

Issue No 10
Spring 2011

Editor:
Martin Gostwick,
Secretary

Hugh's News

Newsletter of
The Friends of Hugh Miller



BACK TO THE FUTURE!

WE greet with relief and delight the National Trust for Scotland's appointment of a new full-time Curator/Manager to take charge of the Hugh Miller Museum and Birthplace Cottage.

She is **Dr Alix Powers-Jones**, at present director of The Highlanders Museum at Fort George, and she is due to take up her new post on May 30th.

Alix has kindly accepted our invitation to attend our next annual meeting (see p3) as a guest of honour. She sees this as an early chance to meet with some of Hugh Miller's most ardent supporters. She says she will be happy to answer questions, adding: "I shall also want to ask some, because I want to listen to everybody associated with Miller and the Museum and learn more about what is involved."

She says she is "very much looking forward to the challenge," and she stresses one of her priorities will be to "really drive forward the educational side." Her academic background is in bioarchaeology.

Alix's appointment is the direct result of the magnificent £600,000 anonymous lump sum donation to the Trust announced at its AGM on 25th September last year. It restores the Museum to the full-time management which ceased in August 2009 because of the Trust's then financial difficulties.



Frieda Gostwick, Sinclair Williamson, Janey Clarke and Zooulla Spirou wielding the tools to help Lydia Garden flourish

Mrs Zooula Spirou will continue in her role as Senior Visitor Assistant, and she will be supported by two seasonal Visitor Assistants, and several of the volunteers who came to the property's rescue during 2009 and last year.

These appointments return the property to the staffing levels it enjoyed for many years before the downsizing in 2009. The donation also restores the previous opening days of 7 days a week, from April to September (see Opening Times, p4 for details).

We will have a second guest of honour at the AGM, children's author **Ms Lesley Beake**, currently engaged on a novel, based on a young boy of today discovering the wild world of Hugh Miller's youth.



HELPING LYDIA'S FLOWERS BLOOM

MUSEUM staff, volunteers and members of the Friends joined forces on 21 March to bring order and beauty to the new Lydia Garden behind Hugh Miller's Cottage. They were led and guided by National Trust for Scotland gardens advisor Sinclair Williamson through a whole day's hard, yet highly enjoyable work.

Among the team was Miller's three times great granddaughter, Janey Clarke, who opened the garden on 10 April 2010 in honour of Hugh's wife Lydia and all their descendants. She said: "I am thrilled beyond words to get a fork in the ground of what was once the kaleyard of Hugh's family, and is now becoming a lovely garden, full of herbs, shrubs, roses and many other highly scented flowers."

Others taking part were Zooulla Spirou, the Senior Visitor Assistant who organised the "Volunteer Day", volunteers Frieda and Martin Gostwick, and Neil Urquhart.

Roses were pruned, old, leggy heathers removed, frost-killed shrubs dug up, weeds taken out, and the whole garden covered in some 25 bags of leaf-mould mulch kindly supplied from Brodie Castle. Fertiliser and manure are to be added later.

Sinclair Williamson's brief covers the gardens and grounds at Hugh Miller's, Brodie Castle, Leith Hall, Pitmedden and Culloden Battlefield. He also oversees the Trust's training scheme for students of horticulture, and the compilation of a massive pan-Trust plants database.

He commented: "We have made a good beginning to the cultivation of this small, but most attractive garden. Many more plants will be added as we go along. Gardening is always a continuous, creative process, building on the original plan."

What with the crisp, golden new thatch on the cottage roof, the tidied and refreshed Lydia Garden, and the rebuilt "Old Red" back wall, the Birthplace and surrounds are looking more attractive than for many a long year.



Darren Gilchrist, Donnie Mackenzie and Ross MacDonald have almost finished rebuilding the wall, with lime-pointing to follow

OLD WALL REBUILT LIKE NEW

ONE winter's day, the old wall at the back of Lydia Garden collapsed, sending big blocks of Old Red Sandstone cascading down over the rockery beneath it, and on to the terrace below.

It has been painstakingly rebuilt by Inverness contractor Donnie Mackenzie, and colleagues, stonemason Darren Gilchrist, and labourer Ross McDonald, over some three weeks, just in time for the new season starting 1 April. Darren, who relaid the wall, said: "I'm quite proud of what I've done, and I hope Hugh Miller the stonemason would be too."

All the original stone was re-used – to the last block – and one slab raised particular interest when found in the base of the wall. It was a skewputt, the lowest stone supporting the rest of a gable coping.

Darren speculated: "This block could have been dressed by Hugh himself, considering he built the cottage for his Aunt Jenny which is immediately adjacent." An exciting idea, but no way of proving it, one way or the other.

National Trust for Scotland surveyor Glyn Young commissioned the work, with a contribution from the Historic Scotland Annual Repair Grant scheme.



Could this skewputt have been dressed by Hugh Miller himself? A fascinating possibility occurs to Ross McDonald, Charlie Finlayson and Darren Gilchrist

THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER

FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING

7th MAY 2011

2.30PM, THE CROMARTY CENTRE (Old Brewery) Burnside Place, Cromarty

AGENDA

- 2.00. Doors open. Light refreshments served.
- 2.30. AGM begins.
Welcome to members and Nomination of Professor Trewin to Chair.
Introduction of Guests of Honour,
 Dr Alix Powers-Jones (New Curator/Manager) and Ms Lesley Beake (Author).
- 2.40. Apologies for absence.
- 2.45. Secretary's Annual Report.
- 3.00. Financial Report.
- 3.05. Election of Office Bearers and Management Committee
- 3.10. Invitation to Dr Powers-Jones (New Curator/Manager) to speak about her post.
- 3.20. Invitation to Ms Lesley Beake to speak about her new book.
- 3.25. Close of private annual meeting.

PUBLIC MEETING

3.45 – 4.45pm (approx)

ADDRESS

“An Immense Tract of Sea: Hugh Miller & the Moray Firth”

By

DR DAVID WORTHINGTON

Lecturer in History

University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI)

HUGH MILLER MUSEUM OPENING TIMES

1 APRIL – 30 SEPTEMBER

Daily, 12.00 – 5.00pm

1 – 31 OCTOBER

Tuesdays, Thursdays & Fridays

12.00 – 5.00pm

Contact: Mrs Zooulla Spirou, Senior Visitor Assistant,
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NEWS IN BRIEF

SIR THOMAS URQUHART

A conference to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the famously eccentric laird of Cromarty will take place at The Stables block, Cromarty Estate, on 15 & 16 April.

Sessions on the Friday cover Sir Thomas's lairdship, the religious controversies in which he participated, his literary legacy, and his invention of language. On Saturday, his translation of the great French author Rabelais is reviewed, and 17th Century historical period.

Full delegate places are almost filled, but there are day delegate, and session spaces available. Contact the Cromarty Arts Trust website, or email info@cromartyartstrust.org.uk or www.urquhartconference.org.uk.



The newly restored CROMARTY EAST CHURCH will be officially opened to the public at a religious service, to be conducted at 11.30am on 1 May.

The Church is expected to be opened daily thereafter and a visit is highly recommended, following the £1.2 million scheme to renew and repair its fabric which began in 2008 and is nearing completion.



CROMARTY COURTHOUSE MUSEUM will be open from Easter Sunday, 24 April, Sundays to Thursdays, 11.00 - 4.00pm until 30 September.



The gorgeous colours of the (East Church) pew decorations have been brought back to life