



# SIB FOLK NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE ORKNEY FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

ISSUE No 49 March 2009



*A warm welcome to our*

# 2000th MEMBER

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FAMILY HISTORY  
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Membership



# From the chair

Hogmanay, New Year, Burns Night and some winter snow have come and gone and we are all set for another busy year. 2009 is a big year for genealogy in Scotland as the Scottish Parliament promotes "Scotland's Year of Homecoming". They have even sponsored our national Football League. So if your ancestors played football for Orkney or personally achieved some acclaim as an Orcadian then why not tell their story in the Sib Folk News.

The Society have no specific events for the Homecoming other than providing an open welcome to all ancestral visitors at our office in the Orkney Library and Archive. Advance warning of your visit would be useful so that we can point you in the right direction to find your ancestral home.

For members living on Mainland Scotland, the Society will be attending the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Scottish Association of Family History Societies on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April in Aberdeen. Why not check out their website; it's packed with information - [http://www.safhs.org.uk/SAFHS\\_Conference.asp](http://www.safhs.org.uk/SAFHS_Conference.asp)

We look forward to welcoming you to our stand.

New members continue to join the Society. The committee are proposing a change to our membership system at our next Annual General Meeting. This is designed to cease having a set membership year with a full year's membership being available to start at any time of year. New and renewals of membership are now available on-line. The changes made to the web-site have been beneficial to the membership and we are indebted to our web guru Dave Higgins. If you haven't logged in to the updated website yet please do so - check out the members' pages.

With a programme of local activity planned for spring and summer, 2009 promises to be an interesting year.

Best wishes and thanks for supporting your Society.

*Alan Clouston*

## Cover Picture - Our 2000th Member

Our treasurer George Gray presents new member Mrs Ann Walls ( MS Scott ) with a copy of "Around the Orkney Peat Fires" by W R MacKintosh to mark the occasion of her being our 2000th member. Ann lives in Finstown and is a distant cousin of our 1000th member Keith Scott from Plymouth. Both Ann and Keith are descended from David Scott and his wife Mary Swanney who farmed at Quoymorhouse in Shapinsay back in the 1880s. David and Mary had 9 sons and no daughters. It was said that every Sunday Mrs Scott made sure all her sons had a good wash by sending them down to the sea below the farm and making them swim across the Bay of Sandgarth from one side to the other. She would stay at the farm and use her spyglass to make sure they all got to the other side.

By coincidence George himself was born at Quoymorhouse in Shapinsay. However, there were a few other families farming at Quoymorehouse between the Scotts leaving to go to England in 1890 and the Gray family taking it over in 1951.



### APRIL 9th Members Night

*Elaine Sinclair*  
Demonstration of  
Family Treemaker  
2009 Software

### MAY 14th AGM

Speaker tbc

**JUNE 14th**  
Outing  
to Westray  
*Don't miss it*

# Tumbledown

## FEATURING 'MUCKLEHOUSE' CAVA

By Alan Clouston – Member No 339

In the last SIB News my *Tumbledown* feature was a small cottage called the *Point*. The resultant response indicated a great deal of interest. Why? The Smith family, who were resident in 1881 to 1901, had a connection with the island of Cava. It was Barbara Smith who had been born in Cava whilst her husband Halcro Smith had been born on the nearby island of Fara, part of Walls parish. In 1871 they were living on Cava at *North House* prior to moving to the *Point*.

Cava is now uninhabited and is part of the parish of Orphir. Not having visited Cava I thought it might be useful to research some of their family connections.

As a result *Tumbledown* looks at the Smith family property on Cava called *Mucklehouse*. As no photograph is currently available an old map of the island shows the Cava households.



It would be interesting to hear of other families from any of our smaller islands. Have you a 'Tumbledown' to tell or questions to ask? Contact Alan Clouston: alan.clouston@virgin.net

### Did your ancestors live here?

Residents of Mucklehouse, Island of Cava	1821	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901
<b>Name</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>age</b>	<b>age</b>
William Smith	60	75	-	-	-	-	-	-
Christian (nee Robertson) (B. Evie)	50	65	71*	82*	-	-	-	-
Margaret	15	35	46*	58*	68*	77*	-	-
Barbara	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
George	15	40	49	60	70	-	-	-
Margaret	-	30	44	50	65	77	-	-
Catherine	-	13	23	-	-	-	-	-
William	-	10	-	-	-	-	-	-
James	-	8	-	-	-	-	-	-
John (Head of Household 1881)	-	4	14	24	34	44	53	-
Margaret	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cecilia	-	0(6m)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ann (married to Isaac Johnston)	-	-	8	18	28	38	-	-
Mary	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-
James Smith (Fisherman)	-	-	-	40	-	-	-	-
William Flett (Fisherman)	-	-	-	37	-	-	-	-
Jean Berston (farm servant) (niece)	-	-	-	-	9	19	-	-
William Berston (Fisherman)	-	-	-	-	43	-	-	-
Isaac Johnston (fisherman from Graemsay)	-	-	-	-	-	37	-	-
Ann Williamina Johnston	-	-	-	-	-	8	16	-
Margaret I Johnston	-	-	-	-	-	5	-	-
Jemima Johnston	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-
John I Johnston	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Elizabeth (m. To John) (born Walls)	-	-	-	-	-	-	33	42
Elizabeth	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	17
John	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	15
Isabella Mary	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	13
Maggie	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
William	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Sarah Inkster (school teacher)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18

\* indicates they were living on Cava but in another small cottage 'Croo'

# My school-age years in Papa Stronsay

By Thomas Scott Member No 31

Tom Scott was born in Papa Stronsay and spent most of his working life with Mullards in Southampton. He missed Orkney a lot, but not for the alogy and gene- attended evening classes in both subjects. He very soon had all the Westray and Papa Westray censuses transcribed and printed. He compiled a book on, 'The Scotts of Trenabie, Westray'. This is basically a list of all the hundreds of descendants of one man and their partners.

Unfortunately he passed away on the 31<sup>st</sup> August this year at the age of eighty four. His great regret was that he was never able to find the birthplace or the burial place of his oldest known relative, Simon Scott, born about 1730.

Another relative, his cousin, Rev Tom Stout died this year too. There are now only eight people who can claim the distinction of having been born in Papa Stronsay. They are George Rendall, Kirkwall, Cathie Rendall, Westray, Tom Stout, a volunteer with OFHS and his three sisters, Irene, Margaret and Kathleen, and also Tom and Mary Clyne.

Unknown to Tom Scott's wife, Pamela, he had written three journals of an autobiographical nature. When she found them she passed them on to us and is pleased to let us print some of it.

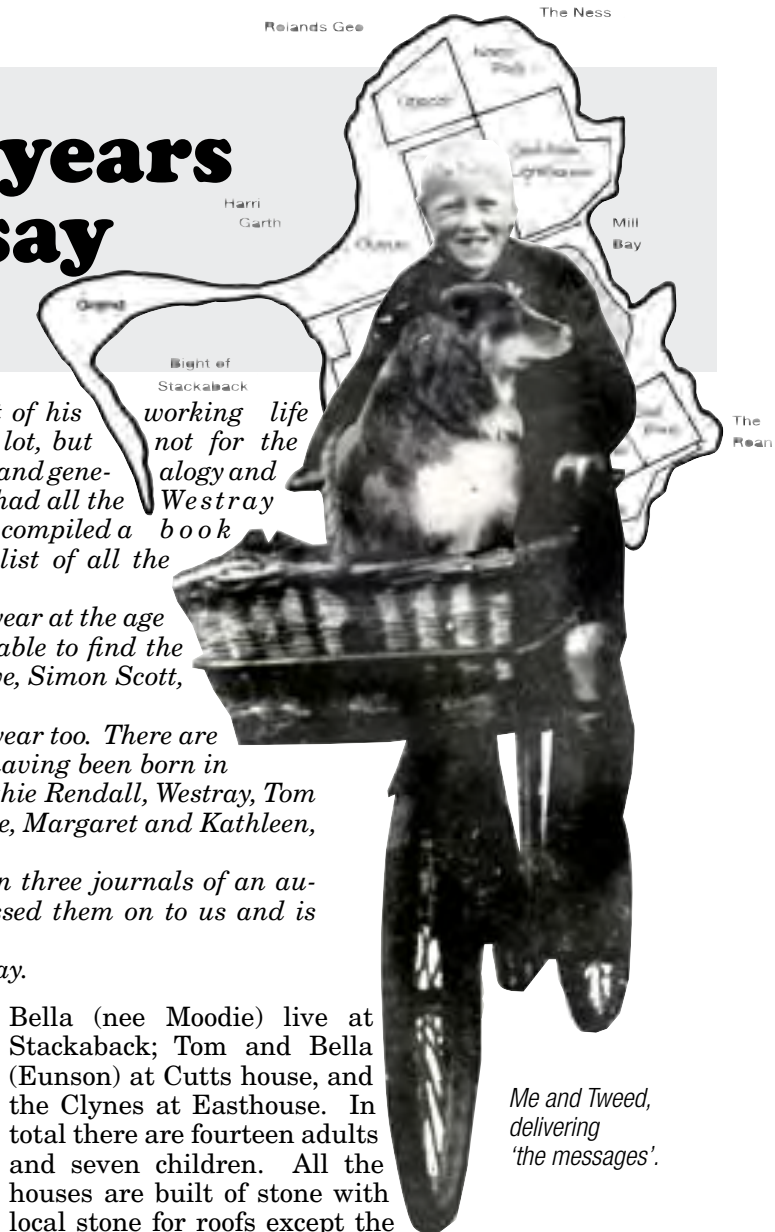
The following are his memories of life in Papa Stronsay.

I am Tommy, born 1924 and I live with my father John Scott, my mother Betsy Scott, my older brother Jack and younger brother James on the island of Papa Stronsay in Orkney. Our island is the smallest inhabited one in the group. It has only one farm rented by my dad from an Orkney laird, but there are other things on Papa Stronsay. There is a lighthouse, five herring curing stations, a loch, two wells, a 'picts' house, the remains of a windmill and water mill, and a real Viking grave with its mound of stones. Dad says there used to be a monastery but only a few stones from parts of the floor are left. He also told me that Papa means "the priest's isle". For most of the year there are five families on our isle.



Jack and Tom flew over their birthplace c.1980. Jack was the pilot and Tom the photographer

We live in the 'Big house'. It has three floors. My Uncle Andrew Drever and Auntie Louie live in the foreman's house and it has two floors. James (Jeemso) Scott and



Me and Tweed, delivering 'the messages'.

Bella (nee Moodie) live at Stackaback; Tom and Bella (Eunson) at Cutts house, and the Clynes at Easthouse. In total there are fourteen adults and seven children. All the houses are built of stone with local stone for roofs except the threshing barn which has a Welsh slate roof.



Farm steading and rear of house

In our house, my older brother and I have one of the top rooms and the two maids, who help mum with the housework and other work, have the other top floor room. Our room has a light in the roof and a small window in the side which only opens a little way at the top. Mummy says that is so that we do not 'fall out', but when it rains we can touch the water that passes in the gutter.

We like our room in summer when the long evening light makes it difficult to sleep, but we can watch all the activity in the harbour. In winter we are scared to go up the stairs in the darkness - our island is full of past memories.

There is a dining room and lounge on the second floor but we only use the dining room at Christmas, or if we have special visitors, when the lounge is used as a bedroom. At other times we children use the lounge or 'spare room' only on very stormy days when a fire is lit so that we can play 'out of the way'.

On the ground floor is my parent's room, the dairy and a large kitchen. We eat and spend most of the time in the kitchen where a Smith and Wellstood stove is used for cooking and heating. What I like about winter is the evenings curled up with my dog, Tweed, on a rug before the fire. My dad is reading in the basket chair on the left side of the fire and mother in the Orkney straw back chair 'doing something', usually knitting.

Our meals are mainly farm produce, mutton, pork, chicken



*Mother and Jimic*

and beef less frequently as it has to be bought in Stronsay. Occasionally we have 'clapshot', a dish made with swede and potatoes with salt herring. Dad buys a barrel of herring every year. I hate potato soup with the long threads like string which won't go down.

We also have bere bannocks made from a local type of barley, oat cakes and white loaves. Dad says when he was my age he only had bread on Sundays. We have it everyday but only cakes on Sunday.

My uncle Andrew, Aunt Louie and two children live next door 'just along the close'. My mum's dad used to live with them; he seemed ever so old with a long moustache. He seemed to sit for hours and hours in his chair and often I used to pull his pipe out of his mouth, but I don't remember anything he said. Sometimes when I was not looking he would fill my soup with salt and chuckle for ages when I tried to sup it - not that I liked my soup anyway. My grandfather died before I was five and my mum's brother James Stout went to live with my uncle Andrew.

On the farm the cattle are housed from October to May and straw, hay and turnips are needed for food. For the farm work five Clydesdale horses are used and we children often have 'lifts' in the carts or occasionally a ride on horseback when the horses are taken for a drink, or to wash their legs in the sea.

In the harvest time two horses pull the reaper, my uncle sits on one seat and my dad the other. A five foot zig zag



*My Dad, John Scott, taken in 1912, with our workhorses*

blade cuts the corn and my father swings up a board to gather sufficient stalks to make a sheaf before sliding it off the board with a rake. A band is made from the bundle to tie the sheaf. Six sheaves are stood on end to make a 'stook.' It takes a long time to cut the grain in the field. The sheaves when dry are sorted and built into peaked rounded 'Stacks' (Ricks) Each one is thatched with 'simmonds' which is a 2 inch thick straw rope. The 'rope' is wound on to a ball of my height so that it is pulled from inside the ball. We like playing hide-and-seek around the stacks in the yard.

The sheaves are carted into a barn when straw is needed



*Cutting oats at Stackaback*

during winter. I enjoy watching the engine that drives the threshing mill. I'm only allowed to watch when dad is there. I do not understand why the red hot bolt heated with a primus makes it fire, or why the spinning balls cut it off, the fly wheel is high, more than twice my height but it rotates easily as the engine goes jug jug jug, jif jif, jug jug jug. I sit on a filled grain sack and watch the heavy oats come out of one shute and light oats out of the other. The straw bounces up and down on four shakers until it drops over the end.

◀ Sometimes the oat crusher is on and dad fills the grain into the hopper with a 'cubbie' - the noise is deafening as the flat rolled oats come out. The straw is used for cattle food, but also to make cubbies, simmonds, chair backs and other things. Clean white oat chaff is used in our beds, and these are ever so soft.



*Burning Kelp. A Tom Kent photograph from the Orkney Library Photo Archive*

The adults not employed on the farm helped with farm work in spring and harvest but their main income was from kelp. During winter and spring the long stalks of seaweed, tangles (wrack) were cleaned and laid to dry on raised stone benches. In May they were put in stone lined cylindrical pits and burned. The burning tangles were raked with long iron shafts. We children used to run through the pungent smoke. The ashes, called kelp, when cold was costed, weighed and stored in a shed until a coaster called to take it to England.



*Gutters and coopers at work. Accommodation hut is in the background*

When the kelp was shipped in early summer our world changed, ships arrived frequently to the herring curing jetties with hundreds of wooden barrels, other utensils and tons of coarse salt. Then the stevedores and foremen arrive and finally the hundreds of ladies who clean and pack the herrings in barrels with salt. The ladies try talking to us but they speak in a foreign language - they try to lift us up. 'Oh my Gra' but we do not understand and we run away.

The fishing fleet is mainly steam propelled 'drifters'. They come from Grimsby, Lowestoft, Peterhead and Buckie, some from Shetland and only five from Orkney. They are Zulus, sailing ships with one large mast and a "lug" sail. One of my cousins can tell where the ships come from they have letters LT, YH, A, K etc on their sides. All summer my parents are very busy. Dad brings nearly all the food, the letters and many other things by boat from Stronsay.



*Drifters discharging herring at Papa Stronsay*

My mother is many hours each day in the shop. Then as quickly as they come, at the end of August or early September the strangers leave. Some may stay longer to load the large steamers for the Baltic and Germany with the barrels of herring. Slowly we get used to the peace and quiet.



*.At back; Betsy Seatter and Janet Carter with Jimmy Scott on her knee. At front: John Drever, Tommy Scott, Jack Scott and Bill Drever. Photograph c. 1934.*

I started school at four and a half years old because we would only have a teacher on our isle if there were three children. My older brother used to go to school in another isle, Westray, where he lived with our uncle. Our school was a room in one of the Church of Scotland Rest Huts. Our teacher comes from Stromness, she is young and we all like her. I don't remember what we do in school.

It is 11<sup>th</sup> January and I am eleven years old. It is winter and in January we have the worst storms. The air hisses as it rushes past the houses, the chimney pots groan for hours on end as they strain to stay upright in the rushing wind. From the windows we see the sea crashing against the coast; the mail steamer can not come; my father can not cross to Stronsay for days on end. Yet for us children the sea is not a barrier, we are not in prison. We have heard of Scotsmen and Englishmen but they live 'doon sooth'

We are Northern and Norse. We dream of future days when the sun rises clear out of the peaceful sea dripping drops of burnished gold. Then as for our ancestors the sea will be a highway taking us to other lands and far off places. ■

# The curious tale of William Glen Rae

## John Rae's older brother



By Robert Whitton, Member No 218

William Glen Rae, b. 1809 emigrated from Orkney in 1827 on board the *Mary Ann*, bound for Montreal. He joined the Hudson's Bay Company as a clerk and was to remain with them until his death in 1845.

William was the older brother of John Rae, the famous Arctic explorer. They were the sons of John Rae of Orphir and Margaret Glen Campbell of Stromness Orkney.

William married Eloise, daughter of John McLoughlin in 1838. McLoughlin was Chief Factor of the Columbia Fur District of the HBC at Fort Vancouver.

In 1841 McLoughlin dispatched his son-in-law to Yerba Buena (now San Francisco) to manage the HBC Store.

This was a combined house and place of business and occupied the easterly two thirds of the block now bounded by Montgomerie, Clay, Kearney and Sacramento Streets. It was here that Eloise kept house and entertained the important personages who called upon her hard-drinking husband.

When the Americans took California in 1846, the Hudson's Bay Company sold the property to the merchants and realtors, Mellus, Howard and Company. Early in 1850, when Long Wharf opened into Montgomery Street, the building became the United States Hotel. This was a short-lived venture as the building was destroyed by fire in 1851. All that remained was the old adobe kitchen that dated from pre HBC days. William Howard had this room roofed with Australian bricks by Chinese labourers. He soon erected a new brick structure, however, and this was occupied by Benjamin Davidson who had been authorised to open a banking firm on behalf of Rothschilds of London who foresaw a prosperous future for San Francisco.

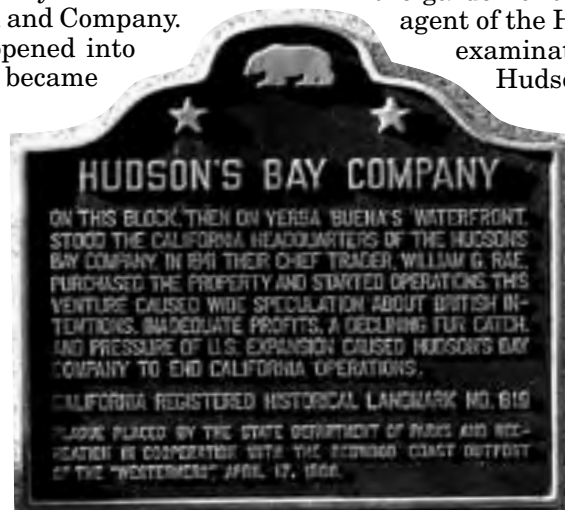


San Francisco Harbour (Yerba Buena Cove) about 1850

In 1854, some labourers, digging a sewer in Commercial Street, came upon a long, narrow wooden box, which, on the removal of the earth, proved to be a coffin with a glass covered aperture in its lid. The awed workmen brushed the loose earth away from the oval glass, revealing, with ghastly distinctness, the greyish-white face of the corpse. All the features retained their form, calm and peaceful. Crowds of people came to look, to turn away, wondering who this long-buried, silent sleeper was and how his grave happened to be there, exactly in the centre of that noisy, thoroughfare, with the music of instrumental bands in the gambling saloons, laughter, song and the never-ceasing tread of eager and excited men, all unconscious of the silent form beneath their feet. Among all the curious gazers, none knew those wonderfully preserved features, once so familiar to many, so dear surely, to some!

Who could explain this mystery? At last, Mr. Bond, the confidential secretary of Wm. D. M. Howard, came that way and he knew that the ground was formerly the garden of the house occupied by Wm. G. Rae, agent of the Hudson's Bay Company. A coroner's examination confirmed that the man was Hudson's Bay Company's agent, William Glenn Rae, son-in-law of Chief Factor John McLoughlin.

Arriving at Yerba Buena in August 1841, Rae opened his post in the store room, with \$10,000 worth of goods. He furnished rebels against Governor Manuel Micheltoarena in 1844, with \$15,000 worth of stores and munitions. Worried over collapse of the revolt and fearing punishment, Rae took to drinking heavily. On January 19, 1845 he shot himself. He was buried in the garden outside his house.



Plaque comemorating location of Hudson's Bay Company



By Alan Aim Member No.1909

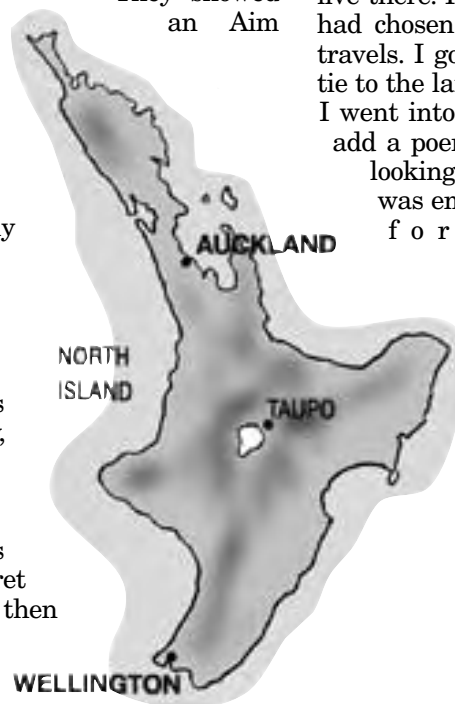
When my sister Karen Aim was murdered in New Zealand in January 2008, my family received over 1,000 letters and cards of condolence from people all over the World – among them were different Aim families in New Zealand. We also received a DVD of the Memorial service held in Taupo, which was held the same day as the funeral in Orkney. Following the service there were personal video messages from Karens Taupo friends, dignitaries, and a group calling themselves the “Aim clan from New Zealand”. Each of them expressed their sorrow for my family and wished they had actually met Karen as many of them lived within a short drive from Taupo, where she was staying on a year long work visa. They showed a group photograph taken at an Aim Family Reunion held in 2003 and said they were organising another reunion for October 2008 and gave an invitation to the relations in the Orkneys who may want to attend.

Tragedy also hit the Aim family in March when Brian Aim from Finstown, manager of Scarths Centre, died suddenly at the Pomona Inn. On researching the family tree I concluded that the Aims in the West Mainland of Orkney, the New Zealand Aims, and the East Mainland Aims were all descendants of a Simon Aim (1767-1836) of Cleat farm, Holm. His son Peter Aim married Margaret Cromarty in South Ronaldsay, then secondly Pheobie Louttit and moved to the Hall of Heddle farm in Firth, where the West Mainland Aims have descended. Simon’s daughter Margaret Aim had an illegitimate son named William, fathered by James Stockend. It is believed William emigrated to New Zealand in 1859 and kept his mother’s surname as he had been brought up at Cleat with his uncle Samuel Aim. Samuel inherited Cleat farm and it’s down his line that myself and the current Aim family at Cleat come from.

When I arrived in New Zealand in October for a month long visit I stayed with Raewyn Harrison (nee Aim) and her husband Ken. The first Sunday

we had lunch with Ken & Raewyn, and her niece Lindell (nee Aim) and her husband Steve Foots. Lindell immediately commented that I looked like her brother Stephen Aim, manager of a Coca Cola factory in Texas! Quite possible as we were 5th cousins. Following the meal I asked Ken if he had realised that every Aim sat around that table had lost a sister under tragic circumstances. Raewyn lost her sister Gail Dalzell (nee Aim) in 2004 to cancer, and Lindell lost her sister Kirsten Aim in 1995 in a car accident when the family grew up in Kenya. The point I made was that tragedy can happen to anyone.

I arrived in Taupo and met many of Karen’s friends who live there. I could understand the attraction of why Karen had chosen such a beautiful place to stay whilst on her travels. I got a bunch of white arab lilies from a florist to tie to the lamp-post at the spot where Karen was attacked. I went into a stationery shop with the flowers, looking to add a poem to the bouquet, to which the lady attendant looking at the flowers said “who’s the lucky lady?”. She was embarrassed when I explained it was a memorial for my sister and not a present for a girlfriend. ▶



My sister Karen





*Stewart Aim's descendants, his wife Hazel, is in the front row centre*



*Jim Aim's descendants, his daughter Gabrielle, front row centre, married a Man from Tonga Islands*

◀The Aim Family Reunion was held in New Plymouth on Labour Weekend – a national holiday in New Zealand. The reunions first began in 1993 following the death of Eunice Tucker (nee Aim) whose main purpose in life was keeping the Aim family together. She had corresponded with the late Ronnie Aim of the Holm Post Office and several family members have visited the Orkneys because of their contacts. The majority of the 70 Aim family members there were descendants of Eunice's brothers Jim & Stewart (both deceased) and Bruce Aim, who at 88 years old was the last remaining of that generation, along with Stewart Aims wife Hazel (Raewyns mum) aged 82. Other Aims there included Lea (nee Aim) and Roger Dickson from Invercargill in the South Island, who had only recently been discovered by the North Island Aims, and myself from Orkney.

The weekend consisted of buffet meals, speeches, singing songs, playing bowls, a Sunday service conducted by Ken & Raewyn who are Pastors of the Pentecostal Church, and general socialising or getting to know one another. I gave a speech on the history of the Aims from the Orkney Isles and played a tourist board DVD of an Orkney Symphony, which was well received, particularly by the younger Aim men who were fascinated by the scenes of the traditional Ba game played in Kirkwall.

Many of my cousins there vowed to visit Orkney

sometime in the future. We bid farewell and I made my long journey back home to Scotland. Since then a website has been established at [www.aimfamily.com](http://www.aimfamily.com) and an Aim group added on Facebook website so that we can share details and



*The Aim Clan—Linda, Clive, Marion, David and Peter Aim*

information with each other. I have now compiled a DVD of the Aim Family Reunion, a copy of which will be kept at the OFHS office for anyone interested to have a look. Anyone who is descended from Simon Aim, or connected to any Aim families, then I look forward to hearing from you. ■



*We won the cup! Karen and Alan celebrate*



By Archie Gilbert, Member No. 1052

When I started to research my Orkney ancestry about five years ago, I was sent a clipping from *The Orcadian* by Anne and Alistair Cormack (No.73) in Pitlochry. My brother lives there and he had mentioned to them that I was pursuing our Gr. Gr. Grandmother, Anne Strang from Sanday.

The article from *The Orcadian* carried a photograph of Colin Strang from Australia and Major Timothy Strange from Salisbury, England. They had met on Sanday while researching their common ancestry. At the same time, the Cormacks sent me other bits and pieces, amongst which was an article by Meta Muir about Sir Robert Strange. The article made fascinating reading, but I confess that I viewed the suggestion that Strangs and Stranges were connected with a great deal of scepticism.

By this time, I had been contacted by a second cousin, Colin Lambie, in Australia who, apart from being younger and more energetic than me, was even more obsessed with researching his ancestry. I sent him a copy of the newspaper article and he set about trying to locate Colin Strang. I thought that this was an impossible task he had set himself, but I underestimated his tenacity, and he succeeded in tracing him. I have no idea how he managed it, but it was mainly by his expertise with the internet.

Colin Strang gave us the information that he was descended from Dr. David Strang from Sanday, one of my Gr. Gr. Grandmother's older brothers. Colin Lambie got his teeth right into all the contacts, and, between us, we discovered a lost branch of the family, one of whom, Helen Ross Keenan, had visited Orkney and had done a lot of valuable research which included information about Sir Robert Strange.

Meanwhile, through Colin Strang, I made contact with Major Tim Strange, who confirmed that Robert Strange's parents were David Strang and Jean Scollay. I had already established that these were the parents of my 4 x G. Grandfather, William Strang b. 1730. It was evident that he was a younger brother of Robert, who later added an 'e' to his surname.

The history of Robert Strange is fascinating and would take up many pages, but if anybody would like to know more, then you would do well to find a library which has a copy of "Memoirs of Sir Robert Strange, Knt" by James

Dennistoun: I have downloaded a copy in PDF from the website of the University of Wisconsin. Suffice to say that Robert Strange trained as an engraver but became embroiled with Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobite cause to such a extent that he was at the Battle of

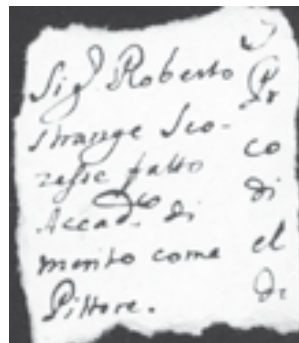
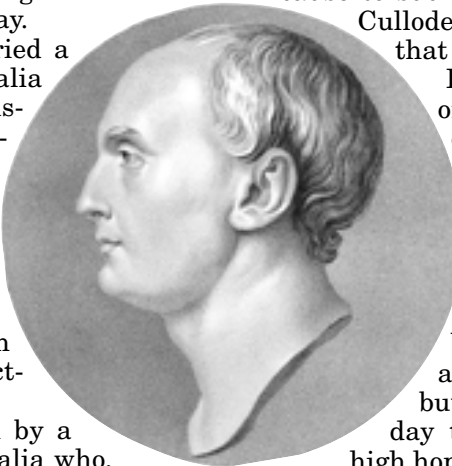
Culloden, but made good his escape. I wonder if that is why he added the 'e' to his name?!

I have not read all of Dennistoun's Memoirs, but before my wife and I went on our trip to Rome last June, I had read enough to know that his fame as an engraver had spread so much in Italy that he was elected a member of the Accademia di San.Luca, the august body of Italian artists and that his portrait had been painted on a ceiling in the Vatican among other famous artists. On arriving at the Vatican we had no choice but to join a half mile queue on a hot June day to get into the Vatican Museum with high hopes of locating Robert Strange's portrait.

Despite numerous enquiries of the guides in fractured Italian, we did not find the elusive portrait. I discovered on my return to Scotland and on browsing Dennistoun again, that the ceiling with all the artists' portraits, so lovingly painted by Stefanelli and commissioned by one Pope, was painted over by the succeeding Pope!

However, undaunted we tramped the streets of Rome and found the Academy of St. Luke just round the corner from the Trevi fountain (and a lot quieter!). We went in and found to our dismay, that most of the building was closed to the public.

By good fortune, when we were trying to explain to the security man (again in fractured Italian), the reason for our visit, one of the archivists who spoke very good English overheard us. She immediately asked us to follow her upstairs. In a short time she had found the indexed entry and then produced an old, vellum bound volume with the original entry of 4th September] 763, when Robert Strange was elected a member. What a thrill to see "Roberto Strange, SCOZEZZE". I was allowed





# Ian Cameron invites you to Find the Surnames

*Just go through your Member's Directory for 2008 and you'll solve it in no time.*



- 1 This one takes the biscuit.
- 2 A good polish and this could mean money.
- 3 American soap.
- 4 Shop for cloth goods.
- 5 First o' the family.
- 6 Give a child a home.
- 7 Sounds like it would go with a bang.
- 8 I'm just wild about him by the sound of it
- 9 Add a German city and White Christmas comes to mind.
- 10 Take a trip to Canada for this one.
- 11 Was he involved with the round table?
- 12 Break it when you come to Orkney and get an extended holiday.
- 13 A large part of Orkney.
- 14 Conqueror and no mistake.
- 15 Find it scattered through Georgia.
- 16 Think Green, think Saintry.
- 17 A turn of nature?
- 18 Eleanor—rendered by a group of insects.
- 19 It will give you a warm feeling (externally).
- 20 When they grow up they will be cities.
- 21 It is below the brae in Scotland.
- 22 A Cape and Saint in S.W. Europe.
- 23 Sir, when you have completed this competition you are one.
- 24 A season of feasting in number 9.

That's Ian on the right—a bit young for making up competitions you might think, but we should point out that this photograph was taken in 1932 when he was on holiday in Orkney with his mother and father. The place he thinks was Valdigar in Holm and the old lady is Margaret Croy m/s Margaret Shearer (Stronsay connections). She was 93 at the time and lived until she was 99. Ian was 4. Answers to the competition will be in the June edition.

## a Strange tale continued from the previous page

◀to photograph the page and have since sent a copy to Major Tim Strange, who is his direct descendant and bears the Arms of Balcaskie in Fife, which Robert Strange adopted when he was knighted by George III in recognition of his engraving of two princes who had died in infancy.

Tim Strange had never seen the original entry, but he had a translation which Robert Strange's Granddaughter has got when she visited the Academy in 1899. She did not have the modern advantages of digital camera or photocopier!

Sir Robert Strange and his wife are buried in the graveyard of St. Paul's, Covent Garden (the actors' and artists' church). There is no gravestone, but there is a plaque to their memory on the wall inside. ■

STRANGE On Thursday last about one o'clock died, after having been long in a declining state of health at his house in Great Queen Street, Lincoln's Inn fields, SIR ROBERT STRANGE, Knight. His nice feelings of honour, probity and benevolence are greatly imprinted in the minds of all who had the happiness to know him: whilst his elegant and masterly engraving will be a lasting monument to transmit his name in prosperity THOMPSON



*Extract From The Times, Monday July 9th 1792*

*Photo and extract credit: Peter Groundwater Russell*

# an Orkney childhood

By Ella Groundwater Clouston (née Sutherland)

Part of a Tom Kent photograph, courtesy of the Orkney Library & Archive

It is supposed to be a sign of approaching old age when one starts looking back, but I very often look back and think that although we never had very much of this world's wealth we had a happy childhood.

I was born in September 1912. My mother had been a school teacher, and my father at that time was a postman. He had Highland blood, his grandfather having come to Orkney to make roads. My mother, however, was a true Orcadian. She was the middle child of eleven, and she was the one who got a chance to go on to school and do something. Her father had a big farm and it is around the farm that my earliest memories are centred, because just before I was due to start school we were living at the farm. My own Dad was at that time in "The Terriers" and I suppose mother was really needed at the farm as her brothers were fighting in France. The farm was Skail Farm, and it was in the bay there where many bodies from the Hampshire came ashore. I can remember one old man wading into the sea and pulling in the body of a sailor who was dressed only in his underwear, which was almost new. This the old man removed and also a gold ring from the sailor's finger. Of course, I did not realise that the sailor was dead but I thought it was a very callous thing to do.

Shortly after this the men started to come back from the war, and my father went away to London to be demobbed. I can still see the doll he brought back for me. She had a beautiful face, but the body was cloth and stuffed. She wore a purple suit with a sailor collar on the jacket, and a pleated skirt, with a beret to match, and around her neck she had a card which read "I'm Florrie the Flapper, Dainty and dapper, Does as she's bid, Good little kid." The very first day I took her out and there was a sudden shower and I pushed

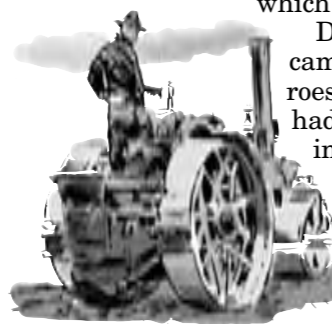
Florrie into a hole in the dyke to keep her dry. And that was the last I saw of poor Florrie. You see, I never did remember



Ned and Isabella Sutherland and children

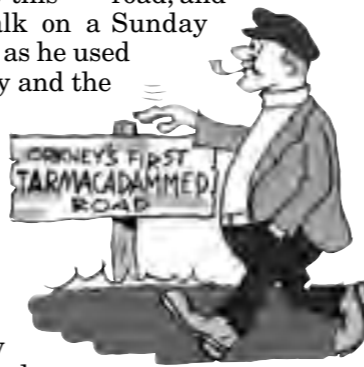
This article was written by my Mother, Ella Groundwater Clouston (née Sutherland) in the 1970s. I found it among her effects after she died in 1980. In the article she says that her father, Ned Sutherland, had Highland blood, his grandfather having come to Orkney to make roads. I can find no trace of this but have traced his lineage back through Sutherlands in Walls, with Flotta and Orphir connections. Sadly my maternal grandfather, died before I was born. He died at Torniston Mill in Stenness. I don't remember my maternal grandmother Isabella (Wards) because she died when I was just 2 years old. In her younger days she was a teacher at Kirbister School in Stromness and at St. Andrews School in Tankerness. She also worked for a time at the Post Office Savings Bank in London. Mother's maternal grandfather started his farming life in Orphir and from there moved to Holland on Stronsay as grieve (farm manager) and then was a farmer at Skail, Sandwick, Langskaill, Kirbister, Stromness and latterly at Barnhouse in Stenness. I've been told that he was well-respected both as an employer and for his knowledge of working horses. Mother says in her article that she and her brother Gregor walked from Stromness Academy to Barnhouse at the start of their holidays, getting on for five miles. I can't see many bairns doing that nowadays!

Mike Clouston. Member No 37



which hole I had pushed her into!

Dad was one of the lucky ones who came back to that "world fit for heroes" we heard so much about. He had got a job during the war driving a road roller for a firm called Topham Jones, and he was really one of the first men in Orkney who could make roads, so he got a job with the County Council driving one of their rollers, a job which he held until the day of his untimely death in 1935. He boasted proudly that he made the first bit of tar-macadammed road in Orkney. It was just a little bit about a mile and a half, but he showed everyone this road, and very often would take a walk on a Sunday to see how it was "holding up" as he used to say. He was paid fortnightly and the money was not even paid into his hand, but was dispatched by bus from Kirkwall, and it was my job to go and meet the bus on the Saturday, to collect it. The amount for two weeks' hard work was never more than four pounds, and never any overtime. No transport to and from work either. Each man had to find his own way. In my father's case this meant a pushbike,



very often to Deerness or Rendall from Stromness. This meant that we saw very little of him except at weekends. In spite of this he and I were always very close, and my mother always had a soft spot for my brother who was four years younger than me. This meant when we were young that I always felt that I bore the brunt of any tellings-off, because Dad was not there to take my side.

When we first moved into Stromness, on the Market Day I was sent to look for my brother who had disappeared early in the morning. I went north, then south, and down all the piers in each direction but no sign of him. Then I was told to go once again as far as the Pierhead. Very unwillingly I went, without seeing any signs of him, and then when I got back into the house he was there eating his dinner. I yelled at him "Whaur have you been?", and the maddening answer was "Doon wir own pier!", the one place I had never looked.

About this same time they cleared away the house on the sea side of Graham Place, and my brother went to "help" the workmen, taking with him a good hammer belonging



Gregor Sutherland



"neeps" removed for the occasion!

Farm carts were quite a big bit of my life then, because all the work was done by them, taking home peats and hay and sheaves, and the ubiquitous tractor of today had still not been thought of. A ploughing match was a big day, and my grandfather's farm very often seemed to be the venue for a match. All the various competitors arriving early in the morning, with horses all beautifully groomed and dressed. The tea, scones, cakes, etc. that we carried out to the field at the "half-yoke", then the proper tea after the ploughing was over, when the judges came in and there was plenty of everything, and all set in the "ben end" with every bit as much for us poor mortals in the kitchen. Then the prize-giving, which read like a roll of honour. A prize for the man with the biggest feet, the youngest and the oldest, and even for the man who travelled farthest to see his lass at the weekend. This usually turned out to be a pair of iron heels for his boots or if he was lucky enough to have a bike, a pair of cycle clips to keep his "breeks" tidy.


A big day at the farm was the day they killed one of the pigs. Everyone seemed to be involved in some way, and we children got the bladder to play with. And what delicious feeds we had for ages after that. Potted heid, puddings, liver, fresh pork, and then there




Ella Clouston, née Sutherland



◀with pickle to cure the rest of the pork. Nothing nowadays ever tastes like these things did. Probably the feeding then was different to what it is now, and frozen food never tastes like fresh. I admit that the modern way of life is easier in many ways, but the people who have all the modern appliances don't seem to have any more time than they did then. Not so much, in fact, because I can remember attending butter-making classes with my two aunts, who had both been making superlative butter for as long as I could remember, but they thought they might learn something, and made time to go. Each summer they packed a huge jar with butter when the milk was plentiful, and this was to last until the winter was over, and I remember one customer saying that the last of her jar was as good as the first. This is a lost art now, with restrictions on the making of butter and cheese. These things are not supposed to be real products nowadays, but a "piece" with good Orkney farm butter eaten with a chunk of good Orkney cheese takes a lot of beating. Chickens too have lost their flavour, and I refuse to cook a frozen one. The fresh variety is becoming more and more difficult to track down.



When my grandfather died the farm was sold and all the stock had to go too. Neither of my uncles was prepared to take it on alone, and I think they were all rather waiting for a chance to get away on their own. Mother was again co-opted into helping with the sale and for about a week we, my brother and I, went to school from the farm, usually getting a lift there and walking back. On the night of the sale we were walking over the Howe Road when we saw a man in the distance leading a cow. We realised that it was someone who had been to the sale, and when we got nearer my brother said, "Oh, hang, hid's ould Kilmarnock." This was our name for the one Ayrshire cow at the farm, and only then did the full enormity of the whole thing hit us. Without "ould Kilmarnock" the place wouldn't be the same, and we realised that she was only one of all the animals that would no longer be friends of ours. That marked the end of an era as far as we were concerned. For as long as I could remember we had gone there the night the school closed and never saw the town again until the night before classes resumed at the end of August.



One auntie had already married and gone to New Zealand, and the other went off to Canada a few years later, and the "boys" too scattered to homes of their own, and we were condemned to town life! Mind you, we soon adjusted, and I was by this time, about fourteen, and the house we lived in then was right beside the Town Hall where all the dances were held, and the music was like a clarion call summoning me to be up and among the dancers. This was not allowed though for a few more years except for school dances, and it was there that I first met the boy who was later to be my husband and dear companion for 32 years, but that is another story.

I think I must always have been a bit of a "loner" because although I was invited to and went to parties, I can never really remember enjoying them, and in the winter time, when everyone else went sledging I went too but there again I did not enjoy it. School I always liked and it was a sad day for me when I had got all my Highers



*Ella Sutherland, Highers photograph. Second left, back row*

and had to leave. I was in tears and I think I would quite cheerfully have stayed on always. However, I had a living to earn and on the 19th of October 1932 I arrived in London to start nursing, I who had never been out of Orkney till then, and as green as grass in the ways of the city. However, I soon learned, and that too is another story. ■

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# SWONA *the island that time forgot*

**John Sinclair Member 588**

Just a four mile boat trip from South Ronaldsay, on Orkney's Mainland, lies the island of Swona. It is 1.25m (2.0km) long and about 0.5m (0.8km) wide with a maximum height of 135ft (41metres).

Swona is situated in the tidal stream of the Pentland Firth with a tidal race at both ends of the island. Throughout history it has been the scene of numerous shipping disasters with the deceptive tides carrying many a vessel to disaster, on to the northern skerries, at alarming speed.

In 1931, a 6000 ton Danish freighter called the *Pennsylvania*, on route from New York to Oslo, was wrecked on the island. The crew got away safely but left behind a cargo of wheat, flour and the latest consumer goods from America. The local newspaper, *The Orcadian*, reported that a gang of 40 men from Wick had been recruited to remove the cargo from the stranded vessel before it broke up and disappeared but Orcadians beat them to it and boat loads of men from the South Isles were reported to be plundering the cargo of typewriters, gramophones, cash registers, even a piano.

The wreck was eventually bought by a syndicate of men from Swona and the neighbouring island of Stroma.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in *Records of a Family of Engineers* of his father's experience of seeing the island-



ers as wreckers from a ship that was close to running aground on Swona. He watched as the islanders callously awaited the harvest from the sea. The wind fortunately changed at the last minute and deprived them of their plunder.

Swona was populated since 500BC and there are prehistoric, pre Norse and Norse remains on the island. In 1973, however, the island was abandoned when the last inhabitants left. James Rosie was no longer able to look after his croft and cattle after developing Parkinsons Disease. James and his sister left Swona never to return. James died in Kirkwall in 1976

*The Island of Swona in the Pentland firth. Photograph by William Annal*

from a perforated ulcer and his sister Violet passed away in South Ronaldsay in 1984.

Their home, Rose Cottage on Swona, is still as they



*Rose Cottage; the table still set for a meal. The magazines from 30 years ago still lie on the window sill. The photograph was taken through the kitchen window.*



*What precious items were wrapped in the bundle and why was it left?*

left it. The kitchen table is set for a meal. A drum of Saxa Salt is still on the table along with a biscuit tin, crockery and cutlery. In another room lies a bundle of their possessions wrapped in a sheet and roped just as they left it. The house is now locked but through the window of the living room can be seen the skeleton of a cow. The poor beast had forced the door open in the winter of 2002, had become trapped and died of starvation. ▶



*This photograph shows the North Houses with the 'Hood' in the foreground*

◀Boats were built on the island and the last of them the Hood still lies where it was hauled well up the beach near the landing stage. It is no longer seaworthy having a hole in it caused by cattle using it as a rubbing post.



*Swona Schoolhouse*

The Swona school consisted of just two rooms. One was the classroom and the other was where the teacher lived.



*The Biggings*

Probably the best preserved of the Swona houses is the Biggings. It still has a roof on it and is used by bird ringers when they visit the island.

The inhabitants of Swona are long gone but their cattle are thriving. When James and Violet Rosie sailed for the mainland they left behind a herd of cattle; eight cows and one bull— a shorthorn Aberdeen Angus cross. Now five generations later the herd has turned feral. It is still going strong and has been classified as a new breed – Swona Cattle - in the *World Dictionary of Livestock*. Numbers have varied over the years with as many as 33 animals being recorded. In 2004 it consisted of ten bulls, four cows and



*Upper Biggings with some of Stroma's cattle in the middle distance* two calves and this appears to be the optimum number that the island can comfortably support.

Professor Stephen Hall, Zoologist at the Lincoln campus of De Montford University in Leicester, who has been studying the herd for many years says that there are now significant differences between the Swona breed and other cattle. They are the first breed to have emerged naturally for hundreds of years. All other breeds in Britain are a result of man's selection. Jersey, Ayrshire, Guernsey and Holstein for milk and Hereford, Angus and Charolais for beef.

On Swona, two calves are born each spring, although not all live to maturity. The herd gets no additional feed, although it is checked by a vet each year. The animals are self-selecting for hardiness, easy calving, and low maintenance feeding off the grass and seaweed. Their isolated position means that they are disease free. They are wary of humans and aggressive, and have evolved a system that banishes old, weak and surplus bulls to one corner of the island. In summer the main herd is usually found in the centre of the island.

Swona is owned by two Orkney farmers but is not worked due to the difficulty of access. It is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest—a conservation area with a number of rare plants. ■

*My thanks to George Gray who supplied the Swona photographs used in this article together with additional information about the island. Ed*



*Articles for our June edition by May 11th please*

## 100% Success in putting names to the photographs

**It's thanks to Hazel Goar, her Aunt, the ladies of the local WRI together with John and Sheena Muir that we have managed to name, not one or two, but every one of the 30 people who appeared on page 21 of the December edition of our newsletter. For anyone who wishes to refer back to that issue here are the miss-**



### TOP PHOTO L1895/4

L to R - Doreen Robson, (Mrs Eunson); Jim Baillie; The late Isobel Baillie; Gladys Robson, (Mrs Leslie); Iris Baillie, (Mrs Kemp); Sheena Robson, (Mrs Ritch); Ida Cromarty, (Mrs Ross);

### MIDDLE PHOTO L3657/2

Back row, L to R

Madge Spence, Ferryhouse; Janie Tait (Mrs Wallace), Lower Breckquoy; Polly Sinclair, Kirkbreck; Rosa Hepburn (Mrs Hutchison), Blomuir; Mrs Osborne; Mary Isbister, Backakelday; Jemina Mackay, (Mrs Wells) Teacher in West School; Belle Sutherland, (Mrs Wylie), Little Hunclett;

### MIDDLE ROW, L TO R

Marian Sinclair, (Mrs Twatt), Graemeshall; Molly Brass, (Mrs Aitken), Grandview; Louis Ritch, (Mrs Tait), Braehead; Jean Petrie, Smiddy; Lily Tait, (Mrs Rosie), Lower Bu; Helen Shearer, Midhouse; Jean Aim, (Mrs Muir), Biggings; Ennie Hutcheon, (Mrs Chidley), St Marys; Miss Tait, Teacher, East School.

### SEATED AT FRONT L TO R

Possibly the Instructor; Jessie Spence, (Mrs Aitken), Stratheast; Annie Manson, (Mrs Couper), Westheath;

*(It is thought that this was a sewing class in Holm)*

### BOTTOM PHOTO L1899/3

L to R - Margaret Anderson, (Mrs Gray); Evelyn Flett, (Mrs Wilson); Kristen Flett, (Mrs Petrie);

***This issue's picture puzzle is on Page??***

## Help! Bridget's hit her brick wall

I read with interest the article in the December issue of Sib Folk from Anne Cormack.

The grave of Donald SMITH mentioned by Anne is the grave of my great great grandfather and his family. I have been researching my SMITH family for nearly 30 years, and have visited the grave many times on my visits to Orkney.

William SMITH [b Sep 1790 Bower] and Helen NICOLSON [Mar 1792 Canisbay] were indeed the parents of Donald SMITH [b 1815 Gills Canisbay - d 1890 Kirkwall]. They all came from near Canisbay Caithness.

William and Helen's children were Helen 1814; Donald 1815-1890; Janet 1818; Sinclair; David 1823-1908; Margaret; George 1827; Jean 1829; Robert 1833; William 1836. The younger children born in Deerness.

Anne mentioned that David was an apprentice blacksmith, he became a blacksmith in Stromess. Younger brother Robert was also a blacksmith and brother

George was a farmer /blacksmith in Millfield Holm. Donald was a Blacksmith in Shore Street Kirkwall.

But here our research differs. Donald's father William SMITH was the son of Donald SMITH [b 1763 Bower] and Janet MURRAY.

Their children were William 1790; Waillet 1793; Sinclair 1796; Catherine 1799; Donald 1800; Matthew 1804; Elizabeth 1809.

Donald SMITH [b1763 Bower] was the son of William SMITH [b abt 1740 in Scotland] and Kaithren MANSON [b Nov 1749 Bower]

I have lodged my research notes and SMITH family tree with the OFHS. But as always my research continues. I would love to get further back but I am finding it difficult to get more information about the William SMITH born about 1740 who married Kaithren MANSON in Canisbay Caithness. Any ideas or suggestions would be very welcome. Another Brick Wall is finding the death of William SMITH b 1790 and Helen NICOLSON b 1792. I have quite a lot of information about them and know that they lived in Ireland Holm on the 1861 census, William was shown as 70 years old. Help in finding them would be most welcome.

Best wishes Bridget A Hunter. OFHS 111.





# The story of our Grandparents

Recorded by one of the granddaughters of William Thomson and Mary Fotheringham

How the years fly. As time marches on we are reminded of the fact that we are growing older. In order to pass the family history on it is necessary to keep a family record. Too often very interesting facts are forgotten. How often we have said to our parents, "Tell me a story of when you were a little boy", and now our children and grandchildren are saying to us "Tell us a Story". In two generations much will be forgotten about Granpa Thomson, who left thirteen grandchildren at his death, if it is not written.

William Thomson was born in Sanday, Orkney Isles, Scotland on June 18th 1819. His parents were Simeon Thomson and Jane Muir. William married Mary Fotheringham on December 15th 1842. They were married in Stronsay, Orkney and their first child was born there, but only lived four months. In 1845 this young couple bade farewell to their native land and embarked on a sailing vessel for the new land. With them came their parents. The trip across took six long weeks, during which time

very rough weather was encountered. As a little girl, granpa used to tell me of his boyhood. When he was a small boy, he had to take care of sheep out in the green fields of Scotland. While doing this he studied "The Shorter Catechism". He went barefooted to church. I can remember that he sat quietly thinking of bygone days when he was an old man and of the fact that his sweetheart had gone. He used to say, "Mary and I begat (began) when she was a small lass, when she was building a playhouse and gatherin' broken dishes". Such recollections would cause tears to trickle down his cheeks.

From this we learn that they were lovers at an early age. It is known that they left the old world for economic reasons but as far as is known no record exists of where they first settled upon reaching Canada. However they did spend a few years in North Pelham Ontario. In 1851 William and his brother in law, William Fotheringham, walked through the woods up to Blanshard Twp. The writer remembers him saying that they only had a shilling between them.

These sturdy young men were very courageous and not afraid of hardships. At this time he bought Lot Six



on concession Nine, where William, son of Thomas now resides.

In March of 1852, this fearless young couple started out for Pelham in a sleigh drawn by an ox. How many here would like to start on that journey in cold March weather with their small children. At that time they had Simeon, Thomas and Mary, who was only 6 weeks old. At that time

there was only a blazed trail through the forest. When they reached their abode, there was nothing but bush. As I recall the story, they were taken in by the Dwyer family, with whom they stayed until a log shanty was built. They had acres of land and more wood than they could use but no money.

In order to get to buy the necessities of life, granpa went back to Pelham to work during the summer. According to the story, fifty pounds of flour was sent to the farm of James Barker, a distance of one mile from the homestead. The only means of transporting it was to carry it, so Grandma carried the sack of flour from the farm of James Maloney to her shanty.

In the winter, these pioneers chopped down the trees and burnt them. The stumps also had to be removed. Later the land was tilled and potatoes and seeds were planted so that the family could be fed. Gramps used to walk to London, Ontario, carrying his axe in order that it could be sharpened.

Other pioneers settled around them cutting down the bush in order to make homes for themselves and their families. Schools had to be erected. The first one I believe was on the tenth concession. There Simeon and Thomas went to school. Nor did the Scottish people forget the religion of their native land. In later years a missionary or minister was stationed in St. Marys. He rode on horseback and visited in the homes.

With the passing of time, ten children were born to William and Mary, although only seven of them grew to maturity.

Perhaps someone in the Orkney Family History Society can add something extra to this story. ■

Thanks To Mimes Manson, Member No132, for passing this article on to me. She received it from James Thomson when he visited Orkney some years ago. Ed.





**Can you put names  
to any of the people  
in these photographs?**

We had a 100% rate in linking names to every one of the people in our last photo puzzle.

The only thing I can tell you this time is that the middle one was taken outside the Stromness Hotel. The folk at the back are probably too small to recognise but if you can help with the front row Orkney Library Archives will be delighted to record these for posterity. You can either send the answers direct to the Archives at [www.archives@orkneylibrary.org.uk](mailto:www.archives@orkneylibrary.org.uk) or to me at [johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk](mailto:johnsin@gotadsl.co.uk) and I will pass them on.



L2845/24



L1002/3



L2847/1

# "Teachers are no like whit they wunt tae be!"



*By George S Burgher Member No 101*

This is a statement which we often hear so I thought that it would be interesting to look at some of the first teachers at Skelwick School, which opened in Westray on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1878.

May Seator of Kirkhouse, was the Pupil Teacher at Skelwick in 1882 and was transferred to Pierowall in 1884. In 1885 she was suspended. Her colleagues reported that she was not punctual, had no discipline, was not teaching, produced disorder in singing classes, ignored and spurned the advice of the infant mistress, was too familiar with pupils outside school, neglected her own studies, her general deportment was not an influence for good and her punishments were not appropriate. A Pupil Teacher could only keep a pupil in or report to a senior teacher, but Miss Seator had been seen "spitting on the hands and faces of children" and she had a "habit of striking children on the head with a rule". The report of Dr Gregory stated: "I certify on soul and conscience that I consider Miss May Seator, Pupil Teacher, to be suffering from nervous excitability and that release from the duties of the school and a period of repose would be of benefit to her health". May was relieved of her duties and her suspension was approved by the Department.

John Nicholson, Commerce Street School, Aberdeen, had been appointed to Papa Westray School in 1884. In 1888 he was censured by the Board and warned "that any similar complaint would lead to his instant dismissal". In July 1889 when a teacher was required for Skelwick he was appointed to the post and it was intimated to him that "in the event of his declining this proposal the Board will require his resignation to Papa Westray School". Despite a petition from the Papa Westray folks he was moved but he was dismissed in October the same year and asked to vacate the Schoolhouse as he was absent from his duties, having been appointed on 21<sup>st</sup> October but absent most of the first week. Following petitions from ratepayers and the Good Templars and a deputation from the district of John Drever, West Brough; Henry Stevenson, Woo; William Miller, Taftend; Henry Mason, Mayfield; and Alex Robertson, Tuan; the Board reinstated Nicholson "with the proviso that in the event of the slightest complaint of misconduct being made ..... shall lead to his instant dismissal and referral to the Department". He had to give written acceptance of these terms. In May 1890 he married a Papa Westray girl, Mary Stewart Traill Miller (1862-1934) [only daughter of Blacksmith, David & Mary Miller, No 5 Newhouses].

Nicholson's relationship with the Board was turbulent. He was warned about sticking to the timetable, violation of log keeping rules, failure to remove standard II from the infant classroom, unfairly treating pupils, quarrelling

with the infant teacher, Mrs Jane Rendall, Tarry Hall, in front of pupils, and holding pupils back on many occasions. Some times it appears that the Board are too severe on him such as when he was told to "take every precaution to prevent whooping cough spreading from his house". He was threatened with requests for his resignation and warned that he "must give more attention to his own conduct and to the school committed to his charge or they would have to take more decided action to prevent the school suffering any further damage through his incapacity". If he continued as at present it "cannot fail to have serious consequences for himself and involve the Board in unnecessary trouble".

John was a U F Church member at Rapness in 1893 when his address was given as Coan Schoolhouse. In the same year he records that the boys are being taught Navigation and Agriculture while the girls were taught Domestic Economy. An Inspector's report stated: "The condition of the school generally gives evidence of markedly rigorous, intelligent and successful teaching". However, the year after his death, the new head teacher records that they have "stopped teaching algebra and Euclid [geometry] as the children find it too much".

In 1902 he wrote a letter "asking for someone to take his place as he was quite unable to attend to his duties". Henry Stevenson was sent to help out but in the Board minutes of May 1902 the Board regretted to record the death [on 26th April] of John Nicholson who had been 18 years in the service of the Board. "His great ability, the excellent discipline he maintained in his school and the interest he took in education were appreciated by us and acknowledged by HMI's of schools".

In the Orkney Herald the report from Westray read:- "The death of Mr John Nicholson, late teacher Skelwick School, on 26th April came as unexpected news to a wide circle of friends. Mr Nicholson was born in Aberdeenshire about 44 years ago, and spent most of his professional career in Orkney. He was a splendid teacher and was loved by the children even in spite of his strict discipline. A few friends accompanied his remains to Papa Westray where he rests from his labours. Much sympathy is felt for his widow and two boys who mourn his loss."

His boys are shown in the 1901 census at Skelwick Schoolhouse as Emslie Nicholson age 10 born Westray and David M Nicholson age 5 born 1896 Westray. The family went to Kirkwall to live and Emslie James died at Portland, Oregon in 1934 aged 42. His mother Mary had resided at 43 Albert Street, Kirkwall.

So why was there this love-hate relationship with the School Board when it was clear from Inspectors' reports that he was an excellent teacher although his relationship▶

Fwith some colleagues was sometimes difficult? Perhaps we can get a clue from one of his pupils.

John Robert Drever of Sangar was born in 1887 and when he compiled a history of his life in 1976 he wrote about herding cattle at Wasbust between 1898 and 1900, when he was aged 11 to 13, as follows:-

“The boss in the Cattle Department was a widow as her husband had passed away several years before. I went to school and took my homework with me. The widow would herd the cattle when I was at school. She was tough and I was scared of her. She never laid a hand on me, as one look and a frown was enough. One rainy day I came home from school at four o’ clock and she was all wet. I could tell by the look on her face that all was not well. She first went for the weather and then the teacher and what she said about him I dare not put in print. I had an excellent teacher by the name of John Nicholson from Aberdeen. He had one hand that was paralyzed but he made good use of the other one when using the strap. He had two faults; one was that when he went to the village on Saturday, he got drunk; and the other was, he did illegal things with the fair sex, but not that widow, as she would have killed him.”

I have been told that Nicholson had an affair with a local married woman and the inference was

that she had a son to him but I have absolutely no proof of any such alleged liaison.

On 22nd March 1915 John W Edwards proudly writes: “I take charge of this School - 10 am.” He only makes a further three entries in the log regarding a visit of the Attendance Officer, admission of seven infants, and attendance at the school.

The resignation of the infant teacher, Miss Rendall, on 14th April prompted the Board to visit the school on 15th April. They “found the discipline of the school, and the manner in which the work was carried out very



An early photo of Skelwick Public School

unsatisfactory, and considered that this state of affairs could not be allowed to continue”. Miss Rendall would not withdraw her resignation and they accepted it with regret. Mr Edwards was asked to resign due to the “distinct inability of Mr Edwards at Skelwick School to keep proper discipline and otherwise to discharge the duties of headmaster in any profitable manner”. Two days later they again visited the school along with the local doctor, Dr Walker. He interviewed Edwards twice and stated that “he was totally unfit and unsafe for his duties in the school”. They found “that the school did not meet today because of the headmaster’s state of mind, and Miss Rendall, Assistant Teacher, found it impossible to carry on her work”. Edwards was suspended “as two men had to look after him all day. The Board resolved that this is a case for the Parish Council.”

The Record of Applications for Public Assistance states:-

John Wilson Edwards (21) single, teacher, East Hammer. “wholly disabled due to insanity. Two men engaged to watch him. Reported to special meeting of Council. To be sent to his father should his condition allow this to be done. Sent to asylum. S t a t u t o r y notices sent to Lossiemouth and to Glasgow his birth parish.”

On 21st April Miss Rendall withdrew her

resignation and on 14th May the Board confirmed his dismissal “on account of his mental condition and consequent inability to discharge the duties appertaining thereto”. On 6th July a firm of Elgin solicitors wrote stating that John Wilson Edwards had died.

Maybe it is just as well that teachers are no longer “like whit they wunt tae be”. It must be emphasised that most of the teachers at Skelwick were excellent and did not have any of the problems detailed above. The last teacher at Skelwick when it closed on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1968 was Nan Scott, the first Chairperson of OFHS. ■

## Where are these Foubisters?

*Hazel Foubister, Member No 1545, would like to trace the descendants of David Foubister, born 1817, of Mussaquoy in Deerness, Orkney.*

*Hazel is keen to find out anything about this branch of the family so if you can help her get under way*

## YET ANOTHER ORKNEY

Another contribution following on from the ‘Putting Orkney on the World Map’ article comes from Ted S Rendall who tells me of an Orkney District near the Red Deer River in Alberta,





## The origins of some Stromness place names

### PIERS

**Brass's** was named after David Brass Merchant (1935). It was sold to Wm Sutherland, Coal Merchant and ship owner (1913), becoming known as Sutherland's Pier. Situated opposite Rae's the newsagent it was a coaling pier.

**Murrell's.** Joseph Murrell, Auctioneer. Appraiser & Fish merchant, paid boats from Rackwick, Hoy, with crews of two men, from £20 - £30 for a season's catch of lobsters. The price had increased greatly over the past 40 years (1888). It was situated at the 'Sooth End'.

**Flett's.** 'For sale, dwelling house and shop occupied by John Flett, pier and slip, bounded by Victoria Street on the west and the sea on the east' (1911). Near the Post Office on the lower side of the street, the property was well known to older inhabitants as Samuel Flett's. It was approached via the narrow close between Argo the Baker's display window and the Chemist's on Victoria Street.

**Old Pier.** One of the earliest in Stromness, was accessed from 18 Dundas Street.

**Ronaldson's.** John Ronaldson worked as a fisher there next to Lyness House in Graham Place. There was a curing station in the late 1800s at a place which boys found a good one for catching combers. The name late changed to Copland's Pier (the designation used in the 1920s).

**Mowat & Hay's.** Once commodious stores and pier in Victoria Street, below the Post Office and occupied as a wood store by the prosperous firm of Messrs Mowat & Hay who stocked slates, wood and joinery products.

**Greig's.** Situated at 38-40 Alfred St

**Baikie's.** While there was one of this name at the North End, it was the name of the pier on the south side of the present museum.

*This article, part of which is printed here, turned up in an old file in the OFHS office. I don't know who compiled it so I cannot credit him (or her). If the author gets in touch I will be happy to rectify the omission. Ed.*

*Maybe one of our members would like to do something similar for Kirkwall?*

**Flaw's.** Associated with many years with Annie Flaws, who stayed there.

**Clouston's** This was down past 80 Victoria Street, in a close which saw the birth of a distinguished artist and writer. It was very busy with gutters during the herring boom and when the Regatta was resumed, after 25 years, in 1934. All the boats and their gear were measured there.

**Thomson's.** This was located at 18 South End.

**Warehouse.** This was built in 1815 as a small stone jetty, a wooden extension being put on in 1870. It was reconstructed in 1972. For some time it housed the Tourist Office.

### FEATURES

**Sofa Stone.** On the brow of the hill to the north of Rocky Park. A large block of granite in the shape of a sofa. In the 1940s a tourist thought he could follow a geometric pattern incised into the stone, attributing it to the Picts.

**Rocky Park.** Lies behind the old academy. There was enthusiasm for extracting granite for road surfacing in 1932 but the project was not developed.

**Sutherland's Park.** Belonged to Mrs Sutherland, Plainstones, it was immediately behind the old school. After 'being natural grass for fully 40 years' it was ploughed in 1920 yielding a remarkable crop of oats the following year.

**Gordon's Close.** The old dwelling house at 23 John Street, once the home of the Gordon family, situated at the entrance of what was, for many years, regarded affectionately as 'Gordons Close'.

**The Brae.** There were many references in the past to The Brae in Dundas Street, the steep curve in the Street known as Porteous's Brae.

**Johnstone's Close.** A short path towards 'woodlands', 27 Franklyn Close.

**Bakehouse Close.** This was the name for the close opening off Graham Place.

**Duncan's Burn or The Burn** comes down under Pidgeon Creek, then under the street and out on the right side of Copeland's Pier.

**Thomson's Brae.** This was the name for Porteous's Brae at one time. Like several of the piers, this location's name changed as different owners or personalities became associated with it.

**Fireman's Close.** Off Alfred Street on the right, going south. It gives onto the warden's accommodation at Rae's Close. As a fireman lived there at one time, the name stuck.

**Paddock Pool.** Was this on Croval?

**Egg Packing Station.** This was located in Cairston Rd. Just after 1945 Orkney was exporting 50 million eggs per annum.

**Jacob's Buildings.** The block in Dundas Street, opposite what was Porteous's Bakery, at right angles to the thoroughfare, was known as Jacob's Biggings. after the former owner Jacob Hunter, of Scorn, Birsay.

**The Quarries.** That long shallow point between Point of Ness and the Beacon.

**Wide Close.** This was the name for what is now Leslie's Close, up from Graham Place with a handrail in the middle.

## O B I T U A R Y

## **Brigadier Sidney Park Robertson,**

MBE, TD, JP, DL, BCom, Hon DLitt

*and Member No 44 of the OFHS*



It is with regret that we report the passing of Brigadier S P Robertson on the 13<sup>th</sup> December 2008 in his 95<sup>th</sup> year. He was already 82 years old when he agreed to be the Honorary President at the inaugural meeting of Orkney Family History Society in 1997. He did not consider himself to just be a kind of figurehead but took an active interest in all that was going on. Out of interest he would sometimes attend Committee meetings and the public meetings when he could.

Whenever new faces appeared at those meetings Sidney would make some discreet enquiries and then say "I must speak with them". That was one of his most likable qualities. He would speak courteously with anyone, of whatever age or status, that he came across. As a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Orkney he

met several of the Royal Family and was equally at home with them. He offered hospitality at his home, Daisybank, to people visiting Orkney from many walks of life and countries.

He was always very proud of what the Society did for Orkney and for Orcadians everywhere. In SFN no21, March 2002, you will see an article written by him that says it all. It also contains a profile giving his family history and an account of his very interesting career. For new members copies of this magazine is still available from the office.

We have felt greatly honoured to have known him and will miss his friendliness and encouragement. We would also like to humbly offer our condolences to his son Robbie and Jane, to his daughter Eileen and David and to all his grandchildren.

### ***The Brigadier with his fellow committee members in 2000***



## 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).*

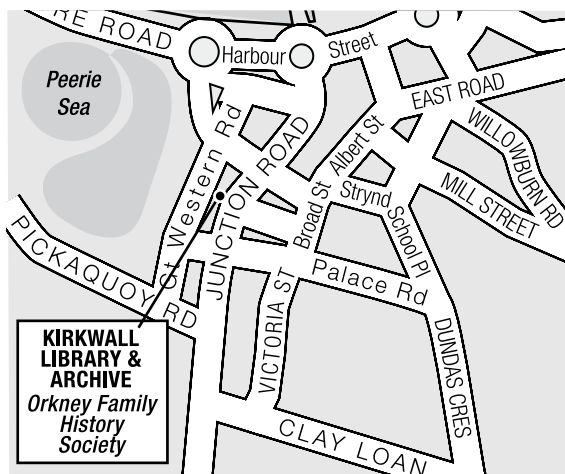
This material is available to members for 'in house' research by arrangement.

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 from 1st March to 28th/29th February and subscriptions should be renewed during the month of March. 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>
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<i>Surface Mail</i>	<b>£12.50</b>
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<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:*  
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