

NUCLEUS James Bremner: Caithness Inventor

THE NUCLEAR AND CAITHNESS ARCHIVES



Portrait of James Bremner. Image courtesy of Am Baile

James Bremner was a great Caithness inventor. He built ships, harbours and rescued shipwrecks.

He was born in Keiss in 1784, and left to start a shipbuilding apprenticeship in Greenock when he was 16.

He loved Caithness though, and came back to start his own shipbuilding business at Wick Harbour. He also started to build harbours. He helped to finish Wick Harbour and built Keiss Harbour in a completely new way. Piers were often washed away in stormy weather, but Mr Bremner realised that laying big stones horizontally meant the waves tossed them about like pebbles! He began to lay stones vertically, wedged together, so the waves couldn't move them. He understood that rules for building at sea were different from rules for building on land.

As well as building boats, Mr Bremner was excellent at raising shipwrecks. He used whatever materials were to hand, once using the timber that was on board a wrecked boat to make a raft to float the boat back to Wick Harbour.

The most famous wreck he refloated was the steamship the *SS Great Britain* in 1847. It was the largest ship in the world. Lots of engineers had already tried and they were embarrassed that a man who wasn't very educated had succeeded where they had failed.

As Mr Bremner always had to work in difficult conditions, namely rough seas, he often had to invent new methods and equipment for each job. Mr Bremner displayed some of his inventions at the **Great Exhibition** of 1851. Among the exhibits were his patented method of harbour building and his suspension crane, and the plans and equipment he used to raise the *Great Britain*.

The Great Exhibition of 1851

The Great Exhibition was held in London in 1851, to display all the wonders of the Victorian Age. You can find out more about it at the links below.

<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Great-Exhibition-of-1851/>

<https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition> has lots of pictures of the exhibition.



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**Research a famous Scottish invention and present your re-
search**

Include :

Information about the inventor

The invention they created and what it is used for

The impact their invention had on society

You can choose how you wish to present your research.

Come up with your own invention!

Think about how it would look, what it would be used for, how it would benefit society and what it would be called. Present your invention in any way you like.

Build a boat/ship that floats in water

Design and build a boat or ship using recycled or household materials. Make a diagram to explain how you will make the boat. Test your design and make improvements if need be. Does it float? Is it durable/sturdy? Were the materials you used the right ones? (waterproof)

