

Newsletter

Fra Birt To Graif



Na Rest We Haif - 1571

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(Currently published twice a year)

Editor's Note

Welcome to a bumper edition of the newsletter, a fitting way to round off the year and prepare for our tenth anniversary.

This month we have the details of the anniversary party held at the Laichmoray Hotel, some very unusual stones found throughout the year and a general round up of the groups activities and where we stand for the coming years.

Anyway, enjoy the issue and have a great Christmas and New Year.

Derek

In Preparation for our 10th Anniversary



Although it is still some four months until MBGRG in reality celebrates its tenth anniversary, the Committee decided that we would turn our end of season 'party' into a commemoration of the inception of the group way back in 2003. It was also agreed to make commemorative mugs so that full members would have something to remember the occasion in years to come.

Various initial designs and component parts were roughly laid out, then 'dumped' on Catherine Sinclair, late of VAM, who very expertly put together the two brilliant designs you see illustrated. So many thanks Catherine for your efforts, which are greatly appreciated.

If you have not already received your mug, (gents or ladies), please arrange to collect them from Helen at your earliest convenience. Associate Members please note:- If you would like one of these anniversary mugs, you may buy them at cost price, plus post & packing where necessary. The current cost prices are £7.00 for the larger gent's mug with design on both sides, while the ladies porcelain one is £9.00, but please be aware that these prices may fluctuate over time.

The 10th Anniversary Party

On 19th October, MBGRG members and friends gathered in the comfortable surroundings of the Laichmoray Hotel in Elgin to share an enjoyable evening together, celebrating the end of season activities and also the forthcoming 10th anniversary of the group's founding. After Keith's initial welcome and a toast to absent friends, everyone was served a delicious two course meal, which as far as comments go, was enjoyed by all. Afterwards we had the cutting of the large green and white cake, so magnificently decorated in his own inimitable fashion by Stephen Leitch.



MBGRG Members Celebrating at the Laichmoray Hotel

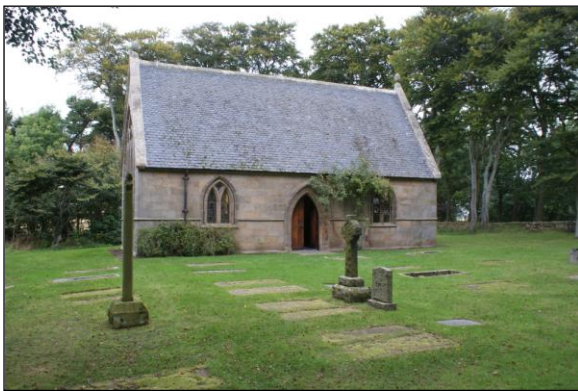


Ruth wins the star Prize

The honour of cutting the cake was given to our most 'senior' member, Sandy McAdam, who is one of our earliest members, and still takes part in uncovering Buried Tombstones. The evening concluded with a Prize-Draw, and thanks must go to all who donated the prizes. To see who won the 1st prize, take a look at the photograph above. Many thanks are also due to Ruth's husband, Tosh who took all the photographs.

The Michael Kirk at Gordonstoun

(by Keith Mitchell, Chairman)



About a year ago, I emailed our long distance member Sue Rennison, who lives on Vancouver Island, that she might like to clean some of the historically interesting flat tombstones at the Michael Kirk, Gordonstoun. Sue, as many of our members know, has a passion for working with wooden skewers and plastic scrapers to remove various forms of detritus from memorials long obscured by various forms of vegetation, certain types of lichen excepted. Her own particular brand of 'heaven' appears to be sites such as Birnie, where she served her 'apprenticeship,' and St Peter's, Duffus, where she

'graduated with distinction' in this rather unusual form of entertainment. Sue accepted the invitation with some degree of excitement.

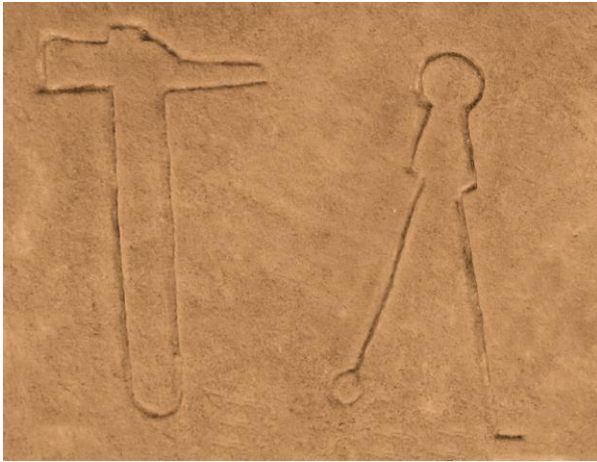
The majority of memorials were previously recorded in Edward Lightowler's excellent book on the subject, published in 1980, later republished in 2004, and was also separately recorded by A&NESFHS.* However, no comprehensive photographic record of the memorials is known to have been made, and I thought it would be a good idea to blend the two projects together, so initial preparation work began in earnest

Before any work could begin, we of course had to obtain the proper permissions from the powers that be in Gordonstoun, as the



churchyard now comes under the full control of the school. I therefore communicated with Hugh Brown, Financial Director, who apart from enthusiastically supporting the project, has been extremely helpful in organizing access to the site.

And so it was that Sue arrived at Inverness Airport on 10th September for her two weeks motivating stint of groveling in the wet grime and turf in an attempt to bring the tombstones back to some degree of legibility. By the time she had completed her last day there, Sue had cleaned well in excess of 30 tombstones, a feat of considerable endurance, considering the overall inclemency of the weather.



One tombstone cleaned to perfection by Sue was one dated 1679. Sadly we do not know who the stone relates to as the text is only made up of initials, in this case IS EF IF IS 1679 then GM 1748, showing that the grave had probably been used by at least two generations. Lightowler states that there are also “*symbols of the mason’s trade, a hammer and a pair of dividers.*” Clearly the tools shown in the adjoining photograph indicate that they may well have been part of a mason’s tool kit, but could equally be interpreted as having something to do with the trade of a blacksmith, or some such other skilled work that made use of a hammer. If the other tool is in fact a pair of

dividers, then it must have been for a very particular use, so far unidentified. I would therefore suggest that some other trade may be indicated here – but what? Whatever the nature of the trade, it would be very interesting to know, just what this particular tool was used for. Any suggestions!



The sun comes out as Sue completes her visit to the Michael Kirk

Although quite a few stones were left to be cleaned by other members of the group, Sue must be warmly congratulated for her admirable work at the Michael Kirk. She certainly made a huge dent in this project, as yet still to be completed.

Stamp Night



Seems someone has told a Joke

The last two stamp nights '*chez the Mitchells*' have created quite a heap of paper for the recycling centre. Seriously, many thanks to everyone who has contributed all there off-cuts, old postcards, stamp albums and stamped envelopes – some even having been sent in from places like Canada. Your thoughts and efforts are much appreciated! Now the only problem is to get all this stuff to the stamp shop in Edinburgh ready for auction. The last time we have been down that way, we just did not have time to visit the shop. However, one way or another we will ensure it is delivered within the next couple of months – but please keep your stamps, etc. rolling in – it all builds up.

Moray's Narrowest Tombstone?

(by Keith Mitchell, Chairman)



For those of you that have not read the October issue of the Knock News, or heard through the grapevine, the following fascinating discovery may grab your attention! On Sunday 16th September, while cleaning and recording tombstone inscriptions at the historic churchyard of Mortlach in Dufftown, MBGRG members uncovered a very unusual buried memorial. As can be seen from the accompanying photograph this stone is extremely narrow. Its overall dimensions are only 8" x 51½" (approx. 20cms x 130cms).

Out of all the many thousands of tombstones our group has recorded, it is certainly the thinnest, (width wise), we have come across. We very quickly pondered over the possibility that this might prove to be the narrowest grave-slab in Moray, or indeed further afield. Thoughts even sprang to mind about the validity of checking out the Guinness Book of Records!

The full inscription reads : **Here Lis the body of William Kelman Farmer In Lessmurdie Who died Aprile 26 1793 Aged 80 & Helen McBarnat his Spouse who died 1st Dec^r 1785 aged 75.** It is also interesting to note that a closer examination of the inscription showed that letters from an older inscription were clearly evident.

The discovery of this small and very plain, yet peculiar tombstone, begs a number of questions as to why William and Helen Kelman should have such a small memorial to record their earthly existence. Were they trying to prove something, or is the reason much simpler than that? Various theories so far have been advanced, but in all probability we will never know the real reason. At one time, certainly in the later 19th century this memorial was visible as it is featured in Andrew Jervise's book on epitaphs, published in 1879.

If anyone knows of a narrower tombstone, please let us know the details for the purposes of comparison and future reference.

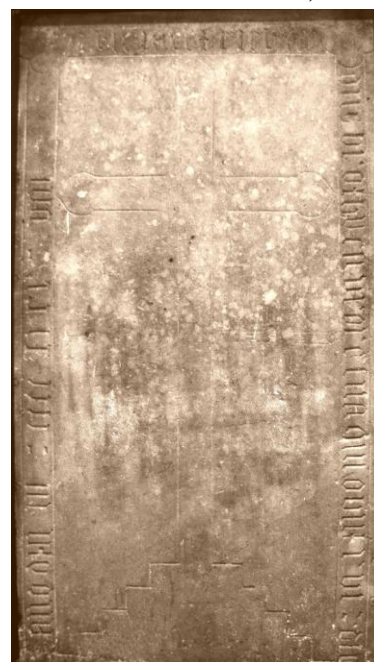
Dyke Parish Church MIs



Since work began recording MIs at Dyke back in 2010, a lot has happened as a result of group activities. Knockando, Aberlour and old Rathven churchyards have been more or less completed, final checks aside. While latterly the group has been involved in recording memorials at Cullen, Elgin East and Mortlach in Dufftown, so as readers will observe, there is still a fair amount in the queue waiting to be published.

After a considerable effort relating to final checks, Dyke at the time of writing is at the printers in Oxford, and all going well should be available by the end of November, or beginning of December, just in time for Christmas stockings maybe.*

The adjacent photograph, which is enhanced, is a Calvary Cross grave-slab that for many years has stood upright in an old doorway at the north end of the original church building. This stone used to be in the burial vault below, and the inscription is dedicated in old Gothic script to Ricardus Broth(u?/y?) (Richard Brothie or Brodie) and his wife. It has been variously dated by previous antiquarians as 1446 and 1488. Neither date appears to be correct.



* For further details please see back page.

Unfortunately the majority of the old Brodie family records were probably destroyed in the 17th century, and our research to date has failed to bring to light any alternative corroboration with which to back up the exact year in which Richard died.

At first glance the date in Roman Numerals appears to read 1448, but careful analysis of each letter appears to show that the mason may have made a mistake in his carving of the numbers that make up the third figure of the year.

Special thanks go to Sandra and Ian Maclellan of Dyke Parish Church, for all the kind help, co-operation and advice they gave us while MBGRG conducted its research into the history of the site, both inside the church and outside in the churchyard.

Doors Open Day



Volunteers - Derek, Stephen Ruth & Penny at St Peter's, Duffus

On Saturday 8th September, MBGRG took part in this national event, opening up both the Michael Kirk at Gordonstoun, as well as St Peter's Duffus. Many thanks are due to everyone who helped out. Although visitor numbers were quite small by comparison with larger places, such as Elgin Museum, the fact that between the two churchyards we had in excess of 80 visitors indicates the importance of highlighting these historical sites as much as possible.

A Cullen Old Kirk Enigma

(By Keith Mitchell – Chairman)

At the beginning of August we made a concentrated effort to record all the memorials inside Cullen Old Kirk, a task made more difficult by the sheer scale of some of the Seafield memorials. Of obvious interest to our team members were the two highly unusual monuments reputedly named for John Duf(f) of Maldavit and Baldavi who supposedly died in 1404. One of these includes a recumbent effigy, while the other is a very large grave-slab with the carving of a man dressed in highly unusual armour. At first glance the inscriptions on both appear entirely unambiguous, but a little historical and artistic research quickly reveals that there is something seriously amiss here, particularly with the readable text on the grave-slab, as well as raising a complex discussion on the authenticity of the visible carving of the man who purports to be John Duff. The doubts raised about who these memorials were originally made for, is possibly a little bit on the sad side, for our very own Field Co-ordinator, Helen, as available documentary evidence appears to show that John Duff could have been her very own 16th (or thereabouts) great grandfather. Wouldn't it be really great if we could genuinely prove the man in armour was one of Helen's ancestors!



Bill Davidson, Brenda Wood & Charles Burnett

In an attempt to highlight the worn carving on the grave-slab, two expert MBGRG members, Gordon Black and Derek Page, delicately and very carefully, dusted the relevant parts with a thin coating of domestic flour, the most effective results of which helped to draw the attention of the local Press and the Knock News a few days later. On this occasion, the church was a scene of intense activity that included our volunteers, ladies organizing the Flower Festival, gentlemen of the Press along with other church members. MBGRG Honorary President, Charles J. Burnett, Ross Herald Extraordinary, then presented a framed photograph of the floured image of "John Duff" to church elders, Bill Davidson & Brenda Wood.

Since then, I have been collecting as much evidence as possible, both of an antiquarian nature and modern opinion as to the nature of the carvings, particularly that of the large grave slab. So far the evidence compiled is extraordinarily conflicting. For example, the armoured figure has variously been described in 1976, by a respected and authoritative source, as having been carved by the "local idiot," while a very recent expert observation is that the creator was someone who was an "academically trained artist. Of crucial import is a copy black and white photograph of this grave-slab I was recently given, showing it standing outside the kirk probably, about the time of its return from Duff House Mausoleum. Close examination of this interesting photograph has already revealed some startling evidence that demands further investigation." The plot thickens, or as Sherlock Holmes would say "the games afoot."

A few weeks ago, Rachel Kennedy, Manager of Duff House, Banff very kindly arranged for Helen and me to visit Duff House Mausoleum to survey the Duff family memorials. The main purpose of the visit, however, was to try and discover where the two Cullen kirk tombstones had been sited between 1792 and 1966. From what we could see, the impression was formed that they were situated within and in

front of the alcove where Rachel Kennedy and Helen are standing in the following photograph. More on this later!



Rachel Kennedy & Helen Mitchell in Duff House Mausoleum

Field Co-ordinator's Report.

(By Helen Mitchell)

Another year of outside work ends. Despite the inclement weather we have achieved quite a lot over the past four months.

Mortlach : Since June we have had three visits and considering the size of the churchyard we have completed more than half of the inscriptions, when we started earlier this year.

Cullen : There have been three visits to clean and transcribe inscriptions. There are no buried stones so far, which appears odd as one would expect some, with an old churchyard. Perhaps the churchyard has previously been well maintained.

Elgin (East) : We have been held back due to the lack of sunny days over the winter months. We are halfway through the MIs.

Kirkmichael : I had hoped to complete the churchyard this year, but weather put paid to that idea. There are a number of buried stones, but many are blank. The last day we were there we uncovered 15 stones, but only four required to be drawn. Hopefully a blitz on one or at most two days next year should see the churchyard completed.

Aberlour St Margaret's : MIs completed both inside and out.

Michael Kirk at Gordonstoun : Sue worked hard at cleaning (see Keith's report) and a number of members continued her work. One more day should see all the stones cleaned and recorded.

Knockando : This is completed and the next stage requires double checking in preparation for publication next year.

Rathven : There are a few checks still to do there.

Aberlour : This churchyard and extension also still requires final checks.

A letter from Vancouver

(by Sue Rennison – Member)

It has once again been my privilege to be involved with the ongoing escapades of this weird and wonderful group. Very obviously, great effort was made for access to the Gordonstoun Michael Kirk. What a place!

Please remember that the historical architecture and graveyards that you are amidst, are substantially aged, compared to the few offerings in the comparatively young country of Canada.

My hosts were incredibly generous in their hospitality. Spending time at the Kirk, I came back to supper and a warm home where I could relax and catch up on a history lesson.

The revelation of historical details was as thrilling as ever. On a personal level, solitary work on the stones gave me time to clear the old grey cells. Not only did the breeze, wind or gale, blow out the cobwebs, but also time was granted for re-visiting memories of a very happy time in this area a few years ago. Future plans will hopefully give me the chance to return again. (I've already reserved my room!)

Maybe by then, there will only be a return to tidy up work that has already been completed by the valiant few. Note; I use the word few. What a shame that the group remains so small, those who give their time and effort, the work taking months to complete.

Having been privy to the background work that takes hours and hours of dedicated slog, I often went to sleep with voices of cross referencing and computer tapping. It always astounds me that the group make so much effort to so accurately document the details.

Once again I must thank you all for making me so welcome and I wish you every success in your future endeavors.

Sue R

Female Convicts Research Centre

(From Ruth McIntosh - Group Secretary)

Below is a copy of an email received from Colette McAlpine, maybe some of you would like to help her.

I am a volunteer with the Female Convicts Research Centre www.femaleconvicts.org.au and I volunteer with Founders and Survivors www.foundersandsurvivors.org. We are currently trying to connect the female convicts who were transported to Van Diemen's Land with their birth and marriage families in the UK and their descendants in Australia. We are searching for gaol and trial records and newspaper stories about our women. I am keen to engage volunteers in the UK who may be interested in researching the lives of some of our convict women who were from their counties. The records that your members have access to in the UK are beyond our capacity. We are currently transcribing all the records we can access in Australia into a database, bringing together the woman, her family and all records pertaining to her. Family historians and academics will use this to help them better understand the female experience of the convict system. Membership of our website is free and once a person joins www.femaleconvicts.org.au they have free access to our database. All our work is done by volunteers. I would encourage you to mention this to your members and perhaps advertise the opportunity in your newsletter. If someone is interested, then I will send over a list of women from your county, along with her trial date, age, known family and stated native place. Colette McAlpine Volunteer Female Convicts Research Centre Tasmania. Colette.mcalpine@gmail.com.

Cemetery of Valle San Floriano (near Marostica, Italy)

Finally, a few pictures from Bruce's visit to Italy



STOP PRESS - Dyke Church & Churchyard : MBGRG's latest book on the MIs from this burial ground is now available. It covers some 318 visible stones and 1570 named individuals. There are 16 colour photographs, 13 illustrations, 3 pages of plans of the churchyard, surname index, 4 pages of introduction and history, as well as the War Memorial.

Copies of this book can be obtained by contacting Helen or Keith Mitchell on 01343 546620, or from the MBGRG website at www.mbgrg.org. The cost is £7.50 excluding postage.