

Issue No 31
Spring 2017

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Hugh's News

Newsletter of
The Friends of Hugh Miller



StAnza Festival

POETS FOR HUGH

We have ventured furth of Cromarty again! We took to the sea off the West Coast in the “Betsey” and “Testimony” voyages of 2014 and 2015. Last year we went national alongside our partners the Scottish Geodiversity Forum with the Hugh Miller writing competition. And in the first week of March this year, we journeyed down the East Coast to St Andrews in Fife to take part in the annual poetry festival there known as StAnza. The venture was the brainchild of our management committee member Lara Reid. Having played such a big role in setting up the writing competition, she got the idea of seeking a public platform for our winning poets to put on a show at StAnza, and the festival’s organisers responded enthusiastically. This event was another part of the Friends’ sustained effort to spread Hugh’s literary and scientific legacy, which began with the Betsey voyage two and a half years ago, and we will be continuing with the further initiatives you will be hearing about at our annual meeting as described on the inside pages of this edition.

For the report on StAnza, and the poems given there, please see ps 10 to 17.

HOMOSTIUS: THE BIG FISH

An outstanding new exhibit for the Museum is the biggest example ever found of this Devonian era fish, *Homostius milleri*.

It comes from the Spittal quarry, Caithness, and the story of its discovery and journey to the Museum is related on p5 by Professor Nigel Trewin. He together with colleague Roger Jones are the donors of the cast you see here.

The slab weighs over 13 kilos. Special arrangements have been made for it to hang safely on the wall of the Learning Room in Miller House.

As well as showing as an ongoing permanent exhibit, it will be of special interest at our forthcoming geology conference, with a talk about it to be given by Roger Jones.



Homostius at Miller House.

Find us on   @friendsofmiller



THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER
INVITE YOU TO HEAR
Harpist/storyteller
HEATHER YULE
performing Hugh Miller's tales live
THE OLD BREWERY, CROMARTY
2.00pm, Saturday, 13th May 2017
ADMISSION FREE (Donations welcome)

NOTICE TO MEMBERS: THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE THE PAPERS FOR THE ELVENTH ANNUAL MEETING. PLEASE PRINT THEM OFF FROM THE EMAIL (OR BRING THE EDITION WITH YOU IF RECEIVING IT BY POST). THIS IS TO SAVE LOTS OF PAPER AND ADMIN EFFORT.

11th AGM: SECRETARY'S ANNUAL REPORT

TAKING ON OUR BIGGEST PROJECT YET

After taking on the great "Betsey" voyage and festival of 2014, and supporting the 2015 "Testimony" passage, then the writing competition last year, we are now undertaking a project which is a bigger organisational challenge than any of those.

Ever since last year's AGM decision to put it on, we have been almost wholly taken up with planning for our major geology conference in September of this year, while simultaneously supporting some important events in the arts.

THE CONFERENCE

An organising sub-committee was set up in the summer last year, consisting of our Chairman, Bob Davidson, Secretary yours truly, and Treasurer, Sue Rider Busby, supported by Nigel Trewin, Gavin Berkenheger and Liz Broumley.

We had to begin literally from scratch, settling first after considerable debate, on the conference's very name. Next came the hiring of the venue, the identification of suitable speakers, the invitations to them, the obtaining of titles for their talks, and the establishment of a dedicated page on our website. Gavin also

set up a Facebook page and a Twitter account. Audio visual aids are being hired from Cromarty Film Club and catering and accommodation arrangements have been made with local providers.

Simultaneously we have been applying for external funding. Grants have been awarded of £500 from Edinburgh Geological Association, £500 from the Cromarty Trust and £1000 from the Palæontological Association. An application is pending for £1,000 from Highland Council and £500 from the Cromarty Trust. All this took until the early spring this year.

We have one over-riding concern: To succeed in attracting a good turnout of delegates. I attended a meeting of the Highland Geological Society in March partly to publicise the event, and am writing by post to our other affiliates and every member body of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum with invitations to send delegates.

THE ARTS

On 25th September 2016, we were proud to support the first public showing at The Old Brewery of the Gold and Silver Darlings Silver quilt, the project of story-teller and fabric designer Lizzie McDougall of Conon Bridge, in which some of our own members and Cromarty residents happily participated to illustrate one of Hugh's favourite tales, *Capt Reid and the Mermaid* tale. The launch took the form of a delightful ceilidh of song and story. The Friends paid a performance and quilt production fee to Lizzie of £70. We hope that Lizzie can bring it for you to see at this meeting.

In March this year, Frieda Gostwick and I, at our own expense, took part with Lara Reid in the StAnza Poetry Festival in St Andrews, in order to support the recitals there of our poetry prize-winners. The Friends helped fund the event with a £200 contribution. It was extremely worthwhile



A panel from the Gold and Silver Darlings quilt.

to hear these poems being given to a new audience, and to see portraits of Hugh Miller, associated landscapes and these poems appearing on a digital installation performing on the walls all over the Byre Theatre, and it was touching that one of the winners, Michael Davenport subsequently donated his performance fee of £50 to The Friends.

We were delighted to receive news that the Miller family graves in The Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh, have been re-lettered at the instigation of the Lothian & Borders Geoconservation Group and the University of the Third Age, Edinburgh, and we supported this work with a donation from the Friends of £184 (see story p7).

Alix will report on some important changes at the Museum put in place over the past year, and on the donation by Friends members of one of the most remarkable fossils ever discovered, the *Homostius milleri* which features in a report in this issue (see story p5).

The Friends continue to supply the Museum with volunteers for various tasks. We have maintained an up-to-date website, with special thanks to Liz Broumley, and published four editions of *Hugh's News*, with the outstanding production services of Piers Hemy.

I would like to recommend consideration be given to donating from the NTS wish list towards the fauna sculptures which will be commissioned to adorn the wrought-iron fence which is due for installation in the Garden of Reflection, with the proviso that the creature/s chosen reflect the writings of Hugh Miller. The sum of £150 is requested per item.

Martin Gostwick

Secretary

THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER

11th ANNUAL MEETING, 13 MAY 2017

AT THE OLD BREWERY, CROMARTY

AGENDA

1. Chairman's welcome.
 2. Apologies. Minutes.
 3. Secretary's annual report.
 4. Matters arising.
 - Geology conference review
 - Second writing competition
 5. Property Manager's report
 6. Financial Statement.
 7. NTS Wish List
 8. Election of Office-bearers and management committee
 9. Next AGM & AOB
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10th AGM: MINUTES

The 10th annual meeting held on 14 May 2016 was hailed in *Hugh's News* (No 28, Summer 2016) as "our finest day," because of its overall success. It opened with the Hugh Miller National Writing Competition prize-giving ceremony, during which seven of the 12 winners present received their award of books and pens from judges Lara Reid, Simon Cuthbert and Kenny Taylor. The Friends were joint sponsors of this hugely successful venture with the Scottish Geodiversity Forum. The prose and prose winners, Jane Verburg and Justin Sales, then performed their compositions to acclaim.

This was followed by an inspiring talk from Lara Reid on "Why Miller still matters."

A financial statement showing our balance up to £5,681 was approved. Donations to the Eliza Miller headstone restoration were applauded.

Property Manager Alix Powers-Jones reported on conservation work to Miller House costing £38,000. A £500 donation from the Friends had been spent on traditional costumes for staff and visitors to perform in at the Birthplace Cottage.

It was agreed to organise a geology conference in the Autumn of 2017.

The office-bearers and management committee were re-elected unanimously, Lara Reid was voted on additionally to acclaim, to complete a committee of eight.

In the afternoon, a guided tour of Cromarty East beach by Professor Peter Scott led to the discovery of a second prize for author Jim Gilchrist, the finding of a spectacular Devonian era fossil fish.

THE BIG FISH FROM SPITTAL

Homostius milleri Traquair 1888

Spittal Flagstones, Middle Old Red Sandstone. Devonian Age (c. 385 million years old) Spittal Quarry, Spittal, Caithness. by Professor Nigel Trewin

This specimen was discovered by quarrymen lifting flagstones from bedrock in Spittal Quarry, Spittal. The quarry is worked by A and D Sutherland, and the slab containing the fossil was kept since it was recognised that it contained an unusual fossil.

The specimen was reported to me at Aberdeen University, and I visited the quarry on 12 February 2010 and recognised the fossil as a specimen of a fish known as *Homostius*. This was an 'armoured fish' belonging to an extinct group known as *Placoderms*. The preserved armour is 66cm long and 40cm wide, thus the fish has a flattened shape with the eyes on top of its head. In life it was possibly a filter feeder, processing the surface waters of a lake for algae and small arthropods such as freshwater shrimps. Another possibility is that it was a bottom-dwelling scavenger. It is assumed that the fish had a soft tail and fins, but they have never been found preserved. The flagstones in which it was found were deposited as mud and silt in a large lake known as Lake Orcadie that covered much of Caithness and Orkney in the Middle Devonian period.

Following discovery at the quarry the fossil fish was outdoors and on a large thick slab that probably weighed about a ton. Mark Mancini of A and D Sutherland located the counterpart slab, and had both cut to a reasonable size, but they were still too heavy to lift into a car. Mark kindly arranged to have them transported to Aberdeen for further study and preparation.

The flagstone had split along the inner surface of the dorsal armour of the fish, giving good detail of some internal structures. It was clear that the bone was well preserved, and that it would be a major undertaking to prepare the specimen to display the external surface. In October 2011 the specimen arrived on two heavy pallets in Nigel Trewin's driveway



The big fish from Spittal arrives in Aberdeen.

in Aberdeen. The first task was to reduce the thickness of both slabs so they could be moved indoors. The slabs could not be safely split, so a rock saw was used to cut a grid on the surface and remove the blocks between the saw cuts with a hammer and chisel. This reduced the thickness of each slab to about 5 cm, and enabled them to be moved into the garage.

Following consultations with researchers it became clear that this could be a scientifically important specimen, that would, if well prepared, reveal new features of the anatomy of this genus of fish, and create an impressive museum display item. It is probably the largest and most complete specimen of this species known. Discussion continued on the best way to prepare the specimen. Potential cost and the availability of a skilled preparator were major factors.

In June 2014 Roger Jones took on the financial burden and undertook to have the specimen prepared by an expert preparator. Chris Moore did the preparation which took an aggregate of 6 months full time work. It was decided to stick the two slabs back together, because the bone needed support during preparation, and some bone was on each slab. High quality casts were taken of the internal surfaces before they were reunited. Chris Moore then prepared the dorsal surface of the fish creating a simply stunning specimen.

Only very minor restoration was required, such as where a saw cut from the quarry pavement saw cut a few centimetres into the head. From the prepared specimen a high quality mould was created from which 10 replicas in Herculite casting plaster have been made for display purposes. The replicas have been coloured to match the original by Tracy Marler and Bryony Jones. The replicas show excellent detail, even of the finest bone ornament, and are difficult to distinguish from the original without close examination.

This specimen shows some differences from the type specimen of *H. milleri*, and further study will determine if the differences are important enough to merit a new specific name. It also appears that the animal suffered an injury during life resulting in distortion of the bone structure on one side. Further preparation of the specimen may be possible to reveal details of the underside of the head and jaws.

Apart from the scientific interest, this fish species is of historical interest as it features in '*Footprints of the Creator, or The Asterolepis of Stromness*' published in 1849 by Hugh Miller, the Cromarty stonemason. Hugh actually confused parts of two unrelated fish, thinking they both belonged to his '*Asterolepis*', but we now know that the scales and jaw he described in the book do not belong to his '*Asterolepis*'. The fish was eventually redescribed as a species of *Homostius* by Traquair in 1888, and given the specific name *milleri* in honour of Hugh Miller.

ASTEROLEPIS FOOTNOTE

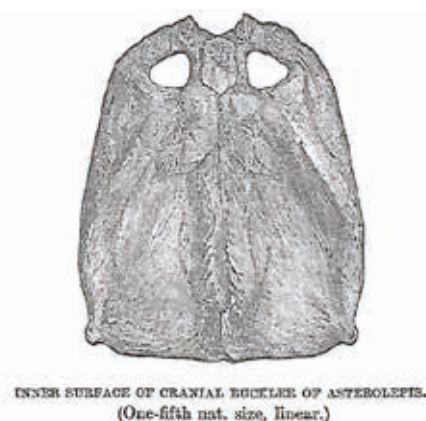
This Devonian creature and Hugh Miller's analysis of it lay at the centre of a debate raging in the 1840s and 50s, between theories of evolution and belief in divine creation, not only in the scientific community but among the public at large.

Hugh Miller sought in his book *Footprints of the Creator* to cite his *Asterolepis* find as a species which could refute Jean-Baptist Lamarck's "theory of development." This theory had been further propounded in a best seller, *Vestiges of Creation*, written anonymously by Edinburgh publisher Robert Chambers a few years earlier. Miller called the development hypothesis "a heresy against Christianity." Hugh founded much of his scientific argument on the sheer size of this fish compared with others of the same era, in his extensive description in *Footprints* (ps 66 - 105). He could assert as undeniable truth that they were comparatively "giants not dwarfs," but this fact could not of itself disprove Lamarck.

The Spittal *Homostius* is much bigger than anything Hugh found. A specimen of Miller's *Asterolepis* of Stromness can be viewed in the top floor Geology Room in Miller House for comparison, and his illustration in *Footprints* is reproduced here.

Charles Darwin settled the argument in favour of evolution conclusively for most when he published his theory of natural selection in *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

MG



GRANGE MILLER GRAVES RESTORED

The Friends were pleased and honoured to be invited to support the restoration of the Miller family graves in the Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh, which has now been completed.

The invitation came from Andrew McMillan of the Lothian and Borders Geoconservation Group, who are, like us, an affiliate of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum. The work, carried out by monumental masons Abercorn (Edinburgh) Ltd, of cleaning the stones and repainting the letters in black, was performed both on Hugh Miller's gravestone and also that of his son Hugh Miller Jun. given that Hugh Jun. was a distinguished Survey geologist. Only the first three lines of the Hugh Jun. stone could be painted as the rest of the inscription is indecipherable. The quotation was for a total of £384.00 (inclusive of V.A.T at 20%). The Edinburgh U3A (University of the Third Age) Geology Group contributed £200, and the Friends covered the balance of £184.

Letters repainted are:

HUGH MILLER
DIED 24TH DECEMBER 1856
AGED 54 YEARS

and

HUGH MILLER
F.R.S.E.
BORN 15TH JULY 1850
DIED 8TH JANUARY 1896

Hugh Junior's gravestone is to the left of his father's, and that of his older brother William and sister Elizabeth (Bessie), still clearly legible, lies to the right.

It hardly needs saying that this was a most appropriate project to be associated with, given that about a quarter of our total membership are family descendants, some of whom we were able to consult in advance.

MG



Miller stones:- Before



Miller stones:- After

ANOTHER BIG SHAKE-UP UNDER WAY

A SECOND major make-over of two rooms in the Museum buildings is being undertaken which will see profound changes in their character, atmosphere and purpose. They promise to make visits to the Museum in 2017 and beyond like nothing which has gone before.

In our last edition (*Hugh's News* No 30, Winter 2017) we reported on the creation of a Learning Space in the Miller House ground floor right room, which is the first visitors see after passing through reception. The display case there was removed to another NTS property, and some of its contents redistributed in the upstairs Edinburgh Room case.

Now, a further reorganisation has seen highly significant alterations to the interpretation of the Miller House Parlour, and, soon to get under way, to the upstairs middle room of the Birthplace Cottage. In summary, the Parlour now holds Miller's bank desk, while the Cottage space is to become a changing room for visitors.

All the changes come within property manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones' ambition to transform the Museum buildings into a centre for "lifelong learning," as she outlined them to staff and volunteers on a pre-season tour of the property on January 19th.

The opportunities for visitors to dress up and role play in the Cottage are to be supported by the introduction of live story-telling ("folk tales by the fireside") by actor and producer Duncan Cook on Wednesday afternoons. These will take place in the Cottage kitchen, the very place where Hugh first picked up his legendary tales. Duncan's Ghost Walks will also continue for another season, and he is planning a round Cromarty history tour.

Upstairs the middle room is being converted into a bedroom/changing room in which visitors of all ages can dress up. The costumes for which The Friends donated £500 in 2016 are all being stored there, ready for instant use. They include caps and aprons for girls, and breeches for the boys.

The albums of correspondence between Miller and his peers, and several of the Cottage visitor books are being removed to archive, but the conditions for studying these documents were far from ideal, and they will remain available on request for those with special interests. The important Royal Commission of Ancient and Historical Monuments drawings and interpretative texts on the Cottage's history as a building will remain where they are, as will Hugh's own original sketch of the Cottage drawn in 1851. The aim will be to make this space a focal point for creating living, interactive history, helping the place come alive.

The tour began in Miller House. When we reached the parlour, I saw that the period piano had sadly been removed, and replaced by the bank desk from the ground floor right. I pointed out that the room had been the family's actual parlour, and that this was where Lydia and the family would have enjoyed her playing, and performing for their visitors. The handsome piano was built in Edinburgh in 1814, and thus contemporary with the Millers. I stated my opinion that the presence of the bank desk in its place had ruined the ambience of the room.



The bank desk and chest now sitting in the Miller House Parlour under the portrait of Hugh with his daughter Harriet.



The mat outside the entrance to the Cottage.



Cromarty Open Studios probably had the finest entry to the Window on the World exhibition at the end of last year.

When we reached the Birthplace Cottage entrance, I observed on the step outside, and on the inside of the front door, two mats in some artificial material, which I noted were incompatible with the historic nature of the building and its surroundings.

I subsequently notified my points about these matters to Alix in writing, undertaking that I would print her responses, and here they are:

PIANO

"My dilemma is that with the change of the ground floor display room into a room for learning, complete with comfort heating, I needed to place Hugh Miller's own bank desk and box (our only 2 examples of furniture original to Miller) somewhere in the building where its environmental conditions would be protective and beneficial.

"In consultation with our conservator and the head of collections, they supported my opinion that fluctuating temperatures in the ground floor room would have threatened the integrity of the wooden furniture, causing it to warp and split, so that leaving the desk and box in this learning space was not viable. Of the choice of the remaining rooms in Miller House, the parlour seemed most fitting in terms of style and content. Replacing the square piano with the desk and box ensured that the parlour didn't become too crowded with furniture. The square piano was on a lapsed long loan from a family in the Midlands, and is being returned by the Trust to its owners.

"Learning in all its forms is the museum's raison d'être. The new learning space offers all our visitors the opportunity to take Miller at his word that "Life itself is a school". Now that we have lost the space in the parlour for temporary displays I am delighted to be able to tell you that the learning space is gaining a notice board and it is here that our new temporary displays will be on show. It would be most fitting to have something from the Friends as the first temporary exhibition in this room."

DOOR MATS

"The doormats, I admit are not the most beautiful items, but their function to draw water and collect grit from the soles of shoes, is a preventive conservation measure and has already proved to reduce the ingress of water and particulates into the buildings. Their installation by our conservator has been, and continues to be, beneficial to the buildings and our collections."

The tour concluded with a look at some of the splendid entries to the 2016/17 Window on the World entries for the gable end window of the Cottage.

Alix and myself have continued to co-operate and collaborate in furthering Millers' cause. Alix will be delivering an annual report as usual at our AGM on May 13th, and is doing her utmost to facilitate our geology conference in September. We intend to provide material for the Learning Room notice board.

In other developments, The NTS London Members Centre has donated another £1000 towards the wrought iron fence and gate which will be a landscape feature in the Garden of Contemplation beside Lydia Garden.

A remarkable £5000 grant from the Royal Society has been awarded for a collaborative programme on the theme *"Joined by the water – observational legacies of Citizen Science"* which the Museum is undertaking in conjunction with the Cromarty Courthouse Museum, and the University of Aberdeen Lighthouse Field Station. It will celebrate *"Local Heroes,"* Hugh Miller and George Romanes.

Romanes (1848-1894) is no doubt of great relevance to the field station's work on dolphins and seals, since he was an evolutionary biologist specialising in animal intelligence, and a great friend and colleague of Charles Darwin.

Members and visitors will no doubt be very interested to assess all the changes when they visit the Museum this year.



SERMONS IN STONES

Martin Gostwick recounts a memorable event with Hugh Miller at its heart

IN St Andrews, the handsome Fife university town, matters took a decidedly poetical turn in the first week of Spring.

This was the setting for an international poetry festival, known simply as StAnza, now in its twentieth year since first conception, and this year it was Hugh Miller's turn to be among the writers showcased.

Lara Reid, organiser of our 2015/16 Miller national writing competition, gratefully secured from StAnza's organisers a platform for the competition's poetry prize-winners to perform their work, together with a visual installation, and a talk by our distinguished author member, James Robertson, under the overall title "*After Hugh Miller.*"

All week, from March 1st to 5th, the magnificent visual installation ran on the walls of every floor in the Byre Theatre, the festival's hub in Abbey Street, featuring the winning poems, together with pictures of fossils, landscapes, portraits and others' writings.

It was exciting that hundreds of the public, both participants and audiences, could see, all day, every day for five days, the striking 1843 calotype photograph of Hugh posing as a stonemason, alongside some of the quotes from his works, as well as the 21st century poetry he inspired.

There could not have been better sustained public exposure for the still not well enough known Cromarty man, all around the ever busy cafe, bar and restaurant, as well the upper floors.

On Saturday, March 4th, five of our poets performed their works before a full house in the theatre's Conference Room, and poem by the sixth winner, Kenneth Steven, was broadcast on the digital installation. The six were Justin Sales, Kenneth Steven, Michael Davenport, Jim Mackintosh, Elizabeth Pickett, and Annabelle Fuller. We proudly publish their works today, apart from Justin's epic *Romer's Gap*, which appeared in *Hugh's News* No 28 Summer 2016.

Their stories of how they came to discover Hugh's eloquence were as moving as the poems themselves. Most of them first came across him by accident or coincidence, hitherto unaware of his existence.

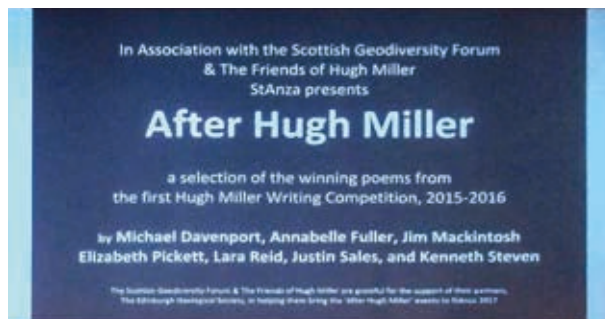
Angus Miller, chairman of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, which sponsored the competition with the Friends, justly paid tribute to Lara Reid for setting up and chairing this wonderful occasion, especially as she had only just begun recovering from a serious operation.

The climactic event of the day was the afternoon address by James Robertson to a sold-out audience in the Town Hall. His was an enthralling account, in some passages delightfully humorous, of how Hugh progressed from a not very inspiring poet to becoming one of the greatest Scottish prose writers of the 19th Century.

He ended with a quote from one of Hugh's lectures, published in *Sketch-book of Popular Geology*, here reproduced, slightly abridged:

"It is said that modern science is adverse to the exercise and development of the imaginative faculty. But is it really so? ... Whenever a truly great poet arises, - one that will add a profound intellect to a powerful imagination - he will find science not his enemy, but an obsequious caterer and a devoted friend. He will find sermons in stones in a few broken scaurs of clay, a few fragmentary shells, and a few green reaches of the old coast line,... in sublime ocean, the broad earth, or the blue firmament and all its stars."

Sermons in stones, lessons and inspirations which we can gather from the natural world, could well be the "theme tune" of a second competition. Watch this space!



of rocks in inundated darkness

by Annabelle Fuller
(under 16s winner)

*each burnished flagstone sits steady,
unperturbed by shuffling scrapes of my old
boots.*

*yellow sandstone cliffs glare down,
abrupt and harsh, ruffians cloistered in imposing
grandeur, casting gloom over the plucky flags.*

*no house can sleep beneath this twilight
murk, no chimney-breaths below the airless
umbra.*

*morasses lie low,
deep, and black...
thick and viscous;
peaty lamentations.
sorrow bubbling.*

*above - precarious spots,
the hopeful grass that dares to grow,
take root in treacle misery.
red sandstone tries to raise its burning head.*

*looking on: the master stone,
unhewable,
unknowable,
a solid mass, colossus,
gatepost to the gods.*

*shrinking away, timid,
the baby caves of man.
dug up, two tiny squares,
plunging deep into the lonely
earth. mosses grow, cling to flinty
sides,
stony pillow, boulder bed, divan of feather pebbles.*

*then thunder growls a warning, summoning clouds.
grey with misery, they collect as one, a seething mass of expectation.
wind gales drop and rise,
crowding sequestered valley caverns.
air warm brooding heavy maternal.
blackness encumbers,
water dashing stones turned dark and cold.
buffeting the wild heather,
endlessly stampeding green grasses.*

*it batters down upon my lonely
cell. blanket sky-drenched,
stones whispering their secrets.*



Annabelle Fuller

"AFTER HUGH MILLER" POETRY READING

Introduction by Lara Reid

Some of Lara's address was contained in her talk to the 2016 Friends AGM, but we think it well worth reproducing here.

The Scottish author Ali Smith once stated: "*The place where the natural world meets the arts is a fruitful, fertile place for both.*"

She was actually referring to an art gallery and space dedicated to those who explore natural sciences through the medium of visual art and sculpture. To my mind, this quote could be equally attributed to the writings, and indeed the life, of the Scottish geologist and folklorist, Hugh Miller.

His love of the outdoors, his fascination with geology and landscape, and his passion for literature, story-telling, folklore and poetry appear to feed off each other, resulting in 'fruitful, fertile' prose that still speaks volumes to us today.

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition began life as a conversation in the car on the way back from the Isle of Arran between Angus Miller – chair of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum – and myself. It was September 2015, and between us we concocted a plan to run a small competition with the aim of promoting Scotland's geological heritage to a wider audience. We chose Miller's work as the inspiration behind the competition – why? Well, Miller was writing at a time where science as a whole was on the up; the Victorians were fascinated by scientific discovery, by understanding and absorbing every possible detail, and at the peak of his career, Miller was a master of communicating the science of geology to the general public.

His prose is poetic, jam-packed full of imagery and metaphor, and his sense of perception and attention to detail is quite extraordinary. As I read his work more widely in the run up to the launch of the writing competition in October 2015, his own enthusiasm for his subject fuelled my own. Miller's prose contains some magical elements, carefully and deliberately chosen, to draw in an audience of all ages and from all walks of life – just as the results of the Hugh Miller Writing Competition have shown us.

First and foremost, Miller was an explorer – he was always '*On the Road*'; someone who yearned to be outdoors, tramping the coastlines, "*an explorer of caves and ravines... a climber among rocks,*" Miller's enthusiasm and excitement for what he could find and learn whilst out walking is infectious. He implores us to '*learn to make a right use of your eyes*', and spent days painstakingly reconstructing his beloved Devonian fish from the fossil fragments he found on his travels. And this is where geology can become so inspiring - it takes you off the beaten track, leads you to the unexpected. As you walk faultlines, dykes, ridgeways and rock lines, ancient plate boundaries and the remnants of volcanoes, you're literally tracking deep time over the landscape. You're bound less by well-trodden pathways and more by a kind of '*trilobite sight*', as the writer Robert MacFarlane calls it.

The judging of the competition was completed in the spring of 2016, and we were astonished and delighted by the quality of the work.

Winners:

First:	Justin Sales, Romer's Gap
Second:	Kenneth Steven, A Different Kind of Light
Joint third:	Jim Mackintosh, Old Is Tomorrow
	Michael Davenport, Pterichthyodes milleri
Highly commended:	Elizabeth Pickett, Every Rolled Pebble a Casket
Under 16:	Annabelle Fuller, Of Rocks in Inundated Darkness

Justin Sales's ambitious work Romer's Gap was judged to bring Miller up to date, and retain much of his spirit as both a geologist and writer. We have already published his poem (Hugh's News No 28, Winter 2016). Do read it again, and enjoy its lovely twist at the end, promising that both fossilized remains and the written word have a chance of "living forever."

Kenneth Steven, based in Aberfeldy is a prolific author, both of novels and poetry. Michael Davenport, is a former teacher from East Lothian, who has recently published a number of poetry booklets including 'Fish Alive', 'Tell Me About Them' and 'The Science of Lives'. He is particularly interested in writing poetry about science and the lives of scientists. The judges felt his poem 'Pterichthyodes milleri' was a powerful piece of poetry which explored interesting links between the separate yet connected legacies left by the fossils Miller discovered, the man himself, and his written texts.

Jim MacKintosh, a Perthshire based poet who has published five collections, the latest of which *The Rubicon of Ash* includes his prize winning Hugh Miller poem *Old is Tomorrow*. He also recently won an Award in the Scots language section at the Wigtown Book Festival and is a member of the Soutar Writers Group. He is also the Poet in Residence for St Johnstone Football Club. His passion away from football, is the landscape and the continuing interaction between humanity and its surroundings - indivisible in many ways. This is what attracted Jim to the Competition - Hugh Miller's unswerving belief in this common past and responsibility for our future.

Elizabeth Pickett spent ten years working as a field geologist all over Scotland for the British Geological Survey. She is now based in Northumberland and is a freelance writer, editor and illustrator, specialising in the natural and cultural landscapes of northern England and Scotland. Her selection of haiku reminded the competition judges of turning over pebbles on a beach – a wonderful collection of clever, concise images which take the reader from one side of the country to another through fragments of geology.

I am particularly grateful to Annabelle Fuller, a young poet from West Yorkshire, who made it all the way up here from Leeds today. She has won various poetry prizes, has read at Ilkley Literature Festival and Oxford University Church and has had work displayed in the V&A and Sigmund Freud museums. She admits that when she chose to enter the Competition she had never actually heard of Miller, but after researching him she thought that stone could be quite an interesting topic on which to write a poem. Her piece is written mostly in response to Chapter 15 of Miller's 'Rambles of a Geologist' - his descriptions of the natural landscape and man's effect on it were really inspiring. She won the under-16 poetry category of the competition.

And finally, keep your eyes peeled for the second Hugh Miller Writing Competition – if I have my way, it will launch in October of this year, running until March 2018.



Byre cafe



Miller poems audience



Tetrapod panel



Great author James Robertson meets budding poet Lara Reid

Every rolled pebble a casket . . .

by Elizabeth Pickett

(from *The Cruise of the Betsey* by Hugh Miller, 1858)

*Desert lakes stacked high
tell Orcadian sagas
on flags of red-gold.*

*Slow Archaean birl
of pyroxene and feldspar
captured in Assynt.*

*Glimmering chlorite
born in the Caledonides
slumbers in green beds.*

*Rippled sea-grey silk hewn
from Atlantic islands
skims the still water.*

*Silver graptolites
write of lost lapetus in
a crumbling cleuch.*

*Broken magma road
stretches darkly back to Mull
stitching the Border.*





Elizabeth sketching

A different kind of light

by Kenneth Steven

To climb out of the known
into the moorland's empty miles;
where sun and shadow meet
and the only elements the ones
that first began this world:
wind and water, rock and light.

You crouch beside the loch,
out of the bullying of the breeze -
and nothing might have changed
since the beginning:
a smear of brightness smiles the water,
before going back to grey.

Somewhere unseen the sadness of a bird
a single song in the hugeness of the sky,
and suddenly you know you do not matter
here beyond the normal and the everyday,
the old enslavement of the hours -

you have escaped to breathe
a different kind of light.

Pterichthyodes milleri

by Michael Davenport

A specimen sits in glass-cased silence.

But I hear the clink, clink of his hammer and chisel, clear like a stonechat in the morning air.

Miller, in his search for fossils,

an explorer of ravines, loiterer along sea-shores, climber among rocks, labourer in quarries.

He splits a nodule to reveal the first example of a 'winged-fish' from the Old Red Sandstone.

I opened it with a single blow and there lay the effigy

of a creature, fashioned out of jet, two 'arms' articulated at the shoulders, head lost in the trunk, long angular tail.

Its armoured plates remind him of a turtle.

In *My Schools and Schoolmasters* he describes his life in Cromarty, family history, education, work as a stonemason, fascination with geology. To Miller fossils were *Footprints of the Creator* that he reproduced in detailed diagrams.

He believed in successive creations by the deity.

A Cromarty churchyard: cold echoes of his trade. Miller carves the headstone of his child, Eliza.

The last time he ever put chisel on stone, his wife reported. Years later, different reverberations:

alone at home he shoots himself.

Despair from religious doubt? Fear of brain disease?

The National Museum: *Beginnings, Life in the Mid-Devonian.*

A sandstone slab, small fish fossil secretive through rise and fall of species, mass extinctions, the appearance of reptiles, mammals, advent of *Homo sapiens* – until released by Miller.

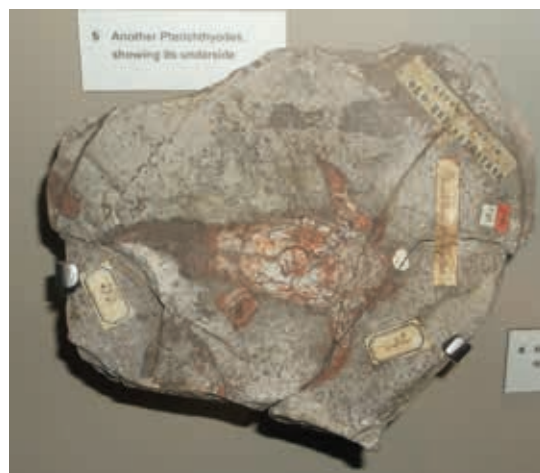
I focus on the label *Pterichthyodes milleri* and see a symbiosis, two existences confirmed by the power of naming.

Eons between the lives joined in this binomial. I whisper *Pterichthyodes milleri*, a 'winged-fish' swims in warm seas and Miller moves clear

of tragedies and struggles. He's part of a community

of discovery and the mystery of how, through transient beings, the world begins to comprehend itself.

(Joint third place)



OLD IS TOMORROW

by Jim MacKintosh

You can see it clearly, if you allow yourself, to breathe out
for the briefest of moments away from the grub
that befuddles our imagination, the digital bleed of information.

*life itself is a school
and Nature
always a fresh study*

layers of past generations
mulch of past milleniums
the openings, the chasms
the marks of ancient furrows

successive soils laid bare in stratified gravel, moraines of memory unpicked
by him, to be scooped up, understood - learning
the memorial of time, a clock ticking past our fragile existence barely
a thin layer of history visible, relevant - brushed
by the frequent eddy of tides where humanity shifted along the shore
and in that shallow glimpse of our past, man
emptied his mouth of gravel and found the plough to till his story.

*and that the man
who keeps his eyes
and his mind open
will always find fitting*

How long have we stumbled and understood nothing? Not him.
He walked with a steady pace: noticed the difference,
even a section of a few feet, our two lines of pointless text message lost
where in that time he would find an archipelago
of islands, brushed by frequent icebergs, and the lift of creatures
sub-arctic molluscs, sand floods, a belief
in all that's left under our feet, belongs in our minds, in our imaginations

*though it may be
hard schoolmasters
to speed him
on his lifelong education*

I am sure of this - Hugh Miller's stride was unbroken, in seeing our story.

His footprints apparent today in the unravelling
of our tomorrows, the unfurling coil of our layers, the unlocking of ourselves
to place fresh words on the shelf next to his.

Note: The words in italics are the last four lines from Hugh Miller's book, My Schools and Schoolmasters.

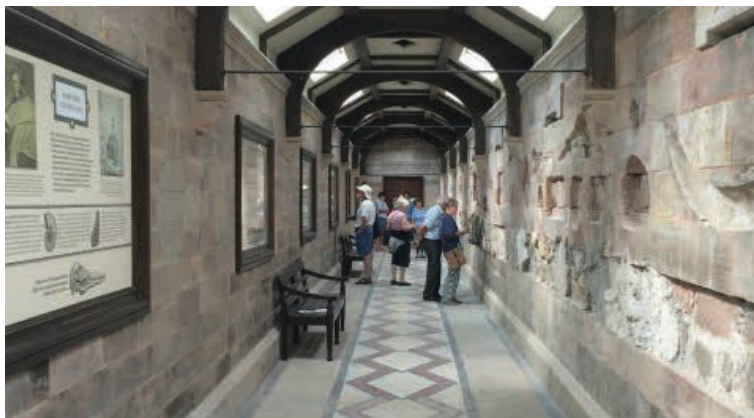
A FORGOTTEN MUSEUM REBORN

The extraordinary story of the re-emergence after over 100 years of a creation museum inspired by Hugh Miller is narrated by Daniel Atherton, gallery interpretation officer.

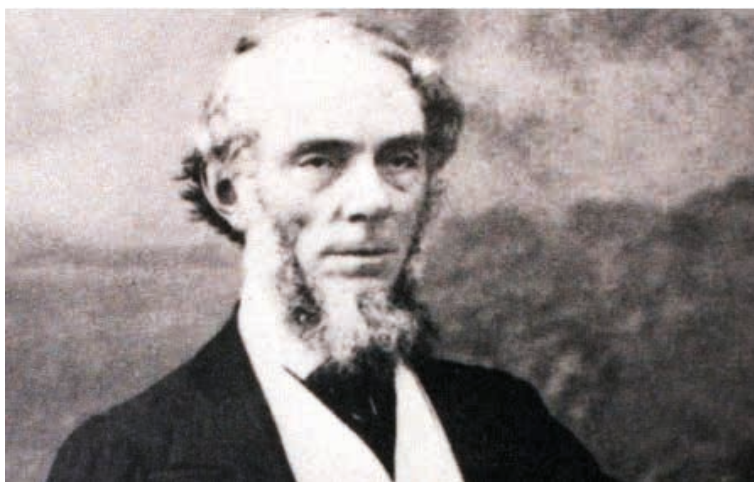
The Geological Gallery at Biddulph Grange Garden, Staffordshire had long been an oddity in a garden of botanical endeavour and structural daring. A hallway one-hundred feet in length it served as a workshop throughout most of the twentieth century during the time Biddulph Grange acted as an orthopaedic hospital. Its former fossil display was considered inconsequential and left to degrade and disappear.

Only when a local geologist from nearby Keele University was told about the place did some recognition of its importance begin to arise. Dr John Stanley entered the Gallery in the 1970s, seemingly the first person with a geological eye to enter the space in nearly a century. He immediately recognised the need to rescue what little remained. Ten fossils from the display were removed, all that remained from a once diverse collection of fossils, strata, minerals and maps. Fossils having been made safe, the Gallery once again was forgotten, still part of private hospital land, and it wasn't until 1989 when the National Trust took responsibility for the restoration of the gardens that the Gallery became relevant once again and it was another twenty-five years before the Gallery has been able to take centre stage.

James Bateman (1811-1897) constructed Biddulph Grange Gardens over twenty years. Given the land by his father as a mining prospect he instead made the place his home developing a remarkable compartment garden that displayed fine botanical specimens framed in dramatic set piece displays. A Chinese garden, an Italian parterre, an Egyptian pyramid, an avenue of enormous Wellingtonia trees, the garden was created as a showground for international botany. Bateman was particularly interested in orchids and gained his admittance to the Royal Society as the result of successful plant-hunting trips he funded in Central America and the production of the *Orchidaceae of Mexico and Guatemala* in 1837.



The gallery



Joseph Bateman



China Spring in the Grange garden

Geological interest came to Bateman much later. Despite his attendance at Oxford in the 1830s during the height of William Buckland's presence there and his friendship with Professor Richard Owen, first struck up when they met at the Great Exhibition, little evidence of geological interest is present in archival sources. Instead it seems that a publication harmonising geology with the creation story was the draw for Bateman, allowing him to reconcile his evangelical Protestantism with cutting edge science.



Day III of Genesis gone missing



Ammonite being replaced

Quite how Bateman came across the work of Hugh Miller is not known, though it was presumably the famous publication *The Testimony of the Rocks* that drew Bateman's eye. Within a year of the book's release Bateman referenced it as a vital influence for his lecture titled "*The Mosaic Vision of Creation: or Genesis and Geology Compared*". On December 12th 1857 he lectured at the Town Hall in Hanley (now one of the towns of Stoke-on-Trent) to the Church of England Young Men's Society. Bateman utilised his scientific friends and acquaintances to create a spectacular display by illustrating the talk with "specimens and drawings, and six large pictorial views, or ideal representations of the six days or epochs of Creation by Mr [Benjamin] Waterhouse Hawkins". Bateman had developed a professional friendship with Waterhouse Hawkins and Professor Richard Owen earlier in the decade when he regularly visited the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace. The aim of Bateman's talk was quite clear. Ever since William Buckland had caused bitter controversy by questioning the attribution of fossils to the Noachian deluge and stating the earth had been in existence for millions of years, previous efforts to reconcile "the antagonism of Scripture and geology" had failed. Bateman though believed he had the answer, considering three propositions:

- "1. That the earlier scenes of our planet's history were exhibited to Moses in a kind of sacred diorama, comprising six successive acts or visions each of which lasted for an entire day.*
- 2. That on each successive day Moses beheld a miniature representation of the characteristics of an indefinite but protracted epoch.*
- 3. That the epochs of geology as portrayed by their characteristic fossils, correspond with the epochs portrayed in Genesis."*

This third point was particularly reliant on the work of Miller and would within 5 years manifest itself into a Geological Gallery portraying the geological elements within their corresponding scriptural days of Creation.

Bateman's talk was repeated locally several times and his use of Miller as an influence was always noted in the press, indeed the *Staffordshire Advertiser* recognised Miller's central influence in 1858: "we may observe that the views set forth by Mr Bateman are mainly those of the late lamented Hugh Miller... wherein it is endeavoured to substitute for the "Mosaic days" indefinitely long periods and to prove that those periods correspond with the assigned geological epochs."

The construction of the Geological Gallery is not noted in archives or press until its completion and public opening in August 1862. Despite the major developments in geological and religious thought during this short period (most notably the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* and the controversies of the Wilberforce – Huxley debate) the Gallery does not touch on these developments. Later in 1862 the Gallery becomes the first destination of the newly formed North Staffordshire Field Club and although the work is attributed to James Bateman (the Club's inaugural President) Miller's influence is clearly noted. The Gallery was opened to the public on August 16th 1862 as part of a fundraising event for the construction of a local church. Described as being lined with fabulous fossils and strata separated in to the corresponding days of creation the display was faced off by a selection of geological maps and sections that were displayed alongside tables of minerals and large benches for those who wanted to study the display.

The restoration of the Geological Gallery has been a process delayed by major structural issues. However, this additional time has allowed us to better understand the space as being more than a parochial oddity and in fact an important theological and geological artefact reflective of the wide reaching influence of Hugh Miller's thoughts.

The project is now entering its final phases as the story of the Gallery is now understood and much of the funding secured. To complete the Gallery the National Trust has commissioned conservator and palaeontologist Nigel Larkin to replicate the fossils that were once on show. Sixty fossils need to be found and through collaboration with Manchester Museums and the Lapworth Museum, Birmingham, Nigel has been able to source and replicate suitable specimens for the first two days.

The payoff for the museum is that they receive back a beautifully cleaned and conserved fossil, whilst Biddulph Grange receive a hand painted replica fossil along with a mould should future replacements need to be cast. The first days will be installed in March 2017, and the following days will be replicated over the coming twelve months.

The final element of restoration is the stone strata which will be returned to the wall after sourcing samples from across the country. The restoration project has only been possible thanks to private donations and a further £20,000 is sought to complete the work. For more information about the Gallery or to donate visit:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/biddulph-grange-garden>



Surviving nautilus



Ichthyosaurus and cast





The Old Red: Hugh Miller's Geological Legacy

**Keynote Speaker: Prof John Long
Flinders University, Adelaide**

**Victoria Hall, Cromarty
9 - 10 September 2017**

<http://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk>

CIRCULAR

GREAT LINE-UP ARRANGED

This two-day meeting is being convened by 'The Friends of Hugh Miller' in Cromarty on the Black Isle. The content is aimed at everyone in the general public who is inspired by the natural world. It will appeal to all those interested in fossils, geology, landscape, Miller's writing, and Scottish history and culture. The theme "*The Old Red: Hugh Miller's Geological Legacy*," and the wide range of talks will show how Miller's 19th century geological contributions, and observations of the natural world still have relevance in the 21st century.

THE PROGRAMME

A line-up of speakers has been secured which includes some of the most eminent earth scientists in their fields, as well as others who set the scientific material in a broader context.

On Day One our first keynote speaker is Professor John Long of Flinders University, South Australia, who will open proceedings on Saturday with a discussion of "*Sex in an old Scottish lake: How Orkney fossils revealed the origins of complex vertebrate reproduction*."

Gold prospector Gavin Berkenheger will explain how Miller was an inspiration for him as a modern geologist. Following him Dr Martin Brazeau's theme is: "*Cromarty in the tree of life; Hugh Miller's lasting impact on our understanding of vertebrate evolution*."

Prolific author Alan McKirdy will talk about: "*Geology and landscape, from Miller to modern times*."

Emeritus Professor John Hudson will lead a session on "*Hugh Miller's Jurassic rocks and fossils*" and his talk will be complemented by Edinburgh PhD candidate Elsa Panciroli on her project: "*Mesozoic Mammals from the Isle of Skye: palaeontological research in Scotland's Inner Hebrides*".

Among her topics, she will discuss the Jurassic reptile footprints on Skye which have already attracted huge public interest.

Friends' chairman palaeontologist Bob Davidson will be "*Putting flesh on fossil bone, from Miller's paper models to 3D printing*" and Day One will climax with oil and gas consultant Dr Roger Jones presenting "*New insights on *Homostius milleri*; Hugh Miller's '*Asterolepis* of Stromness*".

A cast of the spectacular new *Homostius milleri* specimen featured in Roger Jones's talk will be on view as part of a guided tour of the Hugh Miller Museum in Church Street, Cromarty, which will be on offer to delegates at the close of the first day's sessions by the National Trust for Scotland's property manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones.

Day Two starts with our second keynote address to be delivered jointly by Professor Ralph O'Connor and Dr Michael A Taylor on Miller's epic first work on geology: "*The Old Red Sandstone in literature and science; why it mattered in 1841 and why it matters today*".

While geology and its practitioners were achieving global renown, the new art form of photography came to the fore, and this will be examined by Dr Alison Morrison-Low in her presentation of "*Early Victorian photography and stereography with particular reference to the pioneers in the*

earth sciences".

Dr Andrew Ross, Principal Curator of Palaeontology of National Museums Scotland (NMS) will describe the Hugh Miller Collection at National Museums Scotland

At the close of the conference, delegates can join an afternoon excursion to the Cromarty Devonian fish deposits just to the east of the town which Miller discovered and made famous, and where a fine specimen of *Cheirolepis trailli* was found as recently as May this year.

We hope you will agree we have succeeded in drawing up a wide-ranging and exciting programme in which you will feel it is well worthwhile to participate.

BOOKING

Please use the form overleaf to register as a delegate. The fee is a very modest £12, and you can choose which of the catering options you wish to take up.

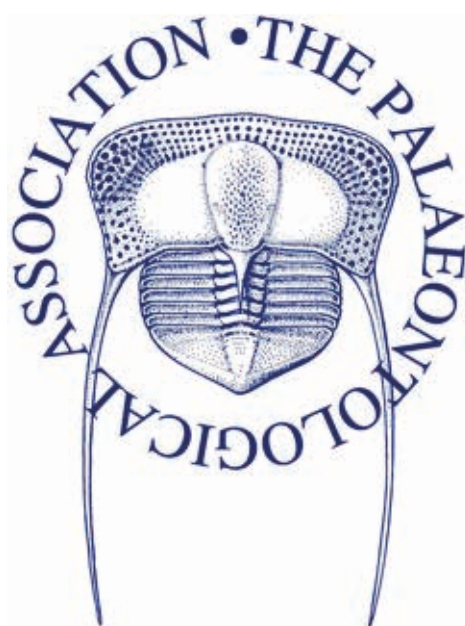
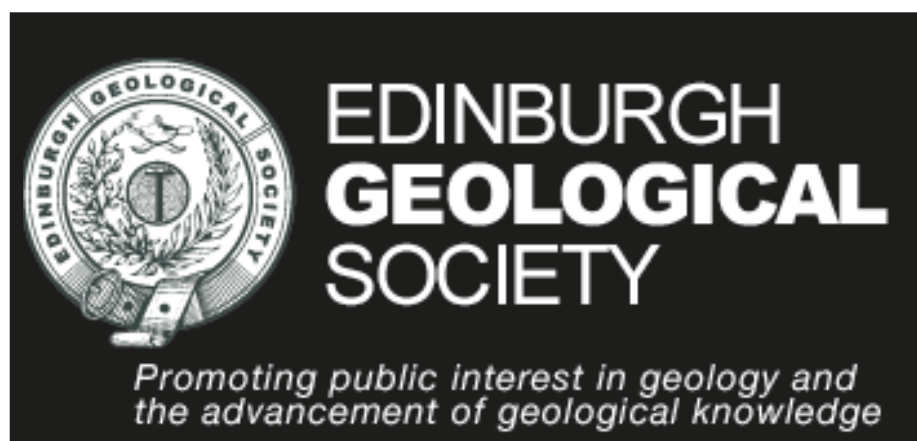
Delegates are also invited to express an interest in a three-day post conference excursion further up the north east coast to see Jurassic rocks in the Brora/Helmsdale area and the Old Red Sandstone fossil localities of Caithness, including the Devonian fish deposits at the famous Achanarras Quarry at Spittal now run by Scottish Natural Heritage.

This trip is being organised separately from the conference – details and cost are dependent on demand. Please tick the box on the right at the bottom of the booking form and you will be contacted with more information nearer the time.

ACCOMMODATION

Conference accommodation in Cromarty has been reserved for you to make your own bookings at the Royal Hotel, Marine Terrace (01381 600217, info@royalhotel-cromarty.co.uk) and B & B/self-catering at The Old Brewery, Burnside Place, (01381 600354, info@cromartyartstrust.co.uk).

Other facilities can be visited on the CromartyLive.co.uk website. Early booking is advised because there is only limited accommodation, although there are several more hires on offer in nearby towns and villages.





The Friends of Hugh Miller Conference

The Old Red: Hugh Miller's Geological Legacy

9 – 10 September 2017
Victoria Hall, Cromarty, Scotland

Booking form¹

Title		First Name		Family Name	
Address					
City					
Post Code					
Email					
Phone Number					
Conference Registration Fee					£12
Optional extras (Please enter the cost in the box on the right)					
Lunch Saturday 9 September (2 courses: £13.50)					
3 Course Conference Dinner (with wine) Saturday 9 September (£45) Limited numbers so early booking is advised					
Total					

Completed forms and payment by cheque (made out to The Friends of Hugh Miller) to: The Friends of Hugh Miller, Martin Gostwick Secretary, c/o Russell House, 55 Shore St, Cromarty IV11 8XL

If you are interested in taking part in a follow-on (11-13 September) 3 day excursion to northern Scotland to see Jurassic rocks in the Brora/Helmsdale area and the Old Red Sandstone of Caithness, including fossil fish localities such as the famous Achanarras Quarry – details and cost dependent on demand - please tick the box on the right and we will contact you with more information later.

¹ Please complete one form per conference delegate