



Hugh's News

Magazine of
The Friends of Hugh Miller

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Secretary

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ENDOWMENT WILL PAY FOR MILLER RETOLD

by Martin Gostwick

Owners the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) plan to use the Hugh Miller Museum and Birthplace Cottage's endowment to cover the estimated £250,000 cost of the 'Miller Retold' refurbishment project.

The Middleton Fund, established in 2010/11 with a core donation of £600,000, saved the Museum from the threat of closure at the time. The donor was The Friends of Hugh Miller's honorary vice-chairman, Mr Henry McKenzie Johnston, in accordance with the wishes of his late wife, Miller's great great grand-daughter, Mrs Marian McKenzie Johnston.

The plan was revealed by NTS head fund-raiser Ms Ali MacLeod in a meeting with Friends' representatives at its Balnain House Inverness office on 28th February, with property manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones and Culloden Battlefield operations manager Raoul Curtis-Machin in attendance.

Ms MacLeod said the Fund now stood in excess of £800,000, and the Trust believed its use would not jeopardise its core purpose of facilitating the Museum's opening with full-time property management seven days a week for at least 26 weeks in the year.

She said the purpose of the meeting was to decide whether Miller Retold should go ahead, and after discussion it was unanimously agreed, with several comments about its exciting possibilities.

Mr Curtis-Machin's offer of meeting four or more times with us to discuss aspects of the refurbishment proposal before a brief is given to design consultants in September was accepted by the Friends' representatives. One of



WHAT'S INSIDE:

HOT NEWS	ps 3 - 5
Competition countdown	p 3
Skye science & art meet	p 4
Elgin "Crawler" on show	p 5
FORTHCOMING EVENTS	ps 7 - 8
Capturing the legacy	ps 9- 11
Final two Profiles	ps 15- 16
Citizen Scientists	ps 17- 19
Ardevell mystery solved	ps 20-21
Johnny Gibb	ps 22-23

*Far left: Amelia Paton's statue in the National Museum of Scotland.
Left: The bust in the Wallace Monument hall of fame*

these meetings will take place on the day of our AGM on 16th May, which he will address.

Dr Powers-Jones said the project had been activated because the Museum had lost one of its 5 stars in the VisitScotland ratings. It had been splendid when opened in 2004, but had now become outdated with changing visitor expectations.

It had low visitor numbers ranging between 4,000 and 4,500, of whom three quarters were elderly NTS and NT members. "If we don't do something, we will go into graceful but steady decline," she added. She announced that Museum staff will be conducting guided tours of Cromarty in the peak weeks of this summer.

A lot of the discussion centred on building the museum and birthplace cottage's story-telling functions. Friends' chairman Bob Davidson stressed that its geology content could be reinterpreted "using existing exhibits in a different way."

Mr Curtis-Machin said the Scotland's Year of Storytelling in 2022 presented a great opportunity. As an example, he thought that Friends' events organiser Gavin Berkenheger's Black Isle folklore map would be worked up into a funding proposal. Gavin stressed the importance of drawing in many more tourists who were not Trust members.

Secretary Martin Gostwick underlined his belief that Miller's achievements in the natural world formed the key attraction. Janie Verburg suggested a biography should be composed for primary age children.

THE RIOT OF RESOLIS

When: Friday, May 1st 2020, **Start Time:** 20:00

Where: Victoria Hall, High Street, Cromarty

As part of Cromarty Arts Trust's Crime and Thrillers' weekend, a dramatisation of a real event which took place during the Disruption of 1843 in Resolis and Cromarty is being staged.

A Canadian reporter discovers his roots lie in the Black Isle and becomes intrigued by a dramatic episode from 1843 involving his forebears. His research includes verbatim records from the subsequent court hearings and through his imaginings the characters are brought to life.

In this unique production the words are spoken by local people, many directly related to individuals involved at the time. With the addition of life-sized puppets portraying the characters and original music performed live, this production guarantees a visual and aural treat inspired by real events - and Hugh Miller is involved!

Tickets: £10 adults; £5 under 16s

Please email info@cromartyartstrust.org.uk or tel 01381 600354 or, if combining with other events over the weekend, complete and return the Booking form at:

https://www.cromartyartstrust.org.uk/userfiles/file/crime_and_thrillers_2020/crime-and-thrillers-2020-booking-form-2.pdf

or simply: <https://tinyurl.com/HN42-Booking>



Caitlin Greig examines a trilobite specimen from the Museum's reserve collection, one of many on long-term loan from the National Museum of Scotland (NMS). The piece is one of the thousands originally in the national Hugh Miller collection purchased from his family for the nation following his death. It bears on the back a label of the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art, the collection's first home, from whence it transferred to the Royal Scottish Museum, before the NMS loan to the exhibition formerly housed in the Birthplace Cottage in the latter half of the 20th Century.

Caitlin was revisiting Miller House following a year's placement there in 2018/19 as part of a Museums Galleries Scotland training course.



Duncan Cook takes in hand a hefty stone-mason's mallet very similar to the one with which Hugh plied his trade for over fifteen years, an essential tool for masons very much still in use.

Duncan has given great voluntary service to the Museum over many years, primarily as an actor and story-teller.



COMP COUNTDOWN BEGINS

by The Editor

All the entries are in, the judges are judging, and the winners of the latest Hugh Miller Writing Competition will be advised shortly. This will be followed by a prize-winning ceremony on Friday, June 19th in Edinburgh's spectacular Dynamic Earth visitor attraction.

The greatest collective prize will be the accumulation from all the entrants of a rich new hoard of material enhancing Hugh Miller's literary and scientific legacy, and the promotion of popular interest in, and participation with the natural world.

This year the competition invited entries inspired by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum's list of the '*51 Best Places to see Scotland's geology*'. This wide and varied set of locations includes the Black Isle and Miller's Museum as well as the dramatic Shetland coastline, Trotternish on Skye, and Edinburgh's Arthur's Seat.

The winners will have the unique privilege of a guided tour by National Museum of Scotland (NMS) staff of the NMS archive store at Granton, where the national Hugh Miller fossil collection is housed, as well as a chance to perform their work at the ceremony.

A particular hope and expectation is that a crop of entries has been received from young people aged between 18 and 25 years. For them, there is a very special prize awaiting. It is the inaugural Middleton-Miller Award for most Promising Young Writer in that age group.

The competition organisers were proud to receive a £440 grant towards this from the Cromarty-based Middleton Trust, founded by Hugh and Lydia Miller's descendants to promote creative work among local young people. The Trust has hitherto funded a children's opera over several years. The grant money has helped promote the competition to young people aged 5 - 25 across the Highlands.

The Middleton-Miller Award winner will not only be given the opportunity to share their piece at the award ceremony, but will receive a choice of cash for book purchase or towards a writing course (winner's choice), as well as a contribution towards travel expenses for the awards ceremony.

Winning poets in the Under-18s category will also be invited to read at the Geopoetry2020 festival in Edinburgh, October 2020 - <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/geopoetry20>.

We must here quote Friends' Cromarty member and judge for the adult entries Janie Verburg on her work with 22 P6/7 pupils at the local primary school. "I was there for an hour and a half and worked with the class for the whole time. I included the following elements: what they already knew about Hugh; new learning about him; thinking of questions to ask him when he was their age; thinking of answers; learning off by heart the quotation: 'Learn to make a right use of your eyes'; fossil handling; information about the competition and about 30 minutes of creative writing. They had the choice of lots of different styles of writing - fact files, interviews, stories, acrostic poems, haiku, maps.... The kids were fantastic and tremendously engaged."

She has also conducted workshops at Fortrose Academy, and Cromarty Youth Cafe; a talk at the Hugh Miller museum; a local leaflet drop; and contacted the 15 Scottish universities, Moniak Mhor creative writing centre, Cromarty Arts Trust and various other organisations.

Our members and Hugh's News readers will be well aware that The Friends of Hugh Miller are lead partners with the Forum in holding this competition, and we contribute a first prize of a weekend stay in Cromarty's Old Brewery hostel, a guided tour of the Hugh Miller Museum, and a fossil-hunting field trip to local deposits. Let's hope some entrants have chosen as their subject one of those '*51 Best Places*' - the Museum itself and the Black Isle!

A full report will be made about the ceremony and NMS collection tour in the next edition.



Dynamic Earth
© Alan Findlay cc-by-sa/2.0

DIGITAL WITNESS UPDATE

More whole years of *The Witness* have now been digitised by the British Newspaper Archive (BNA) - now 1842-1845, 1848, 1854, 1861. The four years 1842-1845 of course cover the events up to, including, and after The Disruption.

https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2020/01/06/06-january-2020-new-titles/?utm_source=fmp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=new-titles&utm_content=UK+New+Titles+090120&utm_term=89390

or simply:

<https://tinyurl.com/HN42-Witness>



WHERE HERITAGE AND SCIENCE MEET

Scientists working on fossils on Skye's Strathaird peninsula have launched an innovative artists' residency project to link their discoveries to the production of art.

They are seeking an artist to work as part of an art-science collaboration, exploring the relationship between palaeontology and cultural and natural heritage. The vacancy has been advertised at the Hugh Miller Museum, The Friends of Hugh Miller website and elsewhere. The deadline for applications closed shortly before Hugh's News went to press. The project is subject to gaining funding from supporters of the creative arts.

The group who are discovering new fossils from the Jurassic rocks on Skye includes palaeontologists from the universities of Oxford and Birmingham and National Museums Scotland (NMS). Dr Elsa Panciroli, who is organising the collaboration, says she believes the collaboration with an artist will be an "innovative way to break down disciplinary boundaries and reach a wider audience." She added that "creative perspective also enriches scientific practice."

It is an exciting, challenging brief, demanding physically apart from anything else. The excitement will come from working against the stunning backdrop of some of Scotland's most impressive natural landscapes. The challenge to stamina will come in staying for a week in the Spring of 2021 with the fieldwork team in their cottage, and hiking with them on a 2-kilometre walk over tough terrain to the search site, where they will join in the hunt for material. The artist will then have three to six months to bring to produce a body of work, which will be shared with local communities and exhibited at local and national venues.



Members of the Elgol site team

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COMING HOME – THE 'ELGIN CRAWLER' RETURNS!

Dr Alison Wright

Elgin Museum Geology Group

In 1826 John Martin, the first curator of Elgin Museum, discovered fossil fish fragments in a crumbling sandstone cliff at Scaat Craig, a few kilometres south of Elgin. The site generated much interest at a time when Hugh Miller was only beginning to consider the older and more complete fishes at Cromarty. The discovery of pieces of jaw, teeth, and numerous scales led to a period of intense collecting^[1]. Many of these specimens were among the earliest donations to Elgin Museum, which opened in 1843, but others were dispersed far and wide.

Nearly 175 years later, Per Ahlberg, a PhD student studying early tetrapods at the University of Cambridge, conducted a review of Devonian collections and realised that many of the Scaat Craig fragments had been misidentified. These were not fish remains but 375 million year old tetrapod fossils, making them the earliest specimens then known. Such was the significance of this discovery that Per's findings were published in the prestigious academic journal *Nature*^[2] and, in a subsequent paper, he gave details of the animal that he named *Elginerpeton pancheni*, the 'crawler from Elgin'^[3].

As part of Elgin Museum's contribution to the Scottish Government designated Year of Coasts and Waters, a temporary exhibition highlighting the local area's importance in the story of tetrapod evolution will run for the forthcoming 2020 season. Although members of the Elgin and Morayshire Literary and Scientific Association collected important fossil specimens from Scaat Craig, sadly none of the material held by the Museum is of tetrapod remains. Consequently, fossils will be borrowed from National Museums Scotland, the British Geological Survey and from the Oxford Museum of Natural History, bringing these fragments together for the first time since they were washed into a large inland river channel running across the Devonian landscape. A reconstruction of what *Elginerpeton* may have looked like, based on Per Ahlberg's 1995 *Nature* paper, was commissioned by Bob Davidson, the Chairman of the Friends, and he has kindly agreed to loan this model to the Museum. Entitled *At the Water's Edge*, the exhibition has been made possible with a grant from the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund.

Scaat Craig and the Devonian Environment

In the Mid-Late Devonian, Scotland lay on the southern edge of a large continent (Laurussia) and sat south of the Equator in the predominantly arid zone. The Devonian rocks of this age in Moray show evidence of wind-blown sand dune formation and river systems flowing towards the north, some of which may have been ephemeral. Across the globe, plants of increasing size and diversity were becoming widely established in the terrestrial environment, stabilising the surface and changing the rate at which sediment and water were delivered to river systems and oceans^[4]. Decaying plant matter and soluble nutrients were also washed into the rivers, altering the water chemistry and depleting oxygen levels. By this time, many bony fish species had already developed lungs which allowed them to gulp air as a means of supplementing the amount of oxygen received via the gills; additional adaptations marked an evolutionary shift that ultimately allowed life to move out of the water and on to land^[5].

Fossil fragments originating from Scaat Craig include pieces of lower jaw, snout, shoulder and pelvic girdles, and part of a femur; these show early skeletal adaptations that would have allowed the animal to support its body weight on paddle-like forelimbs, although it could not walk properly.

In the Devonian 'fish-eat-fish' world, at up to 1.5 metres long, *Elginerpeton* was a top predator, with a fearsome bite^[6], snapping its narrow, elongate jaws to catch small, fast-moving prey^[7]. Although it was able to breathe air, it was more fish-like than reptilian and wouldn't have survived outside its aquatic environment.



Lower jaw of *Elginerpeton pancheni*, with narrow, elongate form and numerous teeth (from: Ahlberg et al. 2005^[8])



Per's 1993 interpretation of what Elginerpeton pancheni might have looked like

The further spread of more advanced tetrapods in the Late Devonian meant that Elginerpeton only survived as a species for a relatively short time; other lineages continued, leading to the further evolution of four-limbed creatures, including ourselves.

Fossil Finder's Weekend 25th-26th April

The exhibition At the Water's Edge was inspired by fossils that were misidentified when they were found and which then lay in drawers for decades before being reassessed. In anticipation that there are other treasures out there, waiting to be rediscovered, Elgin Museum are offering a unique opportunity for people to have their finds identified by visiting palaeontologists from National Museums Scotland during a drop-in event on Saturday 25th April (11 am to 4 pm). The Museum is also running a free coach trip to Clashach quarry the following day (26th) to view the reptile footprints but this must be booked in advance.

For more details see: <https://elginmuseum.org.uk/year-of-coasts-and-waters-2020/>

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Forthcoming Events

CALLING ALL MEMBERS:

COME TO OUR NEXT AGM!

You are cordially invited to THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER'S 14th Annual Meeting, at **The Old Brewery, Cromarty, Saturday, 16th May, 2.00-4.30pm,**

Some very important matters will be up for discussion and decision, including progress with the "Miller Retold" Museum refurbishment project, the Eliza's Path appeal, the Hugh Miller writing competition, the Trewin Memorial Lecture, and forward planning for future events.

There will of course be the usual reports from our treasurer, membership secretary and events organiser, and election of the management committee. All the present members are standing for re-election. Light refreshments will be served.

TOP SPEAKER FOR TREWIN PUBLIC ADDRESS

We, in partnership with Edinburgh Geological Society, will hold our **second Nigel Trewin Memorial Lecture** in Edinburgh on Friday 25th September at a venue and time to be announced. The speaker will be **Dr Nick Fraser**, Keeper of Natural Sciences, National Museum of Scotland. The event will be open to the public, admission free. Please bring along colleagues and friends.

DYNAMIC PRIZES CEREMONY

AT DYNAMIC EARTH

The prize-giving ceremony of the **Hugh Miller Writing Competition** will take place from **3-5pm at Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh**. Winners will have been taken on a tour of the NMS archives in Granton beforehand, including the national Hugh Miller fossil collection.

INVERNESS SCIENCE FESTIVAL ENCORE

The Friends will be exhibiting again at the **Inverness Science Festival Family Day on Saturday, May 2nd Family Day, 11.00am-3.00pm, Leisure Centre, Bught Park, Inverness**. Details to follow.



EXCITING FOSSILS PROGRAMME

AT ELGIN MUSEUM

A Devonian Fossils Exhibition

As part of the Scottish Government sponsored 2020 Year of Coastal Waters, this exhibition "at the water's edge," will be held from 28th March to 31st October.

Late Devonian (375 Ma) fossils highlighting early tetrapod evolution and the importance of *Elginerpeton pancheni* in the transition of life from water to land. The exhibition links to the Scottish Government's Year of Coasts and Waters and has been made possible with a grant from the Weston Loan Programme with Art Fund.

Free entry to Elgin Museum and exhibition

<https://www.elginmuseum.org.uk/atwe2020>



Lecture on a crawler's journey

A lecture by **Prof. Per Ahlberg** (University of Uppsala) will be given at Elgin Museum on **Friday 24th April**: 7.30 pm on early tetrapod evolution. Per first identified and described the fossils in our current exhibition in the early 1990s. £3 entry to non-members of the Moray Society.

<https://www.elginmuseum.org.uk/>

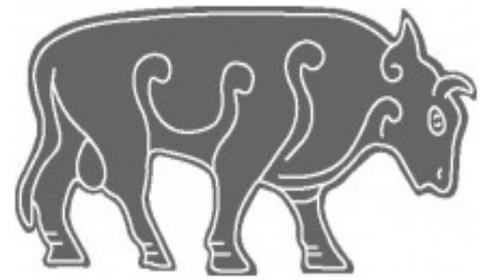
Fossil finders' treat

Elgin Museum Geology Group is running a Fossil Finders invitation event on Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th April. The group has invited prominent palaeontologists from Glasgow and Edinburgh up to Elgin for the weekend. On the Saturday the *Elginerpeton* exhibition will be officially opened. Visitors will be able to ask the experts to identify fossils they may have or just generally to discuss all matters relating to prehistoric life.

On the Sunday the group will be hosting two coach trips from Elgin to Clashach Quarry to look at Permian reptile footprint tracks.

<https://elginmuseum.org.uk/event/fossil-finders-drop-in-day/>

<https://elginmuseum.org.uk/event/fossil-finders-sunday-museum-open/>



THE MORAY
SOCIETY

ELGIN
MUSEUM



MY TASK - "CAPTURING" MILLER'S LEGACY

This article is slightly adapted from a blog originally posted on the National Museum of Scotland website in October 2019. The Miller collection will be included in a tour of the Granton treasures given by NMS staff on 19th June as one of the prizes for winners of the latest Hugh Miller Writing Competition.

By Sherri Donaldson

Palæobiology Curatorial Volunteer

I am a mature third year undergraduate student studying Geology at the University of Aberdeen, with a very strong interest in palæontology.

Over the last year and a half, I've been volunteering a couple of days each month, buried in the depths of the National Museums Collection Centre in Granton, working on the historic Hugh Miller Collection. Wind back to early September 2017, when I attended a conference in Cromarty on the Black Isle titled "The Old Red: Hugh Miller's Geological Legacy". I didn't realise it but this event was a doorway into an ancient world, with global connections and modern relevance. This event was a true immersion into Miller's legacy, with writings, geology and palæontology all brought to life over the weekend. So it was over a cup of tea during a break I got speaking to Dr Andrew Ross, (Principal Curator, Palæobiology), about Miller's collection, and opportunities for volunteering at National Museums Scotland.

Two months later I found myself at Chambers Street discussing the process of accessioning a collection into the digital format of a modern museum. The collection itself was acquired in 1859 and contains around 4,000 individual specimens including the famous Devonian fossil fish, as well as a range of invertebrates such as corals, brachiopods, ammonites and plant material. My task was to capture the invertebrate collection, which were spread throughout the palaeobiology store. Thankfully most had been grouped together in drawers by type.

So armed with a laptop, new archive quality specimen boxes, a head torch and hand lens, my hunt began!

Once I had a Hugh Miller specimen in my hand the task was intricate: I was to re-box it, check and note any damage, then capture all the information from every tag, label and sticker into an ever-expanding Excel spreadsheet.



Hugh Miller specimen ready for processing on the foam lined table together with tools of the trade: new specimen boxes, hand lens, head torch and marker pen.

With some labels well over 150 years old, I often had to use my hand lens and head torch to pick up faded lead-pencil numbers (which match Hugh Miller's original handwritten catalogue). Every drawer held a different surprise – some of my favourites (so far) have been the Scottish belemnites (squid bums!) and Silurian faunal assemblages from Shropshire in England – full of trilobites, brachiopods, bryozoans and crinoids – a view into an ancient sea frozen in time.

After the more obvious drawers of specimens had been catalogued, I took a structured approach to fossil hunting, going rack by rack and shelf by shelf, looking for specimens that had been moved into the main collection. This style of "fossilling" was somewhat easier than in Miller's time, what with being in a climate-

controlled environment, instead of out and about in all weather! With over 250,000 specimens in the store, it often felt like a treasure hunt – thankfully the distinctive yellow labels made my search easier – and I often appeared at Andy's desk with a huge grin, clutching my latest find, almost as excited as its collector must have been, centuries ago.

During the Christmas break from university, I started to transcribe the original handwritten catalogues from digital scans. Having this information in an electronic format makes the management of a collection so much easier, as being able to digitally search the collection will enable wider access and removes the effort of handling ageing historical documents, allowing them to be conserved and preserved. I've now finished physically capturing Miller's invertebrate collection of over 1,200 specimens. Despite my obvious excitement and wanting to make progress, this project has not been about speed – some days I would accession 40+ specimens, while other days were spent matching orphan labels to their specimen, or looking up details from other sources for the spreadsheet. It has been primarily about taking great care, handling once and ensuring accuracy. I love every minute "fossilling" in the store. I have learned an incredible amount – not just about the process of curation, which is even more detailed than I had envisaged – but also from the specimens I've handled.

Hugh Miller once said "Learn to make a right use of your eyes" – and with his guiding words I look forward to continuing my journey through geological time.



FOOTNOTE

Andrew Ross, head of the NMS Palaeobiology Section, has kindly provided the following comments:

"I have databased over 200 type & figured fish specimens and they were put on-line. Many of them were photographed and the photos are also on-line.

If you type Hugh Miller into search our collections-

<https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/search-our-collections/> or simply:

<https://tinyurl.com/HN42-NMSCollections>

1723 objects are now listed. If you click on 'Only records with images' then 130 of them have images attached.

Sherri will work on the HM plants next, and we have a volunteer who is collating data on the main fossil fish collection.

Some of Hugh's fish will appear in an Appendix to the forthcoming Old Red Sandstone book due to be published by the museum this year.

Work is underway to database the rest of the collection.





Top left: Scottish belemnites (or squid bums!) before sorting.
 Top right:.....and squid bums being sorted!
 Above left: Brachiopods about to be catalogued and re-boxed.
 Above right: Brachiopods post cataloguing, ready to go back into the store.
 Left: Faunal Slab containing the coral *Dalmanophyllum subduplicatum* from Shropshire.
 Below: Belemnite *Cylindrotheuthis spicularis* from the Kimmeridgian, Upper Jurassic, Eathie Haven, Cromarty.



Hugh Miller Junior's Memoirs on his Father (Part One)

"AN IMMENSE HEAD AND A FOREHEAD THREE QUARTERS OF A FOOT ACROSS"

By The Editor

We are indebted once again to Miller scholar Mike Taylor for bringing to light the memoirs on Hugh Miller written by his son, Hugh Miller Junior, a geologist like his father before him. We are here starting to serialize extracts from these documents which we think will prove both enlightening and entertaining about his father's character.

The memoirs' discovery in itself makes quite a story.

Hugh Junior, youngest child of Hugh and Lydia Falconer Fraser, was born in 1850, and died aged only 46 in 1895 of heart failure following typhoid and pneumonia. He was a protege of the great Sir Archibald Geikie, who was himself a protege of Hugh snr.

Initially, the great gentleman geologist Sir Roderick Murchison gained the young man a place in the Royal School of Mines. Subsequently Geikie employed him in the Geological Survey. While in post he mapped the Cromarty district for the Survey, and in the course of doing so, he collaborated with his brother William in rescuing, possibly with Geikie's backing, the Birthplace Cottage from dereliction and founding a museum there. He also wrote at about this time the first version of his impressions of his father. This memoir never saw publication. It ended up lodged in family papers belonging to one of the descendants.

It might have lain forgotten in these papers forever, but for the chance, more than a century later, that father Hugh's great, great grand-daughter the late Mrs Marian McKenzie Johnston was rummaging through them when she thought she recognised the son's handwriting. She took the handwritten pen and ink manuscript to Mike Taylor, and he was able to get it confirmed to an acceptable level of certainty by an old colleague who had become a forensic scientist. He then undertook the laborious task of transcribing the text including its many pencil emendations and deletions.

Given its emphasis resting almost entirely on his father's physique and general appearance, the piece clearly related to one of the famous Hill and Adamson calotype portraits of his father taken in 1843. Since the son was only six when his father died, the reminiscences must have been mostly drawn from recollections of his own family and friends, especially his older brother William, with whom he worked on the renovation of the Cottage. But it seems it never saw publication.

It is from this piece that we take our first extract below, edited for maximum interest for the modern reader, and with insertions of some explanatory notes. Where the writer gave two versions of the same sentiment, we have chosen one of them. The full document is now in the National Library of Scotland's archives.

Sadly Hugh Junior's own line has long since died out. But it is to his eternal credit that he, like all the rest of the family in their own ways, paid due honour to the great man.



The famous Hill & Adamson calotype image taken in Calton Cemetery to which the son refers at the beginning of his article

EDITED TEXT OF THE MEMOIR

Hugh Miller 1802-1856

The outlines of Hugh Miller's career are still sufficiently well known to encourage us to spare the reader any enumeration of its bare facts and dates. Of his personal appearance however there can remain with most Scotsmen of the present day only the general impression of a massive head and large rough plaided figure. To his physique we devote this short notice.

The photograph which is reproduced upon the opposite page was taken in the Calton Cemetery at the East end of Waterloo Place, where the photographer D. O. Hill suggested that Miller should assume his old garb and be taken mallet in hand. And in mason garb accordingly he appears: his plaid which he had doffed lying across a stone beside him, his bared arms probably a little less muscular for his two or three years of desk work, but his attitude perhaps not unlike some in which he might have been seen of a summer evening in his uncles' garden at Cromarty, when he was chiselling the ornate sundial that still stands there and happened to be pondering instead of hewing. A few days after this meeting with D. O. Hill there appeared in the Witness a masterly article on "the Calotype".

"There is no likeness of Hugh Miller", said an eminent geologist to us recently, "that adequately conveys the immense strength and mass of his face." Perhaps this early calotype of D.O. Hill's, though not very distinct in its lineaments ... is more suggestive of strength than any likeness of his that remains. There was strength in the bulk and set of his head and even in the shaggy reddish-brown hair; there was strength in every feature and almost every line of his face. But this was not aggressive strength and there was much besides[. His head seemed almost to tower upon his shoulders. He had a large calm blue eye, which could wax very brilliant at times; his smile lit up his face and softened the ruggedness of it; his laugh though little heard was often seen; & his voice was surprisingly soft, & greatly contrasted with his physique. There exists a description of Hugh Miller by himself given to a school friend abroad some years before this meeting with D. O. Hill. "Great reason to be thankful, I am still as ugly as ever. Five foot eleven when I straighten myself, with hair which my friends call brown, and my not-friends red; features irregular, but not at all ill-natured in the expression; an immense head, and a forehead three quarters of a foot across."

As for mere size of head however he would sometimes say that one of the few heads he had seen of equal calibre to his own belonged to that of a poor idiot lad with scarcely enough sense of number to know whether nature had given him one head or two.



Dr Mike Taylor shares a fine head of red hair with the subject on which he has devoted so much scholarship!

Here follows a passage on the then fashionable study of phrenology, and an encounter with a lady practitioner who averred Miller "Couldn't be trusted in a Bank."

Surely perhaps as wide a departure from the truth as phrenologist ever made. "Little could she know" said Miller laughing, that I had been in a bank for three years"....

In figure Hugh Miller was muscular, straight and strong-limbed, with a peculiar marching stride in his gait. His little girl, of three or four years old, was once asked if she had seen her papa walk by. "Papa never *walks*" said the little one, "*he marches*". Miller has himself remarked that a man of military bearing who has not had a military training is generally found to be an uncommon man. An old pensioner in the Fochabers woods mistook him for a Grenadier of the 42nd (*Black*

Watch). "I know you", said the half drunk old soldier, "I know *your kind* well: ye're a Highland-Donald. Och, I've seen ye in the *thick o't*. Ye're reugh fellows when yer bluid's up." But ... there was nothing military enough about Miller to deceive the eye of a sober man except to some extent his gait.

With his homely looking plaid he was often taken for a shepherd. But he was very powerful in build. In his prime he excelled the strongest men in strength and boldest cragsmen in Cromarty. He could raise breast high the "lifting-stone of the Dropping Cave" which no other among his townsmen could bring beyond the knee. The wildest rough in the neighbourhood ... used to say that no man could hold him down when he was in his cups but Hugh Miller. Moral as well as physical force doubtless was employed in this restraint. Readers of "*Schools and Schoolmasters*" may remember... his taming of Click Clack the Carter. "The Carter turned upon me with the fierceness of a wild beast; but first catching his eye as I would that of a maniac I set my face very near his, & he calmed down in a moment."

His strength stood him sometimes in good stead. At Niddry, when his fellow-masons combined against him, he won their unwilling admiration by turning, in the process of hewing, stones that generally employed two or three of them. Actual interference with him they did not dare attempt. Shortly after he had joined and had made himself obnoxious by withstanding their treating customs and drinking habits one of the stronger men in the squad growing violently insolent threatened him with squared fists. Miller caught him by the wrists, and in such a grip did he compress them that when the bully his assailant was cowed and he let go his hold some of the skin came away with his fingers.

To the end of his life Hugh Miller was fond of athletic exercises, especially a trial of skill in the Scottish game of "putting the stone" or a climb among the Cromarty rocks and caves. In putting the stone he generally excelled all comers partly through an excessive length of arm which enabled him to launch it well forth from the shoulder. He provided a few simple gymnastics for his men at the printing office and would sometimes himself lead off in a game. The champion athlete of Scotland in these days – Menzies – was employed at a brewery just over the wall, and when he heard the familiar *thud* of the stone, would sometimes put a ladder to it and come across. Miller tried even his mettle, but was not his match. By chance comers however we have not heard that he was ever surpassed. A party of masons were one day amusing themselves with "the stone" on the Musselburgh links when a stranger in a grey plaid asked leave to join them. It was the Editor of the *Witness* and at the first throw he so much excelled their best attempts that they put on their coats and left the stone lying where it had fallen. This love of athletics once was carried even in a curious contest in the *Witness* office itself. Dr Guthrie and Dr Thomas McCrie the younger were with him there one day, when, moved by a spirit of rather uncanonical fun all three began to compete in a standing leap in an effort to spring from the floor on to the editor's desk. McCrie



A head that "seemed to tower over his shoulders".



The writing desk in his bedroom at the Birthplace Cottage. Few authors could claim Hugh's physicality, and his son seemed to think even a short time working at The Witness might have wasted some muscle.

was a short and rather stout man, failed and fell back; he of the Ragged Schools alighted on the edge of the desk; with his spirit of competition aroused Miller, determined not to be outdone, sprang fairly into the middle, & with such force that the editorial desk split from end to end.

But we have reached our limit. It is more than a quarter of a century since Hugh Miller was last seen in the streets of Edinburgh. The tombstone upon which he leaned when D. O. Hill photographed him stands now a full foot deeper in the ground than it did when he stood by it, a symbol of the processes which ever producing fresh surfaces, perhaps constantly obliterate the old ones. But Hugh Miller's mark will not so readily perish.

The following rough draft text is in pencil; the transcript here is the most accurate possible interpretation,

With his homely dress & his grey maul he was sometimes taken for a shepherd. But few would be blind enough to persist in the mistake after conversing with him. "What makes *you* work as a mason?" said the poor Strath Conon maniac to him. "All your fellows are real masons, but you are only in the disguise of a mason". Quiet and even diffident in company, speaking little and loving much to be alone, hating to be gazed at and opening out best with one or a few congenial friends ... there was yet in his bearing to which we have even heard the word grandeur applied. The "pride of worth" is liable to be called egotism, but with Hugh Miller, the "pride o' worth" is not only pardonable but honourable. Miller would not have denied that he possessed it.

Management Committee profiles

FINAL TWO PROFILES

We conclude our committee's "potted histories" with our Secretary Martin Gostwick, and Events Organiser Gavin Bergenheger. They, and those we have featured in previous editions, Chairman Bob Davidson MBE, Treasurer Sue Rider Busby, Membership Secretary John Armstrong, and committee stalwarts Lillemor Jernqvist, Lara Reid and Jim Mackintosh, have all agreed to stand for re-election at our next AGM.

Martin Gostwick

Born and raised in London, England of mixed English and Baltic lineage, Martin, now 74, is the eldest son of local historians and a life member of the National Union of Journalists. Living in Scotland with his Inverness-born wife Frieda since 1981, he now proudly identifies himself as a "new Scot."

Martin strove on low pay for nearly 20 years on the Morning Star daily paper, as reporter, feature-writer and columnist. He served as Parliamentary Correspondent in the House of Commons (1974-80), and, after posting to Scotland (1980-92), covered the 1984/5 miners' strike. Latterly, after moving to Cromarty, he freelanced for Highland weekly papers, and won Highlands and Island Enterprise's annual media awards three years in a row (1998-2000).

Frieda, then manager of the Birthplace Cottage, employed him as a seasonal guide, and he became a lifelong Miller fan before he had finished the first chapter of My Schools and Schoolmas-



ters. After her enforced retirement through ill health, he succeeded her as Museum manager (2000-2009), acting in that role as a member of the National Trust for Scotland team which in 2003/4 created the new museum in Miller House, and the Garden of Wonders (2008).

With Frieda and Nigel Trewin, he founded the Friends in 2006, and has served as secretary and editor of Hugh's News magazine ever since. He has organised 13 annual meetings, led the drive for new members, and from the start helped promote the Hugh Miller Writing Competitions. Martin has written copiously for Miller's legacy, including a short popular biography, *The Legend of Hugh Miller* (1993), an edition of his early journalism, *A Noble Smuggler and Other Stories* (1997, 2006), the current Museum guidebook, *In the Steps of Hugh Miller* (2004), two anthologies, *Cromarty Living by the Sea* (2007), and *Conversations in Stone* (2018), and numerous articles for the magazine and the website.

His present ambitions for The Friends are to achieve completion of the "Eliza's Path" project, sustain a continuation of the Nigel Trewin Memorial Lectures, support ongoing Miller Writing Competitions and Miller reprints, and contribute to the thinking behind the future refurbishment of Miller House and Cottage.

Gavin Berkenheger

Gavin is a geologist specialising in gold exploration in the UK and Ireland. He received a BSc Honours degree in Geology/Petroleum Geology from Aberdeen University and is a qualified Chartered and European Geologist. Gavin is born and bred in the Black Isle and currently lives with his wife and two children in Muir of Ord. He was inspired at an early age by his geology teacher at Dingwall Academy and the stories of Hugh Miller to go on and study geology at university.

In the past 11 years Gavin has worked throughout the UK, Ireland and Scandinavia conducting geological investigations in the search for gold and other important natural resources.

Gavin's achievements include aiding in the development of a multimillion ounce gold deposit in Northern Ireland, the discovery of a new gold system in the Republic of Ireland and acquiring investment for gold exploration in Scotland. Gavin has also made multiple radio and TV appearances including gold prospecting in Ayrshire on 'The One Show' with Dan Snow.

Gavin has been an active member of The Friends since 2015, and now manages our Facebook and Twitter pages. He has conducted numerous talks and presentations about his work. He curates The Friends' fossil collection, and has travelled the country with it providing demonstrations and science outreach. Collection displays have notably included stands at the "Dippy" Exhibition at Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum with our Chairman last year and associated Natural History Adventure Day in Cromarty, and appearances at the annual Inverness Science Festival.

Gavin also has a keen interest in ancient history, folklore, philosophy and politics. He has made a map locating the sites of Miller's tales in Scenes and Legends, and has hopes that we can in future mount a significant storytelling celebration. His favourite quote from Miller comes from *The Old Red Sandstone* and reads "My advice to young working men desirous of bettering their circumstances, and adding to the amount of their enjoyment, is a very simple one. Do not seek happiness in what is misnamed pleasure; seek it rather in what is termed study. Keep your consciences clear, your curiosity fresh, and embrace every opportunity of cultivating your minds."

Gavin comments: "Miller for me was a free thinker, an independent man who wielded the art of critical thinking to explore and discover the natural and social world around him. This great man continues to inspire many of us today, which is why his memory will live on."



TEACHING TOMORROW'S CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

Last summer, palaeontologist Dr Elsa Panciroli delivered a programme of Fossil Workshops to schools across the Highlands of Scotland. Covering 1,500 miles and speaking to over 300 pupils, she shared stories of Scotland's amazing fossils, taught pupils about the science of palaeontology, and encouraged them to protect their unique natural heritage.

By Elsa Panciroli

I grew up in the rural Scottish Highlands, in a geographically remote location famed for its geology. Our primary school—which at its busiest had about nineteen pupils in total—rarely received visits from outreach programmes. I don't remember ever meeting a scientist while growing up. Despite knowing the landscape intimately, our community was cut-off from the research and teaching being carried out in our hills.

As an adult I work on the Isle of Skye, where my team and I carry out research on extinct mammals, reptiles and salamanders. I wanted to ensure the results of our endeavours were fed back to the local people, to help address the disconnect between rural communities and palaeontology. To achieve this, I created the Scottish Fossil Workshops programme, and secured funding from the Palaeontological Association's Engagement Grant scheme.

The aim of the Scottish Fossil Workshops was to reach schools in parts of Scotland that don't regularly receive outreach, either because their location is distant from major towns and cities, or due to low pupil numbers. It's not difficult to enthuse children about fossils, what's more challenging is widening their interest beyond Tyrannosaurus. Scotland has an incredible fossil heritage, receiving media attention in recent years particularly thanks to Jurassic dinosaur footprints found on Skye. But there are so many more Scottish fossil tales, extending well beyond those 'terrible lizards'. The preserved bodies in rocks across the country whisper to us the story of Scotland's changing environment and the evolution of life on earth



Elsa delivering the talk

I created the workshops with the help of Matt Humpage, a graphic designer and digital artist I've previously worked with on the anthology, *Conversations in Stone* (with co-editor Larissa Reid, see previous issues of *Hugh's News*). Matt designed a bespoke colour scheme and logo for the workshops, creating banners and headers for use in promotional material. Together we compiled an activity booklet for participating schools that included drawing activities, a Scottish fossil wordsearch, puppet making, and much more. I received many generous donations of books, leaflets and posters about fossils and geology for inclusion in the activity pack. The Palaeontological Association funding was used to 3D print a selection of Scottish fossils, and these augmented real fossils for the children to handle, on loan from the Natural Sciences department at National Museums Scotland (NMS).

In May 2019, Matt and I set off on our workshop tour. It's a logistical challenge reaching widely dispersed rural schools, so I set the achievable goal of delivering two workshops per day over two weeks. Workshops were two hours in length, and comprised three components: an interactive PowerPoint presentation, a fossil-handling session, and a fossil-themed game. This structure helped balance listening activities with practical components, keeping children aged between five and twelve engaged with the content.

The pupils were overjoyed to have a palaeontologist visit, and the fossil-handling session was incredibly popular. I selected the fossils to complement the presentation, which was split into three sections: What are Fos-



The fossils used in the talk

sils?; Fossils of Scotland; and Being a Palæontologist. I tied content into the Scottish curriculum for Excellence (CfE), particularly evolution, scientific enquiry, skills building, ecosystems, climate change, and digital technologies. This meant the content could be integrated into the wider teaching framework of the school. Each school was given an enlarged 3D print of our recently published complete *Borealestes* jaw —Scotland's first-discovered Mesozoic mammal—along with a fact sheet about it, and the process of digital printing.



Elsa delivering the talk

Scotland's fossils provide a vivid storyline about environmental change and the evolution of vertebrate life. To illustrate this, I chose key examples from across the country: the Devonian fossil fish of Caithness and Orkney; the first animals on land from the Carboniferous Borders; the strange desert-dwelling Permian synapsids of Elgin; and finally, the rich lagoon fauna of Jurassic Skye. For each one I linked the fossils both to Scotland's landscape and to us, telling the tale of the emergence of the mammal lineage.

To emphasise the diversity of people and subjects in palæontology, my presentation included a range of scientists from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. We talked

about the many different research themes palæontologists follow, and the skills scientists employ—including less obvious ones such as art, teamwork, and communication. Teachers commented that this emphasis on a wide range of skills was inclusive and helpful for them to link taught subjects to their practical applications.

Arguably the most important goal of the workshops was to encourage the pupils to be responsible citizen scientists. Most of them had already collected fossils from local sites, and some brought examples to show me, including ammonites and crinoids. One way to address the problems that can arise from unregulated collecting is to educate young people to protect their local natural heritage. To achieve this I incorporated the Scottish Fossil Code (created by Scottish Natural Heritage, SNH) into the talk, simplifying the message into four bullet points: Ask an Adult (don't collect without checking it's okay with landowners); Be Responsible (look after yourself and look after nature); Be a Good Scientist (take notes about what you find); and Tell an Expert (if you find something, show it to someone!) The children were extremely receptive to the idea that, by behaving responsibly, they were looking after their environment and being real scientists.

Our parting gift to the teachers was to over-excite their pupils with the role-playing Fossilisation Game. Adapted from a simpler version I found online, this game taught them about fossil preservation and how to read the fossil record. Pupils were allocated animals from Jurassic Skye, and encouraged to role-play as their animal (you can imagine the chaos). After a few minutes, we yelled at them to all 'drop dead!' As they lay giggling in dramatic death poses on the floor, I circulated a bag of cards to draw from randomly, and these told them if they became a fossil or not, and why. We then looked at how representative the remaining fossils were of the original animal assemblage, and the 'best' ways to become a fossil.

Anyone who does regular outreach work in schools will know how intense and exhausting it is. Between visits we spent hours on the road, often only able to pick up basic food from petrol stations or supermarkets and eating it in the car on the way to our next location. But the results, and the excitement of the pupils, were more than enough reward for the effort.

Among the comments received from teachers have been:

'Great balance between focused, practical, and active tasks.'

'Yes! It's fab for kids here to experience visits like this! We're so far away from cities!'

'Thank you! The kids all LOVED the workshops – please come again soon!'

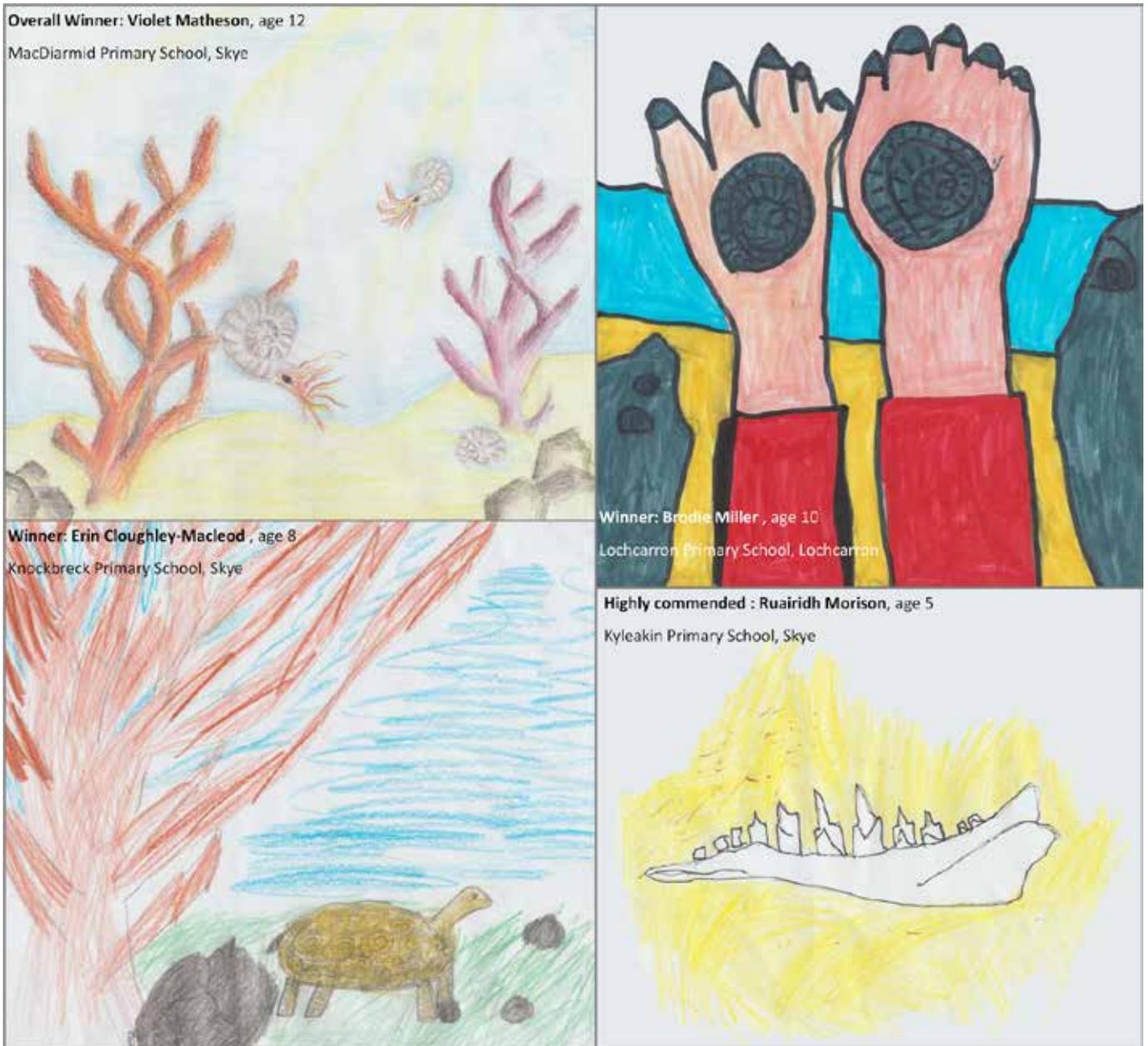
In the following months pupils entered our Scottish Fossil Art Competition. We received 127 entries, and there were four winners and eighteen highly commended entries, chosen in consultation with the Natural Sciences department at NMS. The prizes included books, stickers, and postcards of extinct animals, and a 'Palæontologist's Starter Kit', with hand lens, notebook, and identification guides. As well as this, one overall winner received a rock collection for their school to learn from, containing the main rock types found in Scotland (generously donated by Angus Miller of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum).

It was an amazing experience, made possible by the Palæontological Association funding. I couldn't have done it without the generous support and donations from National Museums Scotland (especially Dr Sarah Stewart), Colin MacFadyen from Scottish Natural Heritage, Angus Miller from the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, Mairi Stewart from the STEM team at the University of the Highlands and Islands, Anthony Kinahan of Dunedin Academic Press, and the British Geological Survey in Edinburgh. Thanks to Roger Benson and Steve Brusatte for providing additional Skye fossils to print. I'm so grateful to everyone who supported me, and of course to Matt Humpage for helping design the content and deliver the workshops.

With an increased interest in Scotland's fossils, it's important to share the science of palæontology with as many people as possible. It would be amazing if the workshops could continue, ideally expanding to reach the rest of Scotland. Hopefully more of us will take our research back into communities—who knows, maybe it will inspire the next generation of citizen scientists to pursue careers in research and conservation?

This article was adapted from Elsa's online blog, Giant Science Lady www.giantsciencelady.blogspot.com/
 Elsa is currently a researcher in evolution and palæobiology at Oxford University, and co-editor of the anthology *Conversations in Stone*

Below: The Art Competition winning entries



ARDAVELL FARMHOUSE MYSTERY SOLVED AT LAST!

This article comprises extracts taken from an entry on the Kirkmichael Trust website, kindly sent to us by its author. He was searching for the story behind a gravestone in the Kirkmichael Burial Ground, and in the course of his research he uncovered the answer to a question of identity which has flummoxed Hugh Miller's readers for generations.

by Jim Mackay - Kirkmichael Trust

Hugh Miller, Cromarty's most famous son, opens his autobiographical *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (1854) with a story about his father who, when a boy, could not bring himself to drown some puppies.

It always seemed a strange way to commence a book but who would challenge such a master of story-telling? The puzzle for us is: at the time of the incident, his father had been living on a farm with a maternal aunt. But which farm and which aunt? We can at last reveal the solution.

But bear with me first, as I set out Miller's opening lines. It is a fine piece of story-telling which engages your human emotions right from the start – hmm, perhaps not such a daft beginning to a biography after all!

*“Rather more than eighty years ago, a stout little boy, **in his sixth or seventh year**, was despatched from **an old-fashioned farm-house in the upper part of the parish of Cromarty**, to drown a litter of puppies in an adjacent pond. The commission seemed to be not in the least congenial. He sat down beside the pool, and began to cry over his charge; and finally, after wasting much time in a paroxysm of indecision and sorrow, instead of committing the puppies to the water, he tucked them up in his little kilt, and set out by a blind pathway which went winding through the stunted heath of the dreary Maolbuoy Common, in a direction opposite to that of the farm-house – his home for the two previous twelvemonths. After*



The red spot marks the location of the Junor Stone at Kirkmichael

some doubtful wandering on the waste, he succeeded in reaching, before nightfall, the neighbouring seaport town, and presented himself, laden with his charge, at his mother's door. The poor woman – a sailor's widow, in very humble circumstances – raised her hands in astonishment: “Oh, my unlucky boy,” she exclaimed, “what's this?– what brings you here?” “The little doggies, mither,” said the boy; “I couldna drown the little doggies; and I took them to you.” What afterwards befell the “little doggies,” I know not; but trivial as the incident may seem, it exercised a marked influence on the circumstances and destiny of at least two generations of creatures higher in the scale than themselves. The boy, as he stubbornly refused to return to the farm-house, had to be sent on shipboard, agreeably to his wish, as a cabin-boy; and the writer of these chapters was born, in consequence, a sailor's son, and was rendered, as early as his fifth year, mainly dependent for his support on the sedulously plied but indifferently remunerated labours of his only surviving parent, at the time a sailor's widow. ... ”

Miller goes on to explain that the boy's mother had “committed him to the charge of a sister, married to a farmer of the parish, **and now the mistress of the farm-house of Ardavell**; but the family death was not to be so avoided; and the arrangement terminated, as has been seen, in the transaction beside the pond.”

The stout little boy with a warm heart was Hugh Miller's father. But to return to the mystery of to which maternal aunt, and to which farm, he had been sent for care. Hugh Miller says that his father, the sea captain Hugh Miller, was told to drown the puppies when he was in his sixth or seventh year (a hard thing to ask a child of that age, of any age, to do). Hugh the father was born in 1754, and the incident "in his sixth or seventh year" would make the year 1759 or 1760. The family father Hugh had been living with was the Junor family. The reason why father Hugh had been farmed out to the Junors was presumably because his mother, Elizabeth Miller ms Feddes, widow of Alexander Miller who had died at sea, was struggling to support the rest of her family. Her sister, **Elspet Junor ms Feddes**, was married to **William Junor** a substantial tenant farmer, so it is clear why young Hugh had to move home, albeit for a couple of years only – until his unexpected return to Cromarty. The Junors tenanted several farms over the years – Little Farness and Ardeville in the parish of Cromarty, and Blairnaclach in the parish of Resolis. Their memorial tablestone stands beside the chancel in Kirkmichael.

Both women were daughters of the buccaneer **John Feddes**, Hugh Miller's great grandfather. Elspet, born 1710, had married farmer Junor in 1730 and would have been approaching 50 when she took the boy in. But which of them ordered the drowning of the dogs, the farmer or his wife? Hugh does not say. The story is merely a preliminary to a whole chapter idolising his dad.

THE APPRENTICE'S DREAM

Another identity puzzle Jim Mackay has at least partially solved concerns the relative whose tomb the young stonemason Hugh Miller inscribed over a week late in 1822 in Kirkmichael Burial Ground.

Hugh refers to this event anonymously in his unnerving supernatural tale, *The Apprentice's Dream*, in Chapter XXIX of *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*. He dreams of a gnomon (sundial) moving to point at the very spot where his unnamed relative was buried five weeks later.

Jim found another Ardeville Junor connection here. A tenant farmer of Ardeville named John Stewart married one of the Junor family, Elizabeth Juner in the latter half of the 18th Century. They had several children, all of whom died relatively young. The mother placed the tomb in memory of them all. The youngest, William, born in 1792, is stated to have been buried on 31st December 1822, aged 30 years, and Jim has surmised that this William Stewart must have been the name Hugh was inscribing.

He has as yet not been able to establish exactly what the relationship between the Millers and the Stewarts was, but Elizabeth Juner shared the same surname, and place of residence as his great great aunt Elspeth Junor. It has been for generations, and remains, quite a common name on the Black Isle.

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

DISRUPTION TIMES**JOHNNY GIBB RECALLED**

By Martin Gostwick

Every so often an almost forgotten literary classic comes to The Friends' attention, and for one such we must thank Miller scholar Dr Mike Taylor. He drew our attention to our mistaken belief that Lydia Fraser Miller's novel *Passages in the Life of an English Heiress* was "the only novel ever written on The Disruption."

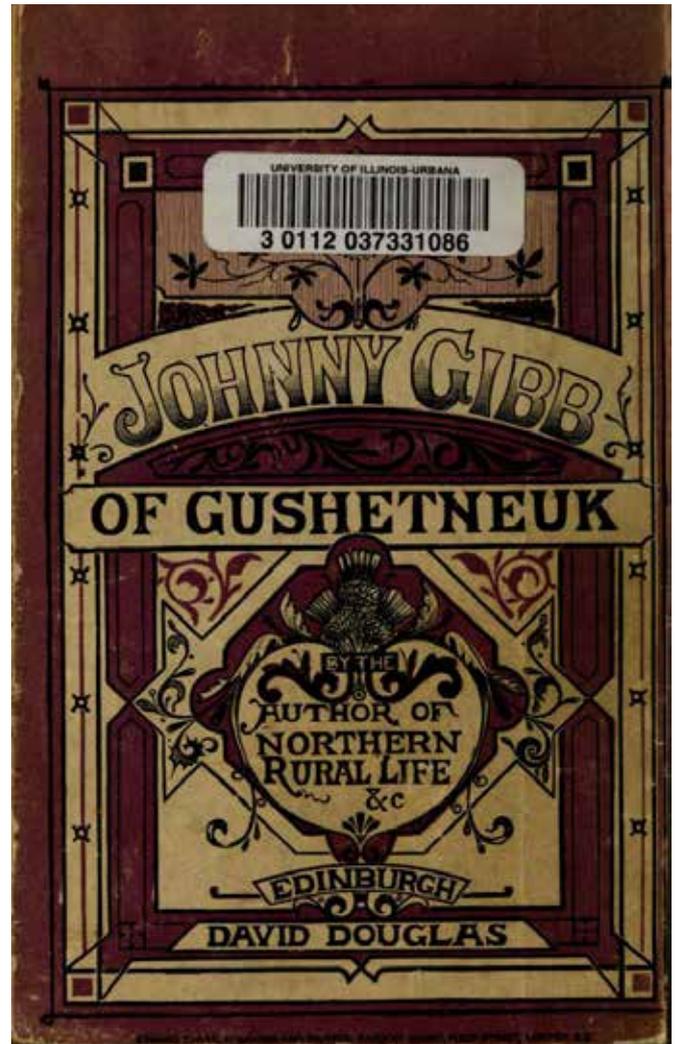
"Come now," said Mike, "have you never heard of Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk?" He promptly proceeded to enlighten me. The author was a certain William Alexander (1826-1894), his subtitle, referring to "the parish of Pyketillim with glimpses of the parish politics about AD 1843." Johnny Gibb, unlike Lydia's indigestible effort, proved to be a bestseller which went into 12 editions, from first publication in 1871.

Mike Taylor tells us the novel is "One of my favourites, written in the fine healthfu' Doric." He goes on: "Not sure where the fictional parish was set but it can't have been too far from Marnoch or Aberchirder."

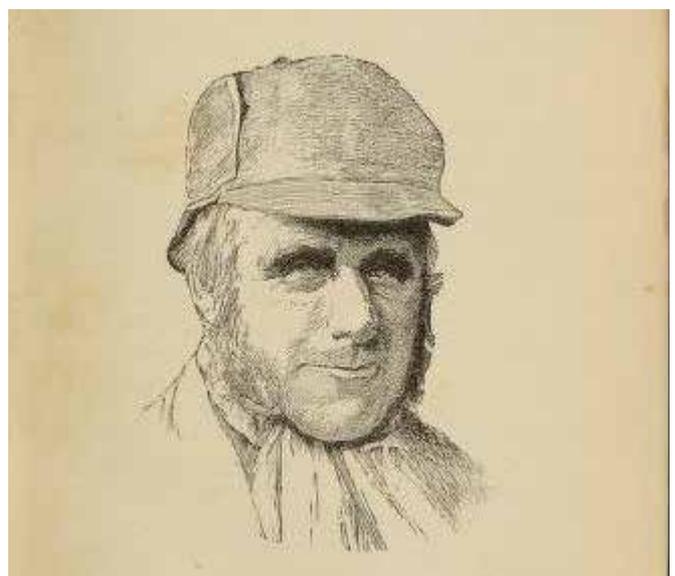
Marnoch, in the parish of Strathbogie, Aberdeenshire, was a key battleground at one point in the "Ten Years Conflict" in the Church of Scotland, which led to *The Disruption*, a climactic event in that prolonged national struggle for spiritual and civil liberties, now largely forgotten. It nevertheless saw plenty of real human drama for those who cared about their faith, as shown in this tale.

The conflict arose because civil courts repeatedly upheld the right of patrons (mainly local landowners) to "intrude" their own choice of ministers on congregations. In Marnoch, in 1841, the entire congregation walked out of church in protest at the appointment of one such intruded minister. Hugh Miller, editor of *The Witness*, wrote leading articles about this episode and others, fervently supporting the fight against "Intrusion."

Johnny Gibb is written in popular style, with dialogue entirely in the local Doric dialect, as Mike says, and is conveniently provided with a glossary, which frankly admits that "the language of Aberdeenshire is so peculiar that many of its words will hardly be intelligible even to the inhabitants of the southern and western districts of Scotland." Actually, the sense of the



The glorious front cover. Publishers don't make them like this any more.



Farmer Johnny Gibb, as imagined by the artist in a "fore an' aft"



Author William Alexander



The walkout from Marnoch parish church in 1841.

“speak” is quite easy to follow.

Here is Gibb, a radical farmer, telling the Moderate (Intrusion-defending) minister Rev Sleekabout to his face: “Weel, sir, ye made a hantle (deal) o’ the poo’ers that be, an’ the duty o’ absolute subjection to them. Noo, sir, lat me tell ye that the Apos’le never inten’et to set up either the laird or the minaster as ane o’ the poo’ers ordeent’

to bear rowle owre’s (rule over us) i’ the fashion that ye seem’t to approve so muckle o’.”

Later, Gibb emerges, almost unintentionally, as a “Disruption leader,” confronting the local laird face-to-face over his vituperative refusal to grant the newly formed Free Church a site to build on.

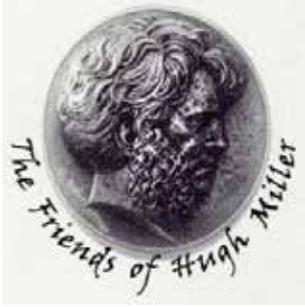
I was able to skim-read the novel thanks to Mike Taylor referring me to the National Library of Scotland’s Wee Windaes website, devoted to preserving and promoting use of Lallans, and which contains a digital copy of Johnny Gibb in a Victorian edition. Incidentally, it is also available free digitally from Illinois, Connecticut and Toronto universities’ libraries, and in print from some antiquarian booksellers.

William Alexander, I learnt, was a leading professional journalist, and a prolific novelist in late Victorian Scotland. He preferred first serialising his books, including this one, in popular newspapers. Like his hero Johnny Gibb, he was a radical, who supported land reform and abolishing hereditary privileges. He exposed the agricultural revolution’s harsh consequences for cotters, labourers and small tenant farmers. He will almost certainly have known of Miller’s writings on the same subjects.

Mike Taylor concluded his missive by revealing that his grandfather had lived in Aberchirder, and that he was thus himself “in part a loon frae Foggieloaan.”

Footnote: There is a third Disruption novel, *The Awakening of George Darroch*, published in 1985, by the today much better known writer Robin Jenkins (1912-2005)





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