



Na Rest We Haif - 1571

Issue 18 - - - June 2012

(Currently published twice a year)

Editor's Note

Welcome to another edition of the group newsletter, and apologies for the slight delay again, but there's been a lot happening lately and we held off to accommodate some of the events in this issue. It is with great sadness that we have to report the passing of our Honorary President Betty Willsher who has been with us for many years and has done so much for the field we are in. A full obituary is posted herein. We therefore have asked Charles J. Burnett Esq. whether he would be willing to undertake this position and he has graciously accepted.

Derek

Heralding a New Honorary President

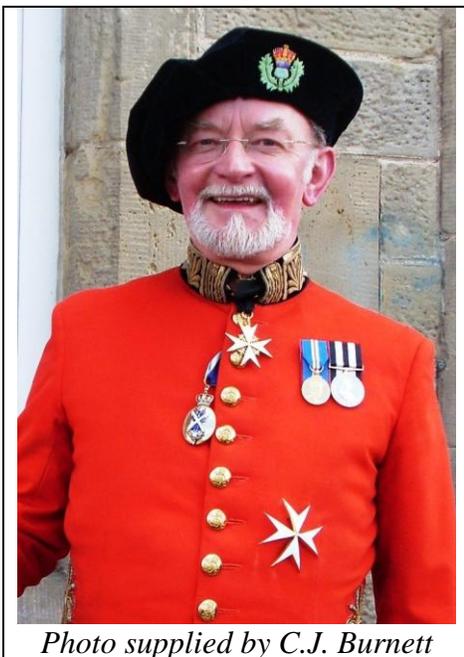


Photo supplied by C.J. Burnett

The Moray Burial Ground Research Group is delighted to announce that Charles J. Burnett Esq., Ross Herald Extraordinary, has accepted the office of Honorary President, succeeding the late Betty Willsher, MBE.

Burnett, who lives in Portsoy, has had a varied career and has been involved with the Lyon Court and Heraldry since 1983. In 1988 he was appointed Ross Herald of Arms, an Honour held until his retirement in 2010.

Educated in Fraserburgh, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, Charles went on to take up various posts largely connected with artistic and antiquarian pursuits. Between 1971-1985 he was Head of Design at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, and from 1985-1996 he held the post of Curator of Fine Art at the Scottish United Services Museum in Edinburgh Castle. Closer to home Charles was Chamberlain of Duff House at Banff during 1997-2004. Other significant positions held by Charles over the years include that of Vice-President of the Society of Antiquaries of

Scotland, a roll he held during 1992-1995, while in 2003 he became President of the Heraldry Society of Scotland. Amongst the many honours held by Charles is that of being made an Honorary Citizen of the State of Oklahoma in 1989. He is also a Holder of The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Charles has co-authored four publications on Scottish historical subjects, including *The Honours of Scotland*, published in 1993, and has written over 140 articles on Scottish Heraldry and History. He also has a regular monthly heraldic feature in the *Knock News*, which is always a great read. Since 1994 he has given over 300 lectures in various parts of the world, including right here in Elgin to our own members in 2011. We extend to Charles a hearty welcome from MBGRG members, in the knowledge that his expert advice on matters heraldic relating to historic memorials will be crucially important in their interpretation.

Field Co-ordinator's Report (by Helen Mitchell)

An appeal!!! Does anyone have a crystal ball which will predict Sunday weather at least two weeks in advance? This year has been slow to start on our outings because of the cold.

Dyke, Knockando, Rathven (Old) and Aberlour are more or less completed. Final checks on Dyke are underway in preparation for printing. Kirkmichael has still to be completed with MI recording and buried stones. Elgin (East) is a quarter of the way through MI recording. Elgin (West) has just become available. See separate report on last page

We have now started at historic Mortlach church with MI recording only at present. With the better weather we will check for buried stones, but in one section there is not a great deal of space between stones. The oldest we have recorded so far is 1463, with a few in the 1600s. At the beginning of the month we started recording at Cullen Old Kirk. Although not a large churchyard, there are many table and flat stones in need of attention by our team of "careful cleaners." I have a feeling that even the recorders will jump at the chance to clean them. See Keith's report for more information on Mortlach & Cullen Kirks. Saturday May 12th saw a few members taking part in Moray Heritage Connection Fair, (of which the Group is a member), in Elgin Library. We had our usual tables with books and the "Gravestone Experience." Although we may not sell much at these fairs, we are promoting the work of the group (and our website) to visitors and local people.

Obituary : Betty Willsher MBE 1916 - 2012



It is with sad regret that we have to report the death of Betty Willsher. As you will know, Betty became our first Honorary President in 2006, and has provided through her work and writings a very valuable insight into the work we do. It was an absolute pleasure to have known her and she will be sadly missed by all in the group.

Betty who died in February had a great passion for researching burial grounds and produced the seminal work 'Understanding Scottish Graveyards' in 1985. She was subsequently awarded the MBE in 1999. Betty, who lived in St Andrews, was an admirer of the research work undertaken by MBGRG members, and where possible made several visits to Elgin to offer her expert advice and support.

James Anderson and Jean Robertson in Mortlach : A Mystery Unfolds (by Keith Mitchell)



Photo by KLM

Our first visit to the historic church of Mortlach a few weeks ago, proved exciting in several ways, not least in the discovery of the inscription displayed in the adjacent photograph.

As the weather was not really suitable for good photography, Gordon and I went round the churchyard looking for tombstones that would not be visible in direct sunlight. In the process, we came upon a small stone that had what appeared to be only a faint trace of lettering on the surface.

On occasions like this we normally make use of plain domestic flour to enhance the visual aspect of worn or difficult text. So out came the brush dipped in the white stuff, and with one stroke across the stone's surface, the following text jumped out at me IAMESI:R 1463. Imagine my immediate and delighted surprise! This seemed too good to be true.

So in *tombstone heaven* I went round telling everyone

about this exciting find so that they could share in the rare experience of seeing a memorial from so long ago.

Any tombstone with dateable text prior to about the middle of the 17th century is indeed a rarity in this part of the country. Memorials dating to the 16th century are most uncommon, while those from the 15th century or earlier are as scarce as the proverbial hen's tooth. However, due to the very ancient history connected with Mortlach Church, it hosts several memorials of equal and even earlier vintage!

Although very simple, and quite crudely carved, our find must surely be considered historically of some significance. This is particularly the case when we are able to identify to whom it was dedicated, i.e. James Anderson and Jean Robertson who presumably was his spouse. We might also infer that James died in 1463, but of course there are other possible explanations for the use of that year. So who were this couple? At time of writing it appears their names do not appear in any surviving records relating to Mortlach we have had access to, but maybe further research will reveal something more about them.

Volunteers (by Ruth Mackintosh)

I recently distributed leaflets in Dufftown advertising the group and asking for Volunteers as we start recording at Mortlach Churchyard. The shops, library and post office were very helpful and willingly took posters to put up in their premises. To them I say thank you as this has resulted in some interest being shown.

As has been said before, we desperately need people to come out in the field to help in our recording and also people to do background work. As well as being enjoyable and getting a real feel of social history while working in really old and historically important churchyards and public cemeteries, we are a really sociable group, and if you get a nice sunny day with the birds singing, then that is the icing on the cake.

You only have to read the guestbook on the web site to realize how many people from all over the world value the work done by MBGRG.

Moray Connections Heritage Open Day (by Ruth Mackintosh)



On Saturday 12th May MBGRG had a stall at the above event in Elgin library, getting our name out there and hopefully attracting some more volunteers. There was a good variety of stalls from as far afield as Aberdeen, Cullen, Buckie, Findhorn, Burghead and Knockando so competition for volunteers was fierce. There was also a representative from WRVS Moray Memories who was collecting information for their web site of people's memories of their first jobs and reminisces of bygone days. Moira

and I contributed to her portfolio, which must mean we are getting old!

Numbers given to us indicate the footfall in the library that morning was in the region of 800 persons with 500 going into the open day itself. We distributed some leaflets about the group and also sold some of our publications. To date we have not had an abundance of new volunteers coming forward, so if you know of anyone, or you yourself reading this who could help in any small way, please come forward and give your name to Helen or Keith, or to any member of MBGRG.

Vandalism in Moray Cemeteries (by Keith Mitchell – Chairman)

Desecration which occurs in burial grounds anywhere in the world must be described as one of the lowest forms of human behaviour. Most 'normal' people abhor such anti-social conduct, and the distress caused to the living and the dead, is in reality indescribable! The basic human right to be buried in peace, and left undisturbed, is something that people should have the right to expect, irrespective of nationality, class, creed or standing in society. However, it seems there are those who think that going into a cemetery and knocking down tombstones, is in some way a so-called *badge of honour*, or a pleasurable way of spending some time on a wrecking spree. In doing so they clearly fail to comprehend the grief their destructive behaviour causes. Maybe some do understand and that's one of

the reasons they do it! Then there are those that are mere youngsters, who have never been taught right from wrong, or who are not in the slightest interested either way. The fact that these delinquents will have to live with what they have done for the rest of their lives is a reality that one day, some may bitterly regret. Rant over!

As reported in our last Newsletter, a number of cemeteries in Moray have recently suffered severe attacks. Elgin Cemetery and Cluny Hill in Forres have come under renewed assault, and it is really sad to note that the work of several hard working volunteers has been undermined by what these totally misguided individuals have done.

At the beginning of February a new Community Payback Order scheme came into force. This replaced several other previous types of Court Order. Suitable candidates are given the opportunity to take part in unpaid work activities for the benefit of the community, and this includes the re-erection of vandalized or fallen tombstones.

Not long ago Ruth and I cleared some vegetation which was covering part of a fallen stone in the East section of Elgin Cemetery. Shortly afterwards a photograph of this stone was published in the Press, along with details about the training scheme to have tombstones re-erected under the terms of this new Payback Order scheme. A few weeks ago Helen and I met up with the scheme's organizers and briefly discussed the possibility with a view to getting MIs recorded from tombstones that are currently lying face down. We await developments.

Humour Corner



Photo KLM

Bill, Sandy & Jim

Captions Wanted – Answers on a Postcard please!

Originally described as “The Good, The Bad and The Ugly,” the above photograph is described in no particular order. It was, however, felt more appropriate to ask for a suitable caption, ode or verse, to describe these three handsome young ‘mannies’ sitting on a bench enjoying a snack before getting back to their tombstone cleaning labours. If you have any ideas, please let us know and we will publish the results in our next issue.

Cullen Auld Kirk - Work Starts (by Derek Page)

Work has now also begun on the old kirk at Cullen and has so far proved to be very interesting, with a vast amount of table stones to be cleaned and recorded. There were a few surprising moments again as more 'recycled' stones were found with older engraving on the under side of tables. I found myself lying partially submerged, upside down in the dirt trying to read the underlying text with a reasonable amount of success! The symbolism on the stones found thus far has been an especial pleasure, detailing many symbols not encountered in Moray before and with some exceptional workmanship by the masons.



Some of the exceptional work by masons at Cullen



A table end showing a rare skeleton design not normally seen this far north, the following angel is at the other end of the table along with the masons marks on the rear.



So Who Was Martin Brydon Bruce?

(By Keith Mitchell – Chairman)

As part of our campaign to record as many unlisted memorial tablets in Elgin, to be published alongside some of the more challenging tombstones in the cathedral, we naturally jumped at the chance to record several that used to be displayed in the soon to be demolished Elgin Academy. Several, including a Great War Memorial, predate the erection of this building in 1967. Two are in Latin, while three have dates that range through 1823-1886.



Photo KLM Andy Oliver with men lifting memorials

As a member of Elgin North Area Forum, I have been in consultation with Andy Oliver, PPP Project Manager for the new Elgin Academy, which opened recently. Through the kindness of both Andy and David Barnett, Head Teacher and his staff, I was given an excellent opportunity to photograph all the memorials, which were mounted on the walls of the old school. Some of these were in awkward positions, while lighting in some cases proved a bit of a problem. However, I was given yet another opportunity to re-photograph them in more natural lighting conditions. Later on, by making use of my photo computer

software, I was finally able to put together a suitable photographic record for future reference and research.

One of these memorials had apparently been stored in a cupboard and very little was known about its history. In the process of photographing it, questions were raised about who Martin Bruce was and what was the Elgin connection with ‘The City of London Imperial Volunteers.’ Martin Bruce’s parents were described as ‘of this Parish,’ but which parish did this mean – was it the Parish of Elgin for example? Thanks to Graeme Wilson and the historical details available at the Moray Heritage Centre, the facts of the case began to unravel.

Martin Bruce was born on 3rd October 1863. His parents were John Bruce, Greenbank, Reidhaven Street, Elgin and Helen Brydon. He worked for Cameron & Allan. However, at the moment we still have to ascertain what sort of business this was. As he grew up, Martin turned into an artist of some merit and became a member of the Royal Society of British Artists.



Photo KLM

Quite how and why he got involved with the volunteer regiments and the Boer War in South Africa we have still to find out. Certain it is that on his return to Britain on board the S.S. Aurania, he died at sea of Enteric Fever on the 25th October, 1900, aged 37, and was buried at sea. On 20th April, 1901, the Northern Scot reported on the erection of the Memorial to Bruce at Elgin Academy, in what is now part of Moray College.

Important Milestone Reached for MBGRG Website Indices

Farquhar	William	-	079
Farquhar	William	-	077
Findlay	Agnes Margaret	Manson	167
Findlay	Andrew	-	166a
Findlay	Andrew	-	073
Findlay	Angela	-	166a
Findlay	Ann	Findlay?	096
Findlay	James	-	073
Findlay	James	-	073
Findlay	Jane	-	073
Findlay	Janet	Younie	073
Findlay	Jessie	-	096
Findlay	John	-	073
Findlay	John	-	096
Findlay	John Fotheringham	-	167
Findlay	John Victor	-	168
Findlay	John Victor	-	166a
Findlay	Sheila Stodart	Bisset	166a
Findlay	Sheila Stodart	Bisset	168
Fraser	Alexander	-	170
Fraser	Alexander	-	170

We have just received our latest publication, Elgin (West Section & New Elgin War Memorial) back from the printers in England. This forms the oldest part of Elgin Cemetery which was opened for interments in 1858. The volume contains 93 pages, including an Introduction, History and Acknowledgements, as well as five pages of plans and a comprehensive index.

In excess of 500 memorial inscriptions have been recorded, and these include details of more than 2,000 individuals.

When this total is later added to our Website Indices in approximately a month from now, this source of genealogical record will have passed through the 50,000 barrier. The fact that this

number has been reached so soon after entering into our 10th year of existence, must warrant something of a celebratory vote of thanks to all our voluntary members who by their diligence over the years have laboured long, hard and enjoyably to make all this information available. Special thanks must go to our Webmaster, Lindsay Robertson, for his ever continuing efforts to keep the website up to date.

Elgin Cemetery (West) and New Elgin War Memorial is available to members prices at £5.00. The price to non members is £6.50 plus P&P where relevant. Please order your copy at enquiries@mbgrg.org.