



# Hugh's News

Magazine of  
The Friends of Hugh Miller

Issue No 38  
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Secretary

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## BOB, MBE



We proffer our heartiest congratulations to our Chairman, Bob Davidson, for being conferred an MBE in the 2019 New Year Honours list. The citation states he receives the award as Chairman of The Friends of Hugh Miller, and for services to palaeontology in Scotland.

The honour, to give it its full title, makes Bob a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, and is a reward for his contribution to Scottish geology, and his services to our charity.

Bob is "walking on air," over the invitation to his investiture with his whole family at Buckingham Palace on 7<sup>th</sup> March.

Full story, pages 2 and 3.



*Above: Nigel at the Hugh Miller: Local Hero conference he organised in 2008  
Left: Bob speaking to a field party at the Cromarty Fish beds.*

## A VERY SPECIAL BEQUEST

A second honour of equal importance for The Friends has been a donation to the charity from the late Professor Nigel Trewin of £2,000.

Nigel, who died on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017, gifted many important items, both to the Hugh Miller Museum, and to The Friends along with his services as our founding Chairman, but this one came as a complete surprise.

Since the letter from the solicitors acting for his executors arrived on 21<sup>st</sup> December, the cheque could be described as the best Christmas present we have ever had.

The Friends management committee has already resolved to establish a suitable project of lasting value to bear Nigel's name and will bring forward proposals in due course.

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@friendsofmiller

## Management Committee Profile

# BOB DAVIDSON, CHAIRMAN

Bob Davidson was awarded an MBE in the 2019 New Year Honours List, in his capacity as Chairman of The Friends of Hugh Miller, and for services to Palaeontology in Scotland. Born in Aberdeen on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1953, he has worked in the oil industry since he was 21 years old. He is now a consultant to two international companies.

The oil industry has taken him all over the world to some 19 countries, but the assignment that changed his life was to the Libyan Sahara desert in 1979-1982.

One of his off duty pastimes in Libya was to drive out to the wind blown gravel beds and collect fossil shark teeth, and he soon discovered that there were far more fossils than just shark teeth. He became an avid fossil hunter and his Libya collection contains fossil crocodile, whale, horse and fish bones, specimens that no one else had realised were there.

On his return to the UK, he collected all the books he could find on palaeontology and taught himself the basics in the period to 1989. After meeting the late Professor Nigel Trewin he started to receive recognition in the fossil field. They produced three scientific papers together and excavated half a dozen or so localities, shedding new light on them and bringing them up to date in print. They founded a field trip group dubbed the Fossil Fish Filleters, who made excursions almost annually to localities all over the north-east of Scotland. Over the years he has amassed a fossil fish collection of some 900 specimens, and co written a further ten scientific papers. He joined the Friends of Hugh Miller in 2008, not least because the charity is based in Cromarty, just round the bay from Miller's Devonian fish deposits, a favourite locality for many excursions. As for the future, he says slowing down is out of the question due to his tripartite passion for palaeontology, motorsport and the oil industry.



## ALARM, THEN ELATION!

*The Editor asked Bob for comment on his honour, and this is his most entertaining reply.*

Anyone who receives a letter with the envelope emblazoned "On Her Majesty's Service. Urgent and Personal. Cabinet Office" could be forgiven for the initial alarm conveyed. I opened mine with some trepidation, but by the end of the first paragraph all became clear and my trepidation turned to elation, I was being offered an MBE in the 2019 New Year Honours List but was asked that it remained confidential until official announcement some 4 weeks hence. I completed the enclosed acceptance form and as instructed, scanned and emailed it to the address provided. The next day I mailed the original to the London address and at the end of the week I called the number provided just to make sure. The full impact was felt when the press published the Honours list on December 29<sup>th</sup>; at last I could tell the world.

To receive such an honour, for services to Scottish palaeontology, especially during my tenure as chairman of The Friends is extra special but is not something that I would claim was achieved single handed. The effort required of me over the past 30 years has necessitated the support of my family, great friends and valued colleagues, all of whom have enabled me to participate in and contribute to, the field of science and its history that has captivated me since boyhood. Although the award is now official, the final step in the process is to receive the award in an investiture in the next few months, when I do so I hope that all those who helped and encouraged me over the years will acknowledge their own share in this great honour.

# WELL DONE, SIR!

Our Chairman has received a considerable number of congratulatory messages, and first on the list is a motion laid before the Scottish Parliament by his constituency MSP, Liam Kerr, North-East Scotland.

## ***Congratulations to Robert Davidson on Honorary MBE***

*That the Parliament congratulates Robert Davidson from Peterculter on being appointed an honorary MBE for services to palæontology in Scotland; understands that Robert was made an MBE for his work with The Friends of Hugh Miller, a registered charity which celebrates and promotes the legacy of the great pioneering Scottish geologist; recognises Robert's continued dedication to palæontology, and wishes him every success for the future.*

And here are some more:

Dr Nick Fraser,  
Keeper of Natural Sciences, National Museum of Scotland.

Professor Ralph O'Connor,  
Professor in the Literature & Culture of Britain, Ireland & Iceland.

Dr Mike Taylor, Miller scholar and biographer,  
Honorary Research Fellow, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester.

Dr Jo Hellawell,  
Executive Officer, Palæontological Association.

Dr Alix Powers-Jones,  
Property Manager, Hugh Miller Birthplace Cottage & Museum.

Aberdeen Geological Society.



# Societies Day

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February, 11.00am - 4.00pm

Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow

One of the largest of all the dinosaurs, *Diplodocus carnegii*, is coming to Scotland. Nicknamed "Dippy," it was discovered in Colorado, USA, in 1877. A cast was made by Andrew Carnegie, the Scots-American steel magnate and philanthropist, which he donated to the Natural History Museum (NHM) in London where it was unveiled in 1905, and has been a star attraction ever since. That is, until now, when the NHM is taking it on tour round the UK.

While Dippy is in Glasgow, you can discover via a series of associated exhibitions and events, more about animals that are under threat because of human actions, and the steps being taken to protect them through conservation and re-wilding. The whole purpose of the tour is to encourage more people of all ages to become "natureonauts" or "citizen scientists."



And The Friends of Hugh Miller could not miss this opportunity to show what we do at the above Societies Day, among natural history groups from all over Scotland. We will be featuring our fossil collection donated by Calum Anton. All members and the general public are most welcome to come and call at our stall at this event, where natural history groups from all over Scotland will be exhibiting their wares and soliciting support.

# KELVINGROVE MUSEUM

## Discovery Centre Room

Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 3.00-4.30pm

### COME AND LISTEN TO SOME OF THE FINEST NATURE WRITING TODAY

The Scottish Geodiversity Forum, largely at the initiative of executive committee member Lara Reid, has seized the chance of the Dippy on Tour exhibition to further promote the best pieces on geology in prose and poetry which won prizes in the first two Hugh Miller Writing Competitions.

At least four first prize winners will be reciting their pieces in the Discovery Room, which can seat 50, with plenty of room for standing, so all those who have not heard these inspirational writings performed live should most definitely come along.

Lara will also be introducing publicly the Hugh Miller legacy book, *Conversations in Stone* which she has co-edited with palaeontologist Ms Elsa Panciroli, and announcing the launching in the Autumn of the third, 2019/20 Writing Competition.

The Friends are of course one of the booklet's sponsors, and this is a second chance for our members, if they missed Societies Day, to see Dippy and get a feel for the whole field of 21<sup>st</sup> Century natural sciences. Entry for both events is free.



# CHILDHOOD WALKS WITH MR MILLER

by Harriet Ross Taylor

*Harriet was born about 1822. She was the eldest daughter of Mr Robert Ross, the banker's agent who later employed Miller as an accountant at the Cromarty Branch of the Commercial Bank in 1835. This is a first extract from her Recollections, which we hope to serialize in forthcoming editions.*

As I am, so far as I know, the only one now living who knew him well it has occurred to me that I ought not to allow my pleasant memories of him to be wholly lost. What he was as a literary and scientific man is known to the world; but what he was as a man could only be known to those who freely associated with him, and with whom he was at perfect ease; and he was a man well worth knowing. From the time I was but a child I saw him very often. I shall speak of him as *Mr* Miller for so I always addressed him and spoke of him; and to do otherwise now would be a constant effort which it is unnecessary to make.

My first recollection of him is seeing him in the parish churchyard bending over my mother's gravestone, hewing and lettering it; which he was considered to do with great neatness. I was then seven years old, and I used to play with my cousins in the "brae" above their father's garden, which adjoined the "minister's brae" above the churchyard. My sorrow at my mother's death was at the time intense, yet soon I played heartily with my companions in this favourite spot. Sometimes, however, a sick feeling at my heart would make me slip through the hedge which separated the two braes, and I would go down nearer and nearer to Mr Miller as he worked. This at length came to be a daily occurrence for he in the gentlest, kindest manner encouraged it. While I stood beside him he spoke of many things, yet never seemed to be speaking *down* to the intelligence of the little child by his side. Graves were around us and some of them had been there for from two to three hundred years, so that the stones were sunk in the earth and covered with moss and lichen.

I remember how he drew my attention to the first beginning of vegetable life on the smooth stone appearing to the naked eye simply as a grey stain; and how this decaying formed a soil for something more perfect; and he would tell me the names of the trees near us, bid me notice the different sorts of grasses etc and so I was interested and cheered. And withal there was a thoughtful seriousness there among the remains of those who had once lived, some of them our own ancestors, and by the grave of her who had been so dear to me.

It was in September of that year or the following one, he was still lettering stones in the churchyard, although my mother's was finished and set up, that talking with him there

*From top to bottom:*

*Ammonite impression from the "Lias" (Jurassic) bed at Eathie.*

*Spectacular natural rock outcrop at McFarquhar's Bed.*

*Cromarty East Kirk, where Harriet first encountered Hugh, carving her mother's gravestone.*

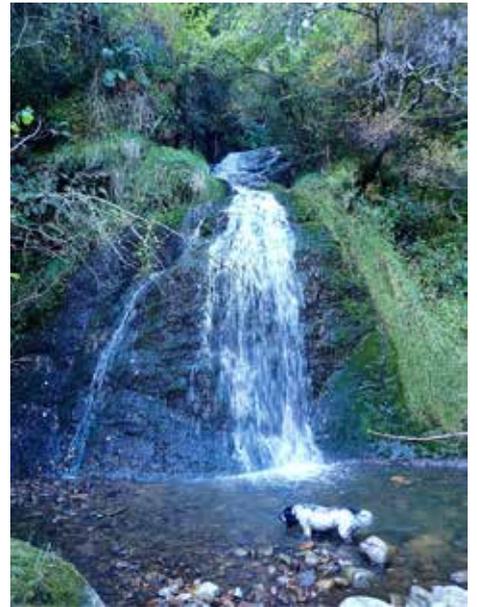


one day he said, I think of going this afternoon to the Doocot Cave. Would you care to come with me, you and your sister Mary and two of your cousins?" Of course I was delighted and so were they when I told them, and we joined him after school; Mary and I without dinner, and what was worse, without permission, either from our father or Betty, our nurse, whose rule over us was a very strict one.

Mr Miller brought us with exceeding care down the steep side of the Sutor, and provided us with a light to show us the white-lined cave with its stalactites and stalagmites, and shouted that we might see the flocks of pigeons which made their home in the sides and roof of the cave; showed how his Uncle Sandy caught crabs, a difficult thing to do, and picked up and gave to us two lovely shells not to be found elsewhere in the district; for the living creatures to which they had once belonged had found a restful home in the quiet cove in the centre of which is the Doocot Cave. Both shells were univalve; one which clung limpet-like to the rock, but of a smooth shining black with dotted stripes of turquoise blue; the other whelk-shaped but coloured pink white and buff. Our enjoyment was great; but safely at the top of the rock there flashed upon me the startling thought that Betty would be very angry; and that Papa would hardly be pleased at our having gone without permission. Our kind friend had enjoyed so much liberty in his boyhood that the necessity for this had not occurred to him. We came off better than we expected, and never repeated the offence. And in truth my father greatly appreciated Mr Miller's kindness, and thought with truth that excursions with him were a great privilege and advantage for us. On many a bright Saturday he led us across the hill to sunny Navity where we looked out on the noble Moray Firth with its encircling mountains. At Eathie he shared our lunch by the waterfall. Ever as we passed he drew our attention and interest to the objects around us - the sandstone rocks along the Navity shore, the Old Red fish-beds at Eathie, and what we admired more, the Lias bed; for as he raised fold after fold of the thick-set layers, ammonites, belemnites and many shells glittered like mother-of-pearl set in dark blue. Then there were the flowers, butterflies, moths etc. Those were happy days, and the memory of them is a happiness to me even now that I am old. I am not sure when Mr Miller began to interest himself in what I read, and to lend me books; but it was from him that I had an old copy of Robinson Crusoe, and I was about nine years old when he lent me Ivanhoe, and was amused at the extravagant delight with which I read it. It was only twitches of conscience which made me tear myself away from it to prepare my school lessons.

#### Footnotes:

The above excerpt was previously published in an appendix to a biography of Lydia Miller by Elizabeth Sutherland (Tuckwell Press, 2003) A full assessment of Harriet's character and her importance to the Miller story, written by prize-winning member Janie Verburg will appear in our next edition.



*From top to bottom:  
Eathie ravine, where Hugh and his young companions enjoyed a picnic lunch.  
The Dropping Cave, one of a series of caverns on the South Sutor shoreline, further east from the Doocot Cave.  
Eathie shore and cliffs*

## IMPORTANT NOTICE

# THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER 13<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SATURDAY 6<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2019 AT THE OLD BREWERY, CROMARTY

- 11.30am - 1.00pm: AGM  
Public meeting - entry free
- 2.00 - 3.30pm: Talk by Kenny Taylor on Highland Writing Today  
Book Launch
- 4.30-6.00pm: Launch by Lara Reid of Hugh Miller legacy book  
Conversations in Stone.

AND

NATURAL HISTORY ADVENTURE DAY - SUNDAY, 7<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2019

fun with fossils for all the family

11.00am-4.00pm

at

THE OLD BREWERY, HUGH MILLER MUSEUM, CROMARTY BEACH FOSSIL-HUNTING

PLEASE NOTE: BRING THE MAGAZINE OR AGM PAGES WITH YOU TO SAVE PAPER AND PRINTING COSTS. THANK YOU.

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## PUBLIC TALK WITH KENNY TAYLOR

2.00-3.30pm (Approx), Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April, The Old Brewery, Cromarty

Black Isle-based naturalist, explorer, broadcaster and writer Kenny Taylor's talk on Highland Writing Today is a must for all who want to discover or learn more about the best contemporary writing across the region. Kenny sailed both on The Friends-sponsored sea voyages, the 2014 Cruise of the Betsey project in the Small Isles, and the Testimony of the Rocks expedition round the islands off Argyll the following year. He is the editor of the magazine *North Words*. Entry is free.



# AGM PROPOSED AGENDA

11.30-1.00, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April - The Old Brewery, Cromarty

1. Congratulations to Chairman Bob Davidson on his New Year honour.
2. Chairman's welcome. Bob Davidson.
3. Museum Property Manager. Dr Powers-Jones, annual report.
4. Secretary & Publications Editor. Martin Gostwick.
5. Events Organiser. Gavin Berkenheger.
6. Finance report. Sue Rider Busby.
7. Membership. John Armstrong.
8. Election of office-bearers and management committee
9. Writing Competitions & Legacy Book launch invitation. Lara Reid.
10. AoB

Please lodge requests for any additional items with the Secretary in advance.

Questions are also welcomed in advance.



Above: Elsa Panciroli  
Below: Lara Reid




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## OPENING CONVERSATIONS IN STONE - THE GREAT BOOK LAUNCH

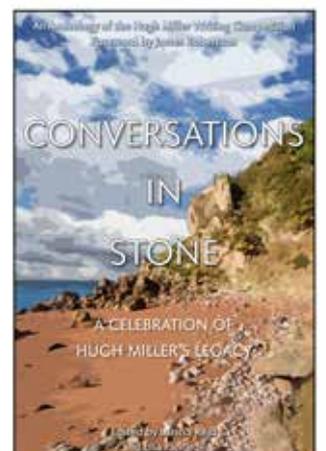
4.30-6.00pm, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April, The Old Brewery, Cromarty

The publication we have all been waiting for will be given its official launching party in the late afternoon, with all welcome as guests of our hosts, the editors, Friends' freelance science writer Lara Reid and noted palæontologist Elsa Panciroli.

Put together over a period of several months, they have compiled an anthology of writings inspired by Hugh Miller, all of which took prizes in the first two Miller Writing Competitions. It features a foreword by celebrated Scottish novelist, poet and publisher, James Robertson (*And the Land Lay Still*, *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, *Joseph Knight* to name only a few), and an interview Members will be aware, of course, of how James helped bring back Miller into public acclaim in the 1990s with his paperback editions of Miller's autobiography, *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, and *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*. Contributions also include material by Miller scholar, Dr Michael Taylor, best-selling nature-writer Robert Macfarlane, illustrations by Elizabeth Pickett, and a commendation from direct descendants.

Lara will also tell us more at the party about the third, 2019-20 Writing Competition launching in October of this year.

There will be wine and light refreshments in what is going to be a very happy occasion open to all, a milestone in spreading the growing appreciation of Miller's legacy in Scottish literature. Advance orders for the book, price £7.99 (plus £2.50 p & p) can be placed with the Secretary, or make sure to snap up a copy of the limited edition on the day. See you there!





## Come to Cromarty and explore some marvels of the natural world!

Sunday 7th April, 11.00am - 4.00pm  
Old Brewery, Hugh Miller Museum,  
Cromarty Beach



See Isle of Skye's Dinos and Mammals  
Handle Fossil Collections  
Go Beachcombing for Fossils  
Discover Ores and Minerals



- 11.00 - 12.00:** Hugh Miller Birthplace Cottage & Museum (Miller's Yard)
- 14.00 - 16.00:** Ms Elsa Panciroli tells the story of Skye's "Everglades", Brewery Café
- 13.00 - 16.00:** Exhibitions: North East Coast Fossils, and Scotland's Mineral Wealth, Brewery Studios 1 & 2
- 11.00 - 16.00:** Excursions to Cromarty Devonian Fish deposits.  
Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

**Book voucher PRIZES for visitors for the best stories or artwork on their day.**

Entry free at all venues  
Donations Welcome



The Friends of Hugh Miller

# MEET THE CROMARTY MEAL MOB!

Nothing gives us more pleasure than when some enthusiasts decide to dramatise one of Hugh Miller's stories, because nothing proves better that they live to be enjoyed by admirers today nearly two hundred years after they were written.

We have seen the Millennial children's opera *Hugh Who?* about his life, Hallowe'en ghost stories from "*Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*," told in the Birthplace Cottage, the play *A Meeting with Monsieur Agassiz* performed in Miller House, and storyteller Lizzie McDougall narrating tales using images sewn into her magic quilt. Now on Ne'er Day 2019 came a fun private performance of "*The Meal Mob*" from the same source.

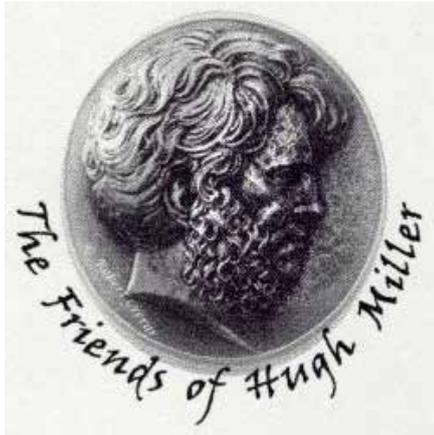
One of our new members, Mr Paul Denholm of Kirkcaldy, Fife, first came up for a Hogmanay holiday in 2017/18 with the family of his daughter, Mrs Catherine Murphy, at the National Trust for Scotland's Paye House next door to the Birthplace, and he, like so many others, became enthused by Hugh and his writings, so much so that he wrote up his own version of one of Hugh's tales, to be performed by members of his family during their stay, "as a step-up from charades."

And so, they returned to Paye House this year, armed with Paul's script based on *The Meal Mob*, from Chapter XXI of Miller's immortal book. For those not familiar with the tale, this is the account of a famine in 1741, and a spulzie led by a Cromarty merchant, Donald Sandison. Some 40 volunteers joined him to raid a sloop loaded to the gunnels with sacks of meal bound for export, and landed the sacks to be lodged in a local storehouse. Attempts by the sloop's master to recapture the meal were repulsed by a mob, women and children to the fore, assailing the oncoming boats with missiles. The storehouse door was soon broken down with an axe by Jess, Sandison's own wife, and the sacks distributed among the starving populace free of charge.

Martin and Frieda Gostwick provided the audience - and participants - for a sitting room performance of enormous gusto, related principally by the women and children, and given further conviction by the props of an almost empty bowl of broth, a real antique (unloaded) pistol, and missiles made of rolled up newsprint.

Here are the players taking a "curtain call," left to right, narrator John, Douglas Murphy as Sandison with pistol, and, as the mob, his son George, wife Catherine, and daughter Rita. Also in the audience were Cath's sister Jenny and husband Richard Rutte.





## 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.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Postcode.....

Tel No.....

Email address.....

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.

RETURN TO:

MARTIN GOSTWICK

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c/o RUSSELL HOUSE,

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