



The Moray Burial Ground Research Group

Newsletter



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Editor's Note

As another year draws to a close, making us all wonder where the time went again, we've managed to catch up with another edition of the newsletter. Our apologies for the delay but it's been an amazingly hectic year for all, not least for Keith & Helen moving home! Anyway, hopefully you'll enjoy the edition packed full of all of this year's activities and progress and I'd just like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.



Derek C Page

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Front Cover:

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Well, That's Another Season Just About Over

(by Keith Mitchell – Chairman)

Shall we start with the good news or the bad news? I think on this occasion the latter would be great to get out of the way first so we can end on a brighter note!

So what is there to moan about this time? A fair bit I suspect, but probably the one thing from an MBGRG point of view that stands out a mile is most likely to be the effects of the foul and stormy weather we have had this year. It has been a truly terrible Spring & Summer (what Summer you may well ask?).

Whether it be on our caravan visits up in Cullen, or here in West Lothian, the amount of daily sunshine we have had has been negligible overall. Although the sun does break through from time to time, we have generally had to suffer day after day after day of either rain, or at best wall to wall cloud cover. To make matters worse most of the weather forecasts we hear or see, tend in general to be incorrect.

Not only do the forecasters invariably get their forecasts wrong (certainly in respect of sunshine and Scotland), but on an hourly basis the information they give is frequently at odds with what you see out of your window of a morning. Maddening! And then when it does shine the overall effect is frequently chilly. The bottom line as far as MBGRG is concerned is that this has made life extremely difficult on the recording side, witness the drastic winds we had one Sunday at Broomhill (accurately forecast for once) which naturally dampened the enthusiastic spirits of several members. It also has screwed up our photographic plans to complete the burial grounds of Keith, Elgin North and the new section at Mortlach. We are now considerably behind in our schedule and unless next year is a fair bit better it is going to take much longer to finish this part of our overall recording plans in Moray.

Another problem the group continues to face is the loss of members who come out with us on a regular basis to record MIs. This year has unfortunately been worse than normal, but as you will hear it is not all doom and gloom. We also have been struggling on the publication side of things. I had sincerely hoped that by this time our next book on Cullen Auld Kirk, Cullen New, Cullen & Deskford and Deskford Churchyard would have seen the light of day ere now. But unfortunately it is not to be. A while back I had made it known that the

book should be published by the end of the year, but making rash statements like this have a habit of backfiring. Most of the work is complete, but getting some of the intricacies relating to the Auld Kirk as accurate as we can, as well as other important aspects of the publication such as the plans, has completely delayed matters considerably. Also our move down to Livingston has had its own set of delaying tactics I regret to admit.

Well enough of the diatribe! And so to some happier comments. Perhaps the first thing of consequence is the fact that this year we have benefited from the inspiring efforts made by our new members, Reg and Paul and Bev and Dave, although it would be wrong not to note the very valuable efforts of all our members. Every hour spent with pencil / pen and paper greatly enhances the work of the group and I know from comments made by many researchers across the globe that the efforts of all our volunteers are greatly appreciated. When we began our recording work this year at the large Broomhill Public Cemetery at Keith we imagined that it might take a good two years to complete. However, the above mentioned stalwarts, now regular attenders, have made such a huge difference to our calculations to the point where we are able to say it is now largely completed. Take a bow, or may be even two! Also Ruth has been valiant in her organizing weekly outings and that has helped the group immensely.

Although our Cullen & Deskford publication is now a fair behind schedule, I am pleased to say that some of our behind the scenes research is proving to be of interest, for example one memorial dated 1668 which only has the initials W L and H M has now been fully identified. It belongs to William Leslie of Burdsbank and his wife Helen Monro and was found during renovations to Cullen churchyard in the 19th century.

We conclude the recording season with our usual meal at the Laichmoray Hotel which will nicely round off our annual activities prior to the festive season.

Why We Do What We Do – (by Keith Mitchell)

There are many reasons why people or groups record monumental inscriptions. For MBGRG members there are probably just as many explanations as to why they are willing to go out on miserably cold, cloudy and windy days standing or sitting in front of grave stones transcribing the family history details of the people they commemorate.

Included within this cocktail of motives there is one very clear purpose that some tapophiles are keen to promote and that is the rescuing of inscriptions before they are permanently lost either, by wanton vandalism (including that perpetrated by local or central government), or through simple decay and the passage of time. Occasionally on burial ground outings we come across memorials which have recently collapsed or disappeared within a very short time frame. A good example of the natural disintegration of a tombstone is demonstrated by the following specimen we recently recorded in

Keith old churchyard extension.

The two accompanying photographs clearly illustrate the problem. In the late 1970s this cemetery along with most of the other burial grounds in Moray was recorded by a small group of young people employed by the Youth Employment scheme ongoing at that time. And what a wonderful job they did! In the process they recorded Keith (old) number 22 and from what they transcribed we are able to ascertain that the inscription was probably more or less complete at that time. Although the surviving Libindx cards in the Moray Heritage Centre were in many cases contracted as in the following Pirie / Cook (Cock) & Pearson inscription, particularly in regards to the method of date presentation, in essence the relevant family history information is complete. As can be vividly seen in the photographs, a large part of the text has vanished. At the time these were taken only four fragments of the original



text survived. Prior to trying to photograph these to best advantage I first had to remove the crumbling collection of bits lying at the bottom of the tombstone and then lay them on the grass in the sunlight, jigsaw fashion.

In an attempt to recreate the original inscription as accurately as possible, Helen and I made use of the helpful Libindx version, inserting the missing words and dates alongside the text we were able to transcribe from the photograph. The resulting MI recording is as follows:-(Erected by William Pirie in memory of his father **ALE**)**XAN**(**DER P**)**IRIE** born 1800 died 1879. Also of his mother **MARGA**-**RET COOK** (born 1814) died 1880. (Also his aunt) **JESSIE COOK** (born 1812) died 1899. (And of his) brother **JOHN** (was born 18)42. Died 1899. Also of the above (WIL)**LIAM PI**-**RIE, clothier, Keith** (born 23.) May 1837, died 15th April 1902 (and his son **A**)**LEXANDER** (died 15.12.1932 and his wife **JANE PEAR**-**SON** who died 21.7.1939.)



Please note that the items within () are from the relevant Libindx card, while those which have been bolded relate to letters or words we have assumed were originally on the stone. It is worth observing that the Libindx card gives Margaret and Jessie surname as Cock, when in reality it was Cook.

Although very clearly parts of the above MI are definitely not what was carved on the tombstone, it is as near to being an accurate recording made under somewhat challenging conditions.

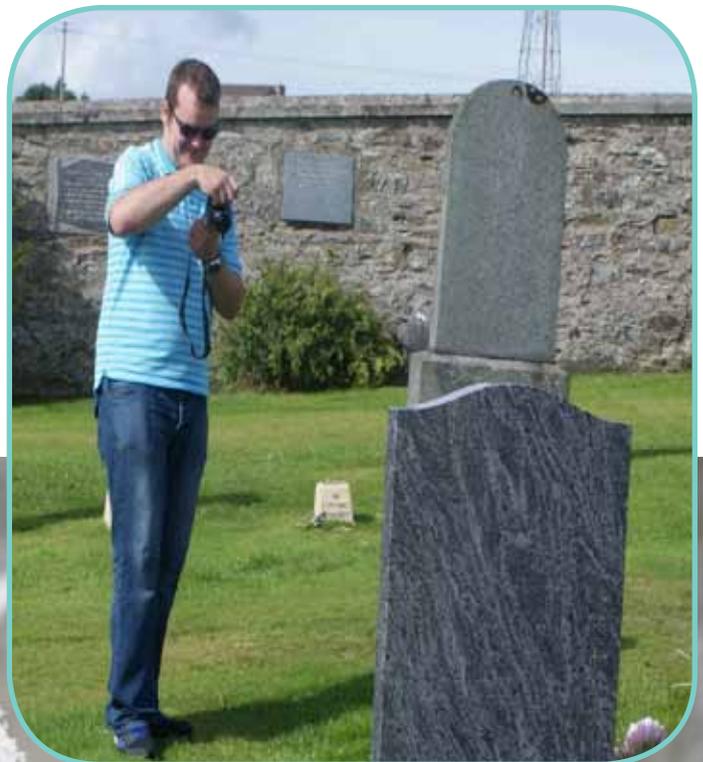


A New Cameraman – (by Keith Mitchell)

Since I took on the roll of MBGRG Cameraman, mainly taking photographs of all the memorials we record for publication, I had hoped that as time went on other folk might get involved, or indeed take on the roll, as my camera finally ends up in camera “heaven” after taking a huge number of images. Actually I have worn my way through four assorted makes of digital camera and for the last few months have been in the process of trying to find time to buy yet another.

Over the years, two or three members have agreed to help out by photographing a pre set area and this has helped to spread the load to some extent. However, the idea of photographing every grave stone in a burial ground can indeed be quite a challenge, particularly if it is a big one with lots of different stylistic examples of sculpture, such as we found in Elgin South with well over two thousand memorials. Then of course there is the notorious Scottish weather to cope with, but that’s another story which you can read about in another part of this Newsletter.

While trying my best to make a good start at making a photographic record of Broomhill Public Cemetery just outside Keith, I discovered that one of our much younger members, Paul Nessling also has an interest in photography. After a wee bit of prodding, Paul agreed to have a go at photographing part of the new section, and the accompanying illustration shows Paul caught in the act, looking very professional. So maybe the well known cry of “where’s my camera?” will end up being a thing of the past in MBGRG’s mythology!



Graveyard or Cemetery?

Some people think graveyard and cemetery mean the same, but, if we want to be a little nitpicky, we should say that graveyard is a type of cemetery, but a cemetery is usually not a graveyard. To understand the difference, we need a little bit of history.

graveyard

Source: Wikipedia

From about the 7th century C.E., the process of burial was firmly in the hands of the Church (the Christian organization), and burying the dead was only allowed on the lands near a church (now referring to the building), the so-called churchyard. The part of the churchyard used for burial was called graveyard.

As the population of Europe started to grow, the capacity of graveyards was no longer sufficient (the population of modern Europe is almost 40 times higher than it was in the 7th century). By the end of the 18th century, the unsustainability of church burials became apparent, and completely new places for burying people, independent of graveyards,

appeared—and these were called cemeteries.

The etymology of the two words is also quite intriguing. The origin of “graveyard” is rather obvious; it is a yard filled with graves. However, you might be surprised to hear that “grave” comes from Proto-Germanic *graban, meaning “to dig”, and it is related to “groove” but not to “gravel”.

Of course, the word “cemetery” did not appear out of the blue when graveyards started to burst at the seams. It comes from Old French cimetièr, which meant, well, graveyard. Nevertheless, the French word originally comes from Greek koimeterion, meaning “a sleeping place”.

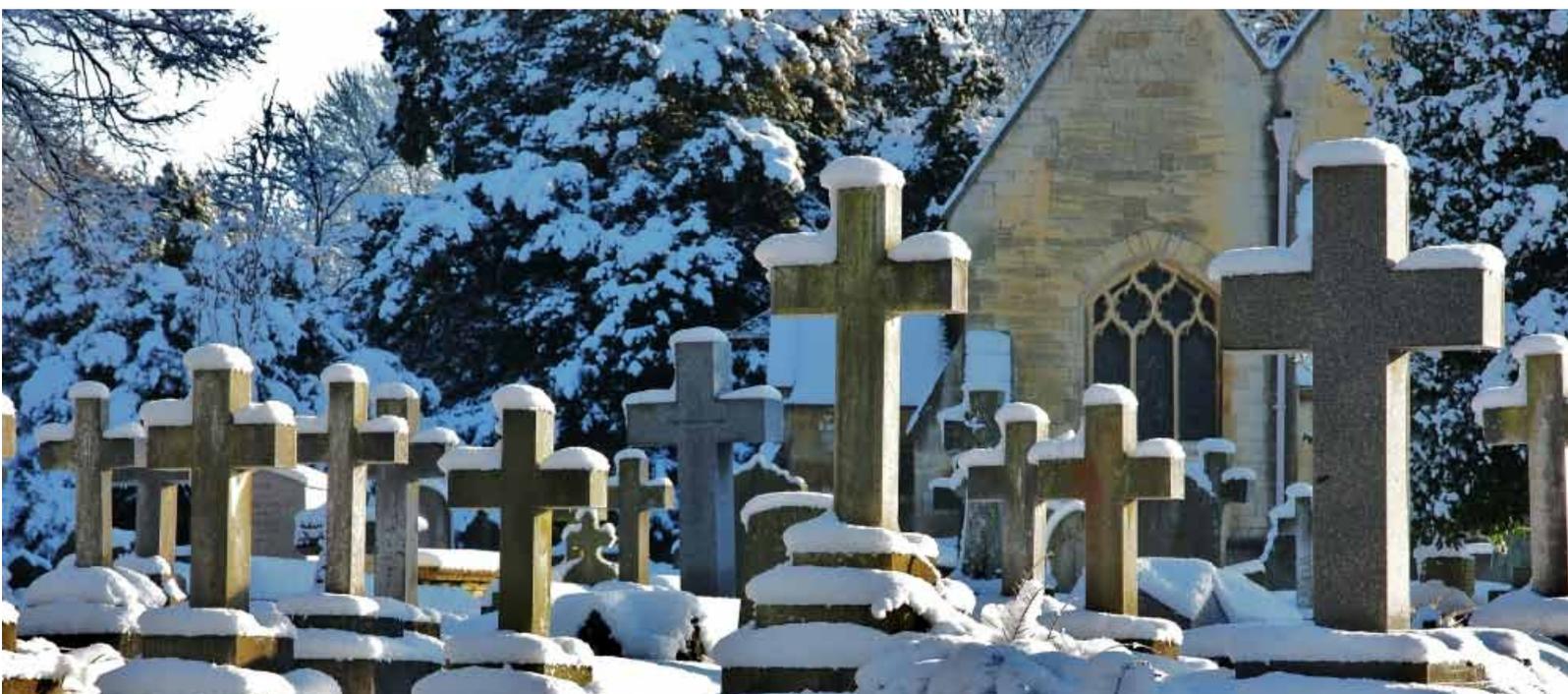


Moray Council trying for a topiary award at Keith?

Although I have volunteered in the field as often as possible at churchyards, helping to uncover buried headstones, probing and taking an occasional photo whenever I come to Scotland on holiday each summer, Keith, Helen & Lindsay have identified another way I can be of service on a more consistent basis even though I am 7,500 miles away when I am back home in Grants Pass, Oregon. Since I have extensive experience in computer-based editorial design, layout and writing the MGBRG Committee invited me to join the Editorial Staff and provide additional assistance in meeting their publishing goals.

I feel extremely honoured and thankful for the opportunity to offer my skills, talents and time to this high-quality, dedicated and hard working group of volunteers on a more regular basis. I look forward upon my return home to working diligently to help this group meet their goals of publishing books of Monumental Inscriptions for Moray church yards and cemeteries which reflect the endless hours of committed enthusiastic zeal all volunteers have contributed to.

~ Claudia Frew, 16 August 2017



Buried Tombstones at Keith - (by Keith Mitchell)

During our MI recording at Keith Churchyard last summer, we located several buried stones which have already been reported on. However, the last remaining four revealed by our survey could not be excavated thanks to the work of Mr & Mrs Mole and family! The results of their considerable tunnelling exploits could be seen over quite a large area, the significance of which meant that the Council mole catcher had to be called in and work abandoned for the year. This was somewhat frustrating as we knew that this churchyard was probably about the last burial ground in Moray where unidentified buried tombstones were liable

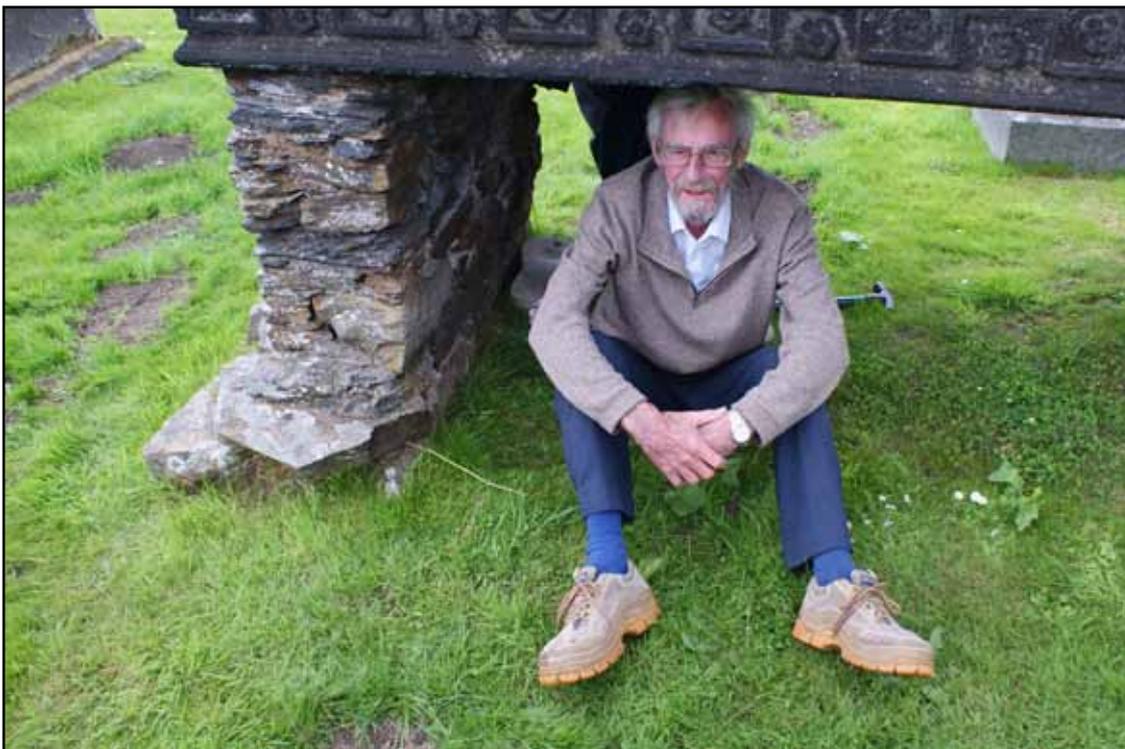


to be discovered. So clearly these last few remaining examples were in many ways of considerable interest to MBGRG.

Our last day of excavation in 2016 was undertaken by Helen and myself along with the timely assistance of Lindsay Robertson, our Webmaster and Claudia Frew one of our newer members who hails from Grants Pass in the state of Oregon, U.S.A. Claudia being the youngest of our



little group, worked with great delight and enthusiasm, putting us slightly older folk to shame, but her physical efforts were a great help in making it all worthwhile. And so to our visit this year with the same team and more or less equal zeal to complete what had been left undone from the previous year. We all worked well together, but Claudia's efforts certainly require more than



a little recognition. Her physical prowess cannot be denied, although she herself would have to admit that the after effects were felt for a wee while afterwards.

Our first main discovery was of a gravestone to one George Gordon in Nether Culshanan. A search of the Libindx and the internet in general could not throw any light upon this place at all, so it probably was one of those many places which has

got lost in the mists of time. Unfortunately as frequently happens the main text was largely complete, but the date of death was almost completely worn away. All that can be said at the moment is that stylistically it probably dates from the late 17th century to somewhere

towards the latter half of the 18th century. More precise than that we cannot be at the moment. Any information about where Culshanan was situated is obviously most welcome.

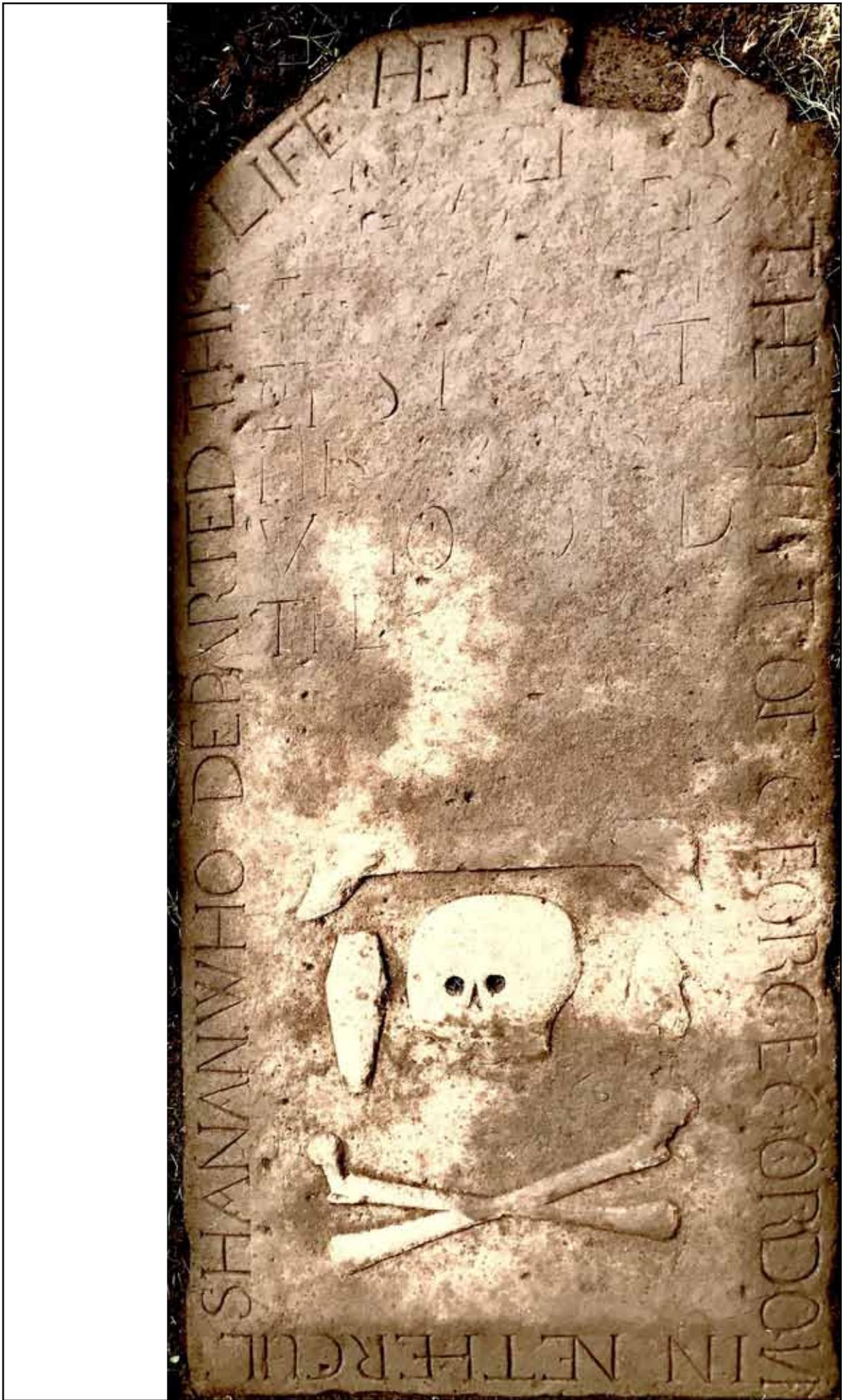
The last memorial to be uncovered was a large stone that only had text on it, but much of it was quite worn. However, with a bit of effort we were able to rescue quite a bit of useful family history information on John Stevenson and his family who came from Newmill. The last entry was to Margaret Cuthbert who died at there on 3rd March 1877, aged 14 years.





MEMENTO MORI
 IN THE HOPE OF A HAPPY RE-
 SURRECTION LIE THE LIEC.
 MARGARET DAUGHTER OF JOHN
 DOWDIE THE HEAVENLY LIGHT
 STEVENSON DAUGHTER OF JOHN
 DOWDIE DAUGHTER OF JOHN
 DOWDIE WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
 THE 14th DAY OF MARCH A.D.
 1875 AGED 14 YEARS.

ALSO MARGARET CUTHBERT
 WHO DIED AT NEWMILL 3rd MARCH 1875
 AGED 14 YEARS.



The Military Men of Kirkmichael & Tomintoul

(by Ruth McIntosh)

From the information contained in the Monumental inscriptions in these graveyards the area had a rich tradition of serving in the military.

There are references to several Fencible Regiments. The raising of Fencibles Corps in the Highlands was first proposed and started recruiting in 1759. Recruitment took place at various times until 1799. There were 29 Battalions of Fencibles in Scotland including the Clan Alpine, Strathspey and Gordon Fencibles. The Fencibles were British Army regiments raised in the United Kingdom and in the colonies for defence against the threat of invasion during the Seven Years War, the American War of Independence, the French Revolutionary Wars, the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812 in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They were composed of local volunteers, commanded by regular army officers, and usually confined to garrison and patrol duties. They had no liability for overseas service.

Stone 86 records the death at the grand old age of 79 years of Captain Robert McGrigor of the Clan Alpine Fencibles & 14th Battalion of Reserve. He died at Delivior 5th Oct 1816. There are three other family members mentioned on the same stone who died serving their country aged 17, 26, and 32 years respectively. Other Regiments mentioned on Monumental inscriptions are Lovat Scouts, Kings Own Scottish Borderers, Royal Army Medical Corps, Bengal Staff Corps, Bengal Infantry, Royal Artillery, Gordon Highlanders, Cameron Highlanders, several Regiments of Foot and Grenadier Guards.

One of the most decorated men buried in the Parish Church of Tomintoul is Inspector General of Hospitals and

Fleet Robert Grant, M.D., R.N., C.B born at Blairnamarrow, 4th Sept. 1842. He attended Aberdeen University and entered the Royal Navy as an Assistant Surgeon in 1868.

He rose through the ranks and became Inspector General of Hospitals and Fleet in 1901 before retiring in 1902. During his service he served on shore with the 88th Regiment during the Kaffir war of 1877. In February 1879 he tirelessly tended to the smallpox patients of HMS Bodicea, and was specially promoted to Staff Surgeon as recognition of this. He landed during the Zulu war in 1879 and accompanied the Naval Brigade to Port Durnford and was mentioned in despatches.

He was Staff-Surgeon of Orion during Egyptian war in 1882, Staff-Surgeon of Orontes, served during naval and military operations in the Eastern Soudan, 1884. He then became Medical Officer in charge of transports, and accompanied the Royal Marine Battalion in action at Tamanieb where he was mentioned in despatches for his admirable arrangements for the sick and wounded. His service was recorded in the British Medical Journal of 1901. In 1902 he was appointed Companion of the Honourable Order of the Bath and in 1905 he became Deputy Lieutenant of Banffshire and a Justice of the Peace. He died at Ruthven, Ballindalloch on 14th July 1910 and is buried at Stone 52 in Tomintoul Parish Church.

Memorials 129 and 150 in the Churchyard of Kirkmichael Parish Church are dedicated to the Gordon family. This family are recorded as farming the lands of Croughly as early as 1560, and they were known as the "Croughly Gordons."

One of those commemorated on stone 129 is the much decorated Lieutenant General

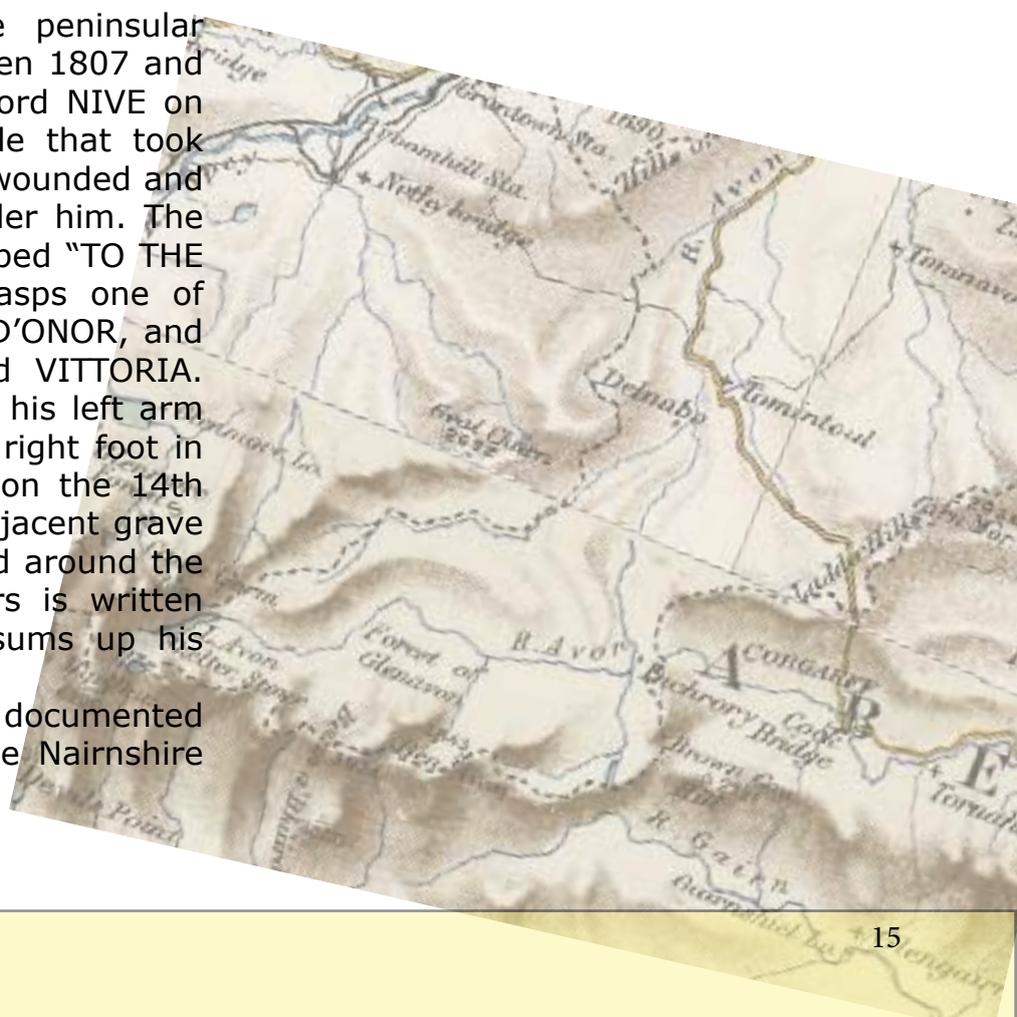


William Alexander Gordon, C.B., who was born at Croughly on the 21st March 1769 and died at Nairn on 10th August 1856. The monument is of grey granite and most unusual as it has sculpted above the inscription a crossed sword and scabbard and the Companion Order of the Bath and two medals with clasps enclosed by two vines with leaves.

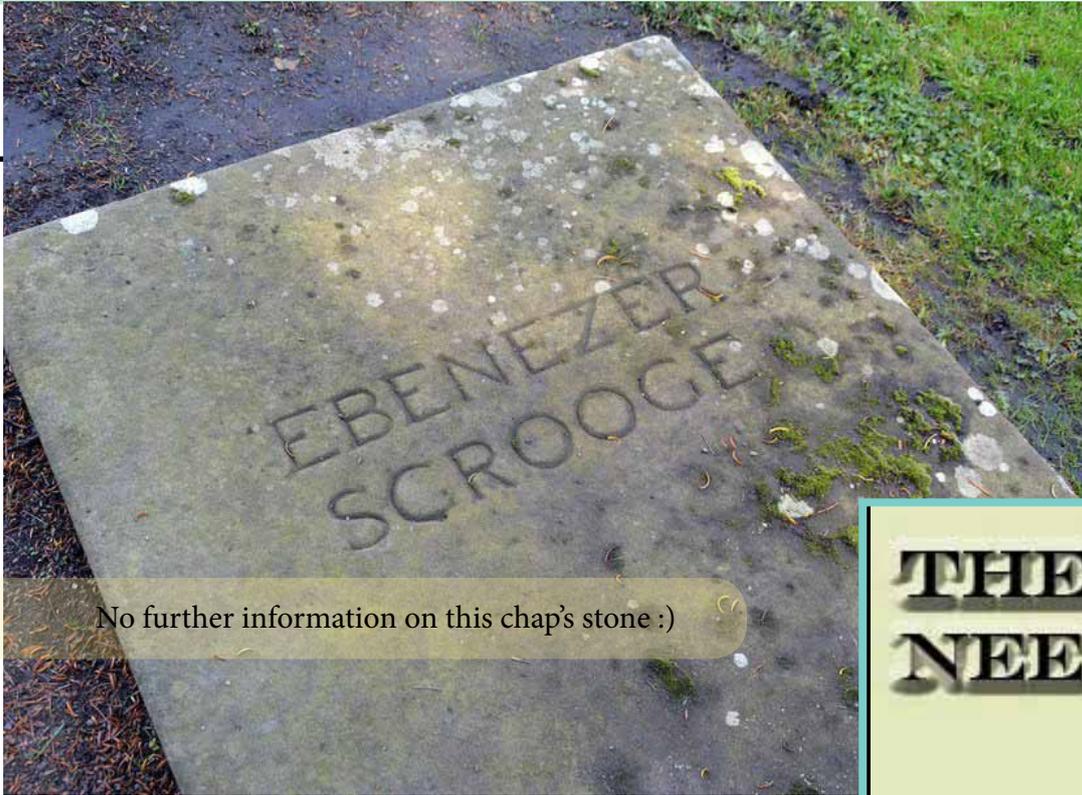
Both medals relate to the peninsular wars which took place between 1807 and 1814. One medal has the word NIVE on the clasp which was a battle that took place in 1813 where he was wounded and had his horse shot from under him. The other medal which has inscribed "TO THE BRITISH ARMY" has two clasps one of which is inscribed FUENTES D'ONOR, and the other which is inscribed VITTORIA. He was severely wounded in his left arm at Vittoria, and again in the right foot in another battle at Haspaine, on the 14th of February, 1814. On the adjacent grave slab is carved a claymore and around the hilt in Old English characters is written "I Fought" which certainly sums up his illustrious military life.

Gordon's career is further documented in his Obituary printed in the Nairnshire

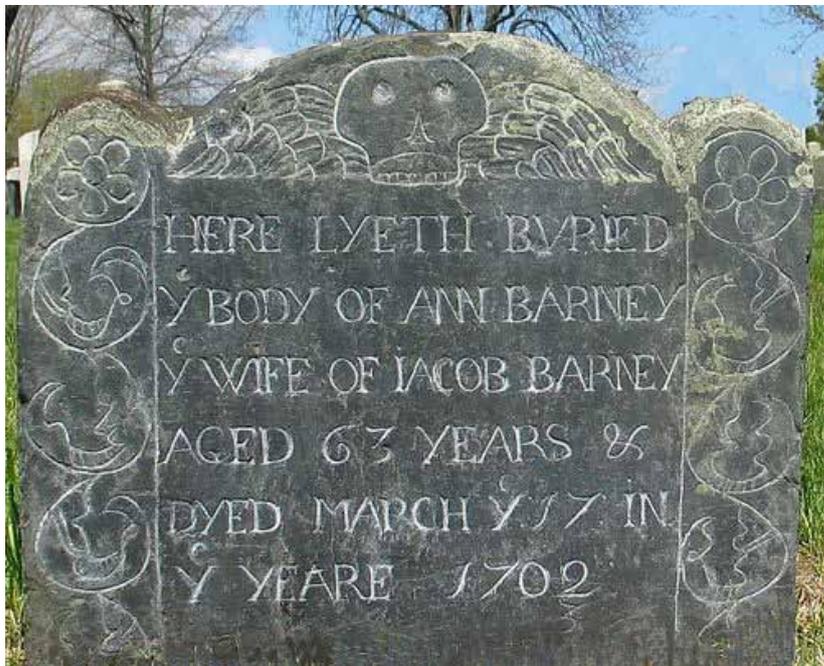
Telegraph of 20th August 1856, which gives a very vivid description of the man himself, his funeral, his life in the military, and in Nairn where he lived in the latter part of his life.



INTERESTING STONES



No further information on this chap's stone :)



**THE MBGRG
NEEDS**



YOU

We are urgently requiring help with all group activities. If you are able to come along and help with activities or even just provide a letter or story for the newsletter, we'd really love to hear from you!

For all submissions and queries, please contact the Editor: Derek C Page



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