

President's Report 2015-2016

The John Rae Society has had a stunning year! Last things first: yes, we own the Hall of Clestrain! There have been lengthy negotiations with Ivan and Jean Cragie, and this has resulted in us being able to purchase John Rae's family home. The generous terms offered by the Craigies have allowed us to pay ten percent of the purchase price, with the balance to be settled within five years of entry, which was 30th September 2016 (John Rae's 203rd birthday), so we are committed to raise the rest of the price by then.

Obviously we have a great deal to accomplish. The Hall needs essential remedial work done so that restoration can begin. Efficient fundraising is imperative. We aim to end up with a world-class visitor and study centre in years to come. This has to be financially viable. A Feasibility Study is being commissioned to examine all possibilities. We plan an open public meeting to help guide this.

Our attendance at local events has kept our profile. Many folk had asked what was happening to the Hall of Clestrain. We were committed to keeping our plans confidential, but had plenty to report. The major occurrence was that a large section of the corrugated asbestos roof blew away in a winter storm. This roofing was placed there just after the 1952 hurricane, which saw Hoy hen houses landing on Clestrain's shore. It seems that this 64-year-old roof has *done asbestos it could*. Casey Construction supplied emergency help, fixing it magnificently. The John Rae Society is extremely grateful to Mr Casey.

Davie Reid was offered Honorary Life Membership as a true thank you for all his hard and stimulating work. He graciously accepted, being a most valuable member of our team.

The sheer workload of the Society is becoming greater than ever. We feel it imperative to recruit Rae volunteers to help with important and exciting future tasks. These folk need not be on a committee. They could just do what they are good at.

The education box is now functioning within our schools and proving very popular and inspiring for Orkney's pupils. This scheme will be expanded through time.

The Dounby Show and the Vintage Show were rewarding this year. Our investment in a grand tent paid off at Dounby. We have also rented out said canvas.

Last year's Lottery raised over £2,000. This year's seems that it will bring in more. Donations to the restoration of the Hall are pleasingly coming in. Well over £1,000 in cheques has been posted to the President so far. We will have to make efforts to secure further funding, so a Funding Committee has been suggested.

Anna Gudge is a splendid Minutes Secretary. JRS simply could not function without her efficiency and verve. Anna Elmy, our Hon. Secretary, has the important role of writing to membership on various aspects and penning letters of appreciation. Now we have taken a long stride forward, I feel it is the time to seek an Administrative Secretary. There will be so much happening with funding bodies, HES,

OIC, NLF, and the rest of the alphabet, so this position is vital. I will propose this at our next Trustee and Management Committees' meeting.

Finally, we had lovely John Rae Birthday celebrations this year. Xandra Shearer offered a malt whisky libation at John Rae's grave, and we had a delightful party at The Royal Hotel, Stromness, where Tom Muir eruditely proposed a toast and we were treated to music by Fiona Driver.

On a personal note, we would not be where we are, were it not for our dedicated band.

Andrew Appleby