



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 38, Autumn 2017

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 28th November 2017 at 7:00pm

Council Chambers, Dunbar Town House, High Street, Dunbar

**Non-members will be warmly welcomed and after the AGM
business – at 7:30pm in the Community Room - Craig Pritchett
will give an illustrated talk on Hutton and Siccar Point entitled:**

Peering into the Abyss of Time: Siccar Point



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Notice of Annual General Meeting
Tuesday 28th November 2017 at 6:45pm for 7:00pm
Council Chambers, Dunbar Town House, High Street, Dunbar

Agenda

- (i) Report of year's activities
- (ii) Filling any vacancies on Council¹
- (iii) Other competent business

Non-members will be warmly welcomed and after the AGM business – at 7:30pm in the Community Room - Craig Pritchett will give an illustrated talk on Hutton and Siccar Point entitled

Peering into the Abyss of Time: Siccar Point

Craig's talk will give his purely personal 'take' on what is undoubtedly a local wonder and well worth a visit, especially if you can manage that slightly awkward descent and confront the extraordinary rock formations head on and close-up, as Hutton did, in 1788, when he and his two companions got off their boat at Siccar Point. Craig will also explain the Unconformity's main contours and its significance in lay-terms and to convey Hutton's claim (made by others) to be the Father of Modern Geology, which is undoubtedly strong. Photographs that Craig and his daughter took on a recent descent to Siccar Point will provide a dramatic backdrop to this illustrated talk.

The Wonders of Geology

It was a full house in the Community Room of Dunbar Town House for Fiona McGibbon's excellent talk about the wonders of geology. Highly informative and entertaining Fiona's talk was much appreciated by all that attended this event on 25th October. Many of the attendees were local geology enthusiasts and a number took at membership of Friends to support the work of the charity. Thanks also go to Friends' council member Ross Combe for organising and publicising the event so successfully.

¹ Nominations for Council accompanied with the nominee's agreement in writing and items for consideration under other competent business should be lodged with the Secretary, c/o John Muir's Birthplace Museum, 126 High Street, Dunbar, EH42 1JJ by Friday 24th November 2017.

John Muir and William Keith: Kindred Souls – a Friends' Exhibition

My wife Val and I were visiting our son and his family in Aberdeenshire recently, writes Will Collin, and I couldn't resist persuading her to accompany me on a visit to Oldmeldrum, a wee town with a large history 18 miles or so north of Aberdeen and six miles northeast of Inverurie. The reason for my visit was a meeting with David Catto, Aberdeenshire Local Studies Librarian, and his colleague Lorraine. Both had visited the Birthplace back in 2015 when a small group representing Friends, ELC Museums and Aberdeenshire Libraries met to discuss the feasibility of a jointly produced exhibition featuring John Muir and his close friend, artist William Keith. That idea was shelved when the two local authorities decided that they had other priorities for their limited resources.

Gone but not forgotten! It seemed to Friends that 2018 would be an ideal year for presenting the remarkable story of the long friendship between the two emigrant Scots who had both been born in 1838. And 2018 is to be Scotland's Year of Young People. Muir left Dunbar with his family in 1849, not quite 11 years old, and Keith emigrated from Oldmeldrum with his mother and sisters when he was twelve. Young people, mere boys, from Scotland who went on to help shape modern California and to have a lasting influence on their adopted homeland, the United States. John Muir already is an inspiration to many young folk in Scotland and elsewhere. Surely their separate and joint stories would inspire many more.

So Friends are leading the way with our next exhibition, provisionally entitled '*Kindred Souls*' and currently being researched. The target date for it opening in the Birthplace is 1 April 2018 in good time for Muir's birthday on 21 April. It is hoped that it will later make its way to Oldmeldrum for 21 November for Keith was born there on 21 November 1838 (although some would argue that it was a year later).

The meeting with David and Lorraine was very helpful. They were enthusiastic about Friends' plans and feel better able to persuade 'the powers that be' in Aberdeenshire to support the venture, even talking about the possibility of interesting Aberdeen to come on board. Also, one of Lorraine's areas of interest is family history and she was able to confirm most of our research findings regarding Keith's earliest years (although the question of 1838 or 1839 has still to be solved).

How the Keith-Muir friendship started and grew

Artist William Keith first visited Yosemite, briefly, in 1864, the year he married Elizabeth Emerson. That was six years before John Muir. In 1872 the Emersons were in New England. Elizabeth was a distant relative of Ralph Waldo Emerson, writer and transcendentalist, and it is thought that the Keiths paid the 'Sage of Concord' a visit. He had just returned from California where Muir's mentor Mrs Jeanne Carr had persuaded him to visit Yosemite and gave him a letter of introduction to Muir. Emerson was hugely impressed by the Scot, adding him to his list 'My Men' which included Coleridge, Wordsworth, Thoreau and Carlyle. Muir was the 18th and last.

The Keiths returned to California. Willie sought out Mrs Carr and was given a letter of introduction. In October 1872, accompanied by fellow artist Benoni Irwin, Keith was literally knocking on Muir's door in Yosemite Valley. The two Scots became immediate friends. Keith returned to Yosemite, and Muir, in 1873, this time with second wife Mary and his two children. Perhaps as a result he spent time in a San Francisco hospital suffering from "over exertion and exposure" but in 1875 he was back in Yosemite joining up with Muir and two mutual friends.

The two Scots were not involved in any major outings together for ten years or so but maintained contact with the Keiths living in Oakland and Muir, now married to Louisa Strentzel, based in Martinez. When Muir accepted the commission to edit 'Picturesque California' in 1886, he invited Keith to be one of its illustrators. The artist accompanied Muir on some of his trips, the longest being in 1888.

By then the Keiths were frequent visitors to Martinez and Muir a regular caller at Keith's studio in San Francisco. The friendship was well and truly forged.

Sherida Bush leaves JMA Board

The John Muir Association, based in Martinez, Costa Contra County CA, was set up in 1956 to preserve the John Muir Home and gravesite in Martinez. In 1964 these properties became the John Muir National Historic Site under the control of the US National Parks Service. Today the JMA continues to support the work of the NPS at the JMNHS, working closely with the small team of NPS Rangers based there.

Friends relations with the JMA have been much closer since links were established with JMA board member Sherida Bush. Sherida has been a member of the board for 11 years and during the last how many editor of its magazine 'The View' (originally 'The View from John Muir's Window'). As JMA project manager, she has also been heavily involved in the organisation of the annual John Muir Birthday-Earth Day celebrations. This is held on the nearest Saturday to 21 April and has been increasing in popularity year on year drawing in over 2,000 participants.

However in August Sherida told us that she had sent in her resignation and her last board meeting would be 14 September. Will Collin sent her best wishes on behalf of Friends and hoped that their one-to-one correspondence would continue. He also asked that JMA nominate a replacement contact and JMA co-presidents Bruce Campbell and Mark Thomson volunteered. Mark was a member of the group of JMA board members who visited Dunbar in May 2015.

John Muir's Birthplace – News

Online Presence

As reported in in Newsletter #35 John Muir's Birthplace staff are increasingly turning to social media and other online opportunities to promote exhibitions and events. The new website² for the John Muir Birthplace Trust was announced in the last newsletter and this has undoubtedly improved the online presence of John Muir's Birthplace. If you would like to keep in touch through social media please follow John Muir's Birthplace on Facebook³ or @JM_Birthplace on Twitter⁴ using #JohnMuirDunbar #EastLothian hashtags. Feedback via social media is always appreciated. For instance, these two recent Facebook Reviews:

5 A wonderful little museum staffed by knowledgeable local volunteers, covers his early life, his work in the States and his later travels. The staff were so friendly they even looked after our little fox terrier while we went around the exhibits on the first and second floors where dogs were not permitted. Highly recommended.*

5 Really lovely place and friendly staff 😊*

² <http://www.jmbt.org.uk>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace>

⁴ https://twitter.com/JM_Birthplace

In addition to these direct means to maintain online contact with (potential) visitors other outlets, such as Tripadvisor, provide a valuable resource. In the past two months new Tripadvisor reviews for John Muir's Birthplace⁵ have been submitted and a number of these are quoted below.

5/5 Fascinating insight to John Muir's upbringing and later life. The chronological presentation set through the house helped to make sense of John Muir's life and passion for nature. The short films helped with the history and impact he had on America and how we have benefitted in Scotland also. Lovely staff welcomed us into the museum and made the visit to Dunbar more enjoyable (pointing us in the direction of the harbour).

5/5 A must for anyone who appreciates nature. An article in a recent issue of Sierra magazine (a Sierra Club publication) shed light on John Muir's Scottish beginnings as well as his boyhood home in Dunbar. A 20 minute train ride from Edinburgh brought me to the picturesque seaside village of Dunbar. From the station it was a 10 minute walk to the house/museum. I spent an hour in this small but immensely informative museum. Do not come here expecting to see his bed, curtains, kitchen, etc. Rather, this is a humble tribute to a great man. There are several educational and entertaining interactive displays including three short movies. The staff (man and woman - I wish I remembered their names) was extremely friendly, enthusiastic and full of information about Mr. Muir as well as the town of Dunbar. I suggest heading down to the waterfront and follow (part of) the John Muir Trail for a lovely seaside walk in honor of this great, forward-thinking naturalist who was ahead of his time.

5/5 Informative without boring you to death. The birth place of John Muir in Dunbar is a fantastic interactive museum. The short informative videos, sound bites and visual exhibits flow nicely from his early life in Dunbar to his environmental work in the American West. It is free, but please throw a pound or two in the donation box. It would be nice to see this place running for the long term.

4/5 Interesting and informative. Lovely small use up with great detail of this wonderful man. The fact that his formal education finished by the time he was 11 year old and he managed to do so much with the rest of his life.

⁵ <http://tinyurl.com/yc28xfv3>

5/5 Fascinating, well presented tribute. Real gem on High Street of John Muir's home town. Knew little of him, but he is clearly a key individual in the history of geology, conservation etc. Display was informative, interactive and current with the clever ability of being able to be approached at a variety of levels from the passing novice to serious researchers. Entirely tasteful and appropriate, well able to cater for visitors' needs and interests. Really welcoming, informative staff. A real joy! Impressed!

5/5 Excellent welcome from the staff on duty at this special mans birth place. Very good knowledgeable staff at this small museum in high street Dunbar. Well worth to visit and understand how this man from humble beginnings did great things here and the USA. If you have time you can even walk some of the John Muir Way lovely way to see the coast of East Lothian.

4/5 Great location. Well worth a look around, staff were very friendly and informative. It is in a town called Dunbar which is quite picturesque and worth walking around. There is a very long beach just right of the golf course which is lovely

4/5 Lovely to see his birth town talking pride in him. It was a nice house with lots of interesting facts, about a man who did a lot, but who I had never heard of to my shame. Glad his home town and Scotland taking pride in him.

Christmas News

Weekend Family Fun

Young visitors to the Birthplace have been enjoying 'Weekend Family Fun' crafts and activities which run from a Friday afternoon until closing on a Sunday. During the weekend beginning Friday 24th November a 'Christmas Light Celebration crafts' event will be held to coincide with the switching on of Dunbar's famous Christmas Lights. The Christmas theme will continue with 'Stained Glass Window' crafts over the weekend beginning Friday 1st Dec. and 'Natural Decorations' the following weekend, beginning Friday 15th Dec.

Shop Local

Once again the Birthplace is participating in the East Lothian Christmas 'Shop Local' event which runs from 1st Nov to 24th Dec. Visitors who spend £20 or more at the Birthplace may enter the draw for the £2000 prize fund by completing a card and returning this (Freepost) to East Lothian Council. Staff at the Birthplace are pleased to have John Muir Trust Christmas cards, 2018 calendars and diaries available for sale and, as usual, a large stock of books

and other gifts. Don't forget that members of the Friends of John Muir's Birthplace are eligible for a 10% discount on items bought at the Birthplace.

Membership News

Online Delivery of Newsletters

A significant number of Friends have opted out of receiving paper copies of the Newsletter and now read the online version⁶ instead. This is a significant saving since the production and delivery cost of the Newsletter is now a substantial proportion of the membership subscription. If you still receive paper copies of the newsletter and would like to opt out of receiving paper copies in the future then please do let us know.

Online News

Due to the fact that this 'paper' newsletter is only produced four times a year some announcements and news items are past their 'use-by date' by the time of production. Many of these news items are published/announced on the Friends' website and/or the Friends' Facebook page⁷ and, for local events, on the Dunbar Events Facebook page⁸. The revamped John Muir's Birthplace website now makes it much easier to post news items and is now an excellent resource for being kept up to date with developments there. There are, of course, many other online outlets for Muir-related news and Friends' also use these for promoting events, etc.

Membership Renewal Reminders

Friends' Council hopes that the initiatives, events and publications that are produced to help promote Muir's life and work and that support John Muir's Birthplace have been of interest to the membership. If our records show that your membership is due for renewal then a subscription form will be included in this newsletter (e-)mailing.

Official address: Friends of John Muir's Birthplace, John Muir's Birthplace, 126 High Street, Dunbar EH42 1JJ: tel: 01368 865899

Friends Email: info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

Friends Website: www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

⁶ <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/>

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/>