

**THE MORAY
BURIAL GROUND
RESEARCH GROUP**

Fra Birt To Graif



Na Rest We Haif - 1571

**ANNUAL REPORT
2006 - 2007**

The Committee of 2006-2007

Hon. President	Betty E Willsher, M.B.E.
Chairman	Keith L Mitchell, FSA Scot
Secretary	Bruce B Bishop, FSA Scot
Treasurer	Irene Black
Field Co-ordinator	Helen Mitchell, FSA Scot
Ordinary Member	Naomi Ratcliffe FSA Scot
Ordinary Member	Moira Windwick

Committee Appointments Held During 2006-2007

Auditor	William Windwick
Webmaster	Lindsay Robertson, FSA Scot

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Elgin Cathedral Table-end Support Dated 1544?



photo : KLM

This photograph shows part of the fragmentary remains of a recumbent tombstone being used to support the early 19th century Table tombstone of Alexander Batchin and his family. It appears to have the year 1544 carved on it, although this might read 1644. It was discovered in mid November when it was cleaned for recording purposes by Brian and Mary Wardle, which was one of the last activities so carefully undertaken by Brian at the cathedral.

Chairman's Report

Just a day before beginning to write this page, I was uncertain about the best way of beginning my Report, however, a message winging its way across cyberspace from New Zealand, suggested an appropriate solution. Kyle who hails from Wellington had been making use of our ever growing Website and found a reference to two ancestors buried in Urquhart old churchyard. I hope Kyle you will forgive my publicizing your comments in our Guest Book, but it seemed to me that they perhaps indicated part of the reasons that family historians like us, do what we do. Kyle says "A great website – very helpful to researchers outside Scotland and the UK. Many thanks to the volunteers whose hard work is very much appreciated." I am sure our response is – Glad to be of help! Take a bow Lindsay.

This year we sadly lost two people who had given a considerable amount of time and valuable service to the Group in a variety of different ways. First I wish to mention Eddie Benzie, who although not a member this year through a long bout of ill-health, had previously acted as our Auditor, and who did so in an extremely efficient and thoughtful manner, as was his way. Second, very suddenly and unexpectedly we lost the friendship and companionship of Brian Wardle, who along with his wife Mary were such regular attenders at our meetings in the field. Brian a very quiet and unassuming man was always ready to help in whatever way he could, and his presence amongst us will indeed be a great loss.

There are a lot of people who should receive an individual mention here, but space unfortunately prohibits this. Therefore, irrespective of what your contribution has been to Group activities, please be assured that your efforts are without a doubt recognized in achieving the aims we have set ourselves.

Membership this year has certainly grown passed all expectations, and it is to be hoped that this trend will continue, particularly in regard to attracting younger people on board. Our finances are in good order, considerably helped by the sale of our Bellie MI publication, which appears to be something of a small success. This bodes well for the decision to publish all our research in-house. On the whole funding schemes have been fairly unsuccessful due to the lack of an organizer. However, thanks to the recent efforts of Jeanne Butler, we now have a new Quiz – "Who do you think they were?", and I would ask you to give this worthy endeavour all the support you can. For example, can your local newsagent, etc. take some?

While working at Birnie (with some exciting buried tombstones seeing the light of day), discussion took place about the possibility of acquiring some high-tech equipment which would allow us to find this type of memorial in a more scientific manner than used at present. The Group's considerable appreciation goes to both William Windwick and John Garven for researching this subject, and as a result our knowledge on the subject has now considerably increased. John undertook a fair bit of research on our behalf, and it seems that some form of Resistance Meter & Twin Probe Kit might well do the task. This would be much less expensive and apparently more effective than the Ground Radar we had at first thought about.

At the end of October Stephen Leitch made a very exciting discovery at Elgin Cathedral. Thanks to a spider, he observed carvings on the underside of a Table-top. Further investigation led us to discover that 14 table stones had inscriptions or other carvings on them. This represents 10% of the total number of Table Stones at the cathedral. Due to safety concerns, we have since then been devising a suitable methodology for recording these recycled tombstones. This chance find seems noteworthy, and it is more than a little interesting to speculate on whether this type of tombstone is unique to Elgin Cathedral, or whether similar examples may be found further afield, perhaps even in other areas of the country.

Keith L. Mitchell (Chairman)

Secretary's Report

The Secretary has attended several meetings, mostly in Edinburgh, over the course of the past year. These have included meetings of the SAFHS Graveyard Working Group regarding the completion of the full Inventory of all Scottish Burial Grounds, in which the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Scotland (RCAHMS) are providing valuable support. The first edition of the Graveyard Inventory CD is expected to be published in time for the SAFHS Annual Conference in Inverness in April. Other meetings have been held with Dr Allan Rutherford of HS and other members of the HS staff regarding aspects of the work on buried tombstones at the Scheduled Site at Birnie, for which final Scheduled Monument Consent has now been granted, and work has now commenced. The MBGRG Methodology for recording buried tombstones has now been published.

The Secretary also met with representatives from the Lottery Awards Scheme to obtain information on possible future funding. Dr Alan Rutherford of Historic Scotland and Dr Iain Hill of the National Archives of Scotland have both agreed to act as sponsors for any future funding applications.

Communication has been ongoing between the Secretary and Mr Gary Morrison of the Moray Council Cemeteries Department, with a valuable two-way exchange of information. The Moray Council continues to be very supportive of the work of MBGRG.

Various communications have been received during the year both by post and email, but the majority of these were requests for information on burial grounds which have not yet been researched, or are outwith our area.

It was decided that all future MI books should be published by MBGRG and not by ANESFHS. Discussions have been held with our printers, Parchment of Oxford, regarding the continued production of small print runs, and agreement has been reached on this matter.

Both of the local newspapers, the *Northern Scot* and the *Press and Journal* have shown considerable interest in the work of the group during the past year, and have been a valuable source of publicity for our work.

Bruce B Bishop (Secretary)

Treasurer's Report

At the end of December we had 32 Ordinary members and 29 Associate members in our group. This generated an income of £557.39 in subscriptions, an increase of £155.39 from the previous year.

Our publishing costs for the year came to £649.96. This was for the reprinting of *Forgotten Tombstones* Vol's 1, 2 and 3 and the printing of *Forgotten Tombstones* Vol 4 and *Bellie M I's*. Our total income to the end of December from the sale of the publications came to £740.60 but, in January, the funds were enhanced by further sales amounting to £293.05.

We have also received £96.82 in donations - £40.00 of this came from selling old coins that one of our members had donated - while a further £77.20 was raised from recycling cartridges.

Other expenditure during the year included, web site costs of £93.41; volunteers expenses, including insurance, £300.00; printing (of newsletter), postage and stationery £176.55;

equipment (mainly materials for making new turf probes) £244.42. The stand at the Family History Fair and the AGM expenses amounted to £83.05.

At 31 December 2006 our bank balance was £488.85.

Irene Black (Treasurer)

Research Co-ordinator's Report

Information regarding the frequency of site visits and the progress made on individual sites is contained in the Fieldwork Co-ordinator's Report.

Historical and archival research has been carried out on all of the sites which have been recorded during the year, and archival research into burials at the various Forres churchyards, and also Dallas, Dundurcas and Rothes, is ongoing at present.

As mentioned in last year's report, work on Elgin Cathedral is revealing many unknown or previously undocumented details of the history of the building and its precincts, and various unusual aspects of many of the tombstones. The project is ongoing. The research of the buried tombstones at Birnie is progressing slowly, but has been delayed to a great extent by the inclement weather, and often by a lack of volunteers on site.

The "Monumental Inscriptions, Bellie Old Churchyard and New Cemetery" is now in print, and despite the book being relatively expensive the sales have been very good. The Monumental Inscription booklets for Urquhart, Lhanbryde and Spynie Churchyards have all been published by ANESFHS. Work at Rafford is now completed and almost ready for publication by MBGRG.

MI books for Boharm and a combined volume for Tombae and Buiternach are in the process of preparation for publication.

Four volumes of "The Forgotten Tombstones of Moray" are now in print, with the fifth, Rafford (included with the Rafford MI's) being in the process of production. It is hoped that a sixth volume, on Alves, will be produced shortly. Sales have been steady, and as good as can be expected given the very specific nature of the material.

Bruce B Bishop (Research Co-ordinator)

Fieldwork Co-ordinator's Report

For one reason or another we have not had so many visits, only 58 compared to 78 last year. Although support tailed off towards the end of the year, the voluntary help our members have given throughout, has been considerable. We decided to have December and January off to allow other work e.g. editing, checking, indexing and preparation for publication, to be done. Of course the best of the winter weather was over those two months and on our first outing of this year to Dallas I had to cancel because of the snow. Our plan is to do MIs at Dallas and buried stones at a later date. The MIs will be integrated with work at the Cathedral and Birnie.

Elgin Cathedral (31 visits). Our main MI recording has been at Elgin Cathedral this year and we have now completed about 80% of some 1200 tombstones. The central section has to be completed and many badly worn flat stones on the south side require careful cleaning, good light and dedicated transcribing. Once again photographs have shown up missed or

incorrectly transcribed lettering and we have returned to view these again perhaps under different lighting conditions. Nicola, our main link with the Cathedral staff, is assisting by checking their monumental inscription cards with our transcriptions, which is proving very helpful indeed. If there are any queries we go back to the photos or recheck the stones themselves. In some cases their cards are marked illegible but with our determined attitude and group deciphering, we often have something to show for it. It would be nice to complete the transcriptions this year but the next stage of editing and indexing will take some time. One or two interesting stones or pieces of stones have been exciting.

Rafford (8 visits). Work here was mainly the buried stones, as Jeanne and Ronald Butler transcribed a great deal of both cemeteries. Rafford old and new is now complete.

Tombae (2 visits combined with Boharm). Keith and I have completed this one with a couple of visits, but photography proved a little difficult at times, some new stones being very close to the building with very little light. As this involves a 60 mile round trip, we combined it with a final check at Boharm. Tombae awaits indexing.

Boharm. Transcription and photography were again undertaken by Keith and myself along with Dave McWilliam for final checks and photographs. This is also now ready for indexing.

Bellie (9 visits). This was for photography only. Some flat stones had to be cleaned again because of the build up of moss on them. The MI book is now completed and published.

Greyfriars, Convent of Mercy (1 visit). Private. This visit was kindly arranged through The Sisters of Mercy and six members had the pleasure of recording MIs both outside and inside the chapel.

Birnie (7 visits). We have waited a long time to begin work here. Once the authorisation came from the Scottish Executive and Historic Scotland, then we were full of enthusiasm. As the MIs had been previously recorded, we are concentrating on buried tombstones. As Birnie churchyard is near the important Iron Age settlement, we have been advised to keep our eyes open for any appropriate archaeological finds. We riddle the soil if it is not too wet using the specially adapted contrivance created by William Windwick. During the summer months it was hard work cutting the dry turf due to the clay composition of the soil. Weather permitting we hope to restart at Birnie towards the end of March. We work on the Sundays when the church service is conducted in the evening.

Helen Mitchell (Fieldwork Co-ordinator)

Webmaster's Report (The MBGRG Website)

The Moray Burial Ground Research Group website was originally created in August 2005 with several major aims in mind.

- a) To publicise the work of the Group to as wide an audience as possible
- b) To make visitors aware of available publications (MBGRG and/or ANESFHS)
- c) To give site visitors Membership Application Details
- d) To publicise the ever increasing MI and tombstone photo indices.

Over the past twelve months, there have been no major alterations to the overall *style* of the website, but content has increased considerable, particularly with respect to the Ancestor Indices (otherwise known as the MI/Photo Index).

Compilation and Use of the Ancestor Indices : Once tombstone photography and the recording of MI's has been completed, typed and checked, for a particular churchyard, summary details are extracted for each individual mentioned. If available this includes churchyard name, stone number, surname, maiden surname where appropriate, forename, and year of death. Pertinent comments as to profession, place of death etc. are also extracted where it is felt this will be useful to a researcher.

This extracted information is double checked for errors or omissions, and once approved for use by the Committee is stored in a database, which the website user can access via some predefined scripts and forms. The user may check to see if an individual of interest is included by entering the first few letters of the surname in a simple form, and is then presented with summary details of all relevant individuals from the database. By noting the churchyard name the user can search the data for that churchyard and obtain summary information of all individuals recorded on that particular stone. Users can then refer to the appropriate publication for the full transcript, or for a small handling fee, obtain full transcripts and or tombstone photographs by contacting the Group directly. At this time, the database includes summary data for some 12,500 individuals from the following churchyards.

Buried tombstones : Graveyards currently included in this set are Bellie, Burghead (Grant Street), Dipple, Drainie Old (RAF Lossiemouth), Essil, Kinneddar, Kirkhill, Lhanbryde Old Churchyard, Urquhart Churchyard & Spynie Old Churchyard.

Non-buried tombstones : Sites currently included in this set are Alves Churchyard and Cemetery, Bellie Churchyard and Cemetery, Buitternach (Pre-publication), Burghead (Grant Street), Dipple, Essil Churchyard and Cemetery, Lhanbryde Churchyard and Cemetery, Spynie Churchyard, and Urquhart Churchyard and Cemetery.

Considerable volumes of data from other churchyards, (publication pending), are also in preparation, being checked or awaiting approval to add to the database in due course.

Website Overview : Overall, it is believed that the website has met its major aims over the last year, Although it can be difficult to know just how successful a website is, the best criteria being user feedback.

Web analyses statistics imply that the website is being visited regularly, by users from around the world (particularly from the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand). An increasing number of other important genealogical websites now contain a direct link to our MBGRG site, and general comments submitted to our Guestbook by visitors has been very positive.

Lindsay Robertson (Webmaster)

Recycle – Recycle – Recycle
(More Than Just a Modern Trend)

Underneath a table stone

While cleaning a slab that had two ends and a table slab above it in Elgin Cathedral, cobwebs caught my attention under the table slab. I glanced up at them and found a full length engraving staring back down at me. Having never checked the reverse of these stones before for engravings, etc. several methodological questions arose, both in investigating stones for this phenomenon and recording the details.



photo : KLM

Using a large mirror lying on a sheet underneath table-top No. 450, and by using computer software that reverses the image, the following text was recorded:-(the) 20 d(ay of) March 1724 aged 78(B)lefsed are the dead that die in the Lord. Sadly the name of the person whose particulars are here described, is hidden under one of the table ends. The face up side of this recycled stone is dedicated to **John Davnie** who died in 1840 and his spouse **Ann Mowet** who died in 1846. It is interesting to wonder whether there could be a family connection between the people recorded on both sides of this tombstone.

The Spouse That Nearly Got Away



photo : Stephen Leitch

A few weeks ago Stephen, Helen and Keith made a short visit to Spynie Churchyard to check on another of Stephen's recent discoveries. Yes, there it was atop one of the enclosure walls, text as clear as a bell staring down at us. On checking carefully around the rim of the four walls, we found another two stones with carvings on them; one of which looked suspiciously like part of a crusader type sword blade. We all tried to decipher the text as seen in the photo, but couldn't make any sense of it.

When this photo was put onto our computer screen, Helen had the bright idea of inverting it, and lo and behold the problem was solved. The inscription was found to readNES HIS SPOUSE....., which might suggest the surname of INNES. So after some 17 odd visits made to this cemetery by our Group, and all the transcribing, photography, checking and double-checking, this lady very nearly escaped our attention. So what else is out there?!

Stephen Leitch & Keith Mitchell