

THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND RESEARCH GROUP

Newsletter

Issue 3 (Currently published twice a year) September 2004



Dear Member, Unfortunately, various circumstances have brought about a small delay in the production of this Issue of the Newsletter. Please accept my sincere apologies as Editor.

Our Logo

The committee so far has not reached any firm decision about how the table-end winged angel in Bellie should be protected from the elements. However, it is hoped that something positive can be achieved before the onset of winter. The Committee is still investigating the possibility of using our logo on members' sweatshirts or tee-shirts. If and when these become available, we will keep you informed about prices and styles.

Alves

Work in researching this graveyard began away back in February. Since then we have made 18 visits during which we have recorded some of 80 buried gravestones, while only covering roughly a third of the ground area. Unfortunately many of these turned out to be blank, a fact that is most depressing to enthusiastic genealogists searching for inscriptions to transcribe. We also found quite a number of gravestones with either very faint or almost illegible inscriptions, while some only had the ghostly remains of "Emblems of Mortality." On the bright side, we inscriptions, including a few that Mr Cheyne, the local schoolmaster to James Cook and his spouse curious symbol incised into the put forward to explain its possible to date was offered by Dr David of Scotland, who suggested it might coulter.



One discovery of some significance original church wall fabric, possibly century. There appear to be some hidden under the turf, but proper feature has been left for future

the recent discovery of a grave slab dating to approximately the 14th century, give or take 100 years. Although almost complete, this slab is unfortunately shattered. However, it still has the very faint remains of the bases of double cross shafts, surmounted by an eight-pointed cross with fleur-de-lis type points. Thanks to Mike, one of our recent new members, the faint outline of a sword-hilt was observed and this detail was carefully drawn and photographed. Both these finds have been reported to the relevant authorities.

is what appears to be part of the dating back to about the 13th fairly substantial foundations archaeological exploration of this study. Another item of interest was

Saturday, September 4th, was a very successful day at Alves, however we had an extremely difficult time uncovering one tombstone in particular. This was the stone of William Rob and his spouse Ann Masson and their children. The above photograph gives some impression of the problems we encountered. Since this stone was first recorded by Mr Cheyne, the adjacent tree roots had covered a significant portion of the entire inscription. After considerable effort, we managed to clear away sufficient root structure that enabled us to record almost the entire inscription while leaving the tree basically undamaged.

Bellie Cemetery

It had been planned to publish the "Buried Tombstone" section by September, but this has had to be postponed till later in the year. In terms of the amount of recording errors discovered in the initial transcription phase of the "Monumental Inscriptions," it has been decided that a complete check should be carried out prior to the publication produced by the Aberdeen and North-East Family History Society. Thanks are due to Alasdair and Isobel Gunn who have been carrying out the very time consuming task of helping to produce an independent check on the original manuscript transcriptions. Keith and Helen Mitchell have also assisted.

It is also good to note that remedial work on some of the damaged tombstones has been undertaken by The Elgin Marble Co. on behalf of Moray Council.

Botriphnie Expedition

On the 27th of July, seven members visited this cemetery specifically to try and complete several tombstone jigsaws, making use of all the fragments that we had uncovered during our previous visit. These were hopefully to be merged with those previously found by Mrs Gordon-Duff's gardeners. Several barrow loads of stone were moved to the agreed sorting area and special thanks for their efforts must go to Brian, Mike and Mrs Gordon-Duff's gardener.

Midway through proceedings, we were graciously given access to Mrs Gordon-Duff's kitchen, where welcome refreshments were provided.

After some discussion, it was agreed that the most suitable place to put these tombstones was outside the cemetery, adjacent to its boundary wall near to the West gate, which leads to private property. The plan as discussed was that they were to be laid flat on the ground surrounded by a layer of chips or stones, so that they might be seen more effectively.

By the end of the day most of the fragments with carvings or inscriptions on them were inserted into their appropriate places, although the accuracy of some of these placements is very much open to question. Overall it would appear that we were dealing with a relatively small number of damaged tombstones, perhaps about 10 in all. It was interesting to note that most were very fragmented, giving the possible impression that they may have been broken up on purpose.

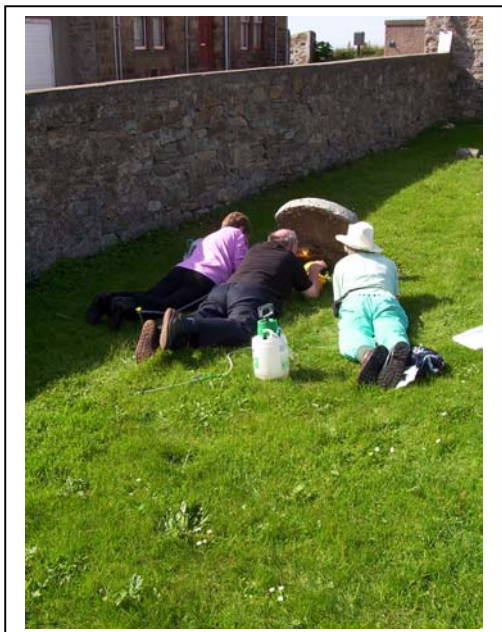
These tombstones will form part of the ANEFHS Monumental Inscription publication on Botriphnie, the draft of which is now complete except for the index.

Cartoon Corner - (selected by Bruce Bishop - Secretary)



Ed. note: if you wish to see more cartoon features in future issues, why not create your own brand of humour, or tell me your ideas and perhaps we can have them drawn for you.

Burghead Cemetery



Burghead Cemetery on a Sunday morning.
Perhaps you can provide a better caption!

Sunday, 5th September saw our group's first visit to this graveyard. Contrary to expectations, the weather was exceedingly kind and the turnout excellent, 12 members being present. The idea was to record all the M.I.'s in one visit if possible, as well as finding buried tombstones.

On the M.I. recording front we did rather well, considering the overall state of the inscriptions, which in many cases were almost non-existent, or very badly affected by erosion, covered in lichen, or both. Out of some 99 tombstones about 68 were recorded. Not bad when you see the problems we encountered, as aptly illustrated by three of our intrepid researchers in the adjacent photograph.

Four buried tombstones have been found so far, but only a small area of the cemetery has so far been probed. We expect to find several more on our proposed return visit on the 19th September.

As part of my ongoing project to make a photographic record of as many tombstones in the region as possible, I managed to keep up with the transcribers. Therefore with luck, this cemetery will have a complete photographic record by the end of our next visit. During our work, several local people stopped to chat, including one young lad who appeared quite interested to see what was going on. Two ladies also came into the cemetery for a closer look and both expressed an interest in joining the group. Interestingly, one of them told us that she had very recently been in the cemetery taking photographs, as she was concerned about the loss of historical information caused by tombstone disintegration and the sort of erosion described above.

Drainie Cemetery (RAF Lossiemouth)

Our first Drainie publication (vol. 2 of *The Forgotten Tombstones of Moray*) published in May, is now sold out. A second run should be available soon. It is great to know that the conscientious efforts made by our group in recording the M.I.'s at Drainie so meticulously, is proving to be a useful reference work to local and family historians.

Drainie - Gordonstoun Connection

As a postscript to our work at the Gordonstoun rubbish dump, I would like to report the following little adventure. Earlier this year, it very unexpectedly came to our attention that the whole tip was in the process of being removed. As there had been some prior discussion about the possibility of doing further rescue archaeology work to search for carved stonework, some very hurried discussions took place with the site manager with a view to permitting some form of observation of the rubbish, as it was being JCB'd into waiting trucks. However, these plans backfired in several ways.

As several truckloads had already been removed to the premises of J. Gordon Williamson Ltd., Waste Disposal Merchants in Elgin for sorting, I took it upon myself to attempt whatever form of additional checking that might be agreeable to. Accordingly I would like to express our group's grateful thanks to the management of this firm, for the extremely co-operative manner in which they dealt with my very unusual request.

So there I was, suitably dressed in hardhat and gloves, standing perhaps some 20-30 feet off the ground, in a metal, boxlike container with a conveyor belt passing through the middle. All the dump material was initially JCB'd into an enormous circular riddle affair, the non-soil items then being deposited onto the conveyor belt

just above ground level. These then ponderously made their way up to the area where I was standing. Several other men beside me were busy removing assorted rubbish from this conveyor belt and throwing these items into other containers. The remainder then made its way out of this area and dropped into other collection areas. As many huge boulders and other heavy items thundered down onto the search area in front of us, I hoped against hope that some item of significance would appear. However, this was not the case. Although I saw nothing of interest, we can at least say that a large proportion of the Gordonstoun dump was minutely scrutinised.

Dipple (Monumental Inscriptions)

In June, the Aberdeen and North-East Family History Society published their Monumental Inscription volume of this graveyard. Members of both groups undertook the task of compiling the information, while Bruce Bishop as usual edited the text.

Essil (Monumental Inscriptions)

We had five visits to this cemetery between February and May to record M.I.s. Between both the old and new sections there are approximately 550 tombstones, including uprights, flats, table-stones and wall-tablets. Most of the recording process was completed by pairs of people dictating and writing as one transcribing unit. After each M.I. was written down, each pair then exchanged places, one person reading what had been transcribed, the other checking the text against the tombstone. Although this may sound a rather laborious process, it certainly brought to light a significant number of recording errors. It is perhaps also worth noting that this process was done in accordance with our groups recently published Handbook For Volunteers published in March this year.

Recording was done during a variety of weather - including snow - but general problems were really limited to vegetation, which in several instances caused considerable transcription problems. Subsequently Helen and I made several visits to take photographs of every tombstone at Essil making good use of our new piece of technology, a 2 x 4 ft mirror. Checking these on computer against the typed manuscript brought out yet a further collection of transcription errors, proving just how highly subjective the process of Monumental Recording is!

Travellers' Tales

St. John's Churchyard, Gamrie - (by Mary Wardle)

About a mile and a quarter, on the B9031, before the Gardenstown turning there is a dangerous bend in the road and an easily missed sign pointing to St. John's Church. You may be forgiven for thinking you have made a mistake, for it is a bumpy, twisting track which leads you down to the car park. It is now you begin to realise what a truly magnificent place this is. On your right a little burn rushes over miniature waterfalls on its way to the sea, and beyond is Castle Hill and the area known as Findon.

We had quite unknowingly chosen one of the few really warm Spring days. The gorse was in full bloom and wild flowers were in profusion. As you walk towards the church you see the whole of Gamrie Bay with Gardenstown below and beyond it Crovie with the headland rising above. Before we reached the churchyard we could hear voices and discovered an English family who had fallen in love with the place.

This churchyard is a joy, not only for the view, but it feels a happy place. It is a jumble of closely packed tombstones only a few of which are illegible. The roofless church is medieval, long and narrow, and could hold a large congregation, the population was larger in times past. I had come here to look for my 3g and 2g-grandparents though I knew I would not find them, paupers graves are almost impossible to find. My 2g-grandparents died within half a mile of the place so I think they are here somewhere. John Bain and Elizabeth Hepburn spent all their working lives at nearby Draidland and we were able to find the graves of the people for whom they worked. I did find a Hepburn stone, but it was too modern and one for a Bain I cannot place, but that was all. We sat for a while on a handily placed bench and chatted with a lady who had walked up from Gardenstown; she knew the history of the area by heart.

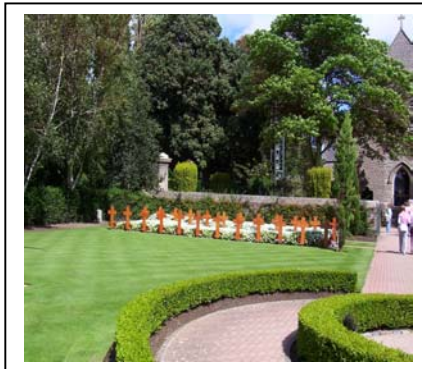
This hillside had once been a place of conflict when the coastal villages were forever in danger from the invading Danes. Tradition said that the original church had been founded over a 100 years before. In 1004 part of the Scottish Army was garrisoned on Castle Hill and from there watched the landing of the Danes on the opposite side of the burn. The alarm was given and reinforcements quickly arrived. The Scottish chief, the Thane of Buchan, made a solemn vow to St. John in front of the whole army, to build a church on the place where the invaders were camped on condition that the saint would lend his assistance. The army succeeded in gaining possession of the hilltop above the invaders and, by rolling large boulders, forced the Danes to flee, many being killed in flight. Then the whole army set to work to build the church on the spot where the Danes had camped. But the Danes returned and drove the Scots back to the Castle Hill. By now the word had spread far and wide and the Scots poured in from all directions. The Scots encircled them and the helpless Danes could not escape. * Three of the Danish chiefs were slain and their skulls were fixed inside the church, and there they remained for 800 years. In more recent times these relics had been pilfered by numerous visitors, but one was said to have been recovered and placed for security in the Museum in Banff.

I have very recently visited the museum and spoken to an American anthropologist (he has a Scots wife) who spends time as a volunteer helping out with the visitors. He knew of the story but had no idea the skull had been in the museum. 'Perhaps,' he said 'it was in the store room.' He was determined to find out. I shall have to go there again to find out if he has been successful.

Ed. note: see The Scottish Chronicle, etc. by Raphael Hollinshead, 1806 edition, Vol. 1, pp. 330-31

Howard Davis Park (Garden of Remembrance) - (by Keith Mitchell, Chairman)

During our all too brief holiday in Jersey a few weeks ago, Helen and I took a stroll one evening through this park, with a view to seeing and listening to some musical entertainment from the bandstand, but unfortunately there was nothing on. However, we discovered a neatly kept small corner of the park. We decided the light was better so we might take appreciating better the beauty of the. Situated beside St Lukes R.C. church, American and British servicemen who with the island's wartime history. crosses are surrounded by a mass of scene of dreadful agony into an area tranquillity. The crosses are split into accessible. The wood is in extremely coated with preservative. Although some are inscribed with named individuals, many of the graves obviously contain the bodies of unknown individuals. These are inscribed after this fashion.



that particular night. "Garden of Remembrance" in to return another day when some photographs, as well as well-kept flower borders. this area is dedicated to lost their lives in connection Some 56 simple wooden colourful flowers, making a of apparent peaceful two sections and all are easily good condition, being well

A NAVAL RATING
R.N.
BURIED
17.11.1943

Buiternach Cemetery Visit - (by Mary Macdonald)

On August 21st, the Moray Field Club outing was to visit the Scalan Seminary at Braes of Glenlivet and afterwards to climb Tom Trumper, a hill nearby. When we left Elgin at 9.30 a.m. the weather was fine and we anticipated a pleasant day ahead.

However, when we arrived at Glenlivet we were subjected to two short, very cold, squally showers so the Tom Trumper part of the excursion was abandoned. An alternative was suggested - a visit to the old cemetery of Buiternach nearby and as no one objected off we went. There was a 20-minute walk uphill on a track through forestry plantation, but when we arrived at the cemetery we decided it was worth the climb. The cemetery is situated on the side of a hill with a panoramic view of the countryside. What a lovely place

to be at rest. There was just one thing which spoiled the outing and that was that this beautiful site is so overgrown that the headstones will soon be invisible. I was just wishing that the group visiting that day had all armed themselves with shears and mowers and what a difference that would have made!

Ed. note: Buiternach Cemetery is situated about three miles south of Tomnavoulin. It has been abandoned for roughly 100 years. I understand that the Council will arrange to cut the grass when we begin work here.

"Skullduggery" - (by Brian Wardell)

Some weeks ago we visited Fordyce kirkyard. Much to our surprise we encountered, just inside the gate, a skull peeping out from under a tree. We asked in the village but nobody we spoke to knew about it. We made a return visit a week later to take a photograph, but it had vanished. I wondered who it belonged to and whether it ever got united with its body.

Oddments

From an article in the Daily Telegraph - (by Mary Wardell)

Tom Garner was an 18th century blacksmith whose mortal remains lie in the churchyard at Houghton, near I think St. Ives in Cambridgeshire. Inscribed on the tombstone:-

"My fire-dried corpse lies here at rest
My soul, smoke-like, soars to be blessed"

Stone-cutter Extraordinary - (selected by Keith Mitchell, Chairman)

In the year 1793, a Stone-cutter at Brecon, was ordered to letter a Tombstone, on which he inscribed the age of the deceased as 89. Those who gave him his orders finding the real age to have been 90, insisted upon his adding another year; this the ingenious Welchman accomplished, and the stone now actually bears - 891! a few years short of that venerable antediluvian Mathusalem.

Epitaph in a Country Churchyard (probably English)

Underneath doth lie until
The Day of judgment, Peter Still,
Who, when living, was a Miller,
Still he then was - now he's stiller.

Ed. note: These two items are extracted from the manuscript writings of John Manders of Dublin & Whitehaven. He wrote them c1829. Courtesy of Scottish Family Heritage.

And now a Word From our Controller - (Helen Mitchell - Field Co-ordinator)

"The best laid schemes o' mice and men....." has definitely applied to us this summer. Due to holidays, health problems and unforeseen circumstances with various members, we have not achieved our goal of completing Alves, however we are now trying to make up for lost ground. For example, the weekend of the 4th and 5th was well attended with a total of 20 members taking part in work at both Alves and Burghead. Lets keep the momentum going! Saturday, 2nd October will be our next visit to Alves, while Sunday 3rd might be used either for M.I. work somewhere, or for a general outing still to be discussed. The remainder of the year is still likely to be very busy, so your help and support is indeed vital to the success of all our projects. Tell your friends, you never know, this type of research and friendly outdoor activity may appeal to them.

Editor : Keith Mitchell, 127 Morriston Road, Elgin, IV30 4NB
Tel: 01343-546620 & E-mail address = keith@family-heritage.demon.co.uk