

Cairn unveiled in memory of airmen at Bennachie

LAST weekend saw a gathering of family members from across the globe as a memorial dedication was held in remembrance of RAF personnel who died on Bennachie.

On Saturday evening a very happy gathering of folk assembled at the home of Bailies of Bennachie council member Ann Baillie and her husband David near Inverurie.

The event was by way of a commemoration of the young pilots Ellard Cummings and Ronald Stewart who died when their planes crashed on Bennachie over 60 years ago making them the first military casualties of World War II and pilot Brian Lightfoot who was lost during an exercise in 1952 when his Meteor jet crashed.

The Bailies of Bennachie council managed to contact relatives of the pilots from different parts of the world and invited them to visit Bennachie.

Saturday night's guests included nephew of Ellard Cummings, Bob Cummings and his wife Jennifer from Ontario, Canada, Ellard's brother John Cummings and his wife Betty and nephew

By **DAVID PORTER**

Ken Cummings and his wife Cathy from Ottawa.

Senior bailie Jackie Cumberbirch welcomed the visitors from Canada and others who had travelled from North Allerton, Leeds and Renfrew.

She also proposed a toast to those who were responsible for the building of a commemorative cairn at Oxencraig near the sites of the plane crashes.

On Sunday a commemorative and moving ceremony took place at Oxencraig at the top of Bennachie.

A cairn built by bailies James Mackay, John Nicol, Kemnay builder Phil McKay and Gus Gurney from RAF Kinloss was unveiled at the invitation of the bailies by relatives of the three young airmen who lost their lives in plane crashes near that spot over 70 years ago.

Fragments of wreckage which had been salvaged have been built into the cairn.

With some stirring airs piper Alexander Walker from Kemnay greeted the many visitors and local folk who had scaled the heights from the Bennachie visitors centre.

Senior Bailie Jackie Cumberbirch gave a welcoming speech and congratulated those more senior members who had insisted on making it to the cairn.

There was help on hand for part of the way thanks to Forestry Commission vehicles driven by John Mackie and Lawrence Campbell.

Sunshine fell on the cairn and the gathering as padre flight lieutenant Andrew Chapman delivered a moving service of dedication which was followed by the Last Post played by bugler Hazel Gray, both from RAF Lossiemouth.

A history of the airmen and descriptions of the aircraft were read by James Mackay and John Nicol gave a vote of thanks to those who travelled far and for the weekend event organisers.

The unveiling of the cairn to reveal the commemorative pink granite plaque was carried out by relatives of the airmen who died on the mountain Bob and John Cummings and Julia Blaikley.

The fine weather prevailed as the gathering was marshalled to troop downhill to the Bennachie centre where very welcome cups of tea, coffee and a hearty spread of home-baking awaited them.



Pilots remembered: Guests gather at the commemorative Bailies of Bennachie gathering at the home of David and Ann Baillie on Saturday evening. Photograph by Griseld McGregor





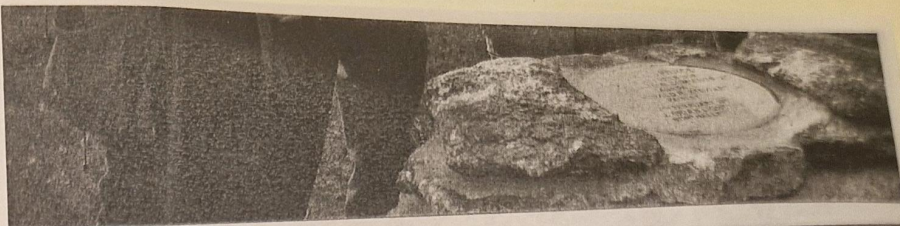
Cairn uncovered: Unveiling the cairn on Oxencraig on Sunday afternoon were (from left) Baillie James Mackay, Jim Dobson, who came from Leeds, nephew of Ronald Stewart and Bob Cummings. Photograph by Griselda McGregor



In tribute: The commemorative plaque made of pink granite on the cairn on Oxencraig. Photograph by Griselda McGregor



Musical welcome: Piper Alexander Walker greets the climbers as they reach Oxencraig and the new cairn on Sunday afternoon. Photograph by Griselda McGregor



Airmen memorial: Cairn builders (from left) James Mackay, Gus Gurney and John Nicol with senior baillie Jackie Cumberbirch at the commemorative ceremony on Oxencraig on Sunday. Photograph by Griselda McGregor



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New heights for charity walker

AN intrepid local resident is heading off on a fund-raising walk next year in aid of Cancer Research UK which will see her participate in a trek to the Everest Base Camp.

For Janine Robertson from Meikle-Wartle the 13 day challenge is a new experience as she explained: "Despite the fact I am scared of flying and my knees are terrible coming downhill, I am going for it."

"I am determined to make it there, it's an altitude of 17,600 feet, four times higher than Ben Nevis."

"This is all put into perspective however when looking at how can-

cer can affect individuals, their family and loved ones.

"Walking to Everest Base Camp will be a huge physical and mental challenge but I am fortunate to know I only have to push myself over a 13 day period."

"There are no guarantees of time limits when fighting this illness and I want to do all I can to help aid the fantastic charity."

She will be holding a fund-raising race night and disco at Inverurie Locos on Friday, September 28, which will be hosted by Steven Innes and has also set up a just giving page at: justgiving.com/janine-robertson.