

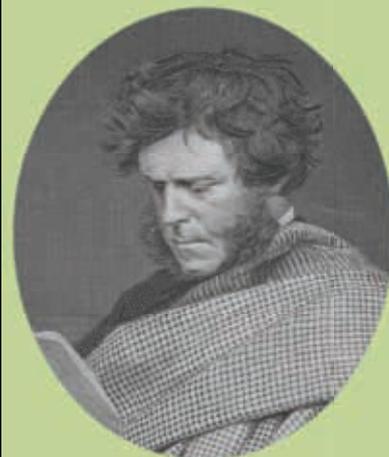
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# Hugh's News

Newsletter of  
The Friends of Hugh Miller



## WISHING A HAPPY AND SUCCESSFUL NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS

THE  
HUGH MILLER  
WRITING  
COMPETITION  
2015-2016



**FOR YOUR DIARY**  
**10th AGM, THE STABLES, CROMARTY**  
**Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2016**  
**2.00-3.30pm**

**Writing Competition Prize-Giving  
and public talk**

**WHY HUGH MILLER STILL MATTERS**

**by Lara Reid**

**Annual meeting, 3.30pm-5.00pm**  
**(see provisional agenda, p2)**

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### OPEN LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

## PLEASE GIVE IT A GO

Dear members and readers

This is a pressing invitation to all of you to start the year by entering our exciting new writing competition, entitled "Testimonies of the Rocks." It is the latest, innovative venture to promote the living legacy of Hugh Miller, and we need the most entries we can get to make it a success.

Entries should be "inspired by the geological and landscape writings" of the great man, and you should interpret this remit in the widest possible terms.

Here are a few examples of who might enter and why:

- **Descendants:** Why you are proud of your ancestor, and you feel you have a personal connection with him and his family.
- **Shipmates on the Betsey voyages.** Three accounts of the 2014 and 2015 sailings have been published in editions of Hugh's News. Surely there are more of you with your own stories to tell?
- **Writers who have taken inspiration from Miller's literary style,** especially in his writings on geology.

*Continued on Page 2*

*Below: Standing in front of a newly-introduced display case at the National Museum of Scotland are Lara Reid, science writer, and Angus Miller, chair of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, the two pilots of the writing competition. The presence of this case at a the third floor entrance to the Natural World gallery came as a delightful surprise on a first visit for some time, all the more so as it is splendidly old-fashioned glass piece, sitting as it does fronting the stunning 21<sup>st</sup> Century gallery behind. Among its most spectacular specimens, named for Hugh Miller, is a *Homostius milleri*, found at Traquair, to Lara's left.*



- Friends' members: What drew you to admire Hugh Miller? It could be, for example, a visit to his Museum, or his qualities as a geologist and writer, and the personal attributes he brought to them.
- Geologists, professional and amateur, with accounts of their own field trips of exploration, discovery, and appreciation of their surroundings.
- Historians and story-tellers who respond to the way he weaves social history and folklore round his expositions of natural science.

As you can see, there is lots of scope. Entrants can pay some form of tribute, or, they need not refer directly to any aspect of Miller's own life and work as their starting point. Their writings need only to be evidently following his paths in one way or another. The writing can be fictional, or non-fictional, a critique, or a journal, poem or essay.

As an important reminder, your entries need to be submitted by **midnight on 18<sup>th</sup> March**. Entries should be submitted by email to : [competition@scottishgeodiversityforum.org](mailto:competition@scottishgeodiversityforum.org). Winners will be notified by **15<sup>th</sup> April**, and prizes will be presented at the next Friends' AGM on **14<sup>th</sup> May**. Under 16s should write up to 200 words, over 16, up to 1,000. The judges will be freelance science writer Lara Reid, naturalist Kenny Taylor, geopoet Norman Bissell and geologists Simon Cuthbert (University of the West of Scotland) and Ruth Robinson (University of St Andrews).

The prizes have yet to be announced, but we can indicate that The Friends will put up a full set of works by and about Miller currently in print, including Dr Michael Taylor's biography, *The Cruise of the Betsey*, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*, and *Testimony of the Rocks*. A guided tour of the Hugh Miller Museum, and the sites nearest Cromarty of his fossil finds, will be offered during the AGM weekend. Detailed competition rules can be found on two websites, [www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org](http://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org), in the Current Affairs section, or [www.scottishgeology.com](http://www.scottishgeology.com) under the heading Writing Competition.

To encourage all of you to take this on, we are publishing in this edition, competition judge Lara Reid's own discovery of Miller in her article, *Walking in Other Worlds: Getting to know Hugh Miller*, ps 4-5. Lara is the speaker at the AGM public meeting, where she will also be presenting the awards. By way of further inducements, you can also read interviews assessing Miller's contribution to Scotland's story with the author James Robertson, and myself, Martin Gostwick in the competition section of the Scottish Geology website.

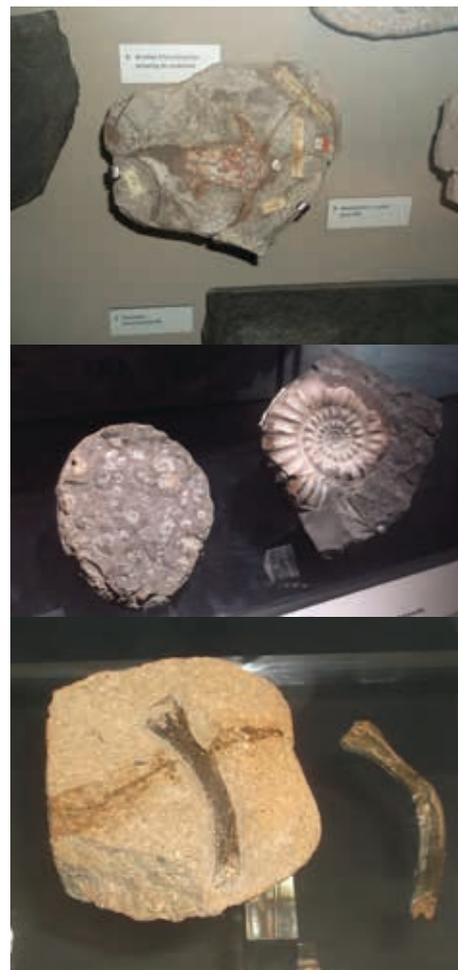
## GEOLOGY FOR SCHOOLS

# CAMPAIGN CONTINUES

The Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) is continuing to make the case for the reintroduction of Earth Sciences into schools. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) have asked for further evidence to support the case. In a study undertaken with Geobus at St Andrews, the society found nearly 100 (mostly geography) teachers across Scotland who were keen to teach an Earth Sciences course in schools, and a potential student audience of more than 900 children. Those interested in helping make the case should contact enquiries@rsgs.org, or 01738 455050. The Friends has given, and continues to give this campaign its full support.

# OBIT - MAY HUNTER

We mourn the passing of May Hunter, a very active first member of our management committee. May designed a suite of stationery for us, including letterheads, a bookmark and gift cards for sale. She also produced envelopes, writing paper and a membership card for administrative use. A keen photographer, some of her images of the Cottage garden still adorn the museum. She will be warmly remembered for these contributions, her enthusiasm, energy, and infectious enthusiasm.



Three items in the Beginnings exhibition in the NMS basement. One (top) is a Pterichthyodes from Miller's own collection. A second (centre) houses a group of small ammonites, and the third (bottom) is a Plesiosaur bone.

## 10<sup>th</sup> AGM PROVISIONAL AGENDA

1. Chairman's welcome.
2. Minutes of 2014 AGM.
3. Secretary's annual report.
4. Financial Statement.
5. Election of Office Bearers and Management Committee.
6. Property manager's annual report.
7. NTS wish list.
8. AOCB.

The final agenda and minutes will be circulated at the meeting

## ELIZA'S RESTORED STONE IS "A JOY TO SEE"

A happy "thumbs up" verdict for the Eliza Miller headstone conservation project was given at first sight by two of its most generous donors.

Dr Lillemor Jernqvist and her partner, Mr Derek Lancaster-Gaye, made a special journey up from their home in Stirling over a November weekend to view the work of Karolina Allan of KK Art & Conservation, Elgin.

They brought with them a little pot of cyclamens to sit alongside a geranium. The couple were given a vow on behalf of the Friends that the grave would be cared for more consistently and carefully in future.

Lillemor circulated the following comments: "It was a joy to see Eliza's headstone and her little grave. I am very pleased with the conservation work carried out by Karolina. The stone is now safe for years to come, and I hope many visitors will include the walk up the hill to see the last stone Hugh so lovingly cut."

Karolina, who has performed other works in Cromarty, notably in the East Kirk, herself declared that she really enjoyed restoring the headstone "with its lovely lettering."

Lillemor and Derek covered the whole cost of the initial report on the stone's condition by Dr Mary Markos. Several generous donations from members contributed towards Karolina's preservative treatments. The total costs amounted to £1,215, of which only £175 had to be met from Friends' funds.

Karolina carried out the treatments between 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September. Before she started, the British Lichen Society certified there were no rare species under protection. The lichen, moss, bird droppings and soiling were then cleaned off using water and nylon and wooden brushes.

In her report, Karolina noted the stone is quite hard, fine-grained sandstone of buff colour. Hugh Miller had selected the stone well for this most tender undertaking, since "it has kept all the lettering very sharp." She further sharpened the legibility of letters A and E in the inscription.

Cracks and cavities were consolidated using a solution of a chemical known as Paraloid B72, dissolved in acetone and industrial methylated spirit, in proportion 50/50. Cavities were filled out using acrylic mortar (a 12% solution of Paraloid B72, mixed with colour match sand). Paraloid B72 is a thermoplastic resin favoured for durable surface coating. A small paint mark at the back was thinned down with scalpel and removed by brushing.

Consideration is being given by FoHM to further conservation work on the adjacent grave where Hugh's great grandfather John Feddes is buried. This will be the subject of future consultation with interested parties.



*A pleased inspection party includes, left to right, Derek Lancaster-Gaye, Lillemor Jernqvist and former museum property manager Frieda Gostwick.*



*Left "Before" and right "After" illustrations of the restorative work.*

*Top, general view of the front of the headstone showing cleaning work to stone and base. Bottom, close-up view of the work using Paraloid B72 on the base stroke of letter E.*

# WALKING IN OTHER WORLDS: GETTING TO KNOW HUGH MILLER

by Lara Reid

Blair Atholl, October 2015

*We thank Lara Reid for permission to reprint this article from her blog. It represents something of a personal epiphany for her in relation to Miller and his talents. We reproduce it to encourage others to enter the writing competition.*

The clearest, stillest autumn I can remember – true halcyon days of blue, yellow, red and orange hues. Leaves dropping through branches, spinning on impact but untouched by the wind. Each morning is icy, a thick layer of frost skimming every surface.

Into this idyllic other-world, I bring Hugh Miller with me on holiday. It may as well be the man himself – his chatty, eloquent prose speaks from the page as though he is ever-present beside me. A testament in itself to the man's life work, written as he tramped across much of Scotland, as eager to unravel the landscape's riddles as many a geologist before and since. In many ways, however, Miller is unique. He is completely self-taught as a scientist, starting from a fairly humble background and training as a stone-mason in his home town of Cromarty on the Black Isle. From the outset, he aims to teach others about all that he finds – and, to this day, he succeeds.



*Glen Tilt*

It may be true that, in terms of today's pared-down writing styles, Miller's prose could be considered dense at times, and difficult to bear with in places. In reality, however, compared with contemporary Victorian prose, I believe Miller wrote clearly, succinctly and above all, with humour. He also had a fantastic ability to describe elements of geology and biology with great clarity, likening many details to phenomena from everyday life. He describes the arrangement of fish scales as overlapping tiles on a roof, the distorted basaltic columns on the Sgurr of Eigg as the ribs of a ship-wreck, and the cross-section of corals as daisies pressed into the surface of a rock, to name but a few.

As I read Miller in the locale of Glen Tilt and Blair Atholl, it is worth mentioning that it is in part thanks to Miller, together with a number of his contemporaries, that we have full and open access to the land here in Scotland. Miller was among a group of early campaigners who lobbied relentlessly for the 'right to roam', and he wrote about Glen Tilt in a *Witness* leading article: *Glen Tilt tabooed*, 1 September 1847 (*Essays Historical and Poetical*, Nimmo, Hay and Mitchell). The piece was a scathing attack on the Duke of Argyll, his gillies, and other "exclusives" who barred access to their property with "illegal violence." He quotes the glen's importance for Hutton's theory, where he found "the most clear and unequivocal proofs in support of his views."\*

For Miller was not 'just' a geologist, he was a true polymath. A man for whom myths and legends, poetry and language, and indeed the state of the human condition held as much weight in his extended vision as the search for the origins of the land on which he walked. Miller's extraordinary enthusiasm bubbles out of the pages of his geological journals – he clearly loves what he does and takes all the more pleasure in trying to decipher the puzzles he meets along the way. Some of his guesses on the bigger picture are a little wild – but that is stated from a standpoint 170 years' worth of knowledge beyond that which he had. Then there are the times he gets it so very-nearly right – and I would argue that any hesitancy is over-ruled by the sheer beauty and inherent simplicity of his descriptions and theories. True, he envisaged a Scotland submerged under an ocean crammed with ice-floes at the time of the last ice-age in *Rambles of a Geologist* (1858) – but his ice-floes were capable of shifting enormous erratic boulders hundreds of yards, if not miles, from where they originated. He simply understood that there was no supernatural or earth-shattering earthquake scenarios at play when it came to mis-placed erratic boulders (much as he loved the folklore stories of giants in endless battles, hurling rocks at one another). At one point he takes great delight in teasing those who would suggest a single rock move 300 yards in an earthquake when nothing else in the area moved an inch.

His ability to map out Scotland according to the 'rock trails' by which he walked is something I find altogether extraordinary. His mind appears full of layers of complex boundary-lines and borders where different rocks meet and are displaced, and he is forever thinking in three-dimensions and seeing beyond what was immediately in front of him. And at the next moment he can be engaged in examining the microscopic intricacies of fish scales preserved in immaculate detail. Would he ever have been comfortable in some of the more-restrictive niches of today's academia?

Another of Miller's passions I love is how he actively encourages, nay almost demands, that people engage in citizen science. The idea of 'citizen science' has been bouncing around a lot on Twitter this summer, particularly with Sir David Attenborough calling for more people to actively study their own 'backyards'. Those involved in science communication and engaging people in citizen science could do far worse than chose Hugh Miller as one of their pioneers of the concept. I love the passage in *Rambles of a Geologist* where Miller yearns for a local to study the Loch of Stennis on Orkney, which ends; "...set himself carefully to examine its productions, and that then, after registering his observations for a few years, he would favour the world with its natural history." There is great value, as Miller clearly understands, in encouraging those with inclination and curiosity to explore and record their 'local patch'.

I am no expert on Hugh Miller, nor would I ever claim to be, but I feel a remarkably strong affinity with him and his desire to encourage those around him to learn and understand, to question and dissect the landscapes around him. I do know this, however – that reading Hugh Miller has awoken something in me that will stay with me forever. The man himself will accompany me, in some way, shape or form, whenever I am out and about in Scotland's stunning landscapes, and I look forward to absorbing all that I can learn from him.

\*My thanks to Martin Gostwick, Secretary of The Friends of Hugh Miller, for his help in linking Miller with Glen Tilt and his campaigns on the 'right to roam'.

#### LANDMARK SERIES NO 9 - THE BIRTHPLACE COTTAGE

## A DARK PLACE WITH SOME PROBABLY INSOLUBLE MYSTERIES

By Martin Gostwick

On the last day of this season, I chanced to be serving as a volunteer in the birthplace cottage, and I began musing over some of its contents, and some baffling puzzles in its history which have never been solved - and may never be. We have wished Hugh recorded in more detail the history of his own home thousands of times, but he confined himself in his autobiography only to describing his "writing room." He clearly never imagined its future as a museum dedicated to his life and work. We are therefore left with much on which we can only conjecture.

Many of our members and readers live far away, and may not have visited for many years, and so I thought it would be a good idea to remind them of the old place, and invite them back, while reviewing some of its mysteries.

What set me off was Hugh Miller's own pencilled sketch of the cottage, and Miller House next door, attached to the upper half of the hanging lum. It bears underneath the caption, written at a guess by one of his sons, "the house where Hugh Miller was born (sketched by himself, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1851)." By this time, Hugh and his family had been away in Edinburgh for more than ten years, and the drawing must have been done during one of his occasional visits to Cromarty. He wrote that by this time he found the once thriving little town had become a desert.

Much about the two buildings still looks remarkably similar, although the thatch is very thin indeed compared with its luxurious new roof today. Outside, the cottage retaining wall in front of the courtyard has no railings and no wrought iron gate. Behind the building, in its garden, is an edifice whose purpose is one of those puz-

zles. It looks to be square in shape, but with a rounded, conical roof. Hugh wrote nothing about it, nor is there any other known record. Could it have been a doocot, or a larder, or for storage of gear perhaps? Millerian scholar Dr Michael Taylor has offered, on checking over the article, the almost certain explanation: An outdoor privy, or earth closet. I wished I had asked him sooner! For over 20 years Frieda Gostwick and I, and other museum staff, have been stumped for an answer whenever the occasional visitor asks: Where did they go to the toilet? We thought there was no visible evidence to go by, when actually the most likely answer lay almost under our noses, in Hugh's sketch upstairs.

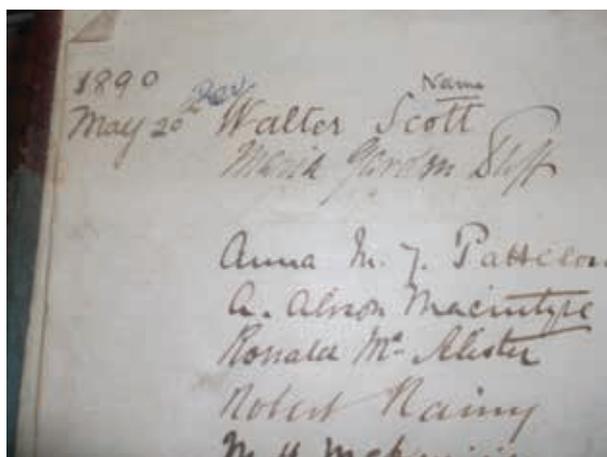
The privy may well have survived as long as a resident caretaker was retained on the premises, into the years between the world wars. Sons, William and Hugh Junior, carried out repairs in 1864. Between then and the opening of the museum by 1887, rooms were intermittently rented from the family by various parties. Then, in the 1880s, the two sons set about converting the place to a museum in their father's honour. They may have been assisted in the noble task by Hugh Jnr's boss, the distinguished Archibald Geikie, director of the Geological Survey, who had employed him to map the district. Dr Taylor is confident that it was open to the public "by 1887."

Yet therein lies another mystery, because there appears to be an unaccountable gap of several years between 1887 and what is believed to be the date of the museum's official opening. This has been and is still assumed to be May 20th, 1890, because that is the date on the first page of the first visitors' book to have survived. The question arises: if there was a visitors' book for that period, has it disappeared without trace? Or was putting one in simply overlooked? Visitors' books survive for almost all the years since 1890 up to the present.

Miller in the late 1880s was still at the height of his posthumous fame. One proof of that is a photographic print of the cottage, shown in a case below Hugh's 1851 sketch, by the renowned commercial photographer, George Washington Wilson, dated 1889. A plaque on the Church Street gable end draws the public's notice to the building, but it was in a sorry state for a place now open to the public as the birthplace of a still very famous man. There are railings and a front gate, but the thatch is still wafer thin, looks to be covered in moss, and there are large damp stains on the front and gable end walls.

A happy tale attends the Wilson print, which could go under the name of that curator's dream, the Chance Lucky Find. Frieda Gostwick and I were researching Miller's history in Edinburgh in the late 1990s, and we parked ourselves in Hugh Miller Terrace, the street in Stockbridge hard by the rushing Water of Leith. This was named for Miller after his death, by admirers of his trenchant *Witness* editorials condemning workers' terrible housing conditions. Today, the artisans' cottages are very "des res," and soon enough a lady emerged and told us firmly that parking there was permit-only. We apologised profusely, said we would find somewhere else at once, but could we come back, explaining the purpose of our presence there? The lady's tone changed completely. Of course we could, and would we like to see over her house? During our tour of her delightful abode, she mentioned she had the G W Wilson print in her possession, and would we care to have it for the Museum? Would we just? A few weeks later it arrived safely in the post.

The 1890-started visitors' book sits beside the Wilson print, and is a fascinating document, now very fragile, which is not surprising since it was in use for 15 years, the last page ending in the summer of 1905. On the flyleaf is a quote written in an unknown hand, from a poem by Robert Browning. Headed "Moral of Miller's



Rev Walter Scott's visit in the Visitors' Book



The first two pages of the Visitors' Book



The flyleaf of the Visitors' Book, with lines from Browning

life," Browning's lines read, "Earn the means first; surely God will devise use for the earnings."

A once sturdy, well-bound volume with gorgeous endpapers, it carries some 20 signatures a page, mostly in brown ink, and with names from all over Scotland, the rest of Britain, and not a few from the United States. It is full of familiar local names, Urquharts, Watsons, MacRaes, Robertsons, some of whose descendants are sure to be still with us. The first page suggests an opening ceremony on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 1890, beginning with the signature of the local minister, Walter Scott (no, not the author of that name, as we have been obliged to tell countless visitors; the insertion of 'Rev' by an unknown hand at a later date has not deflected the queries!), followed by 19 other persons. Another reverend is Robert Rainy (1822 - 1906), then principal of the Free Church's New College. Rainy would come to Cromarty again, for the centenary celebrations which took place in 1902, when the museum also got its first guidebook.

On the opposite wall to Hugh's sketch hang magnificent drawings of the Cottage's history as a building, by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (RCAHMS). They divide the story into four stages. The first, between its erection c1700 to the late 1780s, shows it was a "ha' hoose" (hall house) with a central hall open to the roof, flanked by two rooms at each end, reached by ladder stairs. One of these rooms may have served as a storage loft. The other could have been a bedroom, as it was later where Hugh was born and grew up. A large canopied lum occupied the site of the present stairs, and a section of it can still be seen above them.



*The remains of the original lum*

Phase two began, late 1700s to the 1850s, possibly while Hugh's father, the sea captain, was building Miller House next door, or shortly afterwards when the loss of his ship made it impossible to move in to the smart new villa. He needed all the cash he could raise to fund a new ship, so he rented out the villa. He and his wife Harriet may also have anticipated starting a family, making it imperative to modernise the old cottage. So a new middle floor was inserted, reached by the single wide flight of stairs still there today. This made for a cosy ground floor reception room, and an extra room upstairs. The big lum we see in the reception room today spans both levels, now suffering a large crack on the ground floor. Like the remnants of the ha' hoose before it, this indoor fish smokery is a rare architectural survivor.

Some of the Trust's mid 20th Century alterations continue to puzzle: Why was the lum altered by building out a peculiar, inexplicable structure over where its fire would have been laid? Was it to stop bairns from clambering around inside? A discreet layer of netting would have done that job. Why did they render the rare marriage lintel over the parlour fireplace all-but invisible by blackening the entire surround? This piece of conservation ruined the original artefact. We know they installed a new window in the reception room to improve its lighting, which is more understandable. Some of the answers may lie in ancient files in Trust HQ, but there are no records on the premises.

For that matter, why did the Miller family need a second front door leading into the parlour? Did the parlour once have a different function requiring its own door, perhaps as a smithy, or byre? We can only speculate.

Phase three followed Hugh's death in 1856; notwithstanding William and Hugh Jnr's repairs it continued considerably derelict. The whole family had scattered to the four winds, and had no reason ever to return to the low, dark, damp building, with its clay floor, crusie lamps, rough, rubble-built walls, and permanent reek. Had the sons' museum project not materi-



*The strange alteration to the lower lum*



The second front door from inside



The second front door from outside

alised, it is highly doubtful if would have survived. The descendants handed over ownership and administration to the old Cromarty Town Council in 1926, and the National Trust for Scotland took it over in 1938, when it was again in a poor state. Repairs were carried out in the late 1940s to the old clay and rye thatch, and in 1977 the sturdy Tay reed thatch was laid. In 1983 the Trust refurbished, refurnished and reinterpreted the whole interior. Over the Trust's stewardship in the second half of the twentieth century, many precious artefacts, such as fossils and papers, were removed because of the place's everlasting dampness, and deposited for safekeeping in the national museums in the capital.

Miller House opened as the museum in 2004, presenting the surviving relics, and the family story, transferred from the cottage. It changed the entire role of the cottage, which started its reversion as far as possible to its original status as a family home. The upstairs middle room, with the sketch, the print, and the RCAHMS drawings, is the one survivor of the Trust's 1983 reconfiguration. Between the walls, a lectern, a second case, and a round table support many fascinating documents and memorabilia. Among the documents is a facsimile of Charles Darwin's letter to Hugh, in which he writes: "It may be presumptuous, but I cannot resist expressing the very great pleasure I owe to you from the perusal of the two of your books which I have yet read." It is dated 29<sup>th</sup> March, from Darwin's home in Down House, Kent, but does not include the year. Dr Taylor has pointed to 1855 as very probable. Darwin was seeking further information on the effect of

severe frost on shellfish at Portobello, about which Hugh had recently written an article in *The Witness*. Nor does Darwin give the two books' titles which he had perused, but we can speculate that they were *The Old Red Sandstone* (1841), and *Footprints of the Creator* (1847). The latter would have been of particular interest to Darwin, a literary sensation of the day as it sought to refute early theories of evolution.

Dr Taylor has thrown up another interaction between Miller and Darwin, of which we were hitherto unaware, concerning the Sutor sea caves, but this must be the subject of a future article. Another important manuscript is a letter from the great naturalist Louis Agassiz, by then a luminary of the newly founded Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard University, offering to write a foreword to the American edition of *Footprints of the Creator*, which he duly did. Many more documents, far too numerous to mention, range over the personal and the architectural histories, and public events, like the 2002 Bicentenary.

But the positioning of all these marvellous exhibits in this room may have to change over time. They are themselves a relic of older fashions in museums, where supplying heavy reading matter was the norm, although unlikely ever to attract the casual visitors' attention. Miller House contains the museum, and the cottage is meant, as stated, to live again as a family home. Had there been space in Miller House in which to show them, or archive them, they would have been moved already, and lack of space remains the properties' biggest problem. Property manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones envisages a far more contemporary role for the middle room, as a place where "living history" enactments can start, by both staff and visitors, in the costumes of Hugh Miller's time. In performance, visitors can learn in vivid, much more easy to imagine ways, how folk lived and worked in those days. We can also tell them a bit more now about the sanitation arrangements!

The cottage is an ever-evolving marvel, forever changing in its purpose and presentation. It is the site of more than three centuries of life in one family, in all its tragedies, and triumphs, and the birthplace of one of our greatest Scotsmen, as well as a Grade A listed historic building. For many years, it was primarily shown as a quaint old cottage, somehow strangely more important historically than the once famous man born there. In times to come, the great man will continue in the forefront of the story, set in the context of his times re-enacted.

# GHOST WALK ON HUGH'S LEGENDARY TRAIL



OUR 2015 Museum season finished with a flourish with many of Miller's scariest folk tales retold on Hallowe'en night, on, or very near, the locations where they happened.

The "ghost tour" marked a triumphant return after ten years of first-rate "living history" performer Duncan Cook, Fortrose-based director of the Timemasters Group. They performed the playlet in Miller House, A Meeting with Monsieur Agassiz, in 2005. He dedicated the tour to his late wife, Angela Lynch, who for five years worked as a senior assistant at the Museum.



A brilliantly clear, windless night favoured the expedition as Duncan took a group of some 20 parents and children on a circuit tour of Fishertown, lasting an hour and a half, and finishing at the Birthplace Cottage. Clad in black as an 18<sup>th</sup> Century merchant, in tricorn hat, flowing cape and britches, he brought thrillingly back to life the folklore in Hugh's Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland.

He managed not to frighten the children too much relating some of Miller's spookiest legends, but doing so in an affable, cautionary style. He began with the quite dreadful story of how MacLeod the innkeeper accidentally killed his own smuggler son in a fight with Revenue men in his house.

This was outside The Retreat, Church Street, which continued to be haunted by the remorseful father until late into the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Next we were taken outside the East Kirk, to relive the haunting by the devil of Saunders Munro the post.

By the shore, Duncan produced an egg, and asked for an ale-glass to be filled with water from the sea. Much laughter ensued as the woman who volunteered got her feet wet. Hugh related that "The Charm of the Egg," was a favourite Hallowe'en game of old, particularly for young women wishing to know whom they might marry. Their destiny was supposedly revealed in the shape which the white took as it unravelled in the water.

There was much less laughter on the night, and some shivering instead, when the egg white formed the shape of a funeral shroud on the surface.

Further along the shore, looking over to the parish of Nigg where the story took place, we got the Broken Promise, concerning the awful visitation a farmer's wife received after she failed, through no fault of her own, to attend to the laying out and burial of a childhood friend.

Duncan saved perhaps the most gruesome tale to the last, The Washing of the Mermaid, which also took place on the Fearn Pensinsula. A young woman watched in horror as a mermaid repeatedly washed bloodied garments by soaking them in the water and then repeatedly knocking them on a rock. This was a vision of the sudden catastrophic collapse of the ancient Fearn Abbey roof, in October 1742, killing 36 instantly and eight more soon after.



*Duncan Cook, in costume, with his audience on the streets of Cromarty*

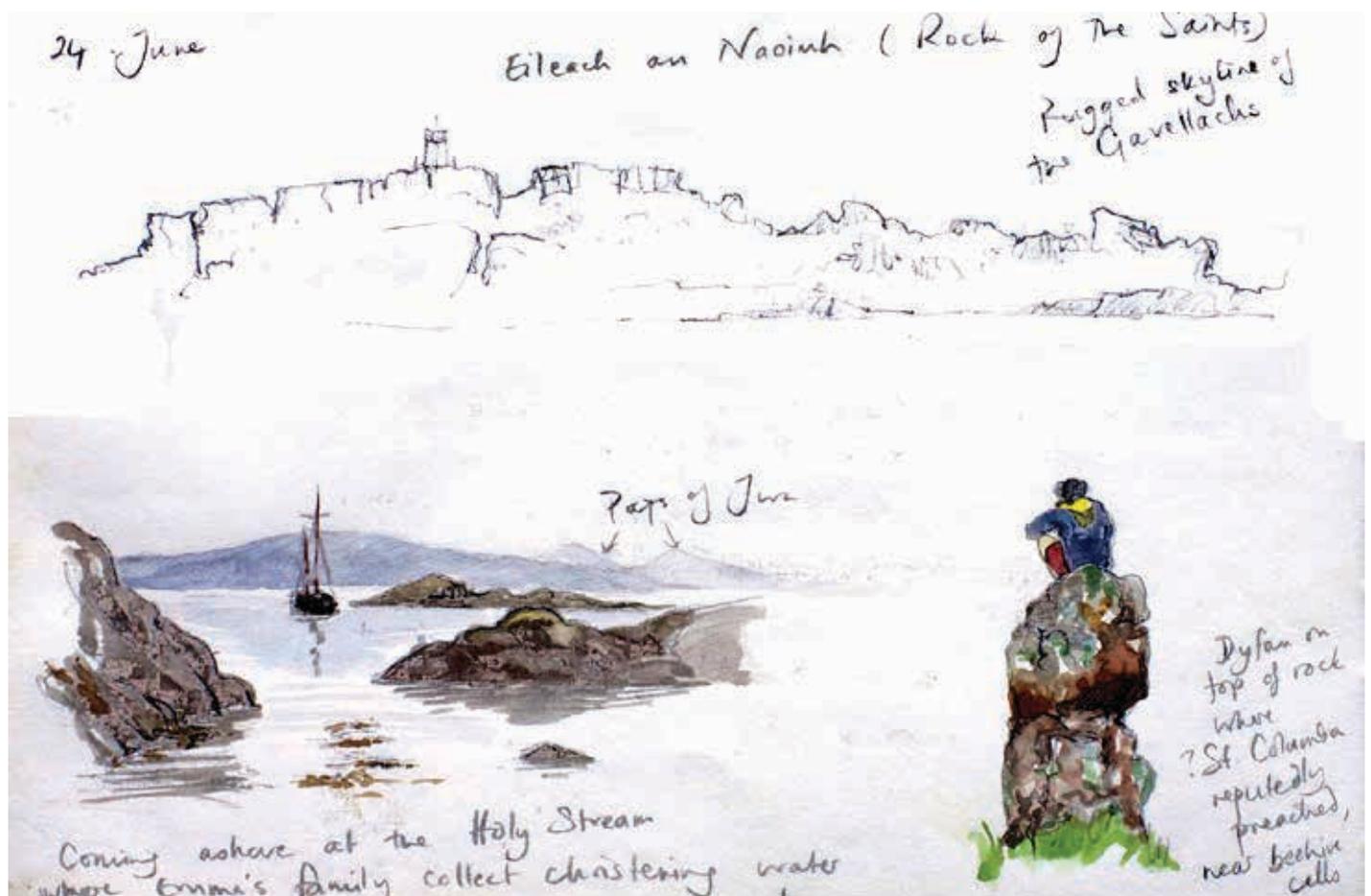
STOP PRESS

# THIRD VOYAGE IN THE OFFING?

HURRAH for the shipmates! The 'Betsey sailors' may take to the seas for a third voyage, this time to complete Hugh Miller's epic voyage of 1844, immortalised in his travel book, *The Cruise of the Betsey*. This was the exciting proposal which emerged at an end-of-November gathering at Dundreggan Lodge on Trees for Life's Glenmoriston Estate, an occasion best described as a 'Betsey reunion'.

Some dozen shipmates from the first two voyages in 2014 and 2015 took part in reminiscences and discussions about how to take forward the inspirational experiences they enjoyed, and continue the celebration of Hugh Miller's legacy.

In 2014, 14 passengers sailed, 16<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> September, aboard the traditional ketch *Leader* on the first half of Hugh's journey with his friend and Free Church minister Rev John Swanson, touching at Lochaline, Morvern Peninsula; Tobermory, Isle of Mull; the Isle of Eigg; Loch Sunart, Ardnamurchan Peninsula; and Loch Spelvie, Mull. It was followed up by a three-day festival in Cromarty, Black Isle, Hugh's birthplace (see *Hugh's News* No 23, Winter 2014).



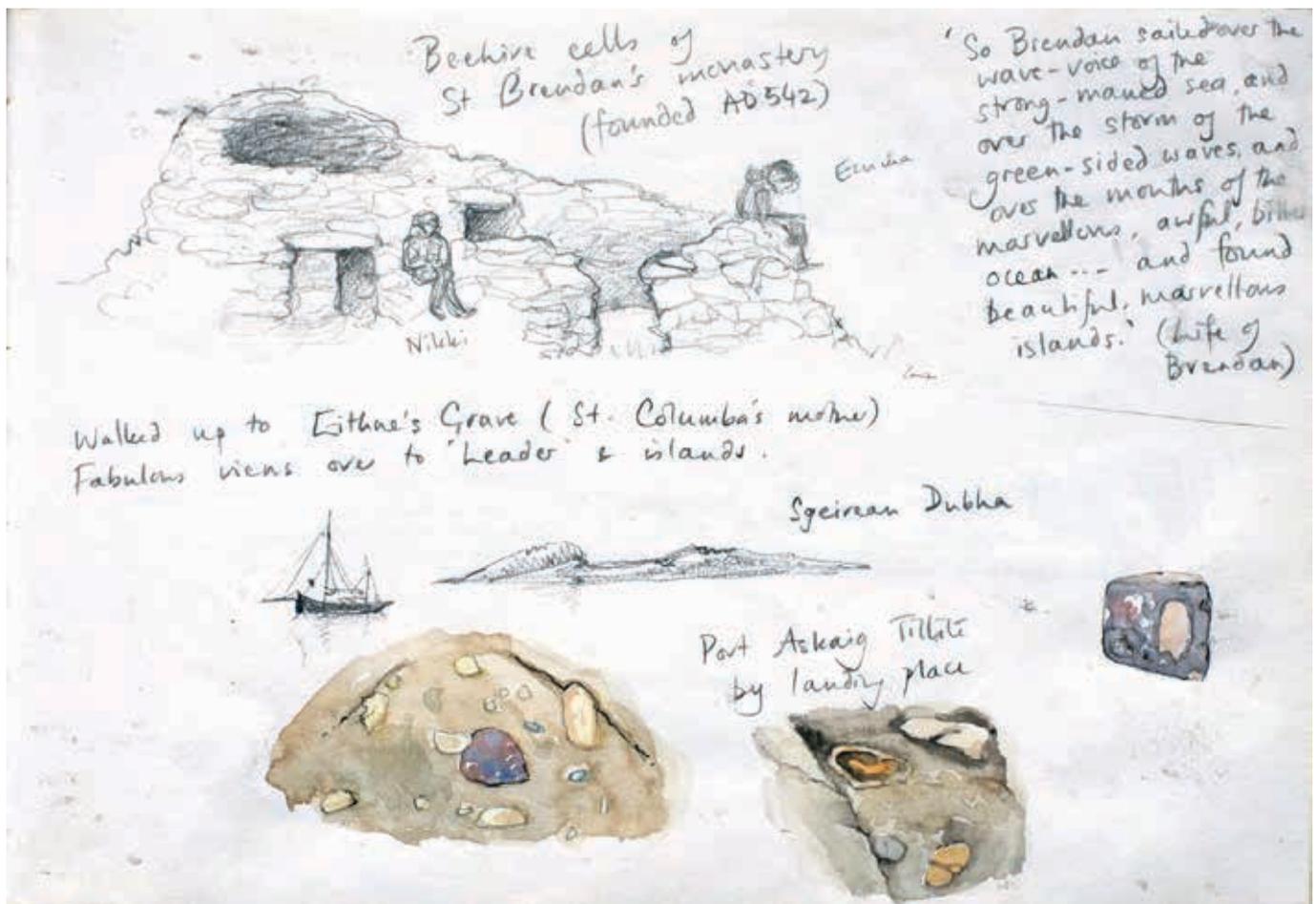
Artist Elizabeth Pickett made vivid illustrations in pencil and watercolour for each day of the voyage. Space allows only for the reproduction of her two sketches for 23rd June. We have supplied her texts, which may be too faint to read.

On the left hand page, at the top is Eileach an Naoimh (Rock of the Saints) and the rugged skyline of the Garvellachs. Bottom left reads: "Coming ashore at the Holy Stream where Emma's family (film-maker Emmy Maclaren) collect Christening water." On the right of the skyline, the Paps of Jura are faintly seen. Bottom right: Dyfan (Roberts) on top of rock where (?) St Columba preached near beehive cells.

This year, June 20<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, 13 voyagers, set sail to bear witness to the "Testimony of the Rocks: Journeys through Time," again aboard *Leader*, to explore the seas and islands off the coast of Argyll, including Jura, Oronsay, Colonsay, the Garvellachs, Shuna and finally Luing, where a ceilidh at the newly opened Atlantic Islands Centre, made a fitting finale.

Dr Joyce Gilbert, lead organiser of both trips, said the third voyage, mooted for 2017, was envisaged to round off the areas of Hugh's voyage which the first one could not reach in the time available. Hugh and the minister sailed in their little yawl, often in appalling weather, to the Isle of Rum, Isle Ornsay, the Isles of Skye, Raasay and Pabba.

We will keep readers in touch with the progress of this project, which will of course have the support of The Friends of Hugh Miller. In the meantime, we will conclude with two more of the rich contributions to the 2015 adventures. These are a couple of folk tales from Bob Pegg, and sketches by artist Elizabeth Pickett.



On the right-hand page, at top left, are beehive cells of St Brendan's monastery (founded AD 542). The adjacent text, (taken from *The Life of Brendan*) describes how Brendan "sailed over the wave-voice of the strong-maned sea, and over the storm of the green-sided waves...and found beautiful, marvellous islands." In the centre section, Elizabeth wrote: "Walked up to Eithne's grave (St Columba's mother)," and "Fabulous views over to Leader and islands." Featured is an outline of the islet Sgeirean Dubha. At the bottom are three depictions of tillite by the landing place at Port Askaig.

# ARGYLL FOLK TALES – SELECTION

*collected by Bob Pegg*

## The Cailleach Bheur

The Cailleach Bheur – the Old Thundering Woman – was born, if that's how she came into being, in the times when there were forests where there are now seas. Her fame was widespread. The Revd Charles Stewart, who contributed the 1792 entry for Strachur and Stralachlan to *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, wrote of a very large stone which was dedicated to her. The stone stood on a high ridge: ...which separates Stralachlan from Glendaruel. There is a descent from it on every side. The prospect from it is very extensive. It is called Cailleach-vear or vera. In the dark ages of superstition, it was personified, and said to have a considerable property in cattle. Cailleach-vear makes a conspicuous figure in the marvellous tales of the country people, over a great part of the West Highlands. Her residence was said to be on the highest mountains; that she could step with ease, and in a moment, from one district to another; when offended, that she caused the flood, which destroyed the corns, and laid the low grounds under water...

This gigantic woman ranged far and wide in her travels. One story says that she came originally from Norway – perhaps she was related to the Norse Giants – carrying a pannier full of rocks and earth on her shoulder. She was heading for the Scottish mainland when the strap of the pannier broke, and the contents tumbled out into the ocean, creating the Western Isles; while Ailsa Craig – the beacon rock in the Firth of Clyde – dropped through a hole in her apron. The Cailleach used to drive her goats across the rocks at the falls of Connel – her stepping stones – and she had her cheese-vats close by at Benderloch. Her horse left its hoof print on a rock on Ben Cruachan, and on the slopes of the same mountain she kept her cow, walking every morning from the Mull of Kintyre to give it water. The well was a magic one. It was covered by a massive granite slab which should only be lifted between sunrise and sunset. One warm, sunny day, after watering her cow, the Cailleach fell asleep and, when the sun set, the well was still open. Water poured out, and rushed down the slopes of Ben Cruachan to fill the glen below, and that's how Loch Awe came into being.

## The Islay Water Horse

In this story the girl bamboozles the monster with a trick that Odysseus used, 3000 years before, to outwit Polyphemus the Cyclops in Homer's *Odyssey*. The same device occurs in a Black Isle folk tale, the Fairies of Eathie Burn, which was included by Hugh Miller in *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*, published in 1835. There are other encounters with giants in folk tales collected in 19th century Argyll which echo Odysseus' blinding of Polyphemus, and it's fascinating to wonder how the ancient Greek epic fed into these modern entertainments.

The Rinns of Islay lighthouse was built by Robert Stevenson in 1825. It's on the little island of Orsay to the west of Islay, just off the Rinns peninsula. Before there was a lighthouse on Orsay, the island was used for grazing cattle, and a man and a girl had the job of tending to the beasts. One day the man went over to the mainland, and a wild storm rose up which prevented him from getting back, so the girl was left there alone. She was sitting in their hut, warming herself by the peat fire, when the place was surrounded with strange voices. She knew it couldn't be the man who had returned. She looked out of the window, thinking it might be the cattle making the racket, and a big, round pair of eyes looked back at her out of the stormy night. The door opened, and, with a whinnying laugh, the owner of the eyes entered. He was tall and broad, rough and hairy, and his face was skinless and raw.

The stranger lumbered towards the fire, and asked the girl her name. 'Mise mi Fhin', she told him. 'Me myself.' The thing grabbed hold of the girl. She picked up a ladle full of boiling water and threw it over him, and he ran off shrieking into the darkness. The girl heard a hubbub of unearthly voices asking what was the matter and who had hurt him. 'Mise mi Fhin, Mise mi Fhin!' – 'Me myself, me myself!' – cried

the monster, and his companions let out a howl of mocking laughter. When the laughter died down, the girl ran outside into the storm. She turned loose one of the cows, and then she took a stick, made a circle around herself, and lay down inside the circle. When morning came she was safe, but the cow was dead.

Footnote: in Miller's version, Jock Hossack, a young farmer, spends the night in an old meal-mill in Eathie ravine, trying to find out what had happened to a neighbour who had very recently disappeared from there without trace. He is cooking a duck for his dinner when he answers to an aggressive fairy demanding to know who he is, that he is "mysel' and mysel'," and hits back at the creature with the scalding duck. When the fairies outside ask the burnt creature who scorched him, he replies "twas mysel' and mysel'", and Jock escapes.

(Stories from Argyll Folk Tales by Bob Pegg, to be published November 2015 by The History Press).

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## KEITH LEASK AND HIS BIOGRAPHY OF HUGH MILLER

by Dr Michael A. Taylor

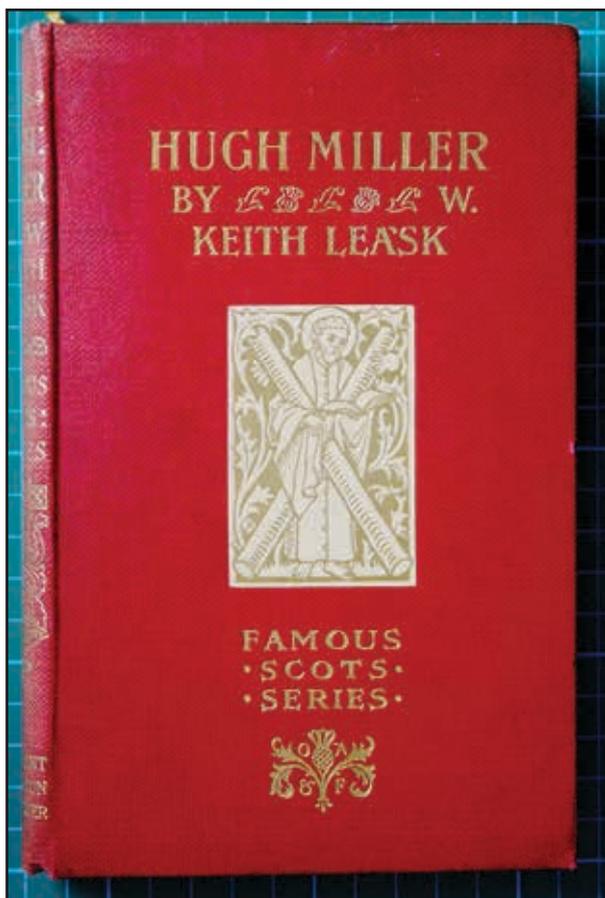
I have long owned a pretty little red biography of Hugh Miller, published in 1896, by one Keith Leask. Some time ago I had occasion to consult it for a research paper, and this raised the question of who Leask was and how seriously he could be taken as an authority on Miller. It did not take long to turn up his obituary in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* for 4<sup>th</sup> May 1925, and a longer memorial piece by his near-contemporary and (possibly) former pupil, P. J. Blair \*, in the *Aberdeen University Review* (vol. 12 (1925), pp. 230-238).

William Keith Leask was born in 1857, son of an Aberdeen lawyer. He did well in classics at Aberdeen University but further studies at Oxford did not go so well. There he gained a second class in his final examinations, damaging his ambitions for a professorship, as did his somewhat independent, irresponsible and tactless nature. Leask did become assistant to the Professor of Greek at Aberdeen in 1881 but this soon ended when a new Professor was appointed. One reason may be that Leask tried and failed to obtain the chair for himself, damaging his relationship with the University Senatus. Leask never did gain a chair, and ended up a poorly paid literary hack writing books, newspaper articles and school texts, though well regarded for the quality of his work. He also wrote much about the University and its history, in his book *Interamna borealis; being memories and portraits from an old university town between the Don and the Dee* (1917). He died unmarried in his lodgings in 1925.

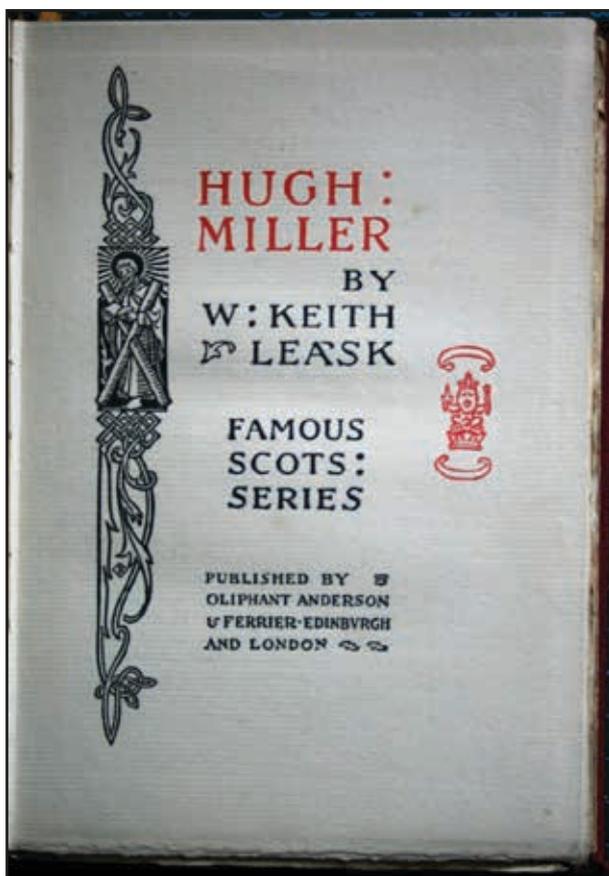
Hugh Miller was published by Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier of Edinburgh in their Famous Scots series, attractively printed on good paper in a red binding. Each book came in two versions, the normal one with black stamped cover, at 1s 6d, and a slightly larger gold-stamped one at 2s 6d as seen in an ad in the *Athenæum* for 16<sup>th</sup> May 1896 (p. 635). That must have been when the otherwise undated book appeared, as its foreword is dated April 1896, and it was reviewed in the *Athenæum* for 9<sup>th</sup> May (p. 619). The publishers plainly targeted the market for school prizes and Christmas and birthday presents, and second-hand copies often bear prize labels. My copy, illustrated here, is the de luxe edition. The standard version can be read online here: <http://archive.org/details/hughmillerleaskw00leasrich>.

Known reviews include those in the *Athenæum*, 9<sup>th</sup> May, *Dundee Courier*, 13<sup>th</sup> May, *Glasgow Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> May, *Leeds Mercury*, 6<sup>th</sup> May, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15<sup>th</sup> May, and *Scotsman*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1896. The

\* From the obituary, and W. Johnston (1906) *Roll of the graduates of the University of Aberdeen 1860-1900*, he must be Patrick James Blair (1865-1932), MA Aberdeen 1885, LL.B in law Edinburgh 1888, advocate, and Sheriff-Substitute (*Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 22 July 1932).

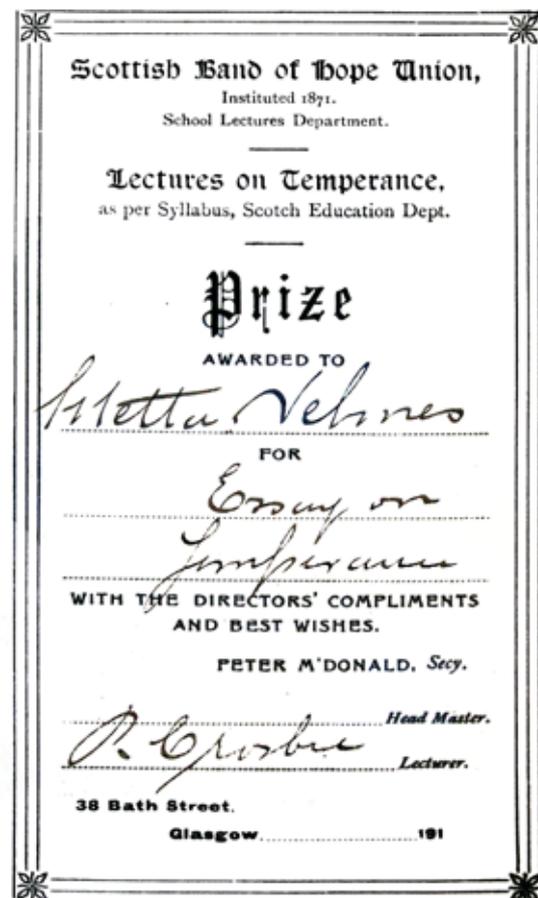


Above: Front cover of the de luxe version



Left: Title page of the de luxe version

Right: Book plate in my copy, showing that it was a prize for an "Essay on Temperance". Little Metta must be Margaretta Campbell Nelmes, born in Cathcart, Lanarkshire, in 1908, the daughter of a billiard table manufacturer and his wife. She must have been about 12 when she got this rather grown up book, but the pencil ticks on the list of Miller's books in the back suggest that some owner at least had access to a set, and might have read them. At least the book did not put her off science, for she graduated from the University of Glasgow in chemistry in 1931 (*Times*, 25<sup>th</sup> June), and eventually retrained as a midwife, passing her examination in 1940 (*Scotsman*, 10<sup>th</sup> February).



story of Miller's life which Leask told is pretty much the usual fodder. But, as one might expect from his obituaries, Leask tried to seek out new material. He had little success, and noted (usefully for us today) that Miller's personal papers (or at least most of them) had gone to Australia. Leask commented critically on Miller's autobiographical writings, and what others wrote about him. He interestingly asserted that Miller had lost little by not going to Aberdeen University as his uncles had wished, given its state at the time.

Some reviewers disliked Leask's strong Covenanter, and perhaps (in the Scots sense) Evangelical sentiment, all too apparent in an unduly long section on wider politics and kirk history, which badly breaks the thread of Miller's story. And when Leask returned to Miller proper he paid too much attention to Kirk politics and not enough, in my view, to Miller's wider writing and social comment. Leask might have inadvertently implied to his 1890s contemporaries that Miller was as dead as the religious disputes of the 1840s.

Leask also makes the mistake of a digressive discursion into science and history, and when he gets to Miller's science he focusses too much on its relationship to reli-

gion. He does redeem himself by praising *The Old Red Sandstone* as a piece of imaginative writing, and in discussing Miller's qualities as a scientific observer and as a writer. I had forgotten his valuable use of Thomas Henry Huxley's quotation about Miller's patience and sagacity as a researcher, some years before the 1902 source that I give in my biography (though the original source remains elusive; whether Huxley had written it for Leask remains an open question, especially as he died in mid-1895). Moreover, Leask, to his credit, obtained the pithy and much-quoted account of Miller by Archibald Geikie.

Leask's work is not, I think, one that can be recommended as a straightforward introduction to Miller, least of all for a schoolchild – indeed, I think it unfortunate that it should have been marketed for children's prizes. But this pretty little book has its real merits and is well worth a look for any Millerophile.

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## OBIT - ANN RIDER

by Sue Rider Busby

IN MEMORIAM : ANN DOROTHY ANGUS RIDER (1925-2015) – who was the last surviving Great Granddaughter of Hugh Miller

Ann Rider passed away on 24 November 2015, a few days before her ninetieth birthday. Her father William Miller Mackay was the fifth child of Bessie and Norman Mackay.

Ann was born in Singapore, her father being a rubber plantation manager at Tebrau estate in what was then Malaya. Ann came to Scotland at the age of seven to attend school in Aberdeen and then St Andrews, but following the outbreak of war she returned to Singapore and was sent to Australia before the fall of Singapore to complete her schooling in Melbourne. She returned to the UK in 1943, enlisted in the WRNS and was posted to Eastcote, Middlesex (an outpost of Bletchley Park). After Japan surrendered her father was freed from Changi prison and was able to return to Scotland, her parents settled in Edinburgh where Ann joined them to attend the University which is where she met her husband, Gordon. She had a busy life as the wife of a GP and also working hard in various charities and was for many years a Samaritan latterly running the branch in Northallerton, North Yorkshire.

Ann was always very proud of her heritage, and both she and Gordon were keen supporters of the Friends of Hugh Miller and attended the bi-centenary celebrations in Cromarty and Edinburgh. More recently Ann had even managed to attend the AGM in Cromarty in 2012.

She will be missed by her surviving children Sue, Treasurer of the Friends, and Don an overseas member of the Friends, and her granddaughter Ishbel, who had spent a very enjoyable few weeks working as an intern at the Cottage in 2012 .

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# LEARNING TO READ FROM THE ROCKS

Dear Martin,

Greetings from Glasgow upon return from a quite extended tour Stateside - I have been offline much of my time away, now back home and back online, so finally a moment to catch up on correspondence long overdue.

Thank you so much for sending me the most recent *Hugh's News* (No 26, Autumn 2015). I am hon-

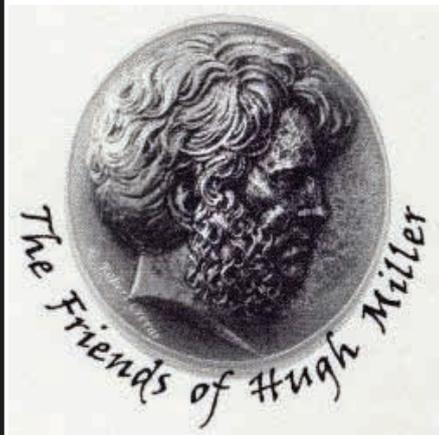
oured to be featured in this edition (*Learning to read from the rocks ps 8-10*), and it is very greatly appreciated that you included such a nice selection of material from my time in Cromarty. Still many things on my mind from my most fruitful time in Hugh's home town, and I certainly hope to return to continue further investigation.

In the meantime, I hope all finds you and yours very well, and I send warmest regards from the chilly west,

Ilana Halperin

4<sup>th</sup> December 2015

www.geologicnotes.wordpress.com



## 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.....

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Membership subscription is £15 annually, payable from 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

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