



Moray & Nairn Family History Society

NEWSLETTER

June 2009

Welcome to the first edition of the Moray & Nairn FHS Newsletter. The county of Nairn has always been a rather neglected area, as far as easily available family history sources are concerned, as has the western part of the county of Moray. In an attempt to rectify this, a group of interested parties met on 21 February 2009, when a committee was formed, a constitution adopted, and the Moray & Nairn Family History Society was founded.

We plan to hold 3 meetings with talks per year, and to publish a Newsletter following each meeting. Meetings will be held in Elgin, Forres or Nairn, and both members and non-members are welcome.

Membership is steadily increasing, and we are sure this will continue. For all enquiries about membership, please contact the Secretary, Janet Bishop.

June 2009 Meeting

The June meeting was held on Saturday 27 June 2009 in Forres Community Centre, where Ken Nisbet gave an interesting and enlightening talk on "The Use of Newspapers in Family History".

Newspapers are very much under-utilised in family history, but they are a very useful source for social history. Local newspapers have always covered births, marriages and deaths, but it is worth remembering that also covered were divorces, breaches of promise to marry, as well as the usual court cases. By the 1850's most towns had at least 1 local newspaper, and by the start of the 20th century, evening papers and sports editions were beginning to appear.

Family historians are used to using birth, marriage and death certificates for the basic information on these life events. Why, then, bother to look at the newspapers of the time? Ken pointed out that there was often a lot more information in the BMDs, eg, a description of the bride and bridesmaids dresses, a list of the presents, details giving an idea of the status of the father of the bride, etc, were often included. Sometimes all trace is lost of an ancestor, the mystery being solved by the reporting in the press of the death overseas of an emigrant local person. If a person was prominent or well-liked, there may well be an obituary in the newspaper. The London Gazette is a valuable source of information (available online) as it published military information, civil service appointments, WWI Citations, etc. In the 1880's, the Nairnshire newspaper published lists of guests staying in local hotels and guest houses. There were also adverts for shops and pubs, etc, as well as reports on the sittings of the Licensing Board. If you discover from a death certificate that someone died in an accident, you can be sure that the accident would be reported fully in the local paper. Suicide was illegal, and therefore reported, and lives lost at sea, all too common in Moray and Nairn, would be reported in great detail, nationally certainly, but with much more feeling in the local paper. It is important not to

Diary

Saturday 24 October 2009, 2 pm
Cawdor Heritage Society: tba
Nairn Museum

Saturday 13 March 2010, 2 pm
Bruce B Bishop: "From Lochindorb to Culbin – the story of 2 parishes"
Elgin Library

Contacts:

Chairman: Bruce B Bishop
net M Bishop

Treasurer: Kenneth A M Nisbet

forget that there were local newspapers overseas too, and these can also be accessed. In many cases there are computerised or paper indexes of newspapers, and it is worth checking at the local library.

Ken had prepared a handout of useful newspaper websites:

Pay per View
British Library (includes Aberdeen Journal)
<http://newspapers.bl.uk/blcs/>

Scotsman
<http://archive.scotsman.com/>

Times
<http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/ukpressonline>

Guardian and Observer
<http://archive.guardian.co.uk/>

Free Indexes
Moray Newspapers
<http://libindx.moray.gov.uk/mainmenu.asp>
Greenock Newspapers Watt Library
<http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/GeneralR.aspx?id=829&catid=1403>

West Lothian Newspapers
<http://wlhas.westlothian.gov.uk:8080/#focus>

Inverness Advertiser, Inverness Journal, Scottish Highlander, John o'Groat Journal, Inverness Courier 1879, 1898-1901 and 1920-1939
<http://www.ambaile.org.uk/en/newspapers/index.jsp>

National Library of Scotland
<http://www.nls.uk/collections/newspapers/>

Janet M Bishop

The Scottish Association of Family History Societies (SAFHS)

At the SAFHS AGM in April 2009, in Edinburgh, Moray & Nairn FHS was admitted as a full member of SAFHS. SAFHS is an umbrella association, representing all the family history societies in Scotland. As a full member of SAFHS, the Society is entitled to be represented at the SAFHS meetings held twice a year. The present representative of MNFHS is Stuart Farrell, Nairn.

The Moray Family History Fair Elgin Town Hall 10 October 2009. 10 - 4

The Moray Family History Fair in Elgin Town Hall on Saturday 10 October, organised by Scottish Genealogical Research and Moray Council's 'MorayConnections' has already attracted considerable interest. There will be 32 stands, representing Family History Societies (including, of course, MNFHS), various Local Heritage Groups, organisations such as SAFHS and several Trade Stands. Some of the events may take place in Elgin Library, which is about 2 minutes walk from the Town Hall.

There will be a series of talks including one by Peter Wadley of the National Archives of Scotland on "When Ewan McGregor's Great-great-grandfather got run down by a train - Celebrity Family History Research"; Kenneth A M Nisbet from the Scottish Genealogy Society on "Researching Your Military Ancestors" and Jean Shirer of the ANESFHS on "Getting started with your Family History Research". A fourth talk is yet to be confirmed.

The Moray Council, in the form of MorayConnections, will provide access to ScotlandsPeople and to the Moray Council Libindx, and Graeme Wilson from the Elgin Heritage Centre will be on hand to give advice.

There will be advice and information tables including ones for English Research, Census Advice and National Burial Index Advice. There will be workshops on Researching Graveyards, Reading Old Handwriting and Laying out your Family Tree.

The café in the Town Hall will be open from 10 until 4, serving drinks and snacks.

New MNFHS Publications

A series of publications has been launched by MNFHS, based on places of burial, as recorded on Death Certificates between 1855 and 1861. Places of burial were only recorded in the first 6 years of Statutory Registration, and this information is invaluable in the search for the final resting place of ancestors, especially if there is no headstone. Titles available are:

The Parishes of Morayshire: Deaths & Places of Burial, 1855-1860: Speymouth & Urquhart, The Parishes of Nairnshire: Deaths & Places of Burial,

1855-1860, Ardclach & Cawdor, The Parishes of Morayshire: Deaths & Places of Burial, 1855-1860, Edinkillie & Dyke and Moy. For ordering details, please see the **Publications** section.

Looking further ahead, publication is also planned of pre-1855 death records for the Nairnshire parishes, but only Auldearn has a fairly complete record, the other Nairnshire parishes being very incomplete.

Monumental Inscription Books are also planned for all the Nairnshire burial grounds. This will be a long-term project, hopefully involving as many as possible local members of the Society. If any member is interested in joining our MI recording team, please contact the Chairman.

ARTICLES

Before the A96 - The King's High Way by Bruce B Bishop

One feature which linked the counties of Nairn and Moray for many centuries was the great King's High Way, the route from Inverness to Aberdeen and to Banff. It can only be conjectured as to when this route first came into use, but by the early medieval period it was certainly the main, in many cases the only main 'road' along the southern shore of the Moray Firth. Not a road as we would know it now, more a skein of dirt tracks across the open moorland, or, nearer to the inhabited areas, wending its way around the 'infield' areas of the runrig lands. Dry and dusty in the summer, virtually impassable in the snows of winter, and axle-deep in mud for the rest of the year, it was up to the traveller to find the best passage along the King's High Way. Only when it came into the towns of Nairn, Forres and Elgin could it really be defined as a road.

After leaving Inverness, the King's High Way wandered its way across the moorland to the north of the House of Culloden, through the old settlements of Croy and Cawdor, arriving in Nairn from the southwest where it arrived at its first major obstacle in the River Nairn. Another 'version' of the route almost certainly ran closer to the coast, passing the village of Campbeltown, now Arderseir, and crossing the Muir of Delnies before reaching Nairn from the west. The town of Nairn, a very ancient settlement situated at the river's mouth, was probably situated about half a mile west of the present harbour, but the encroachment of the sea, and the changing coastline have all but destroyed any evidence of

the old place. By the 16th century, however, Nairn was a typical Royal Burgh, a burges town, with its long riggs running back from the High Street as burgage plots. The High Street of all of these towns derived its name, of course, from the fact that it was the 'High' Way.

The River Nairn was originally crossed by a ford, although there was possibly also a footbridge. It was not until 1631 or 1632 that a stone bridge was erected across the river, but this and later bridges have suffered repeatedly at the hands of the frequent floods which swept down the river.

Nairn stands to this day on the dividing line between the Highlands with their Gaelic culture, and the Lowlands with their Saxon influences. It was in many ways different in culture from the other Royal Burghs in the north. There is an old story, probably apocryphal, that James I referred to Nairn as a town so long that the inhabitants of one end of its then single street did not understand the language of those at the other. In actual fact it is likely that the lower classes spoke Gaelic, and as in most other major towns, the merchants and the better-off spoke lowlands Scots.

To the motorist travelling along the modern road the village of Auldearn, now by-passed, may be of little significance. In the 12th century it was a much more important place, briefly outranking nearby Nairn, and was in fact, for a time, a Royal Burgh. The castle at the western end, the parish church in the middle, and buildings along the single main street, the King's High Way, are all typical of a burgh of such status.

After Auldearn there was not a lot of option for the traveler but to follow the High Way as it climbed gently to the Hardmuir, famed for Shakespeare's witches. A gradual descent then took the traveller down to the House of Brodie, a green oasis in the midst of the moorland, and then onward to the village of Dyke, well to the north of the present main road, before reaching the next and larger obstacle, the River Findhorn. This was crossed at Waterford, where before the building of the bridge at Mundole there was a ferry, and an inn for travellers. Crossing the river the King's Highway approached Forres from the northwest, crossing the Burn of Altyre at the Lee Bridge and its ford before climbing the Kirk Vennel to the east of the church before turning eastwards along the High Street.

Forres was at this time typical of many of the smaller Scottish Burghs. The High Street ran through the centre of the town, widening at the Tollbooth, and the North and South Back Streets enclosed the town outside the ends of the burges

plots. These were probably protected by a peat or mud wall, which also served in a small way to delineate the boundaries of the Burgh.

At the Little Cross at the eastern end of Forres, the High Way turned north towards the port of Findhorn, passing the Abbey of Kinloss from where it swung southeastwards to the Cairn of Kilbuyack and going to the south of the Crook of Alves. Keeping the Knock of Alves, that prominent hillock and home of the fairies to the west of Elgin, on its northern side, the road skirted the Mill Dam of Mosstowie, and continued along the edge of the Moss of Mosstowie past Scroggiemill, and reaching the River Lossie at the Sheriffs Mill.

The River Lossie was forded at Sheriffs Mill, but with the opening of the bridge at Oldmills in the 17th century, most travellers were probably persuaded to make a short detour to the north to be able to cross the Lossie dryshod and reach the west end of the Burgh of Elgin.

Elgin, like Forres, was a typical medieval Scottish Burgh, lying between the Castle at the west and the parish church of St Giles at the eastern. Small lanes ran off to the north and the south at either end of the Burgh, and the whole was bounded by the North and the South Back Gaits, sometimes known as the 'Back Passages'. Within these rather tight confines lay the burgess plots or riggs of the townspeople, stretching back from the High Street out to the Back Gaits. Access from the High Street to each of the Burgess plots was through the gaps between the houses, later to develop into the characteristic pends, wynds and closes of a medieval burgh. Even at this time buildings such as barns and stables were being erected along the sides of the burgage lands to accommodate the beasts kept by the townsfolk, and of course they also grew much of their foodstuffs not only in these burgage plots, but also in the runrig lands which many of them held in the lands beyond the Back Gaits.

The traveller came into the town through the West Port, which was just south of the castle and then entered the High Street, which widened at its eastern end to accommodate the church of St Giles and its churchyard, and also to provide a market area for the burgh. Being very careful to avoid the dungheaps which lay at the entrance to each of the closes, and somehow managing to cross the 'common gutter', the open sewer which ran across the High Street to the River Lossie, he would have reached the market cross. This stood within the churchyard, and in addition to the church this area was also home to the town tolbooth, where the Burgh Council met and the

taxes were collected, and also the jail. As our traveller had found in Forres, Elgin had no town walls, but protection was provided by the boundary walls at the foot of the riggs, these almost certainly substantial enough to ensure that the only way he could have got into or out of the town was through one of the four town 'Ports' or gates.

Leaving Elgin through the East Port, which was near to the entrance to the College of Elgin and the imposing Cathedral to the north of the road, the High Road set its course across the Moss of Barmuckity, a dreary area of peat bog and moorland, originally known, perhaps appropriately, as 'Brownmouldy, the barren waste only broken by the occasional fermtoun with its runrig lands. Through the tiny settlement of Langbride the High Road wended its way past Loch Oire and crossed the Moor of Bauds before reaching the west bank of the River Spey. Some people may have decided, by the time they had reached Langbride, to turn their footsteps to the south, towards Dundurcas, to cross the Spey at the Boat o' Brig, this being a somewhat easier route to Keith

For most people, however, the prospect of a good hotel in Fochabers led them to the Ferry on the Spey at Boat of Bog, which was a long-established regular service, allowing them to cross, for a fee, day and night. The old 'town' of Fochabers straggled along the King's Highway just to the south of Gordon Castle. It was here that the route divided, the coastal road going to Cullen and Banff, and the inland road following the east bank of the Spey down to Mulben, or for the more adventurous traveller even passing over the bleak hills of the Dramlachs, not a good route to be on in the winter even to this day.

So ends our journey through Nairn and Moray along the King's High Way, maybe a day's travel on a good fast horse if the ferry crossings were favourable, or, for most people, a three day walk, or more if the weather was bad. Such is progress.

A CHURCHYARD DISPUTE

by

Kenneth A M Nisbet

Amongst the events reported in the pages of *Nairnshire Telegraph* of 11th May 1882 was a dispute over the rights to place a body in a grave, the placing of burials in the wrong lair and a disrupted funeral. The families involved in the dispute lived in Nairn's Fishertown, and, like many of those who lived there, used two surnames.

“JOHN MAIN CALLIE” v “JAMES MAIN
BOCHEL”

“A rather curious case was lately brought into this Court at the instance of John Main “Callie” fisherman residing at No. 21 Park Street, Nairn, against James Main “Bochel” fisherman, Society Street Nairn. The petitioner prayed that an interdict should be granted against the defender from interfering with stance, or lair, in the church-yard of Nairn, lying to the east of the Parish Church of Nairn, and to which the pursuer had right, and over which a stone was laid, having engraved or cut thereon the following words

‘This stone is erected by Alex. Main and Catherine Main and John Main’ and the initials ‘A.M.; R.M.; I.M.; and M.M.’

and which was bounded on the west by the lair on which a gravestone had been erected, having the inscription cut thereon:

‘Erected by John Main, carpenter, Nairn. in memory of Alexander his eldest son, who died at sea, 22 December 1842 aged 21 years; also Isabella, oldest daughter who died May 31st 1859 aged 41 years; also James, who died October 17th 1834 aged 6 years; also David, who died October 10th 1835 aged 1 year and 5 months’

or from otherwise molesting the pursuer in possession of and lawful right to said stance or lair, and further to ordain the said defender to restore the solum of the ground to the condition in which it was prior to his operations. In the condescence, it was explained that the lair in question originally belonged to Alexander Main, fisherman, Nairn, and in it he and his two wives were buried. Over them was placed the stone already described, and the initials thereon were intended to represent ‘A.M.’ being the original owner of the ground, ‘R.M.’ being Robert Main, a brother of the said Alexander Main, ‘I.M.’ being Isabella Main, wife of the said Alexander Main, and ‘M.M.’ being Mary Main, a daughter of the said Alexander Main, all of whom were buried in said lair and under said stone. The sons of the said Alexander Main were David Main, the eldest, who is now dead; Alexander Main, who was lost at sea; John Main who is also dead; and Adam Main, who is likewise dead.

On the death of the said Alexander Main, the right and title to the foresaid stance or lair devolved according to universal practice, and also at common law, on his eldest son, the said David Main, but he, having acquired right to another lair through his wife, gave order and surrendered his right to the lair in question, to, and in favour

of, the third son of said Alexander Main, being the said John Main, and directed that it should be considered the property of him and his successors for ever. The pursuer is the eldest son of the said John Main, and, as representing his father, has right to the said lair.

In or about the year 1877 the defender, while the pursuer was absent at the herring fishing, and without his knowledge or consent, illegally and unwarrantably caused the said lair to be opened, and the body of his son to be buried therein. On the pursuer hearing of this, he objected to the interference with the grave or lair, but not wishing to create a scandal by the lifting of the body, he allowed it to remain therein. The pursuer’s mother, Margaret McBeth or Main, widow of the said John Main, died on or about 2nd December 1880, and the funeral took place on the 4th day of the said month. The grave was dug in the lair and the coffin placed therein, and some three feet of earth placed over it, when the defender appeared himself in an illegal and unwarrantable and most rude and unseemly manner. The pursuer, to avoid all scandal, while maintaining his right to said lair, allowed his mother’s body to be lifted and the coffin therein placed in the church until another grave was dug in adjoining lair, which also belonged to him, and wherein the body was buried.

With the view of asserting and maintaining his right to the lair in question, the pursuer caused corner stones with the initials cut thereon ‘J.M.C.’ being intended to represent John Main Callie, but the defender has repeatedly illegally, and unwarrantably, and without any rights and title, and also surreptitiously removed the said stones and otherwise interfered with said lair. Interim interdict was in the first instance called. The case was called last Friday, whereon no appearance being made by the defender, Sheriff Smith pronounced an interlocutor, declaring the interdict perpetual and finding the defender liable for £5 of expenses.”

By using census returns and birth, marriage and death certificates, some extra information has been gathered about these families.

The 1881 Census shows John Main living at 21 Park Street, but his surname is shown as Callie. John was aged 54, a fisherman, at the same address were his wife Christina (48) and children James (17), a fisherman, Margaret (15), Bella (11), and Christina (9) – **Ref: 1881 Census, Nairn, 123, Vol 1, page 18.**

The defender, James Main, was by the time of the 1881 census, also living in Park Street, aged 36,

with his wife Elizabeth (36), children, James (10), Margaret (8) and son John (3 mths), the family being recorded under the surname Bochel – **Ref: 1881 Census, Nairn, 123, Vol 1, page 7.**

In the article, the child who was buried in the wrong lair in unnamed, and research has shown this was James and Elizabeth's son Isaac, who died at the age of 16 months, the cause being Chronic Diarrhoea. The surname is shown as Main, but the certificate shows the father's name as James Main (Bochel) and he was the informant on his son's death – **Ref: Death Certificate, 1877, Nairn, 123, No 82.**

The mother of John Main, whose coffin had to be dug up again, was Margaret Main (Callie), who died 2nd December 1880 aged 85 at 2 Society Street Nairn, the widow of John Main (Callie), Boat Builder (Master), daughter of Francis McBeth and Mary McBeth Ms Cameron, cause of death Cancer in Left Leg, the informant being her son John who lived at 21 Park Street – **Ref: Death Certificate, 1880, Nairn, 123, No 93.**

James Main and his spouse Elizabeth Ralph (another common surname in Nairn's fishing community), were married on the 24th of October 1867, at 3 Society Street Nairn, where the bride lived, according to the forms of the United Presbyterian Church. James was aged 25, a fisherman by occupation living, at 18 Society Street, and his bride Elizabeth, a fisherwoman, aged 23, the daughter of the deceased James Ralph, fisherman, and Margaret Ralph ms Main – **Ref: Marriage Certificate, 1867, Nairn, 123, No 15.**

James's father, also named James Main (Bochel), had married twice, his first wife being Elizabeth Main (Coggs), deceased by the date of her son's wedding. James had remarried in 1847 Helen Skinner from Nigg in Rosshire. In the 1881 Census James M Bochel, fisherman, aged 71, was living at 28 Society Street Nairn, again a widower, living with sons David (25) and Isaac (23), both working as fishermen, and a domestic servant Jessie Sailor aged 18 – **Ref: 1881 Census, Nairn, 123, Vol 1, page 12.**

Fortunately for the family historian, Isaac Main, the son of James Main, was born in 1855, and the information on his birth certificate states he was born on the 6th of July 1855 at 18 Society Street Nairn. Isaac was the son of a Seaman, James Main (Bochel), who was born in Nairn, and his wife, Helen Skinner. Isaac was the youngest of 4 boys, all of whom were alive in 1855, their parents having married in Nigg, Rosshire, where Helen had been born – **Ref: Birth Certificate, 1855,**

Nairn, 123, No 60.

Isaac married, under the name Isaac Main Bochel on the 24th of October 1884 at 23 Society Street Nairn, Margaret Main Long, the daughter of John Main Long, fisherman, and his wife Elspeth Main Long, ms Main Ellen – **Ref: Marriage Certificate, 1884, Nairn, 123, No 20.**

James Main Bochel died of apoplexy at the age of 84 at 50 Park Street Nairn on the 8th of April 1894, and the certificate states his father's name as John Main Bochel, fisherman, and his mother as Janet Main Bochel, maiden name unknown. The informant on his death was his son John Main Bochel – **Ref: Death Certificate, 1894, Nairn, 123, No 42.**

WORLD WAR ONE BRITISH ARMY RECORDS – AN INTRODUCTION

by
Stuart Farrell

So you've found out as part of your family research that you have a member of the family who was killed in World War One as part of the British Army, but where do you start?

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission gives a register of all men reported to them up to the 21st of August 1921 and has a searchable database at <http://www.cwgc.org> - family details are often included, as well as a description and location of the cemetery or memorial where a persons remains are recorded.

Another main area of research is to use the Official Government publication called "Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-18" which can give place of birth, place of enlistment and place of residence with occasionally notes. Published in a series of 81 volumes per individual regiment but now available as a CD - at a cost of £28.50! But don't despair, I recommend you look at a site called the Great War Forum <http://www.1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums> and its home page The Long, Long Trail <http://www.1914-1918.net> which will give you lots of advice with the former even giving you the chance to ask other people for help with research and they are both free!

Another publication worth looking at is De-Ruvignys Roll of Honour - 1914-1918; published in five parts, its 1,400+ pages contain the biographies of well over 25,000 men of the army, navy and air force who gave their lives, nearly 7,000 of the entries being accompanied by a photograph. There is also a National Roll of Honour, produced in 14 volumes after the war,

with the vast majority of entries referring to combatants who survived the Great War and the National Roll is often the only source of information available. It was completed on a regional basis based mostly to the south and centre of England.

Sadly most soldiers' original service records were lost to enemy action during the London Blitz in 1940 and there is only a 1 in 4 chance of their records surviving. The web site Ancestry <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> has currently (June 2009) digital copies of those with a surname of A-N and also medal cards, which can give details of medals awarded, and pension records for any man who was discharged as being unfit, but beware both of these are not complete. You should also try the National Archives at Kew, London <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk> where records can be bought online but they are costly; again use the Great War Forum site as a start.

If your relation was an officer you may have better luck. Officers are also recorded in a publication called "Officers Died in the Great War" and most of their records have survived but are still held at

Kew, London. Rumour is that they will be available online in 2011!

In the next newsletter I will give an introduction to web sites to search for records for soldiers who served in the armies of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.

Moray & Nairn FHS Publications

The Parishes of Morayshire: Deaths & Places of Burial, 1855-1860: Speymouth & Urquhart

£4.80, including P&P

The Parishes of Nairnshire: Deaths & Places of Burial, 1855-1860, Ardclach & Cawdor

£4.80, including P&P

The Parishes of Morayshire: Deaths & Places of Burial, 1855-1860, Edinkillie & Dyke and Moy

£4.80, including P&P
