

THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND RESEARCH GROUP

Newsletter

Issue 4 (Currently published twice a year) April 2005



Dear Member, Unfortunately, various circumstances have once again brought about a small delay in the production of this issue of the Newsletter. Please accept my sincere apologies as Editor.

Committee for 2005- 2006

The Annual General Meeting of our group was held as advertised on the 1st of March, at which 14 members were present and five apologies were tendered. This was a very respectable turnout in the circumstances. The Committee was re-elected en bloc, and on this occasion, we had the good fortune to elect our first Hon. President in the name of Dr Bruce Irving. Dr Irving is the Chairman of the Scottish Association of Family History Societies and we extend to him a very warm welcome indeed.

Group Logo

The Committee hopes to have sweatshirts with our 'Winged Soul' logo available in the not too distant future. However, don't hold your breath for long! Orders will be taken as and when details are finalised. Not long ago, Bruce and I paid a visit to Bellie Cemetery, and by relatively simple procedures, we managed to manoeuvre the 'Table End' concerned under a nearby table-stone. So at present the carved image will be much better protected from further damaging destruction by the elements.

Fund Raising

Moray Council Grant

If you read the Northern Scot of March 4th, you will already know that Moray Council have donated the very useful sum of £600 towards our groups running costs. We are extremely grateful to the Council for their interest and support in our activities. Apparently we have 'emptied a council cash pot' for the financial year, and it appears that at least one member of the council did not entirely support the actions of his colleagues. It seems there are hoards of other 'archaeological-style groups' in Moray that may want similar treatment!

Associate Membership

Please remember to support our drive to acquire as many Associate Members as possible. Membership is open to anyone aged 18 or over. The annual subscription rate is only £6.00 and entitles members to receive Newsletters and Annual Reports, and they don't have to do any work! Go on; please get as many of your colleagues, friends, neighbours and relations to support our activities. The more members that join us, the more we can achieve as a group.

Recycling Print Cartridges

Recently Helen Mitchell, our Fieldwork Co-ordinator, came up with the suggestion of raising funds by means of recycling empty printer cartridges. There are various firms that will pay cash for these items. We are still in the process of researching the best deals out there, and if we get enough support from members, it may be that we can raise some much needed extra cash for important things such as publication costs. If you, or your friends, etc., have any cartridges, with or without original packaging, please keep them, then pass them on to Helen when convenient. Many thanks to Simone for doing web research on this subject.

Stop-Press: - Thanks to Mary Wardle & Isobel Ellingham et al, for ideas about fund raising quizzes.

Alves Cemetery (Buried Tombstones)

At long last we are beginning to see some light at the end of this tunnel from the point of completing this frustratingly interesting project. With nearly 140 Buried Tombstones to our belt, we are well-passed the point where publication will require more than one volume.

This project which began in February 2004, is probably not going to finish the excavation stage till well into May; so we still have quite a bit work to do. However, one bonus is that we now appear to have found our way into the original cemetery that existed during the 16th-17th century. Evidence of this was recently found when we excavated a marker churchyard. As the turf came off 1604, which is most certainly come across frequently. We uncovered something of particular was cleared and carefully washed inscription presented itself. found that the stone itself cleaned clarity and colour. One corner is is broken but almost entire. In appears to be exceptionally long an inscription around the contains a crest with a stag's head heraldic 'cushions.' The date, and skull with a bone in its mouth altogether interesting tombstone honourable woman', Margaret 'Dubar' (Dunbar) of Newton, who 1604. It is uncertain when this tombstone was last visible, however, it was recorded by James Davidson



Cheyne, the local schoolmaster, during his research of Alves Churchyard in the early 1920's. Shortly after this discovery, we partly uncovered a tombstone of similar date, and by rights we should hopefully find several others of a similar early vintage. The next few weeks should hopefully prove an exceptionally worthwhile experience in our local Family History annals.

within in the eastern section of the we very quickly observed the date something Family Historians do not quickly realised that we had importance. When the whole stone an almost entire and clear Thankfully on this occasion we with an exceptional degree of broken and missing, while another overall appearance this stone and narrower than usual. It contains 'tramline' borders, while the centre and what are thought to be three six lines of Latin text, as well as a occupy the remainder. This commemorates the life of 'ane Mackenzie, spouse to Master James died on the 12th of December

Alves Historical Comment - (by Bruce Bishop – Secretary)

The Old Church of Alves

“The predecessor of the Church of Alves stood to the south of the present (now derelict) church, belfried gable at the west, along with the main door, and the choir was at the east, or Inchstellie end. It was similar to Birnie Kirk.”

Records suggest that this church was stone-walled with a “thack” or thatched roof. On 17th March 1642 “*The roofe and the thack of the queir being found ruinous therefore the sessione was appointed to see to the repairing of it.*” The Presbytery agreed to these repairs on 8th November 1649, and various stents or taxes were imposed on the people of the parish. Many repairs were carried out between 1650 and 1663, resulting in the demolition of the ‘queir’ at the east end of the kirk, the building of a new east wall, and the erection of lofts in the kirk to accommodate the increasing congregation. The seating in the kirk consisted of wooden planks supported on stones, and some private ‘dasks’ and pews. The congregation was segregated by sex, at least in the poorer classes, and the scholars were confined to one part of the kirk. On 31st May 1663 John Alves in Windiehills “*presented a desire to enlarge his dask, and the session considering that the Alves’ are ane honest and auncient family in the parish grant this desire.*” By 1666 the planks and stones were becoming unsightly, and not in keeping with the newly-restored church, and the owners were given until the autumn to “*put up decent seats.*” In 1670 wooden stair to the loft fell down, and was replaced by a ‘handsome stone stair’. A loft was built in the east end of the church by John Russell in Easter Alves in 1684 for the use of his family and servants. The kirk had no furnishings except for a table and the pews and dasks. There was no Communion Cloth, Cups, Bible or Basons, these all being provided personally by the minister.

“Nothing brings home so clearly the state of disorganisation that overtook the national church following the Revolution settlement of 1690 as the blank records of the Alves church until the establishment of Joseph Sanderson on 2nd February 1703.” The new minister gave much more attention to the parish than his predecessor had, and was active in the reconstruction of both the kirk and the manse. At the time of his arrival the kirk roof was in danger of total destruction due to the number of missing slates, and some of the windows were in need of glass. The repairs cost £218/12/0d Scots.

“The Church commonly called the Mary Kirk stands at Alves Kirktowne between the two towns of Easter and Wester Alves. Alves Kirktown is well situated and every way surrounded by pleasant corn fields. The manse is on the NE side of the kirk, a good habitable house. The first gentlemans’ house of note, to the east of the kirk and not above 80ft distant from it, is Kirktown’s principal lodging. There is an old tower on the east end built by the Spens family, with a handsome lodging adjoining the towers built by Thomas McKenzie of Pluscarden. It has before the gate of it on the south side a very large orchard with a convenient stripe coming from the Kerser Well (The Crook Well) to the south of the kirk near to the fourth part of a mile, and passeth by the north side of an old cross where there is a public inn called ‘The Foord’, and runs northward by the south side of the orchard. James Spens proprietor thereof.”

This house was the twin-towered house of the Spens family, and later the McKenzies of Pluscarden. The south front of the mansion house was flanked by the two towers, the earlier one by the Spens family, the later one by Thomas McKenzie. The Spens family were said to be *“the most intellectually distinguished family that ever made its home in the parish of Alves.”* The branch of the family which lived at Alves was founded by Heironymous Spens of Over Manbeen, in the neighbouring parish of Elgin. He and his wife Catherine Massoun acquired the lands of Kirktown of Alves after the Reformation of the 1560’s, the lands remaining in the family until 1802 except for the period from 1653-1729 when they were temporarily disposed to Sir Thomas MacKenzie of Pluscarden and Earnside. The inconvenient proximity of the Kirk, the Manse and the Laird’s house receive frequent mentions in the Kirk Session Minutes. Easter Alves occupied the western slopes of Carden Hill.

Alexander Anderson (died 1571)

One of the earliest known residents of Wester Alves was Alexander Anderson of Petinsair, who, on 23rd November 1544 was granted a Charter by James, Earl of Murray, appointing him “Principal Mair” of the Province of Moray *“the service of the foresaid office of Mairship useit and wont to Marie Queen of Scotts and her Shreffes of Elgin.”* The precise duties of the office of the Mairship are unclear, but it would appear that the Mair acted as a Constable or Administrator responsible to the Sheriff of the County. Alexander Anderson died in 1571 and is buried in Alves Churchyard, his tombstone being inscribed *“...Alexander Anderson of Petinsair, sumtym in Vester Alves, mair of ye Erldom on Murray, quha deit ye xxv of November 1571. Fra birt to graif na rest we haif.”*

The Witches of Alves

By the second half of the seventeenth century Easter Alves was gaining an evil reputation as the prime centre of witchcraft, charming and sorcery in the parish. Maybe this had something to do with the nearby Knock of Alves. To quote the poet William Hay; *“ ’Tis the land of the famed Knock of Alves - Where fairies and spirits repair - To revel and dance in the moonbeams - Or trip it o’er meadows of air.”*

Young suggests that even as late as the early nineteenth century the belief “in the power of departed spirits, witchcraft, fairies and demonology was very great. Certain old families had demons or spirits connected with them, particularly at the time of death”. Unwary travellers, more particularly those having imbibed a quantity of strong ale or potent aqua-vitae at the Elgin Markets, or at the inn at the Crook of Alves, were entrapped by the inhabitants of these unseen worlds into splendid halls in the recesses of the Knock of Alves. There music and dancing was carried on without ceasing, and the enchantment was so great that days, months or even years passed before the delicious dream was at an end. Or at least this was their excuse!

On 31st January 1658 Isobell Murray, spouse to John Russell in Easter Alves, put in a complaint against Issobell Milne, spouse to James Farcer, who had utter vile imprecations against her saying *“I ask God and Our Dear Lady that the next child Issobell Murray shall beare to her husband may be like ane wedder... .”*

In 1663 Andrew Angous and Agnes Rob were accused of the “*ringing of a miller’s bridle*” thereby hastening the death of Margaret Anderson in Easter Alves. The accusations and counter-accusations of witchcraft in Easter Alves got so bad that in 1663 the Kirk Session had felt obliged to install an additional kirk elder in that part of the parish to oversee matters. James Watson was the residing elder there, and as he had a large house John Alves, another kirk elder, was sent to stay with him. It is unclear how long this arrangement remained in force. On 23rd August 1668 Grissell Duff was reprovved for cursing and saying “*As many crows as your cock should have given, so many devils take them to hell who killed him.*” At this time even the mention of the devil or of hell was a sin against the church.

A Winter's Day at Alves



A Summer's Day at Burghead



The above photos demonstrate the weather variations Family Historians experience in the field.

The photo on the left was recently taken during our Buried Tombstone research. It shows the first of two snow showers that caused havoc with our operations that day. Shortly after this we had a tape recorder been present, it would no doubt have recorded slightly more than a few mutterings of discontent! On the right we see a group of happy Family Historians carrying out M.I. work on a lovely calm sunny day. This is most certainly the way it should be, but no doubt we must be prepared to take the good with the bad.

Lhanbryde (Old & New)

To keep the M.I. enthusiasts within our group happy, it was agreed that we would record memorial inscriptions at Lhanbryde (Old) after our work at Alves was ended for the year. So between November and February, several members set about recording some 200 odd tombstones dating from the 17th century to about the middle of the 20th century. Most of these tombstones are in a fairly good state of preservation, although a few are to be seen lying upside down or in shattered fragments. Thanks in particular here go to Janet Campbell our tireless tombstone cleaner who very carefully and almost single-handedly removed considerable quantities of soil and other suitable organic debris from text and 'Emblems of Mortality.' It should be stressed that this was all done in accordance with our 'Methodology.' I can report that almost all of the memorials at this cemetery have now been photographed, although a few still remain to be done when suitable lighting becomes available. Brian and Mary Wardle by themselves recorded all the memorials in the new cemetery nearby. However, they are in the process of rechecking these transcripts. We are most grateful to them for their efforts, particularly as it was done when the weather was extremely cold!

Humour Corner - (selected by Keith Mitchell - Chairman)

"The following quaint Epitaph, on a Comedian, may be seen in Gimtingham Church Yard. Sacred to the memory of Thomas Jackson, Comedian, who, on the 21st. of December, 1741, was engaged to play a comic

cast of characters, in this great Theatre the World, for many of which he was prompted by nature to excel. The season being ended – his benefit over – the charges paid – and his account closed, he made his exit in the tragedy of Death, on the 17th. of March 1798, in full assurance of being called once more, to Rehearsal, where he hopes to find his forfeits all cleared, his cast of parts improved, and his situation rendered more agreeable, by him who payed the great stock-debt for the love he bore to Performers in general."

Ed. note: Gimingham is on the Norfolk coast. Extracted from the MS. writings of John Manders, Dublin & Whitehaven, 1820's. Courtesy of Scottish Family Heritage. if you wish to see more humorous or cartoon features in future issues, why not create your own brand of humour, or tell me your ideas and perhaps we can have them drawn for you.

Future Research

Following the AGM, and a recent Committee meeting, it was agreed that after completing Alves and Lhanbryde, our next project will be the long abandoned cemetery of Buiternach, situated three miles south of Tomnavoulin. It is quite perhaps some 25 to 30 These are apparently vegetation, so it may be labour could be involved However, we are work that most, or all of these one visit. As yet we are vehicular access, and it undergo a little bit of minute walk or so 'on a plantation.' Apparently a surrounding countryside time taken to get there. The accompanying photograph was taken by Alistair Fraser last August, when the Moray Field Club visited this cemetery. Seated in the foreground is our own Mary Macdonald.



a small graveyard, with visible tombstones. covered with a lot of that a fair bit of physical in recovering the M.I.'s. ing on the assumption can be completed during uncertain about getting may be necessary to healthy exercise – a 20 track through a forestry panoramic view of the is one reward for the

Several other graveyards are being looked at for somewhat longer recording projects than Buiternach. These include Rafford (old and new), Spynie and Urquhart. However, further investigations will be necessary before any definite decisions are taken.

Travellers' Tales

Cromarty Church & Kirkyard - (by Mary Wardle - Committee Member)

It was one of those lovely autumn days and as we had a friend staying with us we decided on a visit to Cromarty. This little town must be one of the jewels of Scotland. We had first visited it many years ago and had fallen in love with its old world charm; we had even considered buying a house there, unfortunately the one we liked was under offer.

We stopped briefly in Inverness then over the bridge and on to Cromarty. In all we counted six oil rigs in the Firth and one anchored and waiting to go in. We had our picnic and then went on the circular walk (far too many steps) along the Firth and back over the hill to the town.

We were pleased to see the charm was still there. Miller's House (National Trust) was closed but we could revisit the church. All I remembered from the previous visit was wooden panelling. It was late afternoon now, the church felt cold and damp, but the fact that it was unusual, at least to us, held our attention. We had never realised this was one of the oldest Protestant churches in Scotland dating from the 1550's. The original church would have been smaller but, as congregations increased, it was enlarged until it became a T-shaped church, with three galleries, the centre one being the Poor's Loft built with money from the Poor Fund (I wonder how the poor felt about that!). Some dirty net curtains tacked over the entrance to the vestry made the place look uncared for.

Outside there was just enough time to take a couple of photographs before the sun dipped behind the trees. First impressions of the churchyard are of a great many table top tombs which date from the 1700's, interspersed by other tombstones. The grass is overlong and the stones mostly covered with moss. I looked at a few but my feet got soaking wet, not very inviting if you want to look around. A little T.L.C. would go a long way one feels. There is little mention of the churchyard in the literature available in the church and I would like to have known more especially about the watchtower. With the sun now gone it had an eerie, damp feel about it. Time now to find a cup of tea, not an easy job at 4.45, but we found the Soutor's Creek willing to serve us.

On the way back we stopped at the bird hide near Jemimaville for a while and then home. Altogether a lovely day out.

Ed. note: Hugh Miller was a noted Writer and Geologist (1802-1856). Please note that in some copies of the previous Issue, the editor inadvertently misspelt Mary Wardle's surname, for which error, apologies are suitably tendered.

Jersey Shell Garden - (by Helen Mitchell - Fieldwork Co-ordinator)



Here are M.I.'s with a difference! They are to be found in a very unusual "Pets Corner." Last summer while on holiday in Jersey, one of the places we visited on the tourist trail was the unusual and colourful Shell Garden. This is all the work of one man who has converted his own garden into a fantastic display that attracts many busloads of visitors. It is the largest mollusc shell garden in the world with over 1,000,000 shells. A large percentage of shells are from around the island, but some have been imported from other countries as well. The display area is quite small being just an average sized house garden, and from our

experience it seems that most visitors probably stay there for something under an hour. The whole display is rich in diversity, with a variety of subjects being artistically portrayed, including dolphins, mermaids, churches, dovecotes and much more, as well as a small Pet Cemetery. As can be seen from the photograph, it doesn't take up much room, but is certainly quite striking. Each memorial is either in the form of a cross or plaque, and is covered in shells, including the particular pet's name.

The SAFHS Graveyard Working Group - (by Bruce Bishop - Secretary)

The Scottish Association of Family History Societies (Council Meeting Saturday 5th March 2005)

At a meeting at Stirling on 15th January 2005 between the Scottish Association of Family History Societies and the Council for Scottish Archaeology Carved Stones Advisor Project, at which there was also a representative of Historic Scotland, it became apparent that the requirements of the archaeological community, regarding graveyards and other burial grounds were in many ways different from those of Family History Societies, although obviously there were certain areas of common interest.

The decision was taken to establish a SAFHS Graveyard Working Group, to formulate a means of initially constructing an inventory of all burial grounds, of all types, across the whole of Scotland. This inventory was to be formulated to include data of primary interest to family historians, but was also to include at least one field in common with the CSA and RCAHMS inventories which are currently in preparation, to allow for an eventual amalgamation of all information if this is felt to be desirable.

The first meeting of the SAFHS Graveyard Working Group was held in Edinburgh on Sunday 13th February. The membership of the group comprises Bruce Bishop (Convenor), Margaret MacKay (Secretary), Elma Lindsay, Ken Nisbet, Lesley Couperwhite, Jean Sanderson and John Durham. It was agreed at this meeting that the aims and purpose of the Group should be "To establish an inventory of all Churchyards, burial grounds, including isolated burials, War Memorials or any other Memorials. Burial places or Memorial Tablets

within Churches or other buildings as well as outside in Churchyards etc are also to be included. If there is any other Memorial that does not come into these categories then these Memorials are also to be included.”

To facilitate the collating of such a list the fields which would be used were discussed and decided upon. They are as follows.

1. County
2. Parish (with OPR reference of site of the cemetery/burial ground).
3. Name of the burial ground.
4. Any alternative name by which the burial ground is known.
5. The type of burial ground.
6. OS Grid Reference.
7. Location.
8. Dates
9. Location of records.
10. Memorials. Are there any?
11. Has the burial ground already been surveyed?
12. Is any of the information for this burial place included in the N.B.I.?
13. The NMRS number if applicable.
14. Any notes or comments.

The Group decided that they would work first and foremost as part of SAFHS and therefore retain their independence from any other group. NRMS numbers would be included from the start with the view that eventually there will be a link to other sites such as Historic Scotland, RCAHMS and the Carved Stone Advisor Project. In this way it is hoped that members of Family History Societies will find the sites user friendly. The target for compiling the list of burial places is two years. It is hoped that a CD of the Graveyards, burial places and isolated burial places may be launched at the 2007 SAFHS Annual Conference.

Oddments - (selected by Keith Mitchell - Chairman)

Friday, Nov^r. 9th. AD 1821.

Whenever I pass through a Church-yard, I am naturally led to read the epitaphs on the tombstones; and indeed the curiosity to peruse the inscriptions of a dormitory, or burial-place, is not only natural to many, but likely, and calculated to instruct all, from the richest to the poorest from the King to the beggar, and from the most noble to the most unknown, the following I have met with in various Church-Yards in England.

On a charitable man.

What I spent, I lost. - What I possessed, is left to others. - What I gave away, remains with me.

On R: C: -

Here lieth R: C: in expectation of the last day; - what sort of a man he was, that day will discover.

On W: Y: who was killed by a rocket.

Here lies I, - Who for my loyalty, - Was killed by a Sky - Rocket in the eye.

(Royal George)

On the 29th. of August 1782, The Royal George being on the heel at Spithead, overset, and sunk; By which fatal accident, about nine hundred persons were instantly launched into eternity; many bodies of the unfortunate floated, thirty-five of which were interred in one grave.

To the memory of - Admiral Kempenfelt - and thirty-five of his - unfortunate Companions - who were interred at Portsea, near Portsmouth - Reader, - With solemn thought - Survey this grave, - And reflect - On the untimely death - Of thy fellow mortals; - And whilst, - As a man -- a Briton -- and a Patriot - Thou readest - The melancholy narrative, - Drop a tear - For thy country's loss.

Ed. note: The Royal George has been described as "the finest vessel in the British service, carrying one hundred and eight guns" and, "about three hundred men, chiefly sailors" survived.

In Lamplugh Church-yard, Cumberland.

When this you see - Remember me - And say when I am gone, - You may go out - And look about - And not find such a one.

(Streatham Church)

On the south wall at Streatham Church, is the following singular inscription:- Elizabeth, wife of Major-General Hamilton, who was married 47 years; and never did one thing to disoblige her husband!" (not even when she died?)

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Singular Prediction

A man of the name of Barry, who lives near Clonmel (Co. Tipperary) and who is in good health and spirits, has got a grave stone cut in memory of his father and mother; the former died at the age of 103, and the latter at 53 years; and underneath it says – "This stone was erected by James Barry, of Ballyquin, who died May 1st. 1826 aged 95; also his wife, Catherine Barry, alias Power, who died May 5th. 1825, aged 85 years."

Ed. note: Problems here for the enquiring Family Historian I think. All the above extracted from the MS. writings of John Manders of Dublin & Whitehaven. Courtesy of Scottish Family Heritage.

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

Climate Change & Its Effects On Our Research

If Bruce Bishop's recent comments about predicted "Climate Change" are in any way accurate, it would appear that Scotland, presumably including Moray, is in for a much wetter time of it, if that were indeed possible! Should this prove to be the case, we may in future, need to think twice about how, in particular, we conduct our winter activities.

Wet and cold weather is definitely not conducive to M.I. recording or Buried Tombstone work. When we try to record an inscription, or draw a tombstone with freezing cold hands, or when the paper is damp or wet, the pencil has a tendency to slip, thus making the creation of errors a distinct possibility. Occasionally we have found that the paper is so damp that we have had to completely stop recording. The de-turfing, cleaning, drawing, photographing and re-turfing of Buried Tombstones can become a very arduous process, particularly if the turf itself is sodden or mushy.

The weather has been against us this winter, and even with our "rapid response team" idea, we are at this stage behind with our planned schedule at Alves. However, we should keep our fingers crossed for the next few months, that the weather improves, but not to the extent we all go down with sunstroke! Any suggestions for future MBGRG winter activities are welcome, so that we can keep the momentum going.

One idea is that this may be a good time of the year to record memorials, plaques or tablets inside church buildings. If you are visiting a church without an attached graveyard in Moray, including the old area of Banffshire, please record the inscriptions, as this could help us later. Also, if you know of any small graveyards in Banffshire tucked away in a remote area that may be previously unrecorded, please let us know, as this information may be of use with the Inventory compilation mentioned above.

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