

Eday

East of Orkney's largest island Gow gave the order to have all the men who had been pressed into service taken onto the quarter deck under guard. Gow was on a high. The only sadness had been leaving Helen, his new wife, with no fond farewell. He knew he would be able to send for her sometime, but he had not told her this before the ship left suddenly. Gow was, this night at least, determined to sail to Eday to grab a small fortune, keep his crew happy and sail off to a wonderful, rich life in command of his own ship.

The huddle of men shivered on deck in the cold moonlight. Gow made it clear that each one was to work on the ship, all hands were necessary. He vowed to make them rich and give them adventure and good experience at sea.

"You can all make better lives for yourselves if you do as bid on the *George*. When you come over to this pirating crew you will have an equal share in making decisions and taking profit. If you decline this then you will work under guard for a meagre wage and be put ashore only when we can spare you." Gow set watches and told them to get on with it.

He left the deck giving Belbin orders to have the two Westray men, Pottinger and Hewison, come to his cabin. He ordered young William Hughes to clear some space in the tiny cabin and set out paper and ink. This boy was useless and had to be told everything. He was not even reasonable company and seemed to have little interest in his duties. John Gow wished he had his cabin boy Peter Hansen with him still. Why did he leave? He had surely listened to those of the crew who believed that if they escaped off the ship they would be free. But Gow knew that by leaving the ship they would be caught, sooner or later, and would be tried as pirates whatever their feelings were about that. Better, he thought, to be in command of your position. At least with your ship the choices were your own. Gow wondered what may have become of Hansen. Did the longboat make it across the notoriously treacherous Pentland Firth? Or were the men working for shelter and a bite to eat among the island crofts? He knew the ordinary, working farmers and crofters would never turn out a hungry boy who would be willing to work his way. Peter is a bright boy, he will be fine, Gow thought as there was a bang at his door. The boatswain pushed the two Westray men in front of Gow.

"As you know, Belbin, I have promised the men some wealth from these islands before we sail west for American waters.

There is a mansion house belonging to James Fea on the lonely island of Eday. Is either of you two acquainted with this island?" Hewison looked at Pottinger's face and nudged him with his elbow. Pottinger was not keen to talk but Belbin put his right hand onto the pistol at his waist. Pottinger who, until he travelled to Stromness to look for Harry Jamieson, worked for another of the island lairds, Trail, and had often been to Eday on his master's boat. There is no peat on the island of Westray and Fea had an arrangement with Trail. In the spring time a boat would come over from Westray with a party of workers to cut peat and over the next couple of months they would return to Eday to stack and gather the black chunks to be used as winter fuel for both lairds, plus some for themselves. They would work alongside the Eday people. "I ken parts of Eday." Pottinger admitted reluctantly. "And I know the big house you mean, but I have never sailed round to that bit of the island. It can be tricky in there."

"But you could take us to the island and to the shore there." Gow said positively.

"Oh aye, we'd certainly get to the shore there." Pottinger looked brighter.

I've sailed around Orkney's south islands and round as far as Kirkwall in my youth," said Gow, "but never among the north isles. We need you to pilot us in that area Pottinger. Are you a man who could do this?"

"Oh yes, I'll do that alright." Pottinger smiled and Hewison frowned.

Gow sat Pottinger down at the paper and, handing the young man a quill pen, asked him to draw a chart of their intended route among the islands. "This little island is Auskerry, Pottinger told them as he scratched away at his map. "I've been here with my father for seals. Just as well, or I would never have been over to the east of the islands at all."

"This did not really fill Belbin and Gow with confidence, but it was all they had to rely on.

"We will drop anchor for tonight Belbin," Gow looked at his own chart and pointed to Widewall on the west side of the island of South Ronaldsay. He would not move his ship further in darkness.

Belbin left the cabin.

The two Westray men relaxed some. Gow watched Pottinger try to master the pen and ink. It was a black mess but he was satisfied with the work.

"I think we will make a good team," Gow suggested. The boys did not respond. Hewison scowled and Pottinger concentrated. It was almost ten years since he sailed round here. He had been about twelve at the time.

Gow worked on the two, reminding them how poor their families are in comparison with their laird.

"Tables are turning for you both. It's time for you to have some of these lairds' wealth." The night wore on and once Pottinger had finished his chart the two were sent to their hammocks.

"Well you're into this up to your neck now Pottinger." Hewison spat at his friend.

"Never you worry, my friend. I'll take care of it." Pottinger fell into a deep, content sleep.

In westerly gales, on February 11th and 12th, the *George* slowly made its way north along the east side of the island group. They headed north east and did, indeed, pass the little island of Auskerry as drawn on Pottinger's map. Gow was well pleased so far. On the night of February 12th Hughes, Belbin and Harvey were put ashore on the island of Stronsay with the small dinghy to steal some hens and ducks from a farm. They took with them scraps for the collie dog which came to greet them. Belbin silently took on more water from a well. They need not have crept around in the dusk. Alarming stories of the pirate ship had reached Stronsay and, as usually happens, the stories had escalated into horrific accounts of murder and pillage. As the ship had approached the island, crofters and farmers had fled to the other side of the island.



On the morning of the 13th the ship was entering the narrow channel of Calf Sound from the east. They sailed close to the uninhabited island, the Calf of Eday, on their starboard side, with Eday to port. There, looking bare and grim, sat the laird's mansion house tucked into the curve of the bay, sheltered from Arctic northwesterlies by a high headland and the Grey Head, on the Calf, protecting it from east winds. Gow agreed with Pottinger's remark. This tricky mile of narrow, curving channel between the islands was going to take some careful sailing. Gow wondered if his old school pal, James Fea, the laird would be at home or if he would be away in Kirkwall with the others of his class preparing to defend the city from his pirate ship. Rumour had it that the principal residents of each island were gathered there. However, Fea was at home in Eday since his wife was unwell and he soon spotted the pirate ship entering the sound. To Fea, the ship looked light and in need of ballast. It had entered at a bad time, running in with the tide. In no time the ship was in difficulty, speeding too close to the Calf. He peered through the fine spume as the crew fought with the anchor and he could just make out men rushing about the ship's deck in panic. The anchor was dropped, saving the situation for the time being. The *George* had touched the bottom and was settled there, precariously but not holed. At high tide it would be possible to heave her off using the anchor and the ship's longboat. But, the longboat was no longer with the ship and the dinghy on board was much too light for the task. Gow had a predicament on his hands.

Fea watched, bemused. Having had word roughly ten hours previously that the pirate ship was heading in Eday's direction, he had mustered all the arms he could and had his men stationed to protect the house. He was calm. He had already penned a letter to be taken to the ship on its arrival. The ship was now in difficulty and Fea could see the ship's dinghy being lowered into the water. It was heading for the Eday shore. The loyal islanders would not permit the crew to set foot on the stony beach. Fea's servant man, James Laing, stepped forward. He announced, bravely, that he was to deliver Fea's letter at once by hand. The men's pleas for assistance could be dealt with later. The rather stunned crew rowed back to the *George* with Laing on board clutching the document.

Gow stood as proud as possible on the sloping deck to welcome his guest. They went to the cabin. Gow read the letter:

Sir,

I have sent this bearer on board entreating that upon old acquaintance you'll be pleased to forbear the usual salutation because of my wife's indisposition. Had she been well I would have come aboard myself. All the inhabitants of this place have fled to the hills because of the bad reports that your enemies have reported of you throughout the islands which I hope are groundless. None would adventure to come on board your ship but the bearer of the letter, whom I hope you will return as soon as possible; for by his return the people may be willing to assist you if need be and you shall not want my assistance so far as honour can allow me. No more but that I am your old school comrade,

James Fea.

While Laing carried the letter over to the ship and answered every question suitably evasively, Fea was arranging for his big boat to be incapacitated. Her sails and oars were removed. The oars and rowlocks of all the smaller boats in the bay were taken and hidden. He knew that Gow would wish to lighten his ship using smaller boats. This might enable him to heave her off the rocks with the anchor. Far from hiding among the peat banks, Fea's tenants were scurrying around doing all they could to assist their laird in his efforts.

At around noon Laing was returned to the shore under cover of the guns on the *George*. He carried no written reply to his laird; only the verbal message that Gow would be willing to offer a substantial reward if Fea would persuade his people to come to his assistance. They would be required to bring over boats to the ship. Laing added that Gow would expect them by his ship right away.

The captain had to wait in vain as the laird of the house had no intention to comply with this request. Meanwhile, he placed six men along the shore to watch and report every movement on board the *George*.

By 5p.m. the pirates' patience had run out. The men, in darkness on the shore, could hear the ship's dinghy being rowed gently towards them. On board were Belbin, the bloodthirsty boatswain, Robb, who was keen to live up to his name, Macaulay, Moor and William Punton. The men were doubly armed.

Fea, with two of his men, met the pirate crew on the shore and asked them why they had stepped onto his island so heavily armed. Their reply was that they had asked for a boat to be sent to assist them off the rocks. None had arrived so they had come to take one by force. The pirates boldly strode over to where Fea's big boat lay half sunk and disabled. They demanded shuffles to bail out the water. In the darkness Fea whispered to one of his men to remove the oars from the pirates' dinghy. The other man wanted to attack the pirates as they worked on Fea's boat, but it was Fea's wish to take them all alive. In fairness, Gow had committed no crime on Eday, yet.

"Boys, this is useless. This old boat is leaky and will be of no use to you. We need to talk." Fea continued with a string of vague replies to a string of requests for a suitable boat.

When Belbin began to lose his temper Fea spoke calmly.

"Sir, if you decide to take the law into your own hands then I am helpless. On the other hand, if your ship is what it is reported to be, a pirate ship, am I justified in aiding your career of crime when all the rest of Orkney's gentry are up in arms against your outrages? I suggest we proceed to the inn where we can talk the matter over."

Belbin was lost for words. Had this man no fear? Was he stupid? But ale at the inn was so tempting. As they walked the short distance along the shore to the ale house Fea managed to have a quiet word with one of his men whom he instructed to come for him in quarter of an hour. Fea was generous in "standing treat". The men were enjoying his generous hospitality and were complacent when Fea was summoned away, as he told them, to attend to his ailing wife. Fea begged the pirates' patience. The pirates hardly noticed he had left.

While gone from the inn, Fea arranged for five men to remain hidden behind a thick bush (a rare item on these islands) by a style in the wall. This was approximately mid way between the inn and the laird's house. He told them that he would try to accompany Belbin along the path, having separated him from the others at the inn.

"You are to ambush these men: take these men by force but with no pistols. No pistols since I shall be one of those men. Should I fail to separate the men and all six of us are seen in the gloom approaching the style, then fire on the group with the pistols. I will take cover. There will be no chance that we can take all five of these ruffians by ourselves with no firearms."

Satisfied with these plans, Fea returned to the inn apologising to his guests for his absence. He told the men that his wife wished to speak to them. "She feels we should, perhaps, be in a position to assist you. But I feel the appearance of all of you may frighten her. Could one of you accompany me to visit her?"

Belbin, in his fuzzy state of mind was quite flattered by all of this and, as the leader of the group, he insisted that he should be that one visitor. His men did not argue. They were quite happy to remain in the ale house. Although Fea delicately suggested that it would be polite to leave his firearms with his companions, Belbin was sufficiently wide awake to refuse this. Before setting out he ensured that each of the four pistols he carried was properly loaded.

Fea felt excited as the two men stepped out into the darkness and followed the narrow field path which ran parallel to the shore along to his house.

As Fea and Belbin approached the style the six men strained their eyes to try to distinguish their leader from the enemy and readied themselves for the struggle. However, Fea wishing to avoid being beaten about by his own men in the dark, suddenly turned, gripping Belbin by the throat. The posse pounced and the two were hurled to the ground. The bewildered boatswain had no time to discharge any of his firearms. It was over in an instant. Fea had his first, and probably the most vicious, prisoner taken captive. Belbin's freedom was gone forever. He called out to his crew but the warning went unheard. The Eday locals catered well for their guests. In fact, Punton was in deep and desperate conversation with Laing in a dark corner. Along the track, as Belbin

tried a second shout, a pistol was forced between his teeth. He was left bound and gagged with two armed men while Fea and the others headed to the inn to round up the remaining four pirates.

This turned out to be quite an easy task. Fea, armed with Belbin's pistols, rushed through the front entrance as some of his men burst through the back door. Fea received a slight blow to one hand when Robb hit him, feebly, with the doghead of his pistol as he tried to shoot the laird. All four were disarmed and taken to join their boatswain. That evening the five pirates were taken to the far end of the island, away from Fea's mansion. Messages were despatched to Kirkwall, requesting among other items, two cannon to play upon the pirate ship. Messages were sent to the neighbouring islands of Sanday, Stronsay and Westray for assistance. At the same time, a warning was issued suggesting that approaching vessels would be wise to give Gow's guns a wide berth. Orders were sent round Eday for all boats to be hauled up onto land and their oars removed in case any of the crew was to swim round and secure one.

Beacons were lit on the hills to spread the alarm round the island group.

On board the *George* Gow waited. Three hours went by, four. Then he saw the beacon burn on the Red Head. He knew there would be no assistance forthcoming from the islanders. Belbin, his crew and the dinghy were gone.

The next day, Sunday, passed without hostilities. A stiff wind blew for most of the day, but was of no use to the stranded ship. By evening, however, the wind backed to the North West, which would blow the ship out of the eastern end of Calf Sound and into open sea. Gow ordered the sails to be set; cursing the day he decided to raid his old schoolmate's house. Murphy, the ship's carpenter stood by the anchor line ready to cut it the instant the ship was lined up and ready to sail off into the North Sea. The wind blew, the sails filled, the men were ready and Murphy severed the cable. But, the ship had lurched in a sudden squall and Murphy had acted at exactly the wrong second; as the prow was at that moment pointing directly at the shore. Since the instant he cut that line, the wrong instant, Murphy claimed it was a nervous error. The *George* had its final *revenge* on its pirating crew and drove hard onto the Calf of Eday. The tide then being at its highest, the ship's fate could be realised in a few seconds. Murphy spent a lively night on board.

At dusk Gow watched, with evil bodings for his future, as the Eday folk kindled more fires on the high points of their island. He was, however, master of this island. His men could raid Eday for Fea's several hundred sheep, but there was little else for the crew. The men were armed and could keep intruders at a respectful distance; but ultimately there was nothing else to do but surrender.

On Monday morning the Fea and his people watched as a white flag was raised on the shore of the Calf. Believing that Gow and his crew wished to surrender, a boat (Gow's own boat) was sent to the island carrying six armed men. They carried a letter from Fea to Gow which was to be delivered to the flag-bearer on the shore. It read:

Sir

Upon Saturday, contraire to my proposed friendship, five of your men having come on the shore armed, did, after a most hostile manner, threaten all the inhabitants of this place; therefore, all the people returned and raised arms. Two of your men made great resistance; but by the providence of God Almighty, they were overcome and carried off prisoners for Kirkwall. The three who did not so much resist, confessed that the boatswain was the man that carried the women on board, and plundered Mr Honeyman's house. The collector ordered me, that if you came here, I was to set the promontory on fire for a signal to the frigates which have been sent to catch you; they'll certainly be here tomorrow or the next day. I therefore, for the regard I have to your father's son, being heartily sorry for you, that ever you should be so engaged with such a crew, desire you to come on shore, and believe you may expect better entertainment from me than any other. If you do surrender you can give evidence against the rest, and I'll do my best for you. If you have any friend with you, take him along with you, and if you do not resolve to come presently, send me word. Take this as a friendly caution, and if you take not my advice you'll certainly repent it.

This in friendship from James Fea.

The letter was duly delivered to the man on the shore. In turn he immediately handed a written message from Gow to Fea. This, of course, had been written previous to the messenger's arrival. Of the two letters this was the most straightforward.

Honoured Sir

According to your promise, I expected James Laing with boats and men to my assistance, but have neither seen nor heard of him since his being on board. I sent my boat ashore to beg your assistance; if they have done

otherwise this is contraire to my orders. I earnestly desire you send me some boats to assist me. If your people are afraid, I'll come on shore myself till they return. If you have a great boat, it would be useful for taking in the best of my cargo to lighten the ship. If you'll grant me your assistance I hereby oblige myself to pay you to the value of one thousand pound sterling; which if it be my misfortune to be ship-wrecked, the Government seizes all; and I'll take care there shall be nothing the better – only guns; for I am resolved to set fire to all, and all of us perish together. I beg you to act to your own advantage, together with my safety. Your men shall have twenty pence a day for every day they assist me.

*I am, honourable Sir, your humble servant,
John Gow.*

Some hours followed. As Fea watched there were no signs of Gow following his instructions. He wondered whether the crew had seen the letter and prevented Gow from coming ashore. But Gow had read the letter in the privacy of his cabin. How he wished the solution could be so simple, but feared it could never be. *“If you have any friend with you, take him along with you.”* Gow re-read Fea's letter and recalled his young friend and cabin boy, Peter Hansen. He would have sent that boy ashore into the care of James Fea. Peter had an openly honest approach to everything he did. Even Fea, Gow reckoned, would have recognised this. It may have done them all good in the long run. But Peter was not there and Gow, once more, hoped all was well with the boy.

At approximately two in the afternoon Fea decided to pen another option to the stranded pirate captain. So, again, the armed crew and messenger set off for the Calf.

Gow read the latest plan and spent an hour composing two replies – one to each of the day's correspondence from Fea.

To the honoured James Fea.

Honoured Sir,

I am sorry to hear of the irregular proceedings of my men. I gave no orders to that effect, and what hath been wrongfully done to the country was contraire to my instructions. It is my misfortune to be in this condition at present. It was in your power to have done otherwise, in making my fortune better since my being in the country. I have wronged no man, nor taken anything but what I have paid for. My design in coming was to make the country the better, which I am still capable to do, providing you are just to me. I thank you for the concern you have for my bad fortune, and am sorry I cannot embrace your proposal as being evidence; my people have already made use of that advantage. I have by my last correspondence signified my design of proceeding, provided I can procure no better terms. Please send James Laing on board to continue till my return. I should be glad to have the good fortune to commune with you upon that subject. I beg you'll please assist me with a boat, and be assured I do no man harm were it in my power, as I am now at your mercy. I cannot surrender myself prisoner; I'd rather commit myself to the mercy of the seas; so that if you'd incline to contribute to my escape, I shall leave you ship and cargo at your disposal. I continue earnestly begging your assistance, honoured Sir,

Yours to command,

John Gow.

As a kind of post script Gow replied to Fea's second letter.

Honoured Sir,

Your letter I received and am glad you are inclined to assist me to get the ship off, which will contribute more to your advantage than if I were ship-wrecked. What I promised in my first letter shall be performed (so help me God). Let your people come on board; they shall meet with good usage, and let them carry no arms. If I have the misfortune to lose the ship, expect you'll assist me with a boat to further my escape. I'll pay you ready cash to the value. Bring in haste, H. S.

Yours to command,

John Gow.

Laing arrived with the letters for Fea mid afternoon. Both the captain and the laird knew that the interchange of carefully thought out letters bore little resemblance to the writers' actual plans. In the end, the more cunning of the two would be victorious.

As dusk fell Fea decided to cross to the Calf. He left instructions for a watch to be kept on the pirate ship. For each person leaving the ship, a flag was to be waved from a roof top. If four or more men were to be seen leaving the ship, then the flag was to be waved continuously. Using a speaking trumpet, Fea asked Gow to meet him, alone on the shore some distance from the ship. To this, Gow yelled agreement. As Fea, with his

boatload of armed men were about to land on the island they discovered that the man waiting at the rendezvous point was not Gow, himself, but the bearer of the truce flag. At the same moment one of Fea's men saw his warning flag waving vigorously. As the laird gave the order to retreat from the shore he spotted five of the pirate crew, carrying Spanish guns with lighted fuses, running back to their ship. The bearer of the white flag, however, advanced to the water's edge where it could be seen he was also carrying a bottle and a small bundle. These, he explained to the laird who was a few yards off shore, were peace offerings from Gow. He set those on the sand, then produced two letters from the captain and waved for Fea to come and collect. Fea refused any presents, ordering the man to leave the mysterious bundle and the bottle on the ground and take the letters to him.

"I have a mind to shoot you for the intended treachery of your comrades," Fea bellowed as the man waded towards him denying any knowledge of the ruse and begging for his life. The papers were snatched from his hand by Fea who dismissed him with the message that his master was a treacherous villain.

The letters ran as follows:

From on board our ship, February 16th, 1725.

Honoured Sir,

With impatience I await your decision, to come to my assistance with boats, or a great boat to transport myself to another place on the mainland where I shall be among friends. I am not inclined to come on shore without James Laing come on board to continue till my return. I know your estate affords the best carpenters that's in the country. Therefore, if you design to serve me, set a carpenter to work to repair and send the boat to me with mast and sail, and small anchor fit for her. If the ships of war arrive here before I can make my escape, I am resolved to set fire to the hold, which will soon seize the upper part, together with us; and as we have lived so we die, which will be the loss of some thousand pounds, and none the better. Therefore, if you'll think of the advantage and the honour of taking such a ship, and if you have any regard to my safety, assist me with a good boat. I'll promise to leave the ship and cargo entire, apart from some provisions for our subsistence. I beg your positive answer as soon as possible. I continue yours to command,

John Gow.

Your people are afraid to come nigh the ship, otherwise I would send a present ashore.

The second letter was addressed to Fea's wife, Lady Clestrain, and explained the contents of the bundle which accompanied the bottle of brandy.

Madam,

I presume as being a countryman, to make known my unfortunate condition at present. I have begged Fea's assistance, which I am not likely to procure without your goodness is pleased to solicit on my behalf, which I earnestly beg. We are all resolved to die together, happen what will, and my death will be but little satisfaction to any, for I beg it of your ladyship, hoping to live to make the country better of me. Please receive a church gown in which is made up only for clearing the duty, which I am hopeful you'll please accept, as being from a country man. Hoping your goodness will pardon which I have done amiss. I am, madam,

Your Ladyship's most humble servant,

John Gow.

Gow was, for another night, left in a state of uncertainty as Fea suspended operations until daylight. We will never know whether Lady Clestrain ever had the opportunity to read the letter. If she read it, did she feel pity for the captain and his crew? Did she plead with her husband to help the man no matter what his sins?

Whatever, her husband took it upon himself to express her sentiments in a letter he dispatched next morning.

17th, 8 of the clock

Sir,

I received yours from on board the ship dated 16th instant, 1725. I am surprised that a youth of your education should not have better manners than to challenge me upon a lie. You confidently assert what I have already refused, that there are carpenters here. Your informer is certainly a rogue. What I meant by your coming on shore with your carpenter you have taken in a wrong sense. You desire James Laing to come on board, but if he would go I dare not give hostage to you. I thought you had more sense than write after such a style. I am sorry I ever wrote you; but I thought you had been such a man as a boy. I pray you seriously consider what a thing it is to burn everlastingly; I pray you repent and amend, and by so doing you'll get a sight of your folly, and turn unto the Lord, for he will have mercy, and takes no delight in the death of a sinner. He is certainly a mad man who would not wish for the longest life, and invite the severest torments. You wrote my wife, and offered her a compliment, which she did not want and returned. However, she condoles your condition, and

wishes you forever to do well and repent. I am a well-wisher of all good men, and will be of you if you amend. This is the last you may expect of me.

James Fea.

You will be a prize this night or the next day to those that will treat you more harshly.

From Eday, that morning, it could be seen that Gow, himself, waited on the opposite shore at the appointed place. Some distance from him a man signalled with a white flag for a boat to be sent across. Fea sent his cousin, James, from Whitehall in Stronsay along with seven armed men. Fea's instructions to the men were to hand over the letter, enter upon no treaty, nor give hostage. They were to do their utmost to secure the captain and bring him back, dead or alive. Fea gave his letter to his James to deliver. However, his cousin did not agree with the mode of procedure and did not hand it over to Gow at all. Instead of taking advantage of Gow's defenceless position and, against orders, he bargained with the captain. He sent an Eday man, named Scollay, along with Gow to the ship as hostage! He was to remain as a hostage for Gow and his crew's safety. Fea, fuming, watched through his telescope, mortified to see that his instructions were being disobeyed. He watched as Gow, armed only with his sword, escorted his hostage to the ship! Fea procured a small boat and rowed out to the island where he raged at his men. During this loud altercation, Fea was surprised to spot Gow and his flag bearer standing, quietly observing, at a short distance from them. Immediately Fea strode over to Gow announcing that the captain was now his prisoner.

"I fail to see how you come to this sudden decision!" Gow replied indignantly, "Since I have just taken your man, Scollay, on board as hostage."

Fea rounded on Gow. "I strictly gave the order that no hostages were to be taken. My letter clearly stated my terms, did it not?"

"No," Gow replied, "For I received no letter."

Fea rounded on his cousin. Another loud altercation took place. Gow stood still, amused, but not for long. Five sets of pistols were suddenly turned on him.

"You, fetch my man Scollay and bring along with him the pirate named Peterson." Fea fired orders at the flag bearer who scurried off to the ship never looking back. Fea's prisoners have been talking too much, Gow thought as he noted how keen his companion was to follow the laird's orders. He was a weary captain who was now wishing for an end to this failure. On board, Scollay was relieved. "Is this your captain's order?" he asked the flag bearer. "Yes Sir." The crew gathered round on deck. Some had hopes and plans to get off the ship.

On impulse the flag bearer added, "and you are to bring Winter along with you." That should make things much more relaxed on board the he thought. Scollay, Winter and Peterson left the ship for the last time. William Harvey, the flag bearer, set down his white flag and stood on deck to watch. As the three approached Fea and his men Gow shouted to his men to run back. Scollay seized hold of Winter and Peterson was grappled by Fea's men before he reached the ship. None of the watching ship's crew did anything to assist their comrades. The two men were bound and thrown in Fea's boat. Fea ordered Gow to surrender his sword which he refused replying, "I'd rather be shot." Fea's men disarmed him and searched his clothing. He was asked to step into the boat, but gave a bitter struggle and, like the other two, was bound, bundled into the boat and taken to Eday.

Later that day Peterson and Winter accompanied by Laing joined the five prisoners already taken and held in the south end of the island. They were loaded onto a large sailing boat and, under heavy guard, escorted to the island of Shapinsay to be imprisoned there.

With Gow now held in a makeshift prison chamber, Fea reasoned that the pirate captain, so far, had acted his part bravely and manfully. He could sympathise with Gow up to a certain point. The prisoner named Punton had given Fea a clear picture of type of characters remaining on the *George* and the laird believed, quite rightly, that he now had most of the ringleaders off the ship. He knew too that William Harvey had been quick witted enough to have the ship rid of John Winter. Winter had been at the head of Punton's list of troublemakers. But there were still one or two hard cases on board. He visited Gow who remained bound within the thick, stone walls of the estate house in his prison chamber, a gloomy, north facing room on the first floor.

Gow was reasonable and now his only care was for the safety of the men pressed into service. Rollson, still on board, would be jumpy. Rollson, Gow believed, would be capable of anything if roused. With that in mind, he agreed to go to the Eday shore opposite the *George* and call on his gunner, Rollson, using the speaking trumpet. When Rollson was seen at the meeting spot on the island, Scollay was sent to pick him up. Gow was surprised to find that his crew man, John Emmerson, came over also. He told the man he was a fool to have come but Emmerson told him it had been the gunner's idea. Once the two men had been dispatched in a similar fashion to Winter and Peterson, Gow was threatened and told to call over his carpenter, Murphy. For months, Murphy

had longed to be set free from the ship and came scurrying along the sand to await his transport to Eday. Fea made the journey to pick up this Irishman. So eager was the carpenter to be off the ship, and so keen to please the laird, Fea found him easily persuaded to return to the ship for more tools and two men to assist him. Murphy chose the Frenchman, Ervy Toul, from those who were keen to accompany him, along with Robert Pottinger who was looking rather beaten about. Murphy and Pottinger had kept much to themselves for the past few days. They were most pleased to be off the ship.

Fea was now satisfied that the principal teeth had now been extracted from the monster with the exception of the Scotsman, Melvin, whom Gow admitted had been party to the murders. He and Booth were all that remained on board from Captain Ferneau's original crew. The rest, with the exception of two men from the American ship, one from the Bristol and one from the French vessels captured by Gow, were all newcomers and the majority of them, as Punton had informed him, were forced. This being the case, Fea was sure there would be little resistance on their part when forced to surrender.

The laird ordered his men to patch up the big boat, have the water run out of her, then have her brought to the Eday shore opposite the *George*. He smiled to himself as he thought he should have had Murphy and his men do this work for him before taking them prisoner. But it was too late now. The men were already on their way, in chains, to the island of Shapinsay to join the other prisoners.

Fea returned to Gow and had him untied. The laird informed his prisoner that he required a letter asking the remaining crew to come to the shore in order to make their escape.

"Further, I shall not hand over my boat until my men have possession of your ship." Gow did as he was bid. Scollay delivered the letter to the crew. Gow's letter came as a surprise to the men since they had watched Fea's big boat being made ready for them. With sails fitted, it looked ready to cross the Sound for them. Amid discussion and confusion it was some time before a unanimous decision could be reached. They could all see that their position was hopeless. Even if they got away in Fea's boat, eventually they would be taken, mercilessly, by a Government man-of-war which would certainly be sent to catch them. The men divided what money they could find on the ship, which amounted to around fifty pounds in gold and, at around seven in the evening on 17th February, all of the remaining crew clambered down on to the beach of the Calf, leaving their ship stuck fast on the shore of the little island.

The force of around fifty armed men, sent across in the darkness, made swift work of securing their prisoners. The crew gave very little resistance; willing to surrender and take their chance at a subsequent pardon.

One of the laird's barns was turned into a prison. The estate blacksmith worked at his anvil throughout the night to turn out sufficient and efficient fetters before the prisoners could be removed to the island of Shapinsay. Fea gave orders that the *George* be searched. Nothing was to be touched or removed and a complete inventory was to be compiled. However, a careful examination was first to be made to ensure no slow match had been set to the powder magazine. Fea did not wish the pirates to score a final victory. All was well. Fea's men did, however, find a raft in mid construction. It was made from ship's timbers and barrels. It was a hefty piece able to support two of the ship's guns.

February 18th dawned grey and hazy. By six in the morning the laird was already on board the *George* searching for ship's papers and the like. Orkney's gentry were mustered on deck when Gow, under guard, was brought onto the ship. There he was forced to sign a document to the effect that he never had any right to the ship and its cargo which, the inventory stated, consisted of beeswax, Turkey leather hides, tent, figs, raisins, rough almonds, silk, fine clothes for men and women layered over with silver and gold laces, and a cherry sack. Then, Gow left his beloved ship forever.

Fea and his men failed to re-float the *George*. Just days later, the Government ship, *Weasel*, arrived and took possession of the pirate ship. Fea spent money and years of effort hopelessly bargaining for what he believed should be his.

Gow was taken to London leaving the laird to his new problems. But did he leave? Today, those occupying the room below that used as Gow's prison chamber, at times hear the sound of someone in fetters, moving in the room above. Also, occasionally, light footsteps are heard ascending the stairs. On reaching the top, they stop abruptly. Could this be the captain's young bride vainly come to contrive his escape?