

# THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND RESEARCH GROUP

Inauguration Issue

## Newsletter

July 2003

---

Earlier this year, Dr. Susan Buckham (Carved Stones Adviser Project with The Council for Scottish Archaeology) suggested that our recently formed group should consider producing a "Newsletter" that might be included in a proposed new website, covering all aspects relating to conservation and research of cemeteries and graveyards, at present being undertaken in Scotland.

To that end, and for the purpose of keeping our small but increasing band of volunteers fully informed as to current progress, the Management Committee have agreed to this trial publication.

Every aspect concerning a group "Newsletter" is up for discussion by members, but it is only with your interest and support that it will be able to function adequately in the future, should it indeed continue. Please therefore let us know your thoughts about the idea of such a newsletter. Would you like to be "Editor"? Could you contribute items of interest? We would be delighted to hear your ideas!

Keith L. Mitchell (Chairman)

## THE AIMS OF THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND RESEARCH GROUP

(Bruce Bishop : Research & Results Co-ordinator)

A brief summary of the purpose of the Research Group is as follows. The aim is to provide an in-depth study of all burial grounds and memorials in Morayshire, this work being divided into several sectors, each of these bringing their own benefits and problems to the researchers. The research is being conducted in conjunction with The Council for Scottish Archaeology, Carved Stones Adviser Project (Dr Susan Buckham), and is sponsored by Historic Scotland and also by the Scottish Association of Family History Societies. This work is intended to be of benefit to genealogists, family historians, local and social historians, archaeologists, those involved in the conservation of burial grounds, and those in many other disciplines.

The first phase of the work is to extend the **Inventory** of burial sites, and of all locations of monumental inscriptions in the area, which was begun on an *ad hoc* basis in 1998, but which is now defined by the methodology compiled in 2002. This inventory includes known cemeteries and burial grounds, whether or not these are associated with a place of worship, and also private burial grounds. Also included is research into the history and location of possible early burial sites now no longer in existence. Memorial tablets within churches are also included in this wide-ranging inventory, as although these may have initially only duplicated the information on the tombstones, many of these which are now so worn or damaged, or have in fact disappeared, that the memorial within the church may be the only remaining record, and as such is worthy of inclusion.

The second phase of the project is to complete a **History of the Site**, including bibliographic and possible archaeological information. This requires work in many archives, from Morayshire to Edinburgh, and in some cases even further afield.

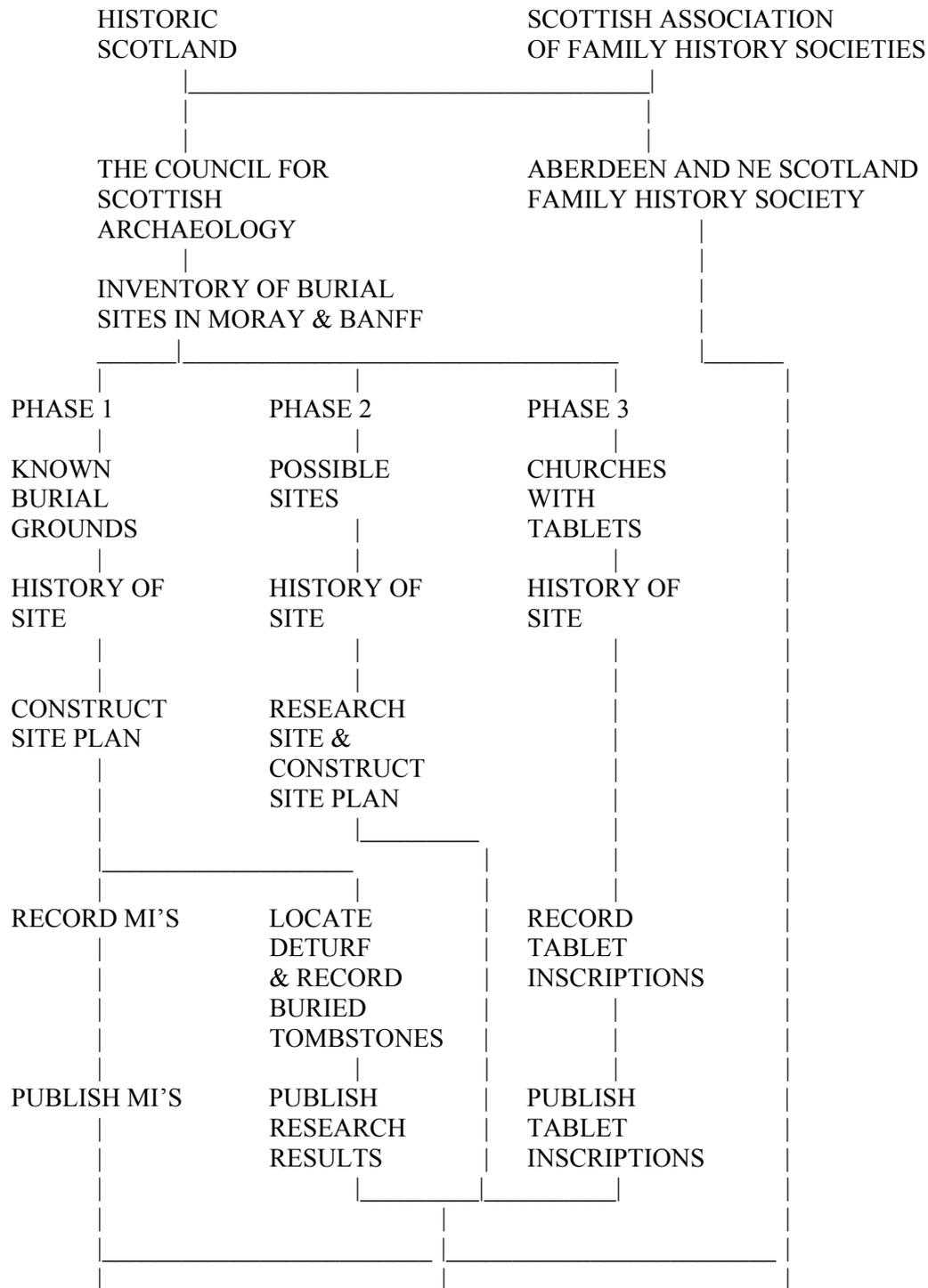
Phase three is to construct a **Site Plan** of each burial ground or church on which to identify the location of all tombstones, memorial tablets, etc. Some plans are already in existence, but many of these need updating or revising.

The fourth phase is in two sections, which may or may not be undertaken simultaneously. The first section, which has been ongoing since 1999, makes use of the already prepared site plan to make a careful, complete and accurate record of all **Monumental Inscriptions** on the site. Although many of these have been done previously, most are in a very abbreviated form, and provide an incomplete record as to the style of text, etc. The second section is to locate and record all **Buried Tombstones**, using a very specific methodology authorised by The Council for Scottish Archaeology and Historic Scotland. These stones are deturfed, recorded both by drawing and photography, and then returfed.

The final phase is the **Publication of Results**. The monumental inscriptions are published by the Aberdeen and North East Scotland Family History Society, as part of their ongoing series. The Morayshire books in this series will also contain a brief history of the burial ground. The research into the buried stones will be published privately, as a booklet to be of use to family historians, and also in an academic form to cover all aspects of research in a greater depth.

# SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE M.B.G.R.G. PROJECT 2003

(Bruce Bishop)



Provide information, research results or advice to Historic Scotland, The Council for Scottish Archaeology, conservation groups, family history societies and local archives

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF OUR PROGRESS

(Keith Mitchell)

Although our activities were formalised with a *Constitution* in March of this year, to apply for a Lottery Grant, our individual interests in burial grounds have in some cases existed for several years.

In February 2001, as part of research undertaken by the Moray Branch members of Aberdeen & North-East Scotland Family History Society, the *Monumental Inscriptions* in the "Vale of Pluscarden" was first published. Since then, five other publications have been issued, which are Alves, Birnie, St. Andrew's Kirkhill, The Michael Kirk at Gordonstoun, and lastly Kinneddar. Old Bellie Churchyard near Fochabers is currently being recorded.

It was while M.I.'s were being recorded at Birnie during 2001, that the existence of several buried tombstones were observed. Their discovery was brought about by simple observation, with an assortment of corners and other surfaces protruding through the soil and turf. This led to a partial survey being done, to quantify the number of existing stones within a depth of about 6" from ground level. The method used was a simple, but careful prodding technique with a thin metal rod. As a result, the existence of some 40 buried stones was revealed. However, as Birnie Churchyard is a *Scheduled Site*, our application to uncover these gravestones, and record their inscriptions, was turned down by Historic Scotland.

Nothing daunted, we turned our attention to burial grounds where permission was only required from the Local Council. Ian Bruce, the Cemetery Manager for Moray Council, kindly gave us permission to proceed with our project. It was from this point that we began to give serious consideration about producing a proper technique, or *Methodology*, for finding buried gravestones. This included ideas about the sort of specialist equipment that would be required, particularly with regard to the production of a suitable *Prodder* and non-metallic tools that would help to specifically minimise damage to stones during the deturfing process. It was also about this time that we thought about the possibility of surveying as many cemeteries in Morayshire as possible.

Our pilot project included Dipple, St. Andrew's Kirkhill, Essil and Kinneddar. The first three have been thoroughly surveyed and recorded, while Kinneddar has been completed except for the upper plateau, thought to contain the covered ruins of the 17th century church. Thanks to the efforts of those involved, some 64 fragmented and complete gravestones have briefly seen the light of day, this figure including a number of Monumental Mason's Blocks.

One aspect of our work that became obvious early on was the necessity of involving other people, particularly those of a "younger vintage," so that we might have some real hope of accomplishing our aims. To that end, in April 2002, via the assistance of Dr. Susan Buckham, and with the kind permission of Gordonstoun's Headmaster, Mr. Mark Pyper, a seminar on "Carved Stones In Scotland" was successfully held. Almost a year later, thanks to the generosity of Mr. Gordon Baxter a "Graveyard Day Seminar" was held in the Great Hall of W. A. Baxter and Sons Ltd. of Fochabers. It was here that Ron Brander, one of the members, presented a short but practical illustrated talk on the work of our group. Partly as

a result of these events, we now have some 12 people (not all oldies) who are now actively participating in what we are trying to achieve. Two further "Graveyard Seminars" were held, one at Dumfries in April, the other at Fort Augustus in May. These were attended by Bruce Bishop who spoke about the activities of the group; the latter event also being supported by Helen Mitchell. If one were to believe the local gossip, it would appear that "the bacon rolls and chips on the way back" from Fort Augustus were most enjoyable.

At the beginning of May we had our first joint meeting with the "Friends of Bellie" where the process of recording M.I's and probing for buried stones was initiated. This latter task has now been completed with some 40 odd "hits" being made. In conclusion, it is perhaps worth commenting that if our results so far were to be extrapolated nationwide, we must assume the existence of thousands of buried gravestones, many dating back to the 17th century. These surely must be considered as a *National Treasure* of primary source information worthy of every effort to record and preserve for future generations!

## **Bellie Churchyard Volunteer Appeal**

(Helen Mitchell : Fieldwork Co-ordinator)

As we now have 12 members currently supporting our buried gravestone activities, it should now be easier to achieve our aim of having at least two groups working together in any graveyard at the same time.

Hopefully during the holiday period we should be able to deturf and record information from quite a few gravestones at Bellie now that we have several people interested in drawing and recording.

It is intended to carry out the recording of *Monumental Inscriptions* and uncovering buried stones on the dates listed below. Please let me know as soon as possible, either personally, or by telephone / letter, if you would like to attend any of them. At present it is planned to carry out this work starting at 1.00 p.m. and finishing about 4.00 p.m. and if you are in any doubt because of weather conditions, please check with me or Bruce Bishop to see if the meeting is liable to be cancelled. See address / telephone details at end.

**(Dates for Bellie : August 10th & 24th - September 7th & 21st - October 5th)**

## **A Fascinating Pastime**

(Mary Macdonald : Member)

A new hobby has been acquired through being a member of a family history society and the Burial Ground Research Group. I have been researching ancestry for years and have had a share of going around graveyards looking for particular family stones. However, nothing compares to the recording of all inscriptions in a particular Churchyard or cemetery. Here we find a whole community of people who have lived in the area. We find families who have been there for generations. We see connections through marriages, various occupations of the time, names of places where they lived, many of which still exist

- farms, crofts etc. All this information almost brings the people back to life. We can picture them going about their daily chores.

It is a fascinating pastime especially on a beautiful summer day with the sounds of the countryside all around. Of course we always go prepared with waterproofs and wellington boots!

## **NEWSLETTER PRESENTATION**

(Keith Mitchell)

### **Articles & Editorial Control**

To create a readable and informative "Newsletter," it would seem worthwhile to establish as quickly as possible what you would like to see as regular features, or items of interest. Subjects of interest might include things such as *Co-operation with other groups*, *Dates for your diary*, *Exciting discoveries*, *Outings*, *Progress at sites under investigation* and *Technical Information*.

It would be envisaged that the nominated Editor would have the usual editorial controls for such a publication. This would include deciding the overall content of each issue, editing or condensing text where appropriate.

### **Funding**

Sadly, as with most things in life, it will cost money to publish this Newsletter. As at present our *Constitution* does not allow for charging subscriptions, ideas about funding would be most welcome. Would you, for example, be prepared to make at least a token payment to receive your copies?

### **Logo**

Do we need a group logo? If the consensus of opinion is yes, then consideration needs to be given as to how one is chosen. Perhaps like some other bodies or institutions, we could have some form of contest. If this was agreed, you could send us your ideas, artistic capability not being necessary.

### **Publication Dates**

How often would you like to see a newsletter issued? At our current stage of development, it might be reasonable to issue one, say between two to four times per year, but of course it could be more often if required.

## Pictorial Record 2001-2003



Helen Mitchell & Ron Brander cleaning a buried gravestone at Dipple during 2001



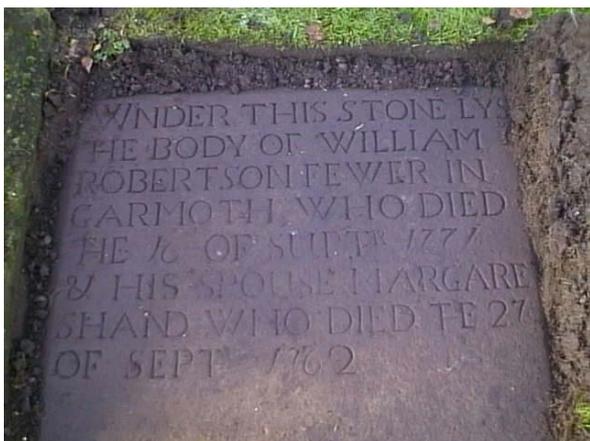
Fragmented gravestone at Essil showing damage possibly caused by 18th century "vandals"



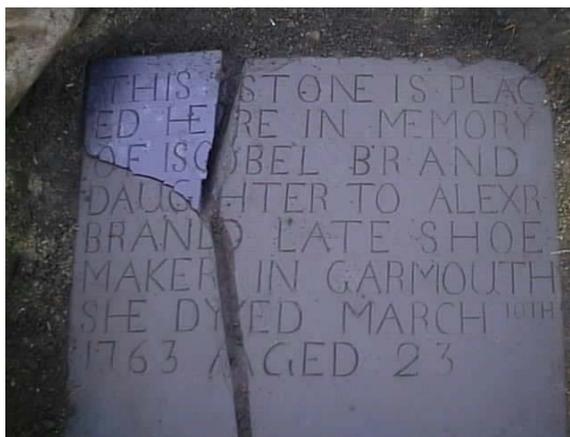
A Latin inscribed gravestone is revealed at St Andrews Kirkhill as we practice our new "Methodolgy"



"Emblems of Mortality" carved for Agnes Innes, wife of William James, Garmouth, died 23rd July 1732



The gravestone of William Robertson, Garmouth, died 1771 & his spouse Margaret Shand, died 1762



Beautifully carved slate gravestone of Isobel Brand, Garmouth, died March 10th 1763, aged 23



Mystery stone object at Kinneddar  
Note the square "socket" beside natural weathering



Well-carved, 18th century "Emblems of Mortality" at Kinneddar, including Coffin, Hour Glass & Deid Bell



Mary Macdonald deep in concentration transcribing Monumental Inscriptions at Bellie



Bruce Bishop drawing 18th century gravestone for publication & Helen Mitchell learning the technique



Gordon Baxter watching our team uncover the gravestone of James Taylor and Agnus Simmeson



An artistic delight! This well-preserved gravestone of James Taylor, who died 10th May 1707, sees the light of day again for a few minutes, before being recovered for its further protection.

## **Work in Progress at Bellie Churchyard.**

(Bruce Bishop)

The group are currently researching this site in conjunction with the "Friends of Bellie Churchyard." Site plans have been drawn, on which all the tombstones have been marked and numbered and a history of the former church is currently being compiled. The somewhat chequered history of the church runs from the 12<sup>th</sup> century until it was allowed to fall into ruin following the move of the parish church to Fochabers in 1797. The local heritors, at Gordon Castle, being primarily of the Catholic faith, appear to have done little to support the church at Bellie. The churchyard, with its two extensions, one in 1929 and the other in the 1970's, continues to be used as the burial ground for the parish.

The recording of the Monumental Inscriptions is making good progress, with about 350 stones having been transcribed so far. The first volume of these MI's will contain the inscriptions on the old part of the burial ground, stones 1 - 562, whilst the second volume will contain the inscriptions in the 1929 extension, stones 563 – 750. As the 1970's section is not considered to be under threat, the recording of this is not a priority.

A survey of the site has resulted in the location of about 40 tombstones buried beneath the surface. Simultaneously with the recording of the MI's, a research team has so far uncovered 7 of these, two of which have proved to be, in one case a blank stone, and in the other rubble, possibly from the remains of the old church. The four, which have so far provided inscriptions, have all been excellent examples of the art of the monumental mason, and although it seems a great pity to have to turf over these stones, this is the only way in which their continued preservation can be assured.

With our current numbers of enthusiastic volunteers, it is hoped that the first phase of the MI recording, together with the recording, illustrating and photographing of all of the buried stones, can be completed by the autumn of 2003.

### **Future Plans**

During the compilation of the Inventory, an attempt has been made to prioritise future work, both for MI's and Buried Stones. Three local sites have become immediately apparent as being in need of action, these being Lhanbryde Old Churchyard, old Drainie Churchyard and Grant Street Burial Ground in Burghead. Permission will require to be obtained for Lhanbryde, as part of the site is scheduled, but Burghead is covered by the current permissions, which the group hold. The Ministry of Defence have granted permission to investigate the old Drainie Church on the airfield, but precise dates for this work, to fit with airfield operations, are still awaited.