

THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND  
RESEARCH GROUP

# Newsletter

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Dear Member, As it is six months since our first Newsletter, the time has come to update you about our progress, as well as giving you some idea about our plans for the forthcoming year.

## Logo

After suggesting the possibility of having a group logo last year, the current Committee feel they have come up with a very appropriate and suitable idea. We hope you agree!

On our last day of carrying out research into "Buried Tombstones" at Bellie Cemetery in November, almost as an afterthought, we inverted two table stone ends in the old section that were upside down and almost completely covered with moss. When we viewed them the right way up, we found that their original carved surfaces were in almost pristine condition, suggesting they had lain in that position for a very long time. One of them contained a very peaceful "Winged Angel" surmounting an Hourglass. The overall carving somehow or other seemed to plead for a more modern use, as well as saying that it could symbolise what our group was trying to achieve.

Bruce has converted the original photo image into a suitable computer graphic, which will allow it to be used on all Group publications where appropriate. Thanks Bruce! One further idea has been put forward regarding this stone. Perhaps the Group might think of "adopting" it to help aid its protection. It is completely detached from its unknown tabletop, and it is unlikely that its original connection will ever be identified. It would be a relatively simple matter to raise the stone slightly off the ground, as well as partially encasing it on three sides so that it would not be quite so open to the elements. Do you have any views or other suggestions on the subject?

## Bellie Cemetery

Between May and November, 12 members helped in the recording of M.I.'s along with members of ANESFHS and the "Friends of Bellie." On the "Buried Tombstone" front we have recorded 29 stones dating from as early as 1693, but the unnamed memorial to the Marquis of Huntly's "Malster Cook" may predate this. Several examples of finely executed carved "Emblems of Mortality" were recorded. One of these, "John Hosack, Boatman on Spey" who died by a fatal shot in 1711, featured in an article by Esther Green, of the Northern Scot. It is hoped to publish the results later this year.

## Drainie Cemetery (RAF Lossiemouth)

While working at Bellie, arrangements were made via Flt. Lieut. Jim Anderson, to begin our survey of this cemetery. As access to the airfield is strictly official, it was a particular privilege to be given this rare opportunity to study the 67 recumbent gravestones within the remains of the church and churchyard perimeter. It therefore became necessary to temporarily stop what we were doing at Bellie so we could complete the Drainie exercise as quickly as possible.

Some of the stones had originally been upright, however, for obvious reasons, these were laid flat. Many of the inscriptions were very difficult to read due to erosion, amongst other factors. However, we were able to significantly enlarge upon the information that had previously been recorded some twenty odd years ago.

One day, at about the mid point of our research, Group Captain Steve Hillier the Officer Commanding RAF Lossiemouth, walked over from the helicopter area to see for himself what progress was being made. During his visit, he promised to arrange to have special Infra-Red Ariel Photographs taken of the site if the appropriate equipment became available, and these were duly taken. Eight members took part in this project, and particular thanks must go to Mary Macd., Irene, Helen and Bruce who turned up every Sunday until we were finished.

### **Drainie : Gordonstoun Connection**

Sunday 11th January saw Bruce, Mary Macd., Helen and myself foregathering at the Gordonstoun main rubbish tip, where previous rummaging had uncovered several old carved stones believed originally to have come from Drainie Church after it had been demolished in 1953. One exceptionally nice stone turned out to be part of probably either a Communion Table or Pulpit base. This large and extremely heavy stone of similar dimensions to a flat gravestone, has at its centre a deeply inset carving of the Greek Capitals IHC, being three of the letters of Iesus, or Jesus.

With the generous and valuable help from three of the ground staff, a chain saw and tractor scoop, some 40 assorted carved blocks of stone, some with very fine window tracery work, were removed from below great heaps of mouldering and rusting rubbish. These were brought over to lie temporarily outside the Music Department. Some of these were then drawn by Bruce, and general photographs taken. We understand that a substantial lintel and two pillar sections are to be set up at the Michael Kirk as a bench, while it has been suggested that the IHC stone is to be incorporated within one of the new buildings yet to be erected. As far as is known, a large proportion of the remaining pieces are to be built into garden walls, etc. of the new Aberlour House School. Finally, the two upper sections of tracery and a pillar section are to be put on display in the Gordonstoun Archives. A further report will be included in the Drainie publication, which it is hoped to publish later this year.

### **Kinneddar (Buried Tombstones)**

This project, which was completed in May last year, will form part of the Bellie publication. We apologise for not publishing the results sooner. However, as the content is limited, the Committee was uncertain about what would be the most suitable cemetery to publish it along with. The predicament has now been resolved, we hope!

### **Dipple (Monumental Inscriptions)**

On 16th November, eight members plus one member of ANESFHS went to Dipple with the express purpose of recording all the M.I.'s led as usual by our ever industrious Bruce. This was thought possible, as Dipple is a very small and compact cemetery with only some 247 visible gravestones and mason's blocks. We all worked very studiously and methodically, so that by the middle of the afternoon a joyous cry went up that indicated a successful conclusion. Later investigation, however, revealed that a few stones had unfortunately been missed out. On a very cold winter's day in early January, Helen and myself went out to try and finish them off, but it proved to be so cold, that in the

end, we had to leave some still to be finished at a later date. Weather permitting, we hope to complete the M.I. survey within the next few weeks.

## **Botriphnie Expedition**

A chance meeting between our own Bruce and Mrs Gordon-Duff of Drummuir, led to a carload of volunteers (Mary Macd., Helen, Bruce and myself) descending on Botriphnie to check out a selection of broken gravestones that had been found outside the cemetery wall. It was thought that they had been dumped over the wall perhaps upwards of sixty years ago. The original idea had been to build a rockery with all these fragments and advice was being sought from our Group.

Mrs Gordon-Duff very kindly gave us a guided tour of the small and tidy cemetery that contains a number of interesting looking tombstones. She informed us that the Monumental Inscriptions had never been properly recorded or published.

We were then shown a jumble of fragments, which the gardeners had laid out around a large tree, with some attempts having been made at reconstruction. We then surveyed a raised area outside the wall where these fragments had been originally found. From what could be seen, it was apparent that more fragments existed, so with the gardener's motorised assistance, several more were rescued and brought over to the main pile. One substantial slate fragment with surviving text was housed in a lean-to for further temporary protection against the elements. Quite some time was devoted to placing a number of the fragments into some sort of connected order and, on at least one of them, we were able to reconstruct the majority of the Inscription relating to a family of Suter, dating to the 18th century.

Mrs Gordon-Duff then provided a welcome cup of tea, while some discussion took place about how progress might be made on recording the M.I.'s, as well as perhaps conducting further research into the gravestone fragments.

It has now been arranged to record the M.I.'s later this year, possibly by the end of May, in readiness for the tourist season. It is envisaged that some of our members will team up with local volunteers possibly over a period of one or two visits. If you are interested in taking part, please let Helen know as soon as possible to book your place.

## **Guidelines & Methodologies**

Throughout the year the Committee, individually and collectively, have been working towards finalising four Guidelines / Methodologies relating to research connected with recording information about burials in general and cemeteries in particular. The subjects covered include Compilation of an Inventory of Burial Grounds, Researching Your Graveyard, Monumental Inscription Recording and lastly Buried Tombstones, Protocols and Methodology.

During our activities this year, we have been attempting to improve various techniques used by our members to accurately record Monumental Inscriptions. However, we are to some extent still in the process of trying out new ideas. For example, one of our past members suggested using a torch with 2,000,000-candle power to help make faint text more readable. We have tried it out and it works!

Thankfully the design problems we previously encountered on our probes used to trace Buried Tombstones, appear finally to have been overcome. Can you believe that the answer lay partly in using the necks of old toothbrushes? While working on the last buried tombstone at Bellie, we had

the first trial use of our new "plastic" bladed trowel. While we were able to excavate quite successfully on and around the stone in question without *any* damage being caused to stone or trowel, some further work will be necessary to perfect this tool for full practical use.

### **To Returf or Not to Returf**

At the conclusion of the Graveyard Day Seminar held at Baxters of Fochabers last April, some of the participants and audience went to Bellie Cemetery to reflect on what had been discussed. While there we explained in general some of our ideas about recording "Buried Tombstones." One lady asked why it was that we replaced the turf after finishing the recording process. Now in some ways this is something of a difficult question to answer!

Gravestones, also known as markers, are meant to visibly mark the spot where people are buried. The fact that they have sunk or been landscaped over cannot eradicate that fact. So each time we uncover a stone, there can be a temptation to leave it open to the elements as it was originally intended. However, having seen many examples of tombstones being preserved in much better condition than surrounding visible stones, we must so far conclude that returfing should be considered as unfortunately unavoidable.

### **Forthcoming Projects For This Year**

We hope to have the M.I.'s at Essil Cemetery near Garmouth, completed by the end of March or April (weather permitting). Also during this time we hope to conduct a thorough survey of Alves old cemetery for Buried Tombstones. After this we will proceed to the deturfing and recording stage. The next project should be at Lhanbryde Old Churchyard. If we are very, very lucky, and all goes according to plan, we might just sneak in some work at Rafford Old Churchyard during the autumn.

We indeed have a very busy year ahead of us, so your help and support will indeed be vital to the success of these projects. Tell your friends, you never know, this type of research and friendly outdoor activity may appeal to them.

### **Newsletter Editor**

To date, our appeal for an "Editor" for the Newsletter has met with no volunteers. While I am prepared to continue acting as "Temporary Editor" for the present, a properly appointed Editor would probably be much more satisfactory. So please feel free to suggest anyone who might be suitable. You can also easily nominate yourself.

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