

**THE MORAY
BURIAL GROUND
RESEARCH GROUP**

Fra Birt To Graif



Na Rest We Haif - 1571

**ANNUAL REPORT
2007 - 2008**

The Committee of 2007-2008

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

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Auditor	William Windwick
Webmaster	Lindsay Robertson, FSA Scot

Committee Appointments Held During 2007-2008

Publicity Manager	Stephen Leitch
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"Elgin Cathedral's "Oor Wullie"

This charming little chap was caught on camera in October last year. Quite who he is meant to represent – if anybody – or when he was carved cannot be said with any degree of certainty. While this may of course be a relatively modern piece of artwork, it seems entirely possible that he was created sometime around the 16th-18th century. If anyone can help with further information, please contact any member of Committee.

Chairman's Report

As we now look ahead to our sixth year of *Tombstone Recording*, it almost goes without saying that our small Group in the *northern-eastern* reaches of Scotland continues to provide family and local historians with a wealth of new information. But there is still so much to do even within the borders of a small county like Morayshire!

On the membership front it is disappointing to note that this past year has seen a significant decline both in Ordinary and Associate Membership, however the output achieved by Group members should still be considered as significant. We should not be too despondent about membership numbers; however, as of course there is every chance that they will grow again shortly. The cry for younger people to join in our activities as ever remains constant, and hopefully with greater publicity, this problem may begin to show results in the forthcoming year.

The passionate zeal of Sue Rennison, whose devotion to tombstone cleaning cannot be overstated, is most assuredly greatly missed at present. Thanks to reading one of our Library leaflets, Sue joined us and very quickly became assimilated into our *Graveyarding culture*. So now the MBGRG flag is most definitely flying alongside the Maple Leaf in Vancouver. Sue has promoted the work of the Group, by her masterly little book entitled *Grave Consequences*, which is written in the style that only Sue could produce. Well worth a read! Sue is planning a holiday return to the fold in the summer, when we hope to be working at St Peter's, where I know she will be in *Graveyard heaven*. In April we will have the very considerable pleasure of seeing Mary Wardle again. She is coming up this way for several weeks, so we plan to make very good use of her recording talents once again where possible.

The following couple of sentences are a direct quote from last year's AGM Report, but they are every bit as valid now as they were then. "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."

The final completion of the Birnie Project by March will in many ways set the seal on what has been a considerable learning curve from the point of view of recording techniques, but one that has most definitely been worth the effort. As stated elsewhere, we hope to complete Elgin Cathedral recording this year, but work on assembling the results into a publication worthy of this historic site of national importance, will be a time-consuming and complicated project for the Group to achieve, but I am more than confident we will rise to the occasion.

Keith L. Mitchell (Chairman)

Secretary's Report

The Secretary has attended several meetings in Edinburgh over the course of the past year. These have included meetings of the SAFHS Graveyard Working Group regarding the final completion of the full Inventory of all Scottish Burial Grounds. The final edition of the Graveyard Inventory CD, containing information on every burial ground site in Scotland, is expected to be published in time for the SAFHS Council Meeting in October. Discussions have been held with Martin Brann and Patricia Weeks, both of HS, regarding the work on buried tombstones at the Scheduled Site at Birnie, and also regarding the proposed application for Scheduled Monument Consent for St Peter's Duffus and possibly also for all Scheduled Sites within Moray.

The Secretary has also represented the group at meetings of the Friends of Bellie Churchyard, and has advised that organisation on the improvements which they plan to carry out to that Churchyard. 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. There have also been many encouraging verbal comments, both from professional bodies involved with graveyard management and documentation and also from family history researchers, all of whom have highly praised the work which the group is undertaking.

The group was approved as a full member of the Scottish Association of Family History Societies at their meeting in October 2007. Keith and Helen Mitchell have agreed to act as representatives for the MBGRG.

The publication of MI books continues, and all of the publications are selling well, either by mail order or through Yeadons of Elgin, ANESFHS or the Scottish Genealogy Society. Parchment of Oxford, our printers, are quite happy to undertake the continued production of small print runs at no additional expense.

Both of the local newspapers, the *Northern Scot* and the *Press and Journal* continue to show 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 27 (32) Ordinary members and 21 (29) Associate members in our group. This generated an income of £497.00 in subscriptions, a decrease of £60.39 from the previous year. The figures in brackets represent the number of members we had the previous year. As you will see, membership numbers have decreased by 5 Ordinary members and 8 Associate members.

Our publishing costs for the year came to £1,353.40. This was for the reprinting of Bellie, the Forgotten Tombstones Vol's 2, 3 and 4 and the first issue of the Forgotten Tombstones Vol 5, Rafford, Boharm and Downan. Our total income to the end of December from the sale of the publications came to £1,583.65 and we had stock in hand to the value of £762.58. Outstanding income due from bookshops at that date amounted to £280.75.

We were very fortunate in being accepted as one of the 100 recipients to benefit from the funds raised at the Elgin, Bell's Rotary's 'Marafun' charity run, which took place in June and a cheque for £638.00 was presented to Keith Mitchell, our Chairman at a presentation in the Town Hall in November. Jeanne Butler cleverly made up an interesting quiz which members sold on behalf of the group and this generated £126.00. Car boot sales by Janet Campbell, with the help of her family, have raised £168.10, this includes £50.00 for the sale of a bike kindly donated by Alan Wills. The members had been collecting and sorting stamps during the year and Keith kindly took them to an auction in Edinburgh in October and this raised a further £32.83 for the group. Sue Rennison, who is sadly, now back in Canada, donated £75.20 from the sale of her book. Other donations amounted to £91.45 and the sale of

photographs and CD's came to £33.00. A further £11.64 came from recycling cartridges and £16.46 from bank interest.

Other expenditure during the year included web site costs of £126.71; insurance £119.85; carriage, printing (of newsletter), postage and stationery £290.71; equipment and repairs £115.94 and £21.98 for sundries.

At 31 December 2007 our bank balance was £1,732.21.

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 past year, and archival research into burials at Clunyhill (Forres), Dundurcas, the MacAllan and Rothes is ongoing at present. Work has commenced on researching the history of St Peter's Duffus in anticipation of the group receiving Schedule Monument Consent to begin work there this summer.

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, including recycling of older stones. The project is ongoing, but consideration is now being given to what format such a publication should take, as it is much larger than anything yet produced by the group. It may prove necessary to form a small working group in order to get this work done as efficiently as possible.

The final detailed research paper on the buried tombstones at Birnie is almost completed, and will be sent to HS in March. This work will also form the basis of the next volume, the sixth, in the "Forgotten Tombstones of Moray" series.

Monumental Inscriptions for Rafford, Boharm, and Downan, Buiternach and Glenrinnies are all now in print, as is the Forgotten Tombstones of Moray Volume 5 which refers to the buried tombstones at Alves. Dallas is our most recent Monumental Inscription publication, which became available in January.

Five volumes of "The Forgotten Tombstones of Moray" are now in print, with the sixth, Birnie, being in preparation. 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

Another year has passed and we have accomplished quite a lot considering our reduced membership. For this reason, and weather, we have lost some working days in the field. Altogether we have had 48 outings, a number of them being for photographic recording only.

Birnie (14 visits) with the group now having completed the recording process of all Buried Tombstones. At time the of writing some background work still has to be done, including the

completion of the overall plan of the site and church. We uncovered some nice stones, but I think we expected a few more exciting ones due to the age of the churchyard. Birnie has also been photographed for an update of the MI book.

Elgin Cathedral (17 visits). I had hoped that we would finish the site before Christmas but the weather was against us. As we were working in the central section we had to be much more sensitive about the grass condition if it had been raining or frosty. Plenty of background work to do, and this will take some months.

Duffus (3 visits) and has been used more as a training ground as it is a fairly simple cemetery with all the tombstones in neat rows. We are still working there. These are MIs only as the older stones are at Duffus Old which is St Peters, (*Historic Scotland Site*).

Kinneddar (6 visits) to photo for update of MIs. The flat stones had to be cleaned again for photos, but Keith and I coped with these during the week on nice sunny days. This task now completed.

Downan (4 visits) to check out the older stones as most MIs could be done with the help of photos and the index cards in the Local Heritage Centre. We prefer not to work with the cards, but because of distance we felt fewer visits would be better.

Glenrinnis is a small cemetery and was completed in one visit.

Dundurcas (4 visits) is our main buried site at present, but due to parking, (boggy), we have held back for the present time. Hopefully we should be able to restart in March.

Dyke MIs are being recorded by two members in their own time.

Forres (Cluny) is also being recorded by one person in her own time.

If you have friends who might be interested bring them along to see what we spend our 'spare time' doing. The more members the merrier, and more work accomplished.

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 transcriptions and tombstone photo indices

MI/Photo Indices

The Annual Report for 2006-2007 reported that the on-line MI/Photo Ancestor Indices database included summary data from the following churchyards.

Buried tombstones: Bellie, Burghead (Grant Street), Dipple, Drainie Old (RAF Lossiemouth), Essil, Kinneddar, Kirkhill, Lhanbryde Old Churchyard, Urquhart Churchyard & Spynie Old Churchyard.

Non-buried tombstones: Alves Churchyard and Cemetery, Bellie Churchyard and Cemetery, Buiternach (pre-publication), Burghead (Grant Street), Dipple, Essil Churchyard and Cemetery, Lhanbryde Churchyard and Cemetery, Spynie Churchyard, and Urquhart Churchyard and Cemetery.

During 2007-2008, new data derived from tombstones at Rafford Cemetery and Churchyard (including buried stones) and Boharm Churchyard have been added. Three churchyards, Alves, Kinneddar and Birnie have been re-surveyed, and on-line indices have been updated to reflect those changes and additions.

The Forgotten Tombstones of Moray, Volume 5, relating to the buried tombstones of Alves Old Churchyard has now been published, and MI/Photo index data is expected to be on-line soon.

At this time, the on-line MI/Photo Ancestor Indices database included summary data for some 17,220 individuals.

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.

Miscellaneous additions

The website also includes all newsletters, an updated 'Research Progress' review, and a report on the MBGRG approved methodology for transcribing inscriptions found on the under-sides of table-stones, (re-cycled stones) with particular emphasis on safety considerations.

Publication Methodology

To assist the researcher, generally all published MI booklets include a surname index. This lists all surnames, maiden surnames, or forenames that could be derived from ancestor surnames, and the stone number on which these names occur.

To date, the manual generation of these surname indices, has proved to be extremely time consuming task, and by its very nature susceptible to clerical error and/or omissions. During the later part of this reporting year, an alternative method had been devised, which uses our existing validated databases, with the addition of a new field for those forenames, which could be regarded as surnames. Following brief pre-processing, data for each churchyard is submitted to a MySQL database and 'php processed' to generate the required index.

Preliminary trials suggest this to be a much improved and more efficient methodology. Some manual checking is still required however, as by default all stones are processed, and some contain only limited data, not suitable for inclusion in the indices (e.g. Masons' blocks).

Many thanks to Steve Robertson, Aberdeen for writing the required 'php' code, and to group members in Elgin, for help in assessing and checking results and for useful feedback.

BBC History Magazine Competition.

In August, the BBC History Magazine (on-line site) advertised a new competition in an attempt to find "the most surprising, enigmatic or bizarre historical gravestone epitaph in Britain".

On behalf of the MBGRG, two entries were submitted with text and photographs, entitled 'The Long and the Short of It', which were thought to be of particular interest. These were the 'Wilyam Wincester' phonetic stone from Birnie (Stone 241), and the 16ft high 'Anderson' stone from Elgin Cathedral churchyard (Stone 617).

The BBC chose one outright competition winner, and four runners up, with a further fifteen submissions being classed as short listed entries.

The Group will be pleased to hear, that, although not selected to be in the top five, both submitted entries, were included in the shortlist, at positions 7 and 8 respectively, and were the only two Scottish entries included in the top 20 selections made by the judging panel.

Full details are to be found in the MBGRG website, together with related Press & Journal coverage.

Lindsay Robertson (Webmaster)

Publicity Report

The past year has been a positive year for press and media coverage. There have been several articles with photos highlighting the group's key finds and work in the Press and Journal (recycled stones at the Cathedral, short listing for the BBC history gravestone competition, etc.). There has been a roving display of the group's work that has been on display around some libraries. There are still more for the display to reach, and I will try to coordinate this with library open days, promotions and place it in a library near current or future projects.

In general I feel that the publicity so far has had little effect in attracting new members, but it has kept the group and its work in the public eye. I am finding people are aware of the group and its work, but obviously a connection isn't being made with people to get them involved. A move away from people thinking of us and our work as grave diggers, even if in jest, may prove useful.

Perhaps a change in approach to publicising the work of the group may help. Focusing more on the genealogy side and encouraging people to help record local history may be one approach to take. Our more adventurous pursuits of probing and uncovering buried gravestones can be an optional extra for people once they are involved with the group.

Keeping up regular communication through newspapers and other media will help promote the group, and let people know where we are working. Using the Town and Country column in the Northern Scot to promote where we are working at a weekend may prove useful, as will keeping the Press and Journal informed of our progress and developments. There is also the option of the What's On section on Moray Firth Radio for letting people know where we are.

All these approaches are free and will help raise the group's public profile, while specific developments and publications can be approached through official press releases to the media.

Stephen Leitch (Publicity Manager)