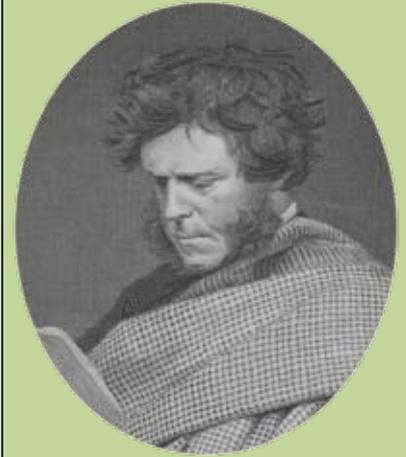


Issue No 16
Spring 2013

Editor:
Martin Gostwick,
Secretary

Hugh's News

Newsletter of
The Friends of Hugh Miller



**WISHING ALL OUR MEMBERS A HAPPY,
HEALTHY & PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR**

**WE INVITE YOU TO ATTEND OUR
7th ANNUAL MEETING**

**on SATURDAY 18TH MAY 2013 at the CROMARTY CENTRE (Old Brewery),
Burnside Place, Cromarty, between 2.00 and 5.00pm.**

followed by a

PUBLIC MEETING

on

“Highland history’s riches and where to find them”

An illustrated presentation by

Norman Newton

(former head of Highland Council Libraries’ reference and information services,
and member of Groam House Museum Board)

Light refreshments will be served

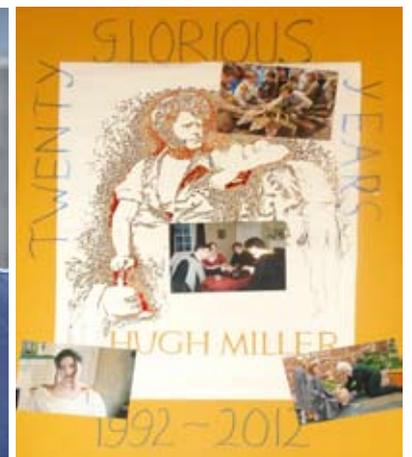
For provisional AGM agenda, see website at http://www.hughmiller.org/the_friends_g.asp

INSIDE:

Friends big new donation	p 2
Yvonne Lambert, RIP	p 3
Nigel Trewin’s finds	ps 3,6
Windows on the world	ps 4-5
Uncle James (Archive Series No 1)	ps 7-8



Norman Newton



“20 Glorious Years, 1992-2012”
(see Window on the World)

A NEW GARDEN "ROOM"

Our management committee has decided to complete the funding for an important extension of the Museum's open spaces – a new garden "room" behind the Birthplace Cottage.



Highland conservation volunteers pause between a wholesale jungle clearance op

This will involve a donation from our reserves of £1,785 to the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), enabling the Museum to purchase the necessary materials. The committee deemed that, with our balance over £7,500 in the black, the Friends can afford this outlay to fulfil such a core purpose of our Constitution.

The new open space, situated adjacent to Lydia Garden, and at the rear of Paye House, was the major item submitted by the Museum to the latest NTS annual funding "wish list," which is circulated to all the Trust's Members Centres and Friends Groups.

Manager Alix Powers-Jones explained: "This will create a much needed outdoor learning space and a place for quiet reflection in our tiny and busy property."

It is hoped many visitors, especially schools and young people's groups, will make use of the garden to study aspects of Miller's own wide interests, and for relaxing and socialising round the benches and table. The space is a small area (roughly 10x12 metres) which had fallen out of use since Paye House's conversion from NTS staff house to holiday accommodation in 2010. It houses at one end a shed for the gardening tools used by the Museum's outdoor volunteers.

It was cleared by a super team from the newly reformed Highland Conservation Volunteers, over a two-day period last August. They rooted out weeds, cleared the walls of ivy, removed heavily overgrown bushes, and laid down weed-suppressing tarpaulin, thus providing a level framework for the garden. Happily, they did leave a magnificent Scots pine planted by Trust staff some 12 years ago, which will now serve as a natural highlight. The conservation volunteers are due back to finish the rest of the work in March, thus enabling the garden room to be ready for public use next season.

An anonymous donor has already come forward with £100, towards the total cost of £2,085.00, and our colleague Rev Ken Dupar has very kindly offered to cover one of the three 4-seater benches estimated at £200 each.

NTS is providing a stonemason and materials for creating the garden, and of course the conservation volunteers give their labour for free. The balance we have agreed to meet will cover two of the three benches, a table, a weed-resistant membrane, gravel, stone and cement, large pots, compost and plants, and a range of essential maintenance tools.

Thus what had become a jungly, ill-looking and out-of-use corner will add to the outdoor pleasures already available in Miller's Yard and Lydia Garden.



The cleared space awaiting development

OBITUARY**YVONNE LAMBERT – “ONE CRACKING LADY”**

We deeply regret to have to inform readers of the loss of Yvonne Lambert, amateur geologist, Museum volunteer and Friends member, who died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack on 13 December, aged 67.

At her funeral ceremony close to her home in Avoch, she was said to be admired as “one cracking lady” by all who knew her, and Museum staff and Friends members can very much confirm this from our pleasure in working with her.

She took an interest in natural life from early childhood. Loved by all her family and friends as “Vonny,” they enjoyed her company on hill and beach, and her skills as an artist, dressmaker and gardener. She became an intrepid hillwalker all over the Highlands, the English Lake District and Wales. She purposefully moved permanently to the Highlands from northern England to pursue her love of its natural treasures.

As a long-standing member of the Highland Geological Society (HGS), and in between her professional career as a legal secretary, she made of herself a well-informed amateur geologist. Hugh Miller himself would have applauded her energy, enthusiasm and will to learn for herself. It was on one of her many HGS-led field trips, at Miller's fossil beds at Eathie that I first met her, and recruited her as a volunteer. Following that, she offered to “tidy up” the hands-on table of fossils on the Miller House top floor (Room 6). She sorted the jumble of specimens into a coherent display, freshly labelled them and laid them out on black felt. She also reorganised and re-labelled the collection of stones which are most commonly found on the Cromarty shorelines. These were tasks she performed with the utmost diligence over many weeks. Yvonne thus achieved an enormous improvement in the presentation, information, education and enjoyment of geology and palaeontology for our visitors. She was the one Black Isle-based geologist on whom we could always count for advice.

She served as a seasonal guide for four successive seasons, including 2012, and would doubtless have continued but for her untimely death. Our condolences to her daughters Karen and Ruth, and their families.



Yvonne Lambert

MILLER MEMORABILIA FROM A LIBRARY AUCTION

Nigel Trewin

At the end of September 2012 a friend alerted me to Hugh Miller items in a book auction due to take place in Carlisle on the 4th October. Whilst it is common to find the odd Miller book in auctions this material was exciting in that it included material with direct connections to our hero.

The sale comprised the *'Library of the Late Peter Fletcher Riddell'*. He was born in 1918 and died in 1985. He was a banker by profession, entering the National Commercial Bank when he left school and rising to be Manager of a branch in Edinburgh (by then the Royal Bank of Scotland). Riddell collected books and early Scottish photographs, many of which he bought at the 'Barrows' in Glasgow on Saturday mornings. He bequeathed his photograph collection to the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in 1985. I do not know the history of his library during the 27 years since his death, but it seems probable that the Miller material has not been touched in that time.

Continued on page 6

WINDOWS ON THE WORLD



Two excellent displays on Celtic art and its revival were mounted by Groom House Museum.

Bottom row, left to right:

The Friends "window" shows some of the events and publications which have done so much for the Millers' profile in the last two decades

Cromarty Courthouse Museum produced a few of the remarkable finds unearthed by the town's residents over the years

The dolphin skull, a product of marine biologists' continuous monitoring and research into the lives (and deaths) of the cetaceans and seals in the Cromarty and Moray Firths

Strathpeffer's toys collection made for a happy set from Ross-shire children

Cromarty Youth Cafe's "little crafters" are becoming adept at handmade collages

Osgood Mackenzie, the Gairloch laird who employed hundreds of tenants to build the shelter belt for his far-famed tropical plantations at Inverewe

An "Advent" community exhibition placed in the tiny window of the Birthplace College featured fascinating mini-displays submitted by organisations from all over the Highlands and beyond in the run-up to Christmas.

This was the brainchild of our manager, Dr Alix Powers-Jones, which brought the Museum really alive in the midst of winter – when it has hitherto been hibernating off-season.

Each "window" offered a display of "Seeing" from the perspective of the organisation showing it, in terms of how it presents itself to the world. Many passers-by peered through the panes for minutes at a time, and on three December Saturdays staff opened the Cottage doors so that people could see the "goods" even closer up – and do some Christmas shopping!

It was such an unusual initiative that it earned praise from the National Trust for Scotland's chief executive, Mrs Kate Mavor, in a festive circular to all NTS staff and volunteers, as "a nice idea that is engaging on many levels." Extracts appeared on the Trust's internal website, and on Cromarty-Live, the local community site.

And since more than 25 bodies took part, stretching the daily show up to the New Year, Alix plans to repeat the exercise next year, inviting exhibitors old and new to reflect on "Journeys – Mental, Physical and Spiritual."

The Friends of Hugh Miller splashed out on a potted history of the Museum covering the period since Frieda Gostwick became Manager in 1992, up to 2012. We have summarised the relative flood of publications by Miller and about him and his family during these "Twenty Glorious Years," and some of the outstanding events, from the 'Hugh Who?' children's musical of 2002 to the openings of Miller House, and the Garden of Wonders.

One of the most startling exhibits was the skull of a Moray Firth bottlenose dolphin, part of the collection shown by the Aberdeen University marine biology research team based at Cromarty Lighthouse. A shock to see such a macabre object, since we all hold these creatures so dear, especially when it was lying on the Cottage bed! However, Hugh Miller would have been instantly fascinated – he who once wrote two whole pages about his minute dissection of a cuttlefish.

That all-consuming curiosity also inspired Miller's friend and co-collector Robert Dick, the Thurso baker, about whom Cromarty resident Jane Verburg entered an eclectic mix worthy of his own extraordinary diversity.

Alix, who offered emailed philosophical reflections on each and every "window," asked interesting historical and topical questions about the two men: "What inspired 19th century individuals like Hugh Miller in Cromarty and Robert Dick in Caithness to open their eyes to the world around them and to do such innovative,



observational research (including fossil collecting) that it led to breakthroughs in our understanding of natural history and geology?

"These two chaps were similar in many ways: largely self-taught, meticulous individuals that wanted to know more about the world around them. Their strengths were that they did not restrict themselves to studying one aspect of that world, instead they were observational polymaths (into everything) wanting to know more."

Alix then posed this interesting quandary: "I sometimes wonder if we force our young people to specialise too soon at school and university, when in fact what should be doing is encouraging them to study a breadth of subjects and so develop a wider understanding. Development of skilled researchers and experts is important, but then so is the ability to put that expert knowledge into context.

Probably the next most startling exhibit after the dolphin skull was: a heavy-weight, larger than life, wooden head of Sir Osgood Mackenzie, founder of Inverewe Gardens in the 1860's. You gaze into his rather sorrowful eyes, and see the creator of a floral miracle, but also someone who decimated the fauna with his merciless shotgun.

From the Kirkmichael Trust came a finial fallen from its former belltower – a reminder of that scenic kirk's very serious need of rescuing conservation .

Alix herself chose one of the simplest things, a few lines on Christmas from her favourite poet, Orkney's George Mackay Brown, which convey with such concision and vision, a holy whiteness.

"...Now kings and shepherds have come.

A wintered hovel

Hides a glory

Whiter than snowflake or silver or star."

A great effort was put in collectively by the Cromarty community itself, including the Courthouse Museum, History Society, primary school, youth club, boat club, tennis club, Arts Trust, Fourways Club, chanters' (apprentice pipers) and crafters' groups. There were far too many exhibitors and exhibits for us to review in full detail here, but to give you an idea of their range, here is a partial list of contributors: Groam House, Ullapool, Strathpeffer (Childhood), Highlanders (Fort George), and Dingwall Museums; Inverewe Gardens; Inverness Royal Academy, Kirkmichael Trust, Buckfast Abbey.

We must wish the 2013 "windows" will provide as much enlightenment and pleasure as those of 2012 have given us. Well done Alix and her team for the inspiration and the hard work, putting up and taking down a display every day except Christmas and Boxing Day, and then setting them out again in Cottage rooms for Saturday viewing.



The great but still largely unrecognised polymath Robert Dick's many talents are specified here from botanist to fossil collector to conchologist, together with a top hat which also caused the baker to be labelled an eccentric



Kirkmichael's fleur-de-lis shaped finial from a gable top, surrounded by the ivy in which it was wrapped. The Kirkmichael Trust hopes to restore the roof.



Continued from page 3

Unable to go to Carlisle for the sale, I had to rely on the auctioneers photographs of the lots, and further information discovered through phone conversation with the auctioneer. On the day of the sale I had a telephone booked for bidding at the auction,- something I had not done before. There were 4 lots of Miller material, and I was successful on three of them, securing all those with items connected to Hugh and Lydia Miller. The lot I did not buy contained several 1st editions of his books, but they were not in very good condition, and did not seem to have any direct connections to Hugh Miller.

The items of most interest are briefly described below, and when I have as much information as is reasonably possible on each they will feature with illustrations in Hugh's News. Michael Taylor, David Alston and Martin Gostwick are kindly looking for specific pieces of information to identify individuals connected with some items.

Two books are dedicated to Miss Marion Wood, one (*'Schools and Schoolmasters'*) in Hugh Miller's hand, and the other (*'Testimony of the Rocks'*) has the dedication written by the publisher 'by Mrs Miller's desire'. The latter has a Tennyson poem pasted in the flyleaf that was written out by Miss Marion Wood for Hugh Miller. Part of a page was lost and Hugh Miller replaced the missing part in his own hand. A note written by Marion Wood explains the circumstance. The poem was returned to Marion Wood by Hugh Miller junior after Miller's death. In Bayne's book on *'The Life and Letters of Hugh Miller'* Marion Wood's thoughts are included as *'Recollections of a Lady'* (Vol. 2, p344-354).

Another item takes the form of a personal memorial to Hugh Miller. It is a slim leather bound volume with 'Hugh Miller' in gold letters on the front cover. Internally there is a Carte de Visite of Hugh Miller by Tunny of Edinburgh, newspaper cuttings from *The Witness* on his death, and four pages of proofs from *Testimony of the Rocks* which are corrected in Miller's hand. This is particularly poignant since the last task Miller completed on the day he died was the correction of the proofs of this book. The person who made up this book appears to have had the initials R.S., but so far I do not have a name. Ideas welcome!

A copy of *'The Cruise of the Betsey with Rambles of a Geologist'* (1858) into which is inserted a ms page by Hugh Miller from *'Rambles'* forms another fine item. This bears a note saying that the ms page was given to the owner 'immediately after Hugh Miller's death by his half brother Andrew Williamson'. It is signed but indistinct, so the original owner is so far unknown.

Possibly the most interesting item is a bank draft from the Commercial Bank of Scotland dated 30 June 1836. The subject is a transfer of 30/- to James Milne in Edinburgh. The form was filled in by Hugh Miller (Accountant at the bank in 1836), and is also signed by Robert Ross ('Agent' or bank manager in modern parlance). Hugh Miller added a letter to James Milne on the form, and inside is a letter from Lydia Fraser to James. Within 6 months of this date Hugh and Lydia were married and Robert Ross gave Lydia away at the ceremony. It appears that James Milne did not cash the draft for reasons so far unknown. The letter has been inserted in a modern binding along with a copy of a pamphlet on banking written by Hugh Miller and dedicated to Robert Ross.

It appears that these items were collected by Mr Riddell over a period of time since they were clearly the property of different people, and not a single-owner collection. Three of the items are clearly personal memorials of Hugh Miller created just after his death. The banking letter and pamphlet were probably bound together fairly recently, probably by Peter Riddell who had an interest in postal history, and may have found the letter for sale as a postal item. Thus there are several questions that remain to be answered concerning these interesting items before the full stories can be told. In the meantime research will continue.



Nigel Trewin

FROM THE ARCHIVES – No 1

We introduce a new series of which we hope to publish an article in every edition, bringing the riches in the Museum's collections to our members' notice, and we hope encouraging scholars to make more use of them. The first piece reveals more about a relative of Hugh Miller who exercised a most profound influence on his whole life.

UNCLE JAMES

A thick book, bound in the blackest leather, offers tantalising hints about the character of Hugh Miller's Uncle James.

The book itself is of interest as one of only a handful belonging to the Miller family still in the Museum. Its subject is *The Life of King Charles*, containing large numbers of his speeches, letters, peace offerings, and even advice to his children just before his execution in 1649. He is recorded as telling his son, The Duke of Gloucester, "Sweetheart, now they will cut off thy father's head."

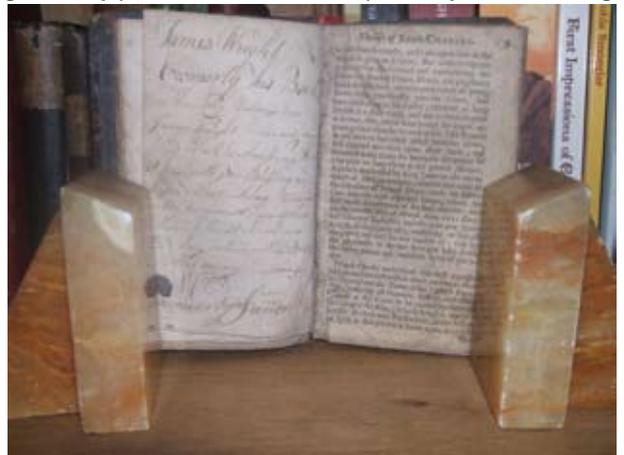
On the flyleaves at the front and back, James Wright has inscribed his name, in the most elegant, flowery italic script, not once but over and over again. The largest copy is on the front flyleaf, proclaiming, "James Wright, Cromarty, his book." What can we learn from these repeated signatures?

A date is written at the bottom of the page, 1783, which would have made him 18 years old at the time. As a teenager he could have been practising his handwriting, as well as asserting his emerging identity through repeated use of his own name in grand style.

He did not marry. Hugh Miller tells us he shared a home with his younger brother Sandy. They were two of nine children born to a prosperous shoemaker, and they took over the parenting of Hugh, and his education, after his father's death.

James was "a humorist, fond of a good joke," and Hugh "much a favourite." Hugh's description of him and brother Sandy over some five pages of his autobiography is as vivid a picture of two beloved relatives as any to be found in all literature.

About James, he wrote: "*My elder uncle, James, added to a clear head and much native sagacity, a singularly retentive memory, and great thirst of information. He was a harness-maker, and wrought for the farmers of an extensive district of country; and, as he never engaged with a journeyman or apprentice, but executed all his work with his own hands, his hours of labour, save that he indulged in a brief pause as the twilight came on, and took a mile's walk or so, were usually protracted from six o'clock in the morning till ten at night. Such incessant occupation left him little time for reading; but he often found some one to read beside him during the day; and in the winter evenings his portable bench used to be brought from his shop at the other end of the dwelling, into the family sitting room, and placed beside the circle round the hearth, where his brother Alexander...would read aloud from some interesting volume for the general benefit.... Occasionally the family circle would be widened by the accession of from two to three intelligent neighbours, who would drop in to listen, and then the book, after a space, would be laid aside, in order that its contents might be discussed in conversation. In the summer months, Uncle James always spent time in the country, in looking after and keeping in repair the harness of the farmers for whom he wrought; and during his journeys and twilight walks on these occasions there was not an old castle, or hill fort, or ancient encampment, or antique ecclesiastical edifice, within twenty miles of the town, which he had not visited and examined over and over again. He was a keen local antiquary, knew a good deal about the architectural styles of the ages at a time when these subjects were little studied or known; and possessed more traditionary lore, picked up chiefly on his country journeys, than any man I ever knew.*"



James Wright - his book

What he once heard he never forgot and the knowledge which he had acquired he could communicate pleasingly and succinctly.... From his reputation for sagacity, his advice used to be much sought after by the neighbours in every little difficulty that came their way; and the counsel given was always shrewd and honest. I never knew a man more entirely just in his dealings than Uncle James, or who regarded every species of meanness with a more thorough contempt. I soon learned to bring my storybooks to his workshop, and became, in a small way, one of his readers – greatly more, however, as may be supposed, on my own account than his. My books were not yet of the kind he would have chosen for himself; but he took an interest in my interest; and his explanations of all the hard words saved me the trouble of turning over a dictionary. And when tired of reading, I never failed to find rare delight in his anecdotes and old-world stories, many of which were not to be found in books, and all of which, without apparent effort on his own part, he could render singularly amusing. Of these narratives the larger part died with him; but a portion of them I succeeded in preserving a little traditional work published a few years after his death....



A handsome ginger and a posy adorn Uncle James's tomb

This splendid vignette makes Uncle James almost the epitome of Burns's "man o sense and worth," who followed up on his youthful dabbling in the biography of the beheaded Stuart with a lifetime of literary and cultural pursuits, in the midst of incessant toil. What telling scenes they are by his hearthside of an evening. He begot in his nephew a love of story-telling, and, as Hugh tells us, served his nephew as his principal source for his own great folkloric work, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*.

His other uncle Sandy commissioned Hugh to compose and cut the epitaph on his grave at the East Kirk, and it is fitting that this moving inscription can still just be deciphered:

"An honest, warm-hearted man
who had the happiness
of living without reproach
and of dying without fear
28th August MDCCCXXVIII (1828)
in the LXII (62nd) year of his age."

It is also fitting that this is the best surviving example of Miller's skills as a stonemason, especially in ornamental letter-cutting. The grave is at the furthest eastern end of the kirkyard, near the boundary wall.



Hugh's epitaph on the tomb, see above

*Archival items mentioned in this and future articles can be consulted on application to the Museum Manager.