



# Hugh's News

Magazine of  
The Friends of Hugh Miller

Special Festive Edition  
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## FOR LYDIA

This edition is dedicated to Lydia Mackenzie Falconer Fraser, writer, and wife of Hugh Miller. Scotland is beginning to pay more heed to the roles played by its greatest women, and it is therefore entirely right that one of them, Lydia Miller, should be honoured in a film which our Scottish Parliament has just made as part of an exhibition it is holding at Holyrood. The film is a follow-up to the great Travelling the Distance artwork already there. The story of how the film came to be made in 2018, and of the part played in it by one of our leading members, Dr Lillemor Jernqvist, is told on p3.

The Travelling the Distance Exhibition opens indefinitely on December 13<sup>th</sup>, and is free to view. It is placed opposite the porcelain plaques on the ground floor of the Parliament, in the Garden Lobby. Do go and see it whenever you are in Edinburgh.



*"My first, my only love" - Hugh Miller*

### ALSO INSIDE

Our centrepiece article is about Doughty Donald Ross, a staunch opponent of the Clearances (ps10-14), by a direct descendant, Dr Andrew Ross, which comprises not only serious new academic research, but a rattling good tale!

### AND

Poet Alex's Prize, ps5-6; On the Trewin trail, ps 6-7; Skye's Everglades p8; Hugh in the Headlines, p9; Book Reviews, p15; Cromarty contrasts, 2018 & 1864, ps16-18; Foolish Angie, p 19; Victor Hugo & Hugh Miller, p20; Tales in a Magic Quilt, ps 21-23.

ENJOY!



***Festive greetings for Christmas and  
the New Year to all our Members***



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# "A WOMAN JUST LIKE ME"

by Martin Gostwick

As she walked down Church Street, Cromarty, the visitor saw a little box of spring flowers on a windowsill high up in a gable end which excited her curiosity. She entered Miller House with her partner, not realising that what she was about to see and learn in the Museum would affect her whole life. Lillemor Jernqvist and her partner Derek told us later they were immediately struck by the contented atmosphere of the place, feeling in fact more like a home than a museum. "I still remember the warm welcome on arrival," Lillemor says.

In the first ground floor exhibition room, she saw the timeline of a great man's life, full of triumphs but also much tragedy. In a glass case opposite, she saw some little children's books written by his wife Lydia, most of them after his death to help support her family. On the first floor, they came to another display case, in which they found the pocket marriage bible which Hugh dedicated to his new wife; she was "*my first, my only love.*" Then they crossed to the Parlour, hearing songs which seemed at once familiar; they were songs by Rabbie Burns, set to music by the composer Joseph Haydn. There was a vintage piano, such as Lydia, an accomplished pianist, might have often played for the children in her class, and in the evening. And there, over the elegant fireplace, hung a portrait of Lydia Miller herself, which Lillemor learnt was the only surviving portrait of a young woman in love, painted while she and Hugh were courting. On an adjacent wall, Hugh and Lydia's four children, Harriet, William, Bessie and Hugh Junior, gazed earnestly out of a studio portrait. "I was charmed by the girl's portrait," recalls Lillemor, "and, standing nearby, a copy on a clothes' horse of the dress she wore in the picture, so petite."

On the top floor, the couple inspected some of the handsomely cased fossils which Miller stored and analysed up there, most of them now returned on long-term loan from the National Museum of Scotland. Then, in the last room, perched on the sill, she saw the window box, full of blooms in season. A card told the story of how the their first-born child Eliza, aged only one, had, in Hugh's own record of it, "planted a little garden of polyanthus, primrose and other spring flowers." It was also the spot where she used to wave to her father as he returned home from his work at the local bank. "This simple gesture touched me greatly, and reminded me that the great man was a family man as well as a stonemason, and that his wife was a hugely important part of his life and work."

For Hugh, Eliza was "a delight and a wonder of all wonders," Lydia wrote in her diary, and her death of a fever aged only 17 months prostrated him with grief. Never again in the course of his life was he thus affected, she wrote, and never again did he put chisel to stone after cutting her little headstone in Old St Regulus' Churchyard.

Lydia made a lasting impression on her. "Although she was born in 1812, she was a woman just like me. One who had experienced love and joy, but also great sadness and loss. She lost her first-born so young, and her husband took his own life on Christmas Eve in 1856, still only in his 50s. Hugh himself said she had 'intellectual facilities of the first order,' and acknowledged her help with his famous editorials. The books she wrote for children were all best-sellers, and she cemented her husband's reputation by continuing to publish his work posthumously."



The Lydia plaque in the Cottage Garden

Years after the museum visit, Lillemor was nominated by a colleague whom she knew through work, Muriel Gray, the noted broadcaster and journalist, to contribute to a Scottish Parliament artwork, entitled "Travelling the Distance," celebrating 100 women who made a mark in Scottish life, past and present. She happened to be the 100<sup>th</sup> nominee, thus the last. "It did not take me long to decide that the woman I wanted to honour was Lydia Miller," and so she did, referring to the painting in the Parlour, "**The only surviving picture of her is a portrait of a young woman in love.**" She is thus permanently publicly remembered on one of the three great plaques among the 100 women which adorn the Scottish Parliament.

Lillemor and Derek come back to Cromarty every year to revisit the museum, and especially to remember Eliza at her little grave in Old St Regulus. "I have

this primitive feeling it would please Lydia that the grave of her little girl is cared for, and that has been my motivation to climb the hill up to the ancient graveyard and leave some flowers there." Regular readers will remember that Lillemor and Derek made sure through The Friends and other donors that the headstone was cleaned and restored

(continued on p3)



Lillemor seen at "Liza's window" in the Museum. Copyright: Andrew Cowan/ Scottish Parliament.

(continued from p2)

two years ago by a professional conservator (*Hugh's News* No 27, Winter 2016). It is worth remembering that after the tragic loss of Liza, Hugh and Lydia did go on to have four children, seen together in the Parlour studio portrait taken in 1860. Harriet who was born within a year of Eliza's death; William, who served in the British Army in India; Bessie, and finally Hugh Junior, who was the principal mover behind the conversion of the Cottage into a museum. Harriet wrote novels, like her mother. Bessie published some of Lydia's memoirs in *Chambers Journal* during her father's centenary in 1902. Both Harriet and Bessie have dozens of living descendants, and so the story, which began so sadly with an infant's loss in Miller House, happily continues to this day, and hopefully for generations to come.

## A FASCINATING NEW INSIGHT

by Susannah Morris, Media Relations Officer, Scottish Parliament

### ***Travelling the Distance* by Shauna McMullan**

The *Travelling the Distance* art installation was created by artist Shauna McMullan and has been on display at the Scottish Parliament since 2006. The artwork was funded by the Scottish Government (then Executive) and commissioned by Government and Scottish Parliament representatives to celebrate the contribution of women to Scottish society and pay tribute to those who had campaigned for equal suffrage.

*Travelling the Distance* is a collection of 100 handwritten sentences made of porcelain. The sentences were collected by the artist on a journey around Scotland to meet 99 women. Each of the 99 women was asked to write something about a woman they felt had made a significant contribution to life, culture or democracy in Scotland. The artist herself also wrote a sentence, about fellow artist Sam Ainsley. Shauna McMullan asked each woman to refer her to another woman, which was the basis for the artist's journey until she reached the final woman. The finished artwork celebrates the achievements but also the strong friendships and connections between the women, creating an alternative map of Scotland.

The making of Shauna McMullan's *Travelling the Distance* and the stories of the women it represents will now feature in a digital exhibit, giving fascinating insight into the artwork, the stories of the women involved in the project, and why they chose to take part in this important celebration of women's achievements. To create the new touchscreen-based exhibit, the Parliament worked closely with the artist Shauna McMullan and ten women who wrote the original sentences. With the help of short films and interviews, as well as new portraits of some of the women involved by Parliament photographer Andrew Cowan, the new exhibit will share some of the research and background to the enduringly popular work of *Travelling the Distance*.

### **Dr Lillemor Jernqvist**

One of the women involved in the digital exhibition is Dr Lillemor Jernqvist, who wrote the sentence "The only surviving picture of her is a portrait of a young woman in love" about Lydia Miller. Dr Jernqvist asked to be photographed in Cromarty, at the grave of Lydia and Hugh Miller's daughter Eliza Miller. Dr Lillemor Jernqvist was one of ten women filmed and photographed for the digital exhibit. The other nine were - Khisha Clarke, Alison Closs, Maggie Fyffe, Liz Gardiner, Deborah Haase, Denise Mina, Jess Smith, Diana Sykes and Sheena Wellington.

### **Shauna McMullan, Artist's biography**

Shauna McMullan studied Sculpture in Cheltenham, followed by a Master's degree at Glasgow School of Art, where she now works part-time as a lecturer in the Department of Sculpture and Environmental Art. In 1997-8 she was awarded the then Scottish Arts Council's Scholarship at the British School at Rome. She has exhibited nationally and internationally. Public commissions have included a permanent public sculpture for The Met Office entitled 'Windbourne', and for the BT Headquarters in Edinburgh the artwork 'Between the Words'. In 2010, the artist worked with the Glasgow Women's Library on the Blue Spine project, an installation at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, that involved collaborating with hundreds of individual women across Scotland.

*Editor's footnote: Lydia Miller is included on a list of nearly 200 women publicly honoured in Scotland at the places associated with them, whether on plaques, statues, streets, named buildings or stained glass windows. This can be found on a website run by the Women's History Scotland group, address <http://www.womenshistoryscotland.org>. Lydia appears, together with a picture of one of her children's novels on display in the Hugh Miller Museum, and on a map, entitled Mapping Memorials to Women in Scotland.*



*The plaques for the 100 women.  
Copyright: Adam Elder/Scottish Parliament.*



# MARIAN WAS FIRST AND FOREMOST ADVOCATE

The story of the endeavour to gain recognition for Lydia Miller in her own right began more than a decade before Lillemor's discovery of her, with strong advocacy by her own great grand-daughter, the late Mrs Marian McKenzie Johnston. She it was, ably supported by her husband Henry, who assisted the Hugh Miller Museum, with a research project stretching back over more than 10 years, to compile a genealogical chart of the family, including, naturally, Lydia's distinguished Highland ancestry.

She opened Miller House in 2004 and furnished it both with a most illuminating foreword to the Guidebook and with parts of Lydia's Journal describing life there, an important part of giving the place, especially the Parlour, its atmosphere as a family home. Most importantly of all, she and Henry collaborated with Black Isle author Elizabeth Sutherland, to achieve a worthy biography, *Lydia, wife of Hugh Miller of Cromarty* (Tuckwell Press, 2002), still on sale in the Cottage shop. Subsequently, the museum was able to acquire copies of Lydia's best-selling children's novels.



Marian McKenzie Johnston

## MEET OUR MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

*At our last AGM, the management committee agreed it would be useful that our eight members should make ourselves better known to the wider membership, and other supporters of Hugh Miller. It was an obvious choice to begin with **Dr Lillemor Jernqvist**, since she is the subject of the article on these pages. The rest of us will be introduced to you in future editions.*

### PROFILE

## Dr Lillemor Jernqvist

Lillemor was born in Gothenburg, Sweden, and came to London in 1974 to work with children with cerebral palsy. "As a psychologist, my main professional interest was cerebral palsy, with focus on the difficulties the brain damage caused, both mental and physical."

In 1990 a "wonderful opportunity" came along and she was appointed the Director of the Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairments in Cumbernauld. She retired in 2007. She remains committed to the philosophy and practice of conducive education.

Her interest in children with disabilities extends to their parents, particularly the mothers, and she thinks this interest is part of what stirred her affection for Lydia and sympathy for her loss.

She has four children, eight grandchildren, and to her delight, a growing number of great grandchildren. She now lives in Stirling, "happy in a country that has given me so much. Hopefully I have given a little back."

It was because of her special affinity with the Miller family, especially Lydia, that she accepted nomination to our management committee. It was felt that she could help bring Hugh Miller's wife to her deserved place on the same stage and given the same importance as him, and this she has certainly done, and is doing, complementing the efforts of the descendants.



Lillemor at Liza's Grave

### DIARY DATES:

**Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019 13<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, Cromarty Old Brewery, 11.30 - 1.00pm**

**Sunday, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2019 Brewery & Hugh Miller Museum, Natural History Adventure Day, 11.00-4.00pm**

# MASON POET ALEX'S SALUTES TO MILLER AND CROMARTY

By Martin Gostwick

It was the Friends' very great pleasure to play host at Cromarty to Alex Woodcock, first prize winner for poetry in our Hugh Miller Writing Competition II. A two-night stay in our town, with visits to our Museum, and the local fossil beds Hugh made famous, together made up that first prize, our donation to the competition and its organisers, the Scottish Geodiversity Forum.

Readers will remember we published his extraordinary winning poem, *Pneumodesmus newmani*, in our last edition, (*Hugh's News* No 36, Summer 2018), judged the competition's stand-out piece, telling of a big wedding at Dunnottar, and the ancient millepede of the title, and finishing with a salute to the tiny beastie from all living beings through the ages.

I asked Alex if he had spent any time in Scotland since the wedding in the early noughties, and he said, No, he had only been back three times, all of them this year. He still remembered that "parade of men in long hair and kilts, like bravehearts, standing in the rain in front of the castle." This year he attended a course in professional writing at Moniack Mhor, the creative writing centre in the Kiltarlity hills, then the prize-giving ceremony in Edinburgh in June, and now in Cromarty as guest of The Friends.

Alex was greeted off the sleeper train at Inverness early on the morning of Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> October by Lara Reid in her dual capacity as the competition's organiser for the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, and member of The Friends' management committee. She had given of her own spare time to make her way up from her home in Fife to be Alex's co-host. The two of them hot-footed it straight down to Eathie beach that morning, fulfilling a long-held wish on Lara's part to make a first field trip there, and they both turned up some ammonites. Frieda Gostwick and I received them for lunch at Friends HQ, Russell House, when Alex gave me some background. He is a stonemason specialising in restoration of medieval sculpture. He spent six years at Exeter Cathedral, 2008-14, and has published two books on the subject, *Of Sirens and Centaurs* (Impress Books) and *Gargoyles and Grotesques* (Shire Books), and has a third, *King of Dust*, due to be published shortly.



Yard group.

I asked him if these sometimes savage-looking, even horrific, or sometimes luridly comic images were derived from pre-Christian myths and legends, and he said they were "not pagan," but traditional motifs carved "in a Christian context" under the supervision of the Church. He said it was easy to overlook that medieval cathedrals were much more ornately decorated than their severe facades might suggest today. They were centres not only of religious life, but hubs for markets, games, festivals of music and dance. They were there to keep the faithful in mind that they lived between this world and the next.

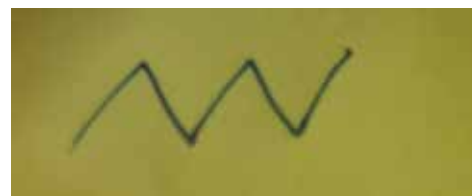
We were then joined from Aberdeen by our Chairman, Bob Davidson for the afternoon's guided tour of the Museum. Manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones and two staff kindly opened up the two buildings specially for this purpose. Alix said they were domestic, homely places. Two favourite spots were Miller's Yard at the rear, and the hands-on fossil

table on the geology top floor. At the Birthplace Cottage we sat in the kitchen where Hugh's story-telling began, and saw the bedroom and scene of his first writings, then examined the sundial pedestal in Lydia Garden, Alex admiring the delicacy of Miller's work. A supper party at Sutor Creek at which eight Friends members and supporters joined Alex ended the day on a high note.

On Sunday, Bob Davidson took over to conduct Alex and Lara round the town, as Lara reported, "a most entertaining and happy host, truly in his element," regaling them as they passed from Monument to Coalheugh Well, to the back of the town, "with many a myth and story along the way." After an alfresco lunch



Alex Woodcock, and his mason's mark.





at the Royal Hotel they finally reached the fish beds. "What excitement when the first three nodules we broke open had bones and scales galore (though no actual 'fish shape') and Bob himself "cracked open a beauty" a tiny 3cm long fish for his own collection. This was to be capped on returning to the town by Bob insisting on giving Alex and Lara "the most beautiful fish fossils" as keepsakes. They rounded off the day with a farewell meal at Lara's hosts, Kenny Taylor and Vanessa Halhead. Thanks to them, and Janie and Menno Verburg for giving freely of their hospitality. Lara said she and Alex were both "really touched" by Bob's gifts, and "overwhelmed by the whole experience."

Alex had ended his prize poem with a salute from all life on the planet to a tiny millipede, one of its first oxygen-breathers. His visit could be seen as a kind of salute to Cromarty life, and his brother stonemason.



Above: Alex & Lara at fossil table.

Below: Ammonite finds at Eathie. Beach group.



Aberdeen Geological Society Annual Excursion:

In memory of Professor Nigel Trewin.

## FOLLOWING THE TREWIN TRAIL

by Bob Davidson, chairman, The Friends of Hugh Miller

Apart from his award winning academic career at Aberdeen University, numerous publications and terms as Chairman of the Friends and President of Aberdeen Geological Society, Nigel's name will be inextricably linked with his research into the Devonian rocks of Scotland and especially, the Achannarras horizon of the Sandwick Fish Bed. However his wider research and leisure interests extended both upwards and down the Scottish stratigraphic column, and across topics. Notably, he combined published research with his active encouragement of amateur geologists and palaeontologists. In particular his work on the promotion of the legacy of Hugh Miller will stand for many years to come.

This excursion, illustrated by specimens and recreations of ancient creatures, was an ambitious attempt to present to a diverse group of delegates, a unique opportunity to visit those localities across Scotland associated with his lesser known, but broad spectrum of interests.

Day 1 started with the group meeting for breakfast south of Dundee before making tracks to the Lower Devonian Balruddery Den locality. Balruddery is important, being first described by Hugh in *The Old Red*



The Society's Trewin Trail group: Left to right, front row: David Longstaff; Bob Davidson; Paul Monk; Sherri Donaldson; Martin Gostwick; Frieda Gostwick, Margie Trewin. Back row (from centre): Sam MacAuliffe; Tom Challands; John Armstrong; Edward Action (partially concealed); Sidney Johnston. Not in the picture is Don Stewart.



The Fossil Fish Filleters

*Sandstone* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed). Here Hugh went on to describe one of the fish from there in his inimitable way, comparing it to the form of the saddler's crescent shaped cutting knife. Nigel and I excavated Balruddery in 2006 and its scientific importance was revealed in a complete section of sediments which told a story of a 420 million year old deep lake violent environment with abundant fishes and giant ancestors of lobsters, in part created by volcanoes and tectonic activity and, from the evidence gathered, ultimately wiping out the fishes by subsequent volcanic eruptions. The delegates were actively looking for fossils but in the event, little was found, such is the nature of so many Devonian sites. In the afternoon the group moved to Tillywhandland Quarry where the rocks are the same age as Balruddery but the fishes are slightly different. This locality was the subject of the first paper that Nigel and I published. Tillywhandland came to light when James Powrie discovered fishes there in 1863 therefore Hugh would not have known of it, however Powrie was granted a short visit with Hugh in Edinburgh shortly before he died, on the premise that Hugh would see him only if he was a geologist. Here again our attempts at Devonian fishing yielded little.

Day 2 found us in the Middle Devonian at Tynet Burn, near Fochabers, the site which was the subject of our second paper which, to my delight, was published by the Geological Society of London, such was the regard in which Nigel's work was held. Tynet is situated at the edge of the ancient Lake Orcadie which contains Nigel's Achannarras Quarry in the deep, lake sediments in Northern Caithness. Hugh knew of Tynet but there is no evidence that he visited the site. Despite the rain the team were able to imagine the 360 million year old near shore environment from the display

of specimens and model reincarnations of the creatures that lived there. Alas once again our fishing nets were empty. We then moved to Scaat Craig in the Upper Devonian for a brief visit to examine the site where one of the rarest fossils of the first four legged animals was found in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century but only recognised in the new millennium. The group then moved to the age of reptiles, 227 million years ago in the Triassic of Spynie Quarry where Dave Longstaff from Elgin Museum took over some of the excursion leader duties. Dave delighted us with tales of the recent history of quarrying here and especially with his find of a partial tail of the primitive reptile *Stagonolepis*. The group also had the chance to collect their personal sample of lead ore, galena. We then took a step down the stratigraphic column with a visit to the 251 million year old Permian Quarry at Clashach. Here the reptiles are represented by their foot prints or trackways and we were not disappointed as recent quarrying has laid bare the surfaces of ancient sand dunes across which several species of reptiles migrated in an arid desert. This locality has been included in many of our excursions and Nigel spent many hours there.

We then moved to Hugh's home town, Cromarty, where we met up with Nigel's wife, Margie, and settled down to an excellent dinner in his honour on Saturday evening. Nigel visited Cromarty many times, both as founding Chairman of the Friends but also on many excursions that we led there; we enjoyed our Cromarty escapes. On Sunday a much more relaxed day was planned with a walking tour of Miller related features of the town in the company of Margie. We were greeted by Martin and Frieda Gostwick on behalf of the Friends and then visited Hugh's beloved Middle Devonian fish beds, followed by Miller's birthplace and fascinating museum run by the National Trust for Scotland. We visited the Coal Heugh well which, against Hugh's advice, locals sunk in the hope of finding coal. In the event they encountered an aquifer which resulted in an artesian well, still flowing today, only the brave amongst us drank from it's metallic waters on this occasion. In St Regulus' churchyard we debunked the so called "pirates graveyard" myth and heard the story of Sandy Wood who, after a lifetime of recrimination with a neighbour, elected to be buried outside the graveyard so that he would have a head start to be in front of Jesus on Judgement day. After a visit to Hugh's monument we returned to the fish beds and this time several of our number were finally rewarded with fossil souvenirs of a very successful weekend.



## SKYE'S "EVERGLADES"

Palaeontologist Elsa Pancirolli gave a talk on The Jurassic Mammals of Skye to the Highland Geological Society on 10 October, and the members were inspired by, as the HGS chairman Stephen Young put it, her "infectious enthusiasm." She likened how the environment in which these mammals lived in the Middle Jurassic period, over 150 mya, as similar to the Everglades in present-day Florida.

She and her colleagues in a 4-strong team of researchers from National Museum of Scotland and Oxford, Edinburgh and Birmingham Universities, have been working for several years in the Kilmaluag Formation near Elgol on Skye's Strathaird peninsula, and are now "on the cusp of new discoveries." They have found many small mammals, living alongside giant dinosaurs. CT scanning has revolutionised the research, enabling the scientists to examine the creatures, including their interior formations, three-dimensionally. They have to use powertools to uncover specimens, because they are bedded in extremely hard limestone, "like concrete." They also have to do a lot on their hands and knees because the fossil remnants are very small, and to work very fast to preserve and record their findings, because the tides can almost immediately damage them irreversibly, or sweep them away.

Elsa showed remarkable, brilliantly-coloured slides of the CT scans featuring the interiors of several animals. As their researches progress, they are "going to reconstruct an entire ecosystem." She said they are fortunately much less likely to be disturbed by unscrupulous fossil-hunters, than those of their colleagues working at the more heavily publicised dinosaurs' footprints found on the Trotternish peninsula, because the fossils are not desirable for collectors, as they require access to CT scanning technology to see and study them. The Elgol area is also far more inaccessible and hard to reach.



Elgol site team with Elsa (centre).

## A NEW "MAGAZINE"

by Martin Gostwick

Readers will have noted some dramatic changes to our publication's masthead, the first of which is to rename its designation, from newsletter, its status for the first 36 issues appearing since its foundation in 2006, to Magazine. The Production Team has felt justified in this initiative because of *Hugh's News'* ever-enlarging scope and range, an expansion made very clear in this Edition, and expected to continue in the future.

We have also changed Miller's image on the masthead, withdrawing the much loved, perhaps overused, and somewhat sentimental J G Tunny portrait of Hugh, the ever-devoted reader, and replacing it with the striking profile exhibited on the solid silver medallion now on display in the Museum's Edinburgh Room. It was cut by Fife goldsmith Robert Crerar as a gift to mark the opening of Miller House as a Museum in 2004. It is the only image that we know of showing Hugh in profile, and we were struck from the first moment we saw it, of how true a likeness it is. We are indebted to Andrew Dowsett for his photographs of the medallion.

On this page, we show as well the medallion's highly original, but less often observed, reverse side. Miller's famous *Pterichthyodes* fish is instantly recognisable; however what may be much less familiar is the quotation:

SEARCH WELL  
ANOTHER WORLD;  
WHO STUDIES THIS  
TRAVELS IN CLOUDS,  
SEEKS MANNA WHERE  
NONE IS

These lines come from *The Search* a poem by the Welsh metaphysical poet, Henry Vaughan (1621-1695). He is urging abandonment of the material world in order to seek a new spiritual life, in which the ultimate reality is God, who fills the world unseen but everywhere. A theme chosen by Robert Crerar most appropriate to Miller's quest.



We further draw readers' attention to a brand new page on our website, <http://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk> called Cabinet of Curiosities, which is devoted to new writing on themes inspired by Miller. It is divided into two sections, Natural Wonders, focussing on geology, and Traditions Today, the latter starting with a highly unusual, stirring poem in praise of The Disruption by Glasgow poet, Jen Gray.



# HITTING THE HEADLINES

"You can't keep a good man down," our Chairman Bob Davidson joked, after Miller starred in October in two prestigious media outlets, one an upmarket American magazine, and the second, a Scottish Sunday national newspaper.

One of our own members, Jim Gilchrist, was the author of the piece *The Greatest Outdoors* published in the Autumn 2018 edition of *Scottish Life*, a Massachusetts-based quarterly magazine. The article focuses primarily on how geotourism is coming increasingly to the fore in Scotland, and another of our members, Angus Miller, chair of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, was its primary source. Jim Gilchrist writes that Scotland can be described as "a little country with big geology," and describes Hugh Miller as "perhaps the most extraordinary figure" among the towering pioneers of the science, whose reputation "after more than a century of neglect, is once again in the ascendant."

The second story on Miller quite unexpectedly appeared in the *Sunday National* of 7<sup>th</sup> October 2010, as part of its "Back in the Day" series on Scottish history by journalist Hamish MacPherson. Headlined "*The extraordinary life of a man who bore witness to God and science*," Miller is placed among the giants of the Scottish Enlightenment. He could "controversially be described as a proto socialist," says Hamish.

Most memorably, towards the end of the piece, MacPherson quotes at length from the famous passage at the close of Hugh's *The Testimony of The Rocks* which starts with the big, challenging question: "Who shall declare what, throughout these long ages, the history of creation has been?" Miller's views, upholding the great age of the earth, made him very unpopular with the Biblical upholders of the Book of Genesis.

It is most refreshing and stimulating to find our man resurfacing in the public eye in this way, and we must hope it will bring more visitors from both Scotland and America to Cromarty and his Museum here.

sunday  
NATIONAL

07-10-18

Seven Days

## BACK IN THE DAY

# The extraordinary life of a man who bore witness to God and science

By Hamish MacPherson

ONE of the most extraordinary Scotsmen of his time was Hugh Miller, who was born in this week of the year 1802. His birth in Cromarty on October 10 that year brought into the world a babe whose childhood would be utterly disrupted by the death of his father, who drowned when his ship foundered in storm when Hugh was just five, and the death of his two sisters a few years later.

He was brought up by his widowed mother, assisted by his two uncles, and had an unusual education for the time in that the uncles often had to teach him.



## INTRODUCTION

Much has already been written about the Highland Clearances, then and since, foremost among them Hugh Miller in the Editor's chair at *The Witness*, with such still famous leading articles as "Sutherland as it was and is" (1843), and by Donald Macleod and other eyewitnesses, to the savage cruelties of many proprietors.

We are honoured in this edition to bring to public notice the story of another fighter, and recorder of the evictions, Donald Ross, a native of Sutherland, who was simultaneously a successful fundraiser to help the landless victims.

The author is Donald's four times great nephew Dr Andrew Ross, Principal Curator of Palaeobiology at the National Museums Scotland (NMS), whose very extensive researches enable Andrew here to present Donald's evidence of atrocities, and his sterling endeavours for the starving evicted tenants. Andrew has also turned up several important connections with Hugh Miller that he made during these campaigns. We wish him well in seeking a publisher for a full biography of this fascinating, worthy, but flawed man.

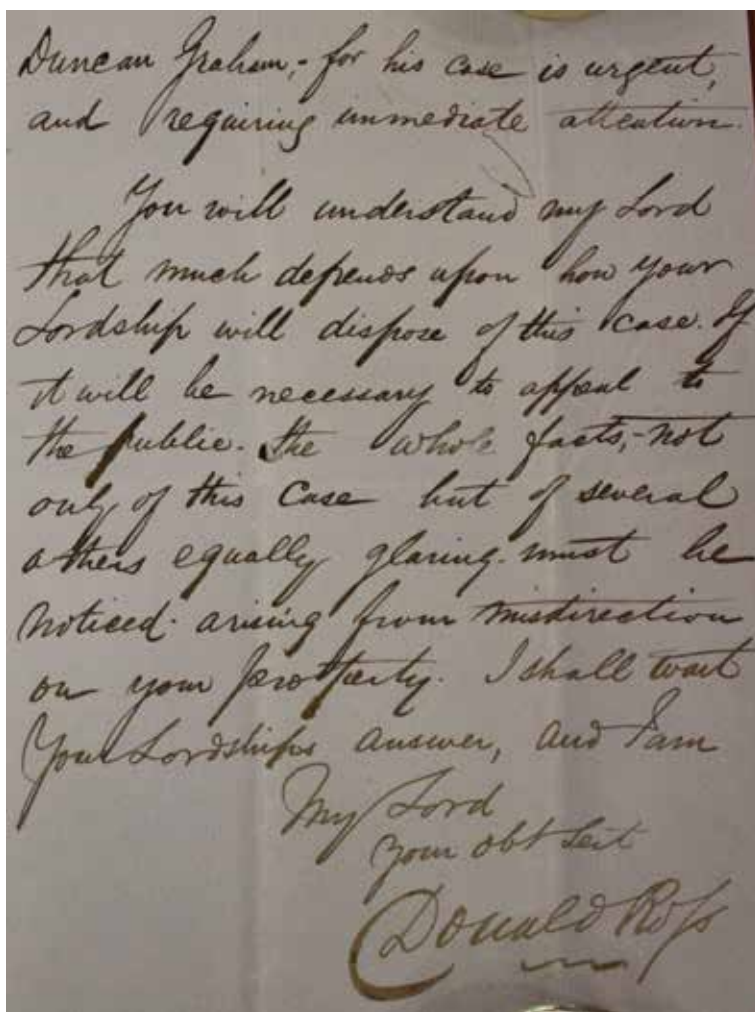
# DOUGHTY DONALD ROSS - FIGHTER FOR CLEARED HIGHLANDERS

*Donald Ross [1813-1882], critic of the Highland Clearances and contemporary of Hugh Miller*

by Dr Andrew Ross

While helping to conduct a Friends of Hugh Miller tour of Miller's Edinburgh last June I mentioned to the secretary, Martin Gostwick, that I was writing a book (in my own time) on a relative of mine, Donald Ross. Martin then invited me to write an article about him for *Hugh's News*. Donald was my great x4 uncle and for several years he was just a name on my family tree until four years ago I made the connection of who he really was and what he had done in his life. For six years I had been walking past a large wall graphic on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the National Museum of Scotland depicting a clearance event, without knowing the image was originally published by my relative!

Donald was the most outspoken critic of the Highland Clearances in the 1850s though very little was known or has been written about him. His most famous publication was *The Massacre of the Rosses* (Ross, 1854b) in which he described a notoriously shameful event in Scottish history when a group of women were brutally beaten by drunken policemen for refusing to accept eviction notices. This pamphlet was reprinted in 1977 by the Journeyman Press as part of their *Radical Reprints* series. The Preface to the reprint started 'Accurate information about Donald Ross has unfortunately been difficult



Duncan Graham, - for his case is urgent,  
and requiring immediate attention.

You will understand my Lord  
that much depends upon how your  
Lordship will dispose of this case. If  
it will be necessary to appeal to  
the public. The whole facts, - not  
only of this case but of several  
others equally glaring, must be  
noticed, arising from mistreatment  
on your property. I shall wait  
your Lordship's answer, and am  
My Lord  
Yours obt. Servt  
Donald Ross

Letter from Donald Ross to the Marquess of Breadalbane, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1851



to come by' and ended 'had it not been for those few years of intense activity by this one man, little or nothing would have reached us of the cruelty and sufferings imposed on the evicted families of Knoydart and Strathcarron.' The Preface listed five of his pamphlets and one more was mentioned by the main historians on the subject- Prebble (1965), Devine, (1996), Hunter (1997) and Richards (2008). However, in the course of my investigations, I have discovered that he wrote 20 pamphlets, published from 1847 to 1857, and I have tracked down copies of 16 of them. Fenyo (2000) wrote about some of his articles that appeared in the *Northern Ensign* and other newspapers, though thanks to the on-line British Newspaper Archive I've found many more. In addition, the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh have yielded a wealth of information, including documents written by him.

Donald Ross was born in Clashmore, Dornoch Parish, Sutherland in 1813; the 7<sup>th</sup> child of 10 born to Donald Ross, the miller of Skibo (my great x4 grandfather). He was baptised in Dornoch Cathedral and grew up as a native Gaelic speaker on the Skibo Castle Estate at a time when the Sutherland Clearances were taking place on the neighbouring estate. Donald took over the running of Clashmore Mill when his father died in 1838. He married May Bayne from Perthshire in 1839 at Dornoch Cathedral. Unusually May was 17 years older than Donald; they only had one daughter, Anne, who was probably adopted. In 1841 Donald, his mother and other family members received eviction notices from the laird of the Skibo Estate, George [Soper] Dempster, however they managed to resist moving out until 1843. Incredibly Donald's mother, Ann Gordon, appealed against the eviction, firstly at Dornoch Sheriff Court and then at the Supreme Court in Edinburgh. The case dragged on for several years during which time she died. The family lost the case though did get some expenses back.

Just after the eviction and with no apparent income, Donald was arrested and charged with six counts of forging and using bank bills in his brother-in-law's name. The Inverness Circuit Court verdict was 'not proven' which was lucky as otherwise he could have been deported to Australia. He then took out an interdict against the 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Sutherland and the other Heritors of Dornoch to prevent them putting a road through Dornoch Cathedral graveyard where his father was buried. In 1845 he became one of the collectors of donations to help the victims of the Glencalvie Clearance who were camped in Croick churchyard, Ross & Cromarty, and scratched messages on the church window

By April 1846 Donald and his family had moved to Glasgow where he became the Agent for the *Glasgow Association in Aid of the Poor*, set up to help those who were entitled to poor relief which was being withheld by the Parochial Boards. This was at a time when disease, abject poverty and crime were rife. Donald was incredibly successful and by the end of 1847 he had helped over 1,500 people. Some of the cases went to court; he was the legal agent and most of the cases were successful. However, he became complacent and supported two fraudulent claims which were found out by the courts. This resulted in the end of his employment and he was later banned from appearing at the bar in any court in Glasgow.

In 1850 Donald became interested in the plight of his fellow highlanders and reported in detail in the newspapers and pamphlets evictions in Barra, Skye, Knoydart and Strathcarron, and on destitution in the Highlands in general. He visited some of the places and interviewed the victims. In his pamphlets he made passing mention to the geology of some of the places he visited and some of his writing is very descriptive. His most creative work is *Real Scottish Grievances* (Ross, 1854a) and he described the Cuillins on Skye as follows-

*The Cullin Hills are in the immediate neighbourhood, having their base at the head of Loch Slapin; yet, rising up to an immense height, with ragged projections, jagged ridges, and gigantic pinnacles – in the utmost irregularity – form the most wonderful cluster of rocks and mountains in Britain. In winter a gloomy grandeur prevails here. The snow is carried along the sides and over the ridges of the large mountains with fearful impetuosity. It is completely at the mercy of the winds. The drift is raised high up, and then is swept along and around the projections, and needle-pointed pinnacles which crown these amazing heights, in such a way as to baffle description. The noise caused by the wind among the rocks, the roar of the distant waterfalls and cataracts wafted along, and rendered more distinct by the clear atmosphere and keen frost which prevailed – the grotesque appearance of the peaks overhead, one side black and bare, the other with a thick coating of snow – the millions of icicles which are forming in the fissures and in the caves and openings in the mountain sides, in some places forming huge glaciers – the monotonous, heavy roll of the sea on the beach*

*underneath – and the circumvolutions of the snow-drift, swept from the conical forms and naked summits above, into the deep gulleys and valleys at the base of the hills, – all combined, render the scene truly magnificent.*

From 1855 he raised, via newspaper articles and pamphlets, a huge amount of money to help his fellow Highlanders suffering from destitution and starvation due to the Potato Famine. He supplied bundles of clothes, hundreds of sacks of meal, seeds, potatoes and other vegetables to the Hebrides, and three fishing boats to Skye. Donald was taking a 5 per cent cut of the donations and thus he was paying himself a lucrative salary, however he did not keep this a secret and it was generally not disapproved of.

Donald became a judge at highland games and was instrumental in setting up *The Glasgow Celtic Society*, supported by patronage from several dukes, earls and other eminent men. In 1857 he wrote a letter to a lady in England requesting donations to help people on North Uist who were suffering from destitution and had lost some boats and menfolk in a storm. The lady sent the letter to the *Inverness Courier* who published it and the editor wrote to the local minister and Sheriff-Substitute for more details. The Sheriff-Substitute replied that he had not heard about any deaths by drowning and that the people had had their best potato crop since 1845. The local minister agreed there was no destitution there. This led to Donald resigning from the *Society* and accusations in the press continued.

With his reputation in tatters, in 1858 Donald and his family emigrated to Halifax, Nova Scotia, though he soon became ill and ran out of money. *The Society of Friends* raised money to help him and later he became a book-keeper and merchant. Donald died in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia in 1882.

His connections to Hugh Miller were few though significant. Hugh knew of Donald as an indefatigable campaigner for the Highlanders. Ross wrote five letters to *The Witness* that I know of, and there are almost certainly more. He gave the great Editor a tribute in his pamphlet entitled *The Scottish Highlanders* (Ross,

**GLENCALVIE AGAIN.**  
**THE ALLEGED RIOTS IN ROSS-SHIRE.**  
—  
**TO THE EDITOR OF THE WITNESS.**

SIR,—In a late number of your paper I noticed an article quoted from the *Inverness Courier* regarding the serving of summonses on the tenants of Greenyard, on the property of Major Robertson of Kindeace, in the parish of Kincardine, Easter Ross. As the article in question reflects very strongly on the conduct of the inhabitants of the district referred to, I have respectfully to request that you will in your next publication insert this letter in exculpation of the maligned people.

The conduct of the constables and of the policemen on the occasion referred to would disgrace anything in savage life. They set upon them with their batons, and, in the most furious and horrible onslaught which ensued, more than a score of women had the flesh torn from their shoulders and backs, their skulls cracked, and their bones broken. Even when weltering in their blood, lying on the ground, the policemen and constables did not spare them, but pummelled them with their batons and staves, until pools of blood were visible on the ground. One female was pursued by a policeman, who struck her several times on the back and shoulders, and then on the head, until at last, driven frantic by this inhuman treatment, she jumped into the deep rolling stream of the Carron, where she would have been drowned had not a man from the opposite bank ran to her rescue.

Four females were handcuffed and were dragged to prison, a distance of twenty miles. Their clothes were clotted with blood, their backs cut, their hair dishevelled and red with blood; their backs were black and blue with the marks of the batons of the policemen, yet they were not allowed to have their heads bandaged, or their wounds tied up, but streaming in their blood were lodged in jail!

The constables, officers, and policemen boast that, notwithstanding of all this fearful bloodshed and onslaught on the females, they themselves escaped without a blow, or even a scratch.—Your obedient servant,

DONALD ROSS.

Glasgow, April 17th, 1854.

*From The Witness 1854*





From top to bottom:  
Croick Church  
Arinacraig  
Buchanan street in 1828  
Halifax from Dartmouth in 1842

1852), declaring: "Some of the greatest men of the age were nursed within the turf walls, and under heath-clad sheilings in the Highlands. Literature and the sciences have to boast of the children of the heather. Murchison in Geography – Miller in Geology – and Duff in Theology, are noble specimens of the Highland character."

Hugh published an extensive review of one of Donald's pamphlets, under the title *A luckless experiment* (*The Witness*, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1853). The previous year Donald had helped girls on Skye gain employment at a cotton mill in Manchester, but the girls were reputedly badly treated and it was reported that one of them had died after a severe beating. An uproar by the girl's parents and a local minister, a certain Reverend Forbes, resulted in the girls being returned to Skye. The minister wrote a damning pamphlet entitled *Weeping in the Isles* (Forbes, 1853), portraying Donald in a very bad light over this. He was actually referred to as a "people trafficker" by one of the minister's descendants, the comedian David Mitchell, in an episode of the BBC series *Who Do You Think You Are?* Donald defended himself in two pamphlets, one in Gaelic, the other English, stating that the girl died of typhus fever. Hugh reviewed both Reverend Forbes's pamphlet, and Donald's English version *Humanity Defended* (Ross, 1853), commenting that he was "a gentleman well known for his exertions in behalf of the Highlanders." Hugh accepted Donald's account, and highly criticised the minister; quoting scripture, he described Rev. Mr Forbes as "not only very sinful, but also a fool." Hugh subtly suggested, that "when famine again visits them and sharp hunger gnaws their vitals" the Skye girls should cook their minister! This was a veiled reference to the fate of a 13<sup>th</sup> Century Bishop of Caithness, Adam of Melrose.

Did Donald ever meet Hugh? In 1850 Donald visited the capital with a party of Gaelic-speaking refugees from Barra to see absentee landlord Colonel John Gordon of Cluny, but he was away (Bruce, 2018). While Donald was attending meetings of Edinburgh City Council and a special committee set up to help the refugees, they waited patiently in the Royal Exchange Square and became a novel attraction. Hugh was not mentioned as being present at the meetings, however he certainly saw the refugees as he published the only detailed description of them (*The Witness* 21<sup>st</sup> December 1850)-

*"All were interesting as individuals: with generally black hair cut short, sparkling black eyes; the men of square, compact forms and faces, in stature shorter, it struck us, comparatively, than the women. But our readers may look with us – so far as a feeble pen can sketch it – at one group. Here is a black-eyed, merry looking girl of six, clinging at the end of a form to her mother. The matron has spare features, with a strong intelligent expression; a high mutch fastened close round her face with a spotted handkerchief,*

*whose knotted ends fall over her care-worn brow. She is looking anxiously, but softly, on another child nestling under her plaid, – a fine boy of some two years old, with dark, peering eyes, and cheeks already tanned. In front is a bashful high-cheeked lad of some eighteen, with his hands in the pockets of his cotton jacket; and beside him the hard-featured father, with coat somewhat in need of the gudewife's needle when the family shall be permanently housed... The lad awkwardly fidgeted when he heard his own praises, – looked at his mother, – and her eyes filled, – and so did ours."*

If any readers come across any evidence that an encounter took place between Hugh and Donald or if Hugh wrote to Donald, then please let me know (via *Hugh's News*).

What do I think of him? He was certainly quite a character. His writings demonstrate anger stemming from the injustice he and his family suffered and clearly he wanted to publicise atrocious clearance events, and help fellow sufferers. He was not averse to exaggerating and even lying, which casts doubt on the validity of his writings, however there is enough corroborating evidence to support most of what he wrote. He demonstrated a master of the English language, though given his first language was Gaelic, I suspect he had help, perhaps from his lowland-born wife. He was supremely confident to fight and win court cases without any formal legal training; but he also became complacent and made mistakes which came back to bite him hard. However every time his world collapsed around him he reinvented himself and bounced back, so a true survivor. In spite of his flaws, I am immensely proud of him as his publicity of the Massacre of the Rosses probably prevented any such atrocity happening again; also he probably saved hundreds, if not thousands, of people from starving to death during the Potato Famine.

My book is three-quarters written though I've yet to secure a publisher. To finish it I need to pay a visit to Nova Scotia to examine their archives and visit his grave. I am also hoping that I will find an image of him there, as at the moment I have no idea what he looked like!

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the librarians and archivists around the UK who have given me access to Donald's works, particularly to Edinburgh University Library for permission to reproduce extracts from *The Witness*.

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BOOK REVIEWS

# HUTTON'S BONES, AND THE SWALLOWS' DANCE

**Flipstones, by Jim Mackintosh (Tippermuir Books Ltd, £9.99)**

and

**The Language of Lighthouses, by Alison Seller (available from the author, £5.00)**

An email begins this story, from Jim Mackintosh, poetry prize-winner in the first Hugh Miller Writing Competition, suggesting he come over to Cromarty and give a poetry reading. A suggestion very promptly accepted.

He was performing the previous day at the Belladrum Festival, near Beauly, so he could easily pop over, he said. The next thing was to enlist the help of our own Cromarty poet, Alison Seller, a winner in the second competition this year, and invite her to join him.

And so we had a Sunday afternoon of rich pleasure at the Old Brewery. At Belladrum, Jim appeared before some 150 folk. Ours was a much smaller gathering, but he was good enough to say afterwards that the occasion had been "no less satisfying and precious."

Jim's new book comprises nearly sixty new poems headed by the title piece *Flipstones*, and a selection from six other previously published volumes. His work is rooted in Perth and its strong writing culture, as expressed in the proud and witty *Pethnicity*. Jim's output is redolent throughout with wry humour and moving, insightful reflection, and much of it is in superbly expressive broad Scots.

From *Wisdom*, he has his twa canny dogs, playing around a stream, "tae sit beside me aw pechin an drookit but/ wi a leal-hertit deek as if to say, 'isn't this brow'?"

He includes his prize-worthy Miller tribute, "*Old is Tomorrow*," (*Hugh's News No 31, Spring 2017*) and another offering, *Hutton's Bones*, referencing "unrooted wisdom relocated by the hammer knock."

There are countless gems of lines, beginning with the flipstones of "fresh words... hoping to please," and such as, chosen at random from *Whispers*, "the vespers of a huddled owl announce the turning hours," and his granddad's *Gardening Jacket*, "shaped by the seasons/held together by fragments of him."

Never has the range and depth of passion of the football fan been better caught than in his musing as poet-in-residence for his beloved St Johnstone FC. *Open the Curtains*, because "Saturdays are fitba' days."

Alison Seller's Cromarty collection, a lovely hand-stitched production, is nothing less than an extended hymn to all the glories of Cromarty, most strongly rendered in *Home*, with its "days and nights of deep magic," and "Heron and oystercatchers skimming the waves," and "Golden moonrise flames the Sutors."



Cromarty sunset

She easily touches the heart, when she yearns in *Dreaming of Swallows* for the return of the swallows "sculpting the sky", their plunging and shooting up in their "festival/of dare-devil dance." We have previously published *Seinn/Singing* on the Gaelic Chapel (*Hugh's News, No 20, Winter 2014*) and *Deep Absence* (*Hugh's News No 36, Summer 2018*), the latter a particularly moving vision of Hugh carving the headstone of his daughter Liza, "his fingers/tracing the letters he has hewn/ His sweet Elizabeth's name/preserved in tender stone."

Her booklet is available from [alison.seller@btinternet.com](mailto:alison.seller@btinternet.com).

## CROMARTY 2018

*Here is a poem by one of the Glasgow poets group, Sally Freedman, on her first encounter with "lovely, lively Cromarty." Readers might like to compare her view of the town compared with the one reported in 1864 (p17). I think we can reassure her that religious "feuding" is a thing of the past!*

by Sal Mackay

## September 2018

Awkward

A first date.

What can I find to say:

"You look gorgeous with your curvy shoreline and bubbly waves," or

"You look wild and wonderful in the wind, blown about, foliage shimmering in the dusk,

Your musky fragrances rising with each footfall."

I'd like to but you'd think I was mad.

Perhaps I could ask you about the feuding, or is it too soon? Wee Free or the others?

A bit forward perhaps. Too personal. Don't mention religion or politics.

What about those? Those structures out there? An eyeful eh?

Must be an embarrassment. You know they look bad, in broad daylight, better in the dark,

With the lights on.

Hell it's political. Everything is...

Let's see...

I have to risk something don't I, if I'm really going to get to know you?

One issue in particular. I'll say it straight out: dolphins or oil? Like that.

I know what I think and I know what I'd want you to think, but you might not, then what?

Anyway I'm nearly late.

Just round this corner,

Oh there you are, so attractive in an olde world way, arty crafty, bursting with colour and notions, quirks and character-I can see it in your vennels, your mellow outlines, you're the real thing.

"Hey, hi. Cromarty. Unusual name. How will we get to know each other?"



*The poets deliver their first impressions of Cromarty in an informal party at the Cheese House at the close of their visit.*



## CROMARTY 1864

*We begin here a series of what we may call vignettes about Cromarty and Hugh Miller's birthplace cottage in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, written by various anonymous authors for newspapers of the time, which show how perilously close it came to utter ruin. They were forwarded to us by the Miller scholar, Dr Michael A Taylor, in the course of his mammoth researches. Some modern punctuation has been inserted.*

*The first article memorably describes the rundown, melancholy state of the Birthplace Cottage in 1864, and a most sad encounter with someone who is almost certainly Miller's personal devotee, the mentally disturbed "Foolish Angie." The tour described went on to cover the rest of the Black Isle villages.*

*The second piece was lifted by the Inverness Courier from a correspondent writing in the Aberdeen Free Press, and shows that despite the "arrangements" the family made in 1864, the place was in no better state 18 years later. As we know from Dr Taylor's researches, Hugh's son, geologist Hugh Miller Junior, would fairly soon set about turning the cottage into a museum. It is not difficult to imagine that if he had not done so, the cottage would inevitably have fallen into total dereliction.*

# A "WRETCHED LOOKING HOUSE"

from the *ABERDEEN PEOPLE'S JOURNAL*

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June 1864

Cromarty is a most interesting place to visit. All who have read the works of the late Hugh Miller - and they do not merit the name of Scotchmen if they have not read at least some of them - will bear me out on this. The situation of the town has been compared to that of Naples, but it is a good thing for Cromarty that the guardian Sutor is not a spitfire like Vesuvius. With very little trouble, however, the Sutors could be made magnificent fires. Were two or three batteries erected on top of each, and a few Whitworths or Armstrongs placed within them, the combined fleets of the world could ride safely at anchor in the unequalled deep water bay of Cromarty. As an old man' o' war sea seaman said to us, "We could then boast of a Scottish Gibraltar, sir, and a harbour of refuge without its equal in the world."(\*1)

Persons with a dash of the adventurous in their disposition would not fail to fall at once in love with Cromarty. Boats can be hired for the day at a moderate sum and in the bay flounders, and haddock are to be caught in large quantities. Round the bluff headlands the sportsman will find plenty of work for his gun. Pigeons, wild fowl, gulls, scarth and ducks are numerous, and northern divers are not infrequently to be met with. Lodgings are cheap, house rents are not high, the beach is safe and particularly well adapted for bathing, and altogether for those whose constitutions are strengthened by the invigorating sea air and by a course of sea bathing, Cromarty possesses advantage such as no other place in Scotland can lay claim to.

But with all these attractions, the town has a languished, worn-out, dilapidated air about it. It is away from the regular route of tourists, and direct from north or south it can only be reached by crossing one of two ferries in small boats. This is a great drawback to its commercial prosperity. And even now there is standing empty at the shore a large building which not so very long ago gave employment to upwards of two hundred hands. The place was built as a hemp and bagging factory, and is still in good order, with every requisite at hand for doing a large trade. Goods could be imported to it from St Petersburg, and after being manufactured, would be exported from Cromarty by sea, or sent to Invergordon, and despatched from thence by rail to any part of the country. Dundee, we have been informed, is one of the busiest towns in Great Britain at present. Might it not be for the interest of some of the enterprising merchants there to take a run north and start the concern again. Solely for the good it would do the town, we are sure that Colonel Ross, the proprietor of the estate, would deal liberally with anyone so inclined. (\*2)

A miserable drizzle began to fall as we set out to see the home in which the late Hugh Miller the noble stonemason



*Cromarty at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, still looking much the same as it did in the late 1860s, and in Foolish Angie's time.*

*Image courtesy of Cromarty Live*

of Cromarty was born. Descending a dirty narrow street in the Fishertown, we arrived at the place, and ... the state of the atmosphere was such as to give the wretched looking house a still more melancholy aspect than usual. Judging entirely from the appearance of the cottage in which he was born, poor Hugh must have had hard enough times of it in his youth. Thatched on the roof, the walls bearing traces of having been "harled" at some indefinite period, and the small windows begrimed with dust, the little house, as it at present stands, looks, of all the places in the world, the most unlikely to have been the birthplace of one destined to shine in the firmament of literature. Opposite the door, and above two mouldy water barrels, planted among thick rank woods, hung the bleached remains of a huge codfish. And, to complete the sorrowful surroundings, in the gutter sat a poor "natural," chattering unintelligibly, and looking with a vacant stare into our faces. (\*3) It was truly a heartfelt relief to us when we learned that arrangements were in course of being carried out to have the place made neat and tidy, and worthy of being visited by the numerous tourists who go out of their way to see the native town of the eminent geologist and man of letters. (\*4).

Under the guidance of Ex-Provost Watson, a genial and gentlemanly man, and a personal friend of the late Mr Miller, we saw many places of interest. Above a gateway in one street, and below the windows of a mason's lodge, is a stone slab with the words "Robertson's Lodge" and the date 1825 neatly cut out. The initials "H.M" are appended at the right hand corner. (\*5). Behind the Fishertown, and on the top of the Kirk brae, stands the monument erected to Mr. Miller's memory by his fellow-countrymen. The shaft is round, and is appropriately built of old red sandstone. It stands on a pedestal eight or ten feet high. On the top is a good statue by Ritchie. The total expense of the whole creation was about, it certainly did not exceed, £310 - a fabulously small sum, looking at the massive structure. (\*6). On the base is the following inscription:-

IN MEMORY OF  
HUGH MILLER  
AND IN COMMEMORATION OF HIS GENIUS  
AND LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC EMINENCE  
BY  
HIS COUNTRYMEN

Footnotes:

\*1 The author has unknowingly anticipated the gun emplacements erected at both Sutors for defence in the next century, and the deployment of the Firth for some 60 years as a summer anchorage for the Royal Navy..

\*2. The author seems not to have been aware that the factory had been in long decline even before it finally closed eleven years before, in 1853, not least because of the arrival of jute for sacking, and its mechanised production in factories in Dundee. See *My Little Town of Cromarty*, by David Alston, Birlinn 2006.

\*3. Dr Mike Taylor, the leading Miller scholar, surmises that this poor fellow could have been Hugh's one time devoted follower, "Foolish Angie," Angus Mackay. See story *In Praise of the Idiot Boy* (p 9)

\*4 The author's guide must have been informed of the Miller family's intention that year to make the building inhabitable again, presumably for letting for rent. See *Geological Curator*, Vol 10 No 7, Hugh Miller, ed Dr M A Taylor.

\*5. Robertson's Lodge has been in existence since 1772, and still functions but there is no trace of the initials HM to be seen there today.

\*6. The sum may have seemed "fabulously small" to this visitor, but it took a great deal of raising, via several appeals over two years, as described by Drs Taylor and Alison Morrison-Low in the *Geological Curator* volume.

## "A WILD MASS OF WEEDS"

from the *INVERNESS COURIER*, Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1882

"It is tenantless, the windows are broken, the thatched roof mossgrown, and the garden, which fronts it lengthways, is a wild mass of weeds, in which the dock and the dandelion predominate."

## BARGAIN BOOKS

Don't forget, readers, we still have available to order from the Secretary the research masterwork, *Geological Curator*, Hugh Miller (Vol 10, No 7) by Dr Mike Taylor and others, at the bargain price of £8.25, plus £2.75 p & p, £11.00 in total, and last copies of Hugh's autobiography in paperback, *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (B & W Publishing, 1993), at the trade price of £6.00, plus £2.75 p & p, £8.75).



## The story of "Foolish Angie"

# IN PRAISE OF THE "IDIOT BOY"

We could not pass the Aberdeen journalist's reference to the "natural" hanging sadly about the Cottage door without recording a little tribute to the handicapped boy and man who showed such singular devotion to his hero, Hugh, even beyond the grave.

Hugh himself provides the first account of the lad, real name Angus Mackay, in a letter to one of his circle of admiring literary ladies on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1834 (1) Hugh is still working as an ornamental stone-carver, and living in the Cottage: "There is a poor idiot boy ... who spends much of his time with me in the church-yard, and who, when I am writing in my little room, frequently creeps upstairs and squats himself beside me. I never yet saw any one of the class in whom intellect is so entirely wanting as in this poor thing. He cannot even count three; but he has a few simple instincts which seem given to him to supply in part the want of the higher faculties, and (a still more important matter) some of the better affections of our nature, - love and compassion, and sorrow for the loss or absence of those who have been kind to him."

Hugh goes on to describe Angus babbling beside him, saying he wants to give him "sugar, a dram and two eggs." He continues with how Angus made him come with him a few days earlier to his father's funeral, which the boy watched with "an expression indescribably affecting, and in which grief, astonishment, and terror seemed equally blended." ... "He is even now telling me that he is to keep part of his morning piece for his father, who is to come out of his grave tomorrow."

Miller notes how grief or affection in such "poor helpless things" can touch us more than when expressed by people of ordinary understanding.

A few years later, with Hugh and Lydia now married and living in Miller House, Lydia takes up the story in a memoir (2), of how the boy would wait for hours at the ferry if Hugh had been away on bank business to see if there was anything for him to carry. He would then accompany Miller home in triumph. "A carpet-bag of Hugh's was a trophy to him; to rub away at his shoes, if he could get them was his heart's delight." Lydia used to "propitiate him with halfpennies." However, much to the amusement of the Miller household, Angus persistently referred to the resident servant as Miller's "wife."

Harriet Ross Taylor, then a pupil of Lydia's at Miller House, and daughter of Robert Ross, the Commercial Bank manager who employed Miller as an accountant, warmly remembered those times (3): "Near Mr Miller's home there was to be seen on all fine days a group of children at play and among them, a boy not like other boys - an idiot he was considered to be, Angus Mackay or Captain, as he liked to be called, the son of an old soldier who had seen much service. This poor boy was devotedly attached to Mr Miller and though he had never before moved many yards from his father's door, when Mr Miller came to the Bank, which was at the other end of our little town, he at once followed him and soon made himself at home in my father's kitchen, and had his dinner there every day while my father lived. "Bless Miller, good boy! Kind to me" was part of Captain's prayer before each meal. He was capable of the deepest attachment; and his love for what was good, and hatred for what was wrong and shrinking from bad company was assuredly heaven-taught."

It is a most distressing moment when we seemingly next encounter Angus in the Aberdeen journalist's story of the decrepit cottage, eight years after Miller's death; "And, to complete the sorrowful surroundings, in the gutter sat a poor 'natural,' chattering unintelligibly, and looking with a vacant stare into our faces."

Miller scholar Dr Mike Taylor surmises this was most likely to have been "Foolish Angie." He suggests he may have been still hanging about the place because Hugh's mother Harriet had died only the year before: "I have a horrible feeling he may have been sitting there in the rain wondering what had happened to his free soup from Hugh's mum." Angus in his wandering mind could even have been wondering when 'Miller' was coming home for his summer holidays. He may have been living at the time just up the Paye in the single-room cottage Hugh had built in the 1820s for his Aunt Jenny.

It is good to find in Harriet Ross Taylor's recollections that Foolish Angie did not live on in misery or die a lonely death, but, on the contrary, fared well: "He lived to the age of sixty-three, kindly treated by everybody; and his mind seemed to expand as he grew older. Latterly he received a suit of clothes each year from the Poor Board, and it was carefully kept for Sunday until the next suit was given. In great business he was that day; and after my father's death came to my husband for his penny, and it must be a bright one, to put in the church plate. He went to the Free Church, and dearly loved Mr Elder who was for thirteen years its minister."

Footnotes:

(1). *Hugh Miller's Life and Letters*, Vol 1, biography by Rev Peter Bayne, 1871

(2) *Lydia, wife of Hugh Miller of Cromarty*, biography by Elizabeth Sutherland, Tuckwell Press 2002.

(3) *Recollections of Hugh Miller*, by Harriet Ross Taylor.



*Cromarty at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, still looking much the same as it did in the late 1860s, and in Foolish Angie's time. Image courtesy of Cromarty Live*

# A STRIKING COMPARISON

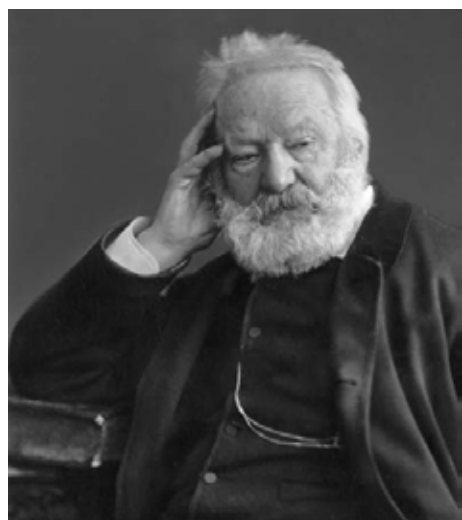
We are much obliged to a young Frenchwoman, Jessica Petitedmange, for drawing most interesting parallels between that titan of French literature Victor Hugo and our own Hugh Miller.



Jess spent three months as an intern at our Museum this summer and thus had a chance to get acquainted with some of Hugh's social commentary, and when we met at the Cottage one afternoon, she observed that Hugo and Miller were "quite similar in outlook in several ways."

For a start they shared their birthdate, 1802, and both have a birthplace museum in their native town. Maison Victor Hugo is a three-storey building in the centre of the city of Besançon, in the Franche-Comté region of Eastern France.

Jess noted during her internship that Hugo and Miller both deplored the suffering and oppression inflicted on the poor in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Hugo spoke out against child labour and the death penalty, and in favour of women's rights and free education, writing articles prolifically for these causes, as well as reflecting them in his immortal novels, *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. Meanwhile, Miller was exposing the terrible housing, living and working conditions found in Scotland in articles for *The Witness*, such as *The Cottages of our Hinds*, *The Bothy System*, *Climbing Boys - Chimney Sweeping*, and many more.



Jess lives in Besançon, and says one of her favourite places is the fine reading room in the Maison Hugo Museum, which is "only five minutes from my flat." She explains how she came to spend time several hundred miles away at our small museum in the north of Scotland: "I had the opportunity to do a placement abroad to validate my master's degree, I really wanted it to be in Scotland as I have felt drawn to the country since I was a kid. So I contacted the National Trust for Scotland, because I was much interested by the work they are doing, and Alix (Dr Powers-Jones, the manager) was the one who wrote back to me with an offer to work at Hugh Miller's." She will be compiling a 50-page report comparing the two Museum of as part of her final submission for her masters degree. She hopes to be a writer herself and find a career in the cultural field in one sphere or another, "as I like to say, 'advienne que pourra' (come what may)."

Her comments prompted us to wonder: Did Hugh Miller read Hugo, whose epics won almost instant international acclaim? Could Hugo possibly have been aware of an outspoken contemporary Scottish critic of society's ills? Miller had his literary admirers in Britain, Dickens, Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle among them, and his reputation quickly spread abroad, certainly to some of the great scientists, possibly writers too.

Such musings can only be fanciful in the absence of any evidence, but it is certain that Miller benefits from comparisons with the mighty Hugo.



Top to bottom:

Hugh Miller

Victor Hugo

Jess beside the marriage lintel in Abertarff House, the National Trust for Scotland's drop-in visitor centre in Inverness.



## MUSEUM NEWS

## SONGS OF LEGEND, BEASTS OF YORE

by Martin Gostwick

From the outside, the Museum looked like it was holding a party, with a large banner and balloons on every railing. From the inside of the Birthplace Cottage the Elysian airs of a harp wafted on to the street.

This was "Live" or "Beo" in Gaelic, an arts festival with and for young people in the Highlands, in which Hugh Miller's was one of six National Trust for Scotland (NTS) venues participating, holding its events on 17th August as part of Scotland's Year of Young People (YOYP) 2018.

Swiftly stepping into the Birthplace Cottage, there sitting in the kitchen at the back was the Black Isle's own great folklorist, Lizzie McDougall, and spread out on her knees lay her gorgeous gold and silver darlings quilt. It bears images of legends from up and down our north-east coasts, and first made its public appearances two years ago (*see Hugh's News Nos 29 and 30*).



Lizzie &amp; Sianni

She was regaling Cromarty parents and children, Antonia Gordon and daughter Alexa, and Kelly More with her son Nate, with the much-loved tale of Captain Reid and the Mermaid, when I walked in, and Lizzie promptly reminded me of the parts Frieda Gostwick and I played in composing the panel showing that story.

Beside Lizzie, sat her daughter Siannie McDougall Moodie, the harpist joining her in narrating the tales in magical tunes and song. Siannie is a professional musician who specialises in traditional music, who also studied earth science at St Andrew's University, so appreciates Hugh Miller from both angles.

It was so appropriate that they gave their stories at the very place in the Cottage where it is believed Hugh as a boy picked up his old legends from family and neighbours over 200 years ago. Lizzie said that in that intimate space, it was not like performing before an audience, more like "having lively conversations" with those who popped in. She and Siannie were "very grateful" to be asked to do this.

Jointly with the folklore at the Cottage came an exhibition along the street at The Old Brewery of fossil impressions, made by pupils from various Black Isle schools, and taken from specimens in the handling collection bequeathed to the Museum by the late Nigel Trewin. Their work was finished at the Highland Print Studio, Inverness, and included many striking images of primordial beasts.

The organisers of the broad range of YOYP events at the six Highland NTS properties were the Highland Youth Arts Hub who filmed the happenings, and leading its team was Miranda Strachan, from Alness, who

soon acquainted me with her strong Cromarty connection, in that her grandparents married in the East Kirk.

Last year, she gained a degree in museum studies, and hopes she can go on to a future in Scottish heritage.

The day was an altogether successful occasion in all its parts, and showed off the Museum to new audiences, which of course is one of its prime aims.



year of young people  
bliadhna na h-òigridh  
2018

## TWO FABULOUS TALES IN ONE

*Our Growing Stories event in The Old Brewery on 20<sup>th</sup> October featured the tale of one in particular of the twelve items in Lizzie McDougall's magical Gold and Silver Darlings Quilt, that of the Dunbeath Stone. It is two-fold, in that it begins with its totally unexpected turn up - the proverbial lucky find, more like miraculous discovery - related here by Lizzie herself, and follows with the remarkable evidence the stone reveals of early Christian life in the north of Scotland, given on the Dunbeath Heritage Centre's website.*

### "Don't come in till you find me a pictish stone!"

by Lizzie McDougall

Over twenty years ago, George and Nan Bethune returned to live in Dunbeath on the old family croft at Chapel hill and began making a garden.

There were a number of out buildings on the croft; one was in a dangerous state, so they decided to have it knocked down and asked their friend with a JCB to do it.

George and Nan went off to Thurso for the day and when they came back found a great pile of stones that had been tipped out of the JCB bucket. Nan said she would go and get the tea on, and George said I will just have a look at that pile of stones to see if there are any nice ones to make a path in the new garden. Nan called back "Well, don't come in till you find me a Pictish Stone"

George went over to the pile and spotted a nice rectangular stone on the top of the heap, he picked it up, it was covered in earth which he started to brush off, and what did he find ... Carving !

He called out to Nan "I think I've found you a Pictish Stone, can I come in for my tea."

Later they had a closer look and invited Pictish art historian Isobel Henderson to come and see it. She said "It's not usual Pictish design, but I think it's very early."

George and Nan went on to help set up the wonderful Dunbeath Heritage Centre, which has this stone at its heart. The current thinking is that the Stone was carved with this image to represent the wooden crosses that travelling Priests and Pilgrims carried from place to place to act as holy places in early Celtic Christian times.

Besides the stone in the panel is the Pilgrim Road, used until quite times by the local minister to walk the 12 miles from one church to another. He is seen at the very top of the road on the Scaraben ridge. An angel is shown above him who would help him lift his knees when he got tired. Also in the picture, on the left, is a broch, in which a piper was held for a year, according to local lore, by the fairies.

*Two drawings by a child, Finn Robertson, inspired by tales from Hugh Miller's Scenes and Legends shown on the quilt, about Finn MacCoull and The Giants of Knockfarrel.  
The quilt panel featuring the Dunbeath Stone.*





# House of Peace, Chapel Hill, Ballachly

Extracts from the Dunbeath Heritage Centre website (Archæology page)

Since the discovery of the 7<sup>th</sup>-century Ballachly Stone along with other dressed stones and fragments of a second, later Pictish cross-slab, we have been able to begin piecing together a fuller picture of the strath in the early medieval period.

The nature of these carvings, together with the monumental scale of the remains at Chapel Hill, point to the development of a significant monastic institution in Dunbeath. Such an establishment should be seen both in the context of the Christianisation of the north of Scotland and in the context of power struggles between the dominant Pictish clans or families in the area (and later between these groups and the Norse invaders).

It is likely that Dunbeath was the seat of a particularly powerful group. Research elsewhere has demonstrated that, as an expression of status, local elites often gifted lands to monastic institutions, and it is possible that this occurred in Dunbeath – the 'sacred' power base represented by the Church being installed adjacent to the 'secular' power base represented by the broch which gives its name to the area.

With the coming of the Vikings in the 9th century, it is intriguing to note that Dunbeath retained its Celtic name while the majority of places along the coast were given Norse names. This suggests that Dunbeath, with its well-established Church, had continued to prosper and was sufficiently powerful to either repel or form alliances with the invaders.

Some of the most striking features at Chapel Hill are the massive walls which radiate from its central knoll, dividing the surrounding enclosure into three distinct areas ... Retaining an aura of mystery and sanctity, the 'House of Peace' is still considered by many as a place set apart.

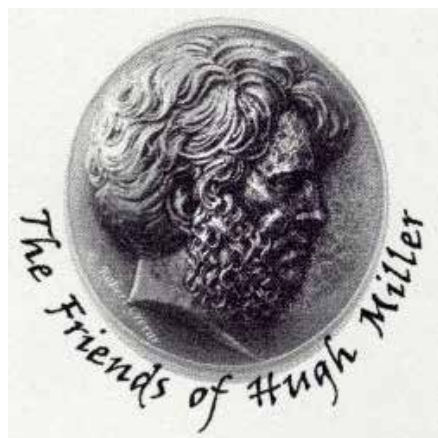
The Ballachly Stone, discovered by chance in the mid 1990s, represents an early tradition (c.7<sup>th</sup> century) of Christian stone-carving in northern Scotland, distinct from the better-known Pictish symbol stones and cross slabs of the area and perhaps showing the influence of Iona and Ireland.... The spirals at the corners of the arms are found on carvings on Iona and Ireland. The spokes that they contain perhaps represent stars, with the large one and the curved hook on the upper arm being the sun and moon. This hook may also stand for the P-shaped Greek letter Rho which was often combined with the cross to form Chi-Rho, the first letters of Christ's name in Greek. Another early symbol of Christ was the fish, and the salmon facing the centre of the cross-head probably has this meaning.



*Above: The Ballachly (Dunbeath) Stone*

*Right: Dunbeath broch*





## MEMBERSHIP FORM

I WISH to become a member of The Friends of Hugh Miller (Registered charity No 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.

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

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