

THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND
RESEARCH GROUP



ANNUAL REPORT
2009 - 2010

The Committee of 2009-2010

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	Moira Windwick
Ordinary Member	Stephen Leitch

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Auditor	William Windwick
Webmaster	Lindsay Robertson, FSA Scot

Committee Appointments Held During 2009-2010

Fundraiser	Ruth McIntosh
Newsletter Editors	Keith Mitchell & Derek Page
Publicity Manager	Stephen Leitch



Fairy Ring at Clunyhill Cemetery

Chairman's Report

I wish to begin this report by reflecting on the sad death of member, Ronald Butler, who passed away in October, after a brief illness at Dr Gray's Hospital. Ronald and Jeanne have supported the work of the Group for several years, but although they had not been out in the field regularly of late, their efforts have considerably assisted our endeavours at Alves, Dyke, Elgin Cathedral, Rafford, Spynie and St Ninian's. Last year they undertook the task of recording MIs at Dyke and Moy, and had succeeded in completing over 100 transcripts. Ronald's last day out with us was at the Summer Outing, and his company along with Jeanne, was most welcome. I know that Ronald will be sadly missed by many within his own circle of family and friends, as well as by members of the Group who knew him.

During the last few months the Group has accomplished a great deal, although much of the work has been carried on behind the scenes. Due to the way things have worked out, there has only been one publication issued since our successful 'Elgin Cathedral' book was published in April, that being the 2nd edition of Dallas MIs, including all the buried tombstones we uncovered there. At the time of writing we are in the process of finalising our St Ninian's, St Gregory's and St Peter's, Buckie booklet, and all going well this should be available within the next few weeks. However, from all the work that has been achieved this year, it looks like 2010 is going to be a bumper year for publications.

Membership on the whole still seems to be holding up and we have received a bit of a boost in gaining at least three new members, and possibly another as a result of the "At Home" events held at Lossiemouth Library and Elgin Town Hall. A great success at these events has been Derek Page's carved "Graveyard Experience" which proved of interest to several people, although it must be said that we had more young volunteers than adults trying it out, but that in itself is I think a good thing and bodes well for future similar activities. A word of special thanks must go to Derek for taking this idea on board and spending so much time bringing it all to fruition. Derek is of course now Newsletter Editor, and I wish him all success for the next 100 issues anyway. Please support his efforts by sending any contributions directly to him in the usual way. I would also like to thank Stephen Leitch for taking up the reign as Group delegate for SAFHS. This lightens the load considerably for myself and Helen, and spreads the responsibility for group affairs in a much better way I think. Publicity for the Group of late has continued to do well, particularly from the Northern Scot & Press and Journal. However, we did receive a very good piece of publicity via the Knock News who gave us a two page spread for the Open Day at Bellie.

The Website goes from strength to strength and we are still getting enquiries from various parts of the world. The visitor counter was reset on August 11th, and since then there have been nearly 8,000 individual people logging on. Comments continue to be positive, although requests for photographs have indeed been quite limited, which makes me wonder if the way we are doing things is really worth the effort. One problem definitely seems to be the method of payment from overseas. There does not seem to be an easy way to send small amounts of money without incurring additional costs, and I know that some people have been put off ordering photos as well as joining the Group. As a result, we are seriously looking at the possibility of opening up a PayPal account on the website, which hopefully will get over many of these problems. Our Webmaster, Lindsay Robertson has now taken on board the task of investigating the problem of how best to achieve this, bearing in mind the difficulties involved relating to having a Group account. Particular thanks go to Lindsay in this respect and I know he will value any helpful comments or suggestions about this.

Happy Recording during 2010-2011

Keith L. Mitchell (Chairman)

Secretary's Report

The Secretary has attended numerous meetings in Edinburgh over the course of the past year. Discussions have been held with Martin Brann of Historic Scotland, regarding a revision of the application for Scheduled Monument Consent for Kinloss Abbey, which would allow the group access to some of the more obvious buried tombstones, and this has now been granted. A Scheduled Monument Consent application for work at Mortlach has been approved, and work is nearly complete on the Scheduled site at Duffus St Peter's. The Secretary has represented SAFHS, and thereby also the MBGRG, on the User Group of the ScotlandsPeople Family History Centre in Edinburgh, and at meetings with the National Archives of Scotland.

The Secretary, as Chairman of the Friends of Bellie Churchyard, continues to advise 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 and Mr Ken Kennedy, both of the Moray Council Cemeteries Department, with a valuable two-way exchange of information about the work which the group is undertaking at other sites, and 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, which have given some indication of the sites for which family historians are thirsting for information. There have continued to be many encouraging comments, both from professional bodies involved with graveyard management and documentation and also from family history researchers, all of whom have high praise for the work which the group is undertaking.

Stephen Leitch has been appointed as the representative for the MBGRG at the twice-yearly meetings of SAFHS.

Both of the local newspapers, the *Northern Scot* and the *Press and Journal*, continue to show considerable interest in the work of the group and have been a valuable source of publicity. Now that we are venturing further into the old County of Banff the Chief Reporter at the *Banffshire Herald* is also very interested in our research at sites in that county. The publication of MI and 'Forgotten Tombstone' books has not been as substantial as in previous years, due to the nature of the larger sites which are now being researched, but all of our existing publications continue to sell well, either by mail order or through Yeadons of Elgin, ANESFHS or the Scottish Genealogy Society.

Bruce B Bishop (Secretary)

Treasurer's Report

At the end of December we had a membership of 35 (35) Ordinary members, 21 (17) Associate members and 1 (1) Corporate group. This generated an income of £581.00 in subscriptions, a decrease of £102 from the previous year. The figures in brackets represent the number of members we had the previous year. As you will see, Ordinary members remain the same though we have had some leaving the group and new ones have joined; the Associate membership has increased by 3. The decrease in income is due to the number of members that prepaid in the previous year.

Our publishing costs for the year came to £2795.52. This was for the reprinting of previous publications and the first issue of Chapelton as well as Elgin Cathedral MIs. Our total income to the end of December from the sale of the publications came to £2,759.35 and we had stock in hand to the value of £1,519.08.

Janet Campbell raised a further £72.00 from a car boot sale. We also had donations totalling £120.12, photo sales amounting to £31.50, cartridge recycling of £15.31 and £1.94 for bank interest.

Other expenditure during the year included web site £125.85, insurance £152.33, printing (of newsletter), travel expenses to Edinburgh for SAFHS meetings, telephone, postage and stationery £828.92, SAFHS subscriptions for 2009 & 2010 £80.00 and £35.25 for hire of room for AGM.

At 31 December 2009 our bank balance was £2,657.57 and we had £1.29 in petty cash.

Irene Black (Treasurer)

Research Co-ordinator's Report

Historical and archival research has been completed for all of the sites which have been recorded during the past year, including St Ninians at Chapelford of Tynet and the neighbouring Roman Catholic Churches, which has opened up some new and valuable research sources. Andrew Nicol of the Catholic Church Archives in Edinburgh is to be thanked for his assistance on these sites. Archival research into St Lawrence's Church in Forres, Kinloss Abbey, Edinkillie, Knockando and the burial grounds in the vicinity of Tomintoul is ongoing at present. The majority of the existing site plans date back about 30 years and they have been redrawn, or are in the process of being revised. This will allow the indication of the location of any new tombstones erected up to the time of recording.

It seems likely that ownership of the land on which Moy Old Churchyard is situated has now been traced, and further communication from this individual is expected shortly as to whether and on what conditions we will be permitted to work at this site.

The publication of the MI Book for Elgin Cathedral has sold very well, and later this year will probably be in need of a reprint.

Many publications have now been produced by the group. In the "Forgotten Tombstones" series, which records the buried or inaccessible tombstones, there are now Dipple, Essil, Kirkhill, Old Drainie Churchyard on RAF Lossiemouth, Bellie, Kinneddar, Burghead, Lhanbryde, Urquhart, Spynie, Alves and Birnie. In the "Monumental Inscriptions" series which records all visible tombstone inscriptions, there are now publications for Bellie Churchyard and New Cemetery, Elgin Cathedral, Rafford Churchyard and New Cemetery, Boharm Churchyard, Downan Churchyard, Glenrines Burial Ground, Buiternach Burial Ground, Dallas Churchyard, Duffus New Cemetery and Extension, Dundurcas Churchyard, Macallan Churchyard, Chapelton R.C. Churchyard, Tombae R.C. Churchyard, and by now St Ninian's at Chapelford should also be in print.

In addition to this many Monumental Inscriptions had earlier been recorded and published by ANESFHS, including those for Birnie, Alves, The Vale of Pluscarden, The Michael Kirk at Gordonstoun School, St Andrews Kirkhill, Kinneddar, Dipple, Essil Old and New, Botriphnie, Burghead Grant Street, Urquhart Old and New, Lhanbryde Old and New and Spynie Churchyard. Much of the recording work for these publications was done by members of the Moray Burial Ground Research Group.

Surveys have also been made of some other sites such as Greyfriars Convent in Elgin, and the burial grounds on the Knock of Alves and at Innes House. The Group has also been responsible for the production of the Methodology for Recording Buried Tombstones, and other research works.

All members of the group are to be congratulated on the vast amount of information which has been made available to Genealogists and Family Historians over the past years.

Bruce B Bishop (Research Co-ordinator)

Fieldwork Co-ordinator's Report

The group visits this year have been the same as last year, (33). Quite a number of extra visits have been for photos or checks only. The weather called for a few cancellations but keep our fingers crossed that it improves this year.

St Peters : In all we had 13 visits with perhaps one other visit to finalise checks. This churchyard proved quite a challenge due to the cleaning required on the flat stones, in many cases to reveal a blank stone, or with only a few letters visible. We found 46 buried stones.

Kinloss Abbey : We had 12 visits for recording MIs. One aspect of our work there was disappointing in that several table tops had been laired on top of one another and we were unable to record them. We appreciate the help given by members of The Kinloss Abbey Trust in recording and cleaning. Recording of the visible tombstones is now complete, but in late spring we hope to uncover a number of flat stones which are showing patch marks on the grass.

Forres (Clunyhill) : This has been a long task to check, as the numbering system of the gravestones is rather mixed. The plans are in the process of being redrawn. There are still a few enclosure kerbstones to record where the grass has grown above the text line, and as these are mostly with lead lettering great care must be taken.

Forres (Clovenside) : Two members are recording this site as it is very modern.

St Ninian's (Chapelford) Braes of Enzie was our summer outing. This was recorded in a day, followed by high tea at Christies of Fochabers. Included in this volume of Monumental Inscriptions are Preshome Church, where there are two wall tablets inside and a memorial outside. Also St Peter's R C Church at Buckie, where there are a number of tablets and a shrine to fallen soldiers who were members of St Peter's, within the building. This volume is our next publication.

Altyre : All necessary work was completed one very wet afternoon. This churchyard will be published later with another as it is too small to publish alone.

Lossiemouth : Part of the top section has been recorded from photographs, and the next part will be done the same way when the plans have been drawn and numbered.

Roths : To date there have been 3 visits. Plans are drawn and recording the top section has been started. The lower section (Burnside) will be a challenge because of the black condition of the gravestones, due to residue from the distillery. There could be a number of buried stones and probing has commenced. We eagerly await better de-turfing conditions.

Dyke : We have had one initial day to check out the site. Due to church services on a Sunday morning, most of the work will be done during the week. Two members are recording the section behind the church.

Publications over the past year have been Elgin Cathedral and the second edition of Dallas with buried stones included.

With 2009 having been the Year of Homecoming, group volunteers attended a few events where we were involved with demonstrating how to uncover and record buried gravestone, helping visitors to locate some of their ancestors gravestones, or giving advice on how to go about researching their family history. Through these events we gained three new members, and a few interested people who have not joined up to date.

Helen Mitchell (Fieldwork Co-ordinator)

Webmaster's Report (The MBGRG Website)

Updating of the MBGRG website is on-going, and in particular regular attention is paid to updating the relevant pages, to reflect the field activities, and publication progress of the Group, e.g. Churchyard Map, Research Progress, Latest News, Publications, etc.

Reports added:

MBGRG Annual Report, 2008 –2009

MBGRG Newsletter Issues 12 and 13

Knock News, Issue 31, Sept 2009 – A fully illustrated article on the Forgotten Tombstones of Moray (with the kind permission of the Publisher/Editor, Mr David Gordon).

MI/Photo Index Database Additions:

MI abstract records from Elgin Cathedral, a major update, was added in May 2009.

Dallas records were recently updated to include minor corrections, and abstracted data from the buried stone records as recorded in the newly re-published MI booklet for Dallas (Dec 2009), are due to be added very soon.

I expect our database record count to exceed 30,000 named individuals, during the coming year.

Work has continued, with regards to abstraction of data for future additions to the databases, including checking procedures, and the preparation of computer generated publication indices. Churchyards in this 'pending' category should be included in the MI/Photo databases early in 2010, following publication of the relevant MI booklets. These are Altyre - St Gregory's (Preshome) - St Ninian's (Chapel Ford) - St Peter's (Buckie) & St Peter's (Duffus).

Many thanks to all Members, who have worked tirelessly to make those records available for inclusion on our website, and to our wider website audience.

Lindsay Robertson (Webmaster)

Publicity Report

During the past year MBGRG has been actively promoted and publicised in various ways, the key being through the local newspapers and via attending events. These included attending the various local heritage and family history fairs during the summer and autumn months, complete with unique interactive gravestone experience.

Lossiemouth Heritage and Family History event, Elgin Family History Fair and the Forres Family History Fair, all these events attracted hundreds of people and provided a great opportunity for the group to promote its work to people. These events were also successful in attracting new members for the group.

As well as appearing in the general publicity for these heritage events in newspapers and library publicity, the group appeared in other press articles. One notable article was in reference to our Associate member, Dr Jeff Russel, who came over from Switzerland to see his 3 x great-grandmother's gravestone being buried near to where the group first recorded it. The launch of the Elgin Cathedral publication in April also saw good publicity in the local press. Continued use of the local media and highlighting key finds and new publications will help to promote the work of the group in the public sphere, while starting recording work in the New Elgin cemeteries will provide the group with an ideal opportunity for a targeted recruitment campaign for new members.

Stephen Leitch (Publicity Manager)

Fundraising Report

During the last year I set out to raise funds to help with the publication of the Elgin Cathedral book. There was some success in securing donations from local firms and from our own members. This is now completed with the book now available for sale. I am now going to concentrate on raising funds for future research, recording, and publishing of MIs.

During the last few months I have been concentrating "on surfing the net" for trusts and other bodies who have funds to distribute. Unfortunately we do not fit neatly into their criteria on most occasions as we are a voluntary body, and not a registered charity.

I am going to MVSO next week to use their Funderfinder package to see if I have success with that, and hope to be able to report to the Committee of my success or otherwise at their next meeting.

If anyone knows of firms or groups who distribute money in the local area, please let me know so that I can add them to my list and target them with a letter about our group.

Ruth McIntosh (Fundraiser)