

The Disappearance of toddler Francis Stephen Hay 10th May 1914

The disappearance of the toddler, Francis Stephen Hay on 10 May 1914 is an interesting story. It was looked at in depth a few years ago. The little boy is believed to have gone missing from Drothlen Farm (sic) on the 10th of May 1914. Despite huge search parties on the hillside after his disappearance, no trace of Francis was found until nearly seven years later on 21 March 1921. There were thoughts that an eagle might have carried him off.

Francis was illegitimate and there were also reports that he had been ill-treated by his mother, grandmother, and step-grandfather, and that his alleged father might have been involved in his disappearance. Exactly what did happen was never ascertained. Newspapers in 1921 reported that the remains were “discovered in a wood near the summit of the Mither Tap of the hill of Bennachie, some 1500 feet above ground level.”



Figure 2: The present cross made from planed timber.

they purchased the farm after Francis Hay was found.

In the old photo of the grave (Figure 1) it looks as though the cross is made from rough wood but in the newer photo (Figure 2) it is made of squared and planed timber, neatly dovetailed. It does not look like the same cross. This raises the question of whether the two crosses are on the same grave.

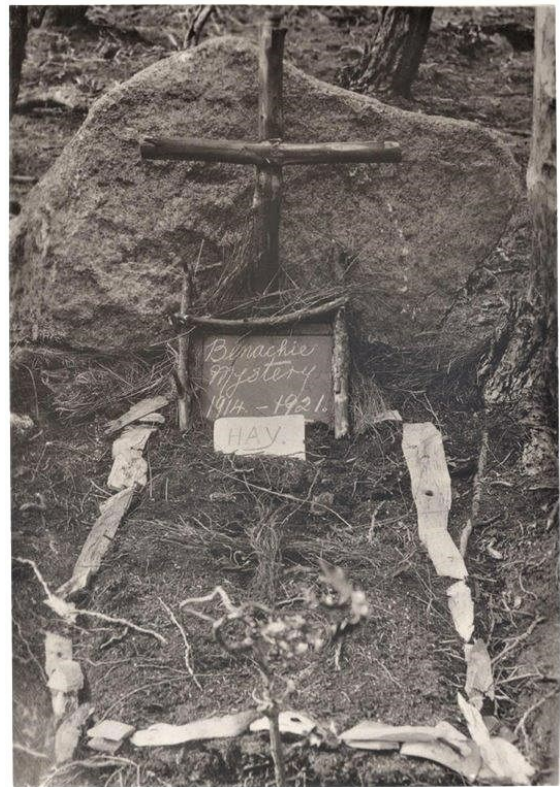


Figure 1: Old photo of grave with marker saying "Bennachie Mistry 1914 - 1921"

It is probable that the farm mentioned should be Dorlethan, which is at the foot of Bennachie not far from the visitor centre, as there is no record of Drothlen on the local maps.

The Hay family have farmed at Whitecross, which is across the valley from Dorlethan, but



Figure 3: Original head stone now lying on its back.

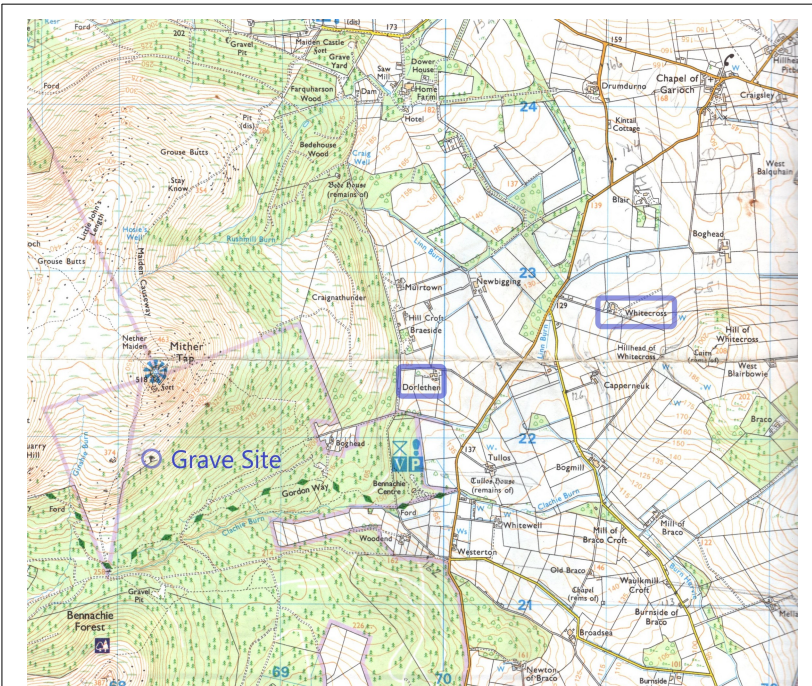


Figure 4: Location map showing location of grave and Dorlethan and Whitecross farms.

The grave can still be seen. It is located about 500m west of south from Mither Tap roughly 20m from the top of the larch plantation. The grid reference is approximately NJ 6820 2187 (Figure Error: Reference source not found) It is clearly the same grave as the headstone seen in Figure 1 with its characteristic shape is still there (Figure 3). It has now fallen and is lying on its back. It looks as though it has simply rotated along its lower edge, in which case the grave would have lain in a NE direction.

Two trees have recently fallen over the grave and recent photos of the site show these (Figures 5 and 6). They are useful in finding the location as they are currently about the only fallen trees in the area.



Figure 5 Fallen Trees, almost the only ones in the area.



Figure 6 Fallen Trees. The grave is under the trunk.

Andrew Wainwright

12/03/21