



The
John Rae
Society

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Peter Warren Dease 1788-1863

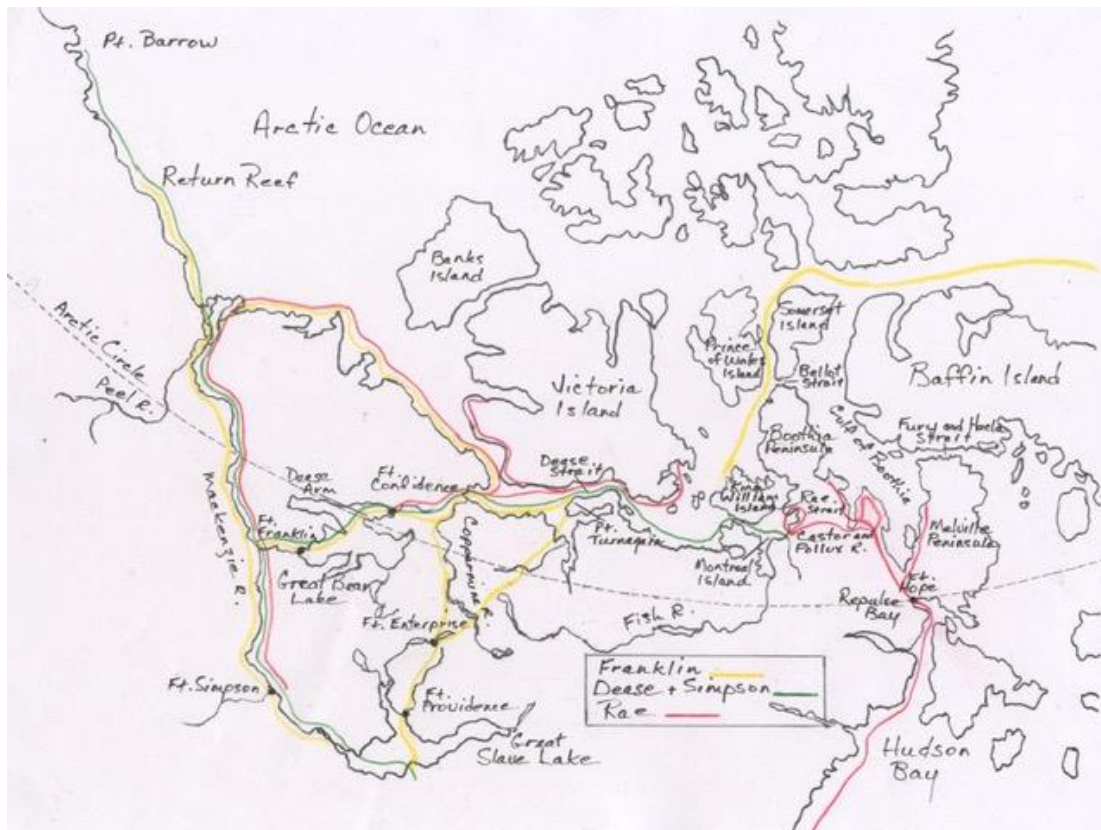
I have warm memories of a visit to Mainland, Orkney, in the fall of 2022. Along with the beauty and sites of the island, I was captivated by the deep history of the Hudson's Bay Company in Orkney, highlighted throughout Stromness and in the local museum. That history resonated with me because of my Canadian family connections with the HBC. Andrew Appleby, president of the John Rae Society, further piqued my interest and kindly suggested that I contribute an article to the Society newsletter. The story that may be of interest to readers is that of Peter Warren Dease, my third-great-uncle, a Canadian-born Hudson's Bay Company fur trader and Arctic explorer. His expeditions to survey and map extensive sections of the north coast of North America between 1837 and 1839 bridge the overland quests of the better-known explorers Sir John Franklin in the 1820s and John Rae in the 1840s and 1850s.

Peter Warren Dease was the son of Dr. John Dease, from Ireland, who was a Loyalist settler in Upper Canada and a colonial administrator of Indian affairs. He married Jane French, reportedly a Caughnawaga Mohawk. Peter Warren was one of four of Dr. Dease's sons who had careers in the fur trade. First employed by the XY company and the North West Company out of Montreal, they joined the Hudson's Bay Company when it amalgamated with the North West Company in 1821. John Warren Dease (1783-1830), my third-great-grandfather, was a chief trader and manager of Fort Colville in the Columbia Territory when he died. I descend from him and his 'country wife' Geneviève Beignoit.

Peter Warren entered the fur trade at the remarkable age of 13. He had several postings in the northwest in the Athabaska and Mackenzie Districts. In 1821 he was appointed a chief trader, taking charge of the HBC post at Fort Chipewyan. There he met and gave logistical advice to John Franklin who was preparing for his first overland expedition to map the continental coast. Franklin's expedition was one of the many British Admiralty missions to find a Northwest Passage, and his orders were to explore east from the mouth of the Coppermine River. Headquartered at Fort Enterprise, Franklin's party travelled as far as Point Turnagain on the Kent Peninsula. However, due to lack of experience in the North that success was tainted by a disastrous return journey resulting in starvation and significant loss of life (11 of 20 men). Franklin's second overland expedition in

1824 was therefore planned to have more on-the-ground support from the HBC. Franklin specifically requested the services of Peter Dease, who had impressed him with his expertise on the region and vital relationships with the indigenous people. George Simpson, colonial governor of the HBC, agreed that Dease was the best qualified man for the job. He was officially assigned to Franklin's expedition to establish and manage the base camp and to supply provisions, guides, and hunters. Dease built Fort Franklin on an old NWC site on southwestern Great Bear Lake and over-wintered in 1825 and 1826 with Franklin and his party, which included Dr. John Richardson and George Back. Franklin named Dease Inlet on the lake after his colleague, Richardson named Dease River that flowed east out of the lake, and Back painted a watercolour portrait of Dease's son James (Jacques or Toutout), which is now in our national archives. The Dease family, consisting of Peter's 'country wife' Elizabeth Chouinard and some of their children, lived at the fort to help provide essential assistance – at times intersecting with Peter's brother Charles Dease, a trader who was posted to Fort Good Hope. Franklin's voyages ended successfully with exploration of the coast west to Return Reef, 280 kilometres short of Point Barrow. The HBC Council made Dease a chief factor because of his vital contributions to the Franklin expedition. By 1830, he was superintendent of the vast New Caledonia district with headquarters at Fort St. James, in what is now northern British Columbia. Segments of the coast remained unexplored, and in 1836 George Simpson entrusted Peter Dease to lead a HBC sponsored expedition to map two missing links along the continental coast that Franklin's team had not reached: Point Barrow in the west and Boothia in the east. In 1834 George Back had explored a small section of the coast at Chantrey Inlet via the Great Fish River, but he had been forced back by ice and the weather. Over three seasons, Dease and his team achieved outstanding success covering vast distances of unknown territory. Travelling overland and by boat, they reached beyond Return Reef to Point Barrow during the first year. From Fort Confidence, a base built by Dease on Great Bear Lake, over the next two summers they explored the intricacies of the coastline east to Point Turnagain and continued to the southwestern coast of the Boothia Peninsula. There they named the river at the farthest point of their journey the Pollux and Castor after their two small boats. They found a supply cache left by George Back on Montreal Island in the Chantrey Inlet. Turning northwest through Dease Strait, they mapped and named a

significant portion of the south coast of Victoria Land before heading back to the Coppermine.



Thomas Simpson (1808-1840), cousin of George Simpson, was the junior officer under Dease, who was twenty years his senior. Arriving in Rupert's Land from Scotland in 1829 to serve as secretary to George Simpson, Thomas was well-educated, arrogant and ambitious. The primary account of the Dease-Simpson expeditions was written by Simpson, *Narrative of the Discoveries on the North Coast of America: Effected by the Officers of the Hudson's Bay Company During the Years 1836-39*, in which he disparages Dease and downplays his contributions. Dease, although clearly a modest man, was highly accomplished and well-loved by colleagues. Charles Ross, a trader serving in New Caledonia, wrote of Dease: 'Mr. Dease I found a most amiable, warm-hearted sociable man—quite free from that haughtiness and reserve, which characterises those who have little to recommend them...'. Unlike Simpson, Dease was accustomed to northern travel and life in the remote forts he managed; he spoke several indigenous languages, and cultivated effective peaceful relationships among traders, trappers, hunters and company officials. His own recently recovered journals of the expeditions were

published in 2002 in a scholarly tome by William Barr: *From Barrow to Boothia, the Arctic Journal of Chief Factor Peter Warren Dease 1836-1839*. Dease's account provides a more insightful and pragmatic look at the logistics and perils of the three years of Arctic travel. Simpson certainly pushed boundaries with his determination and recklessness, but Barr makes it clear that without Dease's competent leadership the gruelling three-year long expeditions would likely have failed. Simpson met a violent death in June 1840 in North Dakota while enroute to Britain, in a mysterious, probable murder-suicide with two of his Métis guides. Dease's accomplishments faded in history until Barr's book and now he is receiving the recognition he deserves.

In 1844 the Hudson's Bay Company commissioned John Rae's first expedition, which was to survey the western coast of Boothia from the Castor and Pollux River, the farthest point reached by Dease and Simpson, to the Fury and Hecla Strait, reached by Sir William Parry in 1822. This expedition was based at Repulse Bay, and although Rae made significant discoveries on the east side of Boothia he was unable to cross the peninsula. In preparation for his expedition, Rae was given the narrative and maps of the Dease-Simpson journeys. He refers often to this narrative in his journals and letters to George Simpson. He obviously knew it intimately, frequently noting fine details of their travels which he used for comparison and planning. This is especially evident during the years from 1848 when Rae was centred at Fort Confidence on Great Bear Lake, searching for the lost Franklin expedition.

Within and beyond the written narratives are extensive links between the Rae and Dease-Simpson expeditions. Rae was assisted by men who knew of and had experience with the Dease voyages. During the 1830s, Rae had roomed at Moose Factory with Alexander Simpson, Thomas Simpson's brother, so he knew then of Thomas's current exploits in the Arctic. Alexander was a supporter and promoter of Thomas's accomplishments and ensured that his narrative was published after his death. George Flett, from Birsay in Orkney, was a key contributor to the Dease-Simpson expedition in 1839, officially in the role of middleman. For his 1846 expedition to Repulse Bay, Rae put Flett in charge of a boat as a steersman and regarded him as an invaluable member of his team. Also on his first expedition were the Inuit interpreters Ouligbuck (Ulibbaq), and his son William (Maqqu). Ouligbuck senior had been on the Franklin expedition in 1826 as a translator and

hunter and travelled with Richardson on the coastal survey between the Mackenzie and Coppermine Rivers. Having improved his ability in English, he was assigned to the Dease-Simpson party in early 1839 and participated in the journey to the Castor and Pollux River. Hector Morrison, from Stornoway, Scotland, joined the HBC in 1832, and was a steersman for Dease and Simpson, and was one of five men accompanying Simpson during the final stretch on foot to Point Barrow. From 1848 to 1849, he served with John Richardson and John Rae in the search for Franklin's lost Arctic expedition. And Richardson of course was well acquainted with Peter Dease, having relied on his support during the second Franklin overland expedition.

In 1848 the Admiralty had ordered John Richardson to help search for Franklin and he requested that John Rae serve as second-in-command. Expedition headquarters were at Great Bear Lake in a fort reconstructed from the remains of Fort Confidence. The restored quarters were built by John Bell, Scottish-born HBC trader and explorer. Bell had married Dease's daughter Nancy in 1824 while serving in the Mackenzie District under her father, and he had contact with the Franklin party during its second expedition. Bell explored the Peel River, where he built Fort McPherson in 1840 and served as chief trader at that post until 1845. There is a striking parallel between the HBC appointment of Peter Dease to the second Franklin overland expedition and the appointment of his son-in-law to Richardson and Rae's expedition to find Franklin. Bell led an advance brigade of five boats loaded with forty-five people and supplies from York Factory to Great Bear Lake, overwintering at Cumberland House. He supervised the support at the fort and, assisted by the local indigenous groups, he supplied all the necessary provisions. Richardson, a naturalist, was appreciative of Bell's extensive knowledge of the wildlife and the environment, and his reliance on Bell's advice is apparent in his published narrative. Richardson and Rae developed strong friendships with Bell during their habitation and travels together, and Rae's connection with him continued after the expedition, when he became head of the Mackenzie District and Bell was posted to Fort Liard.

With orders from the Admiralty and HBC, in 1851 John Rae returned to Fort Confidence to continue the search for Franklin's ships. During his explorations that year, on foot and by boat, he surveyed the winding shore of Victoria Land and the islands north of Dease Strait. With close reference to the charts and accounts of

the Dease-Simpson expeditions, he corrected and completed the mapping and naming of the south coast of Victoria Land. He explored the substantial area east of Anderson Bay that they had not reached. From the south-eastern point of Victoria Land he turned north. The southward flow of the current and ice down the east coast of the island convinced him that there was an open strait leading north along Victoria Land, which he named Victoria Strait. We now know that had Rae been able to transit through this strait he would likely have found the remains of Franklin's ships.

The Hudson's Bay Company sponsored Rae's last Arctic expedition in 1853-1854, which was to complete the crossing of Boothia and to explore the western coast north of the Castor and Pollux River. Travelling overland from his base in Repulse Bay, he finally reached the mouth of the Castor and Pollux, where he found the remains of the cairn left by Dease and Simpson in 1839. As he made headway up the coast of Boothia, he concluded that it was a peninsula, resolving a critical geographical issue that previous Arctic explorers had attempted to resolve. Thomas Simpson, from a vantage point near the Castor and Pollux, had suggested there could be a strait across to the Gulf of Boothia, now definitely discounted by Rae. He continued far enough north to ascertain that King William Land was an island separated by a strait from the Boothia Peninsula, solving yet another mystery. Rae Strait became a vital link in a viable passage through Arctic waters. And it was on this final journey that Rae's guide and skilled interpreter, William Ouligbuck, was able to extract from Inuit in the region the undeniable information Rae needed to affirm the tragic fate of Franklin and his men.

Peter Warren Dease was awarded a £100 a year pension from the HBC for the success of his mission (whereas George Simpson received a knighthood) and he retired to Montreal in 1841. John Rae left the company in 1856, but returned to Canada several times for various endeavours, some on contract for the HBC. Although Dease and Rae never met, these two HBC employees and explorers remain connected in history by their Arctic journeys.

Barbara Winters

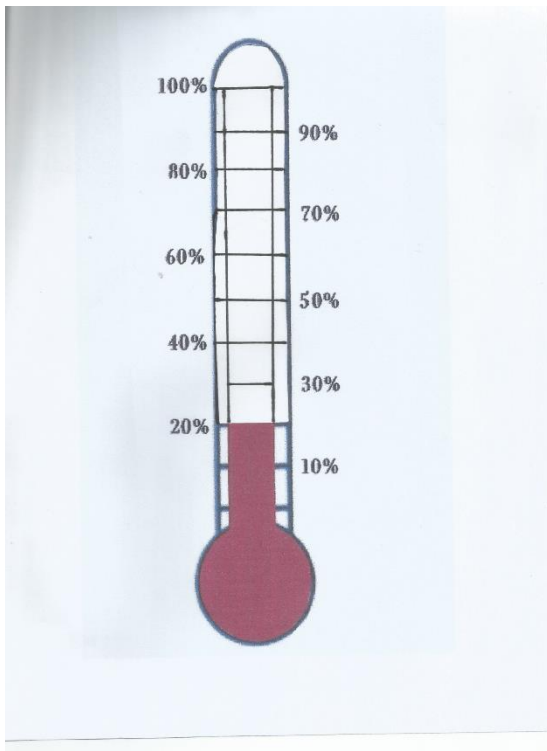
JRS member, Victoria, Vancouver Island

'The Road to The Arctic'

(Or, more immediately, the road to the Hall of Clestrain)

In April this year we launched a fundraising campaign *The Road to the Arctic* to gather funds for a vital access road to the Hall of Clestrain. This will allow essential vehicular traffic to the site from the Orphir Road for construction work.

The target sum is £150,000. For which we have already raised £30,000, thanks to some generous donations and money raised by the president, Andrew Appleby's, swim challenge. We have been promised more donations!



This is the first step towards establishing an Arctic centre at Clestrain, including the restoration of the 18th century Grade II listed house where John Rae spent his childhood.

We are continuing to seek funding for the project in its entirety from heritage funders.

Details of our progress, including donations, can be found on our website: www.johnraesociety.com.

Anyone wishing to donate can do so through the website or by sending a cheque to the Society by post. Those minded to undertake a sponsored challenge should contact Andrew Appleby on 07546 159848.

News in Brief

May We Be Spared to Meet on Earth

This online talk took place on March 9th and was greatly enjoyed by both those giving the talk and their audience. A very lively discussion followed. Sadly, we were unable to record the talk but the speakers, Russell Potter, Mary Williamson and Peter Carney, have kindly given us a copy of the slides with some short notes to accompany them. We will be making these available to those who were unable to attend. (Contact membership@johnraesociety.com)

A New Mantelpiece for Clestrain

Owners of a mantelpiece which originally came from the Hall of Clestrain had offered to return it if a substitute could be made. George Cruikshank of the Orkney Men's Shed worked on a replacement during the years of the lockdown and this has now been installed in Pearl and Frankie Sinclair's home in Stromness while the original has come back to Clestrain. (See below)



For more details of this story please visit the website.

North American branch of the John Rae Society

In December last year David Connell, a new member, enquired about the possibility of a US network to promote the achievements of John Rae and the John Rae Society. I sounded out Martha LaBare, another US member, who was very encouraging. I then contacted the US members (about a couple of dozen) and immediately received a good response from half a dozen or so. One of them (Anne Adams) suggested we should extend the group to include Canadian members and title it the North American group. Some of these, notably the descendants of the Rae family, support the idea of a North American group and all Canadian members are invited to join. Those interested should indicate if they are willing to share email addresses within the group, and suggestions for taking the group forward would be most welcome.

For further information email membership@johnraesociety.com.

Collection of Arctic Plants

In 1856 Sir John Richardson, who together with John Rae had conducted a search for the missing Franklin Expedition in 1847, presented the Linnaean Society in London with a collection of 80 Arctic plants, gathered by John Rae. This collection, known as *Mr Rae's Herbarium*, subsequently disappeared, probably during the 1860s when a number of collections in the Linnaean society were sold or moved elsewhere. JRS member, Janet Ashdown, from the Linnaean Society is eager to find out if anyone knows where it might be.

These plants were identified and classified by members of the Linnaean Society, including Sir William Hooker, to whom Rae also sent botanical specimens collected on his first Arctic journey. (Details are given in *Rae's Arctic Journal*)

The gift is recorded in the Linnaean Society's Presents Book for 4th March 1856 (see entry on next page) and a full list of the plants given in its Botanical Journal for that year.

From the Presents Book

4 Mar 1856 A collection of about 80 species of Arctic plants, collected by Dr John Rae 1813 - 1893 [Orkney botanist, geologist, anthropologist and cartographer. Rae was to become northern Canada's most distinguished explorer, and gained widespread attention by discovering the fate of the expedition by Sir John Franklin FRS FLS]

Presented by Richardson MD FRS FLS, John 1787 - 1865 [Scottish naval surgeon, naturalist and arctic explorer. Travelled with Franklin 1819 -1822 in search of the Northwest Passage during the Coppermine Expedition, as Navy surgeon. Returned with Franklin 1827 on his 2nd Canadian and 3rd. Arctic Expedition, to travel overland to the mouth of the Mackenzie River which flows into the Arctic Sea after 1,738 km. Franklin then went west, whilst Richardson went east to the mouth of the Coppermine River where it flows into the Arctic Sea]

If anyone can suggest where this collection might be found, please contact Janet Ashdown at janet@linnaean.org

As we hope to establish an Arctic Garden at the Hall of Clestrain in the future, information on the arctic plants collected by John Rae is always welcome. Local botanists tell us that some of the genera are known to thrive in Orkney but arctic species would need special conditions.

Archaeology Plan

Tom Addyman of Addyman Archaeology has assisted us in drawing up a detailed archaeology plan which will support the work of restoration at the Hall. He has also compiled a detailed report of the archaeology which has already taken place.

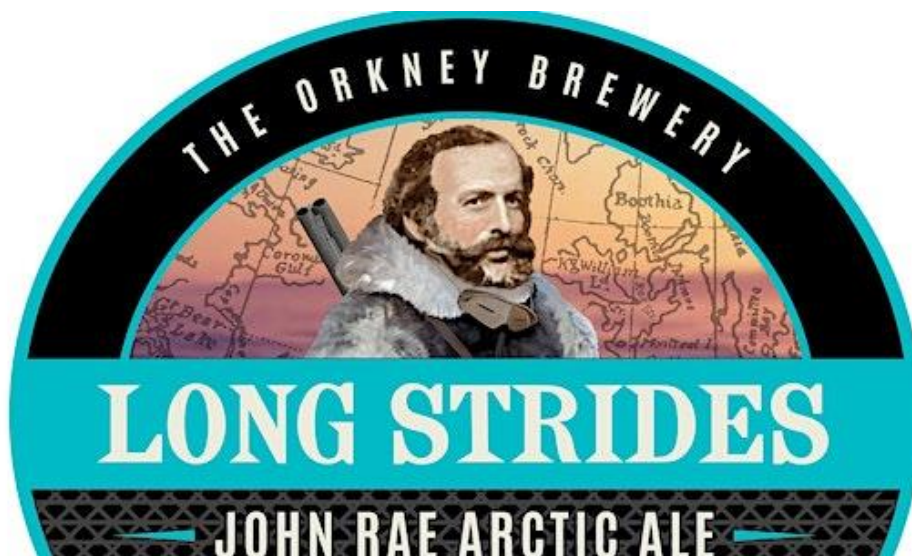
STOP PRESS

We are on the verge of appointing a new Project Manager. Details will follow shortly.

Forthcoming Events

Launch of 'Long Strides', a new beer celebrating John Rae

This will take place at the Orkney Brewery at Quoyloo, Sandwick on Saturday, June 17th from 7.00 to 10.00 p.m. There should be a good attendance.



Registration is required. It will include:

- Live music
- Canapés
- Beer-tasting
- A charity auction
- A Raffle

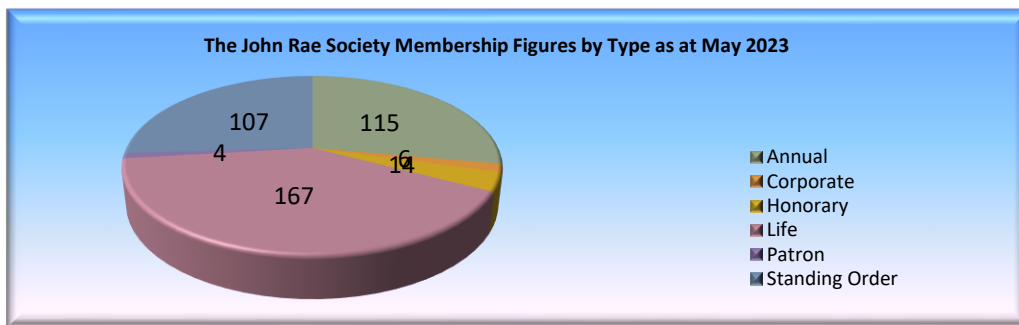
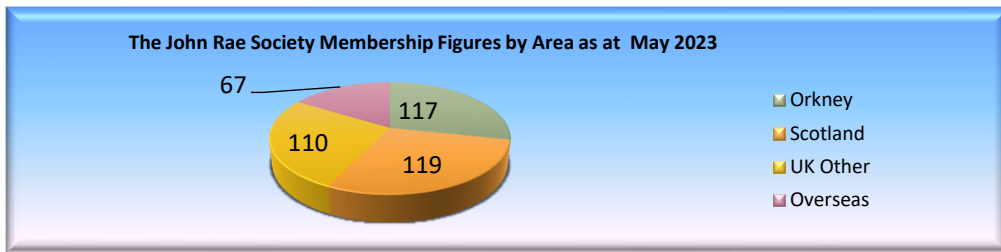
Proceeds will go to the Road to the Arctic Fund

21 Decades: celebrating John Rae's birthday

We always mark John Rae's birthday (September 30th) each year with a graveside ceremony in St Magnus Cathedral kirkyard. This year, as it is 21 decades since his birth in 1813, it will be a larger event with activities in the evening as well as the graveside service at midday. Details to follow in due course.

Membership Report

Membership Type	No.	_	Members by Area	No.	_
Annual	115	28%	Orkney	117	28%
Corporate	6	1%	Scotland	119	29%
Honorary	14	3%	UK Other	110	27%
Life	167	40%	Overseas	67	16%
Patron	4	1%			
Standing Order	107	26%			
Total	413	100%	Total	413	100%



Number of new members joining since		last meeting on 01/05/2023	
Annual	0	Orkney	0
Corporate	0	Scotland	0
Honorary	0	UK Other	0
Life	0	Overseas	0
Patron	0		
Standing Order	0		
Total	0	Total	0

Number of members leaving since		last meeting on 01/05/2023	
Annual	0	Orkney	0
Corporate	0	Scotland	0
Honorary	0	UK Other	1
Life	1	Overseas	0
Patron	0		
Standing Order	0		
Total	1	Total	1

