

**THE MORAY  
BURIAL GROUND  
RESEARCH GROUP**



**ANNUAL REPORT**

**2011 - 2012**

## The Committee of 2011-2012

Hon. President	Betty E Willsher, M.B.E.
Chairman	Keith L Mitchell, FSA Scot
Secretary	Connie Walters
Treasurer	Irene Black
Field Co-ordinator	Helen Mitchell, FSA Scot
Ordinary Member	Moira Windwick
Ordinary Member	Stephen Leitch
Minute Secretary	Ruth McIntosh

## Appointments Held during 2011-2012

Historical Research Co-ordinator	Bruce B Bishop FSA Scot
Publicity Manager	Stephen Leitch
Webmaster	Lindsay Robertson, FSA Scot
Auditor	William Windwick



Photograph by KLM

A good example of the Petra Sancta hatching system used to show heraldic tinctures. From the Macpherson – Grant Mausoleum, Aberlour Churchyard.

## Chairman's Report

Where does all the time go? Here we are again with yet another year of MI recording under our belts and full marks must be given to everyone who has helped our projects to reach the the various stages they are at. As young Mr Grace was wont to say in the TV Sitcom, *Are You Being Served* - - - *You've all done very well*, although I don't think I've quite reached his totttering stage just yet. Perhaps it is also worth noting just a couple of *Guest Book* entries, which go some way to emphasize what some folk on the other side of the world think about the work MBGRG members do. For example, André from Arkansas, USA, says *The work of the Moray Burial Ground Research Group is so very important, and I appreciate all your efforts*. Likewise a few days later on 3<sup>rd</sup> January, Catherine from South Australia comments, *Thanks very much for your quick response and also to the volunteers at MBGRG for their amazing work. So appreciated by people, like me, living so far from their Ancestral lands*. Its good to know our work helps so many other people!

However, my first main duty for this report is indeed a very sad one. We recently learned of the passing to another place of our first Hon. President, Mrs Betty E Willsher, M.B.E. She died on Saturday the 25<sup>th</sup> of February. Betty joined MBGRG in 2005 as an Associate Member, but very swiftly became our Hon. President in 2006. She was a recognized authority on the description and recording of tombstones, and her zest for the subject was known nationally. Betty was indeed one of those people whose positive attitude significantly helped to support our activities, and she will most certainly be missed.

As will be seen in the Treasurer's Report, overall membership is slightly down. However, I think we are still very well placed to continue the various projects we are currently involved with, as well as some of the new ventures we have planned. One of the unfortunate areas where we seem to continually have a problem is recruiting new, young blood. Most of our active membership continues as keen as ever, and it is a real tribute to them to see their results ending up in print. When we were asked to advise the RAF team of volunteers how to go about cleaning the flat tombstones at old Drainie Churchyard, their enthusiasm and manpower was a treat to behold. Even if we had only two or three young members like this, cleaning and recording would become so much easier. If anyone has any ideas about how we could enthuse some of the local young (or younger) people, we would certainly love to hear from you!

Our main projects this year were completing Cluny Hill and Elgin West Public Cemeteries, Knockando Churchyard, as well as more or less completing our survey of the old section at Aberlour. At Knockando we encountered problems with probing a number of areas adjacent to the church when conducting our usual search for buried tombstones. This was due to the fact that there appears to be an extensive area of rubble material lying just underneath the turf surface, which made probing in the usual way much more difficult. Aberlour old churchyard proved to be quite exciting in a number of ways, including the discovery of some old plans in the McPherson - Grant Mausoleum. One of these, dating to 1858, contains well over a hundred named lair records, many of whose records had been previously lost. Although Elgin West is a relatively modern cemetery by MBGRG standards, it was still an interesting site to record. It also had its own little puzzles. One of these concerns four shallow alcoves in one of the south walls for which no precise explanations has so far come to light. One theory is that originally they may have contained alcoves for coffin storage purposes, but that is highly speculative! Our summer outing to Kirkmichael was very well attended and more than half the old churchyard was recorded. At first we thought we were going to have a bonanza in regard to buried tombstones, but sadly most of the ones we uncovered turned out to be blank. Never mind, we may get better results next time! Cluny Hill posed quite a few problems mainly caused by the overall geography of the site. This made recording much more difficult than usual and required a fair amount of climbing up and down hill. The original numbering system of over 1600 tombstones caused a fair amount of angst, and we encountered some unusual photographic problems in one area where many images frequently ended up out of focus using more than one camera. Very odd indeed!

At the time of writing Cluny Hill is in the process of being printed, so it should be available shortly, while it is hoped to have our Elgin West book to hand sometime in March or April, all going well. The next two volumes in our MI series, both containing buried tombstones will be Dyke followed by Knockando.

#### Secretary's Report

Duties this year have mainly been concerned with routine typing and correspondence as required. One area dealt with was endeavouring to establish whether a method could be found to hasten and simplify the location of buried gravestones, rather in the style of a metal detector in that it needs to be portable – and affordable.

To this end letters were sent to 'Time Team' to ask if they knew of such a thing, and the Engineering Departments of both Aberdeen University and Robert Gordon University to ask the same question, or if they might be interested in doing the research. Courteous replies came from both Robert Gordon University, and Time Team, but neither felt they could to help us further. Aberdeen University recommended useful reference material, and may be of future help. Unless anyone has any other ideas it is back to probing as usual.

## **Connie Walters (Secretary)**

### Treasurer's Report

At the end of December we had a total membership of 50 as against 55 for last year and 2 corporate groups, an increase of 1 from last year. This generated an income of £568 in subscriptions, a decrease of £89 from the previous year.

Our publishing costs for the year came to £1,602. This was for the reprinting of previous publications and the first issue of Lossiemouth and Rothes MIs. Our total income to the end of December from the sale of the publications came to £2,612 and we had stock in hand to the value of £1,471.

Thanks to Ruth McIntosh, we received £501 from the proceeds of sales at the Charity Shop she and her helpers operated in January. We also had donations amounting to £349. Mary Evans kindly donated the fee of £150 she received for her article on the MBGRG in the September edition of Family Tree. Further income came from the sale of stamps at auction of £64. Photo sales amounted to £150, cartridge recycling £26 and £1 for bank interest.

The above income includes publication, photo sales and donations, etc. through PayPal to the value of £419.

Other expenditure during the year included the following:- web site £132; web site Guestbook fee £11; insurance £177; printing of newsletter, stationery, travel expenses to Edinburgh for SAFHS meetings, telephone, postage, and photocopying £630; Equipment £53; SAFHS subscription £40; £12 hire of room for AGM; sundries amounting to £197. As with last year, £350 was distributed to members using their cars to site visits during the period from April to September. At 31 December 2011, we had a total of £3,112 in the bank, £54 cash in hand and £337 in our PayPal account.

**Irene Black (Treasurer)**

## Fieldwork Co-ordinator's Report

This past year we have had 25 working visits to the various churchyards and cemeteries with a good turnout of members. Three new members joined us this year.

**Cluny Hill Cemetery** in Forres has gone to the printers.

**Elgin (west)** is in the final stages of preparation for publication.

**Dyke** is completed and awaits checking for publication.

**Elgin (east)** has had one day of recording.

**Aberlour** has had most visits with the churchyard recorded and the cemetery being copied from photographs.

**Rathven** recording of MIs and buried stones is completed except for checks.

MBGRG members are assisting the Buckie & District Fishing Heritage Centre to record Rathven New Cemetery (Burnsdide).

**Kirkmichael** will see the group return to complete recording at this site. As recorded in the last newsletter, this churchyard has proved a little disappointing in respect of buried tombstones.

**Knockando** is completed and awaiting checking and preparation for publication.

This past year saw our publications of Lossiemouth and Rothes. Cluny Hill has been an extra long process with checking, due to the layout of the site, and drawing plans being extremely difficult.

During the year several illustrated talks about the work of MBGRG were given by Group members Helen, Keith and Ruth. These included the Banfshire Field Club, Duffus WRI, Old Saints Episcopal Church in Buckie, the Family History group at the Portsoy Salmon Bothy, St Giles' & St Columba's South Men's Association.

## Historical Research Co-ordinator's Report

With the books on Rothes and Forres Clunyhill now completed, historical and archival research is now focused on the burial grounds in the vicinity of Tomintoul, the churchyards of Aberlour and Mortlach, and other potential sites including St Lawrence's Church in Forres and Edinkillie.

Research into the historic churchyard of Mortlach has proved extremely interesting and productive. It is well known that there was a religious presence at Mortlach long before its brief elevation to the status of a bishopric and cathedral during the 11<sup>th</sup> and early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. St Moluag or Moluóc is said to have founded a monastery on the site in about 566 AD, and it has remained a place of worship ever since. The foundation of the present church is said to commemorate a victory over the Norsemen in the area in about 1011 or 1012.

The Episcopal see at Mortlach, and hence the status of Mortlach as a cathedral, was in existence from about 1011-12 until the seat of the bishopric was transferred to Aberdeen either in 1125 or in 1131. But Mortlach was never a cathedral as we would know it, and no soaring spires or great aisles ever graced the *cathedral* of Mortlach. It must also be considered that the small kirks of Birnie and of Spynie were at times the *cathedrals* of Moray before the building of Elgin Cathedral, and it is more likely that Mortlach was a Monastic bishopric, following the earlier Celtic pattern. The See of Mortlach also included the monastery's five churches, and maybe one of those was the church of Balvenie, now totally lost in the mists of time. Parts of the existing church building are known to date back to the original establishment of the bishopric in about 1011, and there also seems to be evidence of what is possibly 13<sup>th</sup> century construction.

The extensions to the church and its churchyard are numerous, and in 1670 John Sinclair, *Scatter*, agreed to point the kirk roof at a cost of 20 merks Scots and half a boll victual, and *agreed to point it yearlie* for the next 7 years for £2 and a pair of shoes each year. He was advanced twelve shillings Scots. The nails were provided by James Smith in Lechie at a cost of 20 shillings Scots. These two entries provide good evidence that by this date the church roof was slated and no longer thatched. John Forbes was engaged to bring in 10 bolls of *lyme* for the pointing of the kirk, in exchange for his penalty of fornication with Christian Duff. It is recorded that by 1717 all of the windows were *glassed*.

Several sources tell us that in the winter of 1763 there was *an uncommon mortality in the parish ... occasioned by a putrid fever* [probably typhoid], *and during the rage of*

*the disease the frost was so very intense that it was necessary to kindle fire in the churchyard to soften the ground for digging the graves.* Thirteen corpses were buried at the same time in January 1763, including that of the minister, Mr Walter Sime, who had died on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> January.

Writing in 1793 the minister notes that *There is another inscription in marble, on a monument of Mr Hugh Innes, first Presbyterian parson of Mortlach after the Revolution. It is in the wall, beside the minister's seat, under which he was buried. There are likewise some very ancient-looking grave stones with Saxon characters, below the seats and in the passages; but it would take a great deal of trouble to make out what is upon them, and, except to a patient and inquisitive antiquary, the labour would perhaps be very ill repaid.*

The church windows were repaired by William Shand in 1820, at a cost of 9/6d, James Kinnaird being the Session Clerk at this time. The Kirkyard dyke was re-harled the following year at a cost of £7/5/1d, and in 1822 the gates were repaired, the bill from John Thomson amounting to just 10d.

Maybe as a result of the minister's complaints, the kirk was modernised in 1826, and an addition was made to it at the north aisle. It is probable that the galleries were added at the same time, although these may have just been replacements for earlier *lofts* in the kirk. At the same time the churchyard was extended to the north and west. These changes were all completed by 1829. The watch-house in the churchyard, now overlooking the new part of the cemetery, is said to date from this period, but the fact that the windows only look out over the old churchyard and not over the new extension may indicate that the building is from an earlier date.

Research into the churches and churchyards in the parish of Kirkmichael and the quoad sacra parish of Tomintoul is ongoing, with the church at St Bridget's being of special interest as it is almost certain that it would have had its own burial ground. There were also numerous chapels in this remote area, and there is documentary, if not physical evidence, of several other burial grounds in the parish.

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, Glenrinnes Burial Ground, Buiternach Burial Ground, Dallas Churchyard, Duffus New Cemetery and Extension, Dundurcas Churchyard, Macallan Churchyard, Chapelton R.C. Churchyard, Tombae R.C. Churchyard, St Ninian's at Chapelford, St Peter's at Duffus, Rothes Churchyard and Cemetery, Cluny Hill Cemetery and Kinloss Abbey. There are also unpublished surveys of the memorials in Greyfriars Convent in Elgin, and at the burial ground on the Knock of Alves.

All members of the group are to be congratulated on the vast amount of information which they continue to provide for Genealogists and Family Historians researching their Scottish roots.

**Bruce B Bishop**  
**(Chairman of SAFHS & Historical Research Co-ordinator of MBGRG)**

Webmaster's Report  
**(The MBGRG Website)**

Website maintenance is on-going, and regular attention is paid to updating the relevant pages, reflecting the field activities, and publication progress of the Group, e.g. Churchyard Map, Research Progress, Latest News, Publications, Ancestor Indices, etc.

**Ancestor Indices Database Additions:**

MI abstract records from the following Churchyards and Cemeteries have been added to the on-line database during the current reporting period.

Lossiemouth Cemetery (North & South)	Roths Cemetery & Garden of Rest.
St Gerardine's Church (Lossiemouth)	Roths Churchyard
Fisheries Museum (Lossiemouth)	Roths Churchyard Extension
War Memorial (Lossiemouth)	Roths Parish Church
	Roths War Memorial

Work continues, with abstraction of data for future addition to the databases, and the preparation of computer assisted generation of Publication Indices. Sites in this *in-progress* category include Cluny Hill Cemetery (Forres), and Elgin

Cemetery (West), which are expected to be added to the on-line database in the near future.

Once these are added, the on-line databases will hold in excess of **50,000** named individuals.

Dyke Churchyard, including buried tombstones, is currently being processed.

### **MBGRG PayPal Payment Centre**

Due to *technical difficulties* at Elgin HQ early last the year I agreed to handle subsequent processing of MBGRG Quotation Requests. Multiple backup procedures had been instigated, however by our Chairman, with backup copies of all MI transcripts and related photographs being held *off-site* in Aberdeen.

Requests worldwide, for transcripts, photos and publications have continued, and since instigation of the system, over £700 has been accrued, helping to subsidise publication costs. Feedback has been very positive from our customers, as reflected in both personal messages and *Guestbook* submissions.

### **Guestbook**

Due to technical difficulties outwith MBGRG control, the on-line Guestbook had to be replaced, but the majority of entries from the old version have been transferred to the new one. Another example of the way in which we are able to help people with their family history enquiries can be shown by the Guest Book comment made by Sue from West Sussex : She comments - *What a wonderful site this is. It has helped me no end with family research. I just wish I could be there to help. Thank you all for your painstaking work in recording the past for the future.*

### **Reports**

The Annual Report for 2010 - 2011 and Issues 16/17 of the MBGRG Newsletter have been added to the site.

The monthly magazine, 'Family Tree', (Issue, September 2011) contains, among many interesting articles, one submitted by member Mary Evans, detailing the work of the Moray Burial Ground Research Group, with particular emphasis on finding, and recording buried tombstone in the Graveyards of Moray.

Discussion with the copyright holders, Mary Evans and Family Tree/ABM Publishing Ltd, is ongoing, and hopefully permission will be granted to allow us to post a pdf version of this excellent article on the website.

## **Lindsay Robertson (Webmaster)**

### Publicity Report

Throughout the past year the MBGRG has been successful in promoting the work of the group, and promoting the launch of new publications in a range of local media. The launch of the Lossiemouth cemetery monumental inscription book which gained coverage in both the Northern Scot (22<sup>nd</sup> July 2011 p 11) and the Press and Journal (28<sup>th</sup> July 2011 p 4) proved very successful, both in interest of those attending the launch at Lossiemouth Library on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2011, and in book sales generated through the launch event and publicity. Posters were used to promote the launch of the book around Lossiemouth. The launch of the Rothes book also generated media interest in both the Press & Journal (12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2011 p 6) and NS (9<sup>th</sup> Dec 2011 pps 29 & 31).

The group has also been successful in appearing in the clubs and societies section of the Spot Light magazine (September edition). Keith and Helen Mitchell also appeared in the RAF Lossiemouth station magazine 57N (Oct/ Nov 2011 edition p 19), in relation to assisting a group of RAF service personnel in cleaning and maintaining the remains of Drainie church and churchyard.

The work of MBGRG appeared in an article in the September edition of the UK wide 'Family Tree' magazine. This six page feature, written by group member Mary Evans, covered the work of the group especially in relation to recording buried tombstones, and featured many photos of the group at work. In the January 2012 issue, a further contribution by Mary Evans, included a reference to the Group's website, in an article looking at family history websites in the north east of Scotland.

The 2012-13 year will be a busy year for the group in terms of publications and recording new sites, and will provide ample opportunities to look out for publicity options using Moray wide media but also focusing on more targeted local outlets relevant to the area being recorded. Thought may also have to be given to looking for alternative sources and methods of publicity as newspaper readership continues to decline.

**Stephen Leitch (Publicity Manager)**

## Membership Promotion

During the year it was agreed that the group needed to try and increase its membership in the following year, and Stephen and Ruth agreed to work together on this project.

We decided that a two tier approach was needed. At one level continue with promotions targeting Moray wide media to highlight the work of the group and promote new areas of work, and look for editorial opportunities in magazines and newsletters. At a second level there should be a very focused publicity campaign in the local area before and during the time the group start work on a new site. This should feature posters in shops, local library, information to local groups, churches and community councils with invites to come and see the group at work. This though may need to be during the week. Information should be sent to any local papers, newsletters, internet sites and radio stations. Working with a local school may also help generate interest in the local area and may be a way to generate further publicity. We will where practical collate an action plan a month in advance of starting work on a new site and then implement this.

It was also felt that while the aim is to increase overall active membership of the group, the group should not be concerned if people join only to record their local site. Ruth also agreed she would be happy to deliver talks to local groups who were contacted.

**Stephen Leitch and Ruth McIntosh**

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(March 2012)

**Note:**

This version of the Annual Report contains some minor updates and corrections to the original version, issued to members prior to the AGM. These were discussed, and approved at the AGM on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2012.

L. Robertson  
(Webmaster)