

Issue No 13
Spring 2012

Editor:
Martin Gostwick,
Secretary

Hugh's News

Newsletter of
The Friends of Hugh Miller



WE INVITE ALL OUR MEMBERS TO A GREAT "DOUBLE HEADER" EVENT

ON SATURDAY 5TH MAY 2012
At 2.00pm, Cromarty Old Brewery,
Burnside Place, Cromarty

AN EXCITING BOOK LAUNCH AND OUR NEXT ANNUAL MEETING

ORDER OF PLAY

2.00pm. Presentation:

Jamie's Adventures in Time,

Lesley Beake's inspired novel about a troubled boy finding
the young Hugh Miller,

and

Man of Genius

A stirring novel by Hugh's daughter, Harriet Miller Davidson

2.30pm-4.00pm: **SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING**

4.00-5.00pm: Public meeting, illustrated talk on

"Fossil Collecting: Hugh Miller's Legacy"

Speaker: Bob Davidson



Lesley Beake



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

AGM provisional agenda Two new books reviewed Landmark Series 3, The Gruids Open Letters

SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING



Bob Davidson giving a field trip demonstration with fish scale models

5th MAY 2012

2.30PM, The Old Brewery, Cromarty

PROVISIONAL AGENDA

Chairman: Professor Nigel Trewin.

1. 2.30pm Chairman to open the meeting.
2. Minutes of 5th AGM 2011.
3. Secretary's Annual Report.
4. Treasurer's Annual Report.
5. Election of Office Bearers & Mgt Cttee.
6. Museum Manager's report
7. Hugh Miller's national profile, report by Prof Trewin.
8. Discussion of the report.
9. AOB

Please note: If any member wishes to nominate a person for election as an office bearer, or member of the Management Committee, or to raise any matter under AOB, please notify the Secretary, Martin Gostwick, beforehand by email, phone or post. c/o Russell House, 55 Shore Street, Cromarty IV11 8XL, 01381 600301. martingostwick@tiscali.co.uk

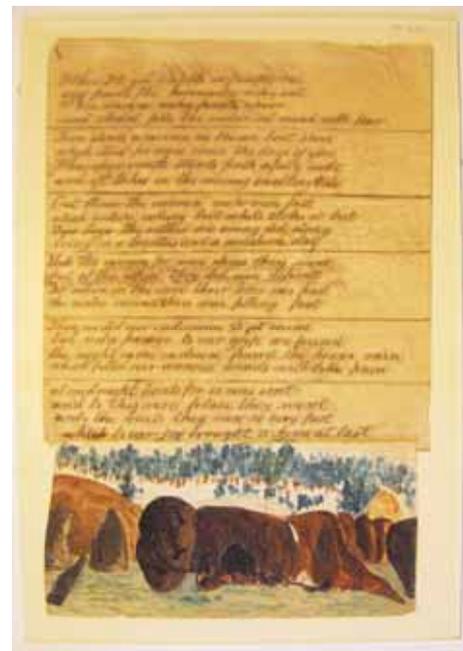
Followed by PUBLIC MEETING to be addressed by Bob Davidson on
Fossil Collecting: Hugh Miller's Legacy. 4.00pm approx.



JAMIE'S ADVENTURES IN TIME

Review by Christine Hart, of *For the Right Reasons*

This is the story of a troubled teenage boy, Jamie Alexander, who was sent to stay with his grandfather at Cromarty in the Black Isle area of the Scottish Highlands. With his grandfather's guidance he is drawn into the early life of Hugh Miller, Scotland's renowned geologist. By following Hugh's discovery of fossils his querying of how they came to be there help Jamie put his own problems into context. Although there is a difference of two hundred years between Hugh and Jamie, the former's experiences resonate with Jamie in the present day. Today's teenagers will empathise with him and this book will make a great addition to school libraries and classrooms. Of Hugh and his friend's plight in the cave (see right), he wrote: "Then we did our endeavours to get round/But not a passage to our grief we found/ The night came on, down pored the heave rain/Which filled our anxious minds with double pain. " All his life Hugh, for all his later eloquent prose, had trouble spelling! Underneath is his watercolour, in which "horrid crags of burnt umber were perforated by yawning caverns of Indian ink, and crested by a dense pine-forest of sap green." The poem and watercolour is still held in the archive room in Miller House, and can be viewed on application to the Museum manager, Dr Alix Powers-Jones.



Hugh's first effort at poetry, "enormously bad verses" (his words) about his night hours trapped by the tides with a schoolfriend in the South Sutor's Doocot Cave, when he was 12. They were recited to great applause by "one of the prettiest young ladies" at his school "before the assembled taste and fashion of Cromarty."

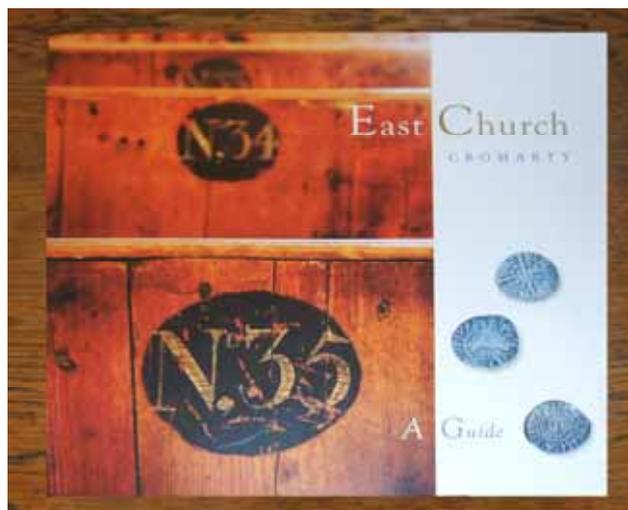
MAN OF GENIUS REVIEWED

Alcoholism among ministers of the kirk is a brave subject for a novel to tackle, especially in Victorian times, but Hugh Miller's daughter, Harriet Miller Davidson, is not afraid to tackle the issues. Addiction, she shows, is no respecter of persons, not even in the ministry, supposedly the bastion of respectability and propriety.

This is a charming book, delightfully written, full of colourful description of town and country life, but it is very much a book of its period. The women tend to be delicate flowers, without an unworthy thought in their heads, while the men are noble, and, even when clearly flawed, never irredeemable.

EAST KIRK OPEN

David Alston and Caroline Vawdrey have written a new guidebook for the magnificently restored Cromarty East Church. This booklet supports all the new interpretation of its history now on display within the precincts.



East Church, Cromarty – A Guide, fleshes out the kirk's colourful history from medieval times to the restoration works and reopening last year. It is superbly illustrated, and is available on the premises, price £5.00.

Any members visiting Cromarty should set aside time to call in at the kirk, and see all the great works for themselves, and take on board its very tangible spirituality and tranquillity. It is open daily, all year round, between 9.00am and 5.00pm.

OPEN LETTER

HAS HUGH BEEN SOLD SHORT?

Dear Friends,

I should like to raise my deep concern about the lack of reference to Hugh Miller in the reorganised Geology Gallery of the revamped National Museum of Scotland. With the exception of his statue, studying one of his fossil finds, which is now located with other random statues on the top gallery of the Main Hall, there is no attempt to explain the importance of Hugh Miller in the context of the history of science. (There is certainly no parallel reference in any gallery to his importance as an ethnographer and as an influence in the political and social changes which occurred in the Church of Scotland in 1843.)

I asked at the Info Centre in the museum if there was another gallery devoted to palæontology and was told that some part of the museum was awaiting redevelopment, but there was no clear indication of its content. It is ten years since we celebrated Hugh Miller's bi-centenary with the full commitment of the National Museum of Scotland, which not only mounted a temporary but interesting display from their extensive collection, but also supported the series of three conferences in 2000, 2001 and 2002 organised by the Cromarty Arts Trust in collaboration with other national organisations. These helped to broaden the public

awareness of the importance of Hugh Miller's place in the scientific, political and social history of Scotland, and the publications arising from the series of conferences were well received. The National Museum itself sponsored the re-printing of Hugh Miller's own early writing, under the guidance of Dr Michael Taylor.

Therefore I think we should raise the issue of the loss of reference to Hugh Miller with the Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland, in the hope that if there is to be a further redevelopment then the importance of his work should be re-emphasised.

As I understand it, the new Director of the Museum is anxious to present the material in a broader context, which is obviously sensible, but there can be no person better than Hugh Miller for illustrating the breadth of personal development in the early 19th century.

Dr Lester Borley (former Patron of the Friends of Hugh Miller)



OPEN LETTER

LYDIA GARDEN PLAQUE "MEDIocre"?

We have received strong representations from Charles Smith, the ornamental letter carver who inscribed the two plaques in the wall of Miller's Yard: Garden of Wonders, objecting to the new Lydia Garden plaque honouring the Miller family and their descendants. We publish his comments, with our reply below.

Dear Friends

When we read Hugh Miller himself on how he "distanced all my competitors in the art of inscription cutting," and carved his ornate dial stone to prove his point, why was it thought fitting to mark Lydia's Garden with a piece of commercial mediocrity? It is the antithesis of Hugh Miller's vision and achievements in stone.

What a humdrum plaque. It just looks like the awful black and gilt mass produced memorials you see everywhere. It is completely out of context.

Anything done in the Miller name, because of the man he was, and because of the woman Lydia was, should be done in the highest excellence. There are many fine carvers who could have done so much better. It is not about what I would have done myself but what should have been done. A plaque in a soft coloured stone with gently tinted letters in keeping with the colours of the garden could have been procured commercially too .

When my wife Jean saw this plaque, she said: "They have let Hugh Miller down."

Yours sincerely

Charles Smith

Given our member Charles Smith's very high standing in handcrafted stonework, as demonstrated in his excellent tablets for Miller's Yard, we must respect his opinions, but we must beg to differ. We regard the plaque as a handsome monument, and entirely right for its context, in the materials, lettering and finish.

The 2011 AGM of The Friends agreed to commission this plaque from Sutherland Stonework, Golspie, to be executed in Caithness flagstone, with standard, but elegant lettering in gold leaf, on a polished surface. The National Trust for Scotland approved the commission, as partners in the venture.



The plaque is, as it needed to be, highly visible and striking to the eye for passing visitors in the street outside. Its memorial inscription also needed to be readily legible from some distance to the museum's visitors, drawing them beyond the courtyard outside the Birthplace Cottage, towards the garden.



LANDMARK SERIES, No 3

HUGH MILLER AND HIS JOURNEYS TO LAIRG

By Reay D.G. Clarke

In Chapters V and VI of Hugh Miller's book *"My Schools and Schoolmasters,"* he tells of three life-changing holidays that he spent in the Barony of Gruids near Lairg at the home of his Gaelic-speaking maternal aunt and cousins.

His stories bear remarkably vivid and extensive witness to an ancient Highland way of life and culture which was even then vanishing, and relate in particular to the influence of cousin George which led him to become a stonemason.

His accounts of his journeys to and from the remote Sutherland croft are gripping too. On the first occasion he and his mother walked the thirty three miles from Nigg Ferry to Gruids in two days, arriving as he says: ". . . early on the evening of the second day, we reached together my aunt's cottage, in the ancient Barony of Gruids".

The next year he and his mother returned for a second visit. In the third year it was Hugh and his cousin, Walter, who made that journey. The first journey was perhaps made around 1813 when Hugh would have been 11 - or maybe earlier. How many boys of that age could undertake such a trek today?

The Barony of Gruids was then the great stretch of land which extends for some twenty miles along the south banks of Loch Shin and the River Shin from the head of that loch to the mouth of the river at Inveran. Today Gruids is taken to mean just the crofting township of Gruids, which lies a couple of miles west of Lairg and astride the road to Rosehall.



Loch Shin

In late April last year, I set out with my daughter Janey and son Hugh – both direct descendants of Hugh Miller – and daughter-in-law Mary Cadogan, to re-trace these journeyings of Hugh Miller. And with us was Lesley Beake, visiting the north of Scotland from her home in South Africa to research for her forthcoming children's book about Hugh Miller. We drove, not being in condition for a 30-mile walk!

We drove down to Nigg Ferry and looked across the mouth of the Cromarty Firth to the white buildings of that "little town of Cromarty" from where Hugh and his mother had set out. It looked well in the bright sunshine of that spring day.

From there we travelled to Fearn, looking across the fine, well-tended farmlands of Easter Ross, and on to pass Tain. We then traversed the southern shores of the Dornoch Firth, passing below the remains of the broch at Dunaliscaig on Midfearn. Hugh Miller writes of that broch: ". . . within whose walls, forming, as it did, a sort of half way stage, I used on these Sutherlandshire journeys, to eat my piece of cake with a double relish".



Aboard the Cromarty ferry crossing to Nigg, the same crossing (on a different vessel!) made by Hugh and his mother in the early 19th Century.

We crossed the Kyle of Sutherland at Bonar Bridge and headed up, high above the River Shin, to Lairg where we turned west across the bridge. Hugh and his mother would have crossed by ferry. Two miles west along the road to Rosehall, we came to the crofting township of Gruids with its neat croft houses and green fields.

Our task was then to try to identify the site of the cottage where Hugh Miller's aunt lived. Local tradition has it that this was at Runachloie. This site is fairly high up and just over a mile from the end of Loch Shin, which



Loch Shin

"The loch furnished...a delightful prospect on still October mornings, when the light gossamer went sailing about in white filmy threads, and birch and hazel, glorified by decay, served to embroider with gold the brown hillsides which, standing up on either hand in their long vista of more than twenty miles, form the barriers of the lake, and when the sun, still struggling with a blue diluted haze, fell delicately on the smooth surface, or twinkled for a moment on the silvery coats of the little trout, as they sprang a few inches into the air, and then broke the water into a series of concentric rings in their descent." (My Schools and Schoolmasters, Ch V, p103, 1993)

THOROUGH CLEARANCES

The crofters of part of Gruids were cleared for sheep farming in 1813 and more were cleared in 1820. It is therefore not surprising that little remains of Cousin George's home for in those days the factors, charged with clearing the people, always made a very thorough job of it. Nothing was left standing by the time they had finished.

We went on up the south side of Loch Shin through the fresh, green birch woods with their carpet of primroses in full flower. We turned the car at Salachy and then drove down through Gruids, past Achany to the Falls of Shin. There we had an excellent lunch in the restaurant and a short walk down to the falls, again in the steps of Hugh Miller and his cousin.

It was here that Hugh's: ". . . right foot came so heavily in contact with a sharp-edged fragment of rock concealed in the moss, that I almost screamed aloud with pain". This injury gave trouble and caused Hugh and his cousin to take the shortest way back to Nigg Ferry. Instead of going round by Tain, they turned off at Midfean and travelled through the hills by way of the Struie road and we also took that route.

He writes that: "we soon found ourselves in a dreary waste, without trace of human habitation". It is hardly a dreary waste today with the shepherd's house at Muidh a Blair, the housing development at Aultnamain and, of course, the Forestry Commission's great forest which stretches out on both sides of the road.

Hugh Miller says could be seen from near the cottage. Today it is difficult to locate this site exactly. It is easier to identify the cottage in which he and his Cromarty cousin stayed during his third visit. He writes that: "The nearer shores of Loch Shin were scarce half a mile away;". We drove a short distance along the road to Sallachy and, certainly on both sides of that road below Claonel, the land has all the appearance of a one time crofting settlement.

Hugh and his cousin would probably have gone by the old drove road down Strathrory. Somewhere, near Scotsburn maybe, Hugh collapsed with the pain from his damaged foot but was rescued by an "old, grey headed man" who took them to his cottage nearby where his kindly wife tended to their needs. On the morrow Hugh was taken by cart across Nigg Bay to Nigg and from there to the ferry and safely back to Cromarty.

Strathrory is still only a walking track so we drove on to Ardross and thence past Scotsburn where we also saw: ". the cultivated country and the sands of Nigg Bay only a few miles below". We noted carefully that "The sands are dangerous at certain hours of the tide and accidents frequently happen in the fords;"

In Chapter XX of "*Scenes and Legends*" Hugh Miller records that in Nigg Bay there is "A narrow river-like channel in the middle, fed by streams which discharge themselves into the estuary from the interior, and which never dries," It "bears the name of "The Pot". It was infamous during even the present century for its death-lights and its wraiths, and for the strange mysterious noises which used to come sounding from its depths to either shore previous to a drowning".

He goes on to recount how an old Nigg parishioner heard just such knocking noises coming from The Pot, and correctly predicted an imminent drowning. The doomed one was a horseman galloping across channel, making for Tain.



The famed Falls of Shin

However at the end of this, his third holiday at Gruids, Hugh and his cousin did get safely home. We just skirted Nigg Bay and also headed for home.

It had been a splendid day. The countryside looked well. Lesley said that it was not nearly as bleak and bare as she had imagined. This opened my eyes to the spread of woodland over these past fifty years. Certainly when I was selling lambs in Lairg during the autumns of the 1950s and 1960s, the road up from Bonar Bridge to Lairg travelled through open heather moorland, stocked with sheep. The sheep have largely gone. Woodland, natural and planted, has taken their place. The roads have been improved out of all recognition.

Certainly the past two hundred years have brought great changes but yet the character of the land remains – the crofts, the rivers, the lochs and the mountains. It is a great countryside. It was a great privilege to retrace those journeyings of Hugh Miller in the company of two of his descendants and the writer Lesley Beake.

References:

My Schools and Schoolmasters. Hugh Miller

Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland. Hugh Miller

A History of Lairg. Lesley Ketteringham 1997



FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER MEMBERSHIP APPEAL

Having read this newsletter, will Members now please consider some of the following actions:

- Increasing your subscription contribution.
- Making a donation.
- Inviting family or friends to join, with the following message from us:

We have pleasure in inviting you to consider subscribing to the charity, named The Friends of Hugh Miller. The Friends' annual subscription has been set at £10 per person. Subscribers receive a Membership Card, a copy of the constitution, a periodical newsletter and an annual report. We look forward to welcoming you as a Member of the Friends.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I WISH to become a member of the charity, The Friends of Hugh Miller (SC 037351), in order to support its work in making Miller's life and work better known, and in particular to assist in the development of the Hugh Miller Museum and Birthplace Cottage in Church Street, Cromarty.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....**Postcode**.....

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Membership subscription is £10 annually, payable by cash/cheque or bank standing order.

We will send standing order and Gift Aid forms on request.

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