



Hugh's News

Magazine of
The Friends of Hugh Miller

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FOSSIL HUNTERS WIN NAMING HONOURS

by Martin Gostwick

Two of our distinguished palaeontologists have just gained the additional prestige of having fossils named for them. They are our chairman, Bob Davidson MBE, and our membership secretary, John Armstrong, and both have been recognised for their work on Acanthodians, Bob in the Orcadian Basin, and John in the Arctic.

Acanthodians were collected by Hugh Miller at Cromarty, and the two - firm friends as well as colleagues going back more than two decades - joke that they have "just joined a very exclusive club, of which Hugh would have been an early member."

Bob's *Falldentus davidsoni* is derived from the latin Fallo meaning false and dentus for tooth, "False tooth." The origin of this is the presence in its jaw area of large gill bones which could be mistaken for teeth. It belongs to the North of Scotland Cheiracanthid acanthodian group which were actually toothless.



"Stellandentus" equals "extremely nasty teeth."

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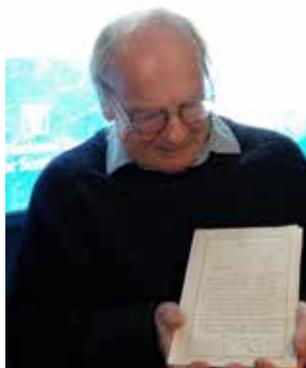
MILLER MS ACQUIRED

The Friends of Hugh Miller has acquired for the Museum's collection a note in Hugh's own hand, which while very short, gives a telling insight into his extraordinary workload, adding his many lectures on geology to his extremely taxing job of editing *The Witness*.

Manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones heartily thanked The Friends for the donation, describing the letter as "a fascinating snippet." We paid £80 for it to an antiquarian collector, Mr Andrew McKendry of Ballymena, Northern Ireland, who has in turn made a present of the cheque to his grand-daughter Claire McDowell.

Dr Powers-Jones plans to have a high quality facsimile copy made, which she hopes to put on display in Miller House when the Museum opens next year.

For Text and analysis, see story p3



The Secretary holds the Miller letter

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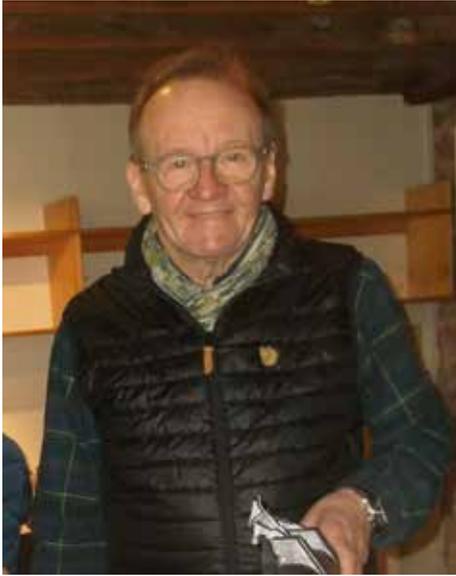
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NAMING HONOURS

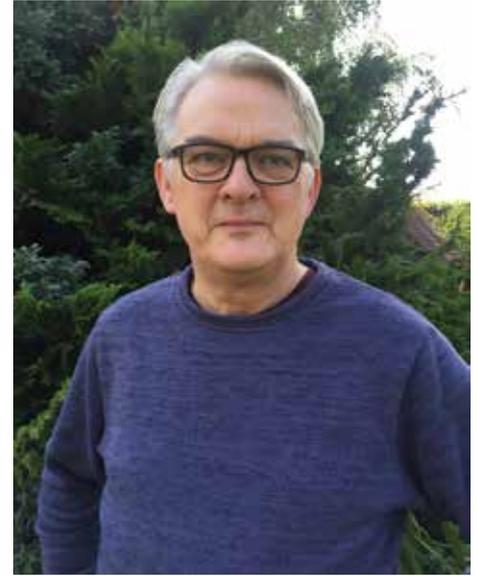
(continued from p1)



Bob Davidson



Nigel Trewin



John Armstrong

The naming authors, Mike Newman (Wales), Jan den Blaauwen (Netherlands) and Carole Burrow (Australia) have long been friends and colleagues of both men. Bob has been a leader in new research, particularly in Forfarshire and Moray. His naming honour is described in a paper by the authors in the *Scottish Journal of Geology*, for helping them “by donating specimens for various acanthodian research projects over the years,” adding that his MBE was awarded for services to palaeontology.

John’s *Serrandentus armstrongi* owes its description to what he says are “the jaws with extremely nasty-looking teeth,” serra being Latin for “saw.” He says: My fish was ‘reconstructed’ purely from its dentition and associated scales by our good friend and colleague Mike Newman (who authored the description of the species in a paper for the *Journal of the Geological Society Of Norway*).” *Serrandentus armstrongi* belongs to a group of shark-like Acanthodians called Ischnacanthids

Acanthodian fish were characterised by having beautiful tiny “chain-mail” scales with graceful spines holding up “sails” of skin in lieu of modern-day fins. The last of the Acanthodians became extinct in Carboniferous times (360 to 300 million years ago), but Bob’s and John’s fish were alive in even more ancient, Middle Devonian times (383 to 392 million years ago).”

John tells the story of how their research all began around 20 years ago, inspired by the late Professor Nigel Trewin. A group of like-minded amateur palaeontologists from around the UK, mentored by Nigel, started re-visiting old fossil fish sites in Northern Scotland, Orkney and Shetland. They became known as “the fossil fish filleters.”

They all became good friends, and “we have spent many convivial evenings on our collecting trips discussing our discoveries (of course, Miller was never far from our conversations!)”

John explains: “In 2017, five of our group planned a trip to the Middle Devonian of Svalbard archipelago (formerly Spitzbergen). It was an opportunity to discover completely new localities with hopefully, some new species. We have just completed our fourth expedition in 2020 and *Serrandentus armstrongi* is just the first of several new species being described in the scientific literature. All five core members of the expeditions are FOHM members, so my fish will definitely NOT be the last to be linked with FOHM!”

Notably there was the millipede *Pneumodesmus newmani* bestowed on Mike Newman, but, they say, “perhaps we have all been trumped by the late Nigel Trewin. Whereas we have had species named for us, Nigel had a genus named in his honour, the gloriously entitled *Trewinia magnifica*.”

"So busy have I become"

It is a tantalising vignette, this note, clearly dashed off in a great hurry, giving us a real glimpse of how frantically busy Hugh Miller was in his last years. Tantalising in the sense that we do not know from whom the invitation came which he was forced to decline, and what could have been the function. Was it a dinner party, or an opportunity to look at another collector's fossils, or perhaps a public meeting? We may never know. Its warm tone, while formally polite, suggests he may have known the man quite well. What it does tell us is that, when not editing and writing leaders for the twice-weekly *Witness*, he spent every minute of his spare time on his lectures, which judging by their content, would have taken an hour or more to deliver.

He gave no less than 18 lectures that we know of to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institute between 1852 and 1855. The date, added in pencil on this letter, possibly by another hand, is Nov 1852. There were six lectures, published posthumously by his widow Lydia as *Sketchbook of Popular Geology*. Another dozen talks from this period, also published after his death in 1856, appeared under the title *The Testimony of the Rocks*, which like the *Sketchbook* went through multiple editions.

Miller and family lived at 2 Stuart Street (now believed to be Abercorn Gardens) between 1848 and 1854, before moving to their last home at Shrub Mount, Portobello.

THE TEXT

Herewith a scanned copy of the original text. Readers will note the mid-19thC difficulties of communication compared with our days of emails and texts.

Edinburgh, 2 Stuart Street
Tuesday morning
Nov 1852

My dear Sir

I live two miles from the Post Office, and ere your letter reached me it had to be posted a second time. And so I have been unable to reply to it. I really fear I will be unable to avail myself of your kind invitation. So busy have I been for the last fortnight that I have not had a moments time to glance over my intended lectures; and up till within an hour or two of delivering them I must be engaged, I find, in labouring for my newspaper.

With sincere thanks for your kindness

I am

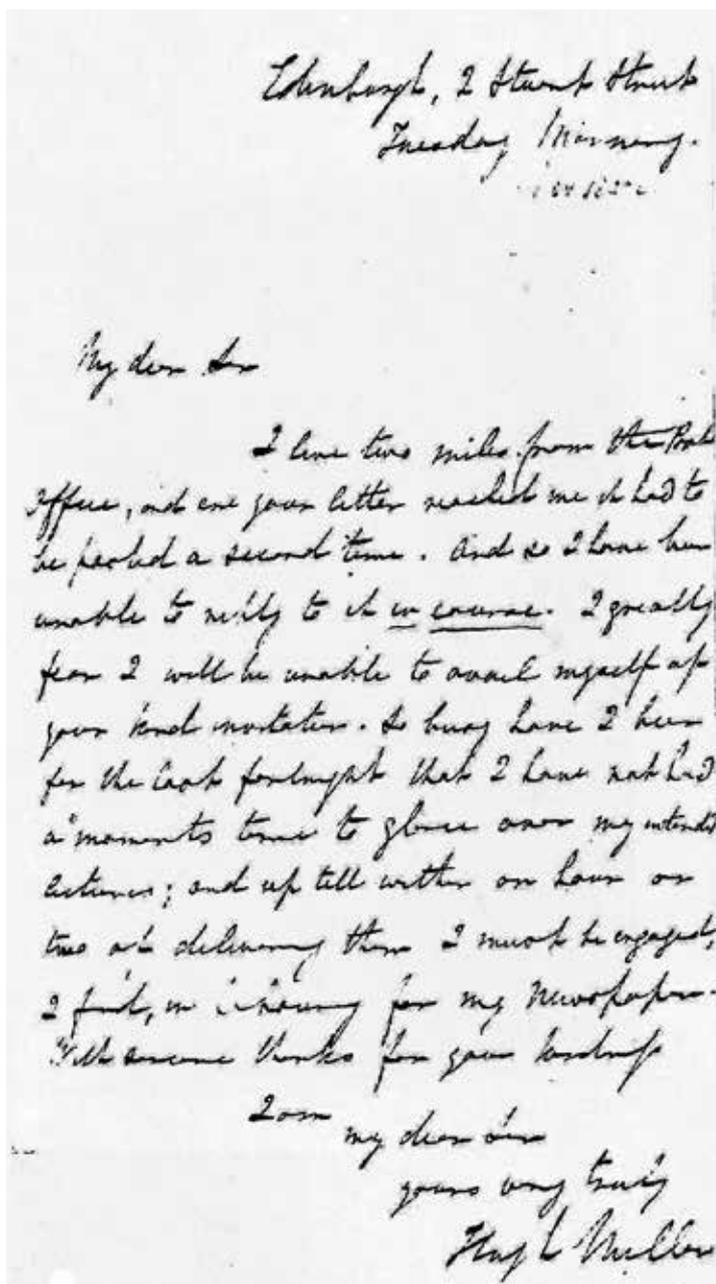
my dear Sir

yours very truly

Hugh Miller

NTS THANKS

The National Trust for Scotland's head of fund-raising, Ms Ali MacLeod, has sent a letter thanking the Friends for our donation to the Museum of Miller's hand-written note as a "wonderful addition," adding that the Trust is "very grateful for our continued support, which is vital ... and gives us all heart and encouragement at a time of such uncertainty."



LATEST NEWS

Miller Retold on hold till 22/23

Refurbishment of Hugh Miller Birthplace Cottage and Museum (HMBCM), known as the Miller Retold project, will not take place until 2022/23 "at the earliest."

Manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones informed The Friends of this delay in an interview on 15th October. She said that a "chunk of money" had been assigned for the development of the project in the operating plan for 2021/22, with a view to briefing a design contractor the following year.

She confirmed that the Friends' already submitted detailed proposals for a complete makeover will be included in the deliberations.

Correcting the "sorry state" of geology

The Scottish Geology Trust has launched a crowdfunding campaign with the aim of setting itself on a firm financial footing and promoting key projects in the promotion of geology, especially support for Scottish Geoparks.

Trust chairman Melvyn Giles said: "We believe that unless the community takes charge of correcting the sorry state of Scottish geology nothing will change." This is a "call for action" to geoscientists in Scotland and internationally who have links to Scotland. "If we let this opportunity to change things slip, it may not come again."



The Friends of Hugh Miller, while not a geological group as such, fully supports the newly-formed Trust and will be circulating members accordingly after the campaign has gone live on 27th October at www.crowdfunder.co.uk/scottish-geology-trust. It will be supported by videos, articles, blogs and tweets. Details of the plans are available from Caroline Gould (project.manager@scottishgeologytrust.org).

Special General Meeting reports

The SGM held on 10th October resolved to continue pressing for the implementation of the Friends' own proposals for Miller Retold, and to resume fund-raising for the Eliza's Path Project. Discussions would be ongoing with member Joyce Gilbert on the possibilities of a third "Betsey voyage."

Chairman Bob Davidson and the Edinburgh Geological Society were congratulated on the success of the second Nigel Trewin Memorial Lecture, and a decision made to seek a speaker for a third one. It was noted that while the Zoom format worked in terms of attendance, it did not yield any new members for The Friends, unlike the first, physical meeting.

Seven members of the management committee were re-elected by 17 proxy votes unanimously: Chairman, Bob Davidson, MBE; Sue Rider Busby, treasurer; Martin Gostwick, Secretary; Gavin Berkenheger, events organiser; John Armstrong, membership secretary; Jim Mackintosh and Lara Reid. Sidney Johnston was elected in place of Lillemor Jernqvist who had resigned due to ill health. She received a warm vote of thanks for her very positive input to the committee's work over several years.

Membership was confirmed at just over 100. A closing balance at 31 March 2020 of £15,537.12 was noted.



TRIBUTE

Henry McKenzie Johnston

We salute the memory of Henry McKenzie Johnston, a true gentleman, and the Hugh Miller Museum's greatest benefactor, who passed away last month at the age of 99.

Husband to Hugh and Lydia Miller's great great granddaughter Marian McKenzie Johnston (née Middleton), Henry's services in partnership with her, and after her death, to Hugh Miller, the museum, the town of Cromarty, and not least to The Friends of Hugh Miller, have been of incalculable value.

The couple compiled and published a family tree tracing the Millers' ancestry on both sides stretching back 500 years and well into the 20th Century, a prodigious feat of research involving parish records, church sessions, registries and other sources. During this project, they established a warm working relationship with the then Birthplace Cottage manager, Frieda Gostwick, which would prove of lasting value as they helped her, and her successors in post, to expand and enhance the Museum's collections, not least in raising standards first in the Cottage, and subsequently creating the Miller House exhibitions.

Henry, Edinburgh-born, after war service in the Black Watch, enjoyed a career in the Diplomatic Service and later on as an Ombudsman. After retirement he went on to write two excellent histories, *Missions to Mexico* (1992) and *Ottoman and Persian Odysseys* (1998).

Marian and Henry made it a principal objective of their support of the Miller legacy to raise the profile of Lydia Mackenzie Falconer Fraser as not only Hugh's wife, but herself an accomplished author in her own right and as his equal partner. This was the basis on which they cooperated with Black Isle writer Elizabeth Sutherland to published the first and so far only authorised biography, *Lydia, wife of Hugh Miller of Cromarty* (2002). This, like the chart, was a product of exacting research.

After Marian's death aged 87 in 2009, Henry continued to strive tirelessly in her memory and in accordance with her wishes, to bring Lydia's life and work into greater recognition, and to help the Museum take its presentations forward.

His first action came in response to an NTS threat that year to close the Museum, and put it in mothballs, during one of its recurring financial crises. In 2010/11, he endowed the Hugh Miller Birthplace Cottage and Museum (HMBCM) with the Middleton Fund (named in honour of Marian's family) with £600,000 capital.

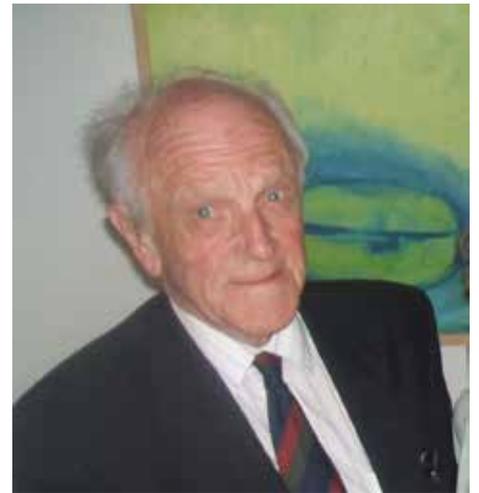
This enabled NTS to employ a new property manager, and to keep the Museum open seven days a week for at least six months a year, the operational basis which has been sustained ever since. At the same time, he donated £5,000 core-funding to The Friends of Hugh Miller, providing the essential finance enabling all its activities. He remained the Friends' honorary vice-president until his death. He also presented the Museum with a family accounts book detailing its expenses in the years following Miller's death.

In 2012, he set up the Middleton Trust, a charity to advance the social, cultural and recreational development of Cromarty's young people. This has supported many excellent projects, such as the Youth Cafe, and the children's operas, and which most recently established a prize for the 18-25 age group in the Hugh Miller Writing Competition.

Henry published at his own expense Lydia's novel, *Passages in the Life of an English Heiress*, a children's novel by Lesley Beake, *Jamie's Adventures in Time: Finding Hugh Miller*, and two books by Hugh and Lydia's daughter Harriet Miller Davidson, *Sir Gilbert's Children* and *Man of Genius*.

It can truly be said of Henry that beside all these contributions both financial and cultural, he was also an inspiration by example to The Friends, a man of old-world courtesy, and a delightful raconteur who always provided the most entertaining company.

MG



Henry McKenzie Johnston

NIGEL TREWIN MEMORIAL LECTURE

A WHIRLWIND TRIASSIC TOUR

One reason for the strong attendance for Nick Fraser's lecture lay in its intriguing title, *Chip Shops and Drain Cleaners*, because its meaning soon revealed that he has a sense of humour nicely complementing that of his then tutor, Professor Nigel Trewin.

While on an honours course at Aberdeen University, he had a whole weekend to collect thousands of bits of tetrapod jawbones encased in Triassic sediments from caves and fissures in a Carboniferous quarry in southern England. Back in the lab at uni, in his enthusiasm to "digest these things" he had as many as eight or nine baths of acetic acid brewing at any one time. The smell of vinegar permeated the whole wing. He would know he had gone too far when "Nigel poked his head through the door and asked for a chip supper."

The bones came from a number of different species of ancient rhychocephalians. A single surviving species of the Rhychocephalia group still lives off New Zealand and is known by their Maori name of Tuatarla, meaning "spiny back'. They are so-called "living fossils."

He went on to discuss the challenge he faced trying to identify the different rhychocephalians from thousands of isolated pieces. He had seven or eight "jigsaw puzzles" to work out and was helped by a memoir by Rupert Wild on the Triassic reptile *Tanytropheus*, which became a "sort of bible" for the rest of his career.

In the last couple of decades, palaeontologists have come to know a whole lot more about fossil rhychocephalians, and how they are a very diverse group and very different from the modern day forms.

While in post as director of research and collections at the Virginia Museum of Natural History he uncovered many fossils of aetosaurs and phytosaurs. He also found some of them by the side of the approach road to Dulles Airport which "sits bang slap on top of the Triassic."

He implored the audience to visit Elgin Museum where there was a very fine related animal, the aetosaur *Stagonolepis*. He ranged over finds in several quarries, such as dinosaur footprints at Culpepper, Northern Virginia, and armadillo types in North Carolina.

He moved on to "the love of my life," the Virginia Solite quarry in the middle of tobacco-growing country. "Just as Nigel had waxed lyrical about his work in the sequences of the Orcadian basin, I felt comfortable about working in the lacustrine sequences in this new setting." He discussed the *Tænytrachelos* reptile with its elongated neck, and plough-shaped ribs.

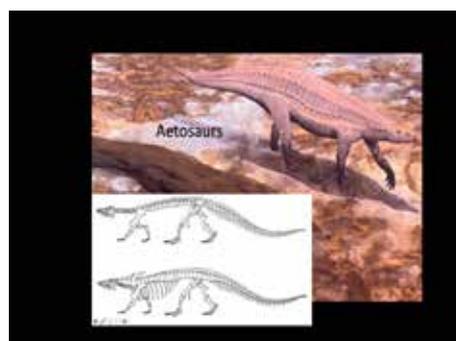
His special enthusiasm was also especially evident in describing excavations, for which he "moved away from



Pangaea super-continent



Crocodilian



Aetosaur, Virginia



Gigantic insects

acid to alcohol" to reveal the forms of "clear, unadulterated insects," all of them in "absolutely remarkable preservation," such as cockroaches, scorpion flies, crane flies and "the first blood-sucking insect known from the Triassic" dating back 24 mya.

He showed giant waterbugs and spiders with relatives still to be seen today. A "personal favourite" insect was a thysanopteran (thrips), which he joked were "the bane of many gardeners today because they eat rose buds and fruit blossom."

We saw in the Madygen formation of Kyrgyzstan some magnificent, gigantic insects and a couple of weird tetrapods whose characteristics continued to baffle research.

We were next taken to Pangæa's western Tethyan coastline, Monte San Giorgio in the Swiss Alps, a UNESCO world heritage sites because of its abundance in incredible preservation of various fishes and a variety of aquatic tetrapods, of which nothosaurs and pachypleurosaurs - "mini Loch Ness monsters" - were particularly abundant.

Then we learnt much more about *Tanystropheus*, the Triassic "drain-cleaner" of the lecture's title, so-called because of its exceptionally long neck and tail, which had been the subject of some incredible "fantasy reconstructions."

In his bid to "reunite Pangæa," he established that the same sort of animal "drain cleaner" found in Monte San Giorgio, Switzerland, had also lived in Guizhou province of Southern China.

And he then unveiled an "even longer reaching drain cleaner," *Dinocephalosaurus*, an remarkable aquatic animal with no less than 33 neck vertebræ, about 5.5 metres long. Another extraordinary aquatic beast found in southern China, was *Ætopodentatus*, with its hammerhead snout, and needle-shaped, closely-packed teeth which he and his team decided it most likely nibbled algæ on rocks, sucked in the suspension and then filtered the mix.

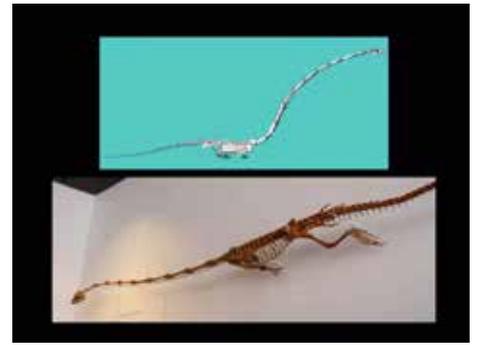
Turtles existed too, some with, and some without carapaces. In addition to the Heath Robinson contraptions of the Triassic, it is also clear that there lived alongside them the most basal forms of modern animal groups.

There were still many questions to be resolved. How much difference lay between the western and eastern parts of Pangæa in their animal life. Had the hammerhead of southern China also swum in Monte San Giorgio in the Alps for instance?

There is still so much more to learn and understand about this remarkable time in Earth's history.

"What is clear is that the Triassic is a mixture of the ancient and modern, where peculiar groups with no descendants existed alongside a whole array of vertebrates and invertebrates which are still very much with us today."

What had caused some species to become extinct, and some to make it through? Evidence pointed to major catastrophic events at both the beginning and the end of the three Triassic eras.



Tanystropheus drainpipe cleaner



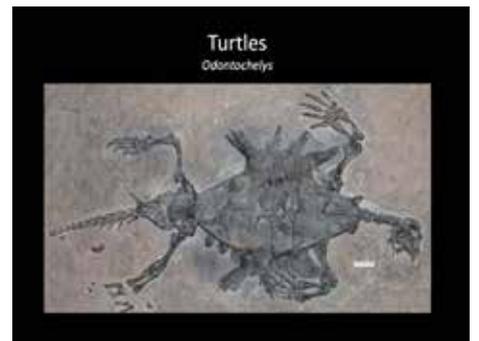
Another drainpipe cleaner.



Ætopodentatus



Ætopodentatus



One of the turtles

Triassic Talk was “a great event”

by Angus Miller, Edinburgh Geological Society and Bob Davidson, Chairman, The Friends of Hugh Miller

Nick Fraser's "Whirlwind Triassic Tour" via the Zoom platform drew an attendance of 115 people on 25th September. This was probably more than we could have expected for a physical event in normal times, and it all seemed to go very smoothly.

From Edinburgh Geological Society's perspective it was a great success, and it was good to do such a successful event in partnership with The Friends of Hugh Miller. This was also a very significant anchor event for the Scottish Geology Festival, which despite all the uncertainty has launched with a bang and an amazingly diverse programme.

The lecture was a very fitting launch to the 'new normal' - the first EGS lecture to be broadcast on the internet, and recorded for members to enjoy in the future. So it is the first entry in our YouTube channel and we will include a link to the recording from our website <https://www.edinburghgeolsoc.org/lectures/>.

Friends members can also catch up on the recording direct from YouTube - <https://youtu.be/R8WF2nLcMhA> (Nigel Trewin Memorial Lecture 2020 - Nick Fraser), and we would strongly recommend anyone else who missed it, to catch up with it there.

Bob Davidson adds: "I thanked Nick for the fascinating talk, EGS for hosting the event, and especially Angus Miller for his organizational efforts. I summed up the FoHM mission and referred to Nigel's role as inaugural chair. I then encouraged new members to visit the website to join up, with a final thank you.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Margie's thanks

26 September 2020

Hi Martin

I just want to thank you for your part in the planning and organising of the Nigel Trewin Memorial Lecture yesterday evening. Also thanks for promoting the event in your wonderful *Hugh News* magazines. I found the article on the research into Hugh Miller as a stonemason of particular interest in this last issue.

I thought the whole Zoom event went really well - thank goodness for technology in these strange times. I could have listened to Nick all evening and was fascinated by the fossils of those weird and wonderful animals of the Triassic. He is an inspiring lecturer and a charming man. I remember his many visits to see Nigel here, particularly when the cancer was in a more advanced stage.

Thank you again on behalf of all the Trewins

Margie, Shari (in New York State) and Phil

Nigel's impact on a student

Dear Margie, Shari, and Phil,

Many thanks for your kind words about Nick's lecture last night. It's great that we are able to have an event such as this to remember Nigel by and I'm encouraged to see that it attracts so many people. In the current conditions I think we all need the occasional stimulating and uplifting experience of hearing some first class fascinating work from experts such as Nick and, last year, Dianne Edwards. Co-hosting the lecture with the Friends of Hugh Miller also brings great pleasure to us.

The first time I met Nigel was as a student at one of the Palaeontological Association annual meeting dinners. I ended up sitting opposite him and remember him cracking jokes and generally being very approachable. As a student that made an impact on me - academics can seem intimidating as a student. I therefore feel lucky and privileged many years later to have been able to correspond with him regarding opening up further access to one of the Caithness quarries. Though I never worked with him directly or published with him, his work and the few interactions I did have with him have inspired me.

I'm so glad that you were all able to make it to the meeting last night and hope you are able to do so in future years.

All the best,

Dr Tom Challands

Researcher in Evolution of early vertebrate sensory systems, University of Edinburgh School of Geosciences.

ELIZA'S PATH PROJECT

SOME WAY STILL TO GO

By the Editor

We are poised ready for The Friends to give the green light for this long cherished scheme, the ornamental railing leading up to the ancient St Regulus burial ground on the outskirts of Cromarty - but we are still short of the necessary funds.

We have named the path up to the graveyard for Eliza, Hugh and Lydia Miller's first-born child who died in infancy, because of its special meaning for that family and their descendants; it is also the burial place for generations of Cromarty ancestors.

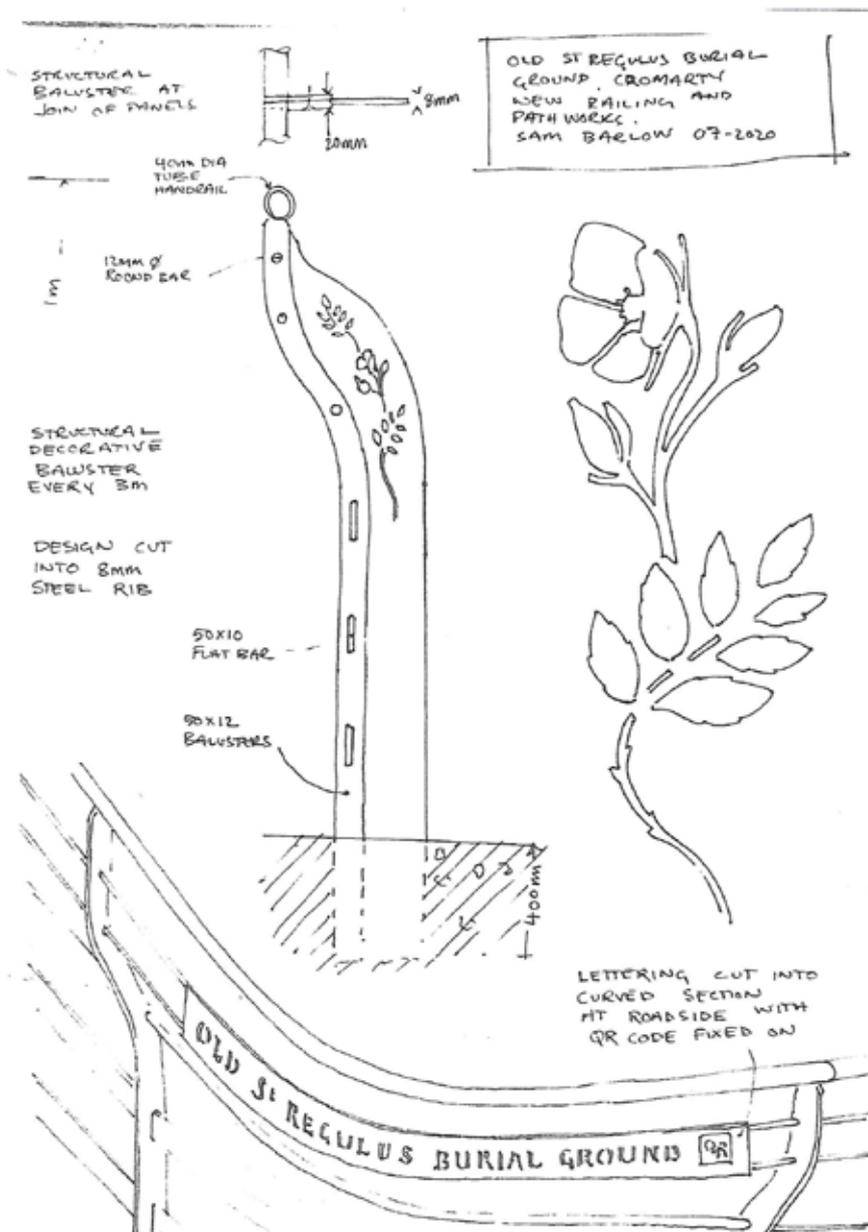
On the this page, you can see the sketch plan for the steel handrail, featuring decorative balusters every three metres. The motif is the wild, dog rose, chosen by the designer for its prevalence in Cromarty and in Highland folklore in general. A favourite flower of Robbie Burns, it is symbolic of purity, love and marriage.

The sketch is the work of the chosen contractor, Sam Barlow of Mooreworks, Lairg, whose blacksmithing designs you can admire on the Mooreworks website. His tender envisages a curved rail at the base, then rising straight up to the top of the slope, a length in all of some 16 metres. A hard-packed durable ground surface would be laid to just under half way up. The railing's curved base will incorporate a sign naming the burial ground, and a QR Code, from which visitors will be able to access a website about the place.

The budget for the project is £16,000, including both railing and groundworks. The total raised so far is £11,500, of which we have just received a magnificent £500 from an anonymous donor who read about

the shortage in the Secretary's Report to the Special General Meeting held on 10th October. This is obviously not a good time to be trying to raise money for any project, given how stretched many households have been rendered by the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic, **but we are here renewing our appeal for further contributions to help us reach the desired target.** The hope is that we can start work in the Spring of 2021, perhaps at about the same time as the Hugh Miller Museum and Birthplace Cottage reopens, with the ambition of completion by the summer peak season.

There can be few spots, even in historic Cromarty, more steeped in its tales, so many Miller takes up an entire chapter (XIV) of Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland to relate them, and the "grotesque" style of the sculptures on the tombstones. Here half buried in the ruins of the old chapel, lies the tomb vault of



(continued on p10)

Clan Urquhart, of not only little Eliza Miller, but Hugh's buccaneering great grand-father John Feddes, of the smuggler MacLeod, and of Sandy Wood, who booked a grave site which he thought would enable him to speak to God first about a boundary dispute with his neighbour.

There are three ways through which you can donate:

1. Use your PayPal account, if you have one, to make a donation to The Friends of Hugh Miller.
2. Make a BACS credit transfer to The Friends of Hugh Miller account:
Royal Bank of Scotland, Sort Code 83-23-10, Account No 10285618
3. Send a cheque to:
Martin Gostwick, Secretary
The Friends of Hugh Miller, Russell House, 55 Shore Street, Cromarty IV11 8XL.



*Top left:
Eliza's path from above*

*Top right:
Eliza's path entrance*

*Bottom left:
Urquhart memorial*

*Bottom right:
Eliza's grave*

"DEGRADED RACES, HOPELESSLY LOST"

We here examine Hugh Miller's views on race, presenting us with difficult truths about the man we admire

By Martin Gostwick

It is a matter of acute disappointment, anguish even, to learn that Hugh Miller, hitherto held in the highest esteem among The Friends, possessed a grievous fault so widespread in his time - racial prejudice.

This facet of his character has long been overlooked, since it did not appear in the vast majority of his work. It has only very recently been brought to our attention by Cromarty-based historian Dr David Alston. Friends supporter Dr Elsa Panciroli suggested looking for background on Miller in the context of the Black Lives Matter campaign. Fellow member Janie Verburg contacted David, who was able to provide this context, as part of his continuing researches into Scottish involvement with slavery.

Thanks largely to him, we have now learned of two very upsetting examples of Miller's views. In the first, Miller came out on the wrong side of a debate in the Free Church of Scotland about accepting cash from slave-holders' churches in the American Deep South. Then, in a public lecture, late in life, he delivered a passage in which he insulted indigenous peoples round the globe.

I had previously been aware of only one misguided comment in an autobiographical memoir of 1829, in which Hugh described a mixed race ("mulatto") boy from the West Indies as having a "wild, savage disposition which I believe is natural to most of his countryfolks." This boy drew a knife upon him, whereupon Hugh Miller drew his and stabbed the lad in the thigh.

This memoir was never published in Hugh's lifetime, in fact not until 1995 ⁽¹⁾. In his official autobiography of 1854 ⁽²⁾ the incident is mentioned but without the prejudicial comment. In the absence of any other obvious evidence, it was therefore possible to deem this comment as a passing remark using language common to the period. Miller admits more than once that his own conduct at this stage in his life was something he wasn't proud of.

In the last decade research into Scotland's links to slavery has exposed many ignominious aspects hitherto buried in a convenient forgetfulness of the past. One story resurfaced in the public mind only very recently in an exhibition by the National Library of Scotland in 2018/19. This was the tour of Scotland in 1846 of the great black American abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The then newly-formed Free Church of Scotland refused to return donations given by slave-holders in the Presbyterian churches of the American Deep South. Douglass led a nationwide campaign calling upon the Free Church to 'Send Back the Money'

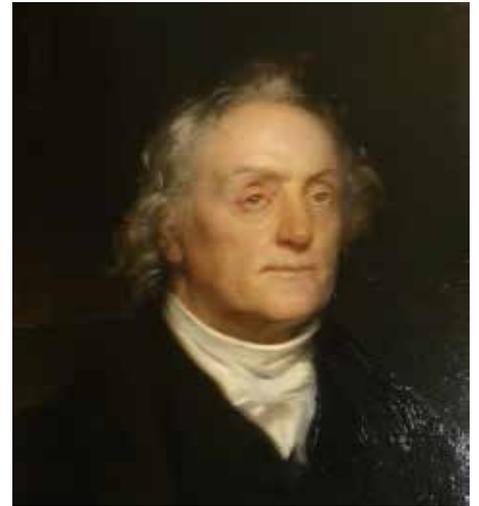
Unfortunately, Hugh Miller as Editor of *The Witness* newspaper, strongly supported the Free Church leaders in their obdurate refusal to do so. His editorials have resurfaced from the depths of *The Witness* files for 1846, which you need a microscope to read. Their existence re-emerged in a new book by Glasgow-based scholar, Alasdair Pettinger ⁽³⁾ and in a blog by an American researcher, Rob Leverett of July 2019 ⁽⁴⁾. Rev Thomas Chalmers, the Free Church leader, was in many ways a most admirable figure, a champion of the urban poor, a philosopher, mathematician, and the most celebrated preacher in the land in an age when many clergy spoke to mass gatherings. He was also *The Witness* editor Hugh Miller's mentor, personal friend, and key supporter.

It should be stated here that Chalmers had earlier expressed his abhorrence of slavery, and Miller too denounced it as "the great evil." But when it came to the Disruption (the split from the Established Church of Scotland), and the Free Church's formation in May 1843, Chalmers and his partners in the leadership faced a desperate need for funds. Hundreds of ministers had lost their churches, their homes and their livelihoods. They needed stipends, and funds to build new churches, schools and manses.

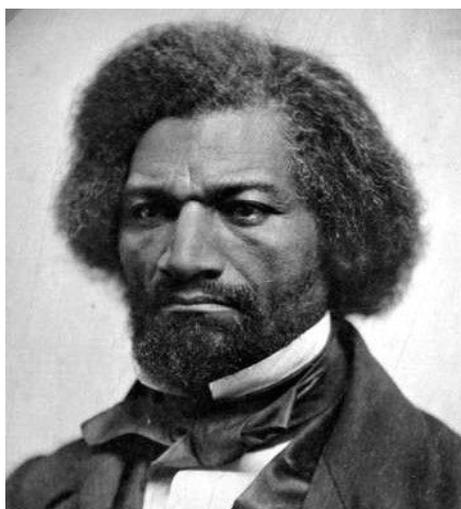
In 1844, Chalmers dispatched five delegates to the United States to seek backing from Presbyterian ministries over there. Monies soon arrived, mostly from New York; accounts vary as to how much, but possibly around three to four hundred thousand pounds in today's money. Some of the cash had also been donated by Southern slaveholders' churches, which caused an immediate public outcry.

Britain's merchants had ceased trading in slaves decades before, and ownership had been abolished by Act of Parliament in 1833. However, the former British slave-owners and plantation shareholders were being paid millions in compensation by the Government, while the slaves themselves received nothing, an incredible injustice whose extent has also only recently been uncovered.

Readers interested in the legacy of these payments can learn more from research by the University College London at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>. David Alston has recently given talks on slavery connections, and associated compensa-



Thomas Chalmers



Frederick Douglass

his own efforts acquired considerable erudition. He was powerfully built, with a voice to match, making him a moving, passionate orator.

Songs were composed around his mass meetings all over Scotland, and cartoons published mocking Chalmers ("Tammy") for his perceived hypocrisy. Earlier, in Ireland, Douglass had declared: "In America, Bibles and slaveholders go hand in hand. The Church and the slave prison stand together, and while you hear the chanting of psalms in one, you hear the clanking of chains in the other; the man who wields the cowhide during the week, fills the pulpit on Sunday."

To give just one further example of his stirring eloquence, Douglass described the slave-holder as "a man-stealing, cradle-robbing, woman-whipping monster." He brought manacles with him, and even invited one audience to imagine a slave collar round the necks of Chalmers' own daughters.

Hugh Miller in a stream of articles in 1846 did his best to counter the Send Back the Money campaign. He pointed out that other churches had sent money, asserted that attempts were being made to impose "impossible standards of moral purity," and deplored the personal attacks on the Free Church leaders. Other voices argued that it was justified because slavery was legal in the US at the time. Slavery's defenders in the Deep South even used Chalmers' and Miller's views to justify its continuation.

Miller wrote that the attacks on Chalmers and his allies sought to "damage and destroy the influence of the most venerable of living Scotchmen." "The lowest buffoonery, the most ribald jests, the most impudent perversions of language, the vilest innuendoes and insinuations were being pressed into service." The reverends were being held up as more contemptible than the slave-holder himself, and, he claimed, these "ultra abolitionists" were actually responsible for "postponing indefinitely the day when his (the slave's) fetters shall be loosed."

In one editorial, Miller also taunted two Quaker women who joined Douglass in his campaign. The three activists were caught trying to carve 'Send Back the Money' into the hillside below Arthur's Seat. Douglass, by the editor's account, was forced to apologise to a magistrate (bailie) for breaking the law. The editorial also mocked the ambition of women's rights advocates, inviting readers to imagine "armed regiments of equalized women charging in petticoat breeches some male anti-equal-right enemy..." and "squadrons of female dragoons emancipated from matrimonial thrall and the side-saddle, trampling all horrid into dust, broken cohorts of imperative husbands and despotic lovers."

Chalmers, and his principal allies, Reverends Robert Candlish and William Cunningham, succeeded at the Free Church General Assembly in May 1846 in negating all calls upon them to review their position, and that more or less put an end to debate within the Free Church. Douglass left Scotland a few weeks later, and the controversy died down.

The sudden death on 31st May, 1847, of Thomas Chalmers probably played a part in defusing the whole row. He is buried in the Grange Cemetery, where Miller would follow him ten years later.

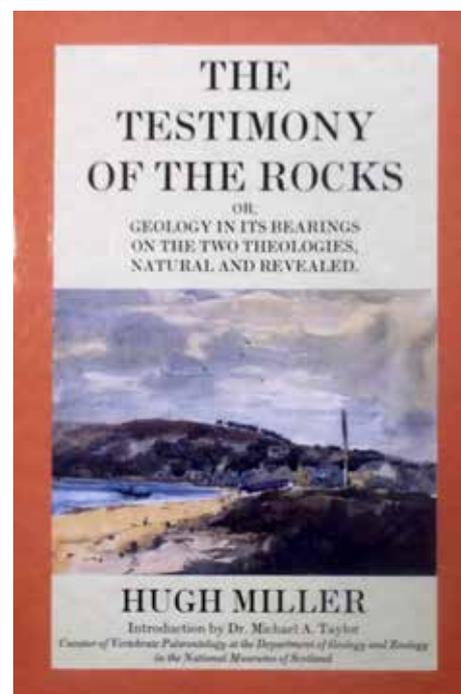
tion, in Highland districts, including Morayshire, Inverness, Easter Ross, the Black Isle and around Miller's Cromarty itself.

It creates a bleak contrast to envisage campaigners for freedom raising their voices across the land, while the former slave-owners all over Britain sat quietly getting even richer.

Chalmers in a *Witness* article reaffirmed his stand against slavery, but sought to draw a distinction between "the character of the system, and the characters of persons implicit in that system." He maintained slave-holding was not inherently sinful. "Oh, the artful dodger!" exclaimed Frederick Douglass in reply. How could slavery be a "heinous sin," but the slave-owner could somehow be a good Christian?

Douglass had arrived from Ireland for his tour of Scotland in January 1846,⁽⁵⁾ and immediately the whole controversy came to the boil, as anti-slavery leagues, emancipation societies, and congregations (including some in the Free Church) all rose to add their voices to the campaign to send the money back.

Douglass himself had made a fraught escape from slavery in 1838, having personally suffered extreme cruelty. He had a commanding presence, and had by



The donations were never returned. Douglass must have known it was a very big ask to expect the church to give the money straight back. He has been criticised for the intensity of his sometimes personal invective. However, he made the cause of enslaved people in America the Scottish people's own, albeit briefly. He seemingly bore no ill-will against Miller for his hostile editorials; he later praised him as "a grand example of devotion to learning." He lived to see President Abraham Lincoln issue the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and give the keynote speech at the unveiling of the Emancipation Memorial in Washington in 1876.

ETHNIC ABUSE

Finally, we come to the worst example of Miller's views, the public lecture in which he racially abused indigenous peoples on every continent. It seems to have been given to the Edinburgh Philosophical Institute in 1855, the year before he died.

It is Lecture VI ⁽⁶⁾, one of 12 incorporated in his final book, *Testimony of the Rocks*, completed just before his death and published posthumously. Its heavyweight title is *Geology in its Bearings on the Two Theologies (Part II)*, and the fact that theology forms its philosophical basis is the very reason why I had never read it (as beyond my comprehension), until David Alston's information required me to do so.

Miller scholar, Dr Mike Taylor, in an introduction to a facsimile edition published around the 2002 Bicentenary (6) says Miller could be described as "the last of the scriptural geologists for mixing science and religion."

As in just about all his geological writing, Miller here brings us his customary magnificent eloquence, describing the ingenious, exceptional "contrivances" of each organism in turn, supported by his own glowing illustrations.

He marvels over the strength and lightness of the ammonite, the armour and defensive coil of the trilobite, the wrinkled scales and solid plates of his Devonian fishes, and each are compared, often favourably, to some later human designs.

All these wonders of nature are cited in praise of a Divine Creator, and he finds a "certain identity of mind" between this "Creator-worker" and man, whom he made in his image and as "the deputed lord of creation," ruled over all the animals around him.

He then turns to discourse on the world's races. He maintains that "all the old seats of civilisation are spread out around the Caucasus region." In this centre were to be found people "fundamentally typical of the highest races of the globe." The Caucasian features and figure, he maintained, were "developed to a remarkable degree among the old Greeks," and were still evident in the various peoples of Europe, who he claims to be the "type of Adamic man." "The Redeemer (God the son), the second Adam, like the first, exemplified... the perfect type of Caucasian man."

Then he embarks upon the offensive assertion of all the other races' supposed inferiority: "Let me next remark, that the further we remove from the original (Caucasian), (Adamic) centre of the race, the more degraded and sunk do we find the several varieties of humanity."

He notes that "in the backwoods of America, in southern Africa, in Australia, and in the Polynesian Islands, the old Adamic type has been asserting its superiority, and annihilating before it the degraded races."

He proceeds to denigrate the physical appearance, and alleged backwardness respectively of Laplanders, Kamchatkans, aboriginal African tribes, Mongolians, aboriginal Australians, aboriginal (First Nation) Americans, Caribbean peoples and Fuegians, among others.

These peoples, in Miller's view, were "palpably *not* what the Creator originally made." Degraded man "has been made what he is by man himself," says Miller, meaning apparently that the degradation is their own doing.

He allows that the Irish peasants have been downtrodden as a result of the British Ulster Plantation of 1611, and the Gælic Highlanders were ruined by their landlords outrageous abuses, but the rest of his list are not seen as victims of oppressors' greed, but of their own imagined indolence, or lack of ability.

Let us translate the actions of the "old Adamic type" whom Miller refers to. He is talking about European empire-builders and colonisers, destroying the lives of indigenous peoples by seizing their lands through force of arms, wholesale plunder, and the infliction of starvation and disease.

It is best not to repeat Miller's insults. Every one of them is a repellent, defamatory stereotype. Anyone interested can read them online, where *Testimony* is offered as a free e-book in a digital reprint. Lecture VI appears, ps 219-266. Miller was not alone among naturalists in this imperial presumption, which was prevalent well into the 20th Century. He may well have derived his impressions of Fuegians, for example, from Darwin's account in *The Voyage of the Beagle* which he reviewed in his paper, *The Witness*. The great Sir Charles Lyell, wrote home about "happy slaves" as a guest of plantation owners in the American Deep South. John Muir, a great admirer of Miller's, wanted the aboriginal American peoples removed from his pristine wildernesses (their land) in the American West.

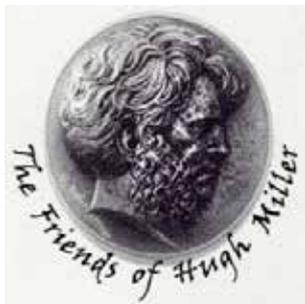
The idea that the origin (or Biblical Eden) of humankind lay in Europe, which was perceived as inherently noble, was widespread until the 20th Century. The discovery of Neanderthals in France, and later Piltdown man in England, seemed to support it. These were heralded as the earliest humans for many years. However, Piltdown man proved to be a hoax, and Neanderthals were later understood to be one of our many human relatives. The notion of European

human origins was based on Victorian racism, not scientific evidence. Darwin was among the first to suggest our origins lay in Africa, a theory now widely accepted based on the overwhelming fossil evidence.

Sad and painful as it is to do so, it is the duty of The Friends of Hugh Miller to highlight and acknowledge the history of our namesake. While his record as a genius of science, and one of Scotland's greatest writers, still stands, we must all learn the truth about some of his beliefs.

Footnote: The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) marked Black History Month in October by announcing 'Facing Our Past', a year-long project to be led by historian Jennifer Melville which will explore the role of the slave trade in the histories of Scotland and some of its properties. Ms Melville has also made a YouTube video Addressing the Legacy of Slavery and Empire in the NTS. We will be sending her a copy of this article for information.

1. *Hugh Miller's Memoir*. Ed M Shortland, Edinburgh University Press, 1995
2. *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, Hugh Miller, B&W Publishing, Edinburgh 1994
3. *Frederick Douglass and Scotland, 1846*, Alasdair Pettinger, Edinburgh University Press, 2019
4. historywithleverett.blogspot.com/2019/07/frederick-douglass-thomas-chalmers-and.html
5. *'I Was Transformed': Frederick Douglass an American slave in Victorian Britain*, Laurence Fenton, Amberley Publishing 2018
6. *The Testimony of the Rocks*, Hugh Miller, facsimile edition, St Matthew Publishing Ltd, Cambridge, 2001



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