

Issue No 1
Summer 2006

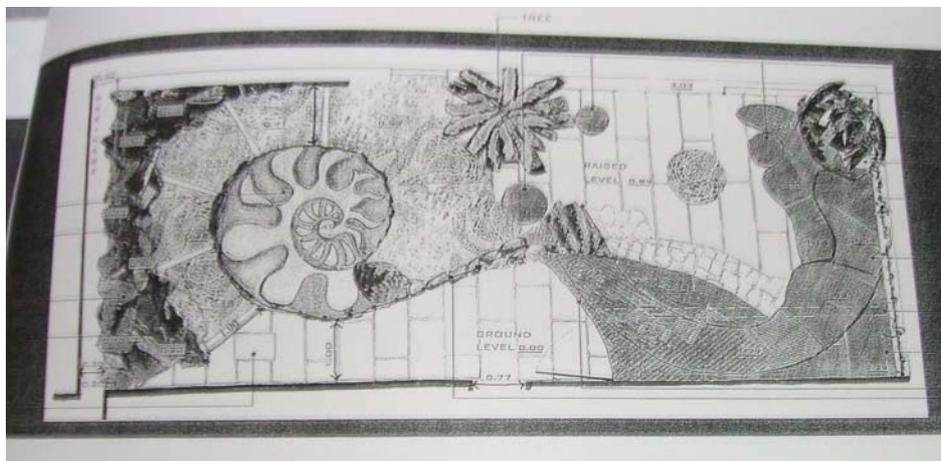
Hugh's News

Editor: Martin Gostwick,
Secretary

Newsletter of The Friends
of Hugh Miller



Hugh Miller (1802-1856)



MILLER'S YARD – GARDEN OF WONDERS

A National Trust for Scotland project team is developing what will probably be the most exciting addition to the museum for a generation – the new back garden to be known as Miller's Yard.

The outline design for the new development is shown here, and you will see it is about much more than the words “back garden” imply. It is a hugely exciting open activity space, an extra “room” for the museum, a dynamic open-air extension.

Its principal elements are a stairway, circling up and around an “ammonite-shaped” water feature sculpted in stone, taking visitors to a higher level, paved “piazza.” Facing the water feature, on the other side of the piazza, will be amphitheatre-style tiered wooden seating.

Striking artworks, such as mosaics, fossil images, and stone pieces inscribed with quotations, will be positioned in stair-rails, on the walls, in the paving, and in amongst ferns and other lush plants.

All these artifacts, natural and man-made, will reflect Miller's delving in the earth sciences, and his own stone-cutting skills, and his admiration for the traditional skilled crafts. The works will be commissioned and sourced from as many local artists as possible.

They will crowd into what is a small, but dramatic space. It is bounded on two sides by the rear of Miller House, and the west wall and thatched roof of the Birthplace Cottage, and on the other two sides, by high walls in the pinkish-red sandstone so special to Cromarty.

In good weather, the space is a true sun-trap which will fully justify calling its upper level a piazza. It has been designed not simply as striking to the eye, but also to give equal pleasure to people of impaired sight or hearing, and to provide the maximum possible access to those with restricted movement.

The Yard will be open to the public whenever the museum is open, offering an opportunity for rest, relaxation and contemplation in a unique setting. It will also function as a new venue

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at the property for events, such as story-telling, talks, music-making, and even receptions for distinguished visitors (like the Friends!)

Containing elements of architecture, horticulture, earth science, arts and crafts, and spiritual reflection, the Yard will serve as an educational resource enabling students of all ages and levels to explore what both the natural and built environments meant to Miller – and means to them.

It all adds up to an utter transformation from the present dull back yard, an anti-climax after the museum's exhibitions, with nothing but a fuchsia, a laurel bush, two flowerpots and a floor of bark chips.

The Yard is a major element in Cromarty's contribution to the Highland Year of Culture 2007, and since it has been awarded major funding by the Highland 2007 Community Programme, it must be completed next year. Opening is scheduled for the late summer.

The designs were prepared by the Trust's Head of Gardens Jan Haenraets, with the help of garden architecture placement students Anne Zaragoza of Versailles, France, and Sarah Foque, of Brussels, Belgium. Jan Haenraets and his colleague Ben Lyte will lead the project's implementation, supported by surveyors, archaeologists, fund-raisers, finance managers, and property-based staffs.

Highland Year of Culture 2007 has awarded a capital grant of £22,000. Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE Inverness and East Highland) has granted £15,000. The Trust has to find a further £17,000, and The Friends of Hugh Miller will seek to contribute to this by making an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's Awards for All scheme.

The schedule for implementation is as follows: Project Team established 3 August 2006; management contract to be awarded by 30 November 2006; archaeology survey, February 2007; Site works, March – July 2007; official opening 02 August 2007. We will keep you posted on developments as they progress.

SCENES AND LEGENDS REPRINT REQUESTED

WE learnt suddenly in July, when seeking to re-order, that the paperback edition of "Scenes", first republished in 1994, has gone out of print and out of stock. We contacted Mr Campbell Brown, managing director of Black and White Publishing, Edinburgh, to ascertain their plans, and learnt that a limited digital re-run is being considered. We have written to Mr Brown urging him to go ahead with this, because we consider it absolutely vital, for obvious reasons, to maintain as many Miller titles in print as possible.

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VISITSCOTLAND'S 5-STAR AWARD RETAINED – JUST!

THE museum is one of only a handful of Trust properties to enjoy VisitScotland's 5-star rating under its "Quality Assurance" scheme. First awarded when we opened Miller House in 2004, a second inspection in May this year had us holding our breath, but we just managed to hold on to the 85% minimum score required to keep the top grade.

The scoring comes in no less than 6 sections and a total of 44 categories. We scored 8 or 9 points out of 10, for our guidebook, signage, the appearance of the buildings, the appearance, attitude and efficiency of staff, interior layout and decor, presentation, general cleanliness.

An "outstanding" 10 out of 10 was awarded for what is probably the most important category of all – interpretation. Top marks came with the comment: "Overall, the attraction is presented in a very engaging and effective way, which is likely to surpass visitor expectations and increase awareness of its hitherto neglected and perhaps largely unknown subject."

The shop scored well for quality of merchandise, and particularly for local and regional variety as well as the expected NTS items.

Proof of the value of these gradings came with the couple touring Scotland who said they were visiting ONLY those attractions carrying all 5 stars, and this was "one of the very best."

The museum also scored 85.4% in the latest of our twice-yearly Mystery Visit audits of customer care, which, while not as high as last year, was still well above regional and national Trust averages.

CLAN DAVIDSON INTEREST

ONE of our members, Mr Nick Hide, membership secretary of Clan Davidson, has asked if we could request any Friends with connections or associations with "the wider Davidson family" to make contact with him to aid his researches.

Mr Hide tells us that Army agent, entrepreneur and Cromarty laird/benefactor George Ross had a Cromarty-born junior partner, Henry Davidson, who also made a fortune. Henry married the daughter of a Cromarty shipmaster, John Mackenzie. The Hugh Miller connection is of course with the Free Church minister, Rev John Davidson, who married his daughter, Harriet.

Anyone who feels they have information worth offering can write to: Mr Nick Hide (M'ship Sec, Clan Davidson), 58 Chandos Avenue, Whetstone, LONDON N20 9DX. Or Email: nickhide@msn.com.

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Domestic bliss returns to Miller House

By Angela Lynch
Senior Property Guide

IT IS over 15 years since house martins regularly nested in the angle of Hugh Miller's Cottage front door, delighting visitors with the chirruping right over their heads. And great was the regret when an overzealous cleaner destroyed their nest, apparently putting them off ever coming back. So it is a matter of joy that the birds have at last returned, this time to Miller House.

They first reappeared in 2005, and we were on tenterhooks this summer to see if they would come nesting again. They "performed" last year, simultaneously with live presentations of a short play depicting scenes of Hugh and Lydia Miller's early married life. Actors and birds thus injected new life into the elegant Georgian house, inside and out.

It seems that we are particularly privileged in that ours appears to be the only building in Church Street to have been selected, in Lydia's own words, as being "bien and comfortable" enough for the nesting birds. Why this is so is a mystery but we think it may have something to do with the fact that the lintels surrounding the windows are bare, unpainted stone – perhaps an easier surface upon which to affix the martins' distinctive mud-shell nests.

Staff and visitors alike are fascinated by the to-ing and fro-ing of these twittering migrants and are thrilled to get a, literally, bird's-eye, view of them through the first floor windows, busily constructing their nests in late Spring and, later, seeing the tiny fledglings (three at the last count!) peeping out of the entrance, and being constantly fed by their parents.

They make an awful mess, but with a little help from us, the parents have put out a notice as follows: "We apologise for the state of the windows! Cleaning has been suspended until our young ones have flown the nest. Kindest regards Mr and Mrs House Martin."

Needless to say, our window-cleaner has the most urgent request to clean the windows when they have gone, but NOT the nest. We have been told that martins were once to be seen crowding the sky in Cromarty, but their numbers and migration patterns have been severely affected by climate change, so we are taking all the care we can to encourage "repeat visits," especially having lost them once before.

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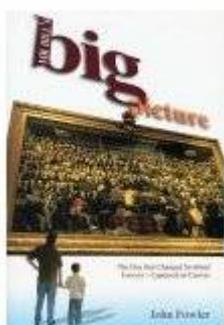
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Although not expert ornithologists, staff are often asked about the birds, the most common question being one of identification: “ Are they swallows or house martins?” Well we have looked at the books and watched Bill Oddie on TV and can now confidently state that these are definitely house martins. (In fact, we call them *Martin's* martins, after our Property Manager – Martin Gostwick!).

The simplest way to recognise the difference between the swallow and the martin is by the shape of the tail. Swallows have very distinctive long tails streamers. They also have a bright chestnut coloured throat and chest. House martins, on the other hand, have a relatively short forked tail and an almost pure white throat and chest.

We also know that, having done their bit to recruit new members for the National Trust for Scotland, they fly off to warmer climes and spend the “low season” in North Africa. Last year there was just one nest, but martins are known to return to their birth place to rear their own young in subsequent years. Comparing the *two* nests that have appeared this year, it seems that the new pair may be last year's returned fledglings, one of the nests being a neat and elegant construction, whilst the other is charmingly higgledy-piggledy and informal; not unlike Miller House and its neighbour, the Birthplace Cottage!

RECOMMENDED READ



Mr Hill's Big Picture, by John Fowler, Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh 2006, ISBN 0-7152-0823-3. £8.99.

Subtitled *The Day that Changed Scotland Forever - Captured on Canvas*, this is the enthralling story of how David Octavius Hill came to paint more than 450 leading participants in The Disruption of 1843 on a single canvas. It is written in a lively, journalistic style, capturing the drama of the event, and the epic of the painting itself. It is also admirably objective and balanced. Miller's important role is given due weight.

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HUTTON TRAIL OPENS

AN article in *Earth Heritage*, the geological conservation magazine (Issue 26, summer 2006) reports the placing of new interpretation panels at key points of James Hutton's field researches, including the classic unconformity section at Siccar Point, part of the National Trust for Scotland's National Nature Reserve at St Abb's Head.

A Hutton wall sculpture has also been completed in Jedburgh.

Visit the website www.james-hutton.org.uk.

WRITING PAPER –INTRODUCTORY OFFER



Hugh Miller Ale, the “champagne beer” brewed for his Bicentenary, has reached the end of production after five successful years. NTS has replaced the ale with a line in beautiful, specially designed writing paper packs. Each pack contains 10 sheets and five envelopes, each sheet carrying one of a pair of designs, on finest quality Conqueror writing paper. One pair of designs features Hugh and Lydia Miller, a second, an Eathie ammonite and a fossil *Cupressocrinus Crassus*, and a third offers two images of the museum, one of them being Harriet's painting of “My father's birthplace”. We are also stocking a bookmark bearing a copy of HM's signature.

These are products designed by Cromarty Cameos, a venture of Friends trustee May Hunter, of ? Cottage, Cromarty, who has also produced the Friends stationery.

The packs are retailing at £4 each, the bookmark at £1.50. We are offering Friends members discounts on both, of 50p and 25p respectively (£3.50 & £1.25), and a £1 discount on pack and bookmark combined (£5). Place your orders by writing, emailing, or telephoning me. Postage and packing is included in the offer.

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