

THE MORAY BURIAL GROUND RESEARCH GROUP



ANNUAL REPORT

2016 – 2017



www.mbgrg.org

The Committee of 2016-2017

Hon. President	Charles J. Burnett, Esq.
Chairman	Keith L Mitchell, FSA Scot
Secretary	Ruth McIntosh
Treasurer	Irene Black
Field Co-ordinator	Helen Mitchell, FSA Scot
Ordinary Member	Mary Evans
Ordinary Member	Stephen Leitch
Minute Secretary	Ruth McIntosh

Appointments held during 2016-2017

Auditor	William Windwick
Historical Research Co-ordinator	Bruce B Bishop, FSA Scot
Facebook Manager	Stephen Leitch
Newsletter Editor	Derek Page
Publicity Manager	Ruth McIntosh
SAFHS Representative	Karen McGregor
Webmaster	Lindsay Robertson, FSA Scot



Photo KLM

Gordon, Irene & Helen on first survey visit to Broomhill Public Cemetery



MESSAGE FROM THE HONORARY PRESIDENT

This has been an eventful year for both the Chairman and Helen, and for my wife, Aileen.

Events have then impacted on the Group, but Lindsay has had a sterling year and much hard work is now providing fruits in terms of appreciation from overseas users of the website. The Webmaster's Report indicates how MBGRG is becoming known, and more importantly, is being used via the world-wide web to provide information for the Scottish diaspora. Once again we are in Lindsay's debt for all he does.

Keith and Helen have gone through the trauma of selling up, moving, and re-establishing their library and possessions in a new home, while still keeping track of the Group's activities. Once settled, they will bring the recording up to date ready for publication. It is gratifying to learn of new younger members joining the Group.

Aileen was diagnosed with breast cancer in August last year and was scheduled for surgery in Aberdeen last November; however a second opinion from a consultant professor in Edinburgh caused us to move to our Edinburgh flat so that Aileen could receive treatment in the Western General Hospital. Since 20th January she has had three operations and has now been cleared of cancer. She will have some radiotherapy.

As a result I am conscious we have not been able to support MBGRG this season and will miss the AGM. Nevertheless I am pleased to have news of the Group's activities and wish everyone well for the coming season. May good fortune attend all your endeavours!

Charles J. Burnett

Chairman's Report

As some of you will know, Helen and I have recently exchanged the rain swept plains of Moray for the drenched savannahs of West Lothian! Since October we have more or less been involved in the daily battle of packing and unpacking during our supposed downsizing project to be nearer family. Whether or not this will prove to have been a wise decision only time will tell, but more play time and cuddles with the little ones certainly makes up for all the pressing problems we have encountered.

Having begun with something akin to a brief "rant" I will progress to summarize events of the year. Although as frequently happens on recording days out, we suffered from frequent stoppages for rain, as well as complete cancellations. Unfortunately this situation was made worse by the number of days lost simply because we did not have enough volunteers to make going out worth while. That said we had several major successes. First and foremost members managed more or less to completely record all the MIs in Keith old churchyard and extension, as well as at Edinkillie Church and churchyard. This latter project was assisted by Campbell Falconer who gave us access to the church and church hall as well as providing useful local information. This included getting almost all the buried tombstones recorded as well as photographing those in the upper old section at Keith. Several very interesting memorials were found including the buried stone relating to John Murdoch, Episcopal minister of Holy Trinity Church in Keith who died in 1850. Also recorded is the very plain inscription erected by James Gordon Bennett Snr. of New York in memory of his parents. We were also very grateful for the helpful local history knowledge Peter Wills gave us. He took a keen interest in our activities as he lives nearby, while Derek's plunge into the River Isla to get photographs of inscriptions on the bridge next to the cemetery is indeed highly noteworthy! It is perhaps worth observing at this stage that with the exception of a few stones at Keith waiting to be uncovered, we are, as far as I can tell, finished excavating all the possible buried memorials throughout Moray, with the exception of those that may exist within churchyard dumps or burial grounds that so far remain lost.

Although getting enough volunteers proved as difficult as ever, we were pleased to welcome several new members including Paul and Dave, two young lads who seemed to enjoy and be proud of their work tidying up memorials ready for recording and photography. One new member Morag came along to see what things were like and joined on the spot. We also welcomed Bev and Reg who contributed much to our various activities at Keith and elsewhere. Anthony also proved to be a dab hand at the digging and his archaeological experience was a considerable boon. Lastly our new American member, Claudia, set to on the buried stones at Keith with a real determination to acquire the necessary skills to do the job properly and her Blogs on the subject made excellent reading. Also Karen's trips up to Moray from Perthshire continued to show the kind of determination some people have in helping to make MI information available to family historians on a world wide basis. However, every member who leaves is

a great loss and here I must make mention of Sheila Cuthbert who regularly came out on our recording visits, but recently moved down to England to be near family. Her generous support was extremely helpful and we will miss her in the coming year.

Our other recording projects have on the whole been reasonably fruitful. (See Field Co-ordinator's Report for further information). However, some sites are much more difficult to record than others. For example due to their situation, most of the remaining memorials of St. Laurence Church in Forres are almost permanently out of sunlight due to the height of the adjacent church. This makes for relatively poor photography, but as it is said, "you can only play with the cards you are dealt."

On the publication front little has so far been achieved this year in terms of books on the shelf. This is down to several factors, although in April we did manage to publish the results of our research at Kirkmichael Churchyard and the various burial grounds in Tomintoul along with the relevant War Memorials. However, a great deal of background and preparatory work has so far gone into preparing our next book which is on the burial grounds within the parishes of Cullen and Deskford. Almost all the checking has been completed, but some specialized work still needs attending to and we now speculate that it may not be available till later this year. Several local people have been involved in giving us information of one kind or another and in particular I would like to acknowledge the help of Bill Davidson, Steve Liley, John Rennie and Ian and Sandra Taylor whose valuable assistance has advanced our knowledge about the area considerably.

Our own usual computer work over the winter months has of course been at a virtual standstill so far, for obvious reasons. Nevertheless throughout the year all sorts of backroom work has been undertaken by several members including, for example, Irene and Ruth who have been helping to collate a variety of information on Elgin Cathedral, which I hope one day will result in volume two seeing the light of day.

Also this year has seen considerable advances in the sale of our PDF formatted publications, which in particular for overseas customers has proved a very considerable boon. Once again Lindsay who has been the prime mover with looking after this area of expertise, has continued to provide an excellent service to family researchers overseas. The frequent and positive comments from people he has helped in no small manner bears testimony to his patience, skill as well as the time he devotes to answering people's requests and queries.

During this coming year we will begin the lengthy task recording the huge public cemetery of Broomhill in Keith, which I conjecture will take a lot longer than a year to complete. Our other recording project is the Burchhead new public cemetery. When published it is projected the results will be merged with that of the old village churchyard in Grant Street which was originally published by Aberdeen & North East Scotland Family History Society in 2005.

Keith Mitchell (Chairman)

Secretary's Report – Publicity Report

As usual I have been busy recording and writing the minutes of group committee meetings, placing publicity notices in local papers and free publications such as Spotlight, Forres Forum, Lossie Local and Knock News.

The publication for Kirkmichael and Tomintoul was released in 2016.

When we recorded in that area I was surprised at the number of military men who were buried or commemorated there. I did some research and wrote an article entitled "Gallant Military Men of Kirkmichael & Tomintoul." This was printed in the local press, the Knock News, and MBGRG newsletter of September 2016 to publicise the publication.

In last year's report I mentioned the ongoing work in trying to get a final resting place for Pte. William McKenzie's cross. It is with great delight that I have to report that William's cross finally found a permanent place in Elgin Cemetery South and the group had a short ceremony and placed a poppy cross there on the 100th Anniversary of his death on the 17th December 1916. Thanks must go to Ken Kennedy of The Moray Council, Paul Henderson of Elgin Granite Works, and Gordon Duncan who piped at our short commemoration, to those who attended on the day and last but not least all members of the group who brought this to fruition. We had some publicity from this with two articles in the Northern Scot.

Ruth McIntosh (Secretary)

Treasurer's Report

At the end of December we had a total membership of 43 (40) plus 1 Corporate Group. This generated an income of £485 (£446) in subscriptions. The figures in brackets denotes the previous year.

Our publishing costs for the year came to £590 (£608). This was for the first issues of Elgin South and Kirkmichael & Tomintoul MIs and reprints of Rathven and Burnside MIs. Our total income to the end of December from the sale of the publications came to £1,203 (£1,090) and we had stock in hand to the value of £1,504 (£1,900). We also made £510 (£145) from the sale of PDF files.

Other income came from the sale of Transcripts & Photos £54 (£76); Donations £159 (£44); Raffle £8 (£13); Sale of Equipment £25 and Bank Interest £2 (£1).

The above income includes subscriptions, publications, PDF files, transcription & photo sales and donations through PayPal to the value of £495 (£323).

Other expenditure during the year included Website expenses of £196 (£131); Insurance £178 (£183); Printing, Stationery, Travel expenses to meetings, Telephone, Postage, and Photocopying £648 (£371); Subscriptions £90 (£75); AGM expenses £77 (£107); PayPal charges £28 (£22); Sundries £38 and Annual Dinner & Outing expenses amounting to £101 (£77).

At 31 December 2016 our total cash/bank funds amounted to £3655 (£3,200).

Irene Black (Treasurer)

Fieldwork Co-ordinator's Report

Keith (Old) churchyard and extension have now been recorded but four or five buried stones still remain to be uncovered. Due to moles causing problems in the upper section we have to return to complete the work. Some interesting stones were uncovered and recorded. (See Keith's report).

Edinkillie Churchyard has been recorded and buried stones completed. Edinkillie New has still to be finished, but this will probably be done from photographs as there are not enough of them to make it worth the time and distance for members to travel there.

Inveravon Churchyard has been completed but a few stones remain to clean and photograph. Some are sheltered by high trees on the eastern embankment and not easy to photograph in the sun. We very much appreciated the assistance of Guy Macpherson-Grant of Ballindalloch Castle who provided information of the memorials within the private family Mausoleum adjacent to the church.

St Laurence in Forres has caused us a few problems due to the position of many of the gravestones that are situated on the steep slope behind the church. Even at 7.30am the gravestones can be out of the sun causing severe photographic problems.

Cabrach Churchyard is well underway to being completed. This was our summer outing and with great enthusiasm the flat stones, all 30 of them, were cleaned and virtually all the recording done. High tea was very welcome at The Grouse Inn to end the day. Also grateful thanks to the Cabrach Trust for allowing us access to record inside the church.

The modern extension to Mortlach Churchyard in Dufftown is still in the process of being recorded and typed from photographs. Various factors including the weather have delayed this part of the project. The very large number of memorials in Elgin North are also being recorded by photographs. It is hoped that the lengthy task of indexing will soon be completed.

Our Kirkmichael and Tomintoul book was published in April. Cullen along with Deskford is in the pipeline, but due to the present circumstances of Keith and myself, checking and editing has considerably fallen behind.

For the year 2017 we hope to finalise the above churchyards whilst working on Burghead New and Broomhill, the latter being situated on the outskirts of Keith on the road to Grange.

Helen Mitchell (Fieldwork Co-ordinator)



Photo KLM

MBGRG help RAF Lossiemouth Volunteers to tidy up Drainie Churchyard

Webmaster's Report (The MBGRG Website)

Website updates:

Items added to the website include the Annual Report for 2015/2016 and Newsletter Issue 25 (September 2016). Regular updates have been carried out regarding new publications, updates to the Ancestor Indexes and News items. The Ancestor Indexes have been augmented with the addition of abstracted data from the MI Booklets for Elgin Cemetery (South), Kirkmichael Churchyard, St. Michael's and the Parish Churchyards at Tomintoul etc., making the number of individuals listed in the MBGRG on-line database to just under 80,000. Various 'Names Indexes' have been prepared, for inclusion in our pending MI publication for Cullen and Deskford.

Website sales and PDF format MI Booklets:

Work has been completed, in collaboration with Keith/Helen, on the preparation of digital versions of our MI books, and all 35 MBGRG publications are now available in PDF digital format and a complete list along with prices is available on the website at www.mbgrg.org/sale.shtml. Master copies of the complete collection of MI PDF files are stored on our secure OneDrive Cloud storage vault.

To date, 128 copies of PDF format files have been sold through website 'Quotation Request' enquiries, and these together with sales of transcripts and related tombstone photographs, have been much more encouraging this year.

Feedback from our customers has generally been very supportive, and most appreciative of the hard work done by all MBGRG members with two examples given below:

1) Anita Grant Steel - Yukon, Canada.

Please accept my most sincere thanks for the incredible gift your organization has provided for those of us who are unable to search in person.

Anita purchased several transcripts/photos and PDF files, and very kindly added a further £40 donation to Group funds.

2) Neil Manson - Australia

Neil ordered a transcript and photo priced at £5, but submitted a payment of £50 which I queried - his response was:

No I did mean £50, as I was so pleased with your service - doesn't happen all that often. The photo will go into the family archives.

Lindsay Robertson (Webmaster)

The Scottish Association of Family History Societies

This is the second year that I have represented The Moray Burial Ground Research Group at The Scottish Association of Family History Societies.

The last two meetings held in March and October in 2016 were held at the Quaker Meeting House in Victoria Terrace in Edinburgh. The last meeting that I attended was on 11th March 2017 and was held at the Augustine Church, George 1V Bridge in Edinburgh.

There is a change of venue for the next SAFHS meeting will take place at the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow in October in studio 3 which can accommodate 125

people. This has been deemed suitable due to disabled access, suitable parking and good transport links.

I have observed that on attending the SAFHS meetings, that there are other representatives who travel a great distance to attend the SAFHS meetings. For some, it is more difficult to attend the meetings due to the long distance in travelling from the far North of Scotland and the Islands.

Disappointingly, all the representatives who attend the SAFHS meeting, (it would seem), are of a pensionable age (myself included) and I personally feel that it would be good if some encouragement could be made to attract younger members to the various Family Societies as they will hopefully carry on the good work carried out by the present generation and carry the Society forward in future years.

Membership

There has been a loss of four member societies in the past year (Alloway, Buckie, Scotslot and AGRA) who have not renewed their membership. The first three was due to the decline in their membership and AGRA decision was that they saw no need to be a member. At present, there are 33 full members and 9 associate members of SAFHS. The Executive are currently reviewing and formalising the entrance eligibility for potential new members which may widen the net to include more varied categories. This is necessary to avoid SAFHS itself diminishing beyond viability. This has resulted in the Constitutional Rules being amended for SAFHS.

Website

The new Scotland's People website has been launched and is up and running. There have been several complaints regarding its functionality. (Many people do not like the website in comparison to the original website). Orders for vouchers are no longer available for the website.

WDYTYA - Who Do You Think You Are

An invitation was received from the above organisation to attend the next meeting between 6th and 8th April 2017 in Birmingham. There has been discussion regarding member societies attending but costs are inhibitive taking into account accommodation and travelling expenses. Initially SAFHS was not attending but an offer was made by WDYTYA that could not be refused and it has been left for the individual Family Societies to make the decision to attend if they wished.

SAFHS Conferences

The last SAFHS conference was held in New Lanark and was well attended and was an enjoyable experience and success for all who attended.

The next conference is to be held by ASGRA on the 22nd April 2017 at The Bay Hotel, Pettycur, near Kinghorn. (Note this is a change of venue from the New Queensferry Hotel)

The 2018 Conference will be held in the Rothes Hall in Glenrothes in Fife. There is a possibility that the 2019 Conference may be held in Wick but this is still being looked at due to accommodation and distance involved.

SAFHS FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The Financial figures have fallen in the last year and it is thought that this may be due to the loss of vouchers through usage of the Scotland's people website.

Costs have been cut down by the SAFHS Committee by changing to different meeting rooms and venues. There has been no change to subscriptions. However the Treasurer is happy with its current state of accounts which are stable. The main income has come from subscriptions and publications. At the end of December 2016 there was £5175 in the bank account. There is a balance of £766 in the Conference account.

Change of SAFHS Editor

There has been a change of Editor for the SAFHS Bulletin. The new editor is Ian Leith from the Caithness family History Society.

SAFHS ARCHIVE

A proposal has been made that an archive of books, photos, papers / documents of interest be set up on the website in due course, with submissions from member groups. This will take some time to set up but may be of interest to many who are carrying out research on their family background in the future or to those who have a general interest in the family societies.

Karen McGregor (MBGRG Representative)

FindMyPast Update

We have been looking for some time at the options for putting our data onto the FindMyPast database. A number of emails were exchanged and several telephone calls held with Paul Nixon of FMP as we sought to understand the technical requirements involved.

A small group of us also visited Gavin Bell who has been responsible for putting the Aberdeen and North East Scotland FHS material onto FMP. He was extremely helpful and showed us how a succession of macros were needed in order to make the information available in a suitable format.

However, we are now hoping to call upon some expertise from our own contacts to make our information available to this wider audience.

Mary Evans (Committee Member)

(1)



Photo KLM

(2)



Photo - Claudia Frew

(1) This fine heraldic memorial sits above the MI which commemorates the death of Dame Kathrine Rose who was second wife to Sir James Strachan of Thornton, the Episcopalian parish minister in Keith. The Latin inscription recounts that she died in childbed on 6th April 1689. It is also interesting to note that this monument was originally within the old parish church of Keith until it was demolished in the early 19th century.

(2) An incredibly exquisite carving of two angels holding aloft a monstrance. For the uninitiated a "monstrance" is an open vessel into which the "Host" is exposed for the purposes of being venerated. I must confess that it was necessary for me to check out a dictionary to ascertain its exact meaning.

This intricately carved 16th century example can be found on the exceptionally fine Sacrament House built into one of the walls of the old and ruined shell of Deskford Parish Church in Banffshire. It was gifted to the church by Sir Alexander Ogilvy of Deskford and Findlater and Elizabeth Gordon his second wife.