

THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND  
RESEARCH GROUP

# Newsletter

Fra Birt To Graif



Na Rest We Haif - 1571

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(Currently published twice a year)

## Editor's Note by Derek C Page

Welcome to another edition of the group's newsletter. It's been a long cold winter since the last edition, with temperatures in Moray dropping to -20 Centigrade! However, we're back to work again now on a range of projects and we're all defrosting nicely. Enjoy the issue and please feel free to send any thoughts or ideas to me at the address shown at the end.

Derek

## The MBGRG Christmas Party - (by Keith Mitchell – Chairman)

As has become an annual event, our Christmas social evening was held *chez nous*, although it must be said that on this occasion all the festive spirit had pretty well worn off by the time it was held. Normally we get together for our annual "fling" within the first two to three weeks of January. On this occasion, thanks completely to the severe weather conditions this had to be postponed twice, much to the hair-pulling harassment of our Field Co-ordinator. Never mind, we finally got into the swing of things on March 13th, the evening before the AGM.

As can be seen from the photographs, the party was well attended, and the tables were liberally stacked with goodies of all sorts thanks to the support of everyone. Of particular note amongst all the delicacies was Janet's *clootie dumpling*, which although not piped in like the proverbial haggis, was shown off to the assembly with considerable admiration.



Janet & her Dumpling

**Needless to say it was more or less polished off at a great rate of knots!**

The entertainment followed on from last year's success with a humorous photographic competition. This involved a photograph taken in the field, actually Dundurcas Churchyard, the centre of attention on this occasion being taken up by two of our stalwarts, Jim & Ruth. The idea was to provide the most suitable caption. After being whittled down to three, the final was graciously judged by Jim and Ruth themselves, with the prize-winning entry going to James representing the Kinloss Abbey Trust.



Looking to the future, we have been wondering about the nature of this event. Given that our membership may increase, and that the weather may continue to interfere with our *best laid plans*, there has been some discussion about whether we should consider holding the Christmas social later in the year, perhaps even as for example, a barbecue. Questions have also arisen about what happens if and when membership increases to the point where it becomes a problem to hold such an event in a member's house. Any and all thoughts on this are welcome.

**And Now A Word From Our Controller - (by Helen Mitchell - Fieldwork Co-ordinator)**

Since the AGM we are now *back in business*. Elgin (west) is now being recorded but we are not pushing it too much at present as it can be done later in the year when the daylight hours are not so long.

Dyke has restarted with recording as well as doing buried tombstones. On our first day of uncovering we came across a very broken and delaminated stone dated 1682. More have since been recorded.

Roths started well with a company of 20. This did include four potential new members. We thought Roths (Burnside) would be exciting for buried stones but so far out of 10 uncovered only two have had text on them. Many were just broken fragments or blank.

Kinloss (buried), Lossiemouth, Forres Clunyhill and Clovenside, are still ongoing. St Peters Duffus should be our next publication. Knockando was the first of our two Group Outings for this season. See separate report later on.

If you have not heard from me about outings please telephone or email to enquire where we are going, and please keep me informed if you said you are coming and then have to cancel. The membership is growing, my brain is *getting older* and trying to keep up with everybody's whereabouts can be daunting at times. However, we always get there in the end. Keep your fingers crossed that the weather improves over the coming months and we can catch up with the time we lost during February and March.

### **MBGRG Member Makes Headlines on Page 1**



*Photo by our in-house photographer KLM*

On 21st March a "gaggle" (if that's the word) of Family History enthusiasts forgathered in the old section of Elgin Public Cemetery to begin the huge, if not *monumental* task of recording every memorial. As it is believed that there are currently over 6,000 tombstones, this will be the largest genealogical study the Group will undertake in Moray. In 1978, this site was initially recorded by the young folk who took part in the Youth Employment Scheme, and their work forms the basis for our research here.

To mark the event, articles appeared in both the Northern Scot and the Press & Journal. Thankfully the sun was shining when the P & J photographer arrived, and in the above photograph you can see Ruth following his instructions to create a suitable image. However, this one never made it off the cutting table, a close-up shot taking precedence.

### **A Genealogical Fragment Recovered & Identified - (by Keith Mitchell – Chairman)**

While chasing the sun, as I call it, to maximize the number of decent photographs I could take on our first day at Elgin, I spied a fragment of stone jammed into the corner of a wall, partly covered with grass. Clearly from its situation it did not belong where it was. As there was some writing on it, I lifted it out to get a clearer view of the inscription which was partly hidden by the grass. Laying it flat on the

ground I "did the necessary" and returned it to its original place. However, before doing so I noticed that its overall shape suggested that it might fit onto a memorial a few yards away. Trying it out for size, it almost fitted but not quite, or so I thought. The inscription which was later recorded, read as follows:-



**In memory of Agnes, infant daughter of David, and Margaret Haye Maxwell, died at Black Hills, 15th July 1861.**

Some time later thanks to the efforts of Moira and Willie, it turned out that this fragment had indeed more history to reveal, and just goes to show how easy it is to miss things of importance. It turned out that the stone had indeed originally been the slab cemented onto tombstone 54, I just hadn't fitted into place

properly. What Moira & Willie discovered was that there was part of a much older inscription on the back, which had been largely destroyed in the recycling process.



What survived was as follows:- .....Esq. of .....of the Gospel at ..... 1741 to the time ... death in 1768. virtue adorned ... for even endear ...to all who knew ... ..ains are interred ... ..ace of his family ... stone is placed ...mbrance of him ... .ean Dunbar .. ted widow.

You might be forgiven for thinking that it would be very difficult to make much sense of the above, but the situation was partly saved by the fact that we deduced the person concerned had been a minister. A quick look at the relevant volume of *Fasti* in the Heritage Centre along with the usual helpful assistance from Graeme Wilson, proved more or less conclusively who this memorial had originally been carved for. This was James Spens, son of James Spens of Alves, who died 20th March 1768. His wife JEAN DUNBAR, died 28th Dec. 1794. Of course having solved this problem, a few more questions have arisen, such as, where indeed are the remains of the good Reverend and his wife buried? It is also worth asking if the Rev. James Spens was by any chance related to the Rev. Alexander Spens of Birnie, who died in 1658 and who's buried tombstone MBGRG recorded in 2007.

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### **FUNDRAISING.** - (by **Ruth McIntosh** – Fundraiser)

Spring is here, spring cleaning time for your loft and boxes stashed in your sheds and garages. If you come across used postage stamps, interesting envelopes with the stamps still attached, or any old postcards you may have lurking in your loft, the group would be very happy to receive them.

If you don't have any of the above stashed away, start collecting stamps for us now. Ask family, friends and workmates to collect.

Have you noticed the number of letters you receive which have labels on them instead of stamps. Every stamp counts so even if you only have a few we would still be interested in receiving them.

Stamps are becoming an endangered species, collect them while you can. You can post or deliver to 17, Thornhill Road, New Elgin, Elgin IV30 6DY.

Thanks in anticipation.

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## **MBGRG WEBSITE (by Lindsay Robertson – Webmaster)**

### **Ancestor Indices**

Since the publication of the last Newsletter (November 2009), the abstracted data from the two most recent MI publications, have been added to the Ancestors on-line MI/Photo database:

Dallas Churchyard, including buried stones (Published Dec 2009).

St Ninian's Churchyard (Chapelford), St Peter's Church, Buckie and St Gregory's Preshome (Published March 2010).

St Peter's, Duffus. A few minor checks are still pending, after which the publication index will be constructed in preparation for publication.

Lossiemouth: Data abstraction for some 350 stones have been completed, and checked.

### **On-line Website Payments**

There has been some discussion over several months, as to the likely benefits of giving our website visitors the option of making on-line payments for MBGRG services. Following the AGM in February, it was agreed that this should be instigated. A relatively simple approach has therefore been set up, with at this time, emphasis being placed on the sale of full MI transcripts, and related tombstone and graveyard photographs. MI booklets, restricted to those published by MBGRG, may also be ordered.

An on-line Free Quotation Request Form, is now available on the website where visitors can list their specific requirements, and Keith has supplied an appropriate pricing guide for transcripts and/or photographs, based on quantity required. On submission, the form is forwarded directly to MBGRG, and a full costing, including handling, post and packaging as required is calculated, by Keith, and returned to the sender by email. If the user wishes to accept this personal quotation, he may do so on-line. Payment may be made at our new on-line 'Payment and Donation Centre' using either a PayPal account, or a wide range of credit or debit cards.

Although I currently administer this PayPal account, both Keith and Irene have secondary user access, to enable them to carry out necessary financial procedures. A range of test payments, refunds, and monitoring procedures have been carried out, and many thanks are due to members both in the UK and abroad, who kindly agreed to test the system.

## A Little Colour from the USA



It's been such a long, grey winter in the UK maybe something bright and cheerful is in order!

One of our MBGRG Members, Penny Jensen, from Seattle, a keen garden photographer, sent me this humming bird photo recently, and I thought it worth sharing.

*Submitted by Lindsay Robertson*

## Ancient Jig-Saw Puzzle at Dyke reveals its Secrets



Not long ago when we began recording buried memorials at Dyke, one of the first to be exposed was this badly broken example. Initially we thought it was going to be nigh on impossible to identify. However, after considerable persistence by Willie & Moira, along with help from the rest of the 'gang' we managed to reconstruct most of the inscription.

*photo KLM*

As an aid to identification we were given a significant boost after discovering an almost identical memorial not far away that clearly gave us the year 1682. This stone was obviously carved by the same mason with more or less the identical pattern and almost certainly in the same year. It also became obvious that the people commemorated on both stones must have been related, the common surname being GOWIE (the Libindx at Moray Heritage centre giving Cowie). So at the end we were fairly confident in saying that our Jig-Saw originally had the following text:-

|  |
|--|
| ALEXANDER GOWIE (or Cowie)<br>CHRISTAN .....<br>1682 |
|--|

## Spring Outing to Knockando - May 2010 - (by Keith Mitchell)



On Sunday 23rd May, some 19 MBGRG members visited Knockando Parish Churchyard with a view to recording as many of the memorials there as possible. As this is an active church, we initially worked in the new section to allow the service to go ahead without any disturbance caused by our activities.

Various weather forecasts suggested we would encounter rain at some point during the day, but the nearest we got to that were some dark clouds and a few odd spots in the middle of the

afternoon. By the time the church service was completed the majority of the modern memorials had successfully been recorded. Unfortunately cloudy skies, coupled with the tall trees surrounding part of the old section, meant that photography was limited to memorials that would never see the sun. So we will have to return another day when that instrument of light is allowed to shine more brightly.

As far as recording goes, this can be said to have been an extremely profitable day. For those who were actually writing the inscriptions down, it seems more than likely that a few folk were suffering from "writer's cramp" towards the end, as one member was heard to remark. This is no wonder as when Helen and yours truly sorted it all out when we got home, it was discovered that overall some 466 inscriptions had been recorded. This total was arrived at with the help of eight teams, resulting in 155 memorial inscriptions being added since 1978. There are only 149 still to be recorded.



Thanks also to our digging team we also uncovered three buried tombstones the most interesting of which related to a John McLean, "an honest and laborious man" who died in 1746 and his family.

*Photos by KLM*

In conclusion, using the style of a certain "department store owner" who used to "grace" our T.V. screens a long time ago, it can definitely be said "**you've all done very well.**" The day ended with another welcome visit to the Delnashaugh Hotel where we relaxed over High Tea and a good blether.

## UNUSUAL GRAVES

A few of the more unusual graves found on the internet.....



A little more 'extravagant' than we're used to over here!

NOTE: Authorship of the above photographs is not known, but will be added where appropriate.