

Orkney Islands



Stromness



Stromness
Nowhere else in Orkney is so closely associated with Gow than Stromness, the place where he spent much of his youth and where he returned in 1725. Gow and his men were warmly welcomed before the alarm was raised over their piratical activities. Supposedly, Gow etched his name into the windowpane of the now lost White Horse Inn during his visit. The inn itself might be gone but there remains plenty of shops and cafes to visit.

Copland's Dock
Located on the opposite side of the bay from Stromness town is Copland's Dock, alternatively known as 'Gow's Garden'. It was here that the Gow family had their modest estate, purchased in 1716 by Gow's father, William. While the land itself was of little value, William Gow planned to build a dock or harbour there, though he died before achieving this. The area became a drydock in the nineteenth century, and today the pier serves Orkney's marine renewables industry.

Brinkie's Brae
A popular vantage point, Brinkie's Brae offers stunning views over Stromness and the hills of Hoy. The hill was also once home to the famed witch, Bessie Millie, who met the writer Sir Walter Scott during his visit in 1814. Sailors would visit Bessie's cottage to consult her about the weather at sea and buy 'fair winds' for their voyages. According to Scott, Bessie, who was believed to be over 90 years old, remembered Gow and recounted the tale of Helen Gordon for the writer.

Stromness Museum
At the south end of Alfred Street sits Stromness Museum. The museum is a treasure trove of artefacts and exhibitions, many of which focus on Orkney's maritime heritage. Amongst the many fascinating items on display is Gow's own telescope, which he used during his 1725 travels, as well as an original copy of the 1726 *An Account of the Conduct and Proceedings of the late John Gow*, commonly attributed to Daniel Defoe.



Standing Stones of Stenness
Having been part of the Orcadian landscape for over 5000 years, the Standing Stones of Stenness have borne witness to much of Orkney's human past. As a young man, Gow undoubtedly visited the stones. Indeed, according to legend, he married Helen Gordon at the Odin Stone, in line with local tradition. While the original stone was destroyed in 1814, a replica can be found on Junction Road, Kirkwall.



Hall of Clestrain, Orphir
The Hall of Clestrain was home to Robert Honeyman of Graemsay and his family at the time of Gow's raid. Honeyman was the high sheriff of Orkney, which was perhaps the motive for their attack on the house. The Hall of Clestrain was also the birthplace of the explorer, Dr John Rae. The hall is not currently accessible to the public, but a virtual tour is available via the John Rae Society website.

Carrick House, Eday
Following the grounding of the *Revenge* onto the Calf of Eday, Eday became the stage for Gow's final piratical act, ending in his capture by James Fea. Fea owned the seventeenth-century manor, Carrick House, where Gow was briefly held captive. According to local legend, a dark stain in the house marks the point where Gow was wounded trying to escape, and ghostly sounds have been heard from the room in which he was held. The house is not open to the public, but Eday can be reached by ferry from Kirkwall.



Kirkwall



Orkney Museum
Situated within the sixteenth-century Tankerness House is Orkney Museum, a must-visit for all. From the Neolithic to the contemporary, you will find a rich display of artefacts and exhibits from across Orkney. During the eighteenth century, Tankerness House was owned by the Bailies of Tankerness, having previously served as a manse for the clergy of the cathedral. After wondering around the museum, head out to the garden to see the 'Groatie Hoose'.

Groatie Hoose
Within Tankerness House Garden stands a garden folly called the Groatie Hoose. Adorned with cowrie shells, known locally as groatie buckies, the structure's spire is decorated with volcanic rock used as ballast on Gow's pirate ship, *Revenge*. It was originally constructed for the former Provost James Traill in the garden of his house in Bridge Street, which had become inaccessible to the public over time. It was moved to its present position in 2005.

St Magnus Cathedral
Since the twelfth century, St Magnus Cathedral has been the beating heart of Orkney. Alongside its spiritual importance, the cathedral also acted as a community hub. During Gow's lifetime, the cathedral's grounds hosted a timber guard house, which was built in 1703 to supplement the old tollbooth (The Ridgeland) situated at the bottom of the Strynd, just a few metres away. It was from these two locations that Kirkwall's Burgh Council organised the defence of Orkney against Gow.



J. Gow Distillery
Founded in 2016 and named after the notorious pirate himself, the J. Gow Distillery is located on the island of Lamb Holm, connected to the Orkney Mainland by Churchill Barrier Number One. Offering a rich array of spiced, unaged and cask-aged rums, all produced on location, the distillery presents an ideal starting point or finishing line on the trail. Pop into the shop to get a taste of Gow's liquid legacy.



J. Gow
No. 1
Rum Distillery

Gow's "Pirate Code"

- The instructions Gow issued to his men upon their arrival in Stromness:
- I. That every man shall obey his commander in all respects as if the ship was his own, and be under monthly pay.
 - II. That no man shall give or dispose of the ship's provisions, whereby may be given reasons of suspicion that everyone hath not an equal share.
 - III. That no man shall open or declare to any person or persons what we are, or what design we are upon; the offender shall be punish'd with death on the spot.
 - IV. That no man shall go on shore till the ship is off the ground and in readiness to put to sea.
 - V. That every man shall keep his watch night and day, and precisely at the hour of eight leave off gaming and drinking, everyone repair to their respective stations.
 - VI. Whoever offends shall be punish'd with death; or otherwise as we shall find proper for our interest.