our Buried Tombstone recording project in May 2005.

These examples of our recording work certainly created quite a lot of interest amongst our visitors. Before the public began arriving, we received a visit from the Press & Journal who reported on our activities and what we were trying to achieve. *Pointing fingers and imaginary brush strokes to the fore!* While this was ongoing we began to wonder if the day was going to be a flop as no-one by this time had appeared: so that when the reporter left, we were indeed getting a little disheartened. However, faint hearts never win the day! Shortly after this we suddenly found ourselves swamped with visitors for most of the afternoon.

Another part of our presentation was our usual publicity display of photographs, etc. which was put up in the entrance way to the Church Hall, and visitors were also plied with teas ably provided as usual by Kirk members. Overall the day must rate as a considerable success, for surprisingly we had well in excess of one hundred visitors who specifically took the time and trouble to find out what MBGRG had been doing on site. Subsequently we gained three new members, who have since been helping us at St Peter's, while another volunteer is proving to be a considerable help in translating Latin inscriptions.

MBGRG Website Guestbook Extracts

Stuart Walker (Elgin, Scotland)

You are doing a very important exercise. It's always been of interest to me. Keep up the good work.

Pat Blend (New Jersey, USA)

Enjoy your site and most of all the work you are doing. Keep up the great work. Wish I could get out there and help even on snowy days.

St Peters, Duffus



Cartouche from the Alexander Steeil tombstone

Over the last few months recording work at this old churchyard has brought to light many interesting inscriptions and other memorial carvings. Many of the tombstones from which these come have previously been recorded as being *illegible*, but thanks to our careful techniques, a considerable amount of genealogical and other historical detail is now being revealed. However, we also have been faced with more than our fair share of blanks and extremely worn recumbent tombstones, which has been quite frustrating at times. In the 1966-1967 Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, John di Folco published quite a number of the inscriptions from St Peter's and these are proving most useful when it comes to checking our own recording work.

One of the tombstones he records is that of Alexander Sutherland who died in 1479. This tombstone is of the Calvary Cross Slab type with Cross on a stepped base, as well as a long sword as part of its carved symbolism. It certainly gave all our volunteers something to shout about when Ruth started removing the accumulated grass and moss from the stone surface. Her luck was surely in that day! Other tombstones from the Sutherland enclosure dating, for example to 1597, etc. paled into insignificance by comparison. Amongst other *goodies* that we have discovered are a variety of 18th century Masonic Symbols, showing that the Craft was well established in the area during the early stages of modern Freemasonry in Scotland.

Also of considerable interest are several tombstones with a very distinct leaning towards seafaring life. Several tombstones include large anchors and tillers, but perhaps the most unusual we have found so far can be seen in the emblematical cartouche of a sailing vessel, fully rigged with, as some have suggested, the skipper himself sitting at the tiller. The family history details of the stone, apparently never recorded before, tell that the stone itself is dedicated to Alexander Steeil; *who departed the 7 day of Aprile 1701*. Any suggestions as to the specific type of sailing vessel portrayed on this tombstone would indeed be greatly appreciated.



Ruth cleaning 1479 tombstone with Janet looking on



Members cleaning at St Peter's Churchyard

Kinloss Abbey

At the beginning of August, Bruce, Helen and Keith were invited to meet members of the Kinloss Abbey Trust, with a view to advising on various aspects connected with their plans to remove vegetation (mainly ivy) from a number of table-stones. This was in preparation for the visit to the site by HRH, The Princess Royal, to commemorate the completion of the first phase of conservation at Kinloss Abbey.

On Friday, 3rd October, Princess Anne met with various dignitaries, including Ian Shepherd, Principal Archaeologist for the area, as well as members of the Trust, who guided her around the site. After the tour, which included a speech by Councillor Jeff Hamilton, who mentioned in his address that MBGRG would record all the tombstones, invited guests received refreshments in the marquee where there was an opportunity to speak with Princess Anne, who in conversation wished us “Good Luck” in our project.

As a result of the work undertaken by the Trust to remove the offending vegetation, it was decided to record as many of the affected tombstones before they started to deteriorate. At least the ivy had kept them very largely clean. On Sunday 12th October, a joint Kinloss Trust and MBGRG cleaning and recording team managed to complete almost all of the area concerned, the only fatality being photography as the lighting conditions were quite inadequate.



Before cleaning



Members cleaning table-stones



Cleaned table-stones



Princess Anne on her tour of Kinloss Abbey

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