

# ANNUAL REPORT 2016

Bailies of  
Bennachie



We care about Bennachie, its natural environment, history and culture - protecting this unique landscape for future generations

# Chairperson's Report

Over the last year, we have been busy: monthly work parties, involvement with various consultations, such as supporting Aberdeenshire Council with their plans for making Bennachie a Special Landscape area, actions against pylon developments and against the dualling of the A96 near to Bennachie. We are supportive of and in alliance with the 'Save Bennachie' group who are actively working against this road dualling near Bennachie. We have also responded to the Forestry Commission Scotland's 10 year land management plans for Bennachie. From our responses we are able to plan a 'forest garden' near to Shepherd's Lodge which we hope to progress in 2017. We have also received invaluable help from Garioch Partnership as we revise our constitution, work out our action plan, redesign the logo and re-assess our membership fees. We look forward to seeing you all at our **AGM on Thursday 22 September 7.30pm** at The Fly Cup, Inverurie.

At the beginning of the year, we discovered that the Bailies tool shed had been broken into and nearly £700 worth of tools had been stolen. Initially, we were very disheartened but this soon changed as we soon discovered the very generous nature of both Bailies and friends. We received many donated tools and money and help from a local locksmith. We were soon able to replace all the stolen tools and add to our collection so that our archaeology group now have tools too!

In May, we were helped by Garioch Fiddlers, to run a Doric Concert in memory of Geordie Smith. Geordie Smith had been the master of ceremony at our yearly Doric night so we thought we should commemorate him in some way. We raised £650 each for Inverurie OAP group and Age Concern Inverurie. The money was given to Moria Smith (Geordie's wife) who donated to these groups.

In June, the Bailies welcomed friends and relatives to Bennachie to commemorate Kate Campbell who regularly helped out at work parties and with archaeology digs. The Bailies planted two oak trees and erected a picnic bench near to the Clachie burn.

Unfortunately in June, James MacKay, founder member and stalwart of the Bailies, died (see article about James in this report on page 7). He will be greatly missed and we plan to organise an event/activity to commemorate James' work on Bennachie and with the Bailies. I personally have a lot to thank James for in both his support and knowledge.

As always, I wish to thank the Bailies Committee for all their help and support in 2016. John Nicol has now left the Bailies Council but is involved with the

Bennachie Centre Trust and our treasurer Steve Wright, due to work commitments, is standing down. We have an active Bennachie Landscapes Project Group that is working away in the background on Bennachie and within the surrounding area. The members of this group undertake regular archaeological fieldwork and have been enthused by recent LiDAR (see page 5) images of the hill that require further investigations. The group have also updated the free Colony leaflet which can be seen at the Bennachie Visitor Centre and have undertaken several talks to groups such as Alford Heritage Society and societies at Aberdeen University.

Thanks to everyone for your help and support.

Jackie Cumberbirch



*Members of the Bailies 'Work Party' planting oak trees.*

# News Round-up from the Groups

## Bailies Work Party News

The following gives a summary of the work undertaken at work parties during the last year and also an account of various other events the group has been involved in.

We have been busy over the last year: we painted the picnic tables at the Bennachie Centre, took one up to Danny Gordon's Widdie, cleared and repaired parts of the Gordon Way Path, removed trees at old Inverurie water supply, cleared scrub at Burnside and the pond and sorted out the Tool container. (Pause for breath!). We pruned the willow structure at Back O'Bennachie, cleaned Oxen Craig water bars and drains, removed whins, broom and bracken from colony houses, planted trees at Donview and a couple in Danny Gordon's Widdie. The last was in memory of Kate Campbell, a work party member, who sadly died last year. We cleared water bars and drains on the Rowantree path to Mither Tap and Craigshannoch as well as the water bars and new steps on the trail from the Bennachie Centre to Mither Tap. We extended the fence at the Wild Life

Station at the centre with a brash fence and painted the tool container.

We met with various people to accept money, tools and a stronger lock with strengthening for the tool shed. All were kindly donated after the loss of everything in the container following a theft at the Centre.

The work party handed over a cheque for £500 to Aberdeen Mountain Rescue on behalf of the Bailies. At Burnside we also built a picnic table in memory of Kate Campbell before meeting there the following week with her family and friends, some who had travelled from California. 1,500 oak trees were also planted at Donview, which was arranged by Jackie Cumberbirch and Forestry Commission Scotland.

Another sad note during the year was the passing of James MacKay in June. James was undoubtedly '*Mr. Bennachie*' and he will be greatly missed not only by his family but by his Bennachie family as well.

We would like to thank all the volunteers who come along to the work parties to help with our work, caring for Bennachie.

*Constructing Kate's picnic table on Bennachie.*

Mick Taylor and Harry Leil



# Learning from the Bennachie Landscapes Project

This year the University of Aberdeen has been working to learn broader lessons from the Bennachie Landscapes Project and other community heritage projects across the UK. Jo Vergunst and Colin Shepherd from the Bailies were on the research team, along with academics from Cardiff, Sheffield and Leeds. We carried out a series of meetings and project visits in order to find out what makes for a successful heritage project when communities and universities are involved. An event at Bennachie was held in May 2015 when the Bailies welcomed visitors from the Caerau and Ely Heritage Project (Cardiff) and the Friends of Wincobank Hill (Sheffield).

On the plus side, we found that participants in these projects were generally highly enthusiastic about their work and proud of the results they had achieved. New skills were being learned by participants

and new histories were being discovered. Researching heritage enables ideas of history and place to be debated by communities, not just by heritage professionals. Universities were also opening up to different ways of working and were making their resources more available (e.g. archives, specialist skills).

Some difficulties also became apparent. Sometimes communities were pushing for a still greater say and more access to resources. Other community groups found it hard to sustain the work once initial funding had run out, leading to questions over sustainability. Sometimes universities and funding mechanisms also were not geared well to working with communities, who might operate more slowly and with different conventions.

The conclusion of our work was that community heritage research plays a powerful role and should be supported further. More information can be found on the website <https://heritagelegacies.wordpress.com> (funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council).

Jo Vergunst



## Flora and Fauna Group

Over the last few years we have been gathering information on the flora and fauna of Bennachie, both historic and current. This has involved researching, surveying and pollen analysis. The results have now been analysed and are stored in a digitised format at the Bennachie Centre, providing us with a foundation for our ongoing studies and future projects. Vegetation has played a major role in the make-up of Bennachie's character and through our studies we are hoping to bring such awareness to its many visitors. Our current project is studying the part played by Bennachie's vegetation through history: its usages and benefits for mankind. Displays of some of our results will be shown at the Centre to encourage the local community and visitors to gain more knowledge regarding the natural environment around them.

Photos & text: Chris Foster



## Outreach Activities

A small group of Bailies have been out and about during the year, giving talks to local groups about both the landscape of Bennachie and the people who created and lived in the settlement known as 'The Colony', on the lower slopes of the hill. A revised version of the leaflet about the Colony, with a guided walk, has also been produced for visitors to take with them on their own explorations of the settlement.

By the end of this year we will have visited Alford Local History Group, Dyce and District Oral History Group; Inch Beavers; Newmachar Scottish Womens' Institute; Meldrum and Bourtie Guild; Kintore Library and the National Trust for Scotland at Haddo House and so are meeting quite a wide range of ages and interests.



If your group would like us to come and give a talk on a particular aspect of Bennachie, please contact us via the email address given in the list of contacts at the end of this annual report. We do not make a specific charge for these talks but hope that groups will feel able to make a donation to the Bailies according to their means.

Alternatively, you may be interested in having one or more of our set of six pop-up banners installed for a short time in your establishment, or you may know of somewhere where these could be displayed. These banners were produced in order to disseminate some of the research carried out by the Bennachie Landscapes Project and they illustrate the excavations of the 'Colony' settlement and the natural and historical features of the hill. During the year they have been on display at Aberdeen University Library; Alford Community Campus; Alford Heritage Museum; Garioch Heritage Society and Oldmeldrum Library. Again, please use the contact details at the end of the report to book banners for display.

As you will gather from this short report, there is ongoing research into various aspects of Bennachie and so there will always be something new for us to share with local communities, either by presentations or by printed or graphic media.

Sue Taylor

*Left: Visitors to Alford Heritage Museum consider the information banners (Photo: Sue Taylor).*



*The 'Cosmic Hillbashers' take a well-earned breather on Bennachie (Photo: Gary Gutteridge).*



*Surveying and recording one of the 'Colony' houses.*

## Bennachie Landscapes Fieldwork Group

### DRUMINNOR CASTLE

2015/16 has been another busy year for the group. Excavations at Druminnor Castle have been shedding further light on the original core defensive stronghold of the Lords of Forbes. After at least seven centuries, the Forbes family are still one of the main landholders having land on Bennachie and within its immediate surroundings. However, radiocarbon-dating of charred grain found at Druminnor has now pushed the story back further than the first historical document linking the Forbes family to Druminnor in 1271/72. The grain found in a corn-drying kiln could be as early as the 1030s (predating even MacBeth!) and suggests continual settlement on this site for nearly a thousand years. Few inhabited castles in Scotland can make that claim. Field-walking in the adjacent field (when the weather got too cold for digging!) resulted in the discovery of an Iron Age bead. This pushes the time-line back even further to pre-Pictish times.

### THE 'COLONY' AND BENNACHIE

The publication of a lengthy and important paper by Jeff Oliver (Aberdeen University) concerning the Colony: 'The Bennachie Colony: a Nineteenth Century Informal Community in Northeast Scotland', was published in the prestigious 'International Journal of Historical Archaeology'. This paper puts the Colony clearly amongst the ranks of sites of national importance.

Bennachie has been fortunate to have had a high-tech survey carried out using LiDAR technology (Light Detection And Ranging). This was jointly sponsored by Aberdeen University, Aberdeenshire Council and Forestry Commission Scotland. The area covered included Mither Tap and the Colony and has provided a range of 'targets' to be explored more fully by the Fieldwork Group over the coming months and years. The results are accessible to all after much painstaking work by Aberdeen University technical surveyor Óscar Sveinbjarnarson and the fieldwork response is being organised by Barry Foster. General fieldwork on the hill has also been ongoing with many new and exciting discoveries. Amongst the most significant was Barry's recognition of the remains of a previously unrecorded



*Background: LiDAR image of the skirts of Bennachie showing previously unknown archaeological features.*

*Left: Medieval, gold reliquary cross found at Druminnor (Angela Groat).*

*Right: Iron Age bead from Druminnor (Angela Groat).*

post-medieval longhouse. This would appear to be the first recorded example of a building of this date on the hill. (We're hoping he will go and find a few more, now that he's got his eye in!).

#### FORBES ESTATE AND KEIG

Work has also been continuing at the other end of the historic Forbes estate on the south-west portion of Bennachie at Keig. The pupils of Keig school have been continuing their research into their parish landscape. After the discovery and recording of a formerly unknown water-powered saw-mill, they are now excavating a pre-modern building in order to try to find out about its former use. This structure appears to be one recognisable

from an estate plan of 1770. Such structures would have been well-known to the 'Colonists' on the hill from their childhood days, before the building 'revolution' of the 19th century that saw the more general use of granite walls take over from the traditional turf and timber construction. The school exhibits its findings to the wider community in their own small 'museum' located in the entrance to the school and the community hall.

Projects undertaken by the Fieldwork Group are varied and cover a wide range of historical periods. Most work is undertaken at weekends. Please drop us a line if you would like to be involved.

Colin Shepherd

# James Ross MacKay MBE

## 1933 - 2016

For over four decades James MacKay was a passionate, committed and enthusiastic founder member of the Bailies of Bennachie. This was acknowledged by Her Majesty the Queen in 2001, when James was presented with an MBE at Buckingham Palace for his services to the Bennachie Range.

His love affair with Bennachie began in the 1950's, when he became a student at Aberdeen University. On days off, he would take the bus to Inverurie and walk onto the hill exploring and observing its natural landscape. He missed his native Ross-shire hills and these Aberdeenshire peaks reminded him of home. Bennachie figured largely in James' and his family's lives. The homes they built at Blairdaff, in the shadow of Bennachie, still display wonderful heather gardens which James created. Indeed, he was credited by the Heather Society with Bennachie Bronze, a heather he discovered on the hill.

A science teacher at Inverurie Academy for 34 years, almost 30 of which as Principal Teacher of Biology, his enthusiasm lead other teachers to be involved with the Bailies, notably Algy Watson, Jim Glennie and Bert Cadenhead. James also introduced countless pupils to Bennachie, some studied it in detail, some helped with the practical work, including the building of the indicator on Mither Tap. James over the years, shared his passion of the hill with talks and slide shows to the wider community explaining its flora, fauna, history and landscape in detail to an appreciative audience.

He conducted many walks, setting off at a steady pace, breaking off to point out a plant or enlighten his companions with an anecdote about the landscape, often quoting a line of verse. The one I remember is, "The Mither Tap o' Bennachie, The sailors' landmark frae the sea." Indeed, my daughters all remember during a walk, James stopping and telling them that Sphagnum Moss was collected and dried, then sent off to be used in field hospitals during the First World War, as it had great absorption and antiseptic qualities. Whether James was walking in the woodland or moorland of Bennachie he was meticulous with his notes and observations.

James helped find the Gouk Stane, the Maiden Causeway, marked out routes with Algy Watson for a guide he wrote. This was rewritten three years ago with John Nicol. He was involved in the monthly work parties where his knowledge was invaluable. He was an original Trustee of the Bennachie Centre when it was built over 20 years ago, then oversaw its refurbishment.

One thing James felt impelled to do, was acknowledge the three airmen who died on Bennachie

in two separate crashes. Over a period of time he researched the air crashes and on September 1st 2013 relatives from Canada and the UK joined Air Cadets, Bailies and friends in a Service of Thanksgiving for these young men and helped to unveil a memorial cairn near the crash site on Bennachie.

James had such a passion for the hill and his love of its landscape never waned. Every June 14th, his birthday, James would climb Bennachie, recording his time. This year James was determined to be on his beloved hill and on June 12th, five days before his death his wish was granted. This final, poignant journey was made possible by members of the Aberdeen Mountain Rescue Team. James, a founder member, was in good company.

James was a man of great faith, unswerving loyalty and above all, integrity. He always saw the good in people and enabled many to achieve things they may not have thought possible. His lifelong studies and work on Bennachie is a legacy that he will leave to be enjoyed by generations to come.

Ann Baillie



# Planning and Conservation



## SAVE BENNACHIE ALLIANCE

The Save Bennachie Alliance is spreading the word about proposals for dualling the A96, its potential impact upon Bennachie, and the importance of preserving the landscape of Bennachie. We are enormously grateful to the Bailies of Bennachie, through their membership of the Alliance, for all their help, support, expertise, encouragement and advice as the campaign progresses.

In line with the Scottish Government's policy of dualling routes between Scotland's largest cities, Transport Scotland is currently progressing the programme to upgrade the A96 to dual carriageway standard by 2030. Of the four routes being considered near Inverurie, two would impact upon Bennachie and surrounding areas. Details of the routes along with a map can be found on our website. Route B and especially Route C would have a devastating impact upon the foothills of the Bennachie Massif. Whilst 2030 might sound far away, in fact the decision on the choice of route around the Inverurie area will be taken in a little over two years time. That's why it is imperative that we act now.

Formed in December 2015, the Save Bennachie Alliance is working to protect and defend Bennachie and its environs from any encroachment by the new A96 dual carriageway. Whilst respecting the decision to dual the A96, we aim to demonstrate, through positive means, the reasons why it would be wholly inappropriate to site it near Bennachie, whilst highlighting the massive opportunities which could be created by siting it to the north and east of Inverurie.

Our strategy is to work positively with all parties associated with Bennachie and the Aberdeenshire area to influence as best we can any decisions in relation to the final routing of the A96. Amongst others, we are talking to community groups, business associations, stakeholders and interest groups. We have submitted our Preliminary Report to the Minister of Transport.

Whilst talking to politicians of all parties at local and national level, our campaign is strictly non political and will last till the route is chosen. We will not stall or delay the implementation. Full details of our rationale can be found on the website.

The Save Bennachie Alliance comprises an ever growing band of individuals and groups joining forces to stand up for Bennachie. We have held two very well attended public meetings and at the time of writing over 600 people have signed up to receive our Newsletters through our website, with over 2000 'liking' us on Facebook.

The Alliance dimension is a vital aspect of the campaign. In addition to the Bailies of Bennachie, local community groups, mountaineering and outdoor interest groups have all joined the Alliance. The more groups we have signed up and supporting the campaign, the more we will be listened to. That's why we are very keen on encouraging as many groups as possible to join the Alliance.

We are grateful for all offers of help! Sign up to receive our Newsletters via our website, 'like' us on Facebook ([facebook.com/SaveBennachie/](https://facebook.com/SaveBennachie/)), follow us on Twitter ([twitter.com/savebennachie](https://twitter.com/savebennachie)). Please contribute to the blog and send in your photos and comments to our Facebook page. If you are a member of another group tell them about Save Bennachie, and encourage them to join the Alliance. Tell your friends about the campaign. We could use help in distributing our flyers to homes and businesses. If you have expertise which you feel could be relevant, we would be delighted to hear from you!

As Bailies we love and care deeply about Bennachie. Save Bennachie is all about trying to ensure a dual carriageway does not spoil it for future generations. Please see our web site, [www.savebennachie.com](http://www.savebennachie.com) for more details about the Save Bennachie Campaign or feel free to contact us at [hello@savebennachie.com](mailto:hello@savebennachie.com)

Margaret Garden



*Members of the Save Bennachie Alliance with a map showing the various proposed routes, one of which impacts badly on Bennachie.*

## SSE Pylons

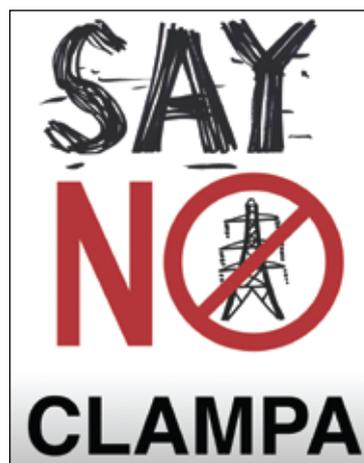
Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) plans for a new 400kV overhead powerline, Blackhillock to Kintore

In late 2015 SSE commenced a process of consultation on their intent to run the noted line to the west of Bennachie, passing Inch through the Howe of Alford en route to Leylodge, Kintore and passing within clear sight of Bennachie. This line is massive in concept and would have pylons with a mean height of 50 metres. The line they say is intended to carry electricity generated by renewables from the north, power from a new hydro scheme to the west, bring power to Aberdeenshire and to provide a security of supply to the Central Belt and the south by creating a secondary line, parallel to that which passes through Perthshire. Consultations were held with landowners and residents from the Inch, Midmar and Sauchen areas prior to Christmas 2015. Subsequent to these discussions SSE extended their 'preferred corridor' to include a new option via Tillyfourie and thus past Monymusk, Craigearn and Leschangie on the way to the major substation at Leylodge. This was presented to invited residents at Monymusk hall on 12th March 2016.

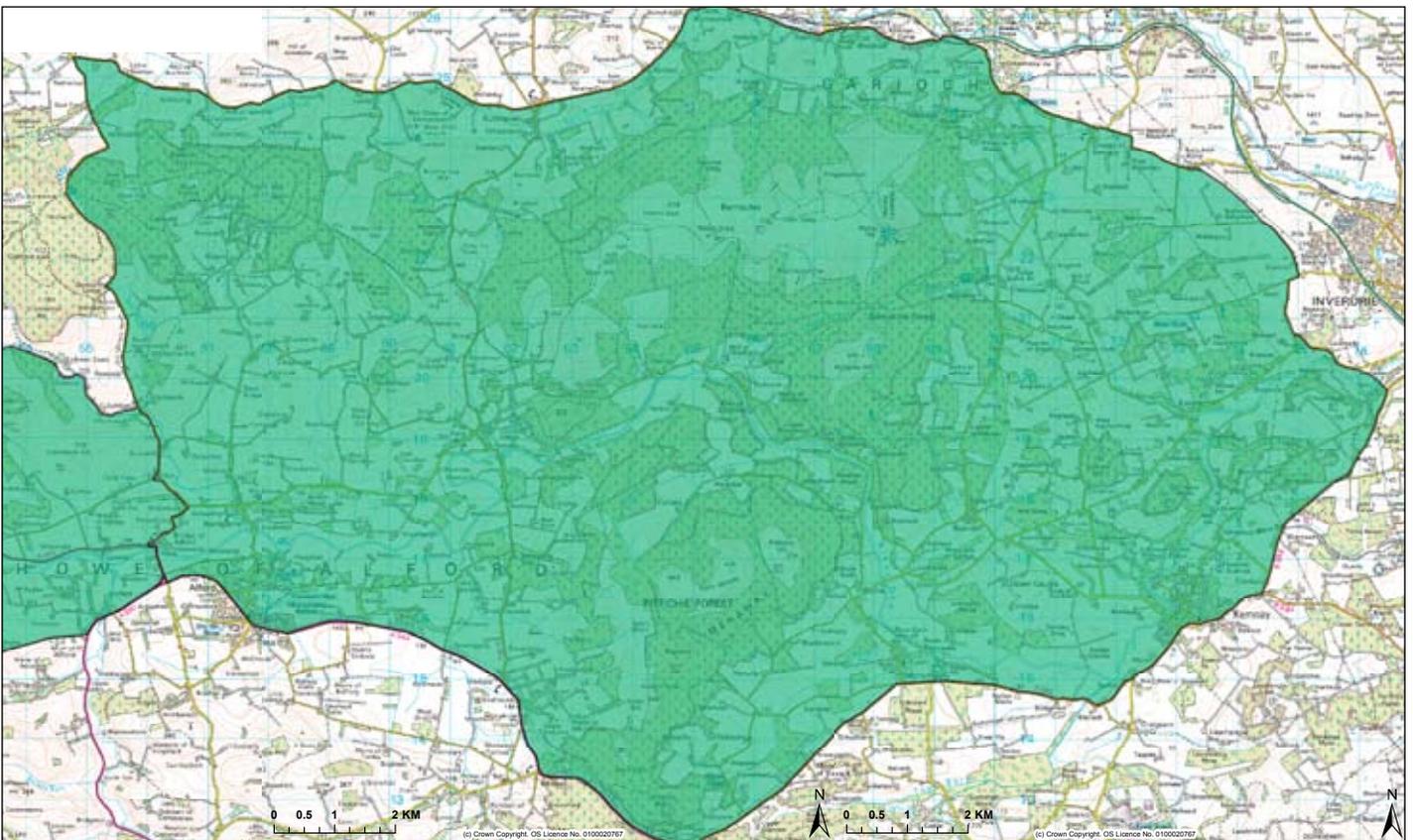
Following this and a Community Council meeting, local residents and some of the major

landowners have combined to question the route, the need and the process of selection that SSE is using. Extending from Inch to Kemnay these organisations, working in concert are named CLAMPA and WAPA being Craigearn, Leschangie and Monymusk pylon action and West Aberdeenshire pylon action. For updates, both organisations have websites and can be contacted on [act@clampa.org](mailto:act@clampa.org) and [act@wapa.org](mailto:act@wapa.org).

Whilst status can be checked on the web sites, suffice to say that some 300 people have been involved, MSP's, MP's and the local press mobilised and extensive representations made to SSE by the National Trust and other organisations concerned and potentially affected. Please show your support by contacting the noted organisations.



Fergus McGhie



*Demarcated zone affecting the immediate Bennachie area suggested for designation in the Aberdeenshire Council 'Special Landscape Areas' proposal document.*

## Special Landscape Area

Aberdeenshire Council is proposing to make the stunning area of Bennachie a Special Landscape Area. The Bailies fully support this initiative and we hope the Council will confirm the status later this year.

The Council have acknowledged that their existing planning policies for local landscapes are very weak and they need a stronger policy to give better protection to locally important landscapes in Aberdeenshire. Therefore, they commissioned a review of local landscapes designations and asked the consultants to suggest areas in Aberdeenshire which might qualify for protection. The consultants devised a set of criteria which they used to select candidate landscapes for protection. The Bailies responded to both consultations run by the consultants and we urged the Council to recognise the importance of the landscape of Bennachie and surrounding area. The consultants agreed Bennachie qualified and they included the Bennachie area as one of the ten candidate areas they have put forward to the Council for consideration as Special Landscape Areas.

The Bailies consider such protection is necessary because in recent years we have been involved in several consultations about projects which could spoil the

landscape around Bennachie, including windfarms, the dualling of the A96 and a new line of very large pylons (as described in other sections of this report). We agree with the planners that a stronger policy is needed and we hope the status of Special Landscape Area will help us to defend Bennachie from inappropriate development more effectively. We think it is important that the iconic landscape of Bennachie is retained for all of us to enjoy now and into the future without being scarred by ugly large scale industrial developments.

The exact wording of the new policy will be confirmed once the Council have approved the designations, but the current suggestion is that development in Special Landscape Areas 'will only be permitted if the qualifying interests are not being adversely affected or effects of the development are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance'.

More information can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website by searching for Special Landscape Areas.

Jill Matthews

## Treasurer's Report

I am pleased to announce that our year end accounts currently under preparation will show a significant surplus due to the generosity of the public following the report of the break in to our tool shed and sadly following the death of two of our members who each bequeathed to us a material sum.

Last year we reported showed a net loss of £7,094 whereas this year we currently estimate a net operating surplus in excess of £60,000 with total funds available now approaching £150,000. This gives us the financial capital to make considered investments as required to help us protect, share and enjoy Bennachie next year and beyond. The council will consult members and plan new projects for 2017 over the winter months.

Due to my work taking me overseas for much of 2016 and the foreseeable future I have been unable to give the treasurer's role the time required and I have opted to step down and handover to another committee member. I will, of course, support the transition.

Steve Wright

## Contact Details

For further information regarding groups and activities associated with the Bailies, please use the following contact details:

Travelling banners: **[ken-ledingham@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:ken-ledingham@tiscali.co.uk)**

Talks: **[bailiesofbennachie@mail.com](mailto:bailiesofbennachie@mail.com)**

Work Parties: **[bailiesofbennachie@mail.com](mailto:bailiesofbennachie@mail.com)**

Fieldwork Group: **[bailiesofbennachie@mail.com](mailto:bailiesofbennachie@mail.com)**

Save Bennachie: **[hello@savebennachie.com](mailto:hello@savebennachie.com)**  
**[facebook.com/SaveBennachie/](https://www.facebook.com/SaveBennachie/)**  
**[twitter.com/savebennachie](https://twitter.com/savebennachie)**

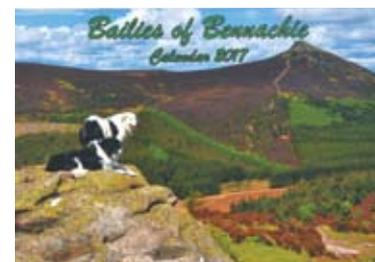
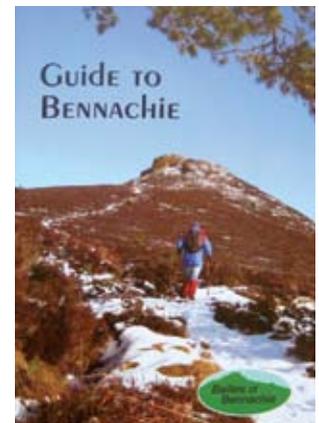
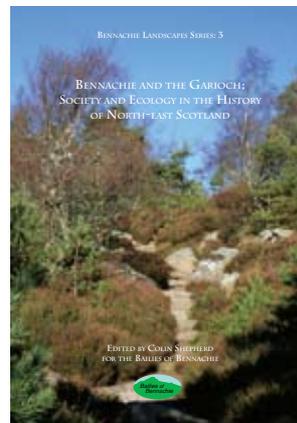
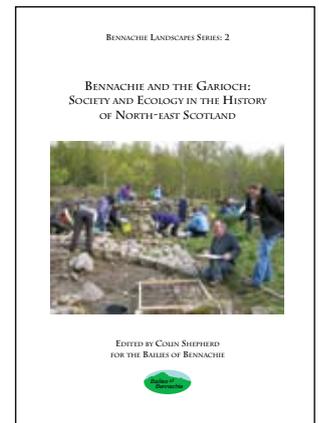
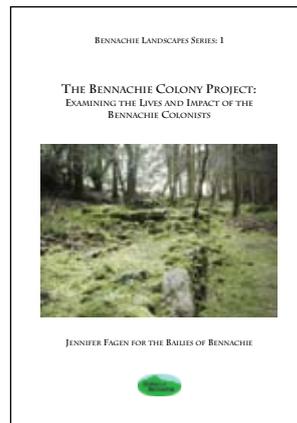
Clampa: **[act@clampa.org](mailto:act@clampa.org)**

Wapa: **[act@wapa.org](mailto:act@wapa.org)**

## Merchandise

The Bailies produce a range of merchandise, mainly publications. These enable the Bailies to disseminate new knowledge and research in order to better inform and enhance protection of the landscape. Buying this material directly supports the aims of the Bailies and permits the continuance of research and education focussed on the hill. For further details of prices and to order, please go to:

[www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/publications](http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/publications)



Also available is the Bennachie Tartan.  
For further details please go to:

[www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/bennachie-tartan](http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/bennachie-tartan)

## A DATE TO REMEMBER!

**Bailies of Bennachie AGM: Thursday 22 September 2016, 7.30pm at The Fly Cup, Inverurie.**

New and Existing Members - All are welcome.

We need to vote on our new constitution and new logo. Which logo do you like?



### **2015/16 Committee**

Chairperson: Jackie Cumberbirch

Treasurer: Steve Wright

Minute Secretary: Rosemary Sievwright

Membership Secretary, Web master and Social media: Donna Taylor

Publications: Ann Baillie

Work Party Co-ordinators: Harry Leil and Mick Taylor

Committee Members:

Brian Cornock, Jill Matthews, Angela Groat, John Nicol (resigned May, 2016), Sue Taylor, Colin Shepherd, Barry Foster, Andy Wainwright, Iain Ralston and Fiona Banks

### **There are many ways to Support the Bailies of Bennachie**

- Become a member
- Join our committee
- Volunteer - Get involved in a hands-on way through:  
research, recording wildlife, archaeology fieldwork, monthly work parties etc!
- Donate money and support what we do

Please see our web site for more details [www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk](http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk) or



Bailies of Bennachie, PO Box 11535, Huntly, AB54 9AD.