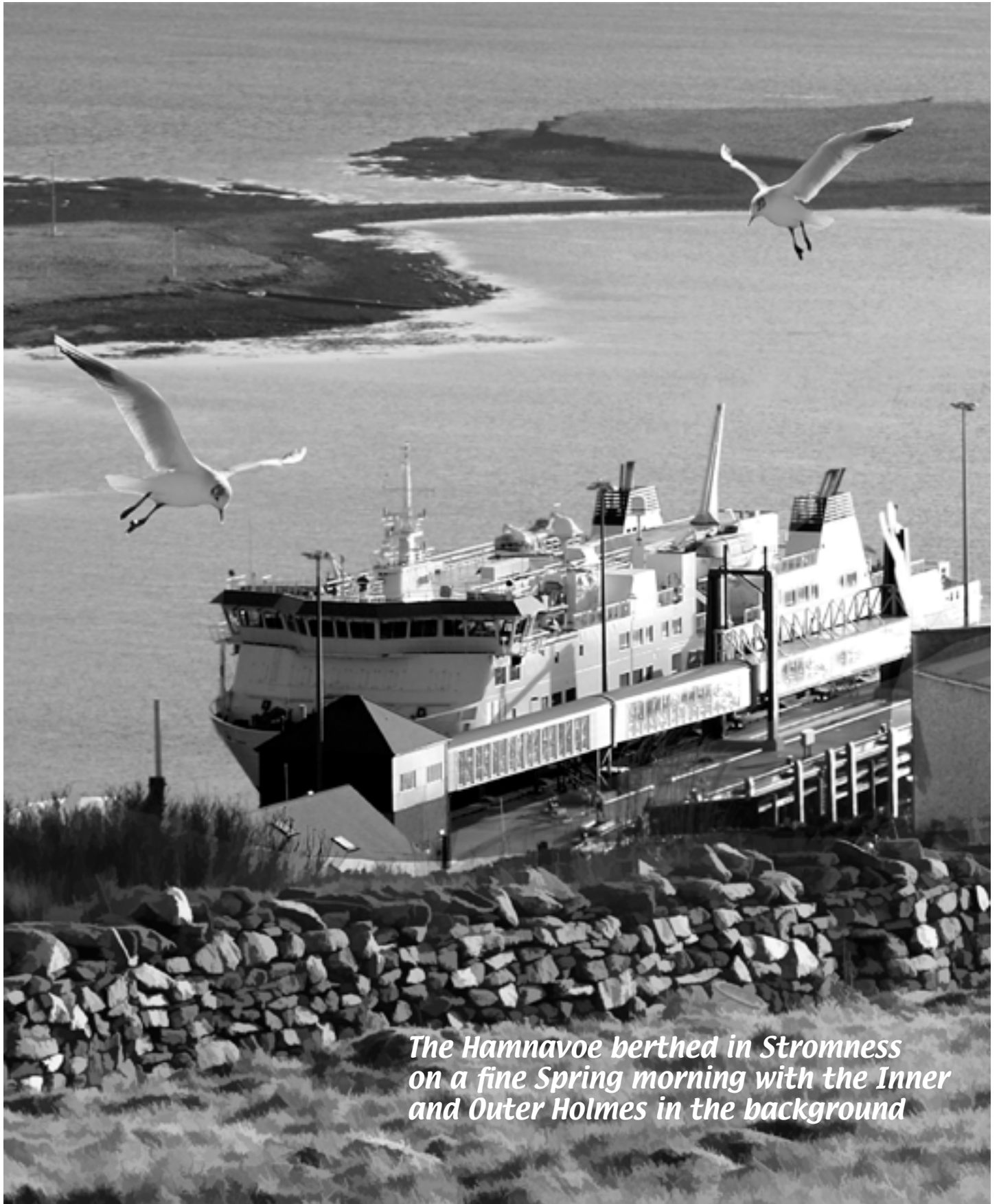




# SIB FOLK NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE ORKNEY FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

ISSUE No 53 March 2010



*The Hamnavoe berthed in Stromness  
on a fine Spring morning with the Inner  
and Outer Holmes in the background*

**ORKNEY  
FAMILY HISTORY  
NEWSLETTER**

Issue No 53  
March 2010

**CONTENTS**

**FRONT COVER**

A spring morning  
in Stromness

**PAGE 2**

From the Chair

**PAGE 3**

TUMBLEDOWN

**PAGES 4, 5 & 6**  
Disecting the 1861  
Walls & Flotta  
Census

**PAGE 7**

Members'  
Photographs  
and comments

**PAGES 8, 9 & 10**  
A family story  
from the Island of  
Cava

**PAGE 11**

Another  
photograph and a  
whale of a tale

**PAGES 12—15**  
A History of  
Fishing in Westray

**PAGES 16, 17, 18**  
Captain Robert  
Swanney's  
Reports to the  
NLB

**PAGE 19**

From Pierowall  
to the Pacific  
Northwest

**PAGES 20,21,22**  
The Island of  
Pharay

**PAGE 22**

More on the East  
Indies Stones of  
Holm Pier

**PAGE 23**

A pat on the back  
for the OFHS

**PAGE 23**

About the Society,  
Memberships etc



## From the chair

*Welcome to our spring magazine. Although we have had some snow and hard frost, Orkney has been luckier than many other places in the UK where flooding and heavy snows have disrupted community life.*

*Our first programmed talk began in February with a talk by Katrina Mainland on "Nicol Spence of Kirkbuster, Birsay". We followed in March with an exploration of "Family History on the Web" through demonstrations by local members on the resources available. The Society recently subscribed to a number of new sites and we are experiencing a greater range of options to satisfy member queries and research. Improved searching for relatives / ancestors in England, USA and Australia is achieving greater results. We will continue to expand our capacity to use these resources for our members' benefit. For Orkney based members who may still be trying to find that ancestor from England, a trip into the office might prove worthwhile.*

*Do you have a particular query that you have not been able to resolve? If so why not let our members help. Use the "Members Board" page on the website or put it in writing to the Society for the next SFN.*

*In June we are planning an excursion across the Pentland Firth for our "Annual Outing" and members are asked to sign-up by telephoning the OFHS Office. Our other programme items are advertised in local papers and on the website.*

*Also in June, the 2010 Annual Conference of the Scottish Association of Family History Societies is being held in Livingston, hosted by West Lothian FHS. If you are interested in attending, check this website link - [http://www.safhs.org.uk/SAFHS\\_Conference.asp](http://www.safhs.org.uk/SAFHS_Conference.asp)*

*Orkney is again hoping to have a stand at the conference exhibition and any mainland-based members will be welcome on the stand during the day.*

*There have been discussions amongst SAFHS members on the threat posed by greater computerisation of records with less emphasis on paper publications. Whilst Orkney FHS is extremely proud of the great website, created by Dave Higgins, we will maintain a balanced approach by still being able to provide paper documents for members who wish to purchase publications. The same information provides the resource on which the website data is achieved. Following a trial usage by a non-member, experienced in family history website use, it was his opinion that Orkney was "ahead of the game" in what it was achieving in making more of its resource information available to its members. Further benefits will accrue over the next months.*

*In respect of your contributions for Sib Folk News, the SFN Editor is appreciative to all those who responded to recent pleas for stories. Please keep them coming, long or short, it's what our newsletter is all about.*

*Best wishes and thankyou for your support.*

*Alan Clouston*

Chairman

# Tumbledown

## FEATURING WEST LINNETDALE

By Alan Clouston – Member No 339

“West Linnetdale” is a small croft house high up the valley of Linna Dale, at the source of the Burn of Croval, in the centre a part of Orphir Parish. It may indeed be the highest located house in Orphir. It has a near neighbour dwelling called Linnadale, occasionally called East Linnetdale. Strangely the position of both dwellings might suggest a reversal of names with West Linnetdale almost appearing to be further east than Linnetdale. On the map they appear directly north-south of each other. There is some suggestion of another ruin further to the west and it may have been the original West Linnetdale. Within the census records, West Linnetdale’s location latterly occurs in district 3, which lies east of the Burn of Croval being the division between district 2 and district 3. From the doorway, with the hills in the rear and both sides, the panoramic view of ScapaFlow lies before you.

If you want to check its location, and have not yet used the online maps of Orkney that were recently made available from the National Library of Scotland, check this link <http://www.nls.uk/maps/os/25inch/view/?sid=75136182>

Its occupation would suggest short-term stays with no consistency of families residing longer than 10 years. To me it was known as “Jessie Thomson’s” – its last long-term resident.



This time we are fortunate to have a photograph of an occupied ‘Tumbledown’— West Linnetdale with Jessie Thomson standing in the doorway.



And, sadly, as the croft house looks today.

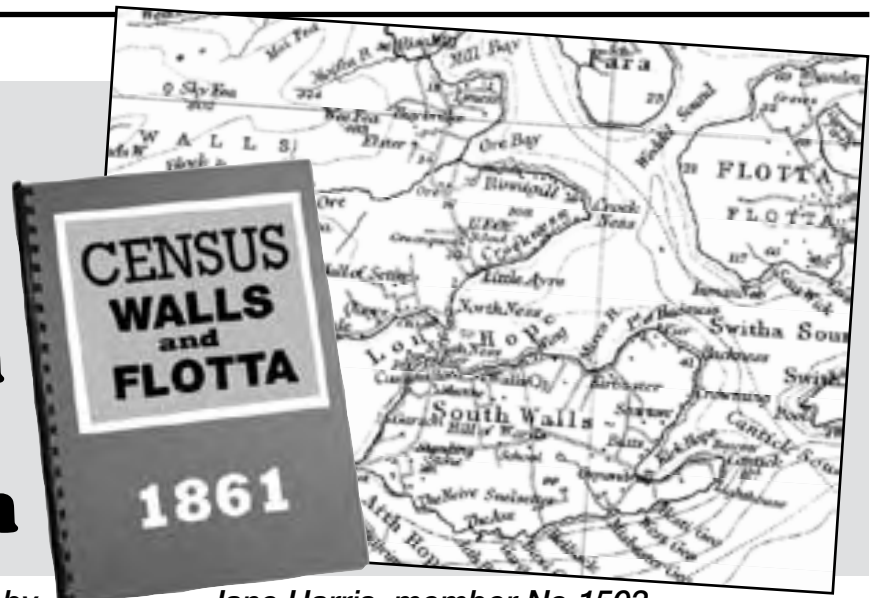
Residents of West Linnetdale	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
Name	age	age	age	age	age	age
George Hay (head) (b. Orphir)	79	-	-	-	-	-
Jane Hay (wife) (b. Orphir) (nee Slater)	70	-	-	-	-	-
John Robertson (beggar) (? Ross-shire)	60	-	-	-	-	-
John Hay (head) (b. Orphir)	-	45	-	-	-	-
Margaret Hay (wife) (b. Orphir)	-	42	-	-	-	-
Margaret (daughter) (b. Orphir)	-	10	-	-	-	-
John (son) (b. Firth)	-	7	-	-	-	-
William Groundwater (head) (b. Orphir)	-	-	25	-	-	-
Helen Groundwater (wife) (b. Gairsay)	-	-	34	-	-	-
Hellen Jane (daughter) (b. Orphir)	-	-	3 mth	-	-	-
Eliza Wards (boarder) (b. Gairsay)	-	-	13	-	-	-
Robert Hay (head) (b. Orphir)	-	-	-	68	-	-
Margaret Hay (wife) (b. Orphir)	-	-	-	65	-	-
John Clouston (son-in-law) (b. Orphir)	-	-	-	34	-	-
Margaret Clouston (nee Hay) (b. Orphir)	-	-	-	33	-	-
Robert W Clouston (grandson) (b. Orphir)	-	-	-	2	-	-
James K Robertson (head) (b. Orphir)	-	-	-	-	41	-
Ann Robertson (mother) (b. Orphir)	-	-	-	-	71	-
Magnus C Brown (head) (B. So Ron)	-	-	-	-	-	35
Ann Brown (wife) (b. Stenness)	-	-	-	-	-	40
Mary Jane Brown (daughter) (b. Stenness)	-	-	-	-	-	7
Annie Brown (daughter) (b. Stenness)	-	-	-	-	-	4

Thanks to everyone who has responded to the previous ‘Tumbledowns’. I know that the editor is grateful for the extra stories that result. If your family is linked to the West Linnetdale residents and you have a story to tell, or if you have further information or questions to ask, please contact me [alan.clouston@virgin.net](mailto:alan.clouston@virgin.net)

# Jane shows how much information you can glean from a census return

Part of the postgraduate project by

Jane Harris, member No 1503



Bare bones, names and dates but none of the flesh of tales, stories, faded photographs and letters. That's how some aspects of genealogy can appear. But what was life like for my ancestors and how typical were their patterns of migration, large families, deaths at sea and so on? From my great-grandfather and his nine siblings, I know of only three male Ross descendants alive now (though I still hope to find more in Australia), none of them in Orkney, let alone North Walls where the 10 young Rosses grew up. Why all the change? Their father was a ferrylooper, like quite a few in Walls, or at least that was my impression from scanning census transcripts.

With all these thoughts in mind, I decided that my project for the Strathclyde University postgraduate certificate in genealogy would look at North Walls and Brims, over a specific period, aiming to get a better understanding of the people, where they came from, where they went and the degree of change in the area's population. This article is based on part of that project.

The 1861 census records the highest population for Orkney and also for Walls and Flotta as a whole parish. With only a very small drop between the 1861 population and that of 1871, before more substantial decline began, this seemed an ideal period to study. My project concentrated on the North Walls and Brims areas. This was for two reasons: all my ancestors came from those parts and, more pragmatically, there was simply not enough time to look at the whole parish.

## Methodology

The first task was to transcribe the 1861 census for enumeration divisions (ED) one and two in the parish of Walls and Flotta. Fara was part of ED1 though with one exception, it was easy to separate the inhabitants of that island. For analysis, I entered the transcription onto a spreadsheet, adapting the presentation of the information in some ways, for example using gender and age columns in place of male age and female age columns. Having transcribed the census data, I was then able to look at birthplaces, occupations and so on.

The second part of the work focused on tracing the 1861 census population through to the 1871 census or an earlier date of death. With almost 600 names, this was quite a laborious task.

There may be another article examining the movements of

the 1861 population but for now I will concentrate on the 1861 snapshot. I use that word advisedly for the census is only a picture of the population on a specific night (7 April 1861 in this case), short term absences are hidden and visitors included. But it is none the less the best source we have for gaining an overview of an area.

Who lived in North Walls and Brims?

Specifically, 330 females and 267 males. Clearly more women than men, with a ratio of almost 1.24 women for every man, compared to 1.17 in Orkney generally and 1.12 in Scotland (Census of Scotland 1861, vol 1 pxx and pxxiii). Even the Scottish figure exceeded that of many European countries and "must tell prejudicially against the prosperity of the Country" (ibid. pxxiii). What hope then for prosperity in North Walls and Brims?

Many of the men were probably at sea and, unless they were in Scottish waters or Scottish ports on census night, they were not recorded. Deaths at sea were also a factor, not least in Shetland where the female to male ratio was 1.42:1 (ibid.).

## What did they do?

Not surprisingly, fisherman was the most common occupation for those recorded in the parish. Of the 200 people in work, 59 or almost 30% were fishermen. 18 of those 59 also stated that they were farmers or farming varying acreages and one was a pilot. The remaining 40 gave no other occupation. A further two men are recorded as farmer and fisherman, though it is impossible to tell whether the order of terms is significant. The next largest group (46) is what I classed as farm workers, that is agricultural or farm labourers, farm servants, ploughmen and dairy maids, occupations where people worked for someone else. Many of these were working for parents or brothers but at least 20 were employed by people beyond the family group, as their relation to the head of the house was usually 'servant'. The farm overseer at Melsetter employed two women (the two dairymaids in all probability) and six men while his equivalent at Manclett employed two men and one woman. The farm manager at Haybreck employed four men. In all three cases, the employees included family members. There were also at least six estate employees: a land agent, two shepherds (both incomers), two gardeners and a gamekeeper (another incomer). ▶

◀There were 26 farmers, almost all tenants of the Melsetter estate. They were mainly small farmers with 12 acres or less. Apart from the three farms with managers or overseers, only North Seatter (later called Greenquoy and now the site of the North Walls School), Lyness and Downtown were thirty acres or more.

For women, the most common occupation was domestic servant. Again, many seemed to be working for other family members, usually a father or brother, but five of the 24 were 'servant' in relation to the head of the house. Another eight were head of the house so it may be that, unless they worked for someone else nearby, they were really housewives.

The remaining occupations are a mixed bag with some real surprises. How did 500 people provide employment for 10 shoemakers? And was one innkeeper really enough (or even the truth)? There are three blacksmiths, three joiners, two coopers, two millers, two grocers and a nurse. While the 16 or so describing themselves as retired might suggest a degree of financial security, the five paupers are a jolt of reality. The two teachers must have had a heavy task with the 99 scholars, though the regularity of their attendance is probably another matter!

#### **Where did they come from?**

Knowing that several of my ancestors came from 'across the Firth' originally, I was curious to know how typical this was. Of the Orcadians, 449 were from Walls itself, a further 13 from Hoy, nine from South Ronaldsay, seven from Kirkwall, six each from Stromness and Orphir with the remainder mainly individuals from a small range of other parishes. The predominant parishes point to the importance of the sea transport.

COUNTY of BIRTH	NUMBER
ABERDEENSHIRE	1
CAITHNESS <sup>1</sup>	77
EAST LOTHIAN	1
FIFE	1
LANARKSHIRE	1
MIDLOTHIAN	3
ORKNEY	499
RENFREWSHIRE	1
ROSS & CROMARTY	3
SUTHERLAND	10

There was no-one from the East Mainland nor the inner north isles living in North Walls and Brims.

The percentage of Orkney-born inhabitants, at just over 83.5%, is noticeably lower than in Orkney as a whole where 91.94% of the population was born in the county, (Brock, 1999 p62). Orkney's percentage is broadly comparable to the other northern counties of Caithness and Ross and Cromarty, slightly higher than Sutherland and lower than Shetland. In contrast, North Walls and Brims are much closer to the percentages for Aberdeen, Argyll, Fife and Inverness. With the possible exception of part of Argyllshire, these are areas where, by reason of geography, a greater in and outflow of population might be expected.

By far the most significant group of incomers is those from Caithness, the main parish being Canisbay. Ap-

<sup>1</sup> For census and registration purposes, the parish of Reay is included with Caithness though it is in the civil county of Sutherland. 12 people were born in Reay.

proaching a third of those born in Caithness and recorded in Orkney in the 1861 census were in North Walls and Brims<sup>2</sup>(Census of Scotland, 1861, vol 2 p330). Since Canisbay includes the island of Stroma, my ancestors were part of this group. What drove or drew them north?

#### **Moving North**

The New Statistical Account of Scotland (NSA) for Canisbay, written 1840, states that rents were high and two of the landholders had turned rent payments in kind into payments in cash which tenants had struggled to pay (NSA vol 15 p28). By 1860, agricultural wages were better in Orkney generally than in Caithness and there agricultural labour was in demand (Purdy, 1862 p 467, p435). However, this does not seem to be a significant factor in North Walls and Brims where only four of the Caithness-born men and three of the women were what I classed as farm workers, several probably working for others in the family. The most common occupation for the Caithness incomers was fisherman, often combined with some farming.

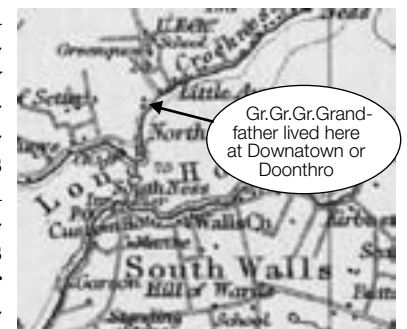
A similar way of life, proximity and little threat of clearance activity must have been strong factors drawing people north from Caithness. Of course, what the census does not tell is the age at which someone came to the island. The reasons parents moved north may have been very different to those that kept their offspring in Walls and Brims.

Looking at the birthplaces and ages of their children, we know that some moved for specific jobs: the two shepherds and their families account for all the Ross and Cromarty, five Caithness and all but one of the Sutherland births.

Decline in another traditional industry also pushed people north – smuggling or illicit whisky distilling. The 1841 census enumerator for Canisbay wrote: "now smuggling being completely suppressed several families have left the island [Stroma] and removed to the Orkneys to follow more lawfull pursuits" (quoted in Young, 1992 p9). Changes in legislation made illicit distilling a much less lucrative pursuit from the 1820s.

This is where legend and history start to walk together. Walter Ross, my great-great-great grandfather, came from Stroma to Walls in the 1830s and there is a suggestion that he was an illicit distiller who carried on his trade in Walls. My father always said that Downtown (commonly known as Doonthro), the home of Walter and his family, was an inn. The late Sandy Robertson, who lived most of his life in the Rinnigill area and died a few years ago in his late nineties, described it as a shebeen.

When we visited Stroma in summer 2003, the son of the current owner recalled a story told by an old man in mainland Caithness about a Ross who had been caught with a still in his stack of bere. The exciseman destroyed the▶



<sup>2</sup> 77 out of 271. The proportion for Sutherland is higher at 10 out of 23.

◀still and Ross's livelihood looked in severe danger. But the wily character had another still hidden in a second stack of bere. He apparently decided to leave for Orkney saying 'It's the whisky that took me doon and it is the whisky that will bring me back up'. Whatever the reason, Walter seems to have done well from his move as Downatown, at 33 acres, was one of the largest tenanted farms. His youngest son, born in Walls, was named John George Heddle after the landlord. That may have helped. In 1861, all four of Walter's surviving sons were in North Walls with their occupations listed as farmer, grocer, fisherman and ploughman. A fairly representative mix of island occupations.

### Surnames

The 10 most common surnames are:

SURNAME	Number in North Walls & Brimms	Number in Orkney
ROBESON or ROBSON	43 (52 including Robertson <sup>3</sup> )	71 (443 including Robertson)
SUTHERLAND	42	461
WILSON	40	263
ROSS	36	125
SMITH	34	465
MANSON	26	158
THOMPSON or THOMSON	26	540
JOHNSTON	23	488 (including Johnstone)
NIC[H]OLSON	19	124
SWANSON	19 (25 including Swanston)	81

(The Orkney top 10 are: Sinclair, Flett, Spence, Muir, Thomson, Rendall, Scott, Johnston, Miller and Smith (OFHS Top Ten Family Surnames – and 3<sup>rd</sup> column above).

Surnames like Ross, Manson and Swanson clearly reflect the movement across the Pentland Firth. I was surprised that Ross was one of the most common with my relatives accounting for 28 out of 36 instances, though they do appear as Rosie and Rossie at different times too.

The variety of surnames in general is evidence of a shifting population with distinctively Orkney names like Corrigan, Groundwater and Sabeston [sic] mixed with McKay, MacDonald, McKenzie and Gunn. The Old Statistical Account (OSA) mentions an increase in population in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century due to "the settlement of a colony of Highlanders, who had been forced to emigrate from Strathnaven [sic] where their farms were converted into sheep pasture" (OSA vol 17 p331). Their descendants probably explain some of the northern-mainland surnames which, by 1861, are shared by those born on the island. Of the different Macdonald/McDonald surnames, three were born in Caithness and four in

<sup>3</sup> While Robson, Robeson and Robertson are distinct surnames now, there was much more fluidity at this period. Even my grandmother (born 1892) would regularly call someone we knew as Willie Robertson, 'Willie Robeson'.

Orkney. There is a similar pattern for the nine Mackays or Mckays, with one from Sutherland, two from Caithness (including a visitor) and the rest from Orkney.

That is a very short overview of some aspects of the population of North Walls and Brims in 1861. There is much more to explore. But what to make of it all? The impression is of a place used to movement, with men going to sea and folk arriving from the northern mainland in surprisingly high numbers, distinctively different from Orkney as a whole. Intermarriages would merit study, with around 25 couples where one is from Orkney and the other from Caithness or Sutherland. My Ross ancestors seemed to fit that pattern. In another article, I will look at the challenges and results of tracing these people in 1871.

### Bibliography

Bremner, Rev James  
The parish of Walls and Flotta in Sinclair, Sir John (ed.) The Old Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-99. Vol 17 pp312-336 Available online at <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1791-99/Orkney/Walls%20and%20Flotta/> Last accessed 2 Nov 2009

Brock, Jeanette F (1999) The Mobile Scot: a study of emigration and migration 1861-1911. Edinburgh: John Donald

General Register Office (Scotland) Census of Scotland 1861: population tables and report (1862-1864). 2 vols. Edinburgh: HMSO. Available online at: [http://www.hist-pop.org/ohpr/servlet/Browse?path=Browse/Census%20\(y%20date\)/1861/Scotland&active=yes&titlepos=0](http://www.hist-pop.org/ohpr/servlet/Browse?path=Browse/Census%20(y%20date)/1861/Scotland&active=yes&titlepos=0) Last accessed 2 Nov 2009.

Jolly, Rev Peter (1840) The parish of Canisbay in The New Statistical Account of Scotland (1834-45) Edinburgh: Blackwood vol 15 pp21-34. Available online at <http://stat-acc-scot.edina.ac.uk/link/1834-45/Caithness/Canisbay/> Last accessed 2 Nov 2009.

OFHS Top 10 Orkney surnames 1841-1901 [online] Available at <http://www.orkneyfhs.co.uk/facts/population.htm> Last accessed 2 Nov 2009

Purdy, Frederick (1862) On the Earnings of Agricultural Labourers in Scotland and Ireland in Journal of the Statistical Society of London, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Dec., 1862), pp. 425-490 Available online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2338598> Last accessed 2 Nov 2009.

Young, Donald A (ed.) (1992) Stroma. Wick: North of Scotland Newspapers. ■

The Map on the preceding page and in the header to the article is from Bartholomew, John G (1912) Orkney, Southern in **Survey Atlas of Scotland**. Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Geographical Institute. Plate 57. Used by kind permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland

## What a surprise to see Aunt Ina smiling out at me

What a great start to the day when I opened my March edition of SIB Folk News and there was Auntie Ina looking a treat in her wide brimmed hat and fur stole.



Georgina Jolly

She was married to Willie Jolly and was one of nine sisters. The second oldest, my mother, Barbara Campbell Macpherson, was third youngest. There were no brothers. You might have thought that my grandfather would have called it a day long before the ninth daughter. Georgina, was born on the 3rd July 1899 at 64 Royal Park Place, Leith and she married Willie Jolly on the 12th January 1918 at 34 Chamber Street, Edinburgh. Auntie Ina died on the 7th March 1983 in Raigmore Hospital in Inverness. She had, by then, been living with her daughter Kristine (Graham) at Croy. Before she left Orkney she had been



Willie Jolly

joined by two of her sisters, Kate (Knox) her immediate junior and Marion (Boyd) who was the fifth eldest sister. Marion, and her husband Hugh, owned the Lynfield Hotel.

I have not really researched Willie Jolly's family but I know that he was born in Sutherland and that his antecedents came from Shapinsay.

Alistair Stewart Member 2087



Jim Wilson, member No 19, sent me this photograph which he received from a descendant of the Reids of Eday and the Wilsons of Kirkwall who are of Fair Isle extraction. He has no other information apart from the name of the photographer, John B Russell of King Street Kirkwall. Russells were certainly in business in 1860 and can still be found in Peace's Almanac for 1884. The photograph is now so old that it is doubtful if there is anyone who knows anything about this family. Jim, however, has great faith in his fellow members and would be grateful for any information at all.

You can contact him at <jim.wilson@hgu.mrc.ac.uk>.



## Marion Cursiter, member 597, recognised everyone in this photograph

The occasion was the retiral of John Cromarty of Bayview in Toab who managed to deliver the mail for the whole Parish of Tankerness. The ladies, along with him are:-

BACK ROW Mrs Clara Hepburn, Burnside, Tankerness. Mrs Mima Bews, Muckle Crofty, Tankerness. Mrs Marion Cursiter, Ellenfield, Tankerness now Earlsfield Kirkwall. Mrs Mabel Thomson, Greenock, Tankerness. Mrs Wilma Pottinger, Hall of Tankerness, now at Ruah, Tankerness. Mrs Maisie Rendall, Vedder, Tankerness. Mrs Belle Hourston, Hall of Yenstay, Tankerness.

FRONT ROW Mrs Mary Ann Dennison, Old Schoolhouse, Tankerness. Mr John Cromarty, Postman, Bayview, Toab, Mrs Jenny Cromarty, John's wife, Mrs Mabel Bain, Hall of Tankerness

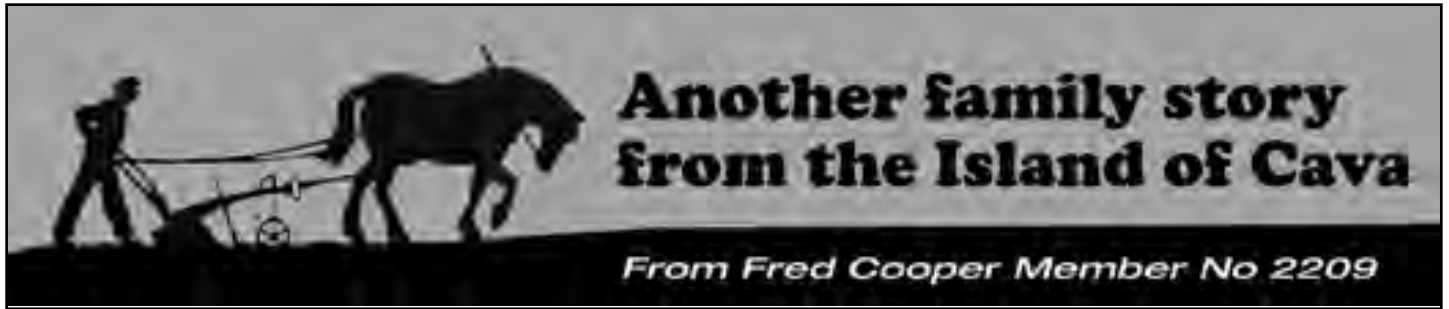
## MEMBERS' PHOTOGRAPHS

I usually use untitled photographs from the Kirkwall Library Photo Archive for this feature but lately I have been receiving pictures from members looking for information on the subjects.

These are always welcome and while they may not be used immediately I will include them in the newsletter whenever possible.

If sending as attachments they should be scanned at 300dpi and sent as fairly high quality JPGS. Send to:-

johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk



What a strange coincidence. I joined the Orkney FHS only a few months ago and in my third newsletter there is an article about the island where my ancestors lived and worked. In the March 2009 edition of Sib Folk News was an article about Muckle House on Cava and in the December 2009 issue Margaret Bakes explains her connection with Muckle House through the Smith family who lived there in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. There were three homesteads on Cava in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – Muckle House, South House and North House. My family connection is with North House and the Banks family.

My interest in family history started quite unintentionally. I never actually knew much about my grandparents as most had passed on before I was born and it never occurs to young people to ask the right questions to their parents to find out about their ancestors, where they were born, worked and their family background. Then of course – its too late – and the wealth of information mam and dad had is no longer available. One day about six years ago I was talking to my sister and mentioned that I was thinking about looking up our family history. Excitedly she said, “Wait there” and off she went upstairs. A few minutes later she re-appeared and placed a scrap of old paper in my hand with some writing on it. “Mam sat beside me one night writing something on a notepad. I asked her what she was doing and she said she was jotting down some family details while she could remember them, and I kept that bit of paper”. I looked at the rough jottings and I became curious to find out more. Shortly afterwards a life-changing event happened. I had taken early retirement and I had time on my hands to pursue this new hobby that was beginning to become an obsession.

My endless searches through the census 1841 to 1911, births, marriages and deaths, parish records and countless family history websites have traced my mam’s ancestors to Orkney. Mam always said that her grandmother, who was endearingly known as “Munna” within the family and who was a major influence in her life, was from an island off the Scottish mainland, which I later discovered to be Orkney. Well here is the story of my ancestors leading to North House on the Island of Cava.

I was born in Seaham Harbour, County Durham in 1950 with older brother Philip and younger sisters Olive and Brenda. My parents were John Cooper and Ellen (nee Harris). The early 1950’s in Seaham were an exciting time with some food still on rationing. The local butcher had sawdust on the floor and even did his own slaughtering out the backyard. The local grocer served butter out

of a barrel; Cheshire cheese was so creamy and crumbly and cut with a wire cutter from a huge slab. Tea, split peas, barley, flour and sugar came from tea chests, flour vats or big barrels and put into a conical packet made from a square piece of blue or green paper. Very rarely did we buy cakes or pastries at the bakers because Mam used to make bread, pies and cakes fresh every day using a big coal fire range, which heated the oven at one side and provided hot water to the bathroom on the other side. Going to the shops as a young boy of four or five was so much more exciting, more an adventure, than going to the supermarket today.



Mam (Ellen Harris) was born in 1914 in Sunderland to Thomas Frederick Harris and Ellen Dunn. Her childhood memories of her father were cut short when she was only five years old. At the age of 29 her father, Thomas Frederick Harris (born 1890), died of wounds suffered in World War 1. He had joined the Regiment of Royal Engineers



as a sapper early in 1915 and was posted to France on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1915. He was promoted to Sergeant but was wounded and died of his wounds in February 1919. My grandmother re-married a couple of years later. Thus began a special relationship of my mam with my great grandmother Johanna Thomasine Harris (Munna) from Orkney who she lived with first in Sunderland and then worked with, in service, for the Laird of Kildalton

Castle on the Isle of Islay.

Johanna Thomasine Harris (nee Banks) was born in Stromness on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1855 and moved with her mother to Sunderland in or around 1871 where she married Thomas Harris a mariner on the coastal ships working



◀ along the North east coast. Her mother was Elizabeth Banks born in Flotta in 1826. Elizabeth (known as Betty) married George Sinclair on 13/3/1856 at Stromness. I have no further information about George Sinclair other than he was a mariner. He appears to have died sometime between 1861 and 1871 as Elizabeth is listed as a widow in the 1871 census. If anyone has any information about him please let me know!



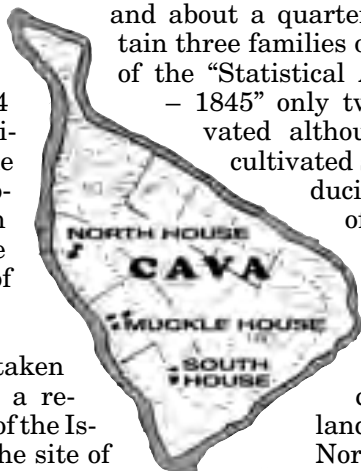
The main thoroughfare of Stromness

According to the 1861 census Elizabeth Sinclair (nee Banks) was living in Main Street, Stromness with her husband George Sinclair, who is listed as a mariner, and her daughter Johanna. Next door to Elizabeth in Main Street are her parents John Banks and his wife Helen (nee Peebles born on Flotta 23 Sept 1789). John Banks and Helen were married 23 Nov 1822 on Flotta and had four children – Ann, Elizabeth (my gg grandmother), Thomas Hutton and John. According to the 1841 and 1851 census they lived at North House on the Island of Cava with their four children.



It is difficult to comprehend that a small island 1 mile long and about a quarter mile wide could sustain three families of 21 people. In an extract of the "Statistical Accounts of Scotland 1834 - 1845" only twenty Scots acres were cultivated although it goes on to say "the cultivated soil is a rich black loam producing excellent crops both of oats and barley, there being an abundance of manure."

The aerial photograph was taken from the North West by a re-ological survey of the Is-2008 showing the site of North House, Muckle House and South House.



The map above shows the location of North House, Muckle House and South House.

The Island of Cava has been central to some notorious stories and events. In an Extract of the "Statistical

Accounts of Scotland 1791 – 1799" there were two rapes recorded on the island. John Gow – who was to become notorious as the Orkney Pirate – moved to Stromness in 1699. He grew up in Stromness and in 1724 at the age of 26 he found himself in Amsterdam aboard the trading ship Caroline as second mate and heading for Santa Cruz. The crew's complaints about bad food and conditions culminated in a mutiny and John Gow was elected captain. The ship was renamed "The Revenge" and soon John Gow and his men were famed for their acts of piracy in the seas surrounding Spain, France and Portugal. Running low on supplies and being pursued by the authorities Gow decided to head home to Orkney. Referring to himself as "Mr Smith" Gow acted the part of an honest prosperous trader in Stromness and his crew and ship, renamed The George, enjoyed the hospitality of the people of Stromness for some weeks. Things came to a head when the captain of a visiting merchant vessel recognised the Revenge and knew of Gow's exploits. The Justice of the Peace was informed and the Revenge fled from Stromness. An account from local people has it that the pirates abducted two servant girls but they were put ashore on Cava some time later "so loaded with presents that they soon afterwards got husbands".

Another account attributed to Daniel Defoe, author of Robinson Crusoe, states that the girls were taken from Cava and that they suffered so badly at the hands of the pirates that one of the girls later died. The Revenge was later grounded near the Calf of Eday near Carrick House and Gow surrendered on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1725. Gow and seven accomplices were executed together at Execution Dock, London on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1725.



Execution Dock, London, where John Gow's adventures came to an end.



Final Plunge of the German battleship 'Bayern' in Scapa Flow on the 21st June 1919

The German fleet was scuttled in Scapa Flow in 1919 and they sank at their anchorages around the Island of Cava. There are four cruisers and three battleships still un-salvaged around the island and I understand this area is well visited by amateur divers.





The map shows the location of the seven German warships around the Island of Cava.

In August 2009 my wife and I visited Orkney. We landed at St Margaret's Hope and visited Kirkwall and Stromness. It was a beautifully sunny day and the sight of Scapa Flow was breathtaking. Unfortunately Cava is now uninhabited and we could only look out at the island from the mainland. The number of people actually living on the island has fallen since the Banks lived

there in the 1860's. The census population over the last 50 years has been 1961(Nil), 1971 (Nil), 1981 (2), 1991 (2), 2001 (Nil).

Our ancestors would look at our lifestyle with envy. In comparison we have it easy – but then there is no comparison really. Only one route out of poverty was available to many families and that was to have as many children as possible, hopefully mostly boys. At some stage the head of the family, the father or mother, would be too old to work. With no “old age pension” they would become penniless and starve if they had no family to provide for them. There were no “retirement homes” to put your parents into - in their old age they lived with their own families. Our ancestors lived through some of the most difficult times in history because of social deprivation, poverty, poor housing, poor hygiene and healthcare and fragile employment structures. Despite all of this the Banks, Peebles, Sinclairs, and Harris line have survived – and survival may have been their main goal in life – and it makes me realise that we shouldn't take our lifestyle for granted and that we should appreciate and be grateful for what we have got in life.

I have searched endlessly for pictures of the residents of Cava, or of the Banks, Peebles and Sinclair family and for information on life on Cava in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but so far without success. However, I accept now that I am no longer just a County Durham lad from Seaham Harbour. I now have family ties with Orcadians and feel very proud to have roots in such a beautiful place. If any Orkney kinfolk are related to the Banks, Peebles or Sinclairs and can shed any light on my ancestors, or the places they lived and worked I would love to hear from them. My email contact details are [fredcooper190@hotmail.com](mailto:fredcooper190@hotmail.com), or write to 2 Sutherland Grange, New Herrington, Houghton-Le-Spring, Tyne and Wear, DH4 4UT.



## Have You got yours?

A big thankyou to the members who responded to my plea for articles for the newsletter.

I won't say that I was inundated but I wasn't left looking at blank pages a week before publication date.

So please; keep the stories coming.

Send them as a Word doc or send them as typed copy. You can even send as a handwritten article although this can slow things up as I have to type them again.

Photos are more than welcome too.

They should be scanned at 300dpi and saved as high quality JPGs. Send them to me at <[johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk](mailto:johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk)> as an attachment or if it is easier just send me copies and I will scan them for you.

Many thanks—John Sinclair



Here's a great picture from Marion Cursiter, member 597. Marion tells me that the occasion was Jack Watson's retiral party in April 1974. That's when cigarettes cost 30p for a packet of 20, a pint of beer was 15p and petrol was only 11p per litre. No wonder everyone is smiling. Maybe you were there. Names please to the editor <johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk> and all will be revealed, I hope, in the June issue.



## Who can tell me about whaling in Orkney?

Asks Ian Corsie Member 1367

This is about Malcolm Corsie, who was born on the 17th November 1798, married Isabella Louttit on the 7th December 1827, and was the tenant of the farm of Nears, Rousay.

Most of my information about the earliest known Corsies of Rousay came to me from Leonard Corsie, my uncle, who spent the whole of his adult life in Canada.

When I re-read what Leonard wrote about the subject of this note it is clear to me that he was recounting what he had been told by his father.

So, to put it into context, I am passing on what my grandfather (born 1858) was telling about his grandfather (born 1798).

This is an extract from Leonard's account:

"Malcolm spent many years with the Dundee whalers, which meant that he was away from home every year

from early spring until late fall, while Isabella managed the farm.

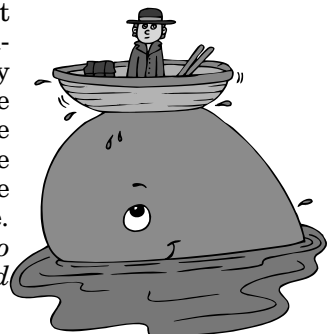
He must have been a man of strong character, and his descendants still refer to him as if he had died ten years ago, instead of a hundred years ago.

When Malcolm was away, Isabella had many of her grand-children at Nears, and practically raised some of them, my father included. (This suggests that Malcolm was still going off in the 1860s).

My father told me that once a pack of gypsies had come around the farm. They must have thought that Isabella was alone, as they had tried to intimidate her, and actually laid their hands on her, just as Malcolm had come around one of the buildings. Malcolm took a whip and beat them up.

On occasions, sailing ships would seek shelter between the islands, and signal for a pilot. As many men as could would try to get the job, but while they were bargaining with the Master, Malcolm would board the ship, start giving orders, and settle with the Master after the ship was anchored. I find the first sentence of the extract a tantalising one, and while the history of the Dundee Whalers must be well documented from a home port point of view, it would be interesting to know if there are Orkney tales waiting to emerge.

If any member can add to Ian's tale we would be delighted to hear from them.





# A history of fishing in Westray

By Alex Costie

## Early man enjoyed his shellfish

The earliest known human habitations in Westray show that shellfish formed an important part of the diet of these early settlers. This can easily be seen at Hodgalee where cockles, limpets and winkles date back about 5,000 years and there is plenty of evidence as shells are abundant around the remains of the old houses. On the Links of Noltland there is a large area of almost nothing other than pure winkle shells this is to the south and west of the area that was excavated in the early 1980s. During excavation work at the Knap of Hower and on the Papa Holm substantial numbers of shells of the Scottish Native Oyster were found. These oysters are very rare nowadays, in fact they are almost extinct but they must have been plentiful 4,000 or 5,000 years ago. The question is were they being gathered from the wild or were they being encouraged to grow by some early form of fish farming. Apparently there is evidence from Skara Brae that shellfish were being kept in holding tanks if not actually farmed. The huge quantities of shell sand that covers some parts of the north and west of Westray makes me think that shellfish must have been much more plentiful in the inshore waters at sometime in the past than they have been in the last century.

## The Viking period, 1,000 to 500 years ago.

There is plenty of evidence that the Vikings who settled in this area were skilled in some forms of fishing. Evidence of this can be seen in the Viking middens that can be found in several areas around the coast. One of the best middens can be seen at Quoygrew. There jaw bones from large cod and ling can easily be seen at the edge of the shore where the midden is being eroded away by the sea. Dr. James Barrette who has been leading several archaeological digs at Quoygrew believes that the large quantities of cod and ling bones found in that area would indicate that fish must have been exported from there. The amount of fish bones found would indicate that far more fish were being caught than would have been necessary to feed a fairly small settlement like Quoygrew. The bones are from big fish and would indicate that they came from a very much underutilised stock. No evidence of the fishing method has been found. Perhaps they would have had some form of trap or gill net but more likely they would have forged fish hooks from iron. The Vikings certainly had the skills to make iron rivets to fasten the planks in their boats together so I suppose it would not be a big step from there to making iron fish hooks. Fish hooks made from wood or bone could never have been very successful. The problem being that by the time you had made them strong enough they would have been too big

to swallow. So the invention of iron fish hooks would have been a great boon. I have often heard of fish hooks being used as currency in the old days when trading with native people who did not have iron to make fish hooks. Iron fish hooks were greatly valued by the Eskimo and they would gladly trade for them. Also the natives of the South Pacific greatly valued iron fish hooks. Captain Cook complained about them stealing the nails from his ship to make fish hooks. I have also heard that someone bought most of the land that Auckland now stands on from a Maori chief for six fish hooks. I am getting a bit away from fishing in Westray now but I think that shows the value of iron fish hooks and we have that and their skills in drying and salting fish to thank the Vikings for.

## Herring, cod and great line fishing.

I will have to skip a few hundred years now because I have no information on the fishing until the start of the 1800's.

I don't know how important cod and ling fishing would have been before 1800 but during the 19th century salted and dried fish developed into an important export industry.

Most districts in Westray still have buildings near the shore that was used to store the fish. These stores are usually near flat rocks where the fish were spread to dry. In many cases these storehouses were used to store kelp after the cod boom had passed.

I am told that the Laird of Cleat built the fish store that stands at Sponess and he brought the Stouts from the Fair Isle to fish for the estate. Over the years there were several influxes of immigrants from the Fair Isle. Stout, Leslie, and Wilson are some of the surnames, all were, and many still are associated with the fishing.

Not surprisingly Pierowall Bay had a bigger and better fish store than anywhere else in the island. In 1883 John Hewison who was the biggest of these fish merchants built what must have been a state of the art building to the north east of Gill Pier.

During the 19th century Westray was being visited by fishing boats from far afield. Scotch herring boats would go line fishing between herring seasons and they would often land at Pierowall. English and French fishing smacks would also base themselves in Pierowall and make several landings to either Logie or Hewison before getting a good enough load to go home with. The French boats had part of their hold as a tank where they kept some of their catch alive. Apparently they did not come in to the pier but sailed back and forth through what was called the Nort Reed in order to keep the water going in and out of the tank.

The French fishermen would sometimes come ashore and

lay a smaa line on the Sand o Gill with the hooks bated with bits of fish in the hope of catching a few seagulls to eat. This practise rather disgusted the locals, although it is hard to see why eating Auks (Guillemots) should make the Westray folk feel so superior.

Apparently winter was the time when much of the cod fishing took place. The 80 and 90 foot herring boats would be hauled up on the beach to the north of the mill burn or in the Dock o Gill and the fishermen would take their skiffs and go to the nort sea to fish for cod. The nort sea meant the sea north of Westray and not the English North Sea.

Johnie O Kenties spoke of the Gullie Bank as being a favourite spot of his fathers and his grandfathers. It was with the three hills in line and Papay low in the water, just like a mans cap on the water was Johnie's description. This would put it somewhere to the north of the Noup and probably 12 or 15 miles off. Quite a distance to go in a skiff, especially if it was winter.

## Why they called it Gullie Bank

The Gullie Bank got its name from an incident that happened one morning as the fishermen were making for their boat. The Skipper and one of the crew had to cross the Kelp Green. This is an area for drying seaweed and of common grazing. Here they disturbed someone attempting to steal a sheep. Although it was still dark they were able to recognise the thief as he made off. They knew him as an old man who had become infirm and unable to go to sea. In his haste the thief had dropped his butchering knife, known locally as a gullie. The fishermen took the knife to the boat with them but later on that day as a line was running out it took a kink around the gullie and flipped it over the side. From then on that area was known as the Gullie Bank. The fishermen never revealed the name of the thief instead they often left a ling or a cod hanging on the wall near the door of this poor fellow to help feed him and his old wife in the hope that he would never have to resort to stealing sheep again.

Although there were lots of cod around in those times they were not to be found everywhere all the time. They could be very spotty just like they are today.

One year it came a spell of very fine weather in February. Three boats sailed from Skello, bellow Branstane, bound for the west sea in the hope of catching cod. They went for three days and all they had to show for their efforts was one barrel stave they had found floating. On the fourth day they filled their boats and it took six horse carts to take the fish above the banks. Fishing can be like that.

Getting back to Hewison and the big store he built above Gill Pier. In the thwart backs (rafters) can be seen sharp

metal hooks about every 9 inches or so that the cod could be hung on to dry after they had been salted. In damp weather a barrow with live charcoal was wheeled through the store to help dry the fish. The vents for this can be seen high up on the inside of the gables. The windows in the big store are almost all on the north side. This is the opposite to most dwelling houses of the time where windows are found on the south side to give both light and heat from the sun. In a fish curing store they only wanted light hence windows only on the north side.

There were several schooners sailing out of Westray employed in the trade of exporting salt fish and kelp and bringing back coal and other goods.

## Fish, Brandy, Ponies or Coal—all in a day's work

One of these was the topsail schooner "Galatea". I am led to believe that on one trip she sailed from Westray with a cargo of salt fish for Bilbao in Spain, she took on a cargo of brandy for the northward journey destined for Iceland. On the way north the "Galatea" hove too in the north sound but could not come alongside in Westray for fear of being charged duty on the cargo by the customs- coastguards stationed at the Braehead. Stores were sent out in a skiff from Broughton. The skippers wife also visited her husband taking passage on the same skiff as the stores. The "Galatea" continued her voyage to Iceland where the cargo of brandy was sold and a load of pit ponies were taken on board. The pit ponies were bound for Fife. I think one of the shareholders in the "Galatea" also had shares in coal mines in Fife. A cargo of coal was then loaded and the "Galatea" sailed for Westray.

I was told of another voyage of the "Galatea", it was too be the last voyage of the season before being tied up in Westray for the winter. They had loaded salt fish in Westray and were bound for Leith. However when they arrived at Leith they found that the merchant who they had been expecting to buy the fish was full up and could not take any more that year. They solved the problem by going further up the Forth to Bo'ness and they lay there all winter and sold the complete cargo of salt fish to housewives who came down to the dock and bought them at a stone or half a stone at a time. They were just finished by spring when it was time to start again and they went across the firth to Fife for a cargo of coal to take home.

Hewison also exported salt fish to Australia. Tommy Logie told me his father had a contract with Hewison to make wooden boxes to pack the fish in for their journey to Australia. The boxes also had to be lined with lead, probably paper thin led like what used to be in tea boxes. Just imagine▶

◀that, it's a wonder the Australians are no worse than they are after eating all that lead and salt fish.

I think it was in 1891 that there was a tremendous quantity of herring close in on the east side. There are reports of the geos on the east side of Papay having herring so close in they could be caught from the shore. The Rackwick of Moa in Westray was also full of herring. I was told of an old lady from Skello who took a cubbie (a basket made from straw or heather to be carried on the back) on her back and went down to Rackwick to see if she could get some fish from a fisherman to salt for the winter.

On seeing a lot of herring close in she thought she would try and catch some herself. She threw the cubbie out from the rocks but was unable to pull it in by herself it being so full of herring. The cubbie she had was old and worn and rather rotten and her helpers had a job to retrieve the cubbie and some fish without the cubbie disintegrating completely.

After this unusual run of herring a lot of saith set into the Rackwick of Moa. They were probably feeding on the herring spawn. It is a common occurrence to find cod, haddock and saith gorging themselves with herring spawn.

One of the boats took a big catch of saith in Rackwick by clipping them from the top of the water. Clipping saith was common at that time especially by the Papay boats working in the bore. Clipping was just using a gaff to pull the fish on board from the top of the water, no fish hook was used. The fishermen thought that since they had a big catch they would go north to Pierowall and sell their fish to Hewison. They duly arrived and told Hewison they had a good catch of clipped saith. His answer was, 'So has every body else so I am afraid it will only be a clipped price'. Nothing new there.

Not long after Hewison built his grand new fish curing store several events began to take place which brought about the end of curing and exporting cod.

### **The coming of steam and trawling**

Steam replaced sail. Trawling replaced lining. The boats got bigger. Someone invented ice making machines. The fishing boats could then take on a load of ice at their home ports and come up north and fish and store their catch in ice before heading back home. No need to make half landings in Pierowall anymore. This left merchants like Hewison and Logie depending on the local fleet for supplies. Cod were getting generally more scarce. The First World War brought an end to most of that. The population of the island was beginning to drop. After the First World War the herring fishing opened again in Stronsay and a few Westray families acquired boats and were involved in that for a few years.

The men from Saverton were involved owning boats and sometimes crewing for another well known family of that time the Fletts.

James Robert or Bob Flett as he was commonly called had married May Wilson from Westray. They moved to Westray from Banff but the Fletts had originally come from Orkney. They lived at no 5 Gill Pier. He had a family of six sons and three daughters. They had a 90 feet Zulu called the "Enterprise" K 97 that drift netted for herring mainly for the Stronsay fishing. In the spring of the year they would go to the great lines mainly for halibut and cod and ling. Sometimes working as far off as Rockall. Bob along with his son Jimmy had a new boat built. It was called the "Ocean

Searcher" This boat was smaller, 65feet approximately and was employed in the same type of fishing as the "Enterprise" had been. The "Ocean Searcher" was built at Heardies in Buckie perhaps in the early 1930s, and cost £350. This price included a set of sails 50 herring nets and a steam capstan that was driven off the bogie stove in the fo'c's'le. She was later fitted with a Kelvin engine. When the Second World War came along Jimmy Flett was called up early on and had to go and serve in the Royal Navy. I believe he was in command of an armed trawler or vessel of that sort.

From then until the early 1960s the fishing in Westray was mostly for lobsters for export with haddock and cuithes (small saith) being caught for local consumption. This was a mainly crofter based industry with few if any fulltime fishermen. Haddock had replaced cod on the local grounds and was a popular fish with the locals.

In the late 1950s and early 60s a change was taking place with bigger boats (mostly old seine net boats from Scotland) coming into Orkney to fish for lobsters. At that time there were areas where creels had never been shot and the lobsters were virtually untouched.

In the early 1950s the Rendalls of Beachouse had a boat called the "Bertha Jane." Unfortunately she dragged her moorings and was damaged beyond repair when she was blown ashore on the Point o' Berridale. George Thompson and his son Billy had a boat called the "Sheena" and they fished lobsters around the Bay o Noup for a few years. The 44ft "Sheena MacKay" was brought to Westray by the Fergus family of Noup farm. They fished well when they had time but they also had a 1,000 acre farm to run and they eventually hired the boat out to John Harcus o Branstane and he along with David Hutchison fished her successfully for lobsters for a number of years, eventually replacing her with a newer boat.

In 1963 the 57ft seine net boat "Chance" WK126 later registered K831 was brought to Westray by Alex and George Costie. This was to be used mainly for lobster fishing with some seine netting for bait and local sales. However the summer of 1963 was spent working out of Lybster with a Lybster skipper and some of his crew on board. John William Flett from Papa Westray (a grandson of Bob Flett) was also on board at that time. This was a good opportunity for the Orkney men to learn something of the art of seine netting. This experience together with some successful seine net fishing when the "Chance" returned to Westray in the autumn of 1963, led to an interest in white fishing which by the 1990s had developed into a sizable fleet of modern trawlers.

White fish boats like the "Enterprise" K880, the "Alma" and the "Our Catherine" had some good times but they were small boats for working in these northern waters and were often hampered by bad weather, so earnings went from very good some weeks to nothing in others. More consistently good earnings did not happen until bigger boats came into the fleet. Tam Harcus brought the 80ft "Rivo" to Westray. She had a 800hp Blackstone engine with bigger horse power. ▶

It was soon going to prove that a big boat with bigger horse power was going to give far better and more consistently good earnings. Alex Costie bought a 80ft wooden boat called the "Dauntless" but from then on the trend was towards steel boats of between 80 and 110 ft.

These trawlers would have a crew of between 6 to 12 men depending on the shift system they were working. Sometimes there were over 80 men going down the pier to work on a sailing morning if the fleet all happened to be in at the same time. Norman Cooper taught navigation and seamanship in the school in Pierowall and Davie Hume and Marcus Scott ran a very successful Sea Cadet Corp. This all helped to develop skills and stimulate interest in the young men to take part in this local industry.

For a number of years the British Merchant Navy had been running down, this meant that for a number of years they were not recruiting men. This was a great help to the fishing industry. It meant that some of the men who were in the merchant service returned and took jobs in the fishing industry. Also there was no longer a drain of some of our best men away to the merchant ships. The Stromness sea school could see that there was no longer a demand for them to train men for the merchant navy so they turned their efforts to training men for the fishing, turning out a constant supply of boys from various youth employment schemes and helping fishermen to sit their mates and skippers tickets. All this helped give the fishing industry the supply of men it had to have in order to develop.

#### Exile Westray Fishermen.

Over the years Westray men have spread around the world and many of them fished with distinction.

Bill Drever from Straits eventually settled in Hull and for many years he was one of Mars top skippers. He regularly fished Iceland waters and often brought back record catches. He regularly skippered the Westella. His son Charlie followed him into the fishing and was soon a

top skipper. He skippered the freezer trawler Northella.

George Peterson from Valdigarth also moved to the Humber and fished out of Hull. His son Michael was also a skipper of Mars trawlers fishing Iceland and later working for Mars around the Falklands.

Bob Flett's son Jock also skippered Hull trawlers successfully.

Eva Flett from Bewing in Papa Westray got married to a Kirkness man from Finstown. After the wedding which had been held in Papa Westray, a small boat which was taking Eva and her husband and some of the guests back to Finstown, broke down in the Westray Firth. Imagine Eva's surprise when the Hull trawler that stopped to give them assistance was commanded by her uncle.

George Rendall of Sandyhole, fished in Canada for many years at gill netting for salmon and ring netting for her- ring. George returned to Westray and was a great help to the local men in the early days of trawling, helping and instructing them to mend nets.

George Eunson of the Tuffos skippered one of Salvesen's whalers but a dispute with the Norwegin gunners union meant he had to leave that job, which was a great pity.

Several other Westray men went to the whaling with Salvesen's of Leith. George Drever now living at Swanson cottage was a radio operator there. His father Sam Drever of the Old School also went to the whaling, also Jackie Bain of the Sheiling and Hamish Bruce from Broughton. Alex Costie was there very near the end of Salvesen's whaling in 1960 and '61. Sam Drever and Jackie Bain fished for whales at both the north ice and the south ice. The rest of the men mentioned here fished the south ice working east and south from South Georgia and into the Weddle Sea.

Jimmy Leslie of the Chapel also worked for Salvesen but on the freezer trawler "Fair Try" working the Grand Banks for Cod.

Gordon Bain from Twiness now based in Harris is a very successful creel fisherman. He operates a fleet of boats mainly fishing for prawns. The prawns are kept alive and flown into Spain.

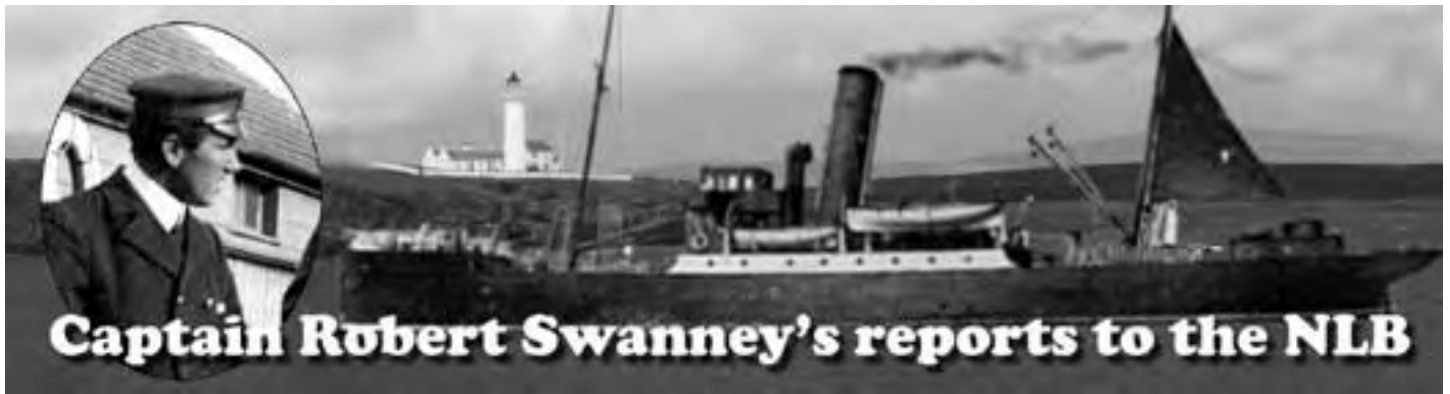
So there you have it. For thousands of years the men of Westray have been harvesting both the land and the sea, and, God willing, they will continue to do so for many years to come. ■



*Alex Costie, front left, author of this article together with his brother George aboard their seine netter 'Enterprise'. Behind them are Malcolm Brown and Alexander Halcro (Sandy H).*



*Pierowall—a welcome sight*



*Maureen Hunter, member 247, has been researching her grandfather's time at the NLB*

**R**obert Halcrow Swanney, my grandfather, was born 6th June 1878 at Main Street, Kirkwall to William Linklater Swanney, master grocer, and his second wife, Jane Wilson, previously Halcro.

After leaving Kirkwall School at 15 in 1894, he went to sea. He travelled the world, sailing with the Shire Line, the White Star Line and the Loch Line. He passed for master mariner at Leith receiving his "square-rigged ticket" in foreign trade. This led to a varied career, travelling to Australia, South Africa, U.S.A. and the Baltic.

Eventually, he returned home to take over the command of the Pentland Firth steamer, St.Ola whose master, Captain Robert Robertson (my great grandfather on my mother's side) of Daisybank in Stromness, had fallen ill and resigned.

After eight years, on 2nd April 1913, he was appointed first mate on the steamer Pole Star which belonged to the Commissioners of the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB). This ship and others carried men and supplies to the lighthouses in Orkney, Shetland and the North of Scotland.

In 1918, he was promoted to Master.

When he retired on the grounds of ill health on 12th Nov.1934, he had spent 40 years in foreign and home waters. His period of service with the N.L.B was 21years 7 months. He earned £281-17-2d to begin with and ended up with £386-7-2d.

He received an annual uniform and subsistence allowance (presumably when he was away during the annual re-fit). His fixed retirement pension was £133-7-8d paid quarterly and his gratuity was £355-7-8d.

He was presented with a silver tray and a fountain pen as farewell gifts from the crew.

On the 6th Oct.1906 Captain Swanney married Maggie Shearer, the daughter of a well-known tailor in Orkney. They had five sons---Charles, Bryce, Peter, William and Robert.

My grandfather died of heart disease at "The Braes" in Stromness 10th March 1937. He was buried in St. Magnus Cathedral churchyard. The doctor who signed the death certificate was Dr T.A. Shaw, the father of the well-known actor Robert Shaw.

In an effort to discover more about my grandfather's career in the lighthouse service I contacted the Northern Lighthouse Board who are responsible for all lighthouses in Scotland and the Isle of Man. Their HQ is still at 84 George Street in Edinburgh (fortunate for me as I live in the capital) and here I learned that all their archive material was now at West Register House in Charlotte Square. The archivist there told me that the records of the NLB had been

meticulously kept and so it proved to be.

The following are some of the reports and letters that passed between the NLB and my grandfather. I found them fascinating and hope that any of my fellow members with an interest in the lighthouse service will find them equally so.

## NORTHERN LIGHTHOUSE BOARD CORRESPONDENCE REPORTS

*Bks. 110-113 1st April 1927 - 30th March 1930*

Report sent by Post Office Telegraphs on 10th August 1916 from the Pole Star in Stromness.

**REPORT 1" HOLE IN THE PLATING. TEMPORARY REPAIR EFFECTED BY PLUGGING HOLE.**

**Reply from "LIGHTHOUSE EDINBURGH"  
ARRANGING DIVER TO EXAMINE CONDITION OF PLATING AFTER REPORT FROM MASTER OF POLE STAR.**

**Reply: Letter sent to C.Dick Peddie Secretary, Northern Lighthouse Board, 84 George Street, Edinburgh from the Pole Star.**

*Northern Lighthouse Steamer "Pole Star"  
Stromness  
24 May 1927*

*In confirmation of my telegram of today's date, I have to report that the Pole Star sprang a leak last night about 8pm. Last night. Mr McLachlan heard a noise while the Pole Star was lying at the mooring buoy. He was going through the alleyway when he heard the sound of water rushing into the stokehole.*

*A hole about "1½ was found in one of the plates in the ship's bottom, right under the port side. A stream of water, about 6" high, was rushing into the stokehole. A wooden plug was made and inserted into the hole. This stopped the rush of water. The plate was so thin that the edges curled up when the plug was inserted.*

*Today I had a diver from Kirkwall and Captain Sutherland, Lloyd's surveyor, to survey the plate. The diver examined the bottom plate and his report says that there is a 2" hole worn through the plate and that the plate is very thin and much corroded. He recommends a temporary repair with 8" patch and the inside to be packed with cement and that a 1/2" plate about 8" square be put on outside and be secured by a 2" bolt screwed to an iron strong-back inside and the space in the bilges to be filled with cement.*

◀ I have arranged with a diver to have a patch put on tomorrow. It will have to be done under water and may not be satisfactory. The diver also reported that he did not think it safe to make the Suleskerry relief until the repair was finished.

Captain Sutherland, Lloyd's surveyor advises that the ship be taken to Leith for repair. He will grant a certificate of seaworthiness for the passage south. It is fortunate this did not happen when we were at sea and in bad weather.

I am,  
Dear Sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
Robert Halcrow Swanney



*The Pole Star 1892 - 1931*

There followed reports from F.W. Campbell, diver, on 26th May from Junction Road, Kirkwall and from Wm. Sutherland on 15th May.

It was decided to make the Suleskerry relief by the drifter Busy Bee (for the sum of £15), provided it was guided by an officer from the Pole Star.

Lloyd's surveyor ordered the ship to be taken to Leith for permanent repair and a certificate of seaworthiness was given for the passage to Leith.

The Pole Star went to Henry Robb's shipyard at Leith Docks and was repaired in the Prince of Wales Dry-dock.

The necessary repairs were carried out at a cost of £308 :8: 3d.

Various other repairs were carried out at the same time while the ship was in dry dock -- repair of ventilators, supplying and fitting a teak door at the end of an alleyway etc.

It was interesting to note that the hourly rates of pay for the tradesmen were:-

*Engineers 2/- (10p) Boilermakers 2/6d Carpenters 2/-  
Joiners 2/- Plumbers 2/6d Painters 2/- Apprentices  
10d (less than 5p) Labourers 1/7d*

The Northern Lighthouse Board applied for tenders to repair their ship Pole Star after damage had been done to her while at her mooring buoy in Orkney.

Henry Robb's duly won the contract and carried out the repair at a cost of £1070. However it was reported to Captain Swanney that "the ship was in poor condition and although, at the time, she suited conditions she had ceased to be such a serviceable ship and would give many an anxious moment to those responsible for her safety".

This report was duly forwarded to the owners!  
**1st Nov. 1928**

Letter complaining that they never had a week-end without duty on the ship as they were at a mooring buoy, not at a pier which gave them more duties e.g. watchkeeping etc.

**20th Nov.**

This was agreed to by the Board.

**29th Oct.1929---TALK OF A NEW SHIP.**

**1930---**There followed proposals for the new steamship and a draft memorandum of agreement was set out.

The new Pole Star, with extra watertight bulkheads and a speed of thirteen knots, was to be built by William Beardmore & Co. Ltd. Naval Constructions Works, Dalmuir, Dunbartonshire.

The price of the vessel, delivered at Tail-of-the-Bank off Greenock, and on completion of satisfactory trials was £57,750. This price was based on delivery of the vessel 8 months from the date of signing contract documents.

*BOOK XII 1st of April 1930 - 31 March 1933*

**5th Dec 1930**

R H.S. asks for more crew members over the winter months as more work had to be done then and relief work at the rock stations presented more difficulties. The request was granted.

The Secretary of the N. L. B. (1930) was J. Glen-corse Wakelin.

Correspondence from 1930 onwards was all about the construction of the ship---engine, bilge pumps, painting, water tanks, steering gear, boiler mountings etc.—between Beardmore's and the Commissioners. Each time letters were sent to Captain Swanney for his perusal.

*Further details are in Book XII.*

**13th Nov.1930**

Beardmores wrote to the Northern Lighthouse Board to say that the launch of the Pole Star (Contract No. 663) would take place on the 4th of Nov. at 11.30.am. "We shall be pleased to hear, at your earliest convenience, whether the Commissioners wish to nominate a lady to perform the naming ceremony and if so, please let us know the lady's name."

**REPLY:-**

Mrs A. I. McClure, wife of Alexander McClure Esq. K. C. Sheriff of Aberdeen, Kincardine and Banff will perform the ceremony.

**LLOYD'S LIST ( EXTRACT from 5th Nov. 1930)**

**BEARDMORE'S LAST LAUNCH**

The Pole Star was 195ft. long with a displacement of 1275 tons and a speed of 13 knots. The machinery consisted of a twin set of vertical triple - expansion engines capable of developing 1450 horse power at 140 revs. per minute. It was 21 years since the company had constructed a vessel for the Northern Commissioners. It replaced a ship of a similar name launched in 1892.

The launch, performed by Mrs A.McClure, wife of Sheriff McClure and passed without hitch.

**DEFECTS IN THE POLE STAR**

The Master reports that the Wireless Room, Wheel-house, Chartroom and the Master's Room have been▶



◀flooded all the way as water had been getting in the windows ( portholes, surely?) especially those with wooden shutters. Since reaching Stromness he has had to vacate his room and live in the saloon.

The Master also reported that the mahogany panel which surrounded the glass mirror in the Saloon was split at both sides on the front. The siren or typhoon steam whistle was out of action and unworkable. There were other small damages as well.

#### 6th DECEMBER 1930

The old Pole Star sailed out of Stromness as the church bells were ringing. Every pier was lined with townfolk seeing the last of an old friend. For 38 years she had acted as the Northern Lighthouse tender for the North of Scotland.

#### POLE STAR TRIALS MON. 22ND Dec.1930

High Tide at Greenock was 1.28 a.m.--1.35p.m.

Left Dalmuir at 8 a, m, and proceeded to Tail-of-the-Bank where they carried out adjusting compasses, steering trials etc. The trials lasted 8 hours and took four days of testing

#### FRIDAY 26 DEC. 1930

Completion and handover of the ship.

The new vessel was to be called Pole Star and was to be registered at Leith.

The Commissioners decided to cancel the registration of the old ship and on the new vessel assuming that name, the old vessel would be sold under a written guarantee by the purchaser that the name would be changed.

Cox & Danks offered £600 but this was turned down as were various other offers.

On 18th Feb. An offer of £800 was accepted for the S.S Orphir (the new name) as she lay at the wharf of Messrs Beardmore at Dalmuir. Capt. Swanney wrote on Feb. 24th 1931 that the two men on watch would now be able to return to Stromness on the following day.

The new owner was Wm. Marshall 27 Kelburn Avenue Dumbreck Glasgow. The ship was to be engaged on the wreck of the Lusitania.

#### 22nd JANUARY 1931

The SCOTSMAN newspaper reported that at 11a.m. the previous day the Pole Star had arrived in Stromness having experienced rough weather on the way north. Chief Officer Maclachlan said the ship had behaved very well on the journey and that she was a much superior vessel to the previous one.

#### 1933

Tenders invited for annual overhaul of the Pole Star .

#### 22nd APRIL 1934

##### CAPTAIN SWANNEY

Owing to serious illness Captain Swanney was removed from Pole Star, then lying at Leith , to Chalmers Hospital on the evening of Sunday 22 April 1934. The following arrangements were made consequent on Captain Swanney's leave of absence viz.

#### POLE STAR

Captain McLachlan to take charge on voyage

Mr Thomson Mate on the "May" to Acting Mate Pole Star

Mr Gorman Carpenter on Pole Star to Acting Second Mate on the May

Mr Galbraith Mate on The Pole Star to Acting Master on May.

Mr Begg Second Mate to Acting Mate

#### 27th APRIL 1934

N. L. B. to Captain MacLaren

"Captain Swanney is making satisfactory progress but will probably be off duty for some time."

Northern Lighthouse Board write to Leith Nautical College for a suitable Second Officer.

#### Henry Robb Ltd.

This firm put in an offer to carry out hull, painting and engine work during the annual overhaul of the Pole Star.

The Hull would cost £345. painting £37, and the engine room £285.

*The rates of pay in 1934 were: Shipwrights 2/- Brass finishers 1/9 Platers 3/6 Plumbers 2/- Joiners 2/- Boy blacksmiths 1/6 Riveters 3/3*

*The highest rate---Turners & Machine men 4/6 d and the lowest were boy labourers 1/3d.*

There were 17 offers to execute the annual overhaul but Henry Robb's were awarded the contract.

#### 13th AUG. 1934

The Pole Star is now under the command of Captain McLachlan.

---

#### NORTHERN LIGHTHOUSE BOARD ARCHIVES

If anyone has ancestors connected with the N.L.B. they will find a wealth of material awaiting them in the Board's archives at West Register House in Charlotte Square, Edinburgh.

There are Registers of Staff, lightkeeper's records, non-lightkeepers records, Establishment Books, Board Minutes, plans of all the lighthouses designed by the Stevenson family of which Robert Louis was a member.

There is much here for the family researcher.

My father (William) often said that his father talked many times of all the Orcadians he had met and spoken to in every corner of the world. It was a great thrill to me, while doing my research, to be seeing the letters that my grandfather had hand written so long ago, especially as he died before I was born.

Little did he think, when he wrote them that, one day, nearly 80 years later, one of his grandchildren would be looking at them.

But, be warned --- be careful who you write to and what you write—it may happen to you too. ■



West Register House



### By Don Logie Member No1342

Fort Vancouver 1845

My grandfather, Thomas Logie, was born in Pierowall, Westray, in 1873. His father, James Logie (1826-1909), built and operated a large store in Pierowall. I have done considerable research on my family, but cannot link-up with the James Logie described in the following article. I would like to think that since we were both from this small island of Westray and we share a common name, that we are indeed related somewhere back in the past.

Like many others, I ignored my families' genealogy for many years. I did not think to ask my parents or grandparents about my ancestors. As a result, when I finally got around to researching my past, I had to source my information from various centers and locations. One site referred me to a Mr. Bruce Watson, residing in Vancouver, British Columbia. I phoned him and found out that he had done considerable research on employees of the Hudson's Bay Company. He had researched a "Logie" and agreed to send me a copy of his findings. This story is based on his research, utilizing considerable references from the Hudson's Bay Company archives.

James Logie was born on October 25, 1814 on Westray, Orkney. His parents were tailor John and Sophia (Miller) Logie. In 1834, at the age of 20, James joined the Hudson's Bay Company. The young Orcadian sailed from Stromness for the Pacific Northwest. His first posting was at the Hudson Bay's Fort Vancouver. He arrived in 1835, after sailing around Cape Horn.

Fort Vancouver was established on March 19th, 1825 at point Belle Vue on the north bank of the Columbia River, some 100 miles (160 km.) upstream from its mouth. For the next quarter century Fort Vancouver would serve as the headquarters of the immense Columbia Department - 700,000 square miles (1.8 million square km.) stretching from Russian Alaska to Mexican California and from the Rockies to the Pacific. In 1818, the United States and Great Britain had agreed to a joint occupation of what was known as the Oregon Country. That is to say, neither had sovereignty over the region and both were to be allowed to operate at will, each agreeing not to interfere with the other. The agreement, renewed in 1827, was a tacit understanding that a boundary would have to be negotiated at some point.

The post's Pacific Coast location meant it was normally supplied by sea. Ships travelled by way of Cape Horn and Hawaii before crossing the river bar and navigating upstream to Fort Vancouver. From there smaller boats, and eventually horse and mule trains, brought goods into, and furs out of, the interior.

Fort Vancouver became the hub of HBC's agricultural enterprises. Governor George Simpson was keen to expand HBC's interest beyond the fur trade alone, and in the Pacific Northwest he saw great potential for agriculture. Self-sufficiency in foodstuffs would reduce HBC's own operating costs by reducing the amount of costly food imports. As the "civilian" population of the Oregon Country grew – settlers, missionaries, prospectors

and professionals – Vancouver's agricultural industries also expanded to include orchards, grain, food crops, dairying and the raising of cattle and pigs for meat.

The first of James Logie's stays at the HBC post must have been positive, for when his five-year contract expired, he returned to the British Isles in 1839 aboard the Prince Rupert and to Orkney to marry Isabella Miller. They were married on July 9, 1840. While he was in the British Isles, he signed a second contract on March 11, 1840 to work as a labourer in Columbia for an additional five years. Logie returned with his wife, sailing around the Horn on the Vancouver and began a settled life together on Sauvie Island on June 1, 1841. James Logie replaced Laurent Sauvie as Dairy manager in 1842 at the end of Sauvie's contract. At that time, the dairy consisted of three or four residential families, a hundred milk cows and two or three hundred cattle that roamed at will. American interest in the region began after explorers Lewis and Clark had reached the mouth of the Columbia in 1805, but picked up in the late 1830s with the establishment of the Oregon Trail overland from St. Louis. The influx of American settlers changed things forever. In 1846, the new international boundary was agreed at the 49th parallel. In the face of an increasing American population. Britain abandoned its claim to the lower Columbia basin. All of HBC's holdings in Washington, Oregon and Idaho ended up on the American side. In 1860, HBC abandoned the site.

Because Logie's HBC contract came to an end in 1846 and that same year the Oregon Treaty discontinued the rights of the Hudson's Bay Company to the land, Logie took out a Provisional Land Claim in 1845. On March 1, 1849, caught up by the gold fever, he left (retired from) the services of the HBC and went south to California to seek his fortune. He may have returned with poor health, when the time came to file a Donation Land Claim in 1853, it was done under the name of his wife, Isabella. He died the following year, on March 24, 1854 and is buried in a family plot on the original site of the Logie dairy. After Logie's death, his widow married fellow Orcadian, Jonathan Moar. James Logie had one recorded child, Jonathan Logie (1853-1935).

*Hudson's Bay Fort Vancouver, 1843-1847*

*References: Orkney Parish Registers, Hudson's Bay Company archives, www.hbc.com/...forts/vancouver, various books re: Oregon*

*Written by: Don Logie (OFHS Member 1342)*



# The Island of Pharay

Point of  
Scaraber

Pharay



Windywa circa 1930

By Mila Murphy No 640, Mike Rendall No 325 and John Wallace No 767

Our interest in Pharay (called Faray in more recent times) grew out of North Isles family history research covering in particular Westray and Eday. Pharay is an island, about a mile and a half long and a quarter of a mile wide, lying between these two. It was included with the lands granted to the Balfour family in 1560 and became part of the Stewart Estate in 1724 upon the marriage of Isabel Balfour to Archibald Stewart of Brugh (Westray). After the death of James Stewart in 1858 Pharay ultimately became part of the Stewart Endowment, which still owns it today.

The genealogy of Pharay is quite inter-related with a number of families (Drummond, Marcus, Drever, Groat and Burgar) being on the island for many generations, covering most of the 19th century and into the 20th century. There have generally been eight tenancies. The houses run more or less in a line from north to south and are remembered by a rhyme that appears in a number of variants:

*Quoy, Cott, Doggerboat,  
Hammer on the Hess\*,  
Lakequoy, Windywa,  
Holland and the Ness.*

\* a ridge or hill

The earliest list of tenants is the 1810 Rental of James Stewart of Brugh. This list includes a house called Bull or Bu which became part of Hammar about 1850. At around this time the last and most southerly house, Ness, was established. The Ness was also the last house to be vacated when the people left in 1947.

Mary Sinclair (b. abt 1763) was one of the earliest persons known to have been born on Pharay. She was married to William Marcus. Their children born between 1795 and 1808 appear to have been born in Eday, so Mary left Pharay well before the time of the 1810 rental. It isn't known if her husband was related in any way to the Marcuses who held the tenancy at the Bu and Lakequoy in 1810, or if she was one of the Windywa Sinclairs. Mary and William were in Eday for the 1841 census, but by 1851 William had died. Mary evidently died between 1851 and 1855, as her death has not been found in the civil records.

During much of the 19th century and earlier, life on Pharay was probably quite similar to life on the neighbouring islands of Westray and Eday. Inhabitants raised sheep, and farmed and fished. Kelp was produced in great quantities in the 1700s and in significant amounts through at least the mid 1800s. However, Pharay lacked▶

HOUSE	1810 TENANT	SUBSEQUENT OCCUPANCY
QUOY	Robert Groat	Quoy was a Groat house and then Drever following the marriage of Jane Groat to Thomas Drever in 1840 and subsequent death of Jane's parents.
COTT	Thomas Drever	Stewart Drummond and Jean Drever occupied Cott for many years until they moved to Holland. The tenancy was then taken up by Burgars from Westray who stayed on Pharay until 1915
DOGGERBOAT	David Hourston	David Hourston went to Eday and Doggerboat became a Marcus house until 1943.
HAMMAR		A Drever house until 1900.
LAKEQUOY	William Marcus	Wm Marcus may have married Jane Groat and Groats occupied Lakequoy from pre 1841 until about 1928.
WINDYWA	William Sinclair	The Sinclairs moved to Eday in the 1840s/1850s and Drevs occupied Windywa from pre 1851 until about 1928.
HOLLAND	George Stevenson	The Stevensons moved to Eday in the 1820s. Thomas Drever and his wife Christina Drever, unrelated to other Pharay Drevs, occupied it until the mid 1800s when the Drummonds moved to Holland from Cott.
NESS	—	Drummonds from Westray, by the way of Bu, occupied Ness. It subsequently became a Wallace home because of the marriage of William Wallace's mother, Mary Peace, to Wm Drummond.
BU	William Marcus	Probably the same Wm Marcus who married Janet Groat and had the tenancy of Lakequoy.

◀a natural harbour. Most houses used adjacent geos on the east side of the island, where boats had to be raised from the water to avoid being broken up against the rocks in the rough seas. Residents were very dependant upon one another, especially to move livestock and supplies on and off the island.

As with most who rely on fishing for their livelihood, Pharay men were great seamen. Nevertheless, the rough waters surrounding the island were responsible for several accidents and wrecks over the years that sometimes resulted in loss of life. Drownings also occurred in the sound that separates Pharay from a small holm just to its north. When the tide was out, it was possible to walk between the two islands, and Pharay sheep were routinely grazed on the holm. On two occasions residents were swept away when the tide came in earlier or stronger than expected. Another boating accident occurred when a cow was being transported between Eday and Pharay. The cow put its hoof through the bottom of the boat, ultimately causing it to capsize. Although two men were saved, two were lost.

The most memorable and heroic event in the history

cue using the yawl "Mary" owned by William Burgar. It took a man at each of the four oars and one at the tiller to make two dangerous trips across the treacherous waters to rescue the nine crewmen of the Hope. When the rescue was complete, darkness had fallen and the men were exhausted. The nine Hope crewmen were distributed among the eight houses where they received dry clothes and food. Word spread of the heroic actions of the five men and they received gifts and accolades from around the world. In October 1909 they were each presented the Board of Trade Silver Medal at Balmoral Castle by King Edward VIII. The men who became known as the Pharay Heroes were: Robert Reid, Holland; William Burgar, Cott; James Groat, Lakequoy; John Harcus, Doggerboat; and John Drever, Windywa.

There was a school building containing a classroom and living accommodation for the teacher located in the middle of the island between Doggerboat and Hammer. Parents had been complaining about facilities and the Stewart Endowment agreed to construct a new building. The contract was granted to builders from Westray (one of whom later moved to Pharay) and the new school was built in 1884. Even with the school building there were often periods when there was no teacher present, especially in the 1900s.

A chapel existed on Pharay in the early days. It was located on the west side of the island, at the middle of the island, at the edge of the burial ground, which is still very much in evidence. The wall surrounding the burial ground was built from stones that originally formed the chapel. More than 30 headstones, many still legible, mark graves, and certainly many more Pharay residents are resting there.

Toward the end of the 1800s some of the long-residing families began leaving Pharay. Where there had previously been an extended family of two or three households living on a tenancy, there would only be one. As years passed more modern ways came to neighbouring

islands, but the way of life on Pharay did not change. As new families replaced the long residing residents, they tended to view living on Pharay to be temporary until they could go somewhere else, rather than considering it their long-term home. Consequently, there was a much greater turnover of residents. Lack of services such as a shop or medical care meant residents were dependent on neighbouring islands, usually Eday, for these services. The decrease in population from a high of over 80 in the ▶



*Pharay Heroes: Robert Reid, Holland; William Burgar, Cott; James Groat, Lakequoy; John Harcus, Doggerboat; and John Drever, Windywa.*

of Pharay is the wreck of the trawler "Hope." In late December 1908 there was a severe snowstorm, and the Hope, anchored in the North Sound to wait out the storm, was set adrift. The boat was driven ashore on the Pharay Holm during the night. With great difficulty the crew managed to get ashore and make some sort of crude shelter. Early the next morning John Harcus of Doggerboat saw the wreck. The men of Pharay gathered at the north of the island, and decided to attempt a res-

◀1870s to about 36 in 1931 meant there were fewer people to accomplish the labour-intensive tasks of transporting supplies and livestock. The severe weather conditions meant that obtaining supplies and mail could not occur on a dependable schedule, and at times the teacher was not able to return to Pharay after spending a weekend away.

It was becoming more difficult to attract teachers will-



*Pharay School in the late 1980s*

ing to come to the school, a situation further exacerbated after World War II. The declining population meant fewer school age children. Finally, in July 1946 the school was

closed, and the two remaining students had to board in Westray to attend school. Further hardship was placed on the families because weather sometime prevented the children from returning home at the weekends. At this time the population was about 20 people living in six houses. This condition was unsustainable, and these last families left the island over a short period. The last to leave in 1947 was William Wallace of the Ness, who had lived on Pharay over 60 years.

Although no one lives on the island anymore, it has been rented for sheep grazing. Over the years, cattle and red deer also were tried on the island, but these efforts were unsuccessful. The houses and farm buildings have deteriorated from disuse, but the schoolhouse, still used during lambing season, has been maintained. Just recently, the tenancy has been taken over by a farmer from Eday.

After everyone left, an endangered species of grey seals began using Pharay and its holm as a breeding ground. Today the island has special conservation status to protect the seals.

Several former residents of Pharay live in Orkney today. Descendants of Pharay residents are in Orkney and throughout Scotland, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Further information about the island, the people who lived there and their descendants may be found at the web site [genealogy.northern-skies.net/pharay.php?number=1](http://genealogy.northern-skies.net/pharay.php?number=1). We welcome comments from anyone who can provide further information and any photos of the island and those who lived there.

Mila Murphy (member 640), Mike Rendall (member 325) and John Wallace (member 767). ■

## The East Indies stones in Holm pier

In our September issue we told the tale of how stones from the East Indies came to be in Holm Pier. These turned out to have been part of the ballast of the square-rigger, the Argyllshire which had run aground near Holm in bad weather in 1877.

The item had appeared in Peace's Almanac and had been sent to me by John Taylor of Burray.

An interesting enough story I thought and that was an end to it; but not so, for early in January I received a package from Anne Miller in Pequea, Pennsylvania. It turns out that Captain Andrew Laird, skipper of the Argyllshire, was Anne's great, great uncle and he had built a model of his ship which is still treasured by the family.

When the Argyllshire had run aground, Captain Laird, who came from Burray, had been ashore and had left instructions with the mate of the procedure to be followed in the event of bad weather.

Unfortunately, the mate, who was not familiar with the waters of Scapa Flow, did not follow orders with the result that the vessel was driven ashore on Hasquoy Head, Holm.

When the Argyllshire ran ashore, Captain Laird was with his wife and family and because of the gale he was unable to reboard his vessel.

Captain Laird's next command, in 1878 was the Fife-shire but it was also to be his last for she went down in a Hurricane and the captain was to lose his life when only

39 years old.

This is all that Anne knows about her ancestor. She has no idea who his wife was or if they had children and would be grateful for any information her fellow members can provide. You can reach Anne at:-

**[akblmiller@comcast.net](mailto:akblmiller@comcast.net)**



*This is a photograph of Ann'e father, a great nephew of Captain Andrew Laird with the model of the Argyllshire which was made by the captain.*

*Thanks for getting in touch Bridget—delighted we could help*

I read with delight the report of the outing to Westray by Elaine Sinclair. It brought back so many happy memories of a wonderful day out with the Orkney FHS. I felt I must write and tell you about my experience of that lovely day. I was with my husband on holiday in Orkney, planned to coincide with the outing. For me the outing had an extra pleasure as I had recently found that a second cousin of mine was now living in Westray. We were both born in Hertfordshire England our grandparents being Orcadians. We had never met before and were able to spend a very happy morning together in the Snug of the Pierowall Hotel exchanging family history stories and looking at old family photographs. On the way home on the ferry I met with another second cousin and we were able to expand our knowledge of our family history. All made possible by the wonderful organisation of the Orkney FHS. Thank you.

Another thank you must go to the wonderful team that offer such willing support to members who just drop in on them in the office. George stayed behind after his going home time, just to complete his search for the death details of the brothers of my great grandfather Benjamin Hagar Smith. I had popped into the Archives to get more information about their father Donald Smith's Trust left after his death to care for his wife. When I returned George told me the research had almost brought him to

tears. The sad demise of those poor brothers was hard to believe. Out of the six sons born to Donald Smith and Mary Craigie only my great grandfather lived to adulthood. The eldest son a twin Donald died of consumption aged 24 in isolation at his father's farm of Craigiefield. The next William Craigie Smith died aged 5 of a childhood illness the same week as his sister died. John Duguid Smith was drowned aged 18 years when the boat transporting cattle for his father floundered. His body was washed up many weeks later on Shapinsay. His body was identified by the contents of his pockets his coat had been tightly fastened preserving both body and the contents of his pockets.

Another baby son died a few months old. The youngest son David Craigie Smith was killed aged 11 years by a runaway horse, his feet caught in the trailing reins he was pulled across a ploughed field cause brain damage. Of the six daughters three lived to marry and have families including twins who married Cameron Kent and Malcolm Corston and both went to live in Owen Sound Ontario. Only one daughter remained living in Albert Street Kirwall, married to David Balfour Peace.

Thank you all for your kind help, including the creator of the website, which I find so useful with my research from a distance.

Bridget Ann Hunter [nee Smith] Member 111.  
bridget.hunter@btinternet.com

## THE NAIRN FAMILY & LOCAL HISTORY FAIR

PRESENTED BY SCOTTISH GENEALOGICAL IN  
ASSOCIATION WITH  
THE MORAY & NAIRN FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY  
IN NAIRN COMMUNITY CENTRE

SATURDAY 2nd OCTOBER 2010  
10am–4.30pm Admission £1

*There will be stands by Scottish Family History Societies,  
Local History and Heritage Groups, Professional Genealogists,  
Local History Publishers and many others.*

*There will be a series of lectures throughout the day on Family  
History and other related topics. Local Family History Society  
members will be on hand to answer your questions*

**LIGHT REFRESHMENT AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

For further information contact Bruce Bishop  
on 01343 549509  
or email [jmnbb.bishop@virgin.net](mailto:jmnbb.bishop@virgin.net)

## SIB Folk News Binders

*If you have kept every copy of the Sib Folk News these open flat binders will hold them all and still provide space for future copies up to December 2011.*

*Attractively finished in dark green simulated leather with gold blocking on the spine, they will make a handsome addition to your bookshelves.*

*Check out our website for more information.*



# THE ORKNEY FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

**O**rkney Family History Society was formed in 1997 and is run by a committee of volunteers.

It is similar to societies operating worldwide where members share a mutual interest in family history and help each other with research and, from time to time assist in special projects concerning the countless records and subjects available to us all in finding our roots.

The main objectives are:

1 To establish a local organisation for the study, collection, analysis and sharing of information about individuals and families in Orkney.

2 To establish and maintain links with other family history groups and genealogical societies throughout the UK and overseas

3. To establish and maintain a library and other reference facilities as an information resource for members and approved subscribers.

4. To promote study projects and special interest groups to pursue approved assignments.

We are located on the upper floor of the Kirkwall Library next to the archives department and are open Mon–Fri 2pm–4.30pm and Sat 11am–4.30pm.

Our own library, though small at the moment, holds a variety of information including:

*The IGI for Orkney on microfiche.*

*The Old Parish Records on microfilm.*

*The Census Returns on microfilm transcribed on to a computer database.*

*Family Trees.*

*Emigration and Debtors lists.*

*Letters, Articles and stories concerning Orkney and its people.*

*Hudson's Bay Company information.*

*Graveyard Surveys (long term project).*

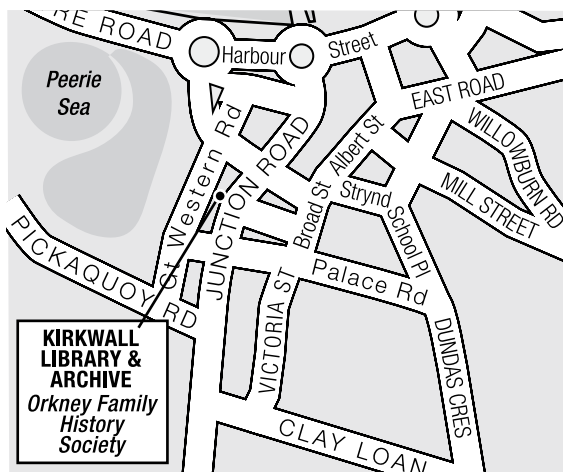
This material is available to members for 'in house' research by arrangement.

Locally we have monthly Members' Evenings with a guest speaker.

We produce a booklet of members and interests to allow members with similar interests to correspond with each other if they wish.

We also produce a newsletter 4 times a year and are always looking for articles and photographs of interest. A stamped addressed envelope should be included if these are to be returned. Back copies of the magazine can be purchased at £1 per copy.

We can usually undertake research for members who live outwith Orkney but this is dependent on the willingness of our island members giving up their spare time to help.



**M**embership of the Society runs annually from the date of membership application. All subscriptions should be sent to the Treasurer at the OFHS address below.

New members joining before the 1st December will receive back copies of the three magazines for the current year. From 1st December new members will receive membership for the remainder of the current year, plus the following year, but will not receive the back copies of the magazine.

The present subscription rates are as follows:

<b>ORDINARY</b>	
<i>Family membership (UK only)</i>	<b>£10.00</b>
<b>FAMILY MEMBERSHIP</b>	
<i>Spouse, Partner and Children under 18</i>	<b>£15.00</b>
<b>SENIOR CITIZENS</b>	
<i>Single or couple (UK only)</i>	<b>£7.00</b>
<b>OVERSEAS</b>	
<i>Surface Mail</i>	<b>£12.50</b>
<b>OVERSEAS</b>	
<i>Air Mail</i>	<b>£15.00</b>

Overseas members should pay their fees in sterling or its equivalent. If it is not possible to send pounds sterling please check the exchange rate. Our bank will accept overseas cheques without charging commission. Receipts will be issued with the next magazine. Members residing in the United Kingdom may pay their subscriptions by Bankers Order and if they wish can have their subscriptions treated as gift donations. Forms will be sent on request.

*Cheques should be made payable to:  
ORKNEY FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY  
and forwarded to*

**ORKNEY FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY**  
Orkney Library & Archive  
44 Junction Rd, Kirkwall, Orkney KW15 1AG  
**Telephone 01856 879207**

*General enquires should be addressed to the office in writing or to*  
Treasurer George Gray (e-mail: george.gray147@btinternet.com)  
General Secretary, Elaine Sinclair (sincs01963@yahoo.co.uk)  
Research Secy, Adrienne Leask (e-mail: amerswyck@talktalk.net)  
Editor, John Sinclair (e-mail: johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk)  
Orkney Family History Society website— [www.orkneyfhs.co.uk](http://www.orkneyfhs.co.uk)

**The Orkney Family History Society**  
**is a Registered Charity in Scotland SCO26205**

*Articles in the newsletter are copyright to the Society and its authors and may not be reproduced without permission of the editor. The Society is a registered charity in Scotland and a member of the Scottish Association of Family History Societies. The Society's newsletter, Sib Folk News is registered with the British Library under the serial number ISSN 1368-3950.*

## LAST BUT NOT LEAST

*In the Supper Room, Kirkwall Town Hall at 7.30pm*

**Thursday 8th April**

**A talk by Paul Sutherland**  
**Sheriff Thoms - the man who saved**  
**St Magnus Cathedral**

**Thursday 13th May AGM**

**followed by a talk from Janette Park**

**JUNE 2010**

**OFHS Annual Outing**

**Caithness - Possibly Castle of Mey**  
**and Latheron**