



# Hugh's News

Magazine of  
The Friends of Hugh Miller

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*Eliza's headstone*

## "ELIZA'S PATH": A SPECIAL APPEAL

by Martin Gostwick

This is our first appeal in a decade. It is addressed particularly to our members, as well as to all those who know about and admire Hugh Miller.



*Clan Urquhart crest*

We are a small charity which manages to fund most activities from membership subscriptions, such as the Hugh Miller writing competitions, fossil collection exhibitions, public meetings, our website, and magazine.

Eliza's Path is, however, a project beyond our limited financial scope. The project is for the erection of a high quality steel railing with appropriate signage, leading up the steep path to the Old St Regulus Burial Ground. Situated on the outskirts of Cromarty, it is popularly known locally as the "Pirates' Graveyard." At present this historic site is almost invisible and difficult to access, especially for the old and infirm. It is a historic site of great beauty and tranquillity, which deserves to be so much better known, easier to reach and therefore more often visited.

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*Painting of the Old St Regulus burial ground by Frieda Gostwick*

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Its particular association with Hugh Miller and his wife, Lydia Falconer Fraser, is that it contains the grave of their first born child, Eliza, who died of a fever aged only 17 months. Her headstone is Hugh's last work as a stonemason. His ancestor the buccaneer John Feddes is buried close by, and within the grounds are the remains of the former medieval castle's chapel and the burial vault of Clan Urquhart chiefs. The graveyard is also the scene of several of Hugh Miller's folk tales.



The construction cost of the railing has been estimated at £16,000, and this is the sum we need to raise to carry out this project. We are applying to several business donors in both public and private sectors to contribute. We also seek individual donations to this appeal, **adding up to a total of £4,000**, from members and other Miller admirers, because it is of such importance and potential for enhancing the Miller Legacy. We believe it will be of especial interest to Hugh and Lydia Miller's direct descendants, since a main purpose is to honour the memory of their daughter Eliza. This is why the appeal carries the signatures of two direct descendants, Stephanie Kulesza and Sue Busby.

*STOP PRESS: Since we first launched the appeal on 19<sup>th</sup> July, we have received individual donations adding up to just over half our target, ie more than £2,000. Will you help us get over the line?*

We look forward to receiving whatever you feel able to give. Payment can be made through our PayPal account on our website, or by cheque to the address given below.

Yours sincerely

Martin Gostwick

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Stephanie Kulesza, great great great grand-daughter

Sue Busby, great great grand-daughter

*Above, from top:*

*Eliza's headstone in the grounds of Old St Regulus*

*Entrance to the path now*

*The path is all but invisible to the passer by*

*Entrance to the Urquhart vault under the mounds which are all that remains of the Urquhart castle chapel*

*Top right: The path from above*



## Other News

# INAUGURAL NIGEL TREWIN MEMORIAL LECTURE

WE are proud to announce that we have engaged the distinguished palaeobotanist Professor Dianne Edwards of Cardiff University to be the first speaker to give the Nigel Trewin Memorial Lecture in honour of our late Chairman. It is most appropriate that the lecture will be held on the campus of Aberdeen University, where Nigel conducted his distinguished career.

Professor Edwards' address will be themed "In the Steps of Nigel Trewin". She collaborated with Professor Trewin for many years in research on the Rhynie Chert.

Please note the following details:

Date: Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2019

Venue: University of Aberdeen, Fraser Noble Building  
Elphinstone Road, Old Aberdeen, AB24 3EF

Doors open: 6.30pm

Entry is free. Donations welcome. We will be delighted to welcome members of our supporting geological societies, and any other members of the public with particular interests in the earth sciences.

Professor Trewin's most generous bequest to The Friends of £2000 has enabled the establishment of Memorial Lectures in his name. The bequest letter stated his wish that the funds "be used to support a meeting or a publication relating to Hugh Miller's geological interests."

The Royal Society tells us: "Dianne Edwards is a distinguished botanist renowned for her study of early plant life on Earth. Through carefully documented field work and painstaking laboratory analysis, she has helped shed light on one of the most important evolutionary events in our planet's history — the colonisation of land by plants." Dianne has commented: "I feel greatly honoured to be asked to give this lecture. Nigel was both a friend and scientific colleague, whom I miss on both counts. In addition, having worked on the Old Red Sandstone for over 55 years, I have Hugh Miller's work on my bookshelves."

Nigel, who died on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, gifted many important items both to the Hugh Miller Museum and to The Friends of Hugh Miller, along with his services as a first-rate Chairman. These included leading roles in organising two major conferences, *Hugh Miller: Local Hero* (2008) and *Old Red: Hugh Miller's Geological Legacy* (2017).



*Professor Dianne Edwards*

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## Miller Re-Told Latest

# £250,000 THE TARGET

REFURBISHMENT of Miller House and the Birthplace Cottage is expected to cost upwards of a quarter of a million pounds, property manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones has reported. Estimates which she has received from two firms of design consultants are both around this figure, with VAT and some ancillary costs to come on top. She is waiting for bids from three other firms.

Alix freely acknowledges this is an "expensive" project. The property recently received a visit from the National Trust for Scotland's Patrons Group of large donors, who could hold the key to ultimate success.

**We must here make it clear that this is an NTS project, completely separate from the "Eliza's Path" appeal, which is entirely a Friends of Hugh Miller project.**

*(continued on p11)*

# CLAN URQUHART GATHER IN THEIR HOMELAND

by Martin Gostwick

One of those rare occasions when history truly comes alive took place in Cromarty on June 22nd, the finest day of a wet summer. It was a Gathering of Clan Urquhart. They celebrated the traditions relating to their most famous ancestor, Sir Thomas Urquhart, and recorded by our other Cromarty man of renown, Hugh Miller.

I was their invited guest having drawn to their attention our "Eliza's Path" project for the old St Regulus Burial Ground, where both Urquhart lairds and Miller family members have been laid to rest.

The clan's association reunite on the Black Isle every few years. They are a small clan compared with some of the bigger emigrant tribes, but are certainly just as representative as the rest of the Scottish diaspora.

They return to Cromarty believing it is their true homeland, only a couple of dozen or so in number, but representing an association with members living all over the globe, especially America.

And they bring with them pageantry, a splendid parade through the east end of the town bearing flags and banners as colourful as their Highland dress, and conducting themselves with obvious pride and high good humour.

For some four centuries the Urquharts held large estates in Aberdeenshire, Moray, and on the Black Isle until Sir Thomas's downfall when supporting the Stuart monarchy against the Parliament army led by Oliver Cromwell. They had two medieval towers on the Black Isle, Urquhart Castle demolished in 1672 only a few years after Sir Thomas's death in exile, and Castle Craig, a ruin just about still standing. They fought the Covenanters back in the day, and many remain passionate Jacobites to this day.

However, they now come in peace, with a message of good will to all, conveyed at a Service held in St Regulus Church conducted by Episcopalian Canon Mel Langille in Gaelic and English, and addressed by their 28<sup>th</sup> clan chief, Colonel Wilkins Fisk Urquhart of Urquhart, US Air Force (retired). Their Commissioner in Britain, Adam Urquhart, based in Glasgow, and their Seanachaidh, Tom Urquhart of Bonnyrigg, Midlothian, also spoke.

The Gathering marched behind a young local piper, Kyle Cameron aged 14, down Church Street, along the Causeway, past St Regulus burial ground and up to Cromarty House, where they were greeted by Ms Emma Nightingale, representing the family which owns the surviving Cromarty estate. There followed a simple, impressive ceremony, in which Ms Nightingale symbolically handed over possession of the old medieval castle of which only a well remains, her family's flag being lowered and replaced by Clan Urquhart's, saluted by the clan chief with raised sword.



*Clan Urquhart flag*



*Urquhart clan chief*



*Urquhart procession*





Above: Clan Urquhart at Cromarty House  
 Right: A clan group at Cromarty House  
 Below: Urquhart crest in Cromarty House



Cromarty House threw open its doors to host a picnic lunch, and show some of the surviving artefacts associated with the Urquharts, including stonework from the old castle, and a vast canvas of a hunting scene after Rubens.

My most memorable conversation was with an Urquhart fan, retired archæologist Connie Rodriquez of New Orleans, who comes over every year, for the ongoing dig at ruinous Castle Craig. She was persuaded by Virginia, dowager of the late 27<sup>th</sup> Chief, Kenneth Urquhart, to come to the rescue of the medieval tower, and now, like so many, has thankfully fallen in love with the Highlands. So much so, that she hopes to find a home here so she can give more time to Castle Craig. Her ambition is that it can be stabilised, and even opened to the public. She joked: "The Black Isle has got just about everything for visitors; the only thing it lacks is a castle!"

One of my Cromarty neighbours remarked good-humouredly that she found Sir Thomas Urquhart a more attractive character than Hugh Miller. The eccentric knight's wonderful flamboyance is memorably related by Hugh himself in a whole chapter of *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*.

He was the genius who attended Aberdeen University at the improbably early age of 11, the multiple linguist, brave soldier, duellist, inventor of a "universal language," composer of incomprehensible treatises on mathematics, and above all, the most magnificent embroiderer of the English language.

Hugh praised a Scottish patriot, a man who stood "a friend to civil liberty," and one who "expressed the earnest wish that a free school and a standing library should be established in every parish in Scotland." He saw him as "an intellectual monster - a sort of moral centaur!"



Such a man is unquestionably both awesome and endearing, who travelled to war carrying three vast trunks of books, and lost them as well as all his lands, who sought release from Cromwell's Tower of London by translating ribald Rabelais, and who, having been ruined in the Stuart cause, supposedly died laughing while in exile at the turn of fate which restored the Monarchy. He was only 41.



# A SECOND GREAT SUCCESS

Our events organiser Gavin Berkenhager took our fossil and mineral collections to the Inverness Science Festival for the second year running, held this year on 11<sup>th</sup> May.

Once again, we found literally dozens of families awed and fascinated by the range of exhibits across our two tables, Gavin striving mightily to answer and explain hundreds of questions.

The University of the Highlands organisers had put on a "scavenger hunt" for the children to go round the tables of the various exhibitors, and for The Friends of Hugh Miller, they had simply to find the portrait of Hugh. Only it was not that simple for many youngsters, looking for his image in black and white on a page of a Victorian newspaper.

On the minerals side, we gave them the opportunity to try and identify the mineral source of everyday household goods. Many found it not too hard to find copper in a pipe, much harder to identify zinc in a tap, and iron in a horseshoe.

On the fossil side, many seemed familiar with ammonites, while belemnites and "devils toenails" were a source of wonder. However, the one item which seemed to draw like a magnet was a specimen of shark poo!

This event is unquestionably one of the most popular summer days out in Highland families' calendar. There can be no doubt our efforts here, valiantly led by Gavin, are spreading the word about the geological riches to be found on our coasts north of Inverness, and may just stimulate one or two more young minds to go exploring, possibly even take up earth sciences as a career.

*Below, top left: Gavin Berkenhager demonstrates.*

*Below, top right: The "shark poo"*

*Below, bottom row: Some of the minerals on show.*



*Above, from top:  
Brothers Andrew and Alasdair Gordon  
drawing on the floor beside our display.  
Father and daughter Jason and Lois Kesson  
putting minerals under the lens.  
A mother and daughter enjoy trying to  
identify some weird and wonderful fossils.*

Episode Three

# EDINBURGH TOILS AND OUR LAST MEETINGS

by Harriet Ross Taylor

*This is the third and final edited extract from her Recollections, describing in detail Hugh Miller's exhausting first weeks at The Witness and their subsequent meetings in Cromarty during his annual leave. She provides important new evidence of the downward slide of his health, ending with her painfully abrupt notice of his death*

Mr Miller waited till his wife had recovered from the severe illness which had followed the birth of their second daughter Harriet, and then he went and took up vigorously his arduous duties at *The Witness*. Mrs Miller and her household were to follow him in April; and I had been so far from well during the winter that she most kindly proposed to my father and mother that I should accompany her in order to get good medical advice. This I did and remained with them till the end of July. Sea-sickness had so prostrated me that I hardly remember how we got up to town; but we were sat down at the end of Princes Street, in the midst of a crowd under the theatre which then stood there. But we did not stand there long, but soon drove on by the bridges to St Patrick's Square where Mr Miller lodged in the house of a young artist with whom his mother and the younger members of his family lived. Long and very wearisome was the ascent to it, being on the third, or rather I think the fourth story of the building.

The days which followed were fatiguing ones for Mrs Miller for the house which had been taken in Sylvan Place must be furnished and she had to be out the livelong day making purchases. Her husband was too busy to help her, and even if he had leisure would not have been well suited to the task. In a few hours of leisure on a Wednesday afternoon he brought his wife and me to the Greyfriars Churchyard and as we entered pointed out the newly-made grave of Miss Fanny Allardyce, a Cromarty young lady who had been for a short time resident in Edinburgh; and he told us that a few weeks before he had met her in the street when she appeared to be in blooming health, and only a week after he was invited to attend her funeral. Her mother, Mrs Allardyce, herself a gifted woman, valued Mr Miller highly; and Miss Catherine, her younger sister, was the close friend of both Mr and Mrs Miller - a person of singularly clear intellect, high-toned principle, and admirable good sense. The old churchyard for many reasons so full of interest I have visited again and again since then; and now there rests there the



An engraving of Cromarty seen from the South Sutor taken in 1825



No 5, Sylvan Place, was the first family home of Hugh and Lydia Miller in the capital, just south of The Meadows, where Harriet records his excruciating toils in the first few months of his Editorship.





*The memorial headstone laid in memory of Robert Ross and his wives in the East Kirk burial ground. The family rented a "table" box pew in the North Loft. The tablet is dedicated in part to Harriet's mother Isabella. It reads:*

ROBERT ROSS

IN MEMORY OF HIS WIFE  
ISABELLA JOYNER  
WHO DIED ON 28<sup>th</sup> NOV 1830  
ALSO HIS WIFE  
VERE MENZIE MUNRO  
WHO DIED 19<sup>th</sup> JUNE 1870

THE ABOVE ROBERT ROSS JP  
THE FRIEND OF HUGH MILLER  
WAS PROVOST OF CROMARTY FOR 20 YEARS  
AND AGENT OF THE COMMERCIAL BANK FOR 43 YEARS

HE DIED 11<sup>th</sup> SEPT 1878 AGED 96

*Robert, a prominent evangelist, played a key part in Miller's appointment to the Editorship of The Witness. In his capacity as Provost, he headed the list of Cromarty subscribers to the monument to Hugh Miller erected above the town in 1859. Worthy Provost Ross also certainly lived to a ripe old age!*

dust of one very dear to me.

It was I think on the same afternoon he brought us to see a review of troops on Bruntsfield Links. What impressed me most was how those companies of strong men were swayed, and every muscle moved in obedience to one will. Ever since that day I have better understood when I read alas what forms so large a part of history, the marshalling of armies and the record of battles. I felt no stirrings of enthusiasm because I was a girl; a lad would certainly have done so.

The house in Sylvan Place was pleasantly situated; for from the windows in front we saw Arthur's Seat, and from the drawing room windows an extent of the richly green meadows with fine trees here and there - much built upon now and different. Mrs Miller furnished the other rooms of the house, but did not find it convenient at that time to fit up the drawing-room suitably; a few things however were put into it and we found it a pleasant sitting-room. Books, which we had brought from Cromarty, and many new ones which came to Mr Miller as the editor of a newspaper were piled up around the walls; and at the foot of the room which was not a small one, his desk was placed. There he wrote all the long day and far into the night, except on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons when he took long walks into the country.

Mrs Miller and I sat either working, reading, or writing, and took good care never to disturb him. He never sat, but walked up and down, repeating his sentences until

they were moulded to his liking; occasionally coming up to his wife, and saying, "Do you think this is the best way to put it?" And when satisfied went to his desk and wrote. At meals that on which he was writing was the subject of conversation, for we were generally alone and often a book was laid on the table out of which something was read. One day he said, "I am thankful to have my books; but," addressing his wife, "you know, my dear, I took no books with me from home, and often during the past months I have quoted various passages from authors and in controversial articles on church questions from books of law entirely from memory, and their correctness was never questioned."

I liked to nurse the good-humoured baby and sometimes when pacing up and down he would stop to caress it, and more than once asked me if I thought she grew at all like her sister. There was a family likeness, nothing more. Harriet was the prettier child, and she was spared to grow up a pretty and clever woman; but there was a wonderful depth of expression in the baby Liza's face, and this child was soon taken where sin and sorrow

are not. During night, although my room was not quite near the room in which he wrote, I could often hear him speak loudly as if arguing with an opponent. I have known him write continuously for eleven hours, and I heard him tell his wife that after writing many hours a pain seized him in

One member has written:

"I must say, I'm particularly enjoying the recollections of Harriet Ross Taylor. Her insight confirms my growing appreciation of Hugh Miller as a truly remarkable man."



one particular spot in his head on which he laid his finger, and she said, "O Hugh, take care that you do not injure your brain." He replied "Dr Chalmers has been warning me."

It was evidently a relaxation to write, as he did at this time, his papers on the Old Red Sandstone, afterwards published in book form. One instance of his thoughtful kindness I must record: One night as he lay in bed he heard a door on the ground floor swing to and fro with the rising wind, and fearing I might be the worse of the noise and the cold, for I had a bad cough at the time, he went down the stairs to close it, and as I learned from Mrs. Miller the next morning, barefooted. He returned from the town one day with an unusually saddened expression, which Mrs. Miller at once noticed and said, "What is it, Hugh?" something has troubled you." "What do you think, my dear," he replied, "Robert Chambers passed me just now in the street giving no sign or recognition !" He at first felt keenly the coldness of several literary men with whom he used to be on friendly terms, and especially of Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, who had previously shown him much kindness. He in no way regretted the position he had taken up, but had not as yet quite learned "to count it all joy to suffer shame for His sake." (1)

Mr. Miller went regularly to Dr., then Mr. Guthrie's church, and was becoming much attached to this most loveable man; he said, "Mr Guthrie's preaching warms my heart, and his eloquence carries me along without effort. I do not at present want argument on Sunday, for my head is exercised enough all week." Mrs. Miller remarked that she had not yet heard any minister in Edinburgh that she would compare with Mr. Stewart, Cromarty. "No," her husband replied, "there are good and able men here, but Mr. Stewart stands alone as a preacher." But the time came when I must return home. Mrs. Miller accompanied me to Leith, and remained on board the boat until night had begun to fall, although it was an evening in July, trying to comfort me, for I found it hard to part from these dear friends.

In the middle of the following winter Mrs. Williamson, Mr. Miller's mother, became dangerously ill, and he at once came north, and remained until recovery had well begun. He was most considerate and gave to his mother yearly what kept her in comfort, as well as bestowing upon "Aunt Kitty" and "Aunt Jenny" what added greatly to theirs. He visited Cromarty almost every year and was welcomed by all, and poor Captain (2) was supremely happy. During one of these summer visits he and Mr. Stewart walked to Rosefarm, about two miles from Cromarty, to see me. I was somewhat of an invalid then, and the younger members of the family and I were



*A front page of The Witness*



*The publisher John Johnstone's offices in Edinburgh's Hunter Square.*



*The plaque outside Edinburgh City Council's headquarters, marking the site of The Witness offices*



*A portrait of Hugh Miller in later life, clearly showing the effects on him of ill health and overwork*

there for the sake of fine air and the freedom of the country. They sat and rested and talked; it was of poets ancient and modern. Mr. Miller remarked that some who were good poets were as men but poor creatures. But he spoke with enthusiasm of Robert Burns, and said, "He would have made a noble Christian!" "What you say of him is no doubt true," Mr. Stewart replied, "but, my dear Sir, he has written some things which are as asafetida in my nostrils."

So early as the summer of 1840 I heard him speak again and again of an acute pain which seized one spot in his head when he studied continuously for many hours, and his wife often warned him that the effect might be serious, but during the years preceding the Disruption it was impossible for him to spare himself. We were grieved, I think it was in 1846, to hear that he was seriously ill - delirious - that a tumour had formed in his head which at length discharged itself by the ear. When he recovered he was by no means his old self; his intellect was still clear and vigorous, but his nervous system so thoroughly shaken that daily life was full of torture, and he took refuge in his old home in Cromarty,

only seeing his boy William, who in order to be near his father was sent to stay with his grandmother. Solitude and quiet seemed absolutely necessary for him, yet he seemed to like and be the better for an almost daily walk with Mr. Stewart on the road which skirted the Bay. Occasionally, too, when he was alone he paid short visits to my father's; but, oh!, he was so changed that we were sad to see it, though we tried not to show it. Gradually, however, he improved, and when going downstairs one evening, I found a servant ushering him in; I rejoiced most truly, and he came forward to meet me, in his old pleasant way saying, "I have come to say good-bye. I go home tomorrow, and to tell that you are so well will be good news for Lydia."

In 1849 he and all his family were in Cromarty for some time, detained by their daughter Harriet's illness - a severe attack of rheumatic fever. But notwithstanding this trial and many inconveniences they seemed to be very happy together, and Mr. Miller's humorous way of making the best of things had quite returned. It was a pleasure to me to see them almost every day.

He was for five weeks in his native town during the summer of 1854, and we saw much of him in our pleasant home at Navity. Miss Borthwick (H.L.L.) was staying with us, one of the best and dearest of women, and a valued friend of Mr. and Mrs. Miller. It was they who introduced me to her in the summer of 1848, and then began a friendship which, to my great happiness, lasted nearly half a century, that is, until she died last September. Mr. Miller often walked up the hill and came to us when breakfast was hardly over, for he wished to show Miss Borthwick all the places of interest in the neighbourhood, and she could have no better guide. Miss C. Allardyce and one or two of our young relatives accompanying them, my husband and I occasionally; but he was a busy man. One morning Mr. Miller and Miss C. Allardyce walked up to Navity, but a storm came on and the day had to be passed indoors, and a very pleasant day it was. In the early part of the day we sat in a cosy little room where we kept our books, and where were my husband's desk and papers. On the shelves were not a great many new books, but a good selection of English classics and of the best poets. He looked over the books and read us choice passages with so much expression that we liked, and were the better for listening, and the interest was in no way lessened by the quaint way in which some words were pronounced. In course of conversation the Bible came to be spoken of, and I was much impressed at the time by the childlike reverence and wisdom with which he gave expression to his thoughts. His manner to all women was singularly good, and the ladies



who were with us that day were highly gifted in heart and mind, so that the conversation was to me a rich treat. "My Schools and Schoolmasters" had just come out, and he read to us one or two of the letters he had received from literary men, among them one from Thomas Carlyle, and one from Robert Chambers.

He visited his mother in the summer of 1856, and very kindly walked to Navity to see me; my husband was seldom at home during the day, but he might meet him in Cromarty. After our first meeting, and before he was seated many minutes, he said, "Now you must show me the baby," and when I had fetched her from the nursery he bent over her with as much interest as though she were his own grandchild, commenting on her expression, features, etc. He looked very ill, and the last photograph taken of him a few weeks later faithfully represents what he was then. It was the last time I saw him - in a few months he was dead.

*Footnotes:*

(1) *The cutting by Chambers and Lauder was almost certainly due to antagonism towards the new Free Church, and Miller's part in its formation. Robert Chambers had, as editor of Chambers Journal, in the 1830s published articles contributed by Miller. Chambers subsequently wrote Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation published in 1844 arguing for evolution, against which Miller contended in his Footprints of the Creator, 1847. Sir Thomas Dick Lauder was another amateur geologist, an aristocrat and author, notably of a novel, The Wolf of Badenoch, who had helped Miller find a publisher for his first book, Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland.*

(2) *"Captain" was a boy called Angus Mackay, who was absolutely devoted to Miller while he was working for the bank in Cromarty. He is described by Harriet in the article In Praise of the Idiot Boy (Hugh's News no 37, December 2018).*



*(continued from p3)*

### Miller Re-Told Latest

## £250,000 THE TARGET

One outline refurbishment submission has particularly impressed Alix, a detailed six-page document which reflects the aims of presenting the buildings' contents in new ways, orally, visually, verbally and physically. It answers to the four main categories identified for enhancement, the life and work, the natural world, the Victorian cultural world and communications.

Among the new ideas put forward were discovery boxes, temporary display boards, wall projections and "atmosphere-creating" features. Alix is particularly keen that the Museum and Cottage should develop to be not just a tourist attraction but a facility for community benefit, especially for those with physical or mental impairments.

The project remains on course, with all the outline submissions due in by this Autumn, followed by issuing of a detailed brief to the bidders, and a firm chosen next summer. A grand re-opening is provisionally scheduled for the Spring of 2021.

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## A critique of Harriet Ross Taylor's Miller memoir

# SHE "BRINGS US CLOSER TO THE MAN"

*We conclude the Recollections of Harriet Ross Taylor with a critical appreciation of her by one who lives in the same house as she did.*

by Jane Verburg

## Introduction

I live in Cromarty, in the house that was the town's Commercial Bank from 1835 until 1954. A few years ago, as part of a Cromarty History Society project, I began researching the building that dates from the early 1820s but buildings do not exist separately from the people who lived and worked within their walls. This Bank is not just about red sandstone, Ballachulish slate and crown glass; it is about widowed Robert Ross who built it, ambitious Hugh Miller and mother-less Harriet.

Harriet Ross (1823-1916), who laughed in the same rooms as I do; daydreamed through the same windows over the same roofs and same firth; ran her hand down the same ammonite-curved handrail. Harriet: the girl who lived here.

## A biography of Harriet

Harriet Munro Ross was baptised in Cromarty on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1823. Her father was Robert Ross and her mother, Isabella Joyner Ross. Robert was a successful man who rose from fish-curer to Bank Agent and, eventually, to Provost of the town. Harriet was their first child. She and her sisters (Mary, born 1826 and Jane Isabella, born 1828) grew up in the house where their father was establishing Cromarty's first bank. In 1830, when Harriet was seven and the younger girls just four and two, their mother died. Hugh Miller hewed the gravestone as Harriet watched from the brae above the church. Robert recognised that Hugh needed some helpful steerage at this point in his life. Hugh wanted to marry and to find work away from masonry to save his health. In November 1834 Robert offered him the post of accountant at the Bank. Hugh was surprised by the offer but accepted the challenge.

We are unlikely to learn what exactly triggered Robert to take Hugh under his wing (possibly fatherly concern) but this was a turning point in Hugh's life and set him on the road to more office-based employment and, in turn, to *The Witness*. Hugh worked at the Bank for five years and played an important role within the Ross family. He often shared meals and evenings with Robert and the three girls; talking through historic topics with Robert as well as dealing with the more prosaic details of the girls' homework. He recommended to Harriet particular books to read and places to explore. He stayed in the house when their father was away to safeguard the bank money and he guided Harriet and her sisters on nature walks. The girls also spent time with Hugh and his mother in their cottage, taking tea and listening to Hugh recount tales and recite poetry. Perhaps Harriet and her father saw Hugh as an avuncular figure, they were clearly 'much attached to each other'; he was twenty-one years older than her and ten years younger than Robert. Harriet recalls his 'gentlest, kindest manner' and his ability to treat her as an adult despite her young age and she reports that her father 'greatly appreciated Mr Miller' and thought that his girls were hugely privileged to spend time with him.

In 1837 Hugh married Lydia Fraser, Harriet's teacher. Harriet was present, she even had particular tasks to



*The front of the Ross family home, which also served as the office of the former Commercial Bank Front door*



*Janie and Menno Verburg love their home*



perform, at the small ceremony in the drawing room of Mrs Fraser's cottage. Later that same year Harriet's father re-married. He was 45 and his second wife, Vere Menzies, 29; Harriet had been mother-less for seven years (we can but guess at her relationship with Vere but she does call her 'mother' in *My Recollections of Hugh Miller* and much later, named her second child after her). Robert and Vere went on to have four children and Harriet lived with her step-family at the Bank along with her sisters, a governess and three female servants (this gives us some insight into the wealth and life-style of the Rosses). Harriet continued to be taught by Lydia and was regularly at the Miller's house on Church Street; she even joined the newly married couple on sailing jaunts to the South Sutor, 'we saw the rays of the westering sun clothing each outstanding rock and pinnacle, and the trees in the hollows on the summit of the Sutor with a golden veil ... a beauty which caused a hush in the soul'. In 1837 Hugh and Lydia's first child was born, Harriet describes Eliza as 'observing and thinking all the time' (an unusually strong description of a baby).

I find myself picturing Harriet - was she a wee slip of a thing dressed in white lace or was she slightly stout and in practical brown? - walking between the Bank and the Miller's home along the streets or across the beach searching for sea-treasures while helping out with the new-born babies of each household. In 1839 Eliza died at just seventeen months old and, possibly partially in the pain of that loss, Hugh accepted the post of Editor at *The Witness* in Edinburgh where he would be influential in 'carrying out the great and important struggle which led to the Disruption'. Harriet sailed with Lydia and their new baby to join Hugh in Edinburgh and she stayed with them for three months as they settled into their 'pleasantly situated' home at Sylvan Place. Harriet had a health issue for which she was seeking 'good medical advice' but she also helped out with the 'good-humoured baby' and generally supported Lydia while Hugh was hard at work. Harriet returned to Cromarty in July 1840, 'I found it hard to part from these dear friends' but we know little about her life between that summer and 1851. We do know that she probably lived in Cromarty and that

she experienced some continuing health issue although we do not know any details. We also know that she met Hugh on numerous occasions when he was visiting his mother. By 1851 Harriet joined her sister Mary and her husband, Alexander Fraser, in Buckinghamshire, where he was a Land Agent. She was probably there to help nurse Mary's budding family (yet more childcare duties for Harriet).

### Marriage and children

On 20<sup>th</sup> January 1854 Harriet married John Taylor in Cromarty, a man thirteen years her senior and widowed (first wife, Mary Hamilton Mackintosh) but without children. When they married she was 29 years old and he was 42. Interestingly, John was also present at Hugh and Lydia's wedding (seventeen years previously) and his mother, Flora Ross Taylor, was a great friend of Lydia's mother, Elizabeth Fraser. Harriet and John probably moved to Navity Farm when they married and remained there for, possibly, fifteen years. John is listed in the 1861 Census as 'Sheriff Clerk and farmer of 400 acres employing 15 labourers'. Their first child, Flora Isabella, was born in October 1855 and seems to have been named after John's mother and Harriet's mother. Of note is the fact that their second child, Isabella Vere, was born on the very day that Hugh Miller took his own life in 1856. In total, they appear to have had five daughters and two sons all born while they were living at Navity Farm. Harriet was 43 when her seventh, and last, child was born, so she must have had a fairly hearty constitution.

### Later years

In 1878 Harriet's father died in Commercial Bank House



The "ammonite-shaped" handrail once used by Harriet, today enjoyed by Janie Verbarg



One of the original fireplaces still in use

(maybe in the room in which I write this). Her husband, John, was present and named as one of the Trustees of the estate. Harriet and the family had by this time moved back into Cromarty, John having become a banker for the Caledonian Bank and a magistrate. In 1893 John died and was buried in the Old Gaelic Churchyard in Cromarty. In 1898 Harriet wrote *My Recollections of Hugh Miller* and in 1900 they were published anonymously in the *British Weekly*. Slightly surprisingly, by 1901 Harriet had moved to Morningside in Edinburgh with two of her daughters and a servant. We do not know what took Harriet away from her home town although it is possible that she moved there shortly after John's death to be close to friends. Ten years later she and the girls were in much the same position.

Harriet died of heart failure on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1916 in Edinburgh, aged ninety-two and was buried with her husband, John, in Cromarty.

### Some thoughts on *My Recollections of Hugh Miller*.

Regular readers of *Hugh's News* will know that Harriet Ross Taylor's *Recollections* was only known as an incomplete document until very recently. Few nineteenth century women of Cromarty left documents so it is a delight to hear Harriet's voice. She offers us a rare and contemporary view of Hugh from someone outside his own family who had known him for nearly three decades. She gives us in the document one of the most observant commentaries on Hugh Miller's character, family and health. Harriet wrote *My Recollections of Hugh Miller* in 1898 when she was 74 years old; forty-two years after Hugh Miller shot himself and twenty-two years after Lydia had died. It takes the form of a list of memories; running from her earliest recollection of Hugh hewing her mother's gravestone through to the last time she saw him just a few months before his death in 1856. At times the document is somewhat rambling but it does hold together and gives us a new resource from which we can glean primary information. Harriet made no attempt to record details of her own life other than in relation to Miller. She wrote under a pseudonym (fear?) and yet felt strongly enough to have the document published (a need to correct Lydia's judgements?). Harriet states that she thinks she is the 'only one now living who knew [Hugh Miller] well' and that this is her reason for writing the memoir. It is possible that someone asked her to write the document; someone who wanted Lydia's comments challenged (who could that have been?). Harriet states that she wants to correct criticisms found in Peter Bayne's biography of Miller (1871) by Lydia about her mother-in-law. Readers of *Hugh's News* will know that Lydia was critical of Hugh's mother and blamed his death, at least in part, on her overpowering stories of the supernatural world. It strikes me as strange that Harriet became involved with this debate so long after Bayne's biography was published; a gap of twenty-seven years. I wonder if she felt guilty that she had not challenged Lydia's comments at the time. It would have taken some courage to write that Lydia's words were 'very misleading', so it is understandable that she did not do this while Lydia was still alive, but why did it take Harriet so long to voice her opinion? Was there, is there yet, a trepidation in criticising Lydia? Of Hugh's relationship with Lydia, Harriet draws our attention to the fact that Lydia's mother Elizabeth Macleod Fraser was 'seriously displeased' with their engagement and forbade them to meet in her house. Harriet describes Lydia as a 'delicately nurtured girl' who was looked up to and loved by her pupils. Harriet declares that 'in those days I almost worshipped her'; a comment that seems to reveal that as Harriet writes, about sixty years later, her opinion has changed.

Harriet describes Hugh's mother (Harriet Wright Miller Williamson) with precision. She talks of her as having a 'refined face and a superior cast' and she details her care and kindness to people in Cromarty who were even poorer than herself. Of Hugh's relationship with his mother Harriet stresses that he 'treated her with the utmost respect and tenderness' and she recounts how he returned from Edinburgh 'at once' to help her recover from a dangerous illness (1840) and stayed with her until 'recovery had well begun'. Harriet records that he financially supported his mother and his two aunts. Importantly, she says that 'he was a prince' in his mother's eyes. It is worth remembering that Harriet would have witnessed, close up, Hugh's mother's utter distress at his death. Harriet directly states that she has written this account of Hugh's



Part of the standing stone on The Links marking the emigration to Canada from Cromarty in the 1830s of thousands of cleared Highlanders. The stone was erected to mark Hugh Miller's Bicentenary in 2002



mother to counterbalance Lydia's 'misleading notice' of her in Bayne's biography.

Harriet simply and memorably describes Hugh as, 'a man well worth knowing'. She talks of him as 'ambitious' but not desiring 'a different social position from that in which he was born'; she says that he was 'greatly respected by all in his native town save those who disliked goodness and they had felt his power more than once when they set themselves to oppose his minister'. He was clearly not a man to cross although she often mentions his 'kindness'. She talks of him as having 'eyes to see both men and nature'; she says he bid her to 'observe carefully'. It is as if Harriet felt he drew her attention to a deeper understanding of the world - of the natural world (trees, shells, lichen, rock, fossils and flowers) and of the spiritual world - he helped her contemplate life and death with a 'thoughtful seriousness'. Interestingly, at no point in *My Recollections of Hugh Miller* does she mention Hugh's interest in folklore and the supernatural and I wonder if this is to distance herself (and him) from Lydia's critical view of this theme in his life.

Harriet gives the impression that Hugh was frequently self-absorbed and struggled to find what we would today call a 'work-life balance'. Although she describes him as attentive to people's needs, he does not seem to have devoted much time to Lydia and the family home. He obviously worked extremely hard and for very long hours but when he had afternoons off he took long walks into the country or worked towards the publication of his books. Harriet also portrays him with a self-assured quality that could be seen as tipping into arrogance; he was evidently proud of the fact that he could quote long passages from books entirely from memory. In a similar vein, she recounts Hugh holding forth in her new marital home at Navity in 1854. Hugh's family spent five weeks in Cromarty during that summer and Hugh often walked up to the farm to meet a group of Harriet's enthusiastic friends to show them the neighbourhood.

One particular day became stormy so the time was passed indoors. Hugh took it upon himself to entertain the women by reading passages 'with so much expression'. He also read from *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (just published) and from supportive letters he had received from Thomas Carlyle and Robert Chambers. He knew how to take the stage. Harriet clearly understood and engaged with Hugh's religious and intellectual pursuits. She frequently mentions Hugh's books and is aware of his friendships and their relevance. She was herself evidently supportive of the Disruption and had independent-minded female friends, such as the translator and hymn-writer, Jane Borthwick, as well as being close to the women of the Allardyce family of Cromarty.

### Mr Miller's declining health

Harriet first refers to Hugh's health being a concern when he and Lydia had moved to Sylvan Place when he was working and writing 'all the long day and far into the night'. She remembers him acting out his opponent's arguments as a way of practising his own position on a topic and she details how he would tell Lydia that after writing for such long stretches 'a pain seized him in one particular spot in his head on which he laid his finger'. She recalls that later in 1840 he also complained of a similar pain when he 'studied continuously for many hours'. Significantly, in 1846 (ten years before his death) Harriet describes that Hugh was 'seriously ill - delirious - [and] that a tumour had formed in his head which at length discharged itself

by the ear...[h]e was by no means his old self; his intellect was still clear and vigorous, but his nervous system so thoroughly shaken that daily life was full of torture...[s]olitude and quiet seemed absolutely necessary for him...he was so changed that we were sad to see it, though we tried not to show it'. These symptoms suggest that he had an abscess, possibly mastoiditis from a middle-ear infection. The pain would have been immense and it is reasonable to think that the problem was recurrent as he had such similar symptoms in 1840.

In the summer of 1856 while visiting Cromarty, Hugh walked up to Navity to see Harriet's new baby, Flora, 'he bent over her with as much interest as though she were his own grandchild'. Harriet goes on to say that he 'looked very ill ... [I]t was the last time I saw him - in a few months he was dead' and with these words Harriet closes *My Recollections*



A Cromarty sunset offers exactly the same view today of the Firth and the Sutor headlands as Hugh and his young friend would have revelled in

of *Hugh Miller*. In summary Harriet wrote that when watching Hugh lettering her mother's gravestone, 'a sick feeling at my heart would make me slip through the hedge ... and I would go nearer and nearer to Mr Miller'. If we take this as a metaphor, I believe that Harriet's document in much the same way brings us from the present, nearer and nearer to the man.

Acknowledgements: Women are easily lost in history. They can leave few footprints. Thankfully, statutory records helped me track an outline of Harriet's life but the gems that have filled out my research are listed below.

Many thanks to Martin Gostwick, Elizabeth Sutherland and Menno Verburg

References: BAYNE, P., 1871 *The Life and letters of Hugh Miller*. London. MILLER, H., 1854 *My schools and school-masters*. Edinburgh. [TAYLOR, H.M.] 'ONE WHO KNEW HIM', 1900 *My Recollections of Hugh Miller*, British weekly, Scotch edition, 4 October, pp 480-481, 11 October, pp 501-502. Serialised in *Hugh's News*, 38, 39 and 40. TAYLOR, M.A., 2018 *A memoir of Hugh Miller (1802-1856)* by Harriet M. Taylor, *Short Notes*, pp. 369-372. SUTHERLAND, E. and MACKENZIE JOHNSON, M.A., 2002 *Lydia, wife of Hugh Miller of Cromarty*. East Linton.

Please contact me if you have any further details about family members relating to the Ross family of Cromarty. I would be delighted if a photograph of Harriet could be found. Jane Verburg. Email: wapiti32@hotmail.com

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## Management Committee Profiles

*We here introduce two more members of our management team, following earlier features on both our Chairman, Bob Davidson MBE (No 38, February 2019), and Lillemor Jernqvist (No 37 December 2018). Meet our indefatigable Treasurer, Sue Busby, and Membership Secretary, John Armstrong.*

## Sue Busby

It was a never to be forgotten moment when, quite unexpectedly, Sue put her hand up to volunteer for the treasurer post at our AGM in 2011. We had lost the services of her predecessor, and people of the right calibre for this vital office are hard to find, so Sue's willingness to take it on was like a deliverance! Ever since she has proved indefatigably diligent in maintaining our accounts, and keeping us up to date with changes in legislation.

Her professional work is in Executive Search and she is more commonly known as a 'headhunter'. However, she regards as of far greater relevance to her post the glorious fact that she is directly descended from the Millers' youngest daughter, Bessie. Bessie was born in Edinburgh in 1846 and died in 1919, aged 73. She was married to the Rev Norman Mackay, Free Church minister of Lochinver, Assynt, and they had six children. One was William Miller Mackay, her grandfather, and his daughter Ann was her mother, who was married to Gordon Rider, a GP, "so that makes me Hugh Miller's great great granddaughter."

Ann Rider was an early member of the Friends and thought her brothers, Alistair, Don and her daughter should join the Friends. Sadly Alistair died in 2013 but Don Rider is an overseas member based in Hong Kong; many commented that he bore a strong resemblance to Miller when he attended the Bicentenary events in 2002. Sue's daughter Ishbel, great great great granddaughter, in 2012 enjoyed a few weeks as a volunteer at the Museum during her summer break from studying History at The University of Edinburgh.

Bessie is portrayed as a strong-minded "free spirit" in Elizabeth Sutherland's biography of her mother Lydia. She and Norman Mackay looked after the ever-ailing mother in her last months at the Lochinver manse, where she died aged 64. Bessie also edited and published in *Chambers' Journal* in 1902 some of Lydia's diary entries which gave us vital reminiscences of the family's early married life in Miller House.





## THE COLORADO CONNECTION

It is worth noting here that Bessie and Norman Mackay have five more direct descendants who are also Friends members, a father and four sons all living in Colorado, USA. Bessie and Norman's second child was named Hugh. He married Ethel Parr ("Cissie") and they had three children, the youngest of whom was Norman Ian Miller-Mackay - always known as Ian.

The present Hugh Mackay is Ian's eldest child and is a great great grandson of Hugh Miller. His four sons Ian, Eric, Heath and Patrick are all members of the Friends. Hugh has very kindly sent us this (slightly abridged) account of his family's Miller connection, via Sue, a wonderful example of how family trees always throw up great stories:

*"Although I left Scotland when I was only seven, I still remember growing up in Carlops and West Linton. My father was a Captain in the British Army and had returned from North Africa when the war ended. My father commuted by bus to Edinburgh to complete the architecture degree he had started before the war. When Dad graduated, we moved to Canada and then the US. Many years later my father visited us in Colorado and happened to pick up a book on Scotland. He opened it to a page with a picture of Hugh Miller and said "you are related to Hugh Miller and are named after him. You are Hugh Michael Miller-Mackay!"*

*"My wife and son, Patrick, were the first to visit Cromarty for the Hugh Miller bicentennial, and met my cousin, Sue. They were welcomed as family. Because of the Hugh Miller connection, Patrick applied for and became a British citizen this year. In 2008 I visited Cromarty with all four of my sons, visited the museum, met Martin Gostwick and walked the same shoreline where Hugh Miller collected fossils. We look forward to each of the issues of Hugh's News. It keeps us in touch with our Scottish heritage."*

## John Armstrong

Two years in post, our Membership Secretary has extensive experience in IT, as a systems analyst and programme manager. He is thus more than well qualified for the job of getting and keeping our subscribers' list in order.

Born in Manchester in 1958, he became a lifelong palaeontologist after being taken to Manchester Museum at the age of 5, and hammering his first fossil out of his gran's rockery, using his grandpa's coal hammer!

When he met and married his wife Ruth, a Glaswegian, they "tossed a coin" to decide whether they would live in Manchester or Scotland, and "I am glad to say that it was the best coin-toss I ever lost." They have two girls in their twenties.

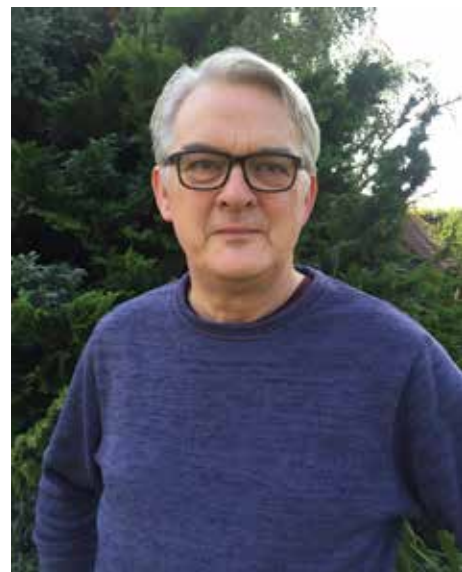
Moving to Edinburgh, he soon became immersed, as a member of the Edinburgh Geological Society, in the "greats" of Victorian palaeontology, including of course Hugh Miller, and found himself fully diverted to the Scottish Devonian, and the Old Red Sandstone.

He was "extremely lucky" to find, some 20 years ago, exciting research in the field, led by the late Nigel Trewin at Achanarras quarry, and Bob Davidson at re-opened quarry sites in Forfar. He became one of the redoubtable "fossil fish filleters," bringing together amateur and professional enthusiasts on frequent excursions into the Old Red fossil fish deposits of Scotland.

He says of Miller that "he talks to you from the page." On his own in the field, "I sometimes take Hugh with me! I enjoy retracing Miller's steps as he takes me through detailed descriptions of his field trips. A particular favourite is Chapter Six of The Old Red Sandstone, in which Hugh journeys along the Cromarty shore "one delightful morning in August 1830."

He finds himself "continually amazed at how much Miller achieved in his life, working in isolation." He often wonders how much he might have benefitted if "he'd had the telephone, the internet, or even good roads."

As one of the "Fossil Fishers" who has so enjoyed taking part in exciting research and meeting "such incredible people," he now feels he should put something back helping The Friends.



# HAIL THE "SCOTCH MERCHANT"

by Martin Gostwick

On a chance visit to the Cromarty East Kirk burial ground recently, I saw some scaffolding on the until now ruinous mausoleum of William Forsyth, one of the foremost characters in Cromarty's history celebrated in a lengthy memoir by Hugh Miller.

I was delighted to see its ruinous state getting some repair, and on investigating its gateless interior was gratified to find on the opposite wall a plaque in Forsyth's memory, though the lettering was now all but illegible.

However, it proved easy to retrieve the wording from the excellent folder in the Kirk vestry containing a history of the building and a survey of all the gravestones in the burial ground which was painstakingly carried out by local volunteers in 1991/2.

The plaque noted that Forsyth (1722-1808) had "his virtues recorded in the memoir of his life by Hugh Miller", and that the plaque had been erected 80 years after his death by his great grandson, William MacAndrew "to perpetuate the memory of a good man."



*The top of the headstone preserved in the kirk's east porch*

But who was responsible for the conservation rescue act still under way during my investigation? On inquiry it turned to be a native of Cromarty with a well known knowledge and fascination for the town's history, but who preferred to remain anonymous.

He told us: "I am repairing some of the masonry, because the damage to it was my fault. I was trying to get out a couple of ash trees by the root, and dislodged some of the coping stones in the process."

He discovered that the elegant curved copes had been numbered, and in superb lettering at that. "I believe the mausoleum was a kit build, with the coping numbered by a mason prior to assembly on site." He thinks the stone was not locally quarried, but landed from afar at a pier near Saltburn on the other side of the Cromarty Firth.

His repairs will not only restore the S-shaped top of the wall, but he has also cleared the ground inside enabling today's citizens to pay William Forsyth his due honour, for which he deserves full credit.

The plaque tells you the tomb below holds his remains and those of his first wife Margaret Russell, whom he married in 1752, but who died in childbirth less than a year later, his second wife, Elizabeth Grant, whom he married in 1764, and the five children whom they survived.

A second Forsyth memorial is the ornate headstone now preserved in the East Kirk's west porch, which elaborates no less than ten of his outstanding virtues. I like best that he was "religious without gloom," and that in him "the Destitute found a Friend, the Oppressed a Protector." Below this is an equally eloquent homage to Elizabeth.

Like all his writing, the Miller memoir, full title *The True Story of the Life of a Scotch Merchant*, is a cracking good read of 93 pages. Written at the Forsyth's family's request it was published in 1839, and can today be read in the collected works' volume *Tales and Sketches*.

In the Miller style, it contains not just a straight biography, but is full of episodes of reminiscence, which he calls "fossils of history," and reflection on the times of huge upheaval through which Forsyth lived and participated in.

Forsyth endeavoured to finance the fluctuating herring fishery. He was a trader who hired a large sloop for trading with Holland, and a freighting boat to deliver goods in the Dornoch, Cromarty and Beaully firths. "He supplied the proprietors with teas, and wines, and spiceries, with broad cloths, glass, delft ware, Flemish tiles, and pieces of japanned cabinet-work: he furnished the blacksmith with iron from Sweden, the carpenter with tar and spars



from Norway, and the farmer with flax seed from Holland." And he exported abroad malt, wool and salmon. Later he had a large sloop built for himself in Fortrose, for trading with Holland, and the ports of Leith, London and Newcastle, the latter being his source for much needed coal when the Black Isle peat beds became exhausted. He transformed the production of linen by supplying spinning wheels to almost every house in the town, replacing the old distaff and spindle.

His chief role other than in business was serving as a justice of the peace replacing the old tyrannical hereditary sheriffdom, dispensing fair judgement for over 30 years from 1747 onwards. Miller notes that he peacefully settled umpteen disputes, and thus "kept lawyers at bay."

Latterly, with the arrival in 1772 and encouragement of Cromarty benefactor George Ross, Forsyth took up farming, rapidly becoming expert in the latest methods of crop-rearing, while Ross built a pier, the Gaelic Chapel, the hempworks, the Courthouse, a brewery and a pork butchery.



*The Forsyth Mausoleum. The scaffolding and a dislodged copestone can be seen on the left of the front wall.*

Forsyth was revered as "the Maister" who acted as a "sort of general agent" who would help persons displaced, or in distress. He of course built Forsyth House, of which "there are not loftier nor better proportioned rooms, larger windows, nor easier stairs" in the town. There he became renowned for his fabulous hospitality, especially for those with whom, enjoying his "compact and muscular frame," he played golf and curling on the Links. The house became "like a crowded inn."

His second wife of 36 years, the minister's daughter Elizabeth Grant had a "lively imagination, and very extensive knowledge, and was one of those who 'walk with God'." It is interesting that Miller remarks in passing that the "genius of the fair sex partakes rather of the delicacy of the myrtle than the strength of the oak." Hugh's own wife Lydia, no doubt having read this passage, took the pen name Harriet Myrtle for her children's books - and a myrtle bush recalls this in the Garden of Wonders behind Miller House to this day.

Hugh spices up the narrative throughout with his tales, often highly amusing, of other merchants, mariners, ship-masters, fisherfolk, smugglers and the very pious such as "Meg o'the Shore." Some of the episodes he recounted again, in his reports for the *Inverness Courier*, and in his book of folklore, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*, also written in the 1830s.

As one example, he cites Forsyth dining out for years on how he smuggled a Hanoverian agent carrying army pay through Jacobite territory to some troops further north, and in consequence spent a night in jail in Inverness as a prisoner of the Jacobites. Another is of Lord Byron, the poet's uncle, visiting the Cromarty Firth on his pleasure yacht with a dead body on board. While at anchor, the skipper supplied a local fisherman with barrels of "Hollands" (gin) in exchange for salmon.

A version of this uproarious tale is reprinted in my volume of Hugh's reports for the *Inverness Courier*, *A Noble Smuggler and Other Stories* (second edition 2006). Forsyth had the corpse buried, but it seems that the three young women found in the lordship's cabin of "worse than doubtful character" did not come ashore.

A printed copy of this edition of  
Hugh's News  
is available, price £2.50, from the Secretary

# WEBSITE COMPLETE REVAMP

Some readers may not have yet had time to look at our comprehensively refurbished website, still at the same address, [www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk](http://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk), so we are giving you notice here to take the chance to catch up!

As you will see, we have introduced it using the scintillating first lines describing our hero as "A Kind of Wizard," taken from Larissa Reid's address opening the readings of writing competition prize-winners at Kelvingrove Museum (*Hugh's News* No 38, February 2019).

The biographical page on Life and Legacy has been rewritten to encourage more reading of Miller's works, and knowledge of our efforts to build on his Legacy.

Another feature is much more info about who The Friends are and what we do, complete with a gallery of our eight-strong management team, whose recommendation it was to modernise the site.

The whole content is set in white on a striking Saltire blue background. We hope you



## *The Friends of Hugh Miller*

HUGH WHO?

LIFE AND LEGACY

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

MILLER RETOLD

ELIZA'S PATH APPEAL

LATEST NEWS AND  
EVENTS

MEET THE FRIENDS

MUSEUM AND GARDENS

IN THE STEPS OF HUGH  
MILLER

### The David Attenborough of his day

Hugh Miller (1802–1856) has been acclaimed as "the supreme poet of geology" and called "the David Attenborough of his day." He gained such accolades not only as a pioneer of the science in its first heyday, but because he wrote about everything he saw and discovered in such gloriously luminous terms. He could lyrically evoke our planet's passage through deep time, while also describing his fossils with homely metaphors and comparisons with the familiar everyday.



He achieved heroic status in his own time and ever since because he grew up in poverty, and achieved so much as a largely self-taught polymath, rising from jobbing stonemason to national newspaper editor and literary lion. His life brought triumphs in science and literature, in journalism, and for his evangelical Christian faith. But it was also beset with tragedy and conflict, and he would die by his own hand at the age of only 54.

Hugh Miller stood just short of 6ft tall, a man of most striking appearance with a great mass of flaming red hair and "sapphire" blue eyes (according to his wife, Lydia). He was proud of immense physical strength, an epic walker, cragsman, and sea diver, but suffered terribly all his life from "the stonemason's malady," silicosis, and this ultimately played a key part in his untimely death. The picture to the left is a Calotype photograph of Hugh Miller as stonemason taken in 1843.



will especially like our new slideshow banner headline, consisting of eight striking images taken from Hugh's own day up to now.

Our most heartfelt thanks to our member Liz Broumley, who took immense time and trouble to design and upload the texts and images.

By the way, we always welcome contributions, especially writing and artworks for our Cabinet of Curiosities page.

## The Editor

*And here she is, Liz Broumley, our tirelessly creative website manager, who took Conversations in Stone up a mountain with her for the perfect read at the top!*

**Why don't you order a copy? Contact the Secretary to place your order.**



### HUGH WHO?

#### LIFE AND LEGACY

#### CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

#### MILLER RETOLD

#### ELIZA'S PATH APPEAL

#### LATEST NEWS AND EVENTS

#### MEET THE FRIENDS

#### MUSEUM AND GARDENS

#### IN THE STEPS OF HUGH MILLER

#### HUGH'S NEWS -

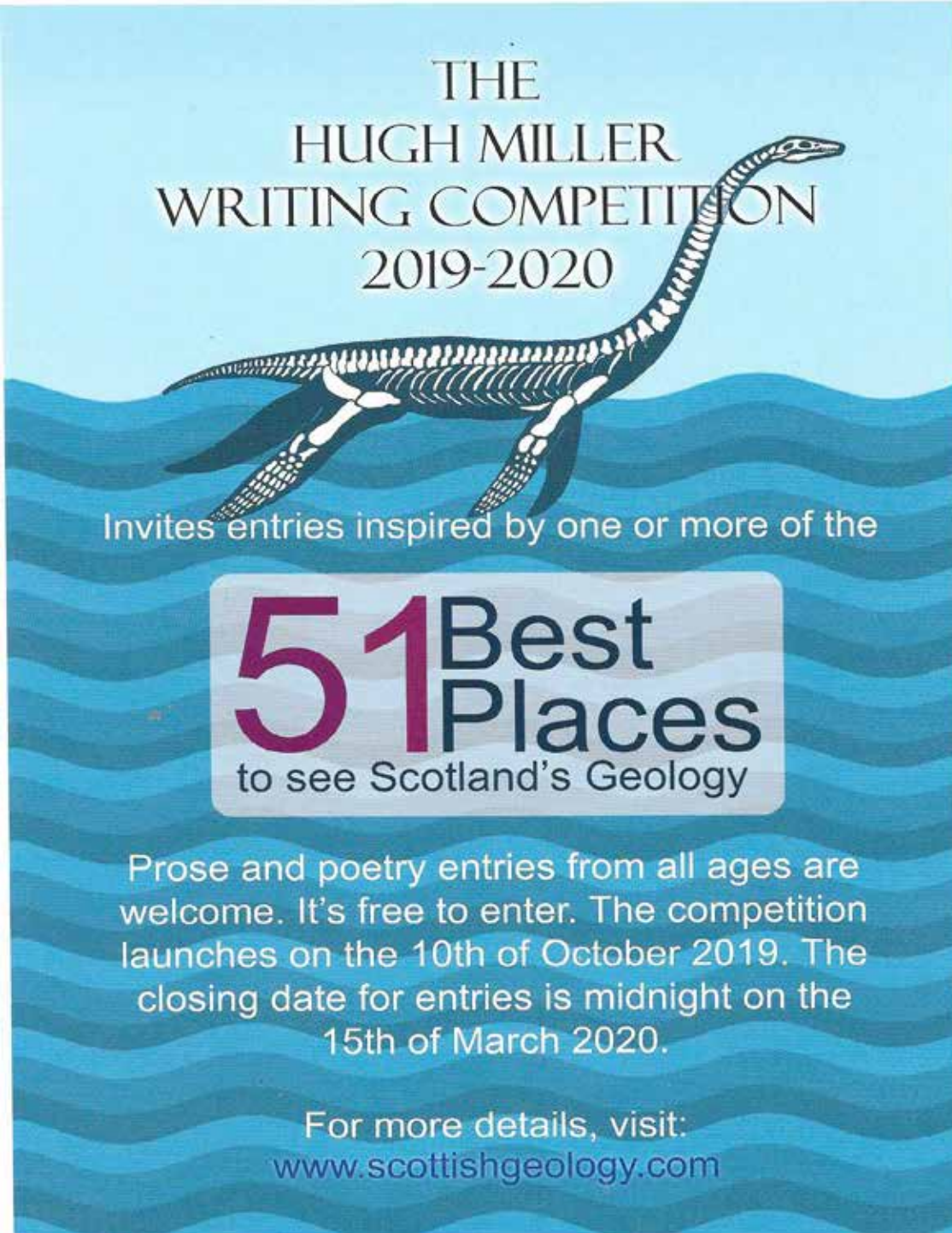
## A kind of wizard

We would like to introduce you to a kind of 'wizard'. He was tall, handsome, with a shock of red hair and large "mutton-chop" whiskers. He strode around our country around 180 years ago, at times covering 30 to 40 miles per day, in search of treasure. Fossilized, ancient treasure. This wizard was humble, determined, intelligent and entirely self-taught in his passion – geology. He studied hard to piece together the story of Scotland's long history, becoming a visitor to deep time itself in his search for evidence. He worked tirelessly, gathering specimens of ancient fish, of reptiles, of long-extinct sea creatures, and pieced them together like a jigsaw – often literally. His finds would be scattered through layers of rock and distributed along shorelines and embankments, quarries and offshore islands, and he would somehow find each tiny piece – a scale here, a bone there, each fossil ghost a fragment of the story – and he would painstakingly reconstruct their past shapes and forms and puzzle over their ancient world. Then, he decided to tell his contemporaries all about his treasures. He began to write.

Larissa Reid







THE  
HUGH MILLER  
WRITING COMPETITION  
2019-2020

Invites entries inspired by one or more of the

**51 Best Places**  
to see Scotland's Geology

Prose and poetry entries from all ages are welcome. It's free to enter. The competition launches on the 10th of October 2019. The closing date for entries is midnight on the 15th of March 2020.

For more details, visit:  
[www.scottishgeology.com](http://www.scottishgeology.com)

## Join our next literary field trip

This autumn we will, in partnership with the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, be launching The Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2019/20 on 10<sup>th</sup> October, Miller's "217<sup>th</sup> birthday".

Entry details will be posted shortly on [www.scottishgeology.com](http://www.scottishgeology.com), and in the meantime why not check out the Forum's 51 Best Places containing our country's most remarkable geology?

Have you walked or climbed over one or more of these sites, and if so, what made the experience special for you, the story of which you can, either in prose or poetry, inspire the competition's judges.



# Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2019-2020

*"The natural features so overtop the artificial ones – its hollow valleys are so much more strongly marked than its streets, and its hills and precipices than its buildings – Arthur's Seat and the Craggs look so proudly down on its towers and spires."*

***Hugh Miller on Edinburgh; Edinburgh and its Neighbourhood; Geological and Historical, with the Geology of the Bass Rock, 1875***



*Salisbury Craggs with the summit of Arthur's Seat behind © Angus Miller*

**The Hugh Miller Writing Competition** carries the name of one of Scotland's most endearing geologists, Hugh Miller (1802-1856), and aims to honour his legacy by inspiring new, original prose and poetry on the theme of Scotland's geoheritage. The competition is organised by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum and The Friends of Hugh Miller.

This year, poetry and prose entries are invited that are inspired by one or more of the "51 Best Places to See Scotland's Geology." You can find full details here: [www.scottishgeology.com/best-places](http://www.scottishgeology.com/best-places). While Miller himself visited many of the locations on our list, entries are most certainly not limited to his haunts alone. We hope that this writing competition, open to all ages, will encourage both a renewed interest in Miller's work, and contribute to a catalogue of new writings inspired by one of Scotland's greatest nature writers. We also aim to highlight the role that Scotland's geology plays in our daily lives and foster greater awareness and appreciation of Scotland's geodiversity.

**Competition launch date:** 10<sup>th</sup> October 2019; closing date 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**Confirmed partners:** The Scottish Geodiversity Forum, The Friends of Hugh Miller, The Hunterian Museum, Cromarty Arts Trust. Further partners to be confirmed.

**Judges for the 2019-2020 competition:**

Freelance science writer Lara Reid, previous prose winners naturalist Kenny Taylor, Cromarty author Jane Verburg, together with geologists Simon Cuthbert (University of the West of Scotland) and Elsa Panciroli (University of Oxford).



## The Friends of Hugh Miller MEMBERSHIP FORM

I/We wish to become member/s of the charity The Friends of Hugh Miller

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Please return this form, with your cheque payable to "The Friends of Hugh Miller", to:

John Armstrong, Membership Secretary, The Friends of Hugh Miller,

3 Ladywell Road, Corstorphine, Edinburgh EH12 7TA.

Email Address: [johnarmstrong7@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:johnarmstrong7@blueyonder.co.uk)