

President's Report 2020 to 2021

30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

***John Rae Birthday Event.***

Due to the COVID restrictions, our John Rae birthday gathering on the 30<sup>th</sup> September was severely reduced to two trustees, a libation and displays of autumn flowers.

***Birthday Draw.***

The arrangements for the John Rae Birthday Draw, dinner and Auction at Sheila Fleet's Kirk Restaurant had to be abandoned. The draw was done by myself and my wife Sigrid at our home. All winners were recorded. Recipients from Canada to Canterbury were delighted.

***Road Planning.***

On the 16<sup>th</sup> October our planning application for our new road access to the north side of The Hall of Clestrain was formally accepted. This has now been granted. Many thanks to Neil Kermod and Karl Cooper.

***Winter Talks.***

Our series of winter talks, organised by Fiona Gould and James Grieve, were a great success. The really sad bit is that scheduled speaker, Ian Waddel died very suddenly, so we regrettably abandoned that lecture date.

***Arctic Library.***

Mr John Ramwell kindly donated his lifetime's collection of around 400 Arctic books. Some of them are signed rarities. JRS is extremely grateful for his generous gesture. They are currently in safe storage at EMEC. These will form a valuable future library for Arctic researchers.

***The John Rae Challenges.***

The Fundraising Working Group had the idea of John Rae Challenges. Fiona Gould wrote her History of Clestrain, Bernie Bell maintained a period of silence, Liz MacInally a cycling challenge. Several other successful challenges, including sea swimming, a 'Kilt Walk' and 'Rowing The North West Passage' were achieved; all raising funds and the profile of The John Rae Society

***Conservation plan.***

On the 1<sup>st</sup> June, our conservation plan went live. More of this from Sandra Deans.

***Archaeology.***

Our excavations were limited this year due to sudden other commitments of volunteers. However, they were redesigned to answer and ask several questions. The Hall of Clestrain seems to have been built in a vast building pit or terrace. This we wanted to find the depth of. We removed a section of the 1850 drain when there was a considerable makeover of The Hall and grounds. The retaining wall around the hall was erected at this time and the terracing filled in behind this wall.

A new Northern entrance with stone steps down to The Hall was built at the same time as the massive drain, which went along the north facade. Then the north courtyard was filled over and levelled to cover the drain. We wanted to establish the depth of the sequence of layers down to the original build. The large drain was built on a line of beautifully fashioned gutter stones. Behind them was a flag pathway, which led to the west corner and turned along the west gable. This pathway may well have gone all round the hall.

The stone gutter, we feel is of the 1769 build and John Rae will have been familiar with it. The threshold he knew will have been very close to that level. To establish whether this drain feature was original to the site, we dug below its level by 16cm into layers of midden infill. This stone gully drain must have been later than the original building of The Hall of Clestrain. We have more work to do to establish that date.

We examined the East wall of the West Pavilion by excavation. It showed the walls of the pavilion going deeper than previously imagined. After accurately recording the 1950's flagstone floor within, we removed half a broken slab and dug beneath. It was laid on shore shingle. Various sherds of Victorian and early 20<sup>th</sup> century pottery came to light in layers of midden beneath. We probed deep below with my special stick to a probable stone surface. This seems to be over two feet down.

It is certain that the north courtyard of The Hall of Clestrain looked very different in John Rae's time than it does now.

The Society is extremely grateful to Paul Johnson for directing the dig, and Gail Drinkall for dealing with the finds and of course the other volunteers.

We had two open days where over eighty folk visited and saw the excavations. Everyone enjoyed their experience, donated and some joined JRS.

### ***Edrington Trust.***

This trust owns Highland Park Distillery along with the Robertson Trust. Every year when Highland Park employees are not actively distilling, they do charitable works. This year we were so lucky, as the team had time to infill our excavations. They also cleaned out all the accrued pigeon guano from within The Hall from top to bottom. They removed the rubble from some partial demolition of the pig pens in the ground floor. They strimmed around the hall to make it tidy for the open days and also cleaned out the concrete shed we own. This has made it into an ideal storage space.

The Society is immensely grateful!

### ***Land Funds.***

The Cuminga Trust promised a further £2,500 donation towards the one acre of the additional land they purchased for JRS.. This was to be given to us after a school programme to come up with suggestions of names for the acre. North Walls Primary School had borrowed the John Rae box and this inspired them to choose names, which the Cuminga trust is considering. They completed their payment, so now we are very close to paying the remainder of the sum due.

### ***Graveside Ceremony.***

Our Lord Lieutenant, Elaine Grieve, gave a moving address to the company and the piper did so well in honouring John Rae. Libations were made as the attendees meditated the man.

Andrew Appleby,

President JRS.