

# THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND RESEARCH GROUP

## Newsletter



Issue 12 --- July 2009

(Currently published twice a year)

### Editor's Apology and Assorted Comments - (by Keith Mitchell – Chairman)



As Editor of the Newsletter I am acutely aware that this Issue is somewhat behind schedule. It should have been out several weeks ago, but due to the fact that Helen and I were in Canada for most of May, it has been unavoidably delayed. Canada of course is a big country and on this occasion we visited Shawinigan and Montreal in the East, where I lived as a boy, visiting places I used to know, including the schools I attended. From there we went down to Toronto, where it was "all aboard *The Canadian* train, which in some three days took us to the beautiful setting of Jasper, Alberta, and the wonders of its glorious National Park.

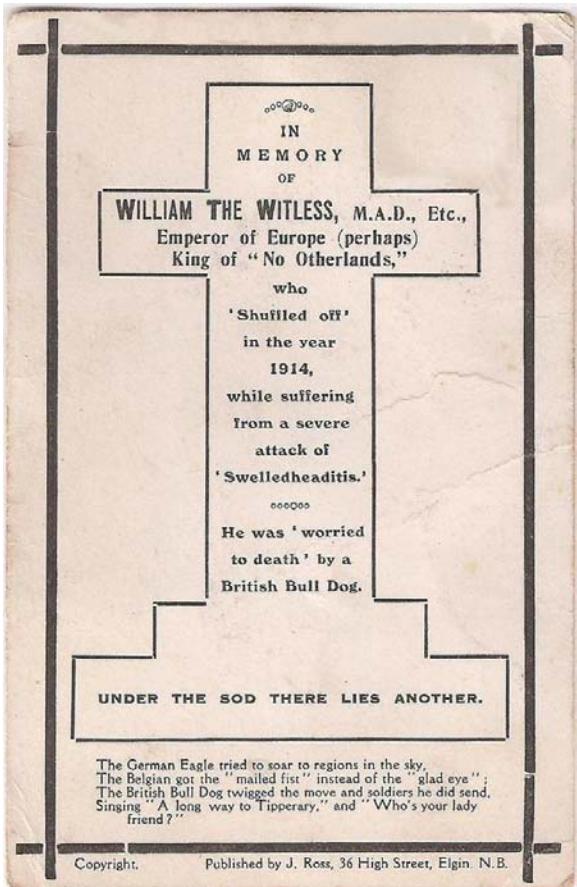
A First Nations burial ground outside Kamloops

After an amazing bus tour of the Columbian Ice Fields, we ended up in Banff where we caught the *Rocky Mountaineer* train for Vancouver. While standing on the station platform in Banff, I had what for me was probably the weirdest family history coincidence of my life. I was approached by a man who asked where I was from, as he recognised my Scottish accent. The subject strangely drifted towards genealogy very quickly, and in a flash I was telling him about my 4 x great grandfather, James Donaldson of The Devon Iron Works at Old Sauchie, in old Clackmannanshire. As soon as he heard the name, he invited me to follow him into the station building so that I could "make a woman very happy." Well, how could I refuse! The room was jam-packed as the train had been seriously delayed, but I very quickly found myself standing in front of this lady and telling her what I had just recounted to the man. Well, I have never seen anyone's jaw drop in amazement for so long. She seemed to be utterly taken aback, as it turned out she had been researching James and his relations as well. It is indeed a very, very small world! After passing the famous 'last spike' driven in by Donald Smith at "Craigellachie" for the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, we trundled on to the friendly town of Kamloops. Just outside we saw our first Canadian burial ground, which on this occasion was, we were told, purely for the First Nations people of the area, who have indeed been living in the area I believe for the past 10,000 years of so.

The remainder of our trip was in and around the area of Vancouver which was all very exciting. I met a distant cousin for the first time at the bottom of Grouse Mountain, wearing my Stetson type hat for ID purposes, which worked out amazingly well. We also stayed for a couple of nights at the home of Group member, Sue Rennison and her aunt Ruby, whose hospitality in their lovely home was greatly appreciated. Then it was back to reality with a bump, cataloguing and transcribing tombstones, although the few days of sun we had at home made us think we were still on holiday.

## A Little bit of In-House Humour

From Irene Black's postcard collection



The following anecdote was told by Gordon Black by way of raising a chuckle around the table at our recent Stamp Night. It goes something like this, but of course loses some of its repartee going from his well told verbal nuances to the written word.

It seems there were two friends who played golf in Scotland, who were just about to tee off near a main road going into town. Behind them were another couple of golfers patiently waiting to take their turn. As the first friend, let's call him Jimmie, was raising his club to hit the ball, a hearse and cortège drove slowly by. At that, Jimmie immediately took off his golfing cap, and faced the row of cars as they made their way past the golfers. He stood, hands clasped in front of him with head bowed in humble respect. The line of cars was a long one, so it took several minutes before the last car passed by. As Jimmie put his 'bunnet' back on and went to tee off again, one of the men waiting to take their turn, said, "Well sir that was fairly a gran' thing tae dae. It surely is wonderful tae show respect like that, something ye dinnae see muckle o' these days." "Weel" said Jimmie, "I thocht it wad be better done, seein' as I wis mairrit till the wifie for last 50 odd year!"

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

There is not much to report this time round. Since the beginning of November to date we have had 13 group outings, 1 at Lossiemouth and 12 at St Peters or Kinloss. Weather and holidays have been the cause of so few outings. There is still plenty background work being carried out with checking and numbering photos.

Please note that the date for the summer outing is Sunday, 9th August. We have decided on St Ninians or another name for it is Chapelford, near Buckie. This outing is for full members only and we hope to go to Christies of Fochabers for **high tea** afterwards. If any of you can suggest somewhere else for a meal then let me know. I need to know numbers for the meal by the 27th of July **at the latest**, so please let me know as soon as possible if you wish to take part. Parking at the cemetery is quite limited, so it may cause some transport problems, but once I know the numbers of participants I can work things out. Access to the churchyard means taking cars through a field of cattle, but the parking is fenced in.

### Fund Raising Schemes

After all our efforts to raise funds for our Elgin Cathedral publication, things have gone a little quiet on the Fund Raising front, so if you have practical ideas on this subject, please let Ruth McIntosh

know, or anyone else on the Committee. Although our bank balance is in a relatively good state, we always have to think to the future when it comes to covering publication costs.

## Postage Stamps & Other Collectables



At the beginning of July we held our first Stamp Night of the year, and as appears usual at these social gatherings, a good time was had by all. No! it's not "Eyes down for a Full House," rather "Eyes down to trim hundreds of stamps to put into Marge tubs."

We also, by the way, managed to get most of the stamps which had been donated so far, all more or less sorted out. However, if this venture is to be really worth while, we need a **lot more** where they came from. So if you have any old

stamp albums gathering dust in your attic, or know of anyone who is prepared to collect stamps from day to day postage, please ask them to help. Every little bit helps! We still also need any old postcards, coins, or any other collectables you might be able to donate.

## Car Boot Sales

We haven't held one for a while, although we are most grateful for donations such as a fridge, and a music centre that both went to good homes. Storage of course is always a bit of a problem, so when we get items donated, we need to shift them fairly quickly. Anyone willing to help with boot sales, please just let us know.

## Annual Summer Outing

As you will see from Helen's article we are holding the Group's second Annual Summer Outing in August. It seems clear by all accounts that more or less everyone enjoyed our first outing to the Roman Catholic churchyard of Chapelton in the Braes of Glenlivet last year. As a result of its success, we will be attempting this year to record a similar site at Tynet called St Ninian's. A few weeks ago, Bruce, Helen and I took a trip there to survey the place, to see if it would be possible for the group to complete it all in a day. It has some 270 odd tombstones, mostly 19th-20 century, although a few date to the 18th century. While there are a few old ones cemented into the walls of a small chapel, as well as a few weathered table-stones, the remainder more modern ones are in well-ordered straight lines, so they should be relatively easy to transcribe and photograph. It was felt that if by any chance we were unable to finish it all on this visit, we should at least be able to make a very significant dent in the recording process, making completion shortly after much more likely. Weather permitting this looks as if it should be a great day out, with an excellent finish at Christies for **high tea**. So please come along and support this venture, and help us to strike another burial ground off the list! Please also make sure that Helen knows you are coming ASAP.

## Bellie Churchyard Open Day

After our very successful open day at Birnie Parish Church last year where we attracted new members, it has been decided to help the Friends of Bellie Churchyard and ourselves by having a similar event in this historic burial ground. Unfortunately we will not have the Birnie Iron Age Dig to help act as a major crowd-puller, so any assistance you can give to make your family, friends and neighbours more aware of this event, will be greatly appreciated.

The date to look out for is Saturday, 8th August, and the day's events will be held between 10.00a.m and 4.00p.m. Some on-site catering will be available via Baxters of Fochabers. Co-incidentally this gathering will be held the day before our Group Summer Outing, so this means a very busy week-end for MBGRG members. The local Scouts are also supposed to be providing several gazebos in case the weather is on the wet side.

The plan is to re-open a couple or so of the most interesting buried tombstones, as well as having members on site to answer questions about any of the work we do researching burial grounds throughout Moray. If you would like to help make this event a success from the group's point of view, or if you would just like to see what's going on, just let Helen our Field-Co-ordinator know, or indeed any other member of committee.

### **The Swiss Connection (part 2) - (by Keith Mitchell – Chairman)**



While members of our Group were recording monumental inscriptions and buried tombstones in Lhanbryde old churchyard during 2005, they discovered a number of assorted fragments of varying shapes and sizes, lying discarded against the south-east boundary wall. These included bits of old table-stones, as well as small sections of uprights. Two of these pieces were found to join together, forming almost a complete inscription. The surviving text, which has partially been reconstructed, is published in the *Monumental Inscriptions : Lhanbryde Old Churchyard and Lhanbryde New Cemetery*, published by the Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society, No. 188c- on page 27, and reads as follows:-

(Er)eected (in) memory of JANET STEWART spouse to JAMES RUSSEL, Weaver, in Elgin, who died 14 (Mar)ch 1812 aged 70 years.

Subsequently I was contacted by Dr Jeff Russel who lives in the district of Zollikon on the outskirts of Zurich. He had traced part of his family roots to Moray, and it turned out that the above mentioned James Russel and his wife Janet were indeed his 3 x great grandparents.

Since then I have been in discussions with Jeff, one of our Associate Members, about the feasibility of doing something with the fragments, so that they did not deteriorate any further. Over the last few months various things have happened on this front. This has included the removal of both sections, to the care of *The Elgin Marble Company*. Since then I have been liaising with members of staff there on Jeff's behalf, and as a result, the pieces have been cleaned, glued together and properly sealed.

As we go to publication, Jeff has just flown in from Switzerland so that he could witness his ancestor's tombstone being buried for its protection



*photographs by KLM*

near to the spot where the shattered fragments were originally discovered. Also present were reporters and photographers from the Press and Journal and The Northern Scot who were kind enough to cover the story.

## Members From Afar

Over the last couple of months we have been lucky enough to have had visits from several Members who live well outside our working area. These include Anne Westcott from Warkworth, Ontario, Sue Rennison from Vancouver, Dr Jeff Russel, from Zollikon, Switzerland, while closer to home we had the pleasure of meeting up with new members Ian Wells from Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Nick Hide of the Clan Davidson Association, who is based in London. We also had the pleasure of Mary Wardle's company for a couple of weeks. Both Mary and Sue were keen to get stuck into fieldwork and naturally their valued assistance was most welcome - and all this during the year of *Homecoming* as it is termed!

## MBGRG Website Guestbook Extracts

Lisa Clydesdale (Aberdeen, Scotland)

Fantastic website, really informative and so easy to use. Well done to all the MBGRG team for their valuable work and dedication.

Fl. Scott (Scottish Borders)

What a great website it's been very helpful for me in my Badenoch research. The website is so well constructed and must represent a huge amount of work.

Ian Wells (Newcastle-upon-Tyne)

Thank you for all the work put into cataloguing the Macallan Churchyard. I am following my mother's line of 'Moir' and 'McConachie' families that farmed the Haugh of Elchies across the river from Aberlour. We think that in this one graveyard we should be able to follow the line to William McKonachie who died in 1687. My great grandfather was John Moir (stone 1) who was drowned in 1898 in the Spey Ferryboat accident. I would be very keen to hear from anybody following this same line. It is amazing that this information is now so accessible. Thanks again for all the group's hard work.

## Monumental Inscriptions of Elgin Cathedral



Keith, Helen, Lindsay and Bruce

At long last, after several years and many thousands of man hours work, this valuable genealogical publication received its book launch at *Yeadons of Elgin* bookshop. The evening saw a very good turn out of MBGRG members, as well as several members of the public. Refreshments were graciously supplied by Yeadons, which were greatly appreciated.

After a short introduction by Vickie Dawson, both Keith and Bruce spoke about the large efforts made to this significant project by so many MBGRG members, and other contributors,

along with everyone else who had supported the venture financially. The remainder of the evening was then spent answering questions, which centred largely on the relevance of MI recording for the benefit of genealogists, as well as family and local historians. Already stocks of our first edition are beginning to run down, but copies are still available from Yeadons, A&NESFHS, the Scottish Genealogy Society of Edinburgh, as well as direct from MBGRG. Our prices are £20.00 retail and £15.00 to full group members.

### **MBGRG Meets The Press** (or photographing the photographers)



*Press & Journal photographer  
with Helen at Elgin Cathedral*



*Northern Scot Photographer  
with Bruce and Helen*



*Forres Gazette Photographer interviewing  
Cllr. Jeff Hamilton & Helen at Kinloss Abbey*

Over the years the local Press have considerably supported the work of MBGRG, and have significantly helped to publicise the various research projects we have been involved in. Generally when being interviewed, the resulting discussions are fairly straight forward. However, when the photographers go into action, in many cases we can find ourselves sitting, standing, or lying in some rather awkward positions. These unusual poses are also frequently taken up by the photographer, although the photos illustrated here do not properly reflect this comment.

### **A Mini McConachie Clan Gathering at the SAFHS's Conference**

Prior to May, Anne Westcott from Canada and I had been emailing each other about her projected visit to Moray, on the trail of her Scottish ancestors and relatives. Our plans culminated in the Cathedral grounds where I was able to take both Anne and her cousin Frances to the gravestone of James Taylor, who died at Kirkhill, Alves in 1905. There was particular interest in the very unusual Christian name of Keturah which appears in the inscription, recounting the death of Ann Keturah, a member of the family who died in 1874, aged seven years. But I will let the story continue in Anne's words.



**April in Moray** - I would like to extend my thanks to Keith and Helen Mitchell and the other members of the Moray Burial Ground Research Group for all their help during my recent trip to Scotland. I spent my first day in Elgin where Keith kindly met my cousin Frances Sharp and me at Elgin Cathedral to guide us to the gravestone of one of our Taylor ancestors. While there he also gave us a tour of some interesting features of the cathedral, making the excursion successful not only from a family history but also from a touristic perspective! That same day happened to be the launch of the MBGRG publication on Elgin Cathedral. I attended this event with another Scottish cousin Joan Angus at the beautiful Yeadon's Bookstore. As a foreign supporter of the group it was good to be able to take part in the book launch, recognizing as it did the great work of the Moray Burial Ground Research Group. Thanks also to Bruce for an interesting talk!

*Anne Wescott & Frances Sharp*

On Saturday April 25, I was in Aberdeen for the Scottish Association of Family History Societies conference at King's College Conference Centre. During the lunch break I went to see the Moray Burial Ground Research Group stall at the Family History Fair, to be met by Keith with news that someone had come to the stall looking for information on the McConnachie family from Knockando, one of my research interests. Helen phoned the man to ask him to return to the stall and I browsed the pamphlets on the table. Imagine my surprise when we realized that there were three of us at that moment looking for the same pamphlet on the Macallan Burial Ground for information on the McConnachie family! The number soon became four when Ian Wells came back to the stall. Such coincidences do happen in family history research and make for great memories – and great strides forward in our research! Ian showed me an article from the Scot's Magazine in April 1932 about my direct ancestor Margaret Chalmers (married to John McConnachie) who was a bonesetter of some repute in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. How I enjoyed reading this information! It's always great to find the trail of ancestors' names and vital statistics dates – but even more wonderful to learn something about what they were like as people.

So thank you again to all the hard-working members of the Moray Burial Ground Research Group who give so many volunteer hours to help advance family history research. Your work is much appreciated!

Eileen Forbes one of the other people at this gathering sent in the following email comment:-



*Anne Westcott, Eileen Forbes, Jean Simpson & Ian Wells*

I must thank you and your team for making it possible to hold our “mini clan gathering” at your stall. I couldn't believe the coincidence when four people all researching the same surname were at your stall at the same time. I know Ian Wells and Anne Wescott certainly found a connection between their “trees” on the bonesetter McConnachie family from Edinville. Unfortunately Jean Simpson and I didn't, although I am sure if we continue to delve deeply enough we may find a connection yet. Our family lines seem firmly rooted in Dufftown and Keith although the branches reach all around the world. I have had the great fortune to make wonderful friends through my interest in family history and regularly correspond with like-minded, long lost relations from

Australia, Canada, America as well as in the UK. I would be grateful if anyone reading your newsletter has any information or photographs they would be willing to share with regards to the McConnachie families from Dufftown or Keith. If you need any particular details do not hesitate to contact me again.\* - Best Wishes - Eileen Forbes (nee McConnachie)

\*Note:- Anyone wishing to correspond with Eileen or to help her will you please contact me in the first instance.

### Mystery of the Missing Alves Tombstones - (by Derek Page – Member)

Living in Alves for around 15 years has obviously stirred our interests in its history and I started trying to compile the few facts I could about the little village that many people can't pronounce and only know as the place where they have to slow to 40 mph between Forres and Elgin. This is very sad as there is a huge wealth of history relating to the village and surrounding area. Unfortunately my Mum and I hadn't joined MBGRG when the recording of Alves church was taking place, and didn't actually even know the group existed until the open event at Birnie, otherwise we'd have joined a lot sooner! It was then that Helen & Keith told us about the missing gravestones from the church and that some remnants had been found near the village itself.

**Ok, we thought, sounds like a project!** How about finding all of the missing stones and returning them back to the Kirkyard? I have since been in discussion with Moray Estates, who farm the land where the remnants were found, Moray Council who own the land and the kirkyard, and the architect who is dealing with the church itself. Everything is looking good so far, and pending a final thumbs up from the *Council Chief Executive Officer*, we may be able to proceed with this monumental task (sorry, couldn't resist that!).



Derek strimming nettles & long grass

Today (24<sup>th</sup> June) Keith & Helen met us at the remnant site for a bit of clearing work to see what we could find there. So far we have one grave slab in 2 parts that is fully readable and dates back to 1736, and one other half which is upside down at present, so it is yet un-deciphered. There are masses of other stones littering the site but they don't appear to be actual gravestones, just rubble probably taken from the field. Going by the records we have so far, it looks like there may be up to 30 missing stones from the kirkyard, so we may have some searching to do yet! But, the project is now underway and we'll report back with any interesting finds and updates.



*Editor's note:-* After a lot of hard work by Derek, Penny Helen and myself, the remains of three broken sections of two tombstone slabs were revealed. The photo at left shows the half of the 1732 / 1736 stone which belonged to Thomas Smith in Easter Alves, his spouse Janet Clark, their son Heirom and his wife Katherine Falconer.

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