

# Aglooka Advisor

Autumn 2015

Issue No. 3



Registered Charity No. SC044463  
[www.johnraesociety.com](http://www.johnraesociety.com)

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## Newsletter Editor

Colin R Bullen



## A Word from our President



Dear members,

I want to thank you all very much again for your valued support. Since our appeal in the previous Newsletter to help pigeon proof the Hall of Clestrain, ALL of the windows have now been secured. The floor is well supported by Acrow Props and we have been able to fix a couple of wee problems with the roof!

As President, I am delighted with this brilliant result. It is a great responsibility for us to be in the position of 'Carers' for the building and this responsibility will grow in the future. If you look on our website you will be able to see how your efforts and contributions have done this.

Raising awareness of John Rae is a constant challenge and pleasure for us. Internationally his reputation increases gradually. At home we maintain the profile of our society with local publicity, educational support and of course by attending the likes of the Dounby Show, Orkney Vintage Rally and Science Festival. These events are always a great boost to funds, and great fun. If anyone wishes to volunteer help for the Dounby Show this year, please do get in touch. Also, if you have any items we could sell for our funds, we will GLADLY accept them.

On the Education side, we have had some exciting contributions for our Education Boxes from the Hudson Bay Company in Canada. They just arrived last week, so this is hot off the press!

We have been creating information boards for the Hall, and these will be completed this summer. Visitors to the Hall can then be better informed. We shall have a donations box there too, so hopefully funds will also trickle in from that.

We welcomed several visitors to Clestrain this summer and gave them a wee tour: this is all part of our remit and we are delighted to show folk round. Ivan and Jean Craigie continue to help us with valuable advice and cups of tea. It is always good to be in their company to discuss the future of John Rae's family home.

The most splendid news I have left until last! Historic Scotland has awarded us a commemorative plaque for The Hall of Clestrain! This will be unveiled, we hope, on 30th September this year for John Rae's Birthday.

Best wishes to all.

Andrew Appleby

# Finding John Rae

A Novel in Progress  
by Jane Hamilton,  
Penetanguishene, Ontario, Canada

Around eight years ago, an e-mail arrived from my cousin Mary Davey in Nova Scotia. “Have you heard of this man?” she asked. I opened the attached link and saw an article about a Scottish Arctic explorer named John Rae, who in 1854 discovered the fate of the lost Franklin Expedition. According to the author, Rae also identified the missing link in the North West Passage, that same year. I enjoy stories about history, exploration and adventure, so Mary’s question certainly caught my attention.

Then, the phone rang. “And we are related to him!” Mary declared. I was completely surprised by the news. As you can imagine, I was all ears!

Thus began a life-altering expedition for Mary and me. We read as much as we could about John Rae and his remarkable life journey, and Mary encouraged me to join her in browsing that part of our own Scottish heritage, through Ancestry.ca. When we located and closely researched the Rae branch of our family tree, we discovered that John’s sister, Marion Sibbald Rae, who married John Hamilton of Hoy and emigrated with their many children from the Haven in Stromness to Ontario, Canada around 1857, was our great-great grandmother. Our mothers told us stories about our other Scottish ancestors, but we never even heard whisperings about our Orcadian connection, even though the name “Rae” has consistently resurfaced throughout our family history. My mother’s name was Isabel Rae Macauley Hamilton, for heaven’s sake. What was going on, here?

Since that phone call, Mary and I have often discussed the man we now fondly refer to as “Uncle John”. We believe that he was honest and compassionate, smart, brave, endlessly curious, and that he cared deeply about his extended family and his wife, Kate. Why, we wonder, was his story deleted from our family history? The answer

is simple: John Rae was written out of British history. His life and adventures took place during the Victorian era, at a time when Britannia ruled the waves and British imperialism was at its zenith. In the eyes of the British Establishment, he was “different”, an “outsider”. He lived off the land in the Arctic, associated with natives and gave credence to what they said; as we all know, these behaviours were considered to be uncivilized and very un-British.

Maybe our Orcadian relatives decided it was safest (from a social standpoint) to keep Uncle John – and his scandalous news about the fate of Franklin expedition survivors – a secret, when they emigrated to Ontario, Canada. This was our loss; however, we are lucky because now we are, indeed, finding John Rae.



The idea of writing an historical novel about our great-great grand-uncle began to take shape in my mind before Mary and I attended the 2013 John Rae 200 Conference in Stromness, Orkney. So many

experts and scholars were assembled on that weekend to share information, discuss and debate stories around the Hudson’s Bay Company, the Franklin expedition and John Rae: historians, authors, teachers, curators, politicians, artists, musicians, filmmakers, storytellers. The list was long. We found ourselves in fascinating company, and our heads were spinning.

For me, the drive to write this book was then – and remains now – electric, persistent and unstoppable. While the wonderful people of Orkney showed us around and shared their incredible world with us, I scribbled down everything I could: visions of the Hall of Clestrain when the Rae family was in residence and John

was an eager young student of self-reliance, the sailing yole 'Brenda', the Hudson's Bay Company ships coming and going through Hoy Sound, the 1845 departure of the 'Erebus' and 'Terror' after drawing fresh water supplies from Login's Well in Stromness, the sight of seals sunning themselves on rocks by the sea, the birds, Scapa Flow, the lochs and the landscape. Mary and I just knew we had to go back, and there was no doubt in my mind that I would continue writing. Before we returned to Orkney in September 2014, my book project acquired a working title I feel very comfortable with: 'Finding John Rae'.

In some ways, our great-great grand-uncle is easy to find, thanks to the excellent works of Ken McGoogan, Pierre Berton, Peter C. Newman, David C. Woodman, the Hudson's Bay Company archives, Bryce Wilson, Iris E. Heddle, the contributors to the New Orkney Antiquarian Journal, Volume 7 (Orkney Heritage Society, 2014) and many, many others, a number of whom we met in Stromness.

Then again, it is not quite so easy to find the man himself. The most challenging and rewarding aspects of writing a novel about John Rae – the man – have involved my willingness to crawl inside his head, into his many geographical and cultural worlds, and also into his heart. His personal story is multi-layered and rich, as I see it, and by imagining his character, personality, thoughts and words as best I can, I hope I have come to know him quite

well. It is also helpful to explore the many interesting characters in his life; the stories around him are rich beyond measure.

His trust in the good character of the Inuit people and their testimony, along with his commitment to defending their words and not backing down in the face of harsh criticism, are inspirational. The continuing saga of "Uncle John" is collective; it is just as relevant today as it was in the twentieth century, because his remarkable story is really about all of us. We are thrilled to feel welcomed as "Canadian-Oradians" in Orkney, and we look forward to going back. It is an honour to spend time with such warm and generous people, and it's exciting to explore the rich history, the landscape, the culture, museums, the music and the art.

Finding John Rae will be published in 2016 by Ronsdale Press of Vancouver, British Columbia. I cannot wait to return to Orkney and celebrate with all our new friends there. Mary has assured me that she will join me, perhaps along with a few other family members. I will keep you advised concerning the exact publication date.

In the meantime, it is a great pleasure to be a member of The John Rae Society, and to participate in the continuing story of his life and his many legacies.

*Jane Hamilton*



*Clestrain Ties*

*now available from our website at £17.50 plus p&p*

## The Naming of the 'John Rae': Forging a Passage through the Ice

**E**arlier this year a very interesting email was received via the JRS website from a mariner called Jurgen Lorenzen, who immediately grabbed our attention with his query: "Would you mind if I call my new Ice Class ship The John Rae...?"

**Intrigued we asked Jurgen to tell us more about himself and the background to his question...**

Jurgen was born in Nordfriesland, a small north German harbour town on the west coast of the state of Schleswig-Holstein on the Jutland peninsula. Starting out as an apprentice shipbroker, he served on and helped manage coasters plying the Baltic and North Sea routes. Following this early sea-going experience he went to work with a Danish ship-owner specialising in live animal shipments around the world. At the age of 24 he sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to Montreal, where he took various shipping related jobs, but eventually geared up with another Canadian to go into business. With an office in Greenwich, Connecticut, they were successful in the

competitive chartering business and eventually sold and merged their business with Canfornav, which operates almost 50 dry cargo ships, mainly in the trade from and to the Great Lakes. For many years the company were carrying the export cargoes of steel from the UK mainly loading in Teesport, Immingham.

The shipping market is very cyclical and having experienced very high markets from 2002 to 2008 Jurgen decided to sell off some of his shares in the company and "slow down a bit". This turned out to be a good decision but as he says "once shipping is in your blood it seems it's hard to let go".

Here Jurgen tells the story of his latest acquisition and also of his great respect and admiration for Dr John Rae.

**F**irst and foremost I want to express that I am very much honoured to be asked to be given the opportunity to appear in your bi-yearly publishing.

*A few months ago I made an offer on a dry cargo ship on which the financing bank was foreclosing on the previous owners. Among the 4 bidders it turned out my offer was the most lucrative and was accepted. The actual takeover of the vessel took place in Indonesia in June. Currently she is*

*trading under the name of 'BBC Niteroi'.*

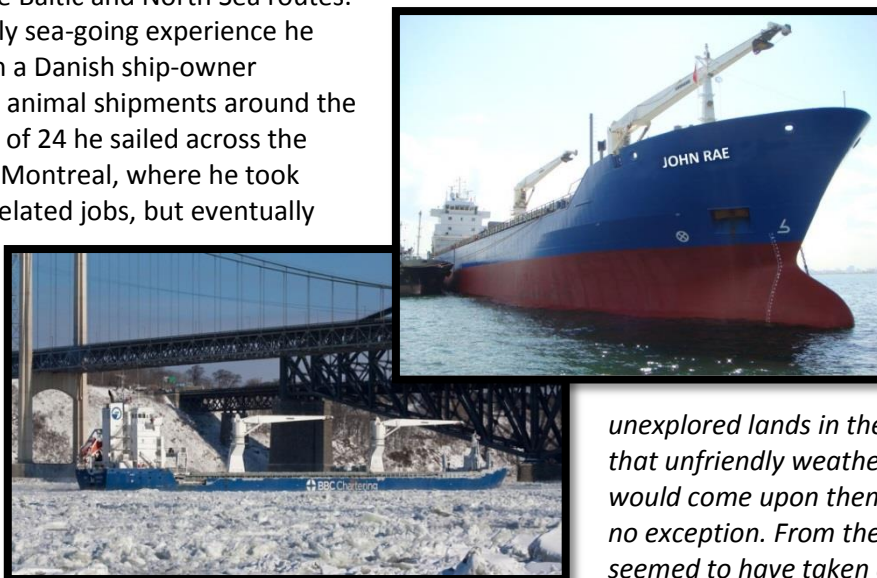
*I have always been mystified by people who took it upon themselves to leave for unknown, harsh and*

*unexplored lands in the north, knowing that unfriendly weather and territories would come upon them. Dr John Rae was no exception. From the beginning he seemed to have taken a humble position*

*towards the indigenous people, the native Indians - specifically the Cree and the Inuit.*

*He respected them and their ways, and consequently he earned their trust. Rae was quite different from the majority of explorers - both prior to and during his lifetime. What also made him different was that he was not a sea-going master sailing for admiralty but a great traveller over land. Monseigneur Pierre Radisson could be compared.*

*Learning and taking on the ways the natives lived and survived, he quickly surpassed other explorers in the Arctic with his great talent, endurance and hunting skills, so critical for survival and success. The fact that he travelled lightly meant he could change his strategy easily and thus accommodate*



**The 'BBC Niteroi' which has been renamed 'John Rae'**



obstacles. Rae also knew what was feasible and did not push on when there was no good reason for doing so. The indigenous communities survive only by sticking together and acting as a unit. It really is not that different today and I have experienced this during my various trips up north.

I am a passionate angler and outdoor enthusiast, interested in the history of the region and respecting what Mother Nature has to offer. I often share a simple cabin on Lake Mistissini, Quebec's largest natural lake, with my Cree friend and his family. There we are away from the daily routine, have no cell phones and the next house is some 60 km away. We can drink the water and lose sight of time and day.

John Rae travelled with the natives and made sure he had a translator with him most of the time: a wise decision. This is how he heard and learned about the lost Franklin expedition and what happened to the ship and the crew. When reporting this back home he was dealt with very harshly mainly due to the influence of Lady Franklin.

Today many people know and have heard about the disastrous Franklin expedition and the long continued search for survivors and clues of the ships whereabouts. Finally, last year the 'Erebus' was located, very close to where the natives had reported a ship sinking following a report by Dr John Rae upon his return to the establishment back home. We will find out a lot more this year.

In all of this the name 'John Rae' must not be forgotten since it was he who first reported some

of the happenings and whereabouts back to England.

Lack of recognition and fame for his achievements - the fact that he had such great human qualities and achieved so much in the north and across the still largely unexplored country we know today as 'Canada' - made me decide to name my ship after him to make up for what he deserved and should have received during his lifetime.

With the arctic north opening up more and more, with communities getting internet connections, I feel great opportunities to trade the ship up there.

She was built in China in 2009, has a capacity of 9800 tons deadweight, is of the highest ice class, and is perfectly fitted with long hatches, box-shaped cargo holds with no understow (i.e. direct stow and discharge), has good strength of tank tops, tween decks and weather deck for heavy cargo, a bow thruster, and two 60 ton cranes with excellent outreach. All these features make her ideal for the Arctic territory trade routes.

Initially she will be trading in a 'marketing pool' with a Danish company called 'Thorco a/s' who operate similar ships. Upon their request, for the time being the ship will adapt a pool name - mv 'Thorco Arviat', after a settlement on the western shores of the Hudson Bay in the vicinity of where Dr John Rae stayed.

The ship is made from steel, as was the man, Dr John Rae - Shall his name not be forgotten.

Best regards

Jurgen Lorenzen



### Footnote

In 2009, Orkney Islands Council fittingly named its new pilot launch 'John Rae' after a competition found this was by far the most popular local choice. It has a gross tonnage of 100 tonnes and is powered by two 860 hp engines providing a service speed in excess of 20 knots.

Its construction features a lightweight aluminium superstructure and hull of 21m in length providing a strong and robust shell ideally suited for the turbulent waters of the Pentland Firth.

## Mary and Jane's 'Letter from Canada'



A year ago Jane and I collaborated on our plans to travel once again to Orkney. We rendezvoused at Aberdeen airport as we had done the year before, and then continued to Kirkwall. Once there we were kindly met by David Reid, one of the Directors of the JRS, and delivered to our lovely house let in Stromness.

We enjoyed evenings with several of the members of the JRS Board and with JRS President Andrew Appleby. We renewed our friendships with the many people we had met when we attended the 'JohnRae200' conference, visited the Stromness Museum and the Hall of Clestrain. Oh, and there was the 'event' at Westminster Abbey and the Scottish Office!

It just doesn't seem right not to be returning this year!

The coastal walk from Stromness to the Warbeth Cemetery, where several times we visited the graves of our 4 x great grandparents John Rae Senior (HBC agent) and his wife Margaret Glen Rae, never failed to captivate us and evoke deep

emotions. It is almost impossible to describe the awe of that landscape. It is both wild and tame, and all the while enchanting. The walk back to the town from the cemetery once you have the Hall of Clestrain in your sights in Orphir is inviting and very stirring.

So what is the affinity we feel with this small community all about? Is it our family history, our new friendships, our relationship with the landscape, the excitement of the projects initiated by the JRS, the inspiration to pursue new opportunities in our lives?

We think it is about a sense of community and interconnection, and the gift of being able to appreciate every bit of it moment by moment, and accept it for what it is.

We are planning to return next year!

*Mary & Jane*

### *John Rae 200 Conference Proceedings*

*Purchase price is £20*

*plus £3 p&p within UK*

*Please visit our website for more details*





## John Rae honoured by Commemorative Plaque Scheme

**J**ohn Rae was one of 11 historic figures to be recognised as part of the 2014 Historic Scotland Commemorative Plaques Scheme, which celebrated the Year of Natural Scotland. We are delighted to announce that the unveiling of the plaque will take place at a ceremony on Rae's birthday 30th September 2015 at the Hall of Clestrain.

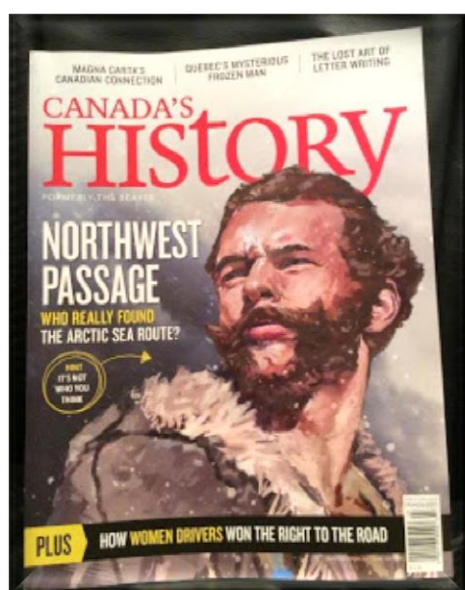
The Commemorative Plaque Scheme is designed to celebrate the life and achievements of significant historic figures, through the erection of a plaque on the home where they lived, or the building that was particularly synonymous with their achievements.

Members of the public were asked to submit nominations and an independent panel of experts

then selected the final 11, which includes, amongst others: Wilfrid Owen the war poet; the 'father of nature conservation' John Muir; Mary Lily-Walker, who did much to help the plight of disadvantaged women in Dundee; the 'father of modern sociology' Adam Ferguson, and Sir Hugh Munro, the original member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club, whom the standard term for Scottish Mountains of over 3,000ft was named after.

We have been working closely with Historic Scotland to find a striking way of presenting the plaque. The public unveiling event will form part of the annual Rae Birthday celebrations.

## Northwest Passage: Who Really Found the Arctic Sea Route?



**I**n the latest issue of 'Canada's History', award-winning author and JRS patron Ken McGoogan "sets the record straight" on who was the first European to discover the Northwest Passage and sorts "the contenders from the pretenders". In his article Ken discusses the explorers involved in the struggle to find a navigable route across the top of North America - a quest which began in the late 1500's.

He concludes that two explorers stand out – John Franklin who "chartered much of the coastal channel" and "established what proved to be the long, second-last link when in 1846 he sailed down Peel Sound to King William Island." But it was Rae who "built on that accomplishment when he found the connecting link: Rae Strait, the final link in the first navigable Northwest Passage."

The striking cover portrait of Arctic explorer John Rae is by contemporary artist David Seguin.



**Ken at Rae Strait in the High Arctic  
beside the Rae Plaque.**

## The John Rae Boxes Project

**D**uring 2013 – the 200th anniversary of Rae's birth - there was an impressive variety of creative work carried out in Orkney schools inspired by themes of 'The Hudson Bay Company' and 'John Rae'. Art, creative writing, special projects, games and story-telling all took place - items such as hand-made blankets and soapstone carvings were proudly displayed on occasions such as Parent Evenings...

Secondary schools have a period at the end of a school year where students can conduct a special investigation. These will often follow a 'cause and effect' format: why did something happen and what was the effect? An example in the context of the Hudson Bay Company might be: why were beavers so important to the HBC..?

Schools also have Inter-disciplinary Learning (IDL) objectives where two departments such as Art and History come together and promote the students learning on a project.

The story of John Rae, the Hudson Bay Company and the indigenous native population of the Arctic present great themes for projects and creative learning. Rae stands out as a particular Orkney-born role model who demonstrated a respect for other cultures and lifestyles – indeed he embraced them and encouraged cooperation between the native peoples and the explorers.

The central aim of the 'Rae Boxes' project is to assist the schools and encourage pupils to continue to learn about and be inspired by the extraordinary impact which one apparently ordinary Orcadian had in the remote Northwest Territories of Canada. To learn from the story of the many Orcadians who served in the Hudson Bay Company, and about the traditions and lifestyles of the indigenous peoples and their skills in surviving the harsh climate of the area.

Society members took inspiration from viewing the already established 'Viking Boxes' which contain an

impressive array of replica artefacts, pictures and books. These are made available to schools and allow pupils the opportunity to consider the life, skills, and traditions of the Vikings and their Orkney heritage – central to our understanding of Orkney's past and present.

Our aim is clear – to produce, purchase and acquire items (images, maps, books and reproduction 'artefacts') which inspire and spark further thought, discussion and debate. The objects should inspire questions such as 'what can we learn from this object'? With an Inuit woman's 'Ulu' (her work knife) or an Inuit hunter's salmon spear in your hand – what do they tell you about the life of the people who made and used them ...?

Or perhaps the object will stimulate story writing or creative art.

We hope the boxes will inspire pupils to produce items themselves which will add to the collection. An example would be a soapstone carving made in an Art class, a geographic investigation, or a story or poem produced in an English or History class.



**From left:- Davie Reid (JRS Trustee), Rankine Firth (box maker), Colin Bullen (JRS Trustee)**

We have already collected several items which will go into the boxes including some which were made for the St. Magnus Festival production "Long Strides". These include a replica skin tunic and a pair of snowshoes in the style of those made and worn by Rae. The Rae box itself has been expertly crafted by Rankine Firth in the style of a traditional trunk of the type which would have accompanied seafarers in the past.

We would like to thank Orkney Islands Council for supporting the project with a funding contribution from their Culture Fund.

We would also very much welcome any thoughts or indeed suitable items from any JRS member.

## Clestrain – Our Thanks for Your Support ... literally!

The existing Hall of Clestrain was built in 1769 replacing the earlier hall which was attacked by the Pirate Gow in 1725. It was the first major piece of designed domestic 'Architecture' since the building of the Earl's palace in Kirkwall in 1607, and was built for the Honeyman family; descendants of the Bishop of Orkney from 1664-76, Andrew Honeyman. The Hall was regarded as one of the most impressive buildings in northern Scotland.

The family later moved to the mainland and the Hall became home to their Orkney estate factor, John Rae. In 1813 his son, the future Arctic explorer, John Rae was born.

In 1952 while the Hall was still inhabited the roof was lost during an exceptional hurricane and the present owner and his family moved out. Although the roof was replaced with corrugated asbestos sheeting which has saved the wallheads and general structure, there has been an inevitable and gradual decline.



**Sponsored Acrow props in place supporting the first floor.**

The A-listed Hall is now inevitably facing a critical point in its history and desperately requires major restoration work to secure its future. Before any works can take place however, it is vital that any deterioration in the building fabric is halted as far as practicably possible. The main antagonists are Orkney's enthusiastic wind and rain – never far away even in the heights of summer (!) – and its wild bird population. In our case the residents were a multitude of wild pigeons to whom Clestrain was a comfortable, historic and scenic roost! An inspection with a local surveyor had also highlighted the need for a large timber beam carrying the principal floor to be further supported.



Our immediate task was to encourage the pigeons to vacate and to deal with the main beam. The Society invited our members to rally to the cause and become sponsors and quite literally Clestrain supporters!

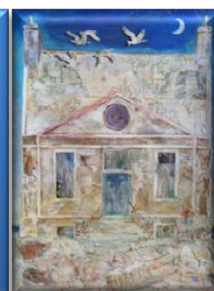
The response has been magnificent: all 8 Acrow props being quickly sponsored and 13 pigeon-proof windows and 2 doors now covered. Sponsorship means we can continue to protect the building and look forward to the day when major restoration can take place.

A number of sponsors have visited the house in the past few months and we have been delighted to show them their contributions at first hand.

*Lovely Clestrain print by local artist*

*Jane Glue*

*available in various sizes so please visit our website for more information*





## Short Passages

### Gravestone



John Rae's headstone in St Magnus Cathedral cemetery has been gently cleaned in early spring in the last two years and this has helped keep the marble stone bright.

We have considered what can be done to improve the overall appearance of the graveside. The cross has some visible cracking and some of the lettering needs attention, however overall the headstone and plinths are in reasonable condition for their age. Local businessman Paddy Casey of Casey Construction has generously offered freely his company's workforce and expertise to restore the gravesite. He has proposed that the wall at the back of the grave should be repointed, the lettering be mended and a light polish of the marble undertaken. The coping stones surrounding the grave would also be mended.

The Society wishes to record our gratitude to Paddy for his extremely kind offer. We are SO grateful for this! Descendants of the Rae family Mary Davey and Jane Hamilton certainly approve. Paddy and his skilled mason will achieve the renovations in a sincere way which will respect the age and nature of the grave.

### Summer Events

We will be attending the Dounby Show on 7th August! We had also planned to attend the Vintage Rally on 10th August but due to Orkney's very poor summer and ground conditions the event has unfortunately been cancelled.

### 2015 Prize Draw

We had a very successful fund-raising raffle in 2014 which was generously supported by local companies and individuals who donated a great prize list. This year we have again a fine collection of prizes including Orcadian jewellery by Alison Moore, a Jane Glue Clestrain print, Fursbreck Pottery, Highland Park whisky, local crafts, signed copies of our Presidents book "Skara" and many more.

As last year, we will be sending books of Prize Draw tickets out to members and hope that together we will make a significant boost to Society funds. The Prizes will be drawn on 20th December.

### Society Membership

As you can see from the breakdown our membership, as expected, is mostly Orkney-based but a large contingent is from Scotland.

Our overseas members are predominantly Canadian, and ever growing each year. We have had quite a few Canadians joining us this year and hope that this may continue.

