

Issue No 24
Spring 2015

Editor:
Martin Gostwick,
Secretary

Production Editor:
Piers Hemy

Hugh's News

Newsletter of
The Friends of Hugh Miller



OUR SHOWPIECE ON DISPLAY



Proudly showing the banner for the first time to our property manager, Dr Alix Powers-Jones (far right) are, left to right, Pam Thompson, Moira Munro, Evelyn Wilson and Estelle Ellwood.

It was launched last summer, it hung from the mains'l boom aboard the *Leader*, it was the welcome sign at our "We Are Cromarty" festival, and now has come the time for all our members to take a closer look at our beautiful showpiece banner.

Those who last year did not see its first appearance in the Highland press, those who were not aboard the *Leader*, and those unable to take part in the festival, can now enjoy it, and congratulate the Cromarty Crafters who made the banner over the course of hundreds of hours.

In the scene, we see the Free Church yacht *Betsey* in the Cromarty Firth, overlooked by many of the local monuments for which Hugh Miller is most famous. Miller explored the Inner Hebrides from the *Betsey*, while his friend the Rev John Swan-

son ministered to the islanders, in the summer of 1844, while 14 lucky passengers replicated that voyage last summer on the traditional yawl *Leader*, to help promote Miller's legacy.

We took a little liberty with history in placing the *Betsey* in the middle of our local Firth, because she never cast anchor there. But her epic sailings round the Small Isles, as described by Hugh in *The Cruise of the Betsey*, form such an important part of his story that the yacht had to form the banner's centrepiece.

His Birthplace Cottage stands out in the foreground. To its left is the Emigration Stone commemorating the embarkation to the New World of Clearance Highlanders in the 1830s.

To the right is the statue of Miller erected by public subscription in 1859, complete with the gull so often to be seen on his head! The familiar outlines of the North and South Sutons around which Miller grew up and wove many a story, frame the Firth in the background. Surrounding the picture, the borders feature representations of the fossil ammonites and Devonian era fish which made his name.

This work was specially commissioned from our town's handi-crafts group, the Cromarty Crafters. The Crafters are a group of

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seven women who spent some three months on it in weekly sessions. They reckoned they took over 250 hours in all. They employed no less than fourteen different techniques.

They are, Coordinator: Estelle Ellwood, with Evelyn Wilson, Pam Thompson, Moira Munro, Mary Bowers, Mary Erskine and Marion Grant. They are a modest lot, who declined to divulge which of them did what parts, and only four of them were willing to take part in the photo-shoot for the media.

Many of you will not be familiar with their techniques; however to specify them is to underline the Crafters' many skills and the trouble they took.

The yacht's sail is appliqued, and embroidered, the hull, cross-stitched. The dolphins swimming past are needle-felted. The North Sutor is hand-knitted, the South made by French knotting and crewel (thin worsted yarn) work.

The waves are crocheted, the sea gulls embroidered. The Birthplace Cottage is a long stitch tapestry. Hugh's Monument is applique and stump (rolled cylinder) work. The Emigration Stone combines applique, embroidery and crewel work.

Our name is appliqued and machine-stitched, and Hugh's dates are in wool tapestry. The border fossils are embroidered. When all the individual sections were completed, they were invisibly hand-sewn and machine-stitched on to the backcloth.

The Friends will always be in their debt for delivering to us such a multifaceted showpiece.

It was due to be displayed at the Museum at its *High Days and Holidays* exhibition on 28 March, and will certainly be fronting our next AGM on 9th May.



The banner hoisted aloft outside the Birthplace Cottage.

NOTICE

We invite all members to attend the 9TH FRIENDS ANNUAL MEETING

on Saturday, 9th May 2015 at Cromarty Centre (Old Brewery), between 2.00 and 5.00pm

and

A PUBLIC MEETING featuring talk and film about

The Betsey Project

By Dr Simon Cuthbert

onboard geologist & lecturer in earth sciences, University of the West of Scotland

We especially ask all members to attend, however far away they may have to travel. Family members and friends who are not members of the Friends are particularly invited to join us at the public meeting to learn about the great Betsey Project voyage on the Leader. Simon will be reciting a superb prose poem about the experiences of the geologist-in-the-field alongside a video of the voyage, and some of the displays from the "We Are Cromarty" festival will be shown again.



Simon Cuthbert aboard Leader, reading from The Cruise of the Betsey



A sketch of Leader at anchor in Eigg harbour, made by one of those in the shore party

FESTIVAL FOLLOW-UP

PRIMARY SENIORS HOME IN

ONE of the splendid "We Are Cromarty" festival ventures was a tie-in with Cromarty Primary School, whose P6 and P7 pupils were undertaking a Hugh Miller Project during that term.

They made a visit to the Museum in the week before the festival, to get to know the key aspects of his life and work. Then Cromarty potter Barbel Dister conducted two workshops for them, to learn the basic skills of her craft, and make a little piece each for themselves as a keepsake.

Story-teller Bob Pegg is also to take them on a walk round the town to familiarise them with the folk tales he preserved.



One of Barbel Dister's fossil fish-themed bowls at the festival.



Above: Some of the pupils showing off their Project work, from left, Gregor Fox, Billy James McPhee, with head teacher Henri Shepherd (centre), and to her right, Lua Mateus and Grace Wilson.
Right: P6 & P7 pupils' work on display at Cromarty Primary School



FOSSIL EXTRAVAGANZA!

by Angus Miller, Edinburgh Geological Society

The Scottish Fossil Extravaganza at Our Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh on Sunday 18 January was a great success!

Dynamic Earth was open to the public for free, so more than 2000 people visited and a good number of them also grabbed the opportunity to find out more about Scotland's amazing fossils, including, of course, those made famous by Hugh Miller.

Organisations represented included the the Tetrapod World project, University of Edinburgh, British Geological Survey, National Museums Scotland, the Hunterian Museum, Scottish Natural Heritage, Mr Wood's Fossils, Edinburgh Geological Society and the Scottish Geodiversity Forum.

So the experts were on hand to answer questions and show people some of the results of recent research, in-



A stall at the Our Dynamic Earth fossil show, science writer Lara Reid on hand for polling in the Fossil Five election.

cluding the recently announced discovery of a new species of ichthyosaur, unique to Scotland. Feedback from people on the day was great, people really enjoyed the opportunity to see some of Scotland's fossils, meet the experts and find out about current research.

They also voted in great numbers in the FOSSIL FIVE poll to determine Scotland's top favourite fossils, which is being run by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum. Miller's Devonian Fish are well in contention based on polling so far.

The Friends of Hugh Miller had intended to be represented at this event, but sadly could not make the trip because of the bad weather.

A VERY BUSY MUSEUM

Museum staff have over the past few months been launching most laudable initiatives to develop off-peak and out of season activities.

It has been Property Manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones's aim from the outset of her tenure to keep the Museum active year-round. Her first venture in this regard, *Windows on the World*, mounted over December and January 2012/13 (see *Hugh's News No 16, Spring 2013*), was crowned with success, with displays contributed from numerous community organisations from all over the Highlands and beyond. And she plans to revive this event next winter.

Meanwhile, on 6th September 2014, she organised a beach trip for keen photographers to capture *One Day's Tides*, and two of the images appear on the next page.

Following this, she and her staff held a series of five talks in the Miller House Parlour in November, and one in February, under the captivating heading of *Talk, Tea and Torte*, whereby for £3, you could absorb an illustrated presentation by an invited speaker, together with a cuppa and a piece of cake.

Two of these with special relevance to Hugh Miller's own interests are featured here as well, both speakers coming from Edinburgh University's school of geosciences.



Dr Stephan Matthiesen demonstrates the behaviours of molecules in crystals under changing weather temperatures - on the parlour floor. A model of a snowflake is reflected on his brow.

He began his extraordinary talk showing how you could make your own basaltic "Giant's Causeway" with cornflour, discussed the myriad forms of snowflakes, and explained the mathematics of pineapples, thus opening the eyes of a packed audience to some of the wondrous complexities of nature.



GETTING INSIDE THE HEADS OF HUGH MILLER'S FISH:

Tom Challands

Teaching Fellow, Edinburgh University Geosciences Faculty.

Hugh Miller was, of course, very familiar with the Devonian fossil fish found around Caithness but his studies were limited to the external features of the fossils he found.

170 years on his findings remain very significant for geoscience. The fossils are aesthetically beautiful, as well as providing vital anatomical information for defining evolutionary relationships.

Today we are in the privileged position of having facilities such as computed tomography (CT) scanning available to us to literally look inside the heads and bodies of 370 million year old fish.

This has provided an unprecedented opportunity to investigate the courses of tubes carrying nerves and vessels and, even more excitingly, a crude picture of their brains.

Using the well known Devonian lungfish *Dipterus valenciennesi* I demonstrate how these techniques have yielded new information about the relationships between fossil lungfish, but also how we are beginning to formulate ideas and hypotheses about how these animals sensed their environment.



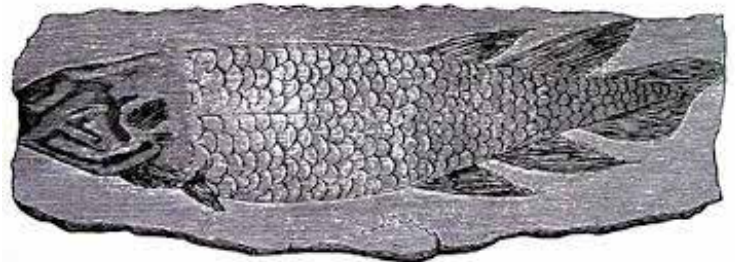
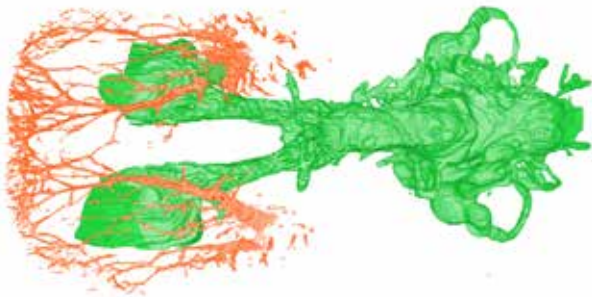
Tom Challands

Below right:

A specimen of *Dipterus Valenciennesi*

Below left:

Image of *Dipterus* brain



ONE DAY'S TIDES

A discarded industrial glove, possibly drifted over from Nigg Yard opposite, is somehow rendered almost picturesque in the shot below by Callum Maclean, a BBC Alba reporter who was covering the event. Liz Broumley captured (right) a light-infused thistle on the shore path which is part of the Reed's Park Loop.



CAMERA CLUB HIGHLIGHTS

One of the "We Are Cromarty" festival treats was an entry by members of Cromarty Camera Club of more than 100 images of our beloved little town, shown continually on a "loop." Here we present just two of them.



The oil platform, mark of revived trade in the Firth, looks almost beautiful in the low sun.

Photo credits (both): Liz Broumley



The Stevenson lighthouse, built in the 1840s even as Cromarty was sinking into decay, remains a splendid landmark, itself lit up by every sunrise and sunset.

BOOK REVIEWS

Two Hundred Years of Farming in Sutherland (The Story of my Family)

by Reay D G Clarke, The Islands Book Trust, Isle of Lewis, 2014, paperback £9.99. ISBN 9781907443602

Here is a truly epic, ground-breaking account of sheep-farming in the northern Highlands, by one of our own members, Reay Clarke, whose ancestors farmed Eriboll for generations, from the 17th century until 1921.

It chronicles in great detail the dealings over the centuries between lairds and flockmasters, the impact of the shooting estates, the many manners of husbandry, and finally of the land's sad decline.

Miller readers will be familiar with his coruscating account of the impact of the Clearances in his essay *Sutherland As It Was and Is (Leading Articles)*, ed Rev John Davidson, Nimmo, Edinburgh). Here, however, as a matter of factual record, Reay recounts that the notorious first Duke treated his ancestor John Clarke sympathetically, and even more striking, that the arch-evictor Patrick Sellar, was a superb agriculturalist in the art of introducing sheep flocks to new ground.

Most striking for me is Reay's final chapter displaying a Biblical sense of how precious is the land. He summarises that for all the skills, care and love which the Clarkes and other flockmasters brought to their sheep-farming, the land has nevertheless inexorably declined.

"The grazings were going back. The rich variety of sweet grasses, herbs and clovers of the shielings, which had been inherited from the transhumant husbandry of the cattle, was replaced by heather and deer's hair and bracken. Muirburn was now being regularly practised on the grazings and the sheep were continually defoliating and weakening each and every edible plant."

Reay goes on to explain exactly the damage to the soils which occurs when the cows are replaced by big herds of sheep. We humans, he emphasises, are just as dependent as every other living thing, on the goodness of the

earth. "The future well-being of all life on earth depends on our care of the topsoil," the six to nine inches known to scientists as the 'A Horizon.'

Reay and his family have been Miller admirers for a long time. His daughter Janey served diligently as a Museum volunteer for years, and he himself was the guide to author Lesley Beake who helped inspire her book for young people *Jamie's Adventures in Time: Finding Hugh Miller*, so this book is another contribution for which we must be warmly grateful.

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*The Great Tapestry of Scotland*, by Alastair Moffat, Birlinn, Edinburgh 2013 ISBN: 9781780271606. Hardback, RRP £30.

This recently completed monumental artwork consists of 160 panels illustrating Scotland's history from the Ice Age to the 21st Century, and is on display in our Scottish Parliament. And in panel 94, our very own Hugh Miller makes an appearance.

Initiated by best-selling author Alexander McCall Smith, historian Alistair Moffat, and artist Andrew Crummy, the panels were put together by over 1,000 volunteer stitchers who worked for an estimated 55,000 hours using a range of embroidery skills and working on Scottish linen.

Miller features in the panel devoted to "Pioneers of Photography 1843-1857." The pioneers are of course David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, and impressions are shown of some of their renowned calotype images. The gun Mons Meg and the Scott Monument are included on the left. Above the pioneers is their studio, Rock House. On the right, Miller's famous fossil, "*P. Milleri*," sits above his portrait. Beneath are images of the Newhaven fishing community. It is possible Hugh also appears as one of the figures (bottom right) in panel 93, The Disruption, but he is not identified.

A word of caution: Only the hardback edition, details above, contains all the panels. A paperback version does not include the Miller panel. If you go and see it, you can also compare the artwork and embroidery skills with our own Cromarty Crafters' and their banner for The Friends (see story ps 1 & 2), and I think you will agree that our local heroines come off very well indeed!

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Geology of Unst and Shetland,

Professor Derek Flynn. British Geological Survey, 2014. Paperback, £20. ISBN 9780852727553.

Detailed information on the structure, stratigraphy, palaeontology, mineral resources and geophysics of the two islands, by the pioneer of what is today a world-renowned geopark.

We would also draw your attention to *Excursion Guide to the Geology of E. Sutherland and Caithness*, Trewin, N. H. & Hurst, A. (eds) 2009. Dunedin Academic Press, Edinburgh; *Scottish Fossils*, by Nigel H Trewin. Dunedin Press, 2013. 118pp, £30. (ISBN 978-1-78046-010-2); and *Fossils Alive!, or New Walks in an Old Field*, by Nigel H Trewin. Dunedin Press. Pp211, £19.95 (ISBN 978-1-903765-88-3)



The Great Tapestry's Panel 94. Please go and see it for yourself in the Parliament. It is scheduled for a move later this year to a new exhibition centre in the Borders.

OBITUARY

ANGELA LYNCH

WE deeply regret having to announce Angela's sudden and tragic death aged just 55. She was for six years an outstanding senior visitor guide at the Museum.

Between 2004 and 2009 she played a formative role in the opening and running of Miller House, as well as contributing her considerable creative gifts, in costume design, dressmaking and in drama.

She designed and made the dresses worn by the four girls at Miller House at its opening on Thursday, 8th April 2004. They recited stories in the Parlour written by Hugh's wife Lydia and one of her pupils about family life in Miller House. Entitled *At Home with Hugh Miller*, the recital before the invited audience drew rapturous applause. One of the dresses, a gown modelled by the girl playing Lydia, is still on display in the Parlour.

The following year, Angela provided the inspiration for a short "living history" play performed by the Timemasters troupe of Inverness, again in the Parlour. This was *A Meeting with Monsieur Agassiz*, based on an imaginary visit by two renowned visitors to the Millers.

Louis Agassiz, the world-renowned naturalist, was played by Timemasters' actor manager Duncan Cook, while Angela, who had no previous acting experience, did a superb turn as the characterful Lady Eliza Maria Gordon Cumming. Lady Eliza, from her home at Altyre House, Morayshire, led a large group of geologists in the newly formed Moray Society on field trips.

During their fictional visit to Miller House, they examined and mightily approved of fossil specimens which Hugh had found in the Devonian era fossil deposits nearby.

Angela co-wrote the script with fellow-members of the cast and the then property manager, Martin Gostwick, as well as mentoring the children and a housemaid who had walk-on parts. She also led colleagues out on to the streets of Cromarty, between performances, in costume, to drum up trade!

The 25-minute play was performed on seven days between 23rd July and 27th August 2005, scheduled for three times daily, but often extending to four or five by public demand. It drew an estimated 500 visitors, and was broadcast live on Moray Firth Radio.

Angela was an exceptionally enthusiastic receptionist, and adept recruiter for the National Trust for Scotland. In Miller House's opening year, she achieved a large share of the record-breaking 99 new members. She performed her last shift on Sunday, 4th October 2009.



There were many facets to Angela. She was a serious champion of women's rights and social justice, and along with her creative side, went a delightful sense of humour. This can be seen in the witty piece about housemartins returning to the Museum which she wrote for the very first issue of *Hugh's News*, Summer 2006.

We republish it here as a tribute. Angela Lynch's name will stand for ever in the Museum's annals. She leaves a husband, Duncan Cook, whom she married some years after the Agassiz play, a daughter, Alice, and many, many friends.

Meeting and greeting are left to right Lydia (Victoria Lochore), Hugh Miller (Shawn Hastings), Lady Eliza (Angela Lynch) and Louis Agassiz (Duncan Cook) in the Living History play, A Meeting with Monsieur Agassiz.

DOMESTIC BLISS RETURNS TO MILLER HOUSE

By Angela Lynch, Senior Property Guide, Hugh Miller Museum

from *Hugh's News No 1, Summer 2006*

It is over 15 years since house martins regularly nested in the angle of Hugh Miller's Cottage front door, delighting visitors with the chirruping right over their heads. And great was the regret when an overzealous cleaner destroyed their nest, apparently putting them off ever coming back. So it is a matter of joy that the birds have at last returned, this time to Miller House.

They first reappeared in 2005, and we were on tenterhooks this summer to see if they would come nesting again. They "performed" last year, simultaneously with live presentations of a short play depicting scenes of Hugh and Lydia Miller's early married life. Actors and birds thus injected new life into the elegant Georgian house, inside and out.

It seems that we are particularly privileged in that ours appears to be the only building in Church Street to have been selected, in Lydia's own words, as being "bien and comfortable" enough for the nesting birds. Why this is so is a mystery but we think it may have something to do with the fact that the lintels surrounding the windows are bare, unpainted stone – perhaps an easier surface upon which to affix the martins' distinctive mud-shell nests.

Staff and visitors alike are fascinated by the to-ing and fro-ing of these twittering migrants and are thrilled to get a, literally, bird's-eye, view of them through the first floor windows, busily constructing their nests in late Spring and, later, seeing the tiny fledglings (three at the last count!) peeping out of the entrance, and being constantly fed by their parents.

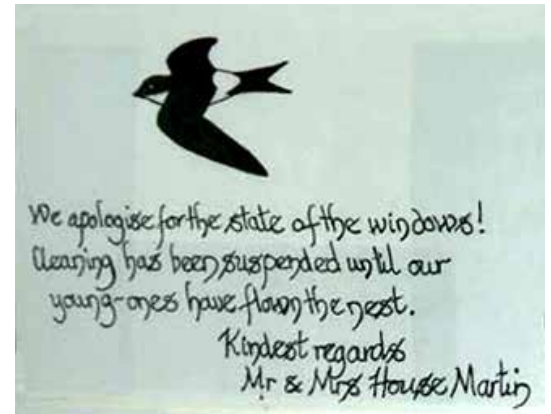
They make an awful mess, but with a little help from us, the parents have put out a notice as follows: "We apologise for the state of the windows! Cleaning has been suspended until our young ones have flown the nest. Kindest regards Mr and Mrs House Martin."

Needless to say, our window-cleaner has the most urgent request to clean the windows when they have gone, but NOT the nest. We have been told that martins were once to be seen crowding the sky in Cromarty, but their numbers and migration patterns have been severely affected by climate change, so we are taking all the care we can to encourage "repeat visits," especially having lost them once before.

Although not expert ornithologists, staff are often asked about the birds, the most common question being one of identification: "Are they swallows or house martins?" Well we have looked at the books and watched Bill Oddie on TV and can now confidently state that these are definitely house martins. (In fact, we call them Martin's martins, after our Property Manager – Martin Gostwick!).

The simplest way to recognise the difference between the swallow and the martin is by the shape of the tail. Swallows have very distinctive long tails streamers. They also have a bright chestnut coloured throat and chest. House martins, on the other hand, have a relatively short forked tail and an almost pure white throat and chest.

We also know that, having done their bit to recruit new members for the National Trust for Scotland, they fly off to warmer climes and spend the "low season" in North Africa. Last year there was just one nest, but martins are known to return to their birth place to rear their own young in subsequent years. Comparing the two nests that have appeared this year, it seems that the new pair may be last year's returned fledglings, one of the nests being a neat and elegant construction, whilst the other is charmingly higgledy-piggledy and informal; not unlike Miller House and its neighbour, the Birthplace Cottage!



NIGEL TREWIN RESIGNS CHAIRMANSHIP

OUR Chairman, Professor Nigel Trewin, has tendered his resignation from the post on grounds of ill health. The Management Committee has accepted his decision with great reluctance because of his outstanding service, while recognising it is unavoidable.

Nigel has chaired The Friends since its foundation in 2006. He is also one of our three Patrons, and will continue to serve us in that capacity, as well as remaining a member of our Management Committee until further notice.

Nominations are open for a successor to the Chairmanship, to be elected at our next AGM at the Old Brewery, Cromarty, on May 9th. It would be helpful to the Committee if any member wishing to nominate someone would notify our Secretary in advance. There is also a vacancy for an eighth place on the committee, for which nominations are invited.

We look forward to as many members as possible attending the AGM, to support The Friends, and in particular the new Chairman, through this transition in our leadership.

Martin Gostwick, Secretary

MGostwick@gmail.com. 01381 600301.



NTS 2015 "WISH LIST" FOR THE MUSEUM

Please note the "wish list" is an annual notice put out by NTS on behalf of all its properties to its Members' Centres and Friends' Groups, and this is the one pertaining to the Museum we support.

HUGH MILLER'S BIRTHPLACE COTTAGE & MUSEUM

Property Manager: Dr Alix H J Powers-Jones

Two portable display boards – to support an exhibition in the autumn. We are fortunate that the exhibition is already being supported by a local senior school and the Highland Seashore Project, but good display boards would make a real impact.

Cost: £200.80 (£100.40 per board inc. VAT and delivery)

Portable film screen. As we extend our public engagement work with visiting speakers, many of them want to be able to show images and a film screen would make an enormous difference.

Cost: £150 including VAT and delivery

Oil tank concealment – in outside Lifelong Learning space (4 parts, each at £1,000)

Total cost: £4,000

Lifelong Learning consumables – e.g. paper, pens, clipboards, stickers, etc

Cost: £250

Materials to create six 19th-century style dressing-up costumes for children

Cost: £240

Materials to create two 19th-century style dressing-up costumes for adults

Cost: £140

Period-style cupboard – for the storage of costumes in the Birthplace Cottage

Cost: £550 (inc. sourcing and transport)

Handheld, wood-effect softie mirrors (shatterproof)

Cost: £60 (for set of 3)

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 £15 per person.

Subscribers receive a Membership Card and a copy of the constitution, with a periodical newsletter and 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.....

Tel No.....

Email address.....

Membership subscription is £15 annually, payable from 1st April, by cash/cheque or bank standing order. A standing order is preferred for administrative convenience, and if you wish to take up that option, please contact the Secretary, details below. A Gift Aid declaration form is also available, which would enable us to reclaim 25p in the £ tax on your subscription.

RETURN TO:

MARTIN GOSTWICK

SECRETARY, THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER

c/o RUSSELL HOUSE, 55 SHORE STREET, CROMARTY IV11 8XL