



The Moray Burial Ground Research Group

Newsletter



Work Starts at Cullen
New Cemetery &
Rothiemay

Helen scoops research award





Editors Note

Welcome to another edition of the group newsletter, I'm afraid we're really behind with this edition, but that was mainly due to a lot of things happening this end (including floods and power cuts!) but mainly items that we wanted to make sure we got it this issue, so I hope you'll agree it was worth the wait.



Derek C Page

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Front Cover: Cullen New Cemetery
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**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!

An MBGRG Champion

As a result of meeting up with Karen McGregor of the Breadalbane Development Association from Perth and Kinross, Helen was nominated for the above award for the very considerable contribution she has made to MBGRG research since its formation in 2003. Both Karen and myself shared in Helen's experience, but although she was not the outright winner, it was impressed on everyone present at the ceremony, that to be nominated for the award was in itself an achievement.

Helen Mitchell, MBGRG Field Co-ordinator receiving her Highly Commended Scottish Civic Champion's Award from Derek Mackay MSP at The Lighthouse in Glasgow, on Thursday 27th April; 2014



Lichen

MBGRG recently started recording in Cullen New Cemetery. We were surprised to find how clean the stones were in terms of having very little lichen on them, which you might expect to see in a place so close to the sea. We have recorded in places inland where stones were badly affected by lichen. Last year I was in Orkney and visited a cemetery close to the sea where lichen was so thick on the walls and on stones near to the wall. Can anyone out there explain why there is this difference in two places with similar conditions?

Ruth McIntosh

Lichen is not one organism, but two, a fungus and an algae and/or cyanobacteria that form a symbiotic relationship. The fungus requires carbon to feed upon which is provided by the photosynthesis of the algae / cyanobacteria and these seem to benefit from the living conditions provided by the funghi. Of the 2000 species of Lichen, at least a third have been found to be growing in churchyards where the stones provide an excellent environment.



11th Annual General Meeting 2014

This year the AGM took place on 23rd March in Lhanbryde Community Centre.

Twenty four members attended the meeting and our Chairman Keith Mitchell welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming. During the meeting Keith called upon our Honorary President Charles J Burnett to make a presentation to group Webmaster Lindsay Robertson for all the hard work he does for the group throughout the year. Charles presented Lindsay with a small token from the members.



Once the meeting had finished the doors were opened to allow members of the public to join us to hear a talk by Dr Fraser Hunter who is Principal Curator of Iron Age and Roman collections at the National Museum of Scotland, whose talk entitled "Dead and sometimes buried : dealing with death in prehistoric Moray" provided a fascinating look at burial practices in the Moray area. Fraser had travelled from Edinburgh just to give his talk to us and we had possibly our largest turnout of people to hear him speak. Judging by the comments at the end none were disappointed.





Work begins at Cullen New Cemetery and Rothiemay

Here we see some of our MBGRG members at work during the first day of recording at Cullen New Cemetery. As you can see there was some sun shining, which made this photograph look quite appealing. Sadly although the weather app on my Ipad stated quite unequivocally there would be sun all morning and most of the afternoon over Cullen, much of day was spent cleaning, planning and recording in dismal cloudy conditions.



Rothiemay near Keith provided us with great weather for our first outing and both sites are now well under way.





Featured Grave

Moray Burial Ground Research Group is presently recording Memorial inscriptions in Elgin Cemetery, South section. Members come across many and varied references to people who have fought and died in various conflicts in the service of their country. While working in Elgin South they found a small cross to the memory of Private William McKenzie of the 5th Scottish Rifles (Cameronians). The cross has become separated from its base and now lies abandoned at the base of a tree. At some time someone, most likely family of William, has placed a memorial to him commemorating his sacrifice in The First World War.

202168 Private William McKenzie died at the Somme on 17th December 1916. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission tells us he is remembered on the Thiepval Memorial. The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme is a major war memorial to 72,195 missing servicemen who died in the

Battles of the Somme of the First World War between 1915 and 1918 with no known grave. He is remembered also in the Regimental Roll of Honour of The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)

It would be wonderful in this time of remembrance of the Great War if some relative of William's came forward to let us know a bit more about him and maybe return his cross to its base as a fitting tribute to a life cut too short.

This article was printed in our local paper The Northern Scot recently, watch this space in next Newsletter for an update.

Ruth McIntosh

Secretary

MBGRG



MBGRG MI Publications Are to Go Digital.

(by Lindsay Robertson – Webmaster)

Many family history groups, and indeed individuals, are considering other methods of publishing their work, rather than the traditional printed book format. (See: 'To Kindle or not to Kindle' by Keith Mitchell in this Newsletter). There is no suggestion that MBGRG will cease publishing in book format altogether, but it is believed that making our work also available in Portable Document Format (.pdf) may have some benefits.

Printed copies are an essential as part of the copyright process, and clearly we would hope that libraries and family history groups would wish to hold at least single copies of our publications as part of their research library, and thus an initial traditional print run would be done as usual. This would be the only way those who prefer to 'avoid computers at all costs', would be able to access our work, and it is important such researchers are not excluded access to our research.

Recently, the logistics of holding stocks of unsold books, has been exacerbated by the general decrease in sales, as noted by several family history groups. Stock takes up a lot of space, and if storage conditions are not ideal, can become spoiled and hence not fit for sale, with considerable financial loss to the group. MBGRG has in the past supplied MI Publications, to customers in various parts of the world, but it is my general impression that these sales are falling off – possible the very high postage rates are a factor, often doubling the purchase price of the order. Also postal delivery delays can be lengthy.

Proposed plans described here do raise an important issue. If you are a 'book lover' and

have been considering adding our Publications to your library, do it soon! As they say in the advertising industry – buy now – 'once it's gone it's gone'. Our printed books may be in very short supply in the near future!

The preparation of the relevant pdf files will however take some time. As I understand it, previous publication methods involved material being sent to the Printer/Publisher in various formats - some text material in digital form, plans and stone drawings as hard copy, individual colour or greyscale images, with all these various parts being combined by our printer, to produce the final publication. This means that those publications which we have had printed previously, are not immediately available as a complete digital file, and will have to be generated by combining all the various elements into a complete digital version before being converted to pdf format, a not insignificant task. As an initial exercise, Keith and Helen have produced a complete digital version of the Boharm MIs Publication, and it has been agreed that a pdf version of this will be made available on the website in the near future. We are using this 'free sample' as an example of what site visitors can expect to receive in the future if they decide to order in pdf format. It has also been agreed that pdf versions will be available at half the price of the printed book price.

It is my intention, to create a simple Report on the website, detailing some of the above points together with a link to the Boharm MIs pdf file for free download. I suggest this and all future .pdf files are restriction free, allowing the user/purchaser to print off all,

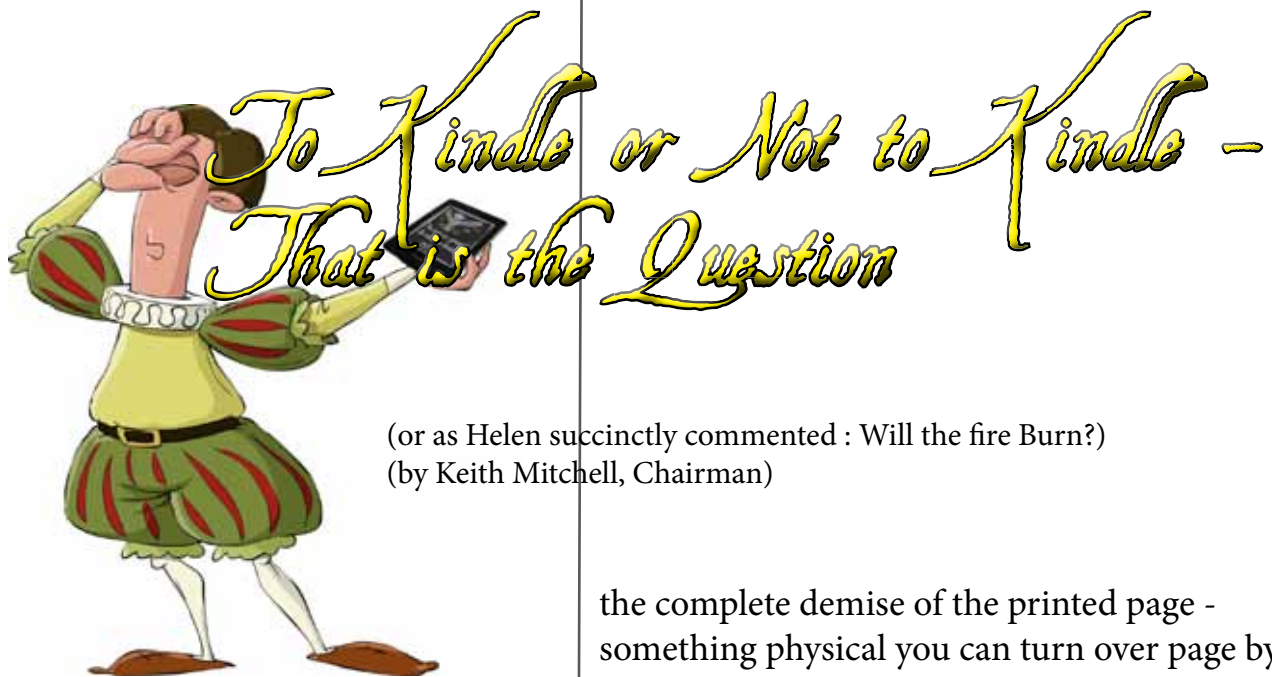
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or parts of the files for their own personal use, should they wish to do so. I see no harm in this, as currently anyone ordering a hardcopy book can read it, and then pass to other family members, rather than ordering further copies!

It is my intention that the main source of progress on this issue should be reflected on our 'Publications' webpage, which currently lists all our publications, with full title, format, number of pages, images, price

etc. I would then just add 'Also available in pdf format', with price, as and when we can make them available. No live link to the pdf files would be placed on the website. Site visitors would then contact us, as they do now, with their particular requirements, and on receipt of payment, the pdf file would be emailed to them.

If you have any feedback on the above I would be pleased to hear your comments.



As most of us will be aware the age of electronic publishing is well and truly here. Indeed, talking with member Nick Hide of London, it seems that many from the world of publishing and those connected with this medium believe the war between "book" and "Kindle" along with its associated kindred, is well and truly won – in favour of E-Publishing.

As a lover of books, I must confess that in many ways this relatively recent development is in many ways sad, and in keeping with most bibliophiles, I can only hope that the balance does not eventually lead to

the complete demise of the printed page - something physical you can turn over page by page and flip through in any way you want! I suspect, on balance, that books will never be killed off completely. However, it is clear that Kindle, Kobos and their ilk are now in use all over the globe, and in many ways perhaps this is a good development for the printed word and many a budding author. So how does this affect MBGRG publications? For various reasons, and in common with many other family history societies, book sales have decreased substantially of late. This process needs to be dramatically reversed, for if we are not successful in doing so, then to my mind it calls into serious question some of the reasoning behind why we exist as a group.

After careful consideration, the Committee

agreed that we should “dip our feet in the water” and at least get our publication extremities wet by having a go at putting some of our older books onto Kindle. It had been suggested that making our books available as PDF files on our website might be a way to go, as this would give us complete control over the whole process. However, it was decided that this would only be successful if our website had a much larger ‘hit’ count. Thanks to the advice and practical help we have received from Marion Gordon of Elgin Writers, work is in hand to trial our “Boharm” MI book on Kindle to see what happens. This book, in common with several others in our portfolio of publications is now almost out of print. So Kindle seems a

reasonable option to extend their lifespan at least in the foreseeable future. As we progress along the electronic highway, we’ll keep you up to speed on progress, as there is a very great deal to learn and many problems to be aware of. But remember to let us know your views about this new method of publishing MIs, as your thoughts are essential to the way forward.



Field Coordinator's Report.

By Helen Mitchell

This season seemed to be off to a slow start, however, with the few members turning up, the outdoor recording work is being churned out. This is partly due to the tombstones being relatively modern. We have finished recording MIs and buried tombstones at Mortlach. There are a few loose ends like photography and checks to do, but Keith and I will do that on a bright sunny warm day if that is possible!

A successful day was accomplished at Deskford Kirkyard. The weather was sunny, which helped the moral of the recorders and ‘photographer’. About 90% of the recording was completed.

Cullen Cemetery “on the clifftop” was our next port of call and recording has recently got under way there. It will not be completed in one day as at Deskford due to the amount of tombstones. Ruth and I spent three hours trying to sort out the plans and find the appropriate stones to match the Local Heritage Centre recordings. We still have half of it to complete and there are quite a number of new stones to be added.

By the time you receive this newsletter we should have another publication in our hands. Elgin East, which joins Aberlour for this year. It was certainly a treat to prepare for publication compared to Aberlour.

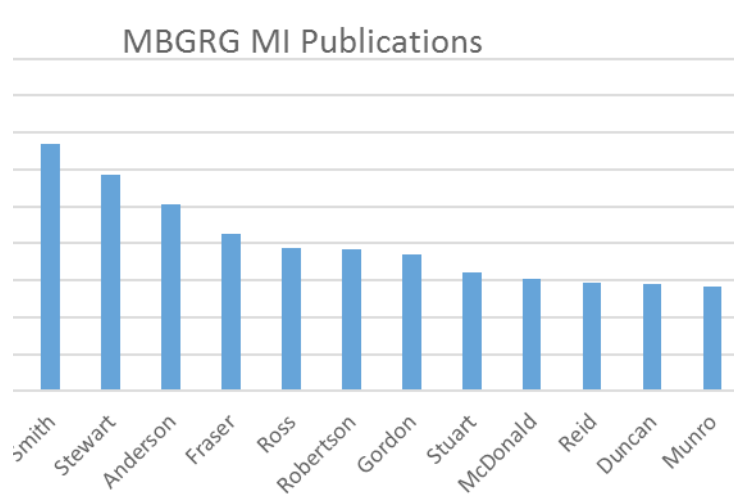
Photography has taken a turn for the better of late, or so it may sound until Keith inserts the disk into the computer and tells me he has taken 300 photos that day. When we are in Elgin South by 8.30am to photograph because the sun is in the right direction with no clouds, then on to Deskford, next to Cullen, and back to Deskford for the late afternoon sun, all in one day, then you can imagine the time it takes to number the photos. Days like this can happen at any time and with over 2,500 stones in Elgin South alone, this takes time, in particular if some have to be floured and cleaned off after. The recording of the South section is now about 1/3rd of the way completed

Members: - A date for your diary Saturday 25th October – end of season meal. Details to follow later.

What's in a name?

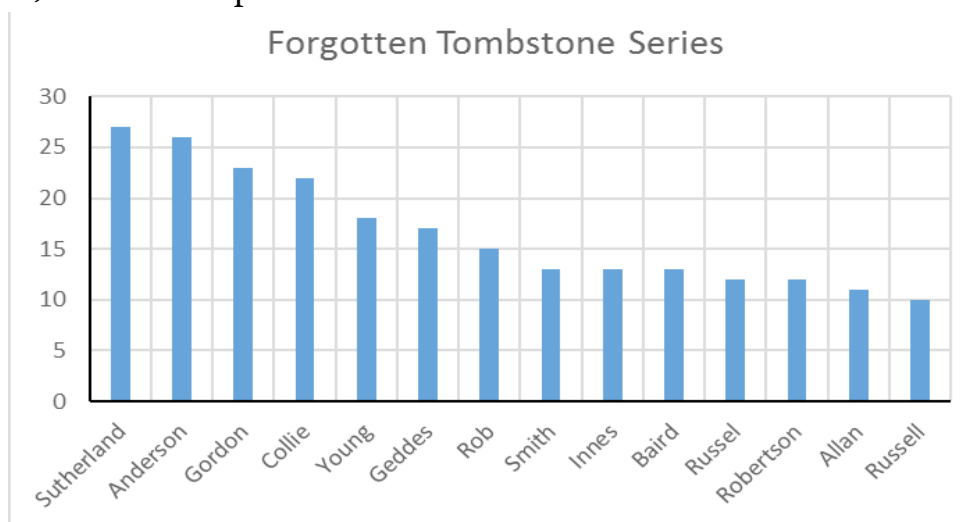
by Lindsay Robertson

The MBGRG on-line 'Ancestor Indexes' contain some 60,000 named individuals, and it occurred to me that it might be of interest to look at the most common surnames we have recorded in our standard MI Publications to date. The graph below shows those, listing only surnames which occur more than 500 times. Those occurring less than that are too numerous to show here, but can be supplied if you are interested in a particular surname.



The total number of distinct surnames and surname variants is also interesting, and currently exceeds 3000. Again the list is too long to publish here, but a random selection of some of the more unusual surnames which occur only once, are Aisladie, Badgery, Choat, Diamond, Eby, Flaws, Gaderer, Holyoke, Isaac, Jansch, Kiteley, Laverick, Northover, Ouseley, Plock, Roebuck, Sheepwash, Tipple, Vlasto, and Winne.

Buried stones are also included in some of our standard MI Publications of course, but the second chart, refers to surnames from a much smaller sample, taken from the Forgotten Tombstones of Moray Series booklets. Here, the most common surname, Sutherland occurs only 27 times. Again a random selection of less common surnames from this group include Alshouner, Bege, Cramend, Dick, Farcher, Grigor, Hirrywood, Junkin, Marquis, Nawtie, Paul, Robe, Sumson, and Witherspoon.





The Cloud – Computer Storage Problems

(by Keith Mitchell, Chairman)

In common with many computer users who have large amounts of data stored on their computers, there is always the fear of systems being corrupted, seriously damaged or at worst, lost altogether. This is something that happens far too often, sometimes with alarming and gut wrenching results. At the last AGM in March, Nick Hide recommended putting all our group data onto one of the modern forms of computer data storage facilities – the Cloud. Perhaps I should say more accurately “a Cloud,” as indeed there are a fast breeding collection of “Clouds” out there in Punterland.

Currently our huge archive of MI information, which contains our very large collection of tombstone photographs, is stored on several computer hard drives, both here in Elgin and for safety's sake in Aberdeen. However, knowing the propensity for ‘Lady Luck’ to frequently deal a bum hand at the most inopportune times, it has been decided that we will also find a suitable ‘Cloud’ to land our files on. At the moment it is merely a question of finding which one would be most appropriate.

Postscript: It seems my extremely low broadband speed here in Elgin will not permit MBGRG files to be uploaded!



Courageous Soldiers

(by Ruth McItosh, Secretary)

By the time you read this MBGRG will have launched their most recent publication namely Elgin East.

Buried in Elgin East are two soldiers, veterans of the Crimea war and the Indian mutiny



both having been at the relief of Lucknow. Although their rank and background, and life after leaving the army were very different they fought in the same places and displayed great courage.

Stone 205.

The first soldier is Duncan McDonald (Old Balaklava) who served with the 93rd Highlanders at Crimea and received a medal and clasps for having been at the battles of Alma, Balaklava and Sebastopol therefore being able to say he was one of The Thin Red Line. He was then sent to the Indian Mutiny and was present at the Relief of Lucknow gaining a clasp for his presence there. He served in the army for 21 years gaining two good conduct medals. His pension on demobilisation was 10d per day (less than 5p today). He lived in Forres for some time

Cont.

returning to Elgin where he ran a sweet stall in the New Market. Near the end of his life he was receiving assistance from the Soldiers' and Sailors' Relief fund. He was in his 76th year when he died and received a Military funeral on his passing in April 1905.

Stone 73.

The second soldier was Lieutenant Colonel William Rennie VC who was born in Bishopmill in 1822. His parents moved to Golspie when he was still quite young, his father working for the Duke of Sutherland. On leaving school he was apprenticed to the saddlery business. This however was not for William and he soon enlisted in the 73rd Regiment stationed at Aldershot. Private Rennie proved himself a very able soldier and was soon promoted to Corporal, Sergeant, and Sergeant Major. It was as a Sergeant he was sent to fight in the Crimean War after which he bought himself out of the Army. Due to the persistence of his former army colleagues he again joined the army buying himself a Commission as a Lieutenant in his old regiment. He was soon sent to South Africa in 1846 to fight in the Kaffir war. It was for this campaign he was awarded a medal for gallant conduct in the field and promoted to Captain. On his promotion he joined the 90th Perthshire Light Infantry. It was with this regiment he was sent to India and was present at the relief of Lucknow where he was seriously wounded, but went on to be awarded a medal and clasp for his bravery. This was not the end of his medal tally. From events which occurred in September 1857 at Lucknow it is recorded "he charged the enemies guns single handed" and "he charged in advance of the 90th columns, in the face of heavy fire, and forced the enemy to abandon their guns" he was awarded the Victoria Cross for conspicuous



Lieutenant Colonel William Rennie VC

gallantry and promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. He was reputedly the first man in Moray to win the VC.

His obituary appeared in the Northern Scot of August 1896 where it states that the officers of the 90th sent a wreath of rare flowers, very large and beautiful to his funeral. His Victoria Cross was sold at Sotheby's for £1,700 in 1969.

The above are only two of a great many service personnel who are buried or remembered on family stones in Elgin East.

The publication is available through MBGRG website, Yeadons Booksellers in Elgin or by contacting Keith or Helen Mitchell on 01343 546620

MLs With a Difference – Brief Holiday Encounters

(by Keith Mitchell, Chairman)



MBGRG held its first European holiday a few weeks ago – well at least six members took part, when we went on a bus tour of the Austrian Lakes, as well as visiting one or two places in Germany. The scenery, the food and the history were a cornucopia of peaceful enjoyment, for the most part, and of course like all good tourists we visited quite a few cathedrals and other religious buildings where historic tombstone memorials abounded. Ulm Cathedral in Germany is mouth watering in its varied and jaw-dropping memorials, while 16th century examples in Salzburg Castle are indeed quite stunning. Of course our visits to these sites were fairly perfunctory, and one would need many days to study them in any significant depth.

At the same time when the bus stopped off at various points for coffee breaks, a few of us would make our way into some of the local

burial grounds, to while away a few minutes of spare time. It is amazing what some



tourists get up to on their travels! One such place several of us visited was in the town of Berchtesgaden, after making the bus trip up to the “Eagle’s Nest, which Hitler received as a 50th birthday present. Nick our bus driver then gave us some spare time in the town, and on the way back, we popped into the local churchyard. Many of the tombstones by design looked quite old, but it turned out that most of them dated to the 1900s, and there seemed to be only a few older ones dotted about on one of the perimeter walls. In keeping with local styles of memorial, these frequently contained the most exquisite and complicated carving, quite different to what we normally see in Scotland. Maybe MBGRG needs to expand into Europe!



Another place we visited in Austria was the ancient village of Hallstatt in the Austrian region of Salzkammergut, which as the name

Cont.

suggests, is well known for its production of salt. The beautiful village is set beside the lake of the same name, and in sunny weather is indeed an extremely idyllic spot. On this occasion, however, it was raining and a long walk through the village, dodging Japanese tourists with cameras continually poised, ended up with a visit to the ubiquitous coffee shop. However, there was one place three of us wanted to see, and that was the local charnel house, beside the historic local Roman Catholic Parish Church. After a lot of

stair climbing, we finally found the place and spent a few minutes taking in the curiosity of the place. On three sides of the small building were set rows and rows of skulls, some 1200 in number, lying over stacks of arms and leg bones. Unusually some 610 of these the skulls had the name of the person intricately painted across each forehead, which made for a sight which is hard to describe. It is recorded that this tradition began in 1720. However, all the ones we could see seemed to date to the 19th and 20th centuries.

Painted skulls in the Charnel House (Beinhaus) in Hallstatt, Austria (Photo KLM)



Diamonds are forever.....

After scouring around for information on different burial practices around the world, this has to be one of the strangest new fads I've come across. It's now possible to be cremated and then get your ashes made into a diamond! Now, this service obviously doesn't come cheap, from budget small stones at around £1300 up to 2 carat examples in red for around £12,000 !

So maybe we'll be doing future research on family history in jewelry and antique stores!



Future MBGRG outing?



A photographer's Rant

(By Keith Mitchell, MBGRG Photographer)

Having been largely responsible for creating the Group's archive of tombstone photographs over the years, it is perhaps worth noting that we hold well in excess of 60,000 images relating to burial grounds all over Moray. Now the majority of these photos would appear to suggest that this part of Scotland is deluged with sunshine for most of the time. However, anyone who does not know the area and thinks this, is somewhat delusional. Indeed it must be said that cloud hopping when out in the field, is a major pastime for yours truly. Now why is this?

The "Good Book" says that one of the first things 'God' did when he began his wonderful works at the beginning of everything was to create 'Light.' Whatever the truth of that may be, it is certain that sunlight makes a tremendous difference to seeing things at their best – well on most occasions, and certainly as far as photographing the majority of tombstones is concerned.

Members who have seen me photographing in various burial grounds will certainly admit that I frequently get impatient when the sun fails to deliver, and the clouds keep shadowing its movements. But sometimes this can get to the ridiculous stage, and today was one of those times. As we all know weather forecasting is a dangerous profession to be in, as frequently those involved in its media presentation appear to frequently get their results a little 'tad' inaccurate. Not only that, trying to get the same result for the same area, e.g. Moray, from T.V.,

radio, newspapers, Ipads and smart phones, appears to be nigh on impossible on frequent occasions.

So, the sun was shining in front and back garden, white clouds appeared here and there, and it looked like an afternoon to go 'shooting.' So Helen and I arrive at New Elgin, South Section ready for action. The sun is still shining. We start cleaning and tidying, with camera at the ready. We get a few done and then a cloud blocks the sun out completely. Looking up in the sky we see huge areas of blue sky all over the place, but also large areas of cloud that drift in from the horizon and from then on almost entirely block out the sun for almost two hours. Every 10 to 15 minutes we perhaps get a minute or two of sunshine and then more and more cloud. Eventually after photographing about 50 tombstones, we give up and go home. On the way, we drive about 500 yards from the cemetery gates and the sun comes out, and stays out even when we get home! The Latin 'nil desperandum,' and other similar expressive comments, spring to mind!





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