

Aglooka Advisor

Summer 2020

Issue No. 10



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Photo on front cover: reconstruction of the Hall of Clestrain as it might have looked in 1769. Drawing by Simpson and Brown 1990.

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The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board of Trustees of the John Rae Society

President's Report

What is on everyone's mind just now is the Corona Virus lockdown. I will refer to that later.

Firstly I have to tell you that our Chairman, Norman Shearer, suffered a stroke earlier in the year. He is recovering well, but he is currently unable to perform his role as chairman. We all wish Norman well.

Founding Trustee, Anna Elmy, has stood down. She has been suffering with mobility problems for a long while and is unable to get out and about. We all wish her well too and thank her for her tremendous contribution to the John Rae society.

We are delighted, though, to welcome Liz MacInally from Stenness onto the board and James Grieve from Kirkwall. Both have the talents we need in this exceptionally busy time for JRS. Another welcome is to Michelle Scott who has volunteered her services as Secretary.

Due to the social distancing we are no longer meeting as before. Mark Newton set up Microsoft Teams so we can

meet remotely. This is very successful and brings us together.

I must mention that Wilma Hutchison of the Pomona Inn, Finstown, has had to close her welcoming pub due to a fall. This was our venue for board meetings and we thank her for her kind hospitality over the years.

Despite all these setbacks, we make long strides forward. Simpson and Brown of Edinburgh are completing a Heritage Assessment with architectural recommendations. Rob Robinson of Heritage Consulting is preparing a business sustainability report too. Thanks to your generosity we can still afford to complete these assignments in separate stages. This will prepare the Society to apply for the major grants when the lockdown has eased.

Another major stride forward is the purchase of additional land at the back of The Hall of Clestrain. We have negotiated a far broader strip for access and a greater parking and turning area. This will give us space for a wider road down, a footpath and cycle path. We can also land and waterscape

the intermittent burn into a more natural feature and create an approach with a rich collection of natural Orkney and arctic plants, giving an enhanced feeling of biodiversity.

The greater parking area removes the risks of placing the car park over archaeologically sensitive areas close to where the north pavilion was. Our archaeological survey showed many interesting anomalies there, and Ivan Craigie once uncovered a well where rubber tyres might have rested. This sensitive area is now protected for later study and conservation.

In total we are purchasing five acres. The cost will be £20,000. The society pays a ten percent deposit and legal fees with three years to complete. We have completed this initial stage already. We have a pledge to support one acre from one of our Corporate Members and another funder is looking at a further contribution. We are grateful to Ivan and Jean Craigie for agreeing to these terms, just as they did when we bought

the Hall of Clestrain from them.

As seen in the last Newsletter, several corporate members have joined us with their support. There is one, however, to whom we gave honorary corporate membership. This is Casey Construction. Paddy Casey has so many times come to our rescue. The Hall's roof was blowing off in a tempest some years back: his firm securely fixed it. We would have lost this gem of an 'A' listed building had he not done so. John Rae's grave in the kirkyard of St. Magnus Cathedral has also been sensitively restored by him. His firm's sheer generosity in providing a splendid cabin as our occasional Visitor Centre is a great boon: here we can provide shelter and hospitality on our open days. Casey Construction's support is indeed highly valued by The John Rae Society.

We held a very successful event in Orphir Community Centre to engage locals in our project. This will be described in the article following this report.

Davie Reid, our stalwart procurer of goodwill and good things, has instigated the John Rae Explorer Badges, supported by a donation from one of our Patrons, Sir Michael Palin: more news of this later in this newsletter.

This year's John Rae Birthday Lottery has brought in worthwhile funds for us all. I would say it made it possible for us to pay the deposit for the extra land at Clestrain and some of the fees.

It is difficult to give details of forthcoming events at this point in time. We had some exciting ones planned and will keep you informed when we know what we are able to offer. Our membership continues to grow apace.

Andrew Appleby

President

The 'Future of Clestrain'

March was supposed to be an exciting month for us at the John Rae Society: the 14th being *The Future of Clestrain* event in Orphir. This event was an opportunity to engage with the public and hear about

what *they* would like to see featured at the Hall, once it has been restored. However, advice from the government was changing so rapidly that it was very difficult to say whether or not the event should go ahead at all. We drew together all the information we had at the time and decided that the event should still go ahead but we would need to take some precautions, like having soap and hand sanitiser available at the door.

We didn't expect a large footfall, but we were pleasantly surprised by the number of people that attended and astounded by the response from everyone that filled out the questionnaires – the creativity and ingenuity that was brought forward from all ages is incredibly valuable.

A special 'thank you' must be made to the community of Orphir. Without their contributions, the event would not have been nearly as successful. They donated an enticing spread of homemade cakes, shortbread, traybakes and biscuits; accompanied by tea and coffee. While sipping

away, one could browse the great selection of plants provided by Eleanor Maciver ranging from intricate alpinines to bluebells, 'in the green', ready to explode into bloom.

If that wasn't enough on its own, then there was an educational information display board created by Fiona Gould, telling the history of the Hall of Clestrain, accompanied by an interesting selection of old pictures of the Hall and its former residents.

Moving round the room, there were some activities for children, including a lucky dip and the chance for even the youngest of people to express their views of 'what they'd like to see at Clestrain' by putting crayon to paper – this is where the idea of solar roof tiles and turbine chimney stacks was born!

There was certainly no shortage of educational material on offer from an old sea chest, brimming with Rae-related items, such as maps of the Arctic and an interestingly fashioned sextant that pivoted on the base of a tuna can. Also, if you ever want to know everything there is to know about Inuit shoes, then rest

assured, there is a lengthy book on just that.

Finally, there was an incredible digital display, compiled by Jim Chalmers. The display went into great detail about the work that has already gone into the future of Clestrain, what ideas the John Rae Society have already, as well as the possibilities and potential to have a thriving hub for the community that meets the needs of many. Architectural mock-up drawings of Clestrain captured the attention and imagination of onlookers, giving extra substance to the creative juices.

There was live accordion and fiddle music throughout the day from Ellen Grieve and Ingrid Tait. This really helped to create a relaxed and social atmosphere, even with everything that is going on in the world.

The highlight of the day was the Maureen Findlay Dancer's dancing *The John Rae Reel*.

Composed by Maureen Findlay herself, to music by Dawn Stout, the dance is a beautiful and very visual portrayal of Rae's journeys through the

Arctic. Comprising some very young dancers, it was a delight to see the practice and dedication that has gone into the performance. John Rae would certainly be proud.

All-in-all, despite the obstacles, it was a very successful event. We managed to raise a total of £164; we have gained several new members and have an outstanding response to our community survey, as well as getting the chance to meet and talk to members of the public about their contribution and ideas to what will one day become one of Orkney's most valuable treasures.

James Grieve

The John Rae Society Patrons

The Society is fortunate in having patrons who are both notable and who make a considerable contribution to the furtherance of its cause. (*For list see page 3*). Recently we have lost one to retirement from public office but have gained another in his place.

We have been privileged to have had as our patron

Captain William (Bill) Spence for or nearly six years. Bill was previously a trustee of the Society then became a patron and, on his retirement from the Lord Lieutenancy in January, remains a dedicated member of the Society. He has always supported us well, arranging for the Duke of Gloucester to visit the Hall of Clestrain in 2017 (in pouring rain), attending board meetings as and when he could and often attending our public events, including the celebration of the purchase of the Hall in 2018.



He has been succeeded as Lord Lieutenant by Elaine Grieve (*above*) who has kindly agreed to become one of our patrons in addition to her other duties.

Bob Shepton, adventurous mountaineer and sailor, was due to give a presentation at the Society's May Festival this year, but this has had to be postponed. So we asked him to write a trailer to whet your appetites for this



event which we hope will take place at a future date. (Editor)

A trailer for *Double Transit of the North West Passage – just!*

Some South African climbers wrote saying they were looking for adventure. 'What about the North West Passage?' 'That will do,' they said. So we set sail across the Atlantic from Scotland. I had made a big thing of how stormy it could be in these northern latitudes. We had benign conditions with Force 4 or 5 on the beam, with sunshine. Halfway across one of them asked 'Is this your gale alley then, Bob?'. Cheeky! We made our way up the long coastline of west Greenland to some twenty

miles south east of Upernavik, where the team made another impressive first ascent on Impossible Wall, 850 metres well into the Extreme grades. Having crossed over to arctic Canada they made another first ascent on a rock wall south west of Pond Inlet. We were held up at Pond Inlet for five days waiting for ice to clear but eventually made it into Lancaster Sound and so to Beechey Island to view the three famous graves from Franklin's expedition wintering there in 1845. After refuelling with a long hose across the beach at Resolute we continued on down Peel Sound to Leask Cove, unrecorded in the Pilot which we later put right, where we were again held up by ice. So we traversed back and forth through the Bellot Strait



'for fun' with *Nordwind*. Later we anchored by *Nordwind* in the Tasmanian Islands, and

helped them when they lost their bower anchor and sustained damage to their prop shaft in a storm there. Making our way out together three days later we were informed by a boat coming the other way that Victoria Strait had opened. This saved us a lot of distance and two tricky channels north and south of Gjoa Haven and we were able to go direct to Cambridge Bay through Victoria Strait.

After re-stocking we enjoyed two pleasant days sailing down Dease Strait and Coronation Gulf before anchoring. Next morning we hit a rock just south of Lady Franklin Point – the helmsman did confess he had not been watching the echo sounder but we were too close in anyhow – and eventually put in to Bernard Harbour to inspect for damage. All seemed well. We motored against big seas to round Baillie Island north of Bathurst, before we could sail again south west towards Tuktoyaktuk. Sailing in 2-3 metres of water below the keel for miles on end in the shallow waters approaching Tuk certainly concentrates the mind.



We waited nine days in Tuk for gales in the Beaufort Sea to pass through. The lads were busy at their computers in a guest house which allowed them Wi-fi, especially Steve who was making and editing a film of the trip. From Tuk we sailed and motored to the lagoon north of Barrow where we waited two days for a favourable wind direction. We did get the favourable but it became a gale which sped us in short nasty seas down the Chukchi Sea running before on bare poles for a day and a night. Very unpleasant. Relief was short lived next day before more wind and another confused sea next evening split the mainsail with an unintended gybe. The Bering Strait however was benign and we had a pleasant sail along the coast to Nome. Finally with some difficulty the boat was hauled out in Nome for the winter.

The next year was a more difficult year in the Arctic. There was a lot more ice, and we encountered strong contrary winds. Why were we going back the same way? Long story, I'll tell you sometime. It was a different crew this year and we started late (July 30) because crew member Rich had battles of his own getting an American visa. Steph was overcome by the rather special romance of sailing through the Bering Strait with America (Alaska) visible to starboard and Russia (Siberia) to port. But we then had to wait — you do a lot of that in the Arctic — for nine days at Point Hope to let strong north winds pass through. At last, we could round the corner and make progress against a more moderate north west wind. So up to Barrow, round Barrow Point, into and out of the lagoon and along the North Alaskan Slope. There were advantages in all the delays, as two boats who had left before us from Nome had a bad time with ice here but it had cleared by this time. On the other hand one big disadvantage of the North Alaskan slope is that there is nowhere to hide and an

easterly gale was forecast. All I could think of doing was to go down to Barter Island and see whether we could find shelter there.

It proved difficult and in the end we ran westwards for six miles and hid behind a gravel bank and waited it out for two more days. Steph who wanted to absorb as much of the Arctic as possible was very disappointed when I said we would have to miss out Herschel Island, with its old whaling station and even a sauna if you could collect enough driftwood for a fire. But another easterly gale threatened so we hurried on to Tuktoyaktuk, where we had a difficult time. Nobody would give us or sell us oil for the engine. In the end the Mayor found a five gallon drum of synthetic oil and in spite of my manual saying mineral oil we had to take it, at \$175 CAN!



Bathurst Point was shielded by a long huge sheet of pack ice coming down from Amundsen Gulf. Eventually we found a way through and continued on through Snowgoose Channel between Bathurst and Baillie Island (plenty to tell you here...) At Dease Strait we deployed our underwater camera to film the fauna and flora on the seabed for a scientist back home as requested, and so made our way to Cambridge Bay. Here we at last met arctic guru David Scott Cowper in his specially designed mean machine *Polar Bound*. We had been trying to meet for ages. Also a couple of Australian lads and an Anglo-Irish crew who respectively were trying to transit the NW Passage in a 22ft dinghy and an ocean type rowing boat. Fortunately both crews had decided to abort at Cambridge Bay!

The skipper soon began to hassle the crew as Victoria Strait was open. This would save us at least a hundred miles though it did mean missing out the sea strait between King William Island and the mainland, the last piece in the jigsaw John Rae had discovered. The Tasman-

ian Islands were not friendly this time, Bellot Strait was. But now we were stuck at Fort Ross, with a huge sword of ice stretching down Prince Regent Inlet and a strong north wind. Eight nail biting days later — were we going to get out before winter? — we were able to weave through eight-ten miles of ice and made it to Lancaster Sound.



An enforced stay in Arctic Bay and Tay Bay and we made it to Aasiaat in Greenland to leave the boat there for the winter. It had been a close run thing.



All's Well at Clestrain

For a long time I have thought, 'Wouldn't it be lovely if there were a well inside The Hall of Clestrain.' This thought oft followed me when I was in the basement. Here it was that the various kitchen and domestic downstairs work took place. A well there would make perfect sense and be such a benefit to the hard-working staff.

The tiny 'room' under the grand steps from outside up to the front door always looked to me like a candidate for such a well. It is damp down there. An old mangle had been chucked in there decades ago, and it is a good, out-of-the-way place.

One sunny afternoon, light streaked in through a hole under one of the steps. It shone onto a beam, which straddled the width of the little room. This shaft of light showed lots of marks as if a rope had been dragged over it. 'Yes!' I thought. 'A well is beneath that spar.'

When showing folk round, I did point it out, but didn't go down into the space. But in the autumn of 2019 I took a visitor there. She had shown such interest in what the John Rae

Society was achieving and was keen to see The Hall. When we got to the undercroft beneath the front stairs, the light wasn't so good. I crept into that crypt and just touched where the rope marks showed. Merely the tiny, gentle pressure from my finger sent the 'beam' spinning! I was amazed. I thought the beam was set solid! But it wasn't. I looked at the ends of the great spindle and they were trimmed into neat pencil points, which fitted snugly into the stonework.



Photo by JohnPeterWelburnABIPP

That beam had probably not spun for a century!

I knew there was another well, which Ivan Craigie had found with his digger. This was at the rear of where the North Pavilion stood. It will have served the workers there. But to discover one within the Hall was wonderful.

Just at this point of discovery, Ivan came into the basement. I showed him. He said he'd never been aware of a well there. But he did point out in the dark right hand corner a very old metal bucket. Could this vessel have swung from that roped beam in days gone by?



Naturally, I was really pleased. This discovery had made my month.

I returned some time later. Sadly, the beam had dropped. Its ends were rotted and the finer points couldn't bear its own weight, so gravity took its toll, but not before the revolving, once rope-bound spar, had told its story.

The spar now rests on a pipgen within the basement. It requires scrutiny from a wood expert and should probably be subjected to an electronic scan. This will reveal a lot of information about the

thickness and nature of the rope that wound round it. When this covid-19 crisis is over, that is another thing we must see to.

When it comes to doing the internal archaeology of The Hall of Clestrain, this will prove to be a most interesting area of research. It will reveal a lot about the everyday life below stairs, and one never knows just what has been chucked down a well!

Andrew Appleby

From 'Erebus' to Orkney

Eighteen months ago the names Michael Palin, Andrew Appleby, HMS Terror, Dr John Rae, Franklin and Stromness, had no links to my everyday life at all. This situation changed because of our love of sailing and owning a boat on the Isle of Bute.

The journey from our home in the Dales to the marina could be tedious so we started listening to Audible books. Sir Michael Palin's book *Erebus* told the story of the event that captured the nation's interest following the disappearance of

the ill-fated Franklin expedition to find the North West Passage.

We listened to the remarkable story of HMS Erebus and her sister ship HMS Terror. I like to build model ships and railways and suggested that Father Christmas might just have a model kit of *Erebus*. A real surprise it was to find a superb kit of her sister ship HMS Terror. More reading and a desire to see where the expedition had called in and taken on fresh water in Stromness led us to a four week visit to Orkney in December 2019.

We were truly smitten by everything about the island and particularly its people. We learnt about John Rae and his quests for answers to Franklin's fate; that Franklin had possibly visited the Raes' house prior to departure. We saw Rae's statue in Stromness and Login's fresh water well, and Rae's memorial in the Cathedral. The museum in Stromness had an exceptional presentation about Rae and his Arctic exploits. It also had many models of sailing ships and my fingers itched to start on mine.

Our most outstanding visit was the result of meeting Andrew Appleby and we told him about my model. That literally opened the door and we were offered a tour of Cles-train with Andrew himself. We promptly became members of the Society and I promised Andrew some photographs of my HMS Terror when completed.



Ken's model of HMS Terror

It has taken nearly 3 months of patient work. Sometimes, with the prospect of making 140 identical blocks and tackles, and then having to fit them, and many other intricate jobs, I have had to walk away, take a deep breath, and start anew. When laying the many deck planks I would think that Franklin would have walked on the real deck when inter-ship visits took place. When I fitted the ship's bell I thought I have seen the real thing on the sea bed in the video of the wreck of *Terror* found in 2016. When

Erebus and *Terror* were moored in Stromness Franklin possibly had walked the same floors of the house we walked on with Andrew. As I worked on the model I would picture Login's Well and the flagged streets of Stromness. I considered my task nothing compared to the restoration of Clestrain House. So I would continue building with renewed energy.

So a simple solution to passing the time on the motorway, and a marvellous book, resulted in another model for the shelf and our acquaintance with remarkable people.

Ken Hack

News from Members

1. Visiting Clestrain

John Rae was always an inspiration to me. I grew up in Canada, travelling regularly to Nunavut and studying northern history — so his name popped up over and over. I got my first in-depth history lesson when I tackled Ken McGoogan's *Fatal Passage*. I devoured it. And then, I began to look more

closely at the maps that I had pored over as a young person.

I first set foot on Orkney as a teenager in 1995. I fell in love with the windswept hills and was captivated by the human history of the islands. I was especially keen on understanding the connection between Orkney and Canada—exciting adventures embarked upon by the Hudson Bay Company and many a fine whaling ship.

In 2006, I joined my father and a few family friends, renting a vehicle in search of the islands' best fish and chips and the family home of John Rae. Of course, we knew of the Hall of Clestrain, and had been forewarned of the state of the building: deserted and crumbling. I remember driving down the long road to the shoreline and seeing the dilapidated building grow large on our approach. My lasting impression of that first visit is the smell. Abandoned. We poked about the basement, assessing the condition, marvelling that such an important homestead had fallen into such disrepair. We strolled the shore of Salthouse Bay and reflected on the significance of the place and the importance of the great

Orcadian explorer and his early years.

This past June, I had the opportunity to visit the Hall of Clestrain again. This time, I came with my own two young girls—Charlotte and Islay—and the group of intrepid adventurers aboard Adventure Canada’s biennial Scotland Slowly expedition cruise. As visitors, we were not alone; we had a host of fabulous Orcadians greet us to share their love of the Hall of Clestrain. We learned about the architecture and the fundraising efforts undertaken by the John Rae Society. The homestead felt a world apart from my first visit; much work still has to be done, but the love and dedication of a small but mighty group was palpable. Like Adventure Canada, the John Rae Society takes great care to preserve and safeguard this historical treasure.

It was a proud moment for me to bring our guests to this place. To acknowledge the great skill and ambition of John Rae by paying homage to the place where he lived, where he no doubt nurtured his desire to explore and laid the foundation for his resourcefulness. It was personally rewarding to,

twelve years later, return to a place that now conjured sentiments of rejuvenation and triumph, where there once was melancholy.

Cedar Bradley Swan, CEO Adventure Canada (*written in 2018*)



Cedar with her younger daughter, Islay, at Clestrain in 2018. Photo by Mike Beadell

2. New member, **Jan Emil Kristoffersen**, writes from Norway:

My reason for joining the John Rae society is to support your efforts to restore the Hall of Clestrain and to keep the memory of Dr. John Rae alive for future generations. He was a true hero. My interest in John Rae is part of a lifelong fascination of the heroic age of Arctic and Antarctic exploration, ever since I stood on

the the deck of the *Fram* as a five year old kid in 1958. I am also attached to Scotland, having spent my first years of life near its borders in Newcastle, and then in Glasgow (Milngavie and Kirkintilloch). Rae's ability to learn from the Inuit, and his obviously enormous physical strength and stamina, combined with academic skills as a surgeon, is an impressive combination of virtues only to be envied. I have been to Orkney once and have seen the wonderful John Rae memorial inside the St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, but I have not yet managed to visit the Hall of Clestrain. It is definitely on my list! I wish the JRS all the best in your restoration efforts and look forward to follow the progress!

3. David Aggett wrote to tell us that:

As a member of the Bridge Ward Club in the City of London at the church of St Magnus the Martyr, he learned of St Magnus Cathedral and St Magnus Kirk on Egilsay. In 1938 the three parishes collaborated in erecting a stone cairn on the highest point of Egilsay. David visited this over 20 years ago and seeing John Rae's memorial in

St Magnus cathedral and his grave in the kirkyard, became inspired by the Arctic explorer who 'lived like an eskimo and dressed accordingly'.



David (on left) with friends by the cairn on Egilsay

Originally a member of the Friends of the Orkney Boat Museum, he has been a member of the John Rae Society from the start and is a staunch and generous supporter.

JRS Explorer Badges

Recently the John Rae Society commissioned the making of a number of badges for the local scout troop, the John Rae Explorers. The funding for this

came from one of our Patrons, Michael Palin, the famous TV personality, traveller and of course one of the Monty Python team. The scout troop decided a couple of years ago to rename themselves the 'John Rae Explorers' and have been active in helping us out at our open days at the Hall. Last June a young lad, Isaac, had his investiture at the Hall, (<https://www.johnraesociety.com/investiture-at-the-hall/>) at his request, and after this Davie Reid, a former Trustee and a very active member, suggested that it would be great if we could produce a badge for them. We decided to let the kids themselves design the badge and after adding our logo a design was agreed.



These were then embroidered by LOGO Orkney (<https://www.facebook.com/LOGO.Orkney/>) and, because of the sponsorship from Michael Palin, these are now given to any new member of the John Rae Explorers. The involvement of the younger generation in our project is

something all the Trustees feel strongly about encouraging and perhaps some of these young explorers will take up the baton of the John Rae Society in the years to come !

Mark Newton

Completion of the New House at Clestrain 1769

At the Archive Day last year in Orkney Library (see *issue no. 9*) the JRS chairman Norman Shearer began studying a document from the Sheriff's Court which is an account for the measuring of and all the carpentry work at Clestrain. It is described as an 'Account of the Measure of Patrick Honyman of Graemsay's new house at Clestrain' and dated 13th September 1769. I offered to complete a transcription of this document but have not finalised it as the Archive is currently closed and I need to check some details with the archivists. The following is a resumé of information gleaned from the article.

The account lists, floor by floor, measurements of the rooms, all the woodwork, windows and some items of furniture. It gives exact lengths of wood (in feet and

inches) and the cost per foot, the amount of putty (in pounds) and the number of lozens (panes of glass) used in the windows. It also refers to separate rooms partitioned off by the carpenter. He was working to a plan which is described as a 'sketch'. Thus we learn that on the ground floor (or basement) there were four rooms (kitchen, parlour and two others) a milk house and a wine cellar, in addition to a lobby and a passage. There were seven sash windows and a light above the entrance. The doors had double architraves and the carpenter put in a clothes press (cupboard) and another one for books and papers, the latter fitted with shelves. There was also a small press above the parlour door.

The first (or ground) floor contained a lobby, a drawing room, a dining room and a 'grain' room. The latter term is something of a puzzle but is most likely to refer to a finish on the walls rather than to a granary!¹ There were nine windows on this floor, with shutters, and a light above the front door. The dining room had a press and there appear to have been five fireplaces.

On the second floor, which also had nine windows, six internal doors suggests a number of bedrooms, with apparently four fireplaces.

The next floor (attic) had fewer windows (five) but most notably a circular window above the front door. The existence of this window validates the theory that the Hall once had a pediment (as shown in the drawing on the front cover of this newsletter).



Extract from the document showing entry about the circular window ²

We know that a fierce gale in the 1790s damaged the roof and it seems probable that the decision was made then not to replace the pediment. As anyone who has been to Clestrain will know, it is located in an extremely windy spot! Residents of the Hall may have discovered that architecture designed in Edinburgh² was not suitable for Orkney. This floor had three skylights.

Reference to a 'garret floor', skylights and the roof of a tympany (a triangular space forming the centre of a pediment) further supports the original pediment theory.

Outside there were 'wings' nowadays referred to as 'pavilions', with casement windows, doors, fireplaces and staircases. There were also byres and stables. The stables



Extract from the document showing entries about the 'wings' ³

had a 33' long rack and two skylights. A pigeon house had a small cupola on top of it.

For furnishing the house the carpenter supplied tables, beds, 'screw' beds, ten foot ladders and washing boards.

Alexander Stewart who submitted his expenses charged 2/6 for overnight



Extract from the document showing entry about the pigeon house³

stays in Kirkwall and 1/6 for boat freight and horse hire from Holm to Kirkwall. Horse hire from Kirkwall to Claistron (*sic*) was also 1/6 and his half freight from Clestron (*sic*) was 2/6. We have to remember that boat travel then was often preferable to going overland, just as John Rae's usual method of travel from Clestrain to Stromness was by boat.

¹Grain' historically referred to Scarlet Grain a red dye made from crushed insects and used from Classical times.

² ¹Gayfield House in New Town, Edinburgh, built in 1764, is remarkably similar to Clestrain and if not designed by the same architect surely comes from the same set of designs.

³All extracts reproduced with kind permission from Orkney Archive

Photos by JohnPeterWelburnABIPP

Fiona Gould

Where is Clestrain's Garden?

I was amazed and intrigued by what looked like an enormous walled garden at Clestrain, and interested to find out more, so I enrolled for the Garden History course at the Botanic Garden Edinburgh in 2015. I had hoped the course would give me the skills needed to do the relevant research. Now, three years after receiving my diploma, I am little the wiser - about Clestrain at least.

I did spend time in Kirkwall's Archive and found some treasures but nothing that talked about the 'high dykes' as a garden. Not in the document outlining the requirements of the house build, not in an inventory when it changed hands in the 19th century. And although it appears on the old maps it is never referred to as a garden. People have assumed it was a walled garden but as yet I have no evidence.

A walk round the walls and through the garden added to the questions but offered few answers. There are niches in the mid points of the walls, a common decorative feature in an historic garden allowing the placement of a small sculpture

for example — yet no gate wide enough to let a cart in. This practical element would seem crucial in the management of a garden of this size. Talking of size, the ground seems rather large to furnish the needs of a modest household like Clestrain's surely? And as the Orkney wind swept over the ten feet high walls, it would have hit the middle of the garden at some speed — making the central area effectively useless for flowers or vegetables.

There is evidence of some gardening however. The remains of a 4' wall runs from east to west separating off about one fifth of the land. Towards the north-east corner of this space is a depression in the soil surrounded by a line of stones which was a pond. (Mr Craigie, owner of Clestrain Farm, noted that his father, arriving in 1925, remembers it.) And some fruit trees still grow on the south-facing wall. Maybe that area was all that was ever formally gardened?

The treasures I mentioned at the start are two letters I found in the Archive from John Rae senior to Watt of Skail (Breckness). The first from 1829 includes a list of 12 apple varieties he recommends as

good in Orkney - and in particular the 'Hawthorn dean and Keswick Codlin'. He also suggests a particular pear, saying that it is, 'the only one that produces well here — at any rate of those in the garden'. In the second letter of 1832 Rae senior is again writing to Watt saying, 'I have cut all the gooseberry bushes that can well be spared...If you can at any time spare a day there are several things you might wish to have [from the garden]'

So Rae senior was a gardener of some knowledge who knew what does in Orkney. I just wish I knew for sure where all that gardening was happening!

Caroline Beaton, Holmlea, Orphir, Orkney

Caroline Beaton is a local resident with a keen interest in gardening and archive research.

JRS Collage for NHS

Andrew Appleby's grandchildren, Inga, Angus and Hamish designed this collage for the NHS on behalf of the JRS. They have also posed some questions for you:

1. In what colours are the children's names hidden?
2. How many Easter eggs are there?
3. What are the colours on Mr Tumble the clown's shirt?
4. In what colour is Peter Rabbit hiding?
5. How many green stars are there?
6. How many pom-poms are there?



Thoughts during 'Lockdown'

March 2020 will forever be known as the time that Britain went into lockdown. When faced with such troubling times as these, it is hard to see a way forward. It is as though a huge wall has been placed in front of us and there appears to be no way around it - it stretches as far as the eye can see and beyond - just miles and miles of obstacles and uncertainty.

Every day is different, and the conditions are changing faster than we can keep up with. You wake up and the situation has changed drastically from what it was when you closed your eyes just hours before. These really are strange times.

We should ask ourselves: what would John Rae do in a situation like this? This may seem a bit extreme, but perhaps the situation that we find ourselves in is not all that different from stepping out into the treacherous unknown of the Arctic for the first time.

We are facing a long journey that, for now, seems impossible. The wall of obstacles that we are faced with, perhaps, prompts many of the same emotions and thoughts that Rae would have had while looking out at the vast frozen wilderness that is standing in his way, like a vicious army, ready to fight.

The task that Rae had sounds simple on paper: map area of coast from A to B. This sounds like a relatively straight-forward objective until you start thinking about what it actually entails: pain, suffering, mental torment for days, weeks, months and

years. Our task is to 'stay home'. Sounds simple enough, but I'm sure I don't need to tell you that it quickly becomes far more complex than just that. I, for one, can certainly draw some comparisons.

John Rae, a man of resilience, determination and adaptability would assess this situation carefully and think about all possible outcomes and what the best approach would be to tackle the task at hand and to get through to the other side. He would not give up hope and he would delve deep to call upon his inner strength. He would see the goal at the end, take a deep breath, put his head down slowly, turn his shoulder to the wind and push forward with supreme determination.

If there was ever a time to be like John Rae, then it is now. Adapt to changes; do not fight them. Take help from others and all pull together – now is not the time to be conceited. Draw upon your inner strength; your explorer, adventurer, hunter and survivor.

James Grieve