

THE VOYAGE



Festive Greetings



Hugh's News Special Edition

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IN THE BETSEY'S WAKE

The Friends of Hugh Miller (FoHM), in the person of our Secretary, Martin Gostwick, and sponsored student Mairi Gilmour, sailed aboard the traditional boat Leader, in a party led by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) and ourselves, from 6th - 12th September 2014, celebrating part of the exact same voyage made by Hugh Miller 170 years ago aboard the Free Church yacht Betsey. Here is Martin's account of an epic journey.

JUST north of Oban, the morning before embarking on *Leader*, we find where the giant Fionn MacCoul, his mighty band, and their monstrous dogs, gathered for the deer-chase.

Hugh Miller, when checking out the conglomerates in the cliffs round the bay, encountered the legendary Dog-Stone. Here Fionn, or Fingal, as he was named by Scottish poet James MacPherson (Ossian), and his brothers tethered their wolf-hounds "wild and gigantic as themselves." The beasts chafed so hard at the stone, that they carved a huge curve out of its base which can be seen to this day. As Hugh described, it is actually a sea stack detached from the cliffs behind, owing its existence to "the largest boulder I ever saw in an Old Red conglomerate."

INSIDE, THE FESTIVAL:

The Cromarty Suite p 18

"We are Cromarty" p 20

In the steps of
Hugh Miller p 24

Above stands Dunnolly Castle, ancestral home of the MacDougall lords of Lorne, still landowners around these parts, whose forbears allegedly made a ruling principle of charging their tenants "moderate" rents, in marked contrast to some of the neighbouring proprietors.

LOG, DAY ONE, SATURDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER

OBAN - LOCHALINE, MORVERN PENINSULA

And so we board the *Leader* at the North Pier, surrounded by incoming and outgoing Calmac ferries serving the Small Isles like giant water taxis. *Leader* is a right handsome ketch, black-hulled, gaff-rigged, 120ft long, 100 tons, at least twice as big as the Free Church yacht *Betsey*. She will carry a crew of four and fourteen passengers, compared with *Betsey's* two crew, Miller's friend the minister and skipper John Swanson, and island mate John Stewart, and one passenger, Hugh. *Leader* is blessed with a powerful engine, where the *Betsey* depended wholly on sail. All week we have light airs, and barely a swell; unfavourable winds also mitigate against much sailing (the mains'l is hoisted just once). Brilliant sunshine for all but the first rather overcast afternoon adds to the pleasure. We know the luxury of hot, most nutritious meals, while Rev John Swanson, mate John Stewart, and Hugh often went hungry. They endured fierce storms between prolonged calms, enforcing serious delays to their itinerary. Had we depended on sail like the *Betsey*, we reckoned our voyage could have taken two weeks or even three instead of one.

As Hugh had done, we round Kerrera and, as *Betsey* did, "stretched northwards, along the end of green Lismore, for the Sound of Mull." Our sponsored student Mairi Gilmour recalls to me holidaying on Lismore with family, and later a sailing uncle would meet her in Eigg harbour. I am minded by the isle's beauty of the ache the Clearance tenants must have felt, expressed in the painting *The Last of The Clan* by Thomas Faed, and the lament, "*Leaving Lismore*."

Our story-teller, Claire Hewitt, begins to weave her imagination around the fabulous setting. As we pass Lismore, she sees the shape of a dolphin in the clouds above, with a rainbow in its mouth, like a portent of the many real cetaceans we would see later on. But before I write more, as we pass the ancient Maclean Castle Duart, and the Lady Rock, I must introduce my fellow-passengers, and our crew.

THE VOYAGERS

Joyce Gilbert, Claire Hewitt, Simon Cuthbert, Bill Taylor, Kenny Taylor, Ro Scott, Richard Bracken, Mairi Gilmour, Derry Wilkinson, Rosie Bradshaw, Katie Campbell, Barney Strachan, Fergus Cruickshank, and myself.

I must first acknowledge our lead organiser, Dr Joyce Gilbert, about to retire as RSGS education officer, greatly impressive in manner, softly spoken, remarkably nimble despite a fragile back; she conducts all our arrangements with the greatest efficiency and the least fuss. She makes things happen, motivates people to go way beyond what they thought possible, is, in short, inspirational.

We have four specialists aboard to make this the most extensive and informative tour of the terrain you could ever hope for. Geologist





Simon Cuthbert, University of the West of Scotland, brings to us his explanations of the once explosive expanses of the Mull lava field and the pitchstone cliffs of the Sgurr of Eigg. And at every appropriate occasion, he gives us moving readings from *The Cruise of the Betsey*. It is with relief, pleasure and pride that I find these readings are silently and attentively listened to by all, uninterrupted. Through these, Hugh is with us, a constant presence, mostly background, sometimes foreground. Naturalist Kenny Taylor has the eagle eye always to be first to draw our notice to the living wonders of sea, mountain and sky. He also busily records on tape our individual responses to Miller's story, which fits in very well with Simon's narrations. He's a fine musician too. Bill Taylor, historian/geographer/ranger, knows the name of, and story behind every horizon, and the human struggles they have witnessed. He has another braw voice for song. Ecologist Ro Scott revels in the floras, drawing on her career experience exploring and developing Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

Enhancing all these vast repositories of knowledge is harpist and story-teller Claire, gentlest of souls, ready in each moment to render the scenes to us in legend and song. She beholds and speaks of giants in the cliffs and mountaintops, protectors who could also be avengers, and the eight great cailleachs who ruled the behaviours of the heavens and the mighty peaks.

Claire is inspired by the age-old rousing chant for hoisting sail to which the crew soon introduces us as we are co-opted - "two, six and HEAVE away." She promptly, spontaneously composes a shanty round the saloon table, aided and abetted by our three students, and several others.

*We're sailing on the good ship Leader, two, six and heave away,
On the trail of the bonnie Betsey, two, six and heave away,
Rocks and salt, sea and stone,
With the fish of friendship you're not alone,
We're sailing on the good ship Leader
Two six and heave awa.*

There follow many more metaphors for the joyful spirit aboard, whizzing round the saloon, verses exalting the salmon o wisdom, majestic mackerel, lucky lobster, crabbit crabs, Finn's chuckie stanes, dancing dolphins. Claire finds in *Leader*, a living, breathing creature, behaving much as the *Betsey* had, playing, in Miller's words, the "voyager's concert," of "guggle, clunk, and splash, - of low continuous rush, and bluff, loud blow." So too does *Leader* embrace us with her creak, and gurgle, though she does not sail in anything like the rough seas endured by the Free Church yacht.

Simon, Kenny, Claire and Bill have all travelled much in Nordic lands, in quest of their geology, wildlife and ways of life, including among the nomadic Sami peoples, and many are the fascinating tales they have of places much more wild and remote even than the Hebrides. They would help us while away many an hour.

What treasures our three sponsored students turn out to be; our own Friends' nominee, Mairi, about to attend a Glasgow University earth sciences course; Derry Wilkinson, working at Kindrogan Field Cen-

tre, Blairgowrie, in her gap year, and Rosie Bradshaw, third-year student at Edinburgh University. The latter two were sponsored by Glasgow and Edinburgh Geological Societies.

Livewire redhead Derry Wilkinson is aye at the ready, the first to every task and challenge, onboard or ashore. She and Mairi, hill-walkers both, race several hundred metres ahead of all the rest on every shoreline scramble and slope ascent. Derry will perform the incredible feat of carrying a large hexagonal lump of basalt weighing several kilos, up from near the Recess to the peak of the Sgurr of Eigg, then down several hundred metres to the boat, planning after the voyage to tote it all the way back to her temporary caravan dwelling.

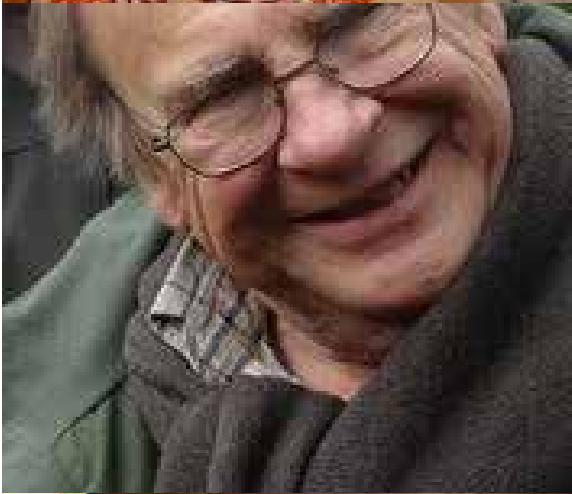
Mairi blends her delight in the rocks with her most accomplished fiddle-playing. Her glad bowing on the companionway hatch roof uplifts a moonlit deck ceilidh, a vision that will abide with us all. Quiet Rosie produces on our final passage a rumbustious sea shanty of her own.

Much thanks are due too to Barney Strachan for his guitar play and great singing, Richard Bracken for his excellent video and artistic insights, Fergus Cruickshank for his dedicated film-making, and Katie Campbell for her lively company.

For myself, I cannot say much. Just before embarkation, I pull a muscle in my back hefting an overloaded kitbag (contents included a bag of fossils), and spend the next four days or so wincing at every move. This, plus my age, slow wits, and status as a lifelong landlubber, makes me of little use on deck. And, embarrassingly, I have to be helped up and down the Sgurr of Eigg by ultimate outdoors man, Bill Taylor. But I am there mainly to promote Miller's legacy and fly The Friends banner, and record the voyage as best I can.

We turn out to be an extraordinarily affable bunch, squeezed together in a very full boat, ranging across ages from 18 to rising 68, all willing and keen to get on and back each other up. We are also gender-balanced, seven each, and to think the old tars used to fear having any woman on board was bad luck! This camaraderie is strongly marked in the group "Appreciations" which precede meals, where individuals publicly express thanks to one or other shipmate for help given or good things done. I think at first this could be a tad embarrassing, but it proves an effective, warming way of bonding. It requires





a very high degree of cooperation to work in tandem on deck duties with boom, bowsprit, sheets, halyards, anchor, fenders. It requires even more to share meals in the tightly packed saloon. I will ever hear the clatterings across the table of crockery and cutlery, and the shouts for coffee, tea, milk, jam, cereal, toast and yet more toast, cutting across conversations, the said articles obligingly passing hand to hand. It has to be outstanding good fortune that we suffer not one show-off, big-mouth or withdrawn loner to make life awkward among us. Instead, with two guitarists, a harpist and bodhran-beater, fine fiddler, and hearty vocalists, we, passengers and crew together, literally, make music night and day, in saloon and on deck, like a travelling band of minstrels, who might have pleased some medieval clan in the hall of their chief's keep. I could not have imagined, or hoped for a better crowd with whom to have shared such close quarters for a whole week. Too good to be true? Almost!

THE CREW

Ben Wheatley, Skipper, Katie Leadham, chief officer, Martin Hendry, bo'sun, Colin Lord, cook.

Ben looks, in his cap, beard, and heavy-duty boots, "the veritable skipper to admiration," as Miller said of his friend John Swanson. A sailor to his marrow he knows these waters like landfolk know their living rooms, and many other waters, having brought *Leader* down from the Norwegian fjords the preceding week.

Martin Hendry, bo'sun, similarly carries centuries of maritime tradition, with his rip-roaring renditions of sea-shanties – the crew had just won a prize as the best sea-shanty singers at a Tall Ships gathering in Bergen?

Mate Katie is the model of quiet efficiency managing the dockings and anchorages. She it is who alone espies a pod of minke whales swimming hard by the boat, in the coal-black, moonshining waters of Eigg Harbour, while on anchor watch - only to be joshed about keeping the best wildlife sightings to herself.

We are fed most sumptuously and abundantly by the ever-cheerful cook Colin from his tiny galley, fare which includes two hot meals a day, plus mid-morning and afternoon snacks, mostly taken on deck, thanks to the fine weather.



LOG, DAY ONE, 6TH SEPTEMBER (continued).

Having not left Oban until late afternoon, dusk has some time since fallen before we tie up at the rather grim Lochaline Pier for our first night at sea. Salmon fillets make a first night feast. Not a sound emanates from the village above, the only settlement of any size on lonely Morvern Peninsula, whose land was Cleared like the rest of the Inner Hebrides, and largely never reclaimed. Kenny Taylor says Clearance is "too polite" a word, for such wholesale destruction and depopulation.

LOG, DAY TWO, SUNDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER

LOCHALINE TO TOBERMORY, ISLE OF MULL

Enfolded by the hills in the narrow Sound, Isle of Mull lying to port, Morven to starboard, Simon Cuthbert reads to us Miller's description of the Western Highlands as "all parts of one great mountainous plain, inclined slantways into the sea," in which the "long withdrawing valleys of the mainland ... as they dip below sea-level, become salt water lochs;" how "the sea deepens as the plain slopes downward; mountains stand up out of the water as large islands, ... lower eminences as mere groups of pointed rocks; till ... all trace of the submerged land disappears, and the wide ocean stretches out and away to unfathomable depths."

Simon tells us about the great expanse of "trap" (volcanic) rock lying on top of the Hebridean coastal peninsulas and islands, forming the Mull lava field, which once stretched in molten masses over hundreds of square miles.

Skipper Ben discusses the differences between a ketch (like *Leader*) and a yawl (the *Betsey*), mainly to do with the positioning of the mizzen mast. The first sailing exercise for the passengers is to haul the mizzen, and the co-opted passenger crew go to work with a will, compelled by the old tars' chant, "Two, Six and Heave Away."

AT TOBERMORY

We land at the new-ish pontoons, a few hundred metres in front of those brightly colour-washed housefronts made famous in umpteen brochures and in the children's TV series, *Balamory*. The wee town, said to multiply its numbers at least tenfold in summer with tourists, is surprisingly quiet. Here at the Crown Estate's harbour HQ, and later on Eigg, we have opportunities for the two showers of the week (there isn't enough water for the two units on board).

A group take a shore walk led by Simon and Ro, the latter in her element pointing out to us gorgeous clusters of blooming heather, mosses, ferns and lichens. Later on deck, Simon would thrill us with Hugh's narrative of his own arrival at the *Betsey*, about midnight on 16th





July 1844, followed by his description of the yacht's skipper, his childhood friend and now Free Church minister John Swanson, the cabin and its contents.

After a most satisfying chicken pasta supper, Simon and I share a turn on the washing-up rota, like Colin's cooking itself no small job for a table sitting of 18. I should mention at this point that *Leader* stocks an excellent bar on a very reasonable tab, and much wine and song means late bed, not for the first or last time.

LOG, DAY THREE, MONDAY 8TH SEPTEMBER

TOBERMORY TO ISLE OF EIGG

We stand out for Eigg still in the narrowest stretch of the Sound of Mull, but now with the far-reaching Ardnamurchan peninsula on our starboard beam, heading for its lighthouse, often said to be the westernmost point on the British Isles. The peninsula is another vast expanse of volcanic basalt, its cliffs as wild and quite inaccessible as any in the Inner Hebrides. It is rugged, still remote, a haven of wild iris in its roadside verges, ancient, stunted wild oaks, deer in the woods, wetlands.

Joyce Gilbert has obtained from the National Library of Scotland and the RSGS's own library fine facsimile copies of the maps and navigation charts which Miller and Swanson would almost certainly have used in the 1840s, and thus with the readings from the Cruise we are able more imaginatively to relive Miller's voyage.

As we open into where the Sound of Mull meets and merges into the Sound of Arisaig, more of the Small Isles come into view, Coll and Tiree to the south-west, Muck to the north. We become aware of a sailing super-highway, with the ferries criss-crossing on their way to and from the Inner and Outer Hebrides. Among them is a cruise-ship Bill Taylor informs us is the *Hebridean Princess* providing luxury tours reputedly at over £1000 a night. We believe we are getting much more value at a fraction of the price.

Rounding Ardnamurchan Point, we see the light looking as if it could do with a good whitewash, and flanked by a spread of unsightly outbuildings. The sea is not the spangled marvel of a 90s visit, lying under grey skies this day. But Bill T has a glorious tale of how the lintel over the light's door was brought there. No one and nothing could move this great block up the steep ascent, until it was tied to a strong horse, which was prevailed upon by its aged owner to tow it, at a trot, all the way up with a thwack on its rear from a stout withy stick.

Passing Muck, Kenny mentions it could have been named for the porpoises abounding in these waters. Its Gaelic name was Eilan nan Muc, or Mouach, which could translate as "sea-pig." The Gaels had a knack for placenames, which have sadly got so corrupted in translation.

And so we at last approach the southern shore of Eigg, the isle which is to be the principal focus of the whole trip, made famous by Miller, his contemporaries and their successors, for its landmark Sgurr ridge, its Singing Sands, and the remains of a great reptile, the Plesiosaur. Hugh also preserved for posterity the appalling hardships of the Eiggachs (islanders) under cruel landowners. And we will meet with the results of its recent providential rescue and revival under the aegis of the Island Heritage Trust.

It is decided by consensus that we will begin by circumnavigating the entire



island aboard *Leader*, and so we trace from on board, and in reverse, Hugh's epic walk in a single day, which he accomplished with John Stewart, geologising all the way as they went, from the Bay of Laig, and the Singing Sands on the western shore, all the way round the Ru Storr (today Sgurr Sgaileach) at the northern tip, and back along the eastern shore to the *Betsey* at Eilean Chaisteal (today Eilean Chathastail). We cruise under the "mighty ramparts" of Beinn Buidha, with their fantastic polygonal columns of basalt and vertical streams. Tis a pity we cannot identify from at sea, the foreshore where Hugh found the abundant Plesiosaur remains, about two kilometres north of Kildonan, nor the ruined shieling a little further north where he and John Stewart met the comely girls at the summer pasturing, but it is good to see for ourselves the scene of Hugh's discoveries, and his heroic walk over ground which has become even more inaccessible than it was in his day. The Sgurr Sgaileach towering headland at the northern tip is a play of sunlit rock atop and dark grassy shadows in the depths. Simon Cuthbert recalls being rescued from becoming trapped there by the chance appearance of a passing Rambler coming in the opposite direction. It is hard to imagine how the sheep browsing on these perilous heights are ever rounded up. Along the western side, we are awed by the "pyramidal" mountains of Rum to starboard, as well as by the chalk-white Singing Sands, and the fertile Bay of Laig with its crofts at Cleadale township, its fossilised oyster beds, and its incredible rounded stone "concretions." Finally, in late afternoon, we are dwarfed under the impossibly imposing, all but perpendicular Sgurr ridge, a few kayaks paddling by seeming even more insignificant; this is the pitchstone colossus, called the glass mountain because of its lustrous black rock, resting on a Jurassic pine forest. The slopes below are where Claire's giants' "chuckie stanes" immovably sit.

Which creatures should greet us, as we neared our anchorage, but a couple of "sea-pigs," porpoise mother and calf. We anchor at almost the exact same spot at which Swanson and Hugh moored "in the tideway about fifty yards from the rocks." Casting the huge anchor is some heavy-lifting job. And on landing by RIB at the pier, we meet a welcome from the members of the Eigg shore party, who are staying at the Glebe Barn hostel on the island for a week, geologising.

LOG, DAY FOUR, TUESDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER
ON EIGG

"We had rich tea this morning," wrote Hugh about his first breakfast aboard *Betsey* in Eigg harbour, and Simon reads the extract while we have ours. Hugh and John Swanson were sent bottles of cream, butter, eggs, tea, and oaten cakes by the islanders (only the meal for the cakes came from the boat's store). The excerpt reminds us that





the minister lost everything in the Disruption schism the year before (1843), when he and 450 ministers walked out of the Church of Scotland to form the Free Church. Without church building, manse or glebe, Swanson was forced to carry out his duties from the yacht; and he was almost wholly dependent on the islanders for food, desperately poor as they were. A few hundred metres from the anchorage, his old glebe stands in plain sight, next to his manse (the latter now sadly dilapidated). He had the largest herd of livestock on the island, and was forced to sell off the whole lot. At least the Glebe Barn is flourishing today as a hostel for visitors, and is this week hosting the voyage's separate onshore party, there for the duration making field trips.

After breakfast we are greeted at the pier by one of the greatest geologists of his time, Professor John Hudson, aged 82, still looking hale and hearty, and with over 50 excursions to Eigg sites behind him over the years. He is leading the onshore party's field trips, jointly with Edinburgh Geological Society's Angus Miller, who is also at the pier. The Ru Storr (Sgurr Sgaileach) the Bay of Laig and the Singing Sands are on their itinerary. Prof Hudson contributed a paper to the Hugh Miller Bicentenary Conferences in 2002. Around then, he took a group including myself to Eigg localities, and when I greet him by name all these years later, he replies: "And you are Martin Gostwick." Great to be remembered like that.

We are immediately excited by the island's welcome sign and display board proclaiming: "Big Green Footsteps." This refers to perhaps the single greatest success of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, the collective which famously and triumphantly bought out Eigg in 1997. Tired of overpaying for polluting fossil fuels, plagued by unreliable supply sources, and needing to boost their always fragile economy, and productive capacities, they decided to generate their own green energy, thus giving them the until then inconceivable benefit of 24/7 power. In 2008, a hydro dam, with two supporting plants, solar panels, and four wind turbines, together producing over 150kW, began operations.



PREACHING AT THE HEARDE.

The Heritage Trust story of how the collective, and its worldwide supporters, came to liberate the island from its private landowners, latterly a playboy and finally a farcical corporates' front man, is one of monumental achievements in the face of every possible obstacle, financial, bureaucratic, legal and psychological. And, nearly 20 years later, they continue to face many challenges, with confidence, optimism and many hard-earned new skills. Before I give a possibly idealised impression of life on Eigg, I should perhaps record the presence of a wretchedly rusted car wreck, lying right at the pier head, and looking as if it had been there for quite a long time. Disposal of heavy waste like that must still present a big problem.

The Trust, a limited company and a charity, supports three subsidiary companies, Eigg Electric for power supply, Eigg Trading running the Galmisdale cafe, shop and store, and Eigg Construction engaged in housebuilding and repairs. A thriving allotment scene maximises local organic food production. The Trust's membership embraces all the 90-odd residents. They were described to me by one recent Cromarty visitor, as "a bunch of communists." She meant it half jokingly, half as a compliment, but they cannot be characterised as such in any traditional sense. They are, yes, a collective, but their success depends on their voluntary co-operation as individuals, and the groups within them demonstrating a great deal of entrepreneurial zeal. The Earth Connections Centre, occupying the old, splendidly restored lairds' Lodge, runs conservation courses. A project called Eigg Box is under way to provide facilities for creative businesses and artists. The place is a hub for developing the arts, environmental education and social enterprise, and a magnet for people internationally to come and learn from Eigg's examples. Hugh Miller would be astounded to observe the island's transformation from poverty, depopulation and inexorable decline, to the forward-looking, thriving community to be seen today.

I cannot recommend highly enough the gripping account of all this in the new edition of Camille Dressler's updated





history.* To which I can add one delightful anecdote, courtesy of both Bill and Kenny Taylor, concerning the climactic episode in the seemingly interminable effort to raise funds for the buy-out. Not everyone was sympathetic to the campaign. Landowners retain friends in influential places. One, a writer, Ian Mitchell, formerly of Islay, was renowned for deploring bodies like SNH and RSPB for allegedly having negative impacts on Hebridean island affairs. He did a knocking piece on the Eigg campaign as it neared its ultimate crisis. He mocked Heritage Trust secretary Maggie Fyffe, pictured lying on her back in exhausted mode. I recognise the name Mitchell at once. This was the very same scribe who later did a hatchet job on our Hugh during the Bicentenary, entitled *Hugh Miller, A Study in Failure*, published in the *West Highland Free Press*. I strongly refuted his assertions at the time, but never forgot the sour note he brought to our celebrations. Well, my informants now tell me, although I have not been able to verify this with Maggie Fyffe herself, that the mystery donor (still anonymous) of the final £1 million which secured the buy-out, made the contribution as a direct response to the Mitchell diatribe. An Englishwoman, she rang Maggie, and said words to the effect: "That item was so unfair. How much more do you need?" It pleases me much to know the bad-mouther was so comprehensively served his turn.

UP AN SGURR, TUESDAY 9TH SEPTEMBER

A group of us led by Angus Miller is to scale the great ridge this morning. The pitchstone of which it is formed stands proud above a basalt basement, resisting the erosion which has wasted away the lower slopes over millions of years.

Hugh Miller ends Chapter II of the Cruise with the dramatic announcement: "The gigantic Scur of Eigg rests on the remains of a prostrate forest." The area where Miller was among the first to discover the remains of *Pinites Eiggensis*, is an extraordinary feature in itself. From distance it looks like a great horizontal cave, cut into an otherwise vertical cliff. It is known today as the Recess, and is very hard to reach over the rough and extremely steep scree slopes around it. Some 58 million years ago, pine trees and flowering shrubs flourished in warm valleys here, formed by erosions between a basalt plateau. The valleys were subsequently filled up by explosive eruptions which created the Sgurr's celebrated columnar pitchstone above.

Miller called these columns "a veritable Giant's Causeway, like that on the coast of Antrim, taken and magnified more than twenty times in height, and some five or six times in breadth, and then placed on the ridge of a hill nearly nine hundred feet high." All the way up lie loose, scattered polygonal fragments, and Derry picks up one of these to take home. They are composed, as Hugh says, "of a peculiar and very beautiful stone, unlike any other in Scotland, a dark pitchstone porphyry, which, inclosing crystals of glassy feldspar, resembles ... a mass of black sealing wax, with numerous pieces of white bugle stuck into it."



At the peak, one of the most spectacular panoramas in all Scotland awaits the grateful climbers - as Hugh wrote, and as seen now, the "blue plain" of the sea shines all around; "the hill-chains of Morvern and Kintail" stretch along the mainland west coast; the isles of the Inner Hebrides are before you, "from the Isle of Skye to Uist and Barra to Tiree and Mull." And "the contiguous Small Isles, Muck and Rum, lay moored immediately beside us, like vessels of the same convoy that in some secure roadstead drop anchor within hail of each other."

I am not among those at the peak today, though I have been previously. The pulled muscle in my back has somehow relentlessly yanked me to starboard, tumbling and stumbling at almost every step, and I am forced to give up near the top of the "nose" below the ridge tower. My head and torso are immovably stuck at nearly 45 degrees angle to my legs. This is when, up and back down, Bill Taylor comes to my rescue, and, incidentally regales me with the above buy-out anecdote. He is the subject of my one Appreciation of the trip.

We have preceded the scaling of the Sgurr with an exploration of the Caves on the southern shore, itself littered with hazardous, slippery boulders. We came first to the Massacre Cave, or Frances cave (Uamh Fhraing in Gaelic). Wrote Hugh: "My friend the minister stopped short. 'There,' he said, pointing to the hollow, 'you will find such a bone-cave as you never saw before. Within that opening there lie the remains of an entire race, palpably destroyed [...] by one great catastrophe. That is the famous cave of Frances, in which the whole people of Eigg were smoked to death by the M'Leods.'

In circa 1577, the MacLeods, feuding with the local MacDonalds, asphyxiated over 400 of them by lighting a fire at the cave's tiny entrance, behind which they had taken refuge believing themselves safely hidden. Miller described the charnel within in gruesome detail over 250 years later. The bones were removed soon after. They had already been looted for souvenirs by ghoulish tourists. Some of our group decline to crawl in, spooked by the grisly history.

On we strive to the massive Cathedral Cave, so clearly named for its yawning, Gothic-arched mouth. Miller and Swanson checked it out as a possible site for Free Church worship, but it was, and is, far too inaccessible for the old and frail. We pass, just before the cave, a huge dyke, running across shore and up cliff. A dyke is a fis-





sure which has been filled with solidified magma, and sticks out most strikingly amidst the surrounding rock. You have to imagine a great pulse of super-hot magma shooting up from the earth's crust, some of it bursting into the air above, some of it cooling and settling within the fissure.

The scramble to the caves has taken the wind out of my sails for the Sgurr ascent. Hours later, back at Galmisdale Cafe, I slowly manage to straighten up. Meanwhile, Joyce and Claire have spent the day at Eigg Primary, talking to the pupils about their history, their legends, and about Hugh Miller, thus nicely blending past, present and future together.

AT THE CEILIDHS

It is a most perfect evening, and through it we enjoy two very special parties in succession. The first is a ceilidh, organised by both off and onshore groups, at the Glebe Barn, at which the legendary story-teller Essie Stewart is to preside with Claire Hewitt, and a poet, Norrie Bissell of Luing, Argyll. Essie has a cautionary tale of the devil's deeds, Claire of a heroic rescue by Finn MacCoul. Norrie's poetry, known as Geopoetics, makes extraordinary connections between nature and how we experience it. A lyrical Gaelic-language singer, Kate Langhorne by name, enchants as well, and, from the boat, Mairi, Barney and Kenny support in great form.

The Eiggachs are our honoured guests. Some 30 of them arrive to spectate, sing along and enjoy the meal laid on. Somehow the *Leader* crew, and passenger team, have assembled a galley-cooked hot meal in great pans, and convey it by RIB from boat to shore, and up to barn by the island's taxi, and the empties go the same way back. A logistical feat if ever there was one. The taxi driver pauses with us to admire the stars before transporting the victuals from pier to barn.

This is the only chance to talk with the islanders, but they are there for the entertainment, not to answer reporter-like questions about their way of life, so I desist. I am buttonholed by Camille Dressler, seeking to know more of John Swanson's antipathy to Roman Catholicism, but I could scarcely enlighten her further. John Hudson tells me he is preparing a new edition of his excellent 2003 guide, *The Geology of Eigg*, which is most welcome news.



Because a return to the boat involves a lot of risky clambering up and down in the dark, we have not imbibed much at the ceilidh; but because it has already been such a good evening, and because the night is so beautiful, we must continue the party. A big fat full moon smiles down on us. And so we play on until well past midnight. In the morning we will depart from Eigg with very full hearts, but not before chief officer Katie has watched the minke whale family pass by on nightwatch, at about four in the morning.

LOG, DAY FIVE, WEDNESDAY 10TH SEPTEMBER

EIGG TO LOCH SUNART, ARDNAMURCHAN PENINSULA

We are not very far southbound before we see a couple of bottlenose dolphins. This is but the prelude only a little later to the most astounding spectacle presented to us in the entire voyage. A shout from skipper Ben announces fins on the starboard beam, in numbers, about a kilometre away. In no time, they are upon us. I have seen a few displays in the Cromarty and Moray Firths, but nothing remotely comparable to this. Anything between 50 and



one 100 dolphins are with us, smaller than bottlenoses but more especially attractive. I learn they are named "common" dolphins; this has to be the daftest misnomer, arising one supposes from their profuse numbers; wrongly named because they are exceptionally sleek and streamlined, white-sided pure, silver and grey backs gleaming in the sun, racing under, over, through the pristine green waters. How do they swim so, with no apparent source of propulsion except the slightest swing of their tails? They glide so effortlessly smoothly, fast as the boat or faster, as they please. They break surface with barely a ripple, soar upwards and forwards, and land just as smoothly, to glide again for a few seconds, before leaping again, some of them this time arc and twist in mid-air, and deliberately belly-flop, for the sake of a good splash, perhaps? They bow-ride, then fall back to our beams, advance again. They continue with this astonishing display for maybe 15, maybe 20 minutes before accelerating with a final dash to leave us awe-struck in their wake. Over and over again, the shipmates click their digicams in mostly futile attempts to capture their flight in mid-air; this is something you really can only enjoy with the human eye, and then remember forever. The whole episode is punctuated with our cries of wonder and delight.

We are left wondering, like so many watchers before. Was this a show put on for our benefit? We feel such empathy with them, they must surely be trying to com-



municate something to us, but what? Are they just having fun? Scientists have as yet been quite unable to explain their extraordinary behaviours to us. We only know their spontaneity and agility and grace bring unfettered joy to us humans, with our care-laden spirits, and lumbering steps.

And so we enter Loch Sunart, longest sea loch of the Ardnamurchan peninsula. At the eastern end of Loch Sunart lies Strontian, site of an all-but forgotten, yet notorious Disruption episode, where Episcopalian gent Sir James Riddell would not allow even a tent to be put up by the Free Churchers. The congregation got a "floating church" built on the Clyde, apparently of cast-iron, a Noah's Ark of a hulk complete with pulpit, vestry and seats for 750 people, moored about 150 metres offshore.

All but two of us opt for a shore walk. Skip Ben pilots us ashore on *Leader's* inflatable. We cross a bog, and wild woodland, to ascend a firm forestry track. At its foot, Simon explains a geological "unconformity" in the cliffs above us: in the lower part of the hill are ancient basement rocks, "Moine Schists," originally formed as sandy and muddy sediments about one billion years ago. In the upper part of the hill are basalt lavas erupted a mere 65 million years ago; they lie across the planed-off ends of the Moine strata – a great erosion surface that was flooded and buried by the lavas. The unconformity is the junction where these two great masses of rock meet. He said that from the time when the Moines were laid down to the time when the lavas erupted the Moines were deeply buried, repeatedly folded and metamorphosed, then many kilometres of rock were eroded from over them until they emerged at the surface. As James Hutton realised over two hundred years ago, such slow but gigantic processes require vast spans of time!

We climb up to a promontory from which we will behold spread before us the sea-loch, and beyond the mountain ranges of Argyll. In the bright sunshine it suggests the flawless, mountain-ringed Hebridean idyll you dream about. The peaks are grey pinnacles, pyramids and towers; green swathes of lush flora abound on the lower slopes, and the water is a Mediterranean blue; and *Leader* looks like a toy boat in a pond anchored far below. But the idyll is punctured by the ruins of old cottages nearby.

Yet again we are favoured by a purple-golden sunset, followed by the full moon, both reflected perfectly in the stillest, calmest water. As dusk fell, a clutch of us round Claire help raise her harp to the skies, so that the soft breezes can hum softly through its strings.



LOG, DAY SIX, THURSDAY 11TH SEPTEMBER

LOCH SUNART TO LOCH SPELVIE

We retrace our course back into the Sound of Mull, then bear to port for the run down the Sound and into the Firth of Lorne, making for Spelvie, Mull's southernmost sea loch. Ardnamurchan is again a port of us in its emptiness, its southern shore revealing a sparse few cottages, and long-since abandoned crofts. We pass another tremendous dyke, a sheer, steep white projection sticking straight out of the ground, and a great spur we learn is named MacLean's Nose.

The sail takes most of the day, and we are uplifted by Simon's reading of his poetic prose describing the geologist exploring among metamorphic rock in the field. Skipper Ben gives us a super-class in the history of merchant-shipping, the rigging, from gaff to lugg to cutter and the rest, and their types and purposes and oceans travelled, from brig to brigantine, barque to barquentine, schooner to ketch, cutter, yawl; just one of them all is actually called a ship, a square-rigged three-master. All along, Ben has been careful to explain to us how the vagaries of tides, currents and weather will determine how far we can go, and where land. We learn a good lesson: At sea, the sea is boss. A lesson that would have been the tougher in rougher conditions. Doubtless the seasoned sailors amongst the team would have relished the challenge of hard-going; others are grateful for the softer ride.

At the mouth of Loch Spelvie, we navigate carefully through the narrow channel between perilous shore shallows and outcrops. This loch hosts a large expanse of fish farms, some growing salmon, mostly mussels. This multi million pound industry has far exceeded its initial expectations. The scene is somewhat surreal, not a soul in sight, while thousands of artificially bred fish leap in their cages to snatch the pellets spewing silently from a remotely-controlled hopper. Scientists are urgently seeking ways to contain and if possible scare off the myriad sea lice pollutants which breed on the penned-in fish.



Spelvie is a most scenic anchorage, as Joyce has earlier promised. Yet this too is an almost abandoned landscape. It is punctuated here and there by ruinous Clearance cottages. At nearby Torosay, the Free Church faithful fared even harder than their Strontian neighbours, forced to gather for worship each Sabbath on the beach between high and low watermarks. When spring tides were running they could end up ankle-deep in the waves. Probably, the sermons went on too long!; a cruel way for a proprietor to treat true believers, all the same.

But the scenery, sunlit heavens, clear skies, and unrivalled panorama are our happiness today. Simon shows us, on deck, a strikingly coloured



British Geological Survey map of south-eastern Mull, explaining the mapping process which involves a lot of inference and deduction based on previous experience and the surface features. We have yet another fabulous sunset (and full moon) to follow; it is a glowing orange-gold orb watched with gasps as, just to the right of a headland, and barely above the sea, it sinks quite gradually, leaving enough light to continue casting golden beams across the waters to us for quite a spell. It is our last night at sea. After supper, it is time for one more moonlit ceilidh. Mairi's fiddle, Kenny and Barney's guitars, Claire's harp and bodhran, fire up the on deck dancing; the planking thuds to the jigs and reels, all the Scots airs which have resounded in these waters for centuries. Clapping hands and whoops echo between mountains and sea.

LOG, DAY SEVEN, FRIDAY, 12TH SEPTEMBER

LOCH SPELVIE TO OBAN

And so back to the "home" port, Oban, and many are the final Appreciations at breakfast. For the inspirer, Hugh Miller, the crew of the *Leader*, and *Leader* herself, the boat that breathes; for the food, the stories, the ceilidhs, the people of Eigg, for organiser Joyce, and for each other. The Friends' hand-sewn banner flutters for the final time from under the mains'l boom, all the way to docking and disembarkation at the North Pier.

Once more we pass Lismore, reviewing the medieval castles ashore, making round Kerrera for the long strand of the mainland west coast. Skipper Ben has been giving keen passengers a turn at the wheel, and some, like Barney Strachan and Katie Campbell, make the most of helming such a heavy-duty, fine-looking vessel.

Sea-shanties once more enliven the passage, and spur on the crewing passengers to their tasks, hefting anchor, hoisting and lowering sail. Rosie Bradshaw sings a cracker of her own, with a ready chorus from Mairi and Derry:

*Shiver my timbers, shiver my soul,
Yo ho, heave ho,
Gonna sail my ship across the ocean whole,
Yo ho, heave ho
They'll be singing and dancing, and a story or two,
Before you know it, you'll be one of the crew.*

Three more verses celebrate the dolphins, and meeting the Sgurr, a "pitchblack monster" that "sleeps on a forest of pine."

Bo'sun Martin has all the hands roaring with one final, traditional rant, *Bound for South Australia*, which somehow, although we are in calm inshore waters nearing port, evokes this morning all the merchant ships which ever crossed the far oceans.

*Haul away you rolling king
Heave away! Haul away!
Haul away you'll hear me sing
We're bound for South Australia.*



Docking at the North Pier, Colin treats us to one last, and best, snack of the lot, which relieves the ache of parting— a spinach, mushroom and blue cheese soup, served with specially baked hot, crusty rye-bread rolls. Then, one by one, we disembark, to go north to Fort William and the Back Isle, west to Perthshire, south to Edinburgh and Glasgow.

We have learnt while sailing that there are changes of hands every so often on Trinity Sailing Foundation's three boats; we can only thank our crew for giving so much of their own personalities and talents to the voyage. Skipper Ben Wheatley tells us Trinity's boats do a lot of sail-training for young people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that our charter would help subsidise the next training outing – and we feel, so much the better.

Joyce has sailed on *Leader* in many of the years since 1986, and so it's something special, especially coming from her in her role as lead organiser, when she says this one has stood out from all the rest. It is because of the special charge of sailing in Miller's wake, and because of the happy mix of passengers, his heirs, and the rich experiences we have gained.

This is not the end of the story. The voyage provided a strong focus at a Scottish Geodiversity Forum conference in the capital, and students Derry and Rosie delivered a very well-received presentation. Plans are afoot for a second geological voyage next year, to the islands off Argyll.

**Eigg, the Story of an Island*, by Camille Dressler, Birlinn, £14.99, ISBN 978-1-78027-259-7.



THE CROMARTY SUITE

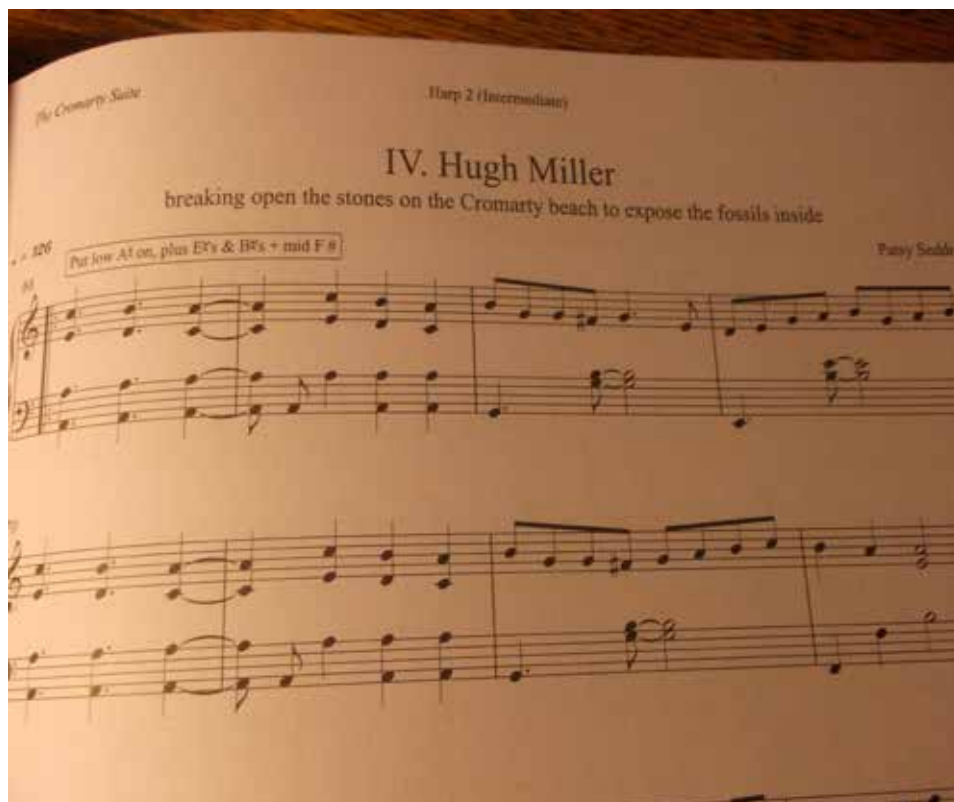
CHIPPING AWAY AT THE STONES

BETWEEN the voyage and the festival, coincidentally, came the inspiring premiere of a new piece of music, the *Cromarty Suite*, celebrating the town's history and continual battles with adversity. It was set round the adventures of the town's two best remembered notables, Sir Thomas Urquhart and Hugh Miller

It was specially commissioned by the Cromarty Arts Trust, and composed and performed by three of the best known harpists in Scotland, Corrina Hewat, Mary Macmaster and Patsy Seddon at The Stables on September 19th.

The *Cromba Air* opens the piece reflecting on the bay's sense of beauty and space, and closes with the *Cromba March*, joyfully signifying the community's successful struggles with hardship and hopes for the future.

Urquhart is remembered for his rambunctious translation of French



priest Rabelais's uproarious comic epic *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and musing on his home soil from inside the Tower of London where he was detained at Oliver Cromwell's pleasure.

Hugh Miller's tunes relate to the images which "resonate most easily" of him these days, chipping away at the rocks as a stonemason, carving tombstones, and breaking stones to expose fossils. The programme notes recall that "*Chipping Away*" was one of the most popular songs in "Hugh Who," the children's musical performed by the entire school roll at Cromarty Primary during the Bicentenary in 2002.

Hugh was again recalled in the tune, *39 Ships Long Since Gone*, composed around the Emigration Stone on The Links, on which is inscribed the description he is reputed to have written of the Cleopatra's departure for the New World.

And to mark the breadth of his legacy came, in an interlude, a most dramatic rendering of one of his folk legends by renowned harpist and story-teller Heather Yule. This was *The Story of Tom M'Kechan and the Fairies*, which would coincidentally be retold by another tale-bearer, Bob Pegg, at the festival a few days later.

The ensemble trio went on to rouse the packed audience with some individual songs and medleys. The evening was the first night of The Arts Trust's annual training weekend, Harp Village.





The Friends of Hugh Miller

"WE ARE CROMARTY"

THREE -DAY FESTIVAL AT THE OLD BREWERY

23RD - 25TH SEPTEMBER 2014

10.30am - 4.30pm daily

Drop in any time

Come and enjoy

Films, arts and crafts exhibitions, fossil-hunting, wildlife, storytelling, music and dance.



PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 23rd September

11.00am Public and media opening

12.00—1.00pm Fossil display and talk;

2.00—4.00pm Second fossil show and field trip

Wednesday, 24th September

10.30-12.30pm: Story-telling and walkabout with Bob Pegg

Thursday, 25th September

11.00am – 1.00pm: Wildlife talk and tour with Kenny Taylor

2.30 – 4.30pm: Poetry and story-reading; harp recital

FINALE, MUSIC AND DANCE SPECTACULAR

Starring Cromarty Youth at

VICTORIA HALL, 7.30-9.30pm

Entry free: All donation are welcome

"WE ARE CROMARTY" FESTIVAL A BIG HIT 23rd – 25th September 2014

FROM the deck of the *Leader* ketch in the Hebrides, we brought our proud new banner to serve as the frontispiece of our festival, hanging aloft over the great hall in Cromarty's Old Brewery.

The festival marked the continuation in Miller's birthplace town of the Betsey Project, in which the *Leader* had sailed two weeks earlier on the same voyage Hugh made on the Free Church yacht *Betsey* 170 years ago.

The Cromarty Craftworkers' banner was making its second public appearance since its grand unveiling at the Museum in August. The crafters were just one among several local contributors to justify the festival's ambitious title, purposely intended to embrace all our talents in the arts and sciences.





Among those participating were Cromarty Camera Club, with a superb slideshow of more than 200 well-loved scenes in our landscape, from the ancient buildings and grounds to 21st Century activity in the Firth.

Cromarty Youth Cafe performers helped make our finale ceilidh a triumph with their music and dancing. Some two dozen Cromarty Primary School P6 and 7 pupils were treated to a demonstration of fossils and how to look for them, by our Chairman, Professor Nigel Trewin. Potter Barbel Dister also led two workshops for them, as a result of which they made individual pieces for themselves as keepsakes.

Members of The Friends from further afield brought their spectacular displays and knowhow, such as our Chairman Nigel Trewin with his outstanding specimens of Devonian era fossil fish, and Gavin Berkenheger with his precious and semi-precious metals.

It was especially valuable to have several of the Betsey Project team taking the story forward. These included Joyce Gilbert, on behalf of sponsors, RSGS, harpist and story-teller Claire Hewitt, and naturalist Kenny Taylor from *Leader*, and poet Norrie Bissell, and communities researcher Issie MacPhail from the Eigg shore party.

Joyce was all-round facilitator. Claire and Norrie conducted the poetry and harp recital, a most beautiful final afternoon of reflection and contemplation. Kenny led one of the three "talks and walks." Issie presented a 40-minute video of Cromarty's evolution as a community through the ages.

The arts and crafts offered superb exhibitions. Julie Price presented meticulous and gorgeous botanical drawings of the creatures Hugh loved to watch; Mary MacLean's vibrant watercolours gloried in local scenes; Barbel Dister's specially commissioned pots and bowls symbolising fossil fish could not have been more colourful or dramatic. Pat Davidson from Aberdeen startled with her productions, such as her herring fossil, and mermaid hiding amid layers of shale and volcanic ash. Exhibition organiser Leon Patchett showed a driftwood sculpture in sensuous curves, and an array of craft wares.

The National Trust for Scotland (Hugh Miller Museum), the Cromarty Medieval Burgh Community Project (2014 Thieves' Row dig), and Scottish National Heritage (geodiversity posters) exhibited in the hall.

The biggest "news" story to come out of the festival? Unquestionably Gavin Berkenheger's exhibition showing there are multi-million pound rewards in mineral wealth lying under Scottish soil, just waiting for Scottish and British government investment to help prospect for the ores. Gavin displayed samples of iron, copper, lead and zinc, as well as gold to make his case. He says the Dalriada goldfield runs from the west coast of Ireland, across Scotland right through to Aberdeenshire.

Among my favourite visitors were: Kirsty Dale, and her two daughters, Alexis and Leila. Kirsty, now living in Munlochy, joined her mother on her return to Scotland, and volunteered at the Hugh Miller Museum for the summer season. She staffed the NTS stand, and

brought her daughters to the poetry and music session.

Then there were Sara Ramsey and her husband and nine-month old, coincidentally named Hugh. Sara introduced herself as a keen palaeontologist and "stone surgeon" (meaning she operates on gallstones at Raigmore Hospital!).

Colin and Brenda Champion were utterly delighted with the geology field trip led by Bob Davidson. Bob's very first opening of a nodule produced a fine specimen of osteolepis, which he promptly presented to them as a gift.

TALKS AND WALKS

Our chairman **Professor Nigel Trewin** followed up his visit to the primary school by presenting an introduction to the life and work of Miller the geologist, the avid reader driven by his curiosity to becoming one of the leading collectors and writers of his day.

Later **Bob Davidson** of Aberdeen Geological Society took Nigel Trewin's audience to the famous Cromarty Devonian fish bed, scene of some of Miller's great discoveries, showing them the strata of sandstone, shale and limestone. He explained that the gigantic Lake Orcadie of that era had risen and fallen some five times.

Well-kent storyteller **Bob Pegg** and his resplendent walking stick led a party on the trail of some of Miller's legends. He started by taking them up the Paye to the entrance of the graveyard, the place where fisherman Thomas Hogg endured a terrifying encounter with a "man-horse." On the other side of the Gaelic Chapel, he narrated the demise of the weird Lady of Balconie, in the Black Rock gorge in the Allt Graad river of Easter Ross. Tam M'Kechan's fate at the hands of the fairies at the mill in Eathie ravine came next, told in Old St Regulus kirkyard, and there too, he recounted Captain John Reid's vanquishing of the mermaid to win the hand of sweetheart Helen Stuart.

The third "talk and walk" was led by **Kenny Taylor**, who noted Hugh's awe in the wonders of the local wildlife, and his accurate observations, for example of the complex and many varieties of bees, without benefit of any field guide. His reference to herd boys chasing the bees, showed how much the landscape had changed since his day, when smallholdings still prevailed.

FINALE CEILIDH, VICTORIA HALL

We had a really strong line-up of local talent for the first half of the evening in the Victoria Hall, the whole conducted by our genial MC, Jon Palmer, actor and co-proprietor of the Cheese House. Among the highlights of the evening were unquestionably the musical turns by members of Cromarty Youth Club, whose performances brought forth a great turn out by local families.

We pay especial tribute to Wanda's Diamond Divas, dancers Tilly Grist, Lauren and Caitlin MacLeod, Tali Caswell, Grace McCluskey, Kathie Patterson, and Teghan Young, so precise and graceful in every step. To singers Lauren and Tali for bringing us "*The Three Corners of Cromarty*," and (very) young pipers, Cody Benjamin and Kyle





Cameron for their stirring tunes, performed with mentor Father Mel.

We heard local musicians including Fyrish and Jiggery Spur, a video extract of the Cromarty children's opera Cinderella, a prose piece by Alison Seller about Church Street, and another by David Ross about the view of town and firth from the "lang brae."

A surprise star performance lit up the ceilidh, a "*Dance for Hugh Miller*," by a girl band of PE students all the way from Musselburgh Grammar School, Midlothian. They portrayed Miller the mason toiling with mallet, Miller the geologist fossil-hunting, and Miller the journalist witnessing the terrible conditions of women workers. The girls, and their teacher, Aileen McSharry, had been enabled at the last minute to make the long journey to Cromarty via a donation from our festival co-sponsors, RSGS.

After their dance, the Musselburgh girls did an amazing quick change into party dress to become the life and soul of the dancing to traditional Scottish jigs and reels played by local band, the Scone Fairies. On the morning after they visited The Museum, to be treated to some harp music and song from Claire Hewitt in the Birthplace Cottage kitchen, just where the boy Hugh picked up his legendary tales.

We must again thank our generous sponsors Highland Council (Black Isle Ward discretionary budget, £1,000), Nigg Energy Park £1,000), Cromarty Trust (£500), and RSGS (accommodation expenses and voluntary staffing) for the funds which helped make the festival such a hit.

Acknowledgements also to:

Mairi MacNeil, Leon Patchett, Kiera Newman, the Cromarty Centre (Old Brewery); Ross Couper (Cromarty History Society, projection assistance); Victoria Hall; Liz Broumley (Camera Club); For The Right Reasons (printers), and Wanda MacKay, Black Isle Youth Development Officer, and Fraser MacLeod.



IN THE STEPS OF HUGH MILLER



by Aileen McSherry, tutor

On Thursday 25th September, 11 Higher PE Aesthetics students journeyed to Cromarty to perform at a Grand Ceilidh in celebration of the famous Scot Hugh Miller.

The students had been choreographing their own piece of work over the six weeks since returning to school in August. The dance was 7.5 minutes long and reminded the audience of three important phases of Miller's interesting life. He had been a stonemason, a writer for the newspaper "The Witness" and then a leading Geologist, collecting over 7,000 fossils that are now stored in the National Museum of Scotland.

The girls stayed over in the Cromarty Training Centre (Old Brewery) and were able to visit the Museum and Birthplace of Miller on Friday 26th September. The Royal Scottish Geographical Society helped to fund the trip through sponsorship from Scotia Mining.

The project has had a positive impact on the students as they have been able to develop their personal skills mentally, emotionally, socially and physically. They were a credit to their families and Musselburgh Grammar. They were embraced by the Cromarty Community as they appreciated their efforts and enjoyed their company in the Grand Ceilidh dancing afterwards.



Caitlin Wilkinson,
Ellie Rowberry, Natalie Rutherford, Isla Wilkie,
Lauren Bloyce, Alison Rafferty,
Leanne Davidson, Niamh Shepherd, Amber Reilly,
Erin Burnside. (Nicole Strachan not in photo)



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