

Issue No 8
Summer 2010

Editor:
Martin Gostwick,
Secretary

Hugh's News

Newsletter of
The Friends of Hugh Miller



STOP PRESS

5-STAR GRADING

The Museum has again been granted 5-Star grade as a tourist attraction by the Scottish tourist board, Visit Scotland, one of only a handful in the entire National Trust for Scotland portfolio of properties to hold this status. It has achieved and sustained this rating since its opening in June 2004. *More next issue.*

MILLER'S YARD

Miller's Yard: Garden of Wonders has won the Place Making category in Inverness Architectural Association's 2010 Moray Design Awards for the Highland Central Area. It will now go forward to the Awards finals covering all five Highland areas, which will be held in the Strathpeffer Pavilion on November 12.

STOP PRESS

FLOWERS OF THE BIRTHPLACE

Mrs JANEY CLARKE was the heroine of the hour as she opened Lydia Garden on April 10th 2010 with a moving tribute to her mother and her aunt.

It was a lovely sunny morning as Janey and other descendants and supporters gathered round at the top of the redesigned and replanted borders.

Janey declared it a great honour to open this addition to the museum's attractions. She paid tribute to Frieda and Martin Gostwick for their part in advancing knowledge of Hugh Miller's life and work.

She then reminded us all that the previous wild Scottish garden here had become very overgrown, and Martin had sought the advice of her aunt, Mrs Bright Gordon about what to do.

Bright, a trained botanist, who maintains a magnificent garden at her home, Rosefarm, had proposed developing three themes as a natural progression:

Retaining elements of the former wild garden with plants used in olden times for cooking and healing; introducing cultivars which had been bred from the wild plants; and adding modern garden plants.



Janey Clarke, three times great grand-daughter of Hugh and Lydia Miller, an enthusiastic volunteer

And Bright suggested renaming the garden for Hugh's wife Lydia. This was intended as a tribute to her late sister, Mrs Marian McKenzie Johnston, who had done so much to ensure Lydia received her due recognition, as a writer, and editor of Hugh's books.

She added: "The family hope that the theme of looking to the future will be carried forward by Hugh Miller's descendants, and they will continue to support the museum in the way that my grandmother Winifred Middleton, my aunts Marian, Bright and Rosemary, and my mother Lydia had done."



At the opening, back row, from left, Sylvia Clarke, Sue Rider Busby, Louisa Heard, Janey Clarke, James Clarke, Lindsay Clarke. Front row: Frieda Gostwick, Martin Gostwick, Zooulla Spirou

The name was also chosen "in remembrance of my mother, Lydia Miller Clarke, who sadly passed away three years ago."

Janey recalled: "My mother was very proud of being descended from Hugh Miller and her greatest love was gardening. I know she would have been delighted to share with her great, great grandmother the giving of her name to this beautiful garden. She has come home. In this week of my mother's birthday, I name this garden, The Lydia Garden."

Her Aunt Bright is in poor health, and those present at this event, and the annual meeting which followed, sent her their very best wishes, and thanks for her contribution towards a significant new attraction.

The Friends of Hugh Miller as a supporting charity is very proud that it financed this project in its entirety. It cost a total of £4,500, consuming a large part of its limited funds.

As Martin Gostwick told the organisation's annual meeting later that day: "Enhancing the Museum and its grounds is a large part of what we are here for."

Although all the plantings are in their infancy, the space is already drawing admiring comments from the public. Additional interpretation is planned for visitors, so they will learn of the family link behind it, and more easily identify the plants.

Space does not permit any detailed description of the garden here. It is hoped our members and the wider public will come to see for themselves.

It is a walk-around garden, replacing the wild one which could only be viewed from the central path. A new crescent-shaped path in fossil-bearing sandstone takes you round a "fragrance garden," highlighted by pillars of climbing roses and strongly scented flowers.

A walk-in area takes you amid the herb garden full of marjoram, angelica, lovage, hisop, arnica, a bay tree, rosemary and thyme. Rowan, holly, birch and wild iris have been retained from the old garden at the top end, where the terrace has been extended with additional flagstone paving.

Landscape gardener who designed the space was Jerry Pamphilon (who was also previously responsible for the borders in Miller's Yard). The contractor was Fountains Enterprises of Munloch.



Aptly named "junglebuster" Dave Linn removes old rotting wattle fence from former overgrown garden

NEW ROOF – STRONGER FUTURE?

HUGH MILLER'S COTTAGE roof is to be re-thatched this summer in one of the most significant conservation projects in the property's history.

And during the operation, archaeological investigations may help to give more accurate dating for the building's erection, which has been the subject of conjecture for decades.

The re-roofing became imperative once the building suffered serious water ingress in the summer of 2008. The existing thatch had thinned to about half its first width, having in later years undergone serious bird predation.

Laid in 1977, it had long outlasted its originally estimated shelf life of about 25 years.

This is a National Trust for Scotland capital project with a budget provision of £30,000, and is being carried out under the Historic Scotland annual repair grant scheme, which contributes a substantial proportion of the cost.

The project is scheduled to start on 2 August, and to take ten weeks. Master thatcher Graham Carter will be laying an immense quantity - some 1600 bundles - of river reed.

Mr Carter is the youngest member of the East Anglia Thatchers' Association, and was picked for the work based on his experience of Scottish thatching in the conservation village of Fortingall in Glenlyon.

Sourcing the thatch to be used has itself proved fraught with difficulties.

NTS surveyor Glyn Young said the thatching material eventually chosen is "as near a like-for-like replacement as possible of the present reed which was supplied from the beds on the River Tay in Perthshire."



Thatch from rear, in Miller's Yard



One of the most photographed roofs in Scotland, but now it's 33 years old and leaking

He said the original roofing of the cottage built by Miller's great great grandfather John Feddes around the turn of the 17th Century would probably have consisted of long straw bedded on clay.

This had a very brief durability of three to five years, but could easily be replenished in those days from local sources no longer available. Modern farming usage of nitrates and fertilisers has weakened the cellulose structure and shortened the stem. High grade long straw is now very scarce. It was thus not practicable to revert to that type of cover.

It had proved impossible to re-source reed from the Tay, because of a harvest failure last year, and because its quality had deteriorated since the beds changed from commercial production to bird habitat.

Norfolk reed was not viable either since the best of it is retained by thatchers in that area to meet the very high demand for it in several counties of Southern England.

The reed finally selected, in agreement with Historic Scotland conservators, has been imported from Continental Europe, hand-cut, and carrying a stronger cellulose wall and a wider, longer stem, than that now available from the Tay.

Once the present thatch has been stripped, the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) is to conduct a detailed dendrochronological study of the timbers forming the roof's support frame.



Lydia Garden looking towards the cottage

Most of the original timbers are still in place, supplemented by some replacement timbers on the higher line installed in 1977. Samples of the earliest timbers will be taken to analyse their growth structure. The resultant dating will then be compared with the year 1711 which is carved in to the marriage lintel in the Cottage interior.

This has long been assumed as the date of construction, but more recent research has suggested building began around 1698.

Before re-thatching, some other essential repairs will be effected, including sandblasting and redecorating the rusty skylights, and improvements to the lead weathering where it meets the crow steps.

During the thatching, Graham Carter has agreed to give opportunities to apprentices training with the Construction Skills organisation to acquaint themselves with his ancient craft, and to provide demonstration days for students at Fortrose Academy, and provisionally Cromarty Primary School.

An interpretation panel on the Cottage railings will explain the works to the visiting public, who will continue to have access to the Cottage interior, but not the Courtyard, or Lydia Garden. Visitors will also be able to view the work on the western half of the roof from Miller's Yard, behind Miller House.

Farmer John Henderson of Udale Farm, near Poyntzfield, has kindly accommodated the very large stack of material on his premises pending the start of works.

He said: "I've been happy to help out, although there's more of it than I bargained for. Visitors have been asking if I'm taking the slate off a steading and putting this thatch on instead. "I hope it will generate a lot of public interest when it starts going up on Hugh Miller's Cottage."



The reed stacked at Udale Farm

BEAUTIES IN BIRCH BARK

By Martin Gostwick

A Highlands-based retired forester, Bryce Reynard, has single-handedly revived a long lost craft in Scotland – the making of all manner of beautiful objects with the bark of silver birch.

And now a magnificent example of his craftsmanship is on display in our Museum.

Bryce was visiting the Birthplace Cottage one fine summer's afternoon, when he became intrigued by a box said to replicate one in which Hugh kept his first "library" as a boy.

On being told by a member of staff that this box had been imported through a mail order company from Siberia, Bryce remarked: "I can make a better one than that for you, out of native Scottish birchwood."

He said that the practice of making household storage wares with birchbark was still quite common in the great forested hinterlands of northern Europe, but it had long since died out in Scotland.

He first came to the craft, late in a 42-year career with the Forestry Commission, when in 1999 he attended a masterclass in basketmaking with birch given by two Danish tutors, using Swedish wood, at Tore village hall on the Black Isle.

He thought he had learned most of what there is to know about timber husbandry, during postings in Argyll, Glenmore, Isle of Mull, Edinburgh, and latterly in Inverness and Dingwall, gaining experience on establishing new forests, harvesting, tree nurseries, provision of recreational facilities, wind and root studies, and industry regulation.



Bryce Reynard presents volunteer Frieda Gostwick with the box

However, he found it a "mind-blowing" experience to learn about a form of harvesting completely new to him, in the enormous range of articles northern Scandinavians made and still make with bark and roots. The Sami people, for instance, produce hats, shoes and rucksacks as well as a wide variety of baskets.

Bryce determined there and then to see what he could do with Scottish material.

He says: "The range of artefacts that can be made from birch bark are only limited by one's imagination. As well as round and square baskets I make flowers, toys, wall decorations, Christmas decorations, lampshades, pencils, bookmarks and cards."

He does it as a hobby. He says it takes far too long to work into products, for it ever to be commercially viable. Many friends and acquaintances commission pieces, and The Friends of Hugh Miller commissioned a new Miller "library" box from him with alacrity.

All the bark he uses is taken from woodlands ("always with the owner's permission of course!") from the Highlands round Inverness, but he is sure supplies could be found the length of the country. "You can go from the centre of Inverness to the centre of Glasgow, and not be out of sight of a birch tree."

Size of tree, rather than age, is critical, "the size of an average human thigh is about right," and he takes a ladder to peel the bark from the middle to upper reaches of a tree, the lower part being too rough. "You lose a lot to knots."

The best time to harvest is when the sap starts to rise in the late Spring, stretching into Summer. "The bark also peels easier when the moon is waxing," he says. He peels round the tree, not up and down. Removing the outer bark layer will not harm the tree.

It comes as a surprise to many, given the outer skin has its brightly silver hue, that the reverse side is an ochre shade, "like a digestive biscuit," with warm brown and gold variations either side of that.

For each product, he first writes a descriptive text, and line-draws the design. He found inspiration in French shellfish baskets, and he has been influenced also by native crafts in the Amazonian Rain Forest.

His tools are "fairly basic, not specialised." His table is a dressmaker's cutting board; he cuts with a Stanley knife, he measures with a steel rule, marks with a pencil, and hones with a flat file. He steams the bark for bending in boiling water in a sink, and used wooden sprung clothes pegs to clamp cut strips. He uses a long, narrow-handled teaspoon to guide strips of bark under and over each other.



Some of Bryce's wares

Hugh Miller's library box embodies a formidable amount of material and labour. It measures 44cm width x 34cm depth x 16cm deep, including lid. It is a fair size, indeed, and contains no less than 50 metres of bark end to end. It is woven in strips four layers thick, each strip measuring 2cm wide. Bryce estimated it took him a total of 29 hours.

He comments modestly: "The trick, as in all crafts, is to try to make things as simple and easy to do as possible." However his reticence conceals the very considerable manual skills and patience involved. The box has no natural or artificial fixings whatever, no glues, screws, dowels, stitches or ties; the weaving alone holds it all robustly together.

Bryce remarks: "A well-made artefact in birch bark, if handled reasonably, has a shelf life of forever."

It is easy to see why he reckons the labour – and the shelf life - forbids such craftwork ever being a viable business proposition, and why therefore he fears he may be the first and last crafts worker to take it up in Scotland..

He is a most industrious producer, however, whose output has found many good homes. The boy Hugh who had read all the children's classics of his day, and much more theoretically "grown up" literature, like Homer's Iliad, before the age of 10, would have been proud to house his treasures in Bryce's box, and that copies of those same books are sitting in it today in the cottage of his birth.

FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING REPORTS

FORTROSE COMMUNITY THEATRE 10TH APRIL 2010

ELECTRIFYING PORTRAIT

AUTHOR James Robertson fired up his audience with what may have been the most rounded picture of Hugh Miller the man of faith, scientist, writer and editor, ever put together.



James Robertson

But first, he reflected on the uncertain future of Miller's Museum – and of museums the length and breadth of the country, resulting from Britain's billions of public debt.

He warned that the closure of any one museum would adversely affect all the rest – a grimly prescient warning given that a few weeks later, all 19 independent museums in the Highlands have come under threat.

James recorded his encounters with Miller from boyhood, through to first reading Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters* some 20 years ago, and subsequent rambles of his own in Miller's footsteps.

He saw Miller's carving in 1846 of his initials into the Dwarfie Stane on Hoy in the Orkneys. James's own ancestors are buried in the old Kiltarn graveyard in Easter Ross, and the Black Rock of Kiltarn provided the scenery for the dreadful gorge in his novel *The Testament of Gideon Mack*.

He said: "Miller's life and work, and his writings, give us a cultural, intellectual, social historical, religious, scientific and legendary map of Scotland in the first half of the 19th Century."

He was "a man of rationalism, yet who appears to have been spooked or at least fascinated by the supernatural. A man determined to make his way in the world with honesty and hard labour, yet also happy to mythologise his own life story."

Concerning Miller as editor, James remarked: "We are bombarded with so much meaningless froth these days that Miller's informed and informative delight in the real world, his engagement with the world of legend and folklore, and his passionate involvement with social, scientific and religious matters, are all hugely refreshing."

James cited numerous examples of Miller's riveting descriptive powers, and his damning of the politicians responsible for the first Afghanistan War of 1839-42. "One can well imagine him lashing today's politicians, bankers, union and business leaders on subjects such as correct practices, absence of principle and dereliction of duty."

Of Miller the geologist, James said: "He wanted both to lose himself in the world's mysteries, and understand its complexities." He reserved some of his harshest words for "anti-geologists," – religious fundamentalists.

He concluded that, "Yes, Miller is still a significant figure, I would argue at a national and international level, but certainly at a local and Highland level, which is why the uncertainty of the future of the Cottage at Cromarty is something that should concern all of us."



UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS

SECRETARY'S REPORT, 2009/10

(Please note: This report has been amended, since delivery, with some information transferred to other articles).

WE at the Hugh Miller Museum have been through a crisis unprecedented in its nearly 120-year history.

In March 2009, we were suddenly presented by the National Trust for Scotland with the threat of outright closure. This, although we knew the Trust as a whole was in financial crisis, came completely out of the blue.

We could spend a lot of time lamenting this, but it would serve no purpose. Suffice it to say that the full-time post of Property Manager was terminated with effect from August 11, 2009, the seasonal staff reduced to one, and the opening days cut from 7 to 4. These drastic cost cutbacks saved the Museum from closure.

The outgoing Property Manager's rapid recruitment of some 12 volunteers also enabled us to remain open on the reduced basis outlined. These volunteers, most of whom have come forward again this season, should be very warmly thanked.

I believe it was also the sustained public pressure which was placed on the Board of the Trust which helped to ensure we kept the doors open. Shoals of letters were sent to the Head Office, and one of our local councillors, Craig Fraser, launched not one, but two online petitions, one for the general public under his own name, and one on behalf of his party. I feel we should applaud all those who wrote in, and Cllr Fraser in particular, for their efforts.

I would like to introduce at this point Mrs Zooulla Spirou, the Senior Visitor Assistant, who came on board last year, and effectively took over the day-to-day running of the property after my redundancy took effect. Coming to the job cold as it were, she has done superbly so far in keeping the place open and working well, and she has a contract to continue in the same role this year.

The Museum will be operating on the same footing in 2010, that is, open from Sundays to Wednesdays from 1pm to 5pm, with Zooulla in charge, supported by a team of volunteers. It would be difficult to over-emphasise the role volunteers will need to play, in terms of staffing one of the two buildings every day they are open, as well as carrying out essential maintenance on the two gardens.

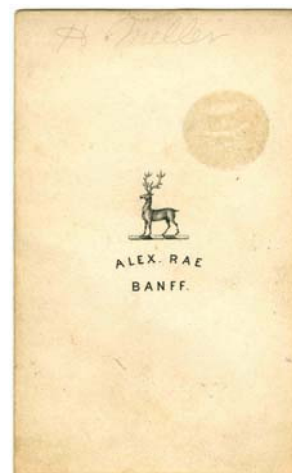
As for our future, it is very difficult to predict what will happen beyond the end of this season. Discussions are continuing between the National Trust for Scotland, the Trustees of our neighbours the Cromarty Courthouse Museum, and the Cromarty East Church, as well as The Friends, about the possibilities of developing more partnership arrangements with them.

If our Museum is to remain open in the future, the critical factor will be covering the staffing salaries and wages costs, at whatever level is sustainable. We, The Friends of Hugh Miller, responded to the Trust's funding crisis by launching an appeal last year, to which members most generously responded by contributing nearly £750. That sum would be sufficient to pay for a Seasonal Assistant for approximately a season and a half, but NTS has not asked us as yet for any contribution. It is a fund in reserve. We as The Friends have to consider further what we can do to keep the Museum open to the public, regardless of any outcome to discussions with our neighbours.

Because of our crisis, The Friends felt there was all the more need for the Museum to keep progressing and developing new facilities.

The above details the replanting and naming of The Lydia Garden, behind the Birthplace Cottage. We also report in this Newsletter the acquisitions of two significant artefacts for the Museum – a birchbark "library box" commissioned at a cost of £150 from forester Bryce Reynard, and a very rare Carte de Visite.

As you see, the calling card bears an image of Miller on one side, and on the reverse, the name "Alex. Rae" and the town, "Banff." We believe Alex Rae was the photographer, and that this card may have been one of a batch Miller had made for himself. It was purchased on the net for £150 from Patrick Pollok Rare Books.



The Carte de Visite

These are developments which surely bode well for the Museum's future in the longer term.

LOSS OF PATRON

We suffered the grievous loss of our patron, Mrs Marian McKenzie Johnston, who passed away aged 87 on 23rd October last year. We pay tribute to the zeal, energy and love which she brought to contributions which were beyond measure valuable to the Museum, in partnership with her husband Henry. We can only summarise: A full Genealogical Chart which took 10 arduous years of research to complete, and, collaborating with our celebrated local author Elizabeth Sutherland, they achieved the first biography of Lydia Fraser ever published. She opened Miller House in 2004, and donated a family heirloom, a tea-set more than two centuries old. I am pleased to announce that her daughter, Mrs Stephanie Kulesja, has agreed to step into her mother's shoes as Patron.

Martin Gostwick, Secretary

Saturday 10th April 2010

FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER FINANCIAL STATEMENT 2009/10

The following financial statement is a true and fair assessment of the income and expenditure for the Friends of Hugh Miller for the period 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Financial Statement as at 31 March 2010		£
Opening Balance at Bank as at 1 April 2009		4291.90
<i><u>INCOME</u></i>	£	
Membership Subscriptions	846.00	
Donations	350.00	
Hugh Miller Appeal	742.00	
Gift Aid (OSCR)	510.24	
Bank Interest	2.00	
		2450.24
		6742.14
<i><u>EXPENDITURE</u></i>	£	
Andrew Dowsett – Powerpoint Presentations	255.00	
Spectrum Centre	20.00	
Prof N Trewin – Travel Expenses	80.26	
Junglebusters	415.00	
Printing - NTS	276.51	
Cromarty History Society	10.00	
Bryce Reynard – Birch Basket/Box	150.00	1206.77
Closing Balance as at 31 March 2010		5535.37

Prepared: Sheona Leonard MCMI

Treasurer

Friends of Hugh Miller

7 April 2010

STRENGTHENED BODY

The severe cutbacks experienced by the Museum, and other factors connected with its management, have necessitated changes to the Constitution, which the annual meeting agreed, and which actually strengthen the organisation.

A most important development was the agreement to expand the Management Committee from four to up to eight members. This will make The Friends more effective in its decision making and administration.

A new post of Chairman has been introduced, to which one of our Patrons, Professor Nigel Trewin, was elected. Martin Gostwick was re-elected Secretary, and Mrs Sheona Leonard Treasurer. These are the three office bearers.

Dr Ralph O'Connor, history lecturer at Aberdeen University, who made such an impact at the 2008 meeting with his address on Miller, and subsequently published an epic work on geology as spectacle, *The Earth on Show*, has also been elected.

The committee was further greatly strengthened by the additions of Mr Henry McKenzie Johnston, widower of the Millers' great grand-daughter, Mrs Marian McKenzie Johnston, and by a direct descendant, Mrs Sue Rider Busby.

Cromarty residents Mrs May Hunter and The Rev Ken Dupar were re-elected.

These management changes are incorporated in re-wording to Article 5 in the Constitution, Structure (see below).

Please note that The Friends have welcomed Mrs Stephanie Kulesja's acceptance of an invitation to be a Patron of The Friends, taking on the role so splendidly filled by her late mother.

We have received intimation from another Patron, Dr Lester Borley CBE, that he wishes to step down from the role, to "make way for someone younger and with more energy." It would be difficult to find anyone more energetic than Lester has been, but the Management Committee is now open to nominations to fill the vacancy. Lester remains with us as Patron until then.

Other descendants who took out membership of the Friends at the annual meeting were Mrs Miranda Kitchen, and Ms Lindsay Clarke.

Significant amendments have been introduced to Article 1, Aims, specifying, for instance, projecting Miller's legacy in printed publications and other media, acquisition of artefacts, and enhancement of the two gardens.

Article 1, Aims, also lays down a new requirement on The Friends to seek to provide the Museum with volunteers from among its members. These amendments to the Aims reflect activities which the group has already undertaken.

Here follows the revised constitution in full:

CONSTITUTION OF "THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER" (SC 037351)

(AS REVISED BY ANNUAL MEETING, 10/04/2010)

1.0 NAME

The organisation shall be known as "The Friends of Hugh Miller", hereafter referred to as "The Friends", or "the organisation", as appropriate.

2.0 AIMS

The objects of "The Friends" shall be to advance the education of the public concerning the name and work of Hugh Miller in the fields of Scottish science and literature, and to develop increased public interest in Scotland's heritage by supporting the Hugh Miller Museum and Birthplace Cottage, Church Street, Cromarty IV11 8XA, Ross & Cromarty, Scotland.

The subsidiary objectives of the organisation will therefore include:

- 2.1 Endeavouring to enrol and maintain a subscription membership whose role will be to assist the custodians of the museum, namely the National Trust for Scotland, in pursuing the above aims.
- 2.2 Encouraging and assisting in attracting as many visitors to the Hugh Miller Museum as possible.
- 2.3 Furthering all the organisation's aims by encouraging others to become Friends.
- 2.4 Fund-raising in support of developments at the Museum buildings and grounds, with emphases, for example, on projecting Miller's legacy through publications in print and other media, the acquisitions of artefacts, and enhancement of the gardens.
- 2.5 The Friends will endeavour to assist Museum salaried staff through the services of volunteers from among its members.

3.0 MEMBERSHIP & SUBSCRIPTIONS

Membership is open to all who wish to see the achievement of the organisation's primary and subsidiary aims. The Friends as an organisation will encourage those who have not yet done so, to become members of the National Trust for Scotland.

There shall be a single membership category of Friends, with an annual subscription of £10. The Financial Year of the organisation will run from 1st April to 31st March of the following year. The first year begins from 1st April 2006, and subscriptions will be renewable from the 1st April of each following year, payable within 30 days, after which membership automatically lapses.

4.0 FINANCE

The funding of "The Friends" shall consist of membership subscriptions, individual and corporate, donations, and appeals for funds to finance specific projects. A bank account shall operate in the name of "The Friends of Hugh Miller," whose signatories shall be the organisation's Secretary and Treasurer. Accounts shall be kept by the Treasurer to show

income and expenditure. The accounts will be audited, presented for approval to an annual general meeting (AGM), and subsequently submitted to OSCR, the Scottish Charities Regulator.

5.0 STRUCTURE

The Friends shall have up to three honorary patrons. The administrative structure shall consist of a Management Committee comprising Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and up to five additional members. They will be representative of Hugh Miller's interests, and of the membership as a whole, and people actively involved locally in supporting the Museum.

5.1 NOMINATIONS & ELECTIONS

Each AGM will nominate and elect the three office bearers, namely the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, and the members of the Management Committee. Posts on the Committee must be open to alternative nominations, and existing office-bearers must be willing to offer to stand down after three years' service.

5.2 INFORMATION & MEETINGS

The Secretary will submit an annual report on the organisation's activities for approval to each AGM. The annual meeting will be held conjointly with a public meeting, to be addressed by an invited speaker on a key facet of Miller's legacy. The organisation will produce reports of all its meetings, including the annual meeting, in periodical newsletters, and other communications, for circulation to the membership, and to any other interested parties by agreement of the Management Committee.

6.0 BENEFITS

The primary beneficiary will be the Museum itself, through the generous support of the Friends. For members of The Friends, the benefits will include a membership card, free entry to the Museum, attendance at annual and other meetings, and the periodical newsletters.

7.0 REVIEWS

All aspects of The Friends' constitution and administration shall be subject to review and change, on the initiative of the Management Committee, and/or on the basis of proposals from Friends' members placed before the annual meeting. Items of future consideration may include the subscription rate, meeting attendance charges and other financial factors. All suggestions made by Friends members for the development of the property and for events and activities will be considered by the Management Committee.

7.1 DISSOLUTION

The Friends may be dissolved as an organisation in the event of a failure for whatever reason/s to sustain itself as an active body. A winding up would be effected by a Management Committee recommendation to the existing membership at the time, which recommendation would require acceptance by at least 50 per cent of those responding. Following wind-up, any remaining assets would pass to the National Trust for Scotland.

STILL IN THE BALANCE

NATIONAL Trust for Scotland (NTS) Chief Executive Kate Mavor could not offer any cast-iron guarantees on the Museum's future when the Secretary, Martin Gostwick, questioned her at a meeting at Trust HQ on May 13.

She did say, however, that she hoped all the properties, including those facing possible closure, would "remain within the fold."

She said the Trust was in a much better position than last year. The financial situation was "stabilised." Visitor numbers were rising, revenue increasing, and membership had gone up to over 310,000.

NTS faced a need, either to get costs down further, or bring in more money. This year, NTS had "a very tight budget, with no wriggle room." She acknowledged staff had been "very stretched, perhaps stretched too far."

The meeting was the Chairman's Lunch, an annual event hosted by NTS for its Members' Centres and Friends Groups, which Martin Gostwick attended on behalf of The Friends of Hugh Miller.



CONNECTED LIVES

VALUABLE new links have been established between our Museum and the new heritage centre in Thurso, known as Caithness Horizons.

Secretary Martin Gostwick assisted in the preparation of, and attended a conference there on the theme of "Darwin-Miller-Dick: Connected Lives" on January 28.

A highlight of this conference was the celebration of the collaboration between the Thurso baker Robert Dick, and Miller, brought to life in the splendid new exhibition of Dick's life and work there.

Caithness Horizons education officer Christine Russell presented a vivid psychological portrait of Robert Dick as a naturalist of scarcely credible energy and enterprise, courage and integrity – yet a person so blunt and forthright in manner that he may have been hard for some to like.

Professor Nigel Trewin spoke of 40 years delving in the Achanarras Quarry, where lie "the best preserved Middle Devonian fish in the world, full stop."

He appealed to those responsible for conserving Caithness heritage to create a representative display of fossil fish, which were one of the area's most outstanding features, with "more people interested in these specimens than there were in the 19th Century."



Robert Dick's portrait on poster in Caithness Horizons exhibition



Exhibits of Dick artifacts

Curator Joanne Howdle asked for help in documenting some of the museum's collections.

Dr Ralph O'Connor of Aberdeen University expounded on "The Evolution of Creation: Science and Religion before the Origin of Species."

"Connected Lives" also means retaining connected museums, and The Friends of Hugh Miller wishes Caithness Horizons

every success in resisting serious funding cutbacks which now threaten all the Highland's independent museums. Members are highly recommended to visit Caithness Horizons, Old Town Hall, Thurso KW14 8AJ. Tel 01847 896508. Email: info@caithnesshorizons.co.uk.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

SAY 'NO' TO A CULTURAL WASTELAND!

The Friends of Hugh Miller Management Committee wishes to alert all members to the grave proposals of The Highland Council, to reduce funding to 19 Museums in the region's independent sector in the financial year 2011/12. These proposals have been circulated to the public in a consultation exercise.

Our Museum is not directly affected financially by these threatened cutbacks, since it is owned and managed by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), and does not receive funding from the Council. However, our Management Committee feels that if these independent museums lose vital financial aid, the impact on our Museum could be serious in a number of aspects.

As an independent charity, we cannot claim to speak for the Trust. However, the committee feels that as a body, and as individual members we have a right to express our concern and make representations to the authority as a contribution to the consultation process.

We wish to express our strongest support for the retention and development of all 19 Museums, recognising that our Museum's own future is linked with theirs. We oppose The Highland Council's proposed option to withdraw vital funding of £14,500 a year to all of these bodies. **We have been reliably informed that the loss of this funding would lead to the inevitable closure of most of them.**

Equally, we oppose the Council's alternative options of closing Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, and the Highland Folk Museum at Newtonmore.

Our most pressing concern is with the potential damage to tourism in the region, and to the immediate localities involved, that would be incurred by the loss of these attractions. While we recognise the importance of all the attractions affected, we must note that eight of them are situated in The Black Isle, and Ross and Cromarty areas, and their possible closure or substantially reduced operation would inevitably have a knock on effect on our own visitor numbers and revenues.

Our neighbour and partner, the Cromarty Courthouse Museum is one of the 19 facilities concerned. And Cromarty Public Library is one of 17 small libraries proposed for closure. The Courthouse and the Hugh Miller Museum are mutually dependent in attracting visitors to historic Cromarty. The public library offers free access to most of Hugh Miller's published works.



Poem for Hugh in Cromarty porch window

Other important cultural centres within two hours' drive of us include Groam House Museum (Rosemarkie), Nairn Museum, Highland Museum of Childhood (Strathpeffer), Dingwall Museum, Tarbat Discovery Centre (Portmahomack), Tain Through Time, Dornoch History Links; and Timespan Museum (Helmsdale).

The Friends Management Committee believes the Council should conduct an across-the-board review of its budget, which might well identify more substantial savings, rather than targeting specific sectors such as this one.

These museums take up just 1.1 per cent of the authority's budget. The funding of £261,000 is paid in return for vital cultural services performed to the highest professional standards. The alternative of attempting to transfer them to community-run not-for-profit organisations will in most cases prove practically impossible. And the belief that they can be run almost entirely by volunteers is also misplaced.

The Management Committee is of the view that The Highland Council should conduct the exact opposite policy, and ring fence its cultural funding. These museums and libraries will be needed all the more in the coming times of hardship, as resources available very cheaply or for free, to both local people and the touring public.

They collectively offer a magnificent monument to the Highlands' rich past, and illuminate our present and future. They are priceless assets, and irreplaceable if lost. Many of these Museums have rescued countless precious artefacts from otherwise certain oblivion. Their collections have nowhere else to go.

We urge our members to lobby The Highland Council to reconsider its budget allocations in order to protect the Museums and Heritage Centres. We are inviting our members to contact Highland Council individually on this basis, addressing their views to policy6@highland.gov.uk, or in writing to the Budget Leader, Cllr David Alston, The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX

FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER MEMBERSHIP APPEAL

Please consider inviting family or friends to join The Friends of Hugh Miller.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I WISH to become a member of the charity, The Friends of Hugh Miller (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.....

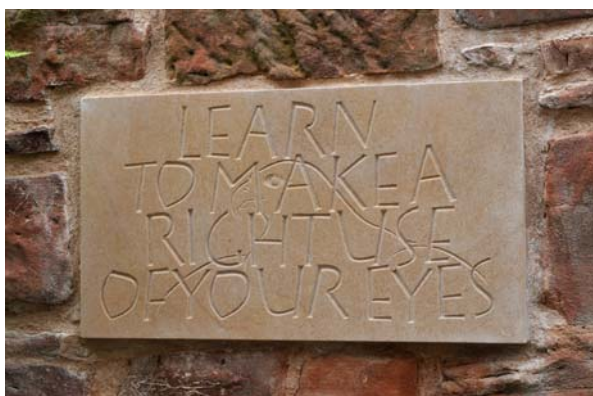
Membership subscription is £10 annually, payable by cash/cheque or bank standing order.

We will send standing order and Gift Aid forms on request.

RETURN TO:
MARTIN GOSTWICK, SECRETARY, THE FRIENDS OF HUGH MILLER, C/O HUGH MILLER MUSEUM, CHURCH STREET, CROMARTY, ROSS-SHIRE IV11 8XA.
TEL NO: 01381 600245.
EMAIL ADDRESS: martingostwick@tiscali.co.uk



Two details which helped Miller's Yard win an architectural Place Making Award (see Stop Press). Do you recognise the copper "chambers" in Helen Denerley's ammonite sculpture, and the quotation from Hugh Miller in Charles Smith's wall plaque? (Above and below)



A view of the new Lydia Garden from the Cottage end.



New on-street signs make the Museum even more inviting to visitors. (Above and below)

