

President's Report 1st October 2019 to 30 September 2020

We received a splendid donation from the Orkney Community Co Op of £9,928 on November 21st 2019. This was from their local funding scheme, which ran through the spring, summer and autumn. The money went towards our development plan.

Our Newsletter attracted contributions from members far and wide. It is good to get this variety of articles and interest.

We launched our 2020 John Rae Birthday Lottery in December, sending the tickets out to members in our 2019 Winter Newsletter. They were dispersed in shops and public places in the New Year. Our members have been very generous, some adding donations over and above the value of the tickets. The draw was to be held live on 30th September 2020 but took place online on 4th October. Apologies for the delay and the added suspense.

We held an important event at Orphir Community Centre. This was called 'Heart of Orphir' on Saturday March 15th. Despite Covid bulk shopping, we had a good turnout. The purpose was to show our ideas for the development at the Hall of Clestrain and the Arctic Centre. This was greatly appreciated by the attendees, who enjoyed refreshments, a spring flower stall and the Society's merchandise. We had valuable input from the public, which was the whole point of the exercise. Some volunteers were recruited, and this included our invaluable Michelle Scott, who began to record our minutes and has now taken on other vital responsibilities.

Regrettably, Scotland went into lockdown a few days afterwards. All our events were cancelled, so no open days or Agricultural Shows. To actually be getting on with something positive, my wife Sigrid and I decided to do the long-awaited makeover of the cabin loaned by Casey Construction. The interior was redecorated, and the correct exterior paints procured. The showcase, given to us by Orkney Museums, was scraped down and repainted. Davie Reid assembled it and now it is ready for displaying. Fiona Gould prepared excellent notice boards showing the history of The Hall of Clestrain. Other volunteers sanded down the exterior of the cabin and repainted it ready for the winter. We are very grateful to them. We are grateful also to Lord Younger for arranging a donation of £1,000 towards creating this educational facility. When the COVID emergencies are over, we will be ready to accept visitors.

In mid-June Sigrid and I cleared some interesting and impressive stonework at the North door of The Hall of Clestrain. This revealed substantial curbing with a paved area inside it. This paving, we found later, covered a short stair leading down to the older ground floor before the pig pens were installed in the 1950s. To do any further investigation required a small team of professional volunteers. Paul Johnson, retired standing buildings archaeologist, and his partner, Gail Drinkall, Curator at Orkney Museums, stepped in. Marie Claire Rackham-Mann, a professional archaeologist, joined too. We excavated on Wednesdays and Sundays, always observing social

distancing. Further experienced and trainee volunteers joined forces with us. A report on the discoveries will appear further on in the Newsletter. For the moment, I will just add that 'Dig it' organized by the Society of Antiquaries Scotland, gave the excavations much valuable exposure.

The Cuminga Trust donated £2,500 to our Land Fund. This represents the cost of half an acre. It is their intention to make a similar donation in 2021. Adventure Canada has offered us £5,000 for another acre when their Cruises can recommence. We are actively searching for other donors so we can complete the purchase as soon as possible. This extra five acres will give us far better access to The Hall and much better parking areas as well as ground for development.

Fiona Gould has transcribed a 1769 entry in the Court Sessions papers, which details the measurements and the materials used within the Hall and adjacent buildings. This has been an amazing effort and will be very useful when the restoration work starts.

The Trustees have had a series of Microsoft Teams meetings with Simpson and Brown, Architects, and Rob Robinson Heritage Consulting, to determine the ways forward with developing our Arctic Centre at Clestrain. Sandra Deans, our Project Manager has been working closely and tirelessly with them to bring the schemes along. She has also sought other grants to keep her in post and further our aims even more.

A fundraising Working Group, headed by Liz Macinally, has been created. Firstly, all hours worked on the excavations have been logged and valued for match funding. It is hoped that volunteers and Trustees alike will assess their time as well. The group has also launched an exciting series of sponsored personal challenges. These include writing the history of Clestrain in 5,000 words; cycling 300 miles; distance rowing on a rowing machine; and wild sea swimming. It is hoped to raise considerable funding from this.

James Grieve organized the filming of our 'Virtual Guided Tour' of The Hall of Clestrain for 'Open Doors' over the weekend of 26th and 27th September. This was a great success and allowed people to visit the Hall via their computer screens. We must all thank Mark Newton for his tremendous work with this, as well as on the Dig It project, amongst many other website feats of his making.

We should also thank Neil Kermode for working with the Orkney Planning Committee on the proposed new access road to the Hall, and for stepping in and chairing our online board meetings, which has required considerable commitment in time and organization.

Our annual John Rae birthday ceremony by his graveside on the 30th September had to be severely curtailed due to a new raft of COVID restrictions. However, a beautiful autumnal floral tribute was displayed at his burial place and a liquid libation of Highland Park whisky poured.

Andrew Appleby. President JRS.