

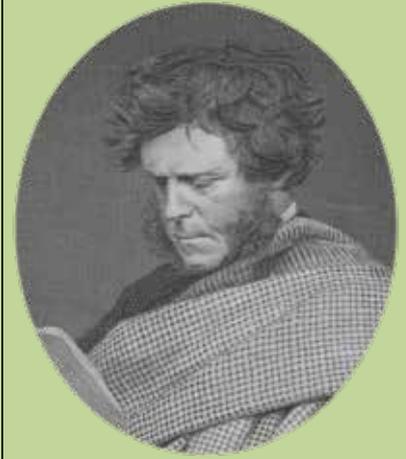
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# Hugh's News

Newsletter of  
The Friends of Hugh Miller



## “MY PLACE IS ON THE LAND”

by Martin Gostwick

“My place is on the land.” This declaration formed the final line of Thomas Halliday’s elegiac story, winning the first prize in prose in this year’s second Hugh Miller Writing Competition.

Thomas Halliday was speaking not only for himself, but for our remote ancestor, *Casineria*, the first amphibian who made it on to dry land 300-plus million years ago, and for all of us, the billions walking this earth today.

It encapsulated in a single sentence the belonging we all feel towards the land, and occupied perfectly what competition organiser Lara Reid aptly called “that fluid space between the arts and sciences” once gloriously occupied by Mr Miller.

This was only one of the events of a weekend in our capital city in which one superlative happening followed another. Who could imagine that an AGM, generally considered the most routine, if not downright dull of meetings, could have yielded such remarkable progress.

Credit for much of the success belonged to the venue, the Scottish Poetry Library, the most welcoming, friendly and culturally enriching space in a close just off the Royal Mile.

The annual meeting proved how right the decision was to move ourselves to the capital city to hold it, attracting, for instance, no less than five living descendants, and many members living in Scotland’s Central Belt, and points further south.

It relaunched The Friends with new ambitious targets for more public meetings promoting Scottish literature and the earth sciences. It approved revamping our Constitution’s management structure with the creation of three new office-bearing posts.



Top: Competition prize-winners eagerly await their chance to perform. Among them, in the foreground are Ross Barnett and his family, and behind them, Gillian Staunton and Alex Woodcock.

Above: Thomas Halliday receives his first prize (prose) from Lara Reid at the Hugh Miller Writing Competition II awards ceremony.

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It saw, together with the writing awards ceremony, readings aloud from Hugh's masterpiece, *The Old Red Sandstone*, and the announcement of a new edition's publication within the next year.

The partnership bloomed between competition holders, the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, and The Friends, and many new supporters, and confirmed that the second competition is to be followed by a third, and a Miller "Legacy booklet" is to be produced, mainly comprising winning entries and backed by some leading authors.

All the winners in competition number two fully delivered on its promise to showcase some of the best new writing in Scotland.

Our walking tour on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> June was also outstanding in delivering both enjoyment and enlightenment about Hugh Miller and his family's life in the capital, with some palæontological marvels thrown in.

You will find full reports in words and pictures on all these breakthrough facets of the most memorable weekend on the following pages.



Top: Four direct descendants in one room at the same time - a cause for celebration in itself!

Left to right: Anna Gordon, StephanieKulesza, Hugh Miller Clarke and Sue Busby.

Above: Frieda Gostwick, who, as Birthplace Cottage manager, started it all by securing Miller House as a museum, and Jim Mackintosh, poet prize-winner in 2017

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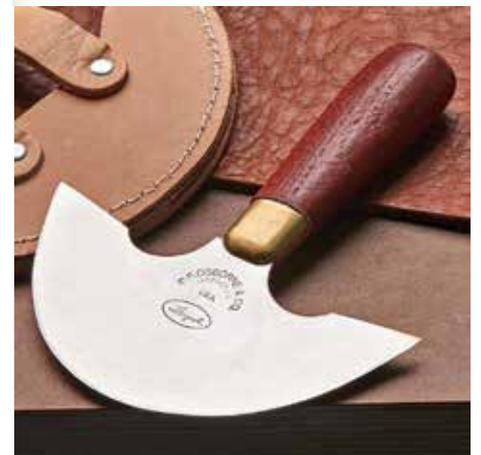
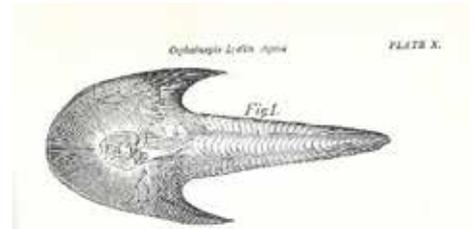
## AN OPENING TO REMEMBER

OUR 12<sup>th</sup> AGM started with Chairman Bob Davidson dedicating the meeting to the memory of the late Professor Nigel Trewin, who died last October.

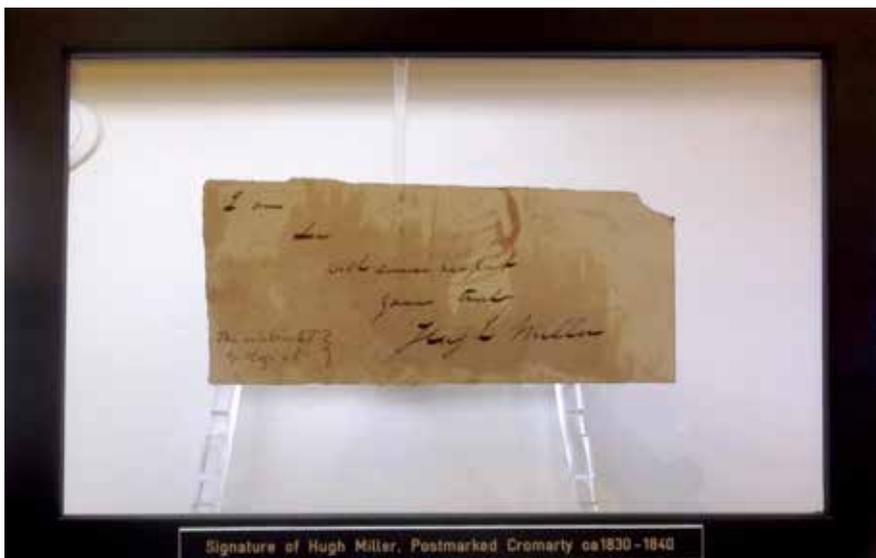
As readers know, Nigel Trewin was one of the leading palæontologists of his day, the chief author of the Scottish Fossil Code, and several popular books on geology. He was the founder of a group called the "Fossil Fish Filleters." He was also the founding chairman of The Friends. Bob welcomed his widow Margie Trewin to the meeting as a guest of honour.

In his opening address, he outlined the various measures being retaken to relaunch The Friends, and then took to a reading of Miller himself from *The Old Red Sandstone*, in which Hugh compares the shape of the headshield of an early Devonian fish, *Cephalaspis*, to a half-moon, or crescent-shaped, saddle cutter. Bob then held up one such tool to the audience, dramatically reinforcing the accuracy of Miller's description. He gave a second example of his rare descriptive abilities applied to fossils.

During the coffee break, Bob showed a rare artifact gifted to him by Prof. Trewin, Hugh Miller's signature to a letter, which was shown alongside some of the fossils in our new collection, taken down especially for this meeting by our new events organiser, Gavin Berkenheger.



Above: *Cephalaspis*, plate from *The Old Red Sandstone*, and saddler's cutter.



Above: Margie Trewin (left) meets our events organiser Gavin Berkenheger, and Jim Spencer.

Left: Hugh's signature on a letter

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## MAJOR NEW PUBLICATIONS ANNOUNCED

A long lost Memoir of Miller had to be one of the most significant discoveries in many a year, and it was not surprising that it should have been made by that indefatigable researcher Dr Mike Taylor.

The discovery was the long lost second half of Harriet Ross Taylor's Recollections of Hugh Miller, which Mike unearthed in a long since extinct publication, *The British Weekly (Scotch Edition)*, dated October 1900.

Harriet, you will remember, had been a pupil of Hugh's wife Lydia during their stay in Miller House. She was the daughter of banker Robert Ross, who gave Miller an accountant's job. The first half of her recollections are contained in Elizabeth Sutherland's biography of Lydia, and can be read in the Parlour of Miller House. The text was taken from a typescript which broke off inexplicably after Lydia has warned Hugh that his serious headaches could lead to brain damage.

The second half in the *British Weekly* Journal is an intimate description of life with the Miller family in 5 Sylvan Place, Edinburgh, and of subsequent meetings with him on his visits to Cromarty, the latter overlaid with melancholy concerning his declining health.

Dr Taylor has pursued a colossal amount of research in between doing the herculean job of editing, with colleague Professor Ralph O'Connor, a new edition of *The Old Red Sandstone*. Among his other finds is an early memoir by Miller's son, Hugh Jnr the geologist. *Hugh's News* hopes to publish extracts from both these memoirs in due course.

He also brought out a magnum opus of a volume entitled *Geological Curator*, exploring the history of the Miller fossil collections and manuscripts, the calotype portraits by Hill and Adamson, the building of the Cromarty monument in 1859, and the development of the tourist industry round the Birthplace Cottage. Copies of this volume are available to order from the Secretary, for £8.00 (plus £3.50p & p).

The Friends have also purchased 50 paperback copies of the autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, for sale online at £6.00, plus £3.50 p & p).

The Secretary's written annual report was approved, which referred principally to the success of our conference, *The Old Red: Hugh Miller's Geological Legacy*, in September 2017, the acquisition of our fossil collection, and our exhibition at the Inverness Science Festival in May.

The Financial Statement, showing a balance at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 of £6,352.65, was endorsed, and its use for promoting and paying for more events was agreed, to be run on similar lines to the geology conference.

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# MANAGEMENT REVAMPS FOR EXPANDED AIMS

A reorganising of our management committee and its work, with the creation of new office-bearer posts has been agreed, and Article Five (5) of our constitution amended accordingly.

Chairman Bob Davidson, Secretary Martin Gostwick, and Treasurer Sue Rider Busby were re-elected, while nominated and elected to their posts for the first time were Gavin Berkenheger as Events Organiser, and John Armstrong as Membership Secretary.

Gavin Berkenheger has already proved his worth in the Events role, organising the very successful Friends exhibition at the Inverness Science Festival in May, and has ambitions to take us, with our new collection of fossils, on the road at every opportunity that arises.

John Armstrong, a programmer and systems analyst, and Friends member since 2013, joins the committee for the first time, taking its numbers back up to eight. John, in addition to his expertise at "number-crunching," brings great enthusiasm as a geologist, being one of the "fossil fish filleters" group founded by the late Nigel Trewin and Bob Davidson.

Martin Gostwick has accepted the newly created position of Publications Editor, alongside his post as Secretary, on the basis of being the present Editor of *Hugh's News* and our website. Re-elected as committee members were Jim Mackintosh, Lara Reid and Lillemor Jernqvist.

Our committee structure, and the election of the committee, its office-bearers and their responsibilities, have been reworded in Article Five of the Constitution. The meeting agreed the proposals for these modifications, as set out in *Hugh's News No 35, Summer 2018*

The changes provide for the election of honorary patrons and their terms of voluntary service, the possible enlargement of the committee beyond eight members, the creation of new office-bearers' posts covering events, membership and publications.

The whole committee requires to be open to re-election or replacement annually, and the office-bearers are expected to submit reports to each AGM. The Friends will endeavour to hold public meetings to promote the legacy as opportunities present, replacing the old commitment to a single annual meeting.

In attendance: Janie Verburg; John Armstrong; Susie Gemmill; Margie Trewin; Jim Spencer; Anna Gordon; Vivien Bremner; Marek Kulesza; Sue Busby; Katy Robinson (NTS guest); Alix Powers-Jones (guest); Gordon Lang; Frieda Gostwick; Martin Gostwick; Bob Davidson; Elsa Panciroli; Lara Reid; Hugh Clarke; Sidney Johnstone; Jim Mackintosh.

Apologies for absence: Dr Mike Taylor; Henry McKenzie Johnston; Lillemor Jernqvist, Derek Lancaster-Gaye; Andrew Ross

*New posts created were those of Membership Secretary (John Armstrong, top) and Events Organiser (Gavin Berkenheger, middle).*

*Susie Gemmill (bottom) is happy to be back at a Friends meeting.*



# MUSEUM ACQUIRES TWO ORIGINAL MILLER MSSs



Undoubtedly one of the most exciting developments at the Museum this year has been the prospective acquisition for the National Trust for Scotland's property of two "conversational" letters written by Hugh himself in July 1842.

Most of the Miller papers have long been held on deposit for the Trust in the National Library of Scotland. Donations of original manuscripts to the Museum are rare, and therefore highly valued.

So Museum manager Dr Alix Powers-Jones drew expressions of strong appreciation when she announced the gift from Mr Andrew Munro of the letters which she said he believed belonged to his father.

The letters were written early in Miller's career as Editor of *The Witness*, in some ways his hardest years in the job leading up to The Disruption of 1843. Hugh sent one from Cromarty to a Miss Sutherland in Inverness touching on her invitation to a dinner party. The second was sent on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1842 regarding various travelling arrangements. It is hoped the full texts will become available for visitors to the Museum - and to our readers - in due course.

Dr Powers-Jones also announced that the Museum has been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund-supported apprenticeship on a 12-month bursary worth £15,000, which will enable the training of the successful applicant on all aspects of museum management. She indicated that she will additionally be able to take on two internships in the coming season.

The Museum had taken part in the Trust's "Reveal" programme, to complete and digitise the archives of all its possessions. It had been "ticking over" in visitor numbers, with just under 4,000 in season 2017.

The Trust has appointed Dr Powers-Jones to manage, in her addition to her duties at the Museum, the building which for many years served as its regional offices - Abertarff House, Church Street, Inverness, and is now to operate as a visitor centre.



Top: Alix brings great news to our AGM  
Above: Abertarff House, to be an NTS visitor centre

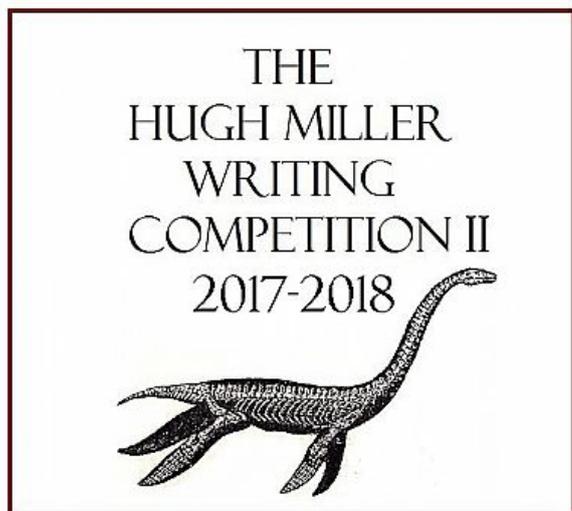
She said it was the oldest secular building in Inverness, dating back to 1593, and the ground floor would be open to the public free of charge three days a week, for three hours a day, during July, August and September. It will provide information on all the Trust properties in Highland region - our own Museum, plus Brodie Castle, Inverewe Garden, Culloden Battlefield, the Glenfinnan Monument, and Corrieshalloch Gorge. She said the centre's success would depend largely on volunteers doing the staffing, and if any Friends' members would like to offer their services, please contact Dr Powers-Jones at the Museum (01381 600245).

Right: Our chairman Bob Davidson, with guest Katy Robinson from NTS, and palaeontologist Elsa Panciroli.

She said it was the oldest secular building in Inverness, dating back to 1593, and the ground floor would be open to the public free of charge three days a week, for three



# CREATING OUR OWN CABINET OF CURIOSITIES



by Lara Reid

*Organiser of the Hugh Miller Writing Competition II*

A MOMENT everybody involved had been waiting for over many months had finally arrived, and as it turned out, it more than fulfilled expectations.

There was heady delight, exhilaration and even some tears as a packed audience at the 2017/18 competition prize-winning ceremony in the Scottish Poetry Library on June 16th as the six winners at last had the platform to recite their pieces and receive their awards.

All six attended, some travelling a considerable distance, and the audience on the library's mezzanine floor was packed out to hear the rich, diverse and inspiring prose and poetry

entries that mirror the very landscape from which they stem.

The privilege of reading their work and choosing the six winners as the best of 44 entries had previously of course been the job of the five judges, geologist Simon Cuthbert, palaeontologist and writer Elsa Panciroli, naturalist Kenny Taylor, and the 2015/16 first prize prose winner, Janie Verburg, plus myself in the chair.

I must thank them, and must also thank Hugh Miller himself of course.

Miller's writing occupies that beautiful, fluid space between arts and sciences that I am delighted to find flourishing in today's world. Miller had a way with words. A way of pulling apart preconceptions about old rocks and broken fossils and remaking them anew. Indeed, he literally spent hours recreating his beloved fossil fish, scale-by-scale, bone-by-bone, and described what he saw with care, precision and elegance. He was quite determined to use language that everyone would recognise, that the working folk of his time could relate to:

*"a fish [caught] almost in the act of wishing itself into a bird. There are wings which want only feathers, a body which seems to have been well adapted for passing through the air as the water, and a tail by which to steer."*

Periodically, throughout his book *The Old Red Sandstone*, his delightful and dense description of fossils held within that very rock type, Miller lays out his fossil specimens in front of us. *"I have placed one of them before me,"* is a common refrain, followed immediately by *"Imagine..."* He asks that we visualise fish-scales as roof tiles, bone structures as vaulted cathedral struts, teeth bent like the beaks of hawks. You can see why Miller is such a rich source of geo-inspiration!

We follow his puzzlement, work through problems, fit his and our knowledge together like a jigsaw. Because we work alongside him in his 'lab', we as his readers are his equal. He doesn't talk down to us; rather he actively encourages learning and his own thirst for knowledge becomes infectious.

Of writing *Old Red Sandstone*, Miller said:

*"Should my facts regarding [these fossils] – facts constituting the slow gatherings of years – serve as stepping-stones laid across, until such time as geologists of greater skill and more extended research shall have bridged over the cap, I shall have completed half my design. Should the working man be encouraged by my modicum of success to improve his opportunities of observation, I shall have accomplished the whole of it."*

I like to think that Miller, in his quest to help all people from all walks of life understand a little of natural history and geology, would see the Hugh Miller writing competition as following very much in his own footsteps. For here we are creating our own cabinet of curiosities, a selection of poetry and prose inspired by Scotland's geoheritage, our landscapes and fossils, in the hope of reaching out and inspiring many others; particularly those who haven't much knowledge or understanding of geology or palaeontology.

I am proud of this competition, of where it has brought us and where it will take us in future. Here's to the third writing competition to be launched in 2019!

# INSIDE THE CABINET

Here we proudly introduce readers to the winning entries of

## **“Footprints in the Sand: The Hugh Miller Writing Competition II”.**

It carries the name of one of Scotland's most endearing geologists, Hugh Miller (1802-1856), and aimed to honour his legacy by inspiring new, original prose and poetry on the theme of Scotland's rich fossil heritage. The competition was organised by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, The Friends of Hugh Miller and other partners.

Copyright of the competition entries rest with the authors. Requests for reproduction can be forwarded to the author: email [competition@scottishgeodiversityforum.org](mailto:competition@scottishgeodiversityforum.org). The authors have consented to their pieces being published here. Further details of the competition, and all the winning entries, are also available at

[www.scottishgeology.com/hughmiller/](http://www.scottishgeology.com/hughmiller/)

## First prize in Prose



### **Landward**

**by Thomas Halliday**

The judges felt this beautiful, lyrical piece of prose stood out for its unusual turns of phrase and language use. The author's presence both in the landscape and within Deep Time, and indeed the choice of fossil described, made this piece unique. The folding and unfolding metaphors that bridge the piece were carefully thought-out and well-executed. The judges also applauded the accuracy of the geological knowledge here and felt that there was a strong element of Hugh Miller's own voice to be

heard. A worthy winner following Miller's legacy in geological descriptive prose.

Thomas was born in Edinburgh and brought up among the hills of Cumbria and the Black Wood of Rannoch, during which time he became very interested in the everything to do with the natural world, watching birds, mammals, and insects, and even choosing the topic of Linnean taxonomy for a primary school project. He has a Natural Sciences (Zoology) degree from Cambridge, an MSc in Palaeobiology from Bristol, and a PhD from UCL studying the diversification of mammals after the most recent mass extinction. He is now a Fellow in the School of Geography, Earth, and Environmental Sciences at the University of Birmingham and a Scientific Associate of the Natural History Museum in London.

## Prose Runner-up



### **Impressions**

**by Ross Barnett**

The judges were taken with the final paragraphs of this piece, particularly with the memories-like-fossils nod and the links between past and present that were deftly made. The idea of following an ammonite (both in object and as image) through time, from its own lifetime into the hands of a young child through to adulthood, was well-executed. The description of a childhood fossil-hunt on Raasay is one that will resonate with many, as indeed is the idea of a fossil discovery paving the way for a future related career.

Dr Ross Barnett received his doctorate from the University of Oxford, studying the genetics of extinct felid (cats!) species. Since then he has worked at universities in Edinburgh, York, Durham, and Copenhagen on similar themes. His love of the natural world and the study of extinction was encouraged early in life on family fossil hunting trips on the west coast of Scotland. Born in Inverness, he lived in Cromarty until the age of 5. He currently lives outside Durham with his wife and two daughters. He has published over 50 peer-reviewed scientific articles, book chapters, and commentaries as well as popular articles. He is currently working as a part-time lecturer in Durham as well as with the educational charity the Brilliant Club. His first book *“The Missing Lynx”* is due for publication by Bloomsbury in 2019 and will give a history of extinct species in Britain.

## First prize in Prose

# Landward

by Thomas Halliday

The sun reluctantly skents beneath the clouds to cast long afternoon shadows along the strandline at Yellowcraig. A stiletto of an east wind blows in from the Bass, scattering the sand. I turn my back to the blast, away from the dog walkers and families, and down the narrow path between the buckthorn, the bents and the strand. The basalt isle of Fidra with its lighthouse sulks in the mist as I skirt the black rocks. Over my shoulder are towering volcanic plugs and the remains of bulging underground lakes of magma, silent reminders of a turbulent geological past. Berwick Law. The Lamb. Craigleith. The Bass. They disappear as I round the corner, this next bay sheltered by a stand of pines. It is quiet save for the distant thwack of golf balls to the laughter of fieldfare, as I see the dark Forth laid out before me.

Against the yellow sands, the shales and cementstones are exposed. I crouch down to peer at the revealed rock pools. Crabs and brown shrimp flee from view, while thrawn limpets hold fast. A pebble of shale, recently detached and fractured, reveals the perfect white memory of a different shrimp, and a different coast.

Here, in this small bay, was once a freshwater lake or lagoon, some three hundred and thirty million years ago – a time best known for its intense heat and congested mires of plant matter, congealing and transforming into peat and coal. The middle of the Viséan period, during which these rocks were laid down, was one of strong, monsoon-like seasons mixed with unpredictable periods of drought. The surface of the lake rose and fell, fed by tropical rains flowing through a vast, meandering river delta from northern hills now lost to time. The volcanoes that once overtopped the Law and Bass Rock were active and explosive, hot lava steaming in the mudflats. In those days the sun climbed higher in the sky, and the sheer heat of its direct, equatorial gaze was enough to separate the surface water from the drowning cold depths that, unable to muster enough energy to break the surface, became suffocated of oxygen. But for the rumbling of the earth from the young and petulant volcanoes, and the occasional intrusion of salt water from the nearby sea, the lake was calm and still – and was teeming with shrimp.

These fossil shrimp, beautiful though they are, are not why I am here. This is something of a pilgrimage, as one might make to the grave of a distinguished ancestor, even long after all who knew them are gone. For, among the crustaceans and plants, if one is lucky enough to find them, the hills and coastlines of southern Scotland hide ancient pioneers who lived alongside these ancient lakes. The oldest – and smallest – of them, *Casineria*, lived here at Yellowcraig. The fossil itself is unassuming; ribs, feet, and vertebrae scattered like a tangle of broom, headless, tailless, and small, but with a tale to tell.

With periodic droughts, the pools dotting the river delta would, from time to time, run dry. For the amphibious four-legged beasts that populated the freshwater pools and swamps, this was a problem. In the long heat of an extended drought, and without water to lie in, the soft, wet eggs would desiccate and die. One evolutionary innovation changed all that, and allowed a single small-bodied group of organisms to escape the confines of the water. A series of almost impossibly thin membranes within the egg: the allantois across which oxygen passes, and the protective chorion and amnion, providing a private pond allowing the embryo to grow, all surrounded by the armour of a shell. The eggs of the relatives of *Casineria* – my ancestors – would become strong enough to remove the need to reproduce in water. The whole of the terrestrial realm, from the lakeshores and riverbanks up to the highest mountain and into the driest desert, was suddenly habitable. That world had already been colonised twice, by plants and arthropods – insects, millipedes, arachnids – and was a landscape rich with food and opportunity. If I look around, there is nothing that is not as it is because of the tiny developmental shift from water-bound tetrapod to amniote. The reach of *Casineria* and its kin has extended around and beyond the earth, shaping environments throughout that long 'yesterday of the globe' and into human history. All around this flattened landscape, settlements have sprung up around black-stained shafts driven down through time into the Carboniferous swamps, still influencing the global environment hundreds of millions of years later.

The name of this land, it is said, derives from Lot, the king of Arthurian legend who reigned atop another Carboniferous volcanic plug at Traprain Law. He, in turn, takes his name from Lleu, a legendary Brythonic demigod, who was said to be vulnerable to death neither during the day nor at night, neither clothed nor naked. He could not be killed indoors, or outside. Only when existing on the borderline, partially clad on a threshold at dusk, neither in one state nor another, was his mortality revealed. Here, in Lot's kingdom, between sea and shore, *Casineria* has cheated destruction. A single individual, whose life began within membranes within membranes and ended sinking into the unbreathing depths of an ancient lake. Compacted in layers of mud, avoiding volcanic fires, the easterly scraping of kilometre-thick ice, the tectonic yawns of the earth, and erosion by the tireless wind, *Casineria* has crossed a third of a billion years to show us the nature of its own liminal existence. A new kind of life, leaving the water behind. Neither amphibian, nor quite amniote, and yet a living whole.

The tired winter sun droops in the sky. The waves are returning, burying once more the ancient lake. The far-stretching stones thin and submerge. A single scoter distantly bobs in the current, still hopeful of shrimp. I turn, and climb the mar-ram-knitted dune. My place is on the land.

## Prose Runner-up

# Impressions

by Ross Barnett

I was about six years old when I first tried to listen to the past. Holding a fossil ammonite to my ear I strained to catch a hint of prehistory, the way you can hear the seaside from a seashell. In a roundabout way, the experience coloured my whole life. I couldn't hear dinosaurs roaring or ichthyosaurs spouting through my little ammonite, but an early introduction to fossils and extinction boggled my growing mind so much that I've spent many of the years that followed immersed in remnants of ancient life. Little me was standing on the island of Raasay- a small, rarely visited scrap of land off the west coast of Scotland.

Famous chiefly for entertaining Johnson and Boswell, having its own subspecies of bank vole, and its varied geology, Raasay is not on the tourist trail. The island was and is home to a fervently Presbyterian Free Church. My own dad (a lapsed geologist) took me fossil hunting here, and such is the abundance of material even a small child can find belemnites, ammonites, and the like. My mother's side of the family, in the beautiful Gaelic phraseology, belong to Raasay. In a way, I do too. My maternal connection ties me to the barest soil of this patchwork island.

Linked to the family who entertained Johnson, sheltered Prince Charlie. Memories of childhood summers tie me here with stronger bonds than just genetics.

I remember the first fossil trip, from the pre-Cambrian of my own life, with a startling vividness. We had set off from our wee caravan in Inverarish, the largest village on the island. Walking past the quiet houses. Walking past the silent playpark with the padlocked swings. There was rain, of course. You cannot visit the west coast in summer and avoid it. The drops bounced off the grass at the side of the path and mingled with the mud. The bracken, copious and verdant, was prehistoric in appearance, acting as a signpost to the past we were going to visit. Travelling east through fields of hardy sheep, I remember complaining, as small children do, about the distance, the weather, the time it was taking.

Looking back now, I cannot ever remember being happier. Family united in a quest. A father wanting to share the joy of finding. A mother showing the places of her youth. A treasure hunt for understanding. I didn't realise any of this; I was six. When we got to the coast and I had been shown how to look for stones of the right size and shape I spent some time among the rocks getting my eye in and scrabbling around. Taking my finds to my father and dropping them at his feet he apportioned a small hammer and gently tapped each one. This was a new kind of magic. There were things inside. Stone cylinders that I learned were called belemnites: the cuttlebones of squidlike creatures that had swum in tropical seas. In one, there was part of a coiled shell: an ammonite. It reminded me of a seashell, I put it to my ear.

Since that summer, thirty years ago, so much has changed. I didn't know it at the time, but my mother was sick. She died a year later from the cancer that spiralled within her. I grew up and made the study of the past my career. A fractal hope that learning about fossils and extinction would help me to preserve knowledge of my own past. If only there was a taphonomy of the mind that could preserve memories and feelings the way the soft earth does! Since then I've striven to keep each memory of my early years properly curated. Each impression must be prepared correctly, adhering matrix removed, content inspected. In my private museum of the mind, I am the curator of memories. They can be taken off shelves for display. Replayed and rethought.

Sometimes they degrade. Sometimes, all I'm left is a shadow of a thought where a memory used to be. Sometimes, what I believed to be treasure is revealed as

worthless. A curator's job is to constantly scrutinise their collection, whether it is fossils or memories. Still, throughout everything, my little ammonite sits on a shelf in the sunshine, waiting to be picked up.

I couldn't hear the past then, but I can now.

## First prize in Poetry

### ***Pneumodesmus newmani***

by Alex Woodcock

For the judges, this poem was the stand-out piece for the competition this year. Innovative, interesting and clever, the poet weaves in and out of time, all the while deftly naming, describing, understanding those met en route (be they animal, vegetable or mineral). There are some stunning, unexpected images and turns of phrase here, and the judges really enjoyed the wedding-like 'toast' as an ending. A heart-felt, funny poem worthy of following in Miller's footsteps.

In a rather beautiful moment of synchronicity with Hugh Miller, Alex is a writer and stonemason from the south coast of England. Following a PhD on medieval sculpture he realised that he ought to know the practical side of it too so learned to carve stone and eventually got a job at Exeter Cathedral, where he worked for six years. During this time he wrote two books on the subject, one for Bloomsbury and one for Impress Books. He is a regular contributor to the nature-writing journal *Elementum* and his third book, *King of Dust*, will be published by Little Toller next year.



*Alex Woodcock*



*Gillian Dawson*

## Poetry Runner-up

### **The first king of Scotland**

by Gillian Dawson

From the first line, the judges felt this poem oozed atmosphere and texture. The beast quite simply crawls from the page to meet you, head on, and the language used to describe it makes this a delightful piece to read aloud. This poem will appeal to all ages – as one judge commented 'you could read this to a child and they would know exactly what kind of creature to draw'. The internal rhymes and movement throughout this piece are nicely executed.

Gillian works in the Library of the University of the West of Scotland, although she started out in Archaeology and likes to volunteer on digs whenever she can. She is a Conservation Volunteer leader with the National Trust for Scotland Glasgow Group and enjoys writing poetry, in particular haiku inspired by direct experience of the natural world. Gillian has had haiku published in *Presence* and *Blithe Spirit* haiku journals, *Snapshot Press Haiku Calendar 2018* and also in *My Time: Poems Inspired by Creativity* published by Voluntary Arts Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Poetry Library.

## Poetry Winner

***Pneumodesmus newmani***

by Alex Woodcock

I was twenty-three,  
Eight years before the discovery,  
Breaking my back in the ceilidh  
In Stonehaven

Drunk and wearing a kilt. The wedding lasted four days,  
The journey from York, six hours;  
We arrived in the dark  
And woke to the waves

But you were already there,  
A scratch in the sandstone,  
A feather on the finger of time  
Hiding out in the cliffs

Waiting for the hammer.

We ate blueberries on the train up, I remember,  
Something exotic, or so it seemed then,  
Like the first air that you sipped  
When Scotland was near the equator,

You, a whisper of life  
Held by the rocks for  
Over four hundred million years:  
*Pneumodesmus newmani*.

The story goes  
It was a local bus driver that broke you free,  
A fossil collector when not at the wheel  
And now the father of an ancient millipede,

Perhaps the first oxygen-breathing animal to live on land.  
There's a photograph online,  
A wide-toothed comb of stone  
Transient as a scar

And no longer than a fingernail,  
Legs floating like the tentacles of a jellyfish,  
A beautiful arrangement by the sediments  
Clearly thinking ahead.

We slipped in our smooth-soled shoes on the path  
To Dunnottar Castle  
And lined up in the rain and the ruins  
As Tim and Claudia were married;

I have a picture somewhere,  
A concentration of formal dress and umbrellas,  
Of men with long hair and cold knees  
And relatives sheltering beside masonry,

A moment in time  
Of many moments in time,  
As you waited  
And waited for the one

When we had evolved  
And had enough fortune on our side,  
To find your tiny footprint  
And recognise your pioneering life.

\*

Now, in another life of my own,  
Hundreds of miles south,  
And walking the shore like Kenneth White  
Ruminating on the rosy quartz,

Thinking of Okuizumi writing  
'Even the smallest pebble in a riverbed  
has the entire history of the universe inscribed upon it'  
– Well, he's right –

Recalling Miller, a stonemason like myself,  
Asleep and dreaming of the day's drab burial ground  
'suffused with the blush of sunset',  
the stones on which he'd only just worked

Antique and thick with moss and lichens;

Looking for echinoids below the chalk cliffs,  
Sometimes finding one in the shingle  
Like the other month,  
Turning over a grey pebble

And realising it was a heart-shaped urchin, *micraster*,  
A mere slip of a thing  
At around  
Sixty million,

I'm thinking of that long weekend  
(Still by far the best wedding)  
And of all the undiscovered and unknown  
Creatures beneath,

Their lives a faint cast or impression  
Deep underground,  
And of your emergence into our world  
In the early two-thousands.

Well

All the Palæozoic fishes,  
All the smiths forging tools in the Iron Age,  
All the bus drivers,  
All the plants that have weathered

A life on the land,

All the artists and scientists,  
All the animals silent in the glow of the moon,  
All the feathered dinosaurs  
eating from the bird-table,

Salute you.



## Poetry Runner-up

# The first king of Scotland

by Gillian Dawson

...

Here he comes, jinking through the gloaming, elated after a night vibrating  
with chorusing frogs, chirruping crickets,  
a teeming larder of insects' rasps and ticks.

He's learnt the skills of the hunt:  
a rearing centipede disarmed with prowess, the crunch of carapace between teeth,  
his stomach taut from the feast.

Home-bound on the familial track  
he scent-marks horsetails and tree-ferns shimmering green on the lagoon  
he drinks in the dawn, sits down to groom.

...

Milk teeth rooted in a stone jaw exposed by the waves of a cold shore

Wareolestes rex: the first king of Scotland

...

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## Highly Commended in Poetry

### **After life: finding Tiny**

by **Fiona Ritchie Walker**

There is a very clever interweaving of past and present in this poem and the judges appreciated the extended metaphor of birth that runs the backbone of the piece. Nice too that the poet has been newly-drawn to Miller as a result of reading about recent discoveries and writing for this competition!

Fiona has been writing poetry for many years with work published in anthologies, including the British Council New Writing series and New Writing Scotland. She has had several poetry collections published and is working on a short story collection, to be published next year by Red Squirrel Press.

This is the first time she has ever written about fossils or geology, but she says she always enjoy a new challenge!



*Fiona Ritchie-Walker*



*Alison Seller*

## Highly Commended in Poetry

### **Deep absence**

by **Alison Seller**

A beautiful, poignant poem that captures deep loss, cleverly placing parent-child relationships at its heart. The judges liked the gentle touch of this poem and felt it was a lovely nod to Miller.

Alison is a former teacher who has been writing intermittently for the last ten years. Her poem about the Gaelic Chapel in Cromarty won the Cromarty Arts Trust Writing Competition in 2013 and was subsequently published in Hugh's News. Her writing is mainly poetry, but she has also written a series of dramatic monologues, which she performed last year.

She has lived with her husband in the beautiful town of Cromarty for 22 years, raising a son there, and is proud to call Cromarty home.

## Highly Commended in Poetry

# After life: finding Tiny

by Fiona Ritchie Walker

Not so much rock as a stone womb,  
preserving life lived, waiting for discovery,  
pick and chisel replaced with discerning scan,  
today's technology birthing  
this 3D re-creation, which I have found  
in a coffee break while flicking through headline news.

I'm drawn in by simple language,  
Tiny's sharp teeth, dimpled chin,  
that take me to the end of the age of fish,  
my birth land straddling the equator,  
and though I say I have no interest in old Scottish rocks, Latin names,  
I find Hugh Miller in my local library, take his history home.

My tongue twists round Tournaisian,  
I picture Tiny, her five digits pulling  
our shared backbone, hinged jaw, lungs  
through swamp water to lycopod forests,  
towards today where my mirror fingers  
hold a pen, record this life change

that has sent me to rocks and beaches,  
museums and scree slopes,  
tracking our shared journeying  
in this world of air and land.

.....

Copyright © 2018 Fiona Ritchie-Walker



## Highly Commended in Poetry

**Deep absence**

by Alison Seller

No bones here.  
No shell of skin, or  
feathers brushed into the  
stone.  
No marbled carapace,  
or shale spiral.  
Only outlines  
traced in tropical  
sand aeons past.  
Now, like Pictish cup-marks,  
they brim with soft Skye rain:  
two footprints  
one cradling the  
other. An imprint of  
family.

Yet, here is deep absence.  
A Jurassic mother and her  
hatchling move on.  
The record of life's  
urgency pressed in stone.  
And I recall  
the melancholy of  
beaches, our footprints  
smooored by surf.  
And, still, I see Hugh Miller,  
who knew the worth and weight of stone.  
I see him  
lost and deep within his grief.  
His fingers  
tracing the letters he has  
hewn. His sweet Elizabeth's  
name preserved in tender  
stone.

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*Inspired by the discovery on Skye, in 2004, of a footprint (25 cms) of a Coleophysis- type dinosaur.  
The footprint, unusually, contained within it a less-than-a-month-old baby footprint (1.78 cms).*

<https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/amazing-fossil-puts-scotland-s-dinosaurs-on-the-map-1-465762>

*Hugh Miller's first-born, Elizabeth Logan, died aged 17 months.*

# MANY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS DUE

by Lara Reid

*I would like to extend my gratitude to all of our partners, without whom the wonderful list of prizes we gave out would not have been possible. To the Scottish Geodiversity Forum for providing web-space and administrative support, most especially to the Chair Angus Miller and to the Forum secretary Gavin Eardley. To the Friends of Hugh Miller for their generous donation of a weekend break for our winning poet and prose writer to visit Cromarty. To Al McGowan of Hills of Hame, who took our prize-winners on a palæo tour of Edinburgh after the prize-giving ceremony. To the brilliant Jane Hunter and Julie Arbuckle, Scottish artists who donated their work, to Matt Dale at Mr Woods Fossils, to the National Trust for Scotland, the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, EGS, the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, Our Dynamic Earth, the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, Cromarty Arts Trust, St Andrews University Geobus, and Lochaber Geopark.*

*The second Hugh Miller Writing Competition (Footprints in the Sand) ran from 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2017 to 15<sup>th</sup> April 2018.*

*Our sponsoring partners were double the number of our first year, with 12 partner organisations in total. The partners provided valuable publicity opportunities, particularly on social media, and also added to the prize pile for the competition. The partners and their donated prizes were as follows:*

*Our Dynamic Earth – 2 x family passes*

*National Trust for Scotland – free entry for winner plus guest at Hugh Miller's Birthplace and Museum, Cromarty, plus museum giftbags*

*The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics – books*

*Edinburgh Geological Society – platform for launch of the competition (public lecture with some of Scotland's leading palæontologists, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017 in Edinburgh) plus books*

*Lochaber Geopark – selection of relevant geological publications*

*Mr Woods Fossils – 2 x fossils*

*Jane Hunter (artist) – A piece of original artwork linked to Miller*

*Julie Arbuckle (artist) – set of geo-inspired ceramic coasters*

*St Andrews University Geobus*

*The Hunterian Museum, Glasgow*

*Cromarty Arts Trust – books*

*Royal Scottish Geographical Society*

*There were also contributions from Scottish author James Robertson in the form of 4 signed copies of his books, and publicity support from writer Robert Macfarlane at Cambridge University and Elsa Panciroli, palæontologist and Guardian science writer.*

*We are grateful to Scottish Natural Heritage for helping fund the project by linking the competition with promotion of Scotland's Fossil Code. To this end, we received money towards running the competition and promoting the Fossil Code. There was also an anonymous donation of £500 towards competition costs.*

*In total, we received 44 entries to this year's competition (all over-16) – this was 7 more entries than last time. Sadly, the lack of under-16 entries was noticeable. There may have been some restriction felt for entrants giving the narrow subject area as inspiration this year (Scotland's fossil discoveries from the last 30 years). However, as Forum chair Angus Miller pointed out, this has helped keep geological science firmly at the forefront of the competition, which is a key goal.*

*Both I and the competition partners were very impressed with the Scottish Poetry Library as a venue for the competition prize-giving. The cost was very reasonable, the space ideal and very relaxed. The staff at the poetry library were helpful and friendly.*

*Perhaps the most successful element of the competition was its appeal to members of the public (journalists, writers and poets) who would not normally come across the Geodiversity Forum, or its affiliated partners.*



Bob Gatcliffe



Angus Miller

## HARD WORK AND VISION -

## ALL DOWN TO LARA



Lara Reid

Angus Miller, chair of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, gives his verdict: "The Writing Competition has proved to be a brilliant way of engaging people in Scotland's geology and it has led to some very inspiring results. I think it is an idea that will run and run, and certainly I will look back with pleasure at being involved in the early competitions!"

"There are many great ideas about how to share Scotland's geological story with the wider public, but turning these ideas into reality takes hard work and vision, and the success of the competitions is entirely down to Lara Reid's huge amount of energy, enthusiasm and professionalism. Especially when considering this is all done by volunteers on a shoestring budget. She's not just picked up the ball and run with it, she has persuaded many organisations and individuals to run with her and the results surpass all expectations!"

# HUGH MILLER'S LITERARY LEGACY: AN EXCITING BOOK PROPOSAL

By Lara Reid

There have been several very successful projects celebrating the life and work of Scottish geologist, writer and folklorist Hugh Miller (1802 – 1856) in recent years. These include the Hugh Miller Writing Competition, two Betsey boat voyages around Scotland's West Coast and a well-attended Miller legacy conference in Cromarty in September 2017 organised by the Friends of Hugh Miller charity.

To build on Hugh Miller's legacy still further, and to celebrate the wealth of new contemporary material inspired by Miller, I propose to produce and publish an illustrated book of prose and poetry on behalf of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum and The Friends of Hugh Miller. As an experienced writer and editor, I will compile the book, with professional design / layout support to ensure the publication is first class in terms of visual quality.

I envisage a square format, soft-cover book, around 21cm square, and around 80 to 100 pages in length.

The content will include : All 18 winning entries from the Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2015-16 and 2017-18 will be included in the publication (assuming the authors' consent). This includes two under-16 entries (one prose, one poetry); nine adult poetry entries and seven adult prose entries (a mix of fiction and non-fiction). One of our poets, Elizabeth Pickett, a talented illustrator, will be approached to produce coloured images to accompany the text. We will also include photographs / images from the Friends of Hugh Miller image library.

I hope the organisers from the Cruise of the Betsey voyages 2014 and 2015, will be able to contribute a couple of illustrated articles, or images, inspired by the time spent aboard ship. Joyce Gilbert and Simon Cuthbert have responded positively.

I have also approached other leading names in Scottish geo-poetics and geoscience, including judges Guardian science writer and palæontologist Elsa Panciroli and naturalist Kenny Taylor. Scottish author James Robertson has offered help.

It is intended to produce the booklet in time for a reading event featuring our Hugh Miller Writing Competition entrants at the Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow at the beginning of March 2019.

I believe very strongly that bringing the Miller projects together in this way will create a beautiful, lasting contribution to the legacy of Miller. The high quality, memorable entries we received for the first Hugh Miller Writing Competition deserve to be reproduced in printed format. I also believe that the project will help promote Scotland's geological and literary heritage to a new audience, and that the additional promotion available at the Kelvingrove Museum will enhance the profiles of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, the Friends of Hugh Miller charity and associated partners.

Estimates for the production of the book are being obtained, and The Friends is already committee to financial support for the venture. You can place a provisional advance order by contacting the Secretary.

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

# ON THE MILLER TRAIL

by Martin Gostwick

We were certainly not a typical bunch of tourists as we gathered on the Royal Mile (High Street) where once Hugh Miller toiled so hard in The Editor's chair of *The Witness*. We were a party signed up especially to tour some of the Miller places in the capital, and the excursion turned out to bring its own marvellous rewards.

We had three guides, geologist and tour leader, Dr Alistair McGowan, palaeontology research explorer Dr Tom Challands of Edinburgh University, and Dr Andrew Ross, curator of vertebrate palaeontology, National Museum of Scotland (NMS). Mountaineer Al McGowan would stand out in any crowd with his tall frame, beard and bright bandanna, and so would Tom Challands with his ginger hair, and overflowing enthusiasm.

*The Witness* site, where now stands Edinburgh City Chambers, is recorded on a plaque erected during the Bicentenary in 2002. I read a short piece summarising Miller's gargantuan endeavours, his campaigning zeal in the Presbyterian evangelist cause and for social reforms, and how he was a gentle man, but a "terrible foe in print."

Our next stop was Hunter Square, where still exists what were the premises of John Johnstone, printers of the newspaper. Al invited us to imagine the wee "printer's devils" (copy boys) running with their (handwritten) texts from the paper's offices in the High Street to Johnstone's to be set in type. The firm were also publishers, who brought out the first edition of *The Old Red Sandstone*, largely based on columns which had previously appeared in the paper.

Still in Hunter Square we passed some roadworks, where Tom remarked on a pile of Old Red Sandstone paving slabs from Spittal quarry, Caithness, which he said were much too thick for the job, double that used previously ("I can't think why.") And so we made our way up to Chambers Street, where, outside NMS Tom led us all bending double, or in one or two cases on bended knee or actually prostrate, studying the remarkable Devonian fish fossils lying on the pavement, walked on by goodness how many pedestrians with no idea they are treading on creatures more than three hundred million years old.

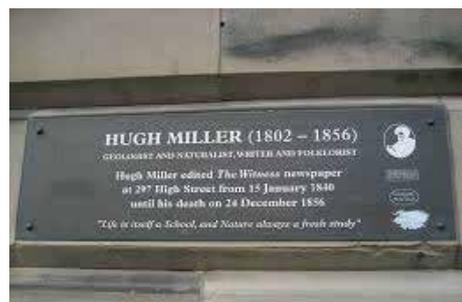
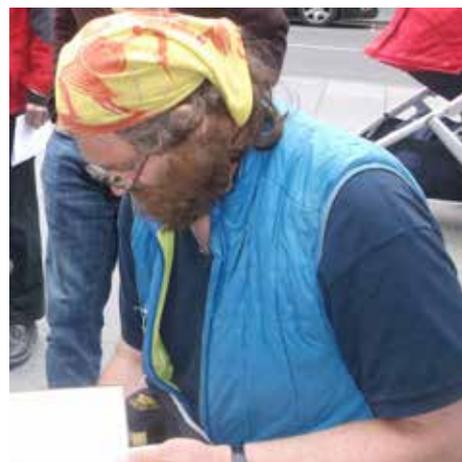
We looked at *Dipterus*, an extinct lungfish, but whose descendants Tom explained still survive, not in our seas, but those of Australasia, Africa and South America. Bob Davidson found a *Gryoptychius milleri*. Writing prize-winning poet Alex Woodcock came upon a *Coccosteus*.

It was between one stop and another, that Andrew Ross chanced to mention that his great great uncle Donald Ross had been a contemporary of Miller's who also wrote about the Highland Clearances, and did much good work to relieve the consequent hardships, but who also was sufficiently a rogue to need himself to emigrate to Nova Scotia. Andy is writing a biography of the man.

Outings such as this tour seem to bring out such pearls of forgotten history.

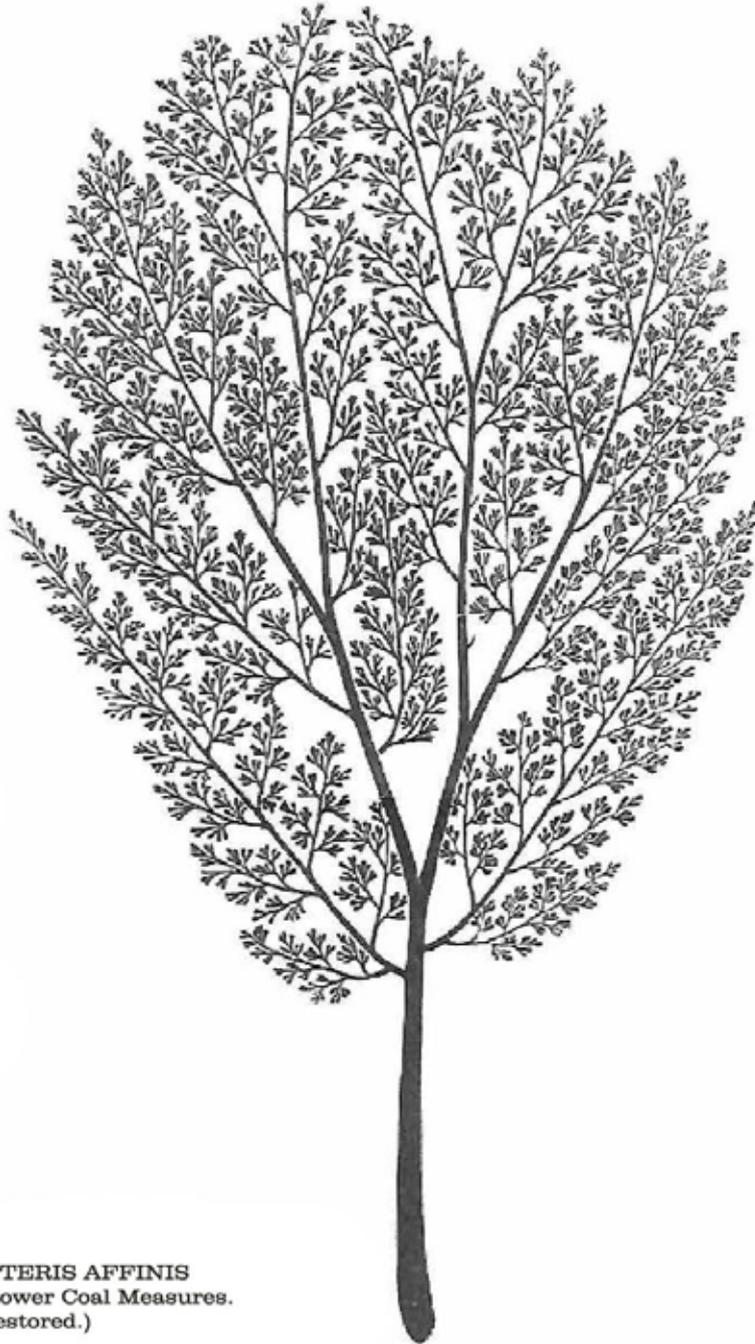
Inside NMS, Andy first took us down to the great Beginnings Gallery.

During this tour, while examining a fossil from the famous Dura Den site in Fife Andy remarked that Miller had been well ahead of his time in trying to examine



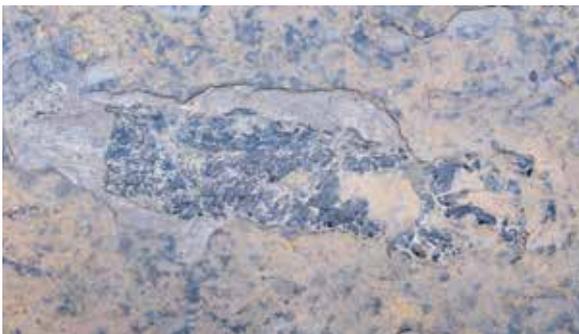
Right, from top:  
Al McGowan, in colourful headscarf, studying his guide material  
*The Witness* Plaque outside Edinburgh City Chambers, site of *The Witness* offices.  
Hunter's Square, the building once the offices of John Johnstone, publishers  
Amelia Paton's statue

Left: Bob Davidson getting a close-up of a fossil with a hand lens



SPHENOPTERIS AFFINIS  
A Fern of the Lower Coal Measures.  
(Restored.)

*Hugh Miller*





fossils' internal structure, a field of study now so much more advanced in Tom Challands' area of expertise microCT scanning.

We were able to see vertebra fragments of a plesiosaur, the reptile Hugh was the first to find on the Isle of Eigg, and a case featuring some of his later, and less recognised work on corals and bivalves. We saw a fern Miller collected at Burdiehouse, south of Edinburgh, on one of his frequent forays when freed of his ties to *The Witness*. He apparently used it for the reconstruction in the frontispiece of *The Testimony of the Rocks*.

We left Beginnings with a viewing of a just refurbished fabulous diorama of pre-historic Scotland, complete with wolves and silver foxes, deer and other animals frequenting pristine forest.

On Level Three, in a large glass case - delightfully old-fashioned and so in tune with the magnificent Victorian gallery - was a type specimen of the Devonian *Homostius milleri*, the very same creature which featured strongly backing Miller's arguments in *Footprints of the Creator*, and of which our Museum has a splendid cast.

On Level Five, we beheld the superb, sensitive statue by Amelia Paton, of Hugh in his plaid, studying a fossil. It is such a touching testament to the artist's high regard and friendship for her subject. Amelia was the partner of David Octavius Hill, the pioneer photographer who made several calotype studies of Miller.

From the Museum we crossed The Meadows, where I told the story of Hugh threatening with a pistol friends he had not recognised in the dusk, Al pointing out that possession of firearms in those days was far from uncommon, and the lighting by gaslamp poor. We reached 5 Sylvan Place, just south of The Meadows, the Millers' first home of their own

in Edinburgh, where I related anecdotes from young Harriet Ross Taylor's *Recollections of Hugh* working sometimes for eleven hours on end, amidst piles of books, aided by wife Lydia in talking over - and purposely contradicting - his views.

Finally, after a longish trudge (for the less ambulant) up a Lover's Lane, we reached Grange Cemetery, where Hugh, Lydia, their sons William and Hugh Junior, are all buried. We shared the report in *The Witness* of his hugely-attended funeral, and agreed with descendant Anna Gordon that we should seek to have Lydia's very faded inscription restored.

Al, Tom and Andy were warmly thanked on the spot for being such splendidly informative guides.

Right upper: Sylvan Place, the Millers' first family home in the capital.

Right over: The Miller family graves at The Grange Cemetery

Above, Top: *Cheirolepis*

Above, middle: *Coccosteus*

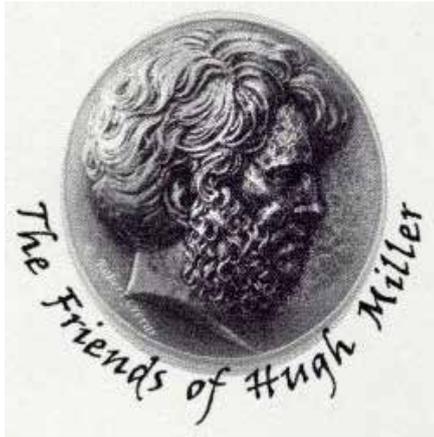
Above, lower: *Homostius milleri*

Facing page:

Fern said to be Hugh's frontispiece illustration for *Testimony of The Rocks*

Three pavement fossils





## MEMBERSHIP FORM

I WISH to become a member of The Friends of Hugh Miller (Registered charity No SC 037351), in order to support its work in making Miller's life and work better known, and in particular to assist in the development of the Hugh Miller Museum and Birthplace Cottage in Church Street, Cromarty.

(SC037351).

Name.....

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.....

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

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