



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 41, Summer 2018

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Date(s) for the diary:

Exhibition

An Ingenious Whittler: John Muir the Inventor

Saturday, September 8, 2018 - Sunday, October 28, 2018

John Muir's Birthplace, High Street, Dunbar

[See page 7 for details]

Obituary: Dan Cairney

[Parts of this obituary originally appeared in the East Lothian Courier¹, written by Stephen Bunyan. Some further details about Dan's invaluable contributions to FoJMB and JMBT were originally published in Newsletter No. 19, January 2012². Dan was undoubtedly a vital advocate for Muir's connection with Dunbar and beyond and Friends' honour him and his legacy. RIP Dan. Ed.]



Dan Cairney, formerly of Dunbar, died at Muirfield Nursing Home, Gullane, on May 9. He was 89.

He was born on Church Street, Tranent, on April 26, 1929. He left school before he was 14 and went to work with Hope Brothers in Edinburgh. He went on to work for R W Forsyth's in Princes Street.

He came to a post in the Co-operative society in Dunbar in 1954. He met Mary McCawley, from Hedderwick, whose aunt was his landlady. They all went to Our Lady of the Waves Church.

Dan and Mary were married on April 3, 1956. They had two daughters, Kathleen McLeish, who survives Dan, and Maureen Austin, who died in 1988. He had five grandchildren of whom he was very proud: Gary, Kieran, Mhairi, Christopher and the late Mark.

After some time, he returned to Edinburgh and worked at Ferguson's on Easter Road, where he became a manager. He stayed with them until they closed. During this period, he became a master tailor and kilt maker.

In 1981, Dan took over a long-established outfitting business, Dan Smith, at 55 Dunbar High Street and he ran the business until 2001, when he retired.

Dan involved himself fully in the life of Dunbar. He joined Dunbar Community Council in 1982 and became vice-chairman. He became chairman in 1992 and held the office until 1997, when he resigned from the community council. In September 1997 Dan became president of Dunbar's John Muir

¹ <http://www.eastlothiancourier.com/news/16251277.obituary-daniel-dan-cairney/>

² <https://www.scribd.com/document/77875084/FoJMB-Newsletter-2012-01>

Association (DJMA) – now Friends of John Muir’s Birthplace. Dan was a founding member of DJMA and served on its Council since its inception in 1994. He retired from this post in 2011.

Perhaps Dan’s greatest local achievement was saving the John Muir Birthplace. It became known in 1997 that it was being sold, probably in three sections. Dan called a meeting of interested parties and the John Muir Birthplace Trust was formed in 1998.

On the 160th anniversary of Muir’s birth – 21st April 1998 – the John Muir Birthplace Appeal was formally launched and Dan was a prime motivator in that campaign. In particular he harnessed his contacts with the local traders and was highly successful in getting their backing for the fund-raising initiative.

As a result of this campaigning and fund-raising the purchase of John Muir’s birthplace was achieved by January 29, 1999. In September 1999, a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £292,000 was made for the development of the birthplace.

Dan also supported The Dunbar Initiative which led to the building of the leisure pool and The Dunbar Townscape Heritage Initiative, which carried through a big programme between 2004 and 2009 to improve the High Street.

He was president of Dunbar Rotary Club twice. He was a member of Dunbar Probus Club. He was a keen supporter of Dunbar Bowling Club and he played golf. He was a member of the Twenty Club, a member of Dunbar Trades’ Association – which for a time he chaired – and a supporter of the tourist board.

His church was important to him and he and Mary were key members of the congregation of Our Lady of Waves. He was president and lay chairman of the supporters who worked to secure recognition for Margaret Sinclair, a Poor Clare nun who died in 1925 and has been beatified.

A Requiem Mass was held in Our Lady of the Waves on Friday, May 18, followed by interment at the Deerpark Cemetery, Dunbar.

Community Council Award for Jim Thompson



Dunbar Community Council annually awards its Community Council Award to a Dunbar resident aged over 25 who has made an exceptional contribution to his/her community. This year there were six nominees but the clear choice of the Councillors was Friends' own Jim Thompson, nominated by Will Collin. Jim received his award at a special awards ceremony³ in the Council Chamber, Dunbar Town House, on Monday 18 June. The award was presented to Jim by Civic Week Queen Annie-Rose Dickson.

Will's commendation read:

"My involvement with Jim has been through his interest in John Muir and his participation in all things relating to Dunbar's most famous son. Back in 1996 when Dunbar's John Muir

Association was fund raising to purchase 126-8 High Street, Jim and I met three or four mornings a week in Dan Cairney's shop to deal with incoming donations. Jim was already a member of the council of Dunbar's John Muir Association, from 2007 Friends of John Muir's Birthplace, and was its convener for over 10 years, until in 2013 when he became its President. During this time he has also been newsletter editor, talks organiser and a link person - with Yosemite Valley School, members of Muir's family, Wisconsin Friends of John Muir and Harold Wood (the webmaster of the Sierra Club's John Muir Exhibit website) among others. With the expansion of social media, Jim has been daily posting information on John Muir and his Dunbar connections as well as links to other Muir sites. He has welcomed distinguished visitors, conducted John Muir walks and gone out to schools.

If anything epitomises Jim's dedication and commitment to the John Muir cause, it is his time as a volunteer museum assistant at John Muir's Birthplace. Since 2004, on Thursday afternoons for four hours per week for approximately 46 weeks or more per year Jim has been welcoming visitors, an estimated 22,000+ of them, to John Muir's Birthplace. I reckon he has put in over 2,500 Muir-hours in that alone. In recognition of his service and the

³ <https://dunbarcommunitycouncil.org.uk/dunbar-community-council-2018-awards/>

insight it has given him into the running of the Birthplace, in 2016 he was invited by the John Muir Birthplace Trust to become a trustee.

Jim has now reached the age of 83 and, sadly for us, feels that he needs to cut back. He has decided to resign from the Birthplace Trust and Friends Council, and cease his Thursday afternoon stints at the Birthplace. All will be the poorer”.

Jim is also an honorary member and a past president of Dunbar Rotary Club and a past president of Dunbar Probus Club. He is continuing his 12-year-long membership of Dunbar and District History Society’s committee, with all the extras that entails, and DDHS secretary Pauline Smeed wrote to Dunbar Community Council in support of Jim’s nomination.

Friends’ Birthplace Exhibition: *William Keith and John Muir: Kindred Souls*

As reported in the last newsletter⁴ the latest temporary exhibition in the Birthplace is about the life of artist William Keith and his friendship with John



Muir. Entitled ***William Keith and John Muir: Kindred Souls***, the exhibition has been researched and written by Will Collin with design input from Emma Westwater of Source Design and funded by Friends. It has been running in the Birthplace since the 30th of March and will finish at the end of August. The exhibition has

proven to be popular with visitors. [See some of the Tripadvisor reviews later in this newsletter. Ed.]

Coming to an End ... and a Beginning

Initially the exhibition was then expected to make the journey north to Aberdeenshire in time for William Keith’s birthday on 21 November. One of John Muir’s closest friends, his fellow Scot Keith had been born in

⁴ https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2018/02/FoJMB_Newsletter_2017_Winter.pdf

Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire, in 1838. His mother took him and his three sisters to New York to join her brother in 1850. Keith met Muir for the first time in Yosemite Valley in 1872 and the two became instant and lifelong friends.

Surprisingly for someone who became California's leading landscape painter and whose paintings are in most of the US's leading galleries and museums, Keith is virtually unknown in Scotland even in the town and county of his birth. It was felt that the recent upsurge of interest in Muir would kindle notice of Keith, at least in the town of his birth and the surrounding area.

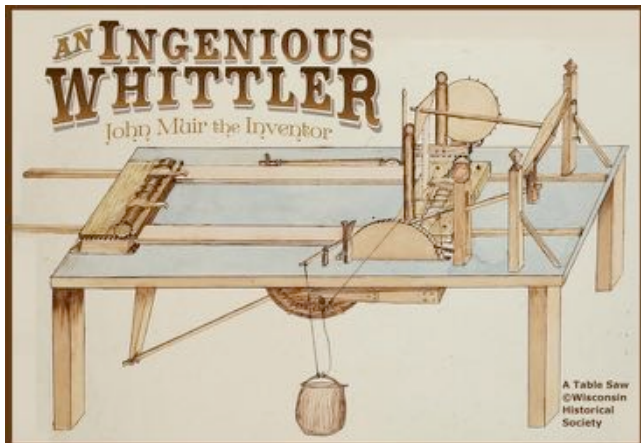
However, acceptance of the offer of the exhibition for no charge other than transport costs has been slow in coming. But come it has and the seven panels, eight canvas prints and a John Muir 'pop-up' panel will make their way north at the beginning of September. Presently, it is likely that they will appear at three venues – Aberdeenshire Council headquarters at Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen (near Aberdeen Royal Infirmary), Garioch Heritage Centre in Inverurie, and Aberdeenshire Library Headquarters, Oldmeldrum.

Hopefully the exhibition will make that final few miles' journey from Inverurie to his birthplace. When Keith returned to Scotland in 1899 he travelled by train to Inverurie. There he sat on the platform undecided as to whether he should go on to Oldmeldrum. In the event he did not go as, according to his travelling companion 'Sig' Beel, he did not wish to meet any relations!



An Ingenious Whittler: John Muir the Inventor

Saturday, September 8, 2018 - Sunday, October 28, 2018



The ever-popular temporary exhibition returns celebrating the amazing machines that John Muir invented to make life easier. His designs included clocks and barometers to plans for study desks and 'early rising machines'. Sit on the loafer's chair for a noisy surprise or draw up a blueprint for your own invention!

Coincidentally, our 'sister' group Wisconsin Friends of John Muir recently shared on their Facebook page⁵ a post by Wisconsin Historical Museum⁶ about Muir's desk clock invention⁷ that enabled him to maintain a rigorous course of study while attending UW-Madison.

Muir wrote: "I invented a desk in which the books I had to study were arranged in order at the beginning of each term. I also made a bed which set me on my feet every morning at the hour determined on, and in dark winter mornings just as the bed set me on the floor it lighted a lamp. Then, after the minutes allowed for dressing had elapsed, a click was heard and the first book to be studied was pushed up from a rack below the top of the desk, thrown open, and allowed to remain there the number of minutes required. Then the machinery closed the book and allowed it to drop back into its stall, then moved the rack forward and threw up the next in order, and so on, all the day being divided according to the times of recitation, and time required and allotted to each study."



⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinFriendsOfJohnMuir/>

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/WisconsinHistoricalMuseum/>

⁷ <https://wihist.org/2B86cBL>.

Visitors to the Birthplace



This August the Cunningham family were among our many visitors who completed the John Muir Way. The family were delighted to receive their completion certs and to visit the birthplace. Having attended the opening of JMW in 2014, where the children carried relay flags along the first part of the route.

American visitors who have enjoyed the JMW this summer and who have made a special trip include parties from California (including Martinez), Colorado, Washington, Ohio, Montana, Utah, and Texas to name just a few.

Visitor Comments

In mid-August a tenth visitor book had to be deployed as the previous one, with entries from June 2017 onwards, was full. Each visitor book has space for over 750 entries so we estimate that around 7000 comments have been left by visitors since JMB opened 15 years ago (on 23rd August 2003 to be precise).

The following selection of comments are from the recently retired book and are typical of the very positive reviews the museum and its staff receive.

- ✓ *Very interesting museum. Very inspiring man. [Germany]*
- ✓ *Awesome. [Canada]*
- ✓ *Wonderful exhibition – v. inspiring. [UK]*
- ✓ *Fantastic place – so glad to be members of JMT & to finally see his birthplace! [UK]*
- ✓ *Very interesting – wonderful volunteer assistance [US]*
- ✓ *What a great way to end my walk! Thank you for providing an inspiring place of a wonderful man! [US]*
- ✓ *Excellent displays – we know much more about John Muir – inspirational! [UK]*
- ✓ *Fascinating insight, really well interpreted and communicated! Thankyou! [US]*
- ✓ *Inspiration! Graduated from John Muir High School, Pasadena CA. We support (the) Sierra Club! [US]*
- ✓ *Beautiful Scotland. Stunning people. [South Africa]*

- ✓ *Superb presentation of an outstanding person. [UK]*
- ✓ *Wonderful insight to an amazing man. Thank you. [UK]*
- ✓ *A must-see & learn so much about a man who helped change the world for the better. [Canada]*
- ✓ *Great museum. Loved the quotations and conservation messages. [UK]*
- ✓ *We work at LeConte Lodge, now Yosemite Conservation & Heritage Center, which honors John Muir & we want to see where he was born. [US]*
- ✓ *Amazing museum and amazing man! [US]*
- ✓ *Wonderful! Thank goodness for John Muir! [US]*
- ✓ *What an unexpected bonus, full of surprises. [UK]*
- ✓ *I was fortunate to chance upon this shrine to conservation but it is worthy of pilgrimage. [UK]*
- ✓ *We've been to Yosemite. We've been to Muir Woods. Now, we've been to Dunbar! [US]*
- ✓ *Incredible exhibition. A great amount of work has gone into the house. [UK]*
- ✓ *Very interesting. Very helpful volunteers. [UK]*
- ✓ *I truly loved your representation of his life and the link to our current time and life tasks. Thank you so much! [UK]*
- ✓ *What joy to be here! [UK]*
- ✓ *Brilliant. Lovely staff 😊 [UK]*
- ✓ *Fantastic [New Zealand]*
- ✓ *A truly wonderful tribute to John Muir. Thank you! [US]*
- ✓ *Splendid exhibition. Approachable at a variety of levels. Highly informative. Thank you! [UK]*
- ✓ *I'm a great fan of John Muir & this was enhanced to an even greater extent after this visit. [Sweden]*
- ✓ *Wonderful! Thank you very much for this inspiring exhibition! [Austria]*
- ✓ *Fantastic experience. [Australia]*
- ✓ *Great place to discover the history of one of the most important men of the last centuries. [Italy]*
- ✓ *A goal of a lifetime fulfilled. No one influenced my life more than 'John o' the mountains' [US]*
- ✓ *Brilliant exhibition. Great for children. [UK]*
- ✓ *An amazing place. So pleased to hear that P5 schoolchildren visit each year. [UK]*
- ✓ *As a boy I grew up with the writings of John Muir & his conservation influence. To come here to his birthplace is a very special experience. Thank you for the work which has gone into this museum. [US]*

Dunbar Grammar School Visit to California: Presentation of Wee Books

Every two years, S5/6 students at Dunbar Grammar School have the opportunity to participate in a once-in-a-lifetime trip to California⁸, USA. The purpose of these trips is to ‘follow in the footsteps’ of John Muir and celebrate links with the John Muir Trust and other Muir-related organisations.

The start of the trip gives the students an experience of the Bay Area, staying with hosts in Dunbar’s twin town Martinez. The highlight of the trip is then a week spent in Yosemite National Park.

John Muir is quoted as saying “*No temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite*” and it’s true – nothing can prepare you for the scenery in which students spend three days hiking on a wilderness trek through the park. The end of the trip is spent experiencing the city of San Francisco, where past visits have involved students cycling across the Golden Gate Bridge and visiting Alcatraz.

Prior to these trips the Friends of John Muir’s Birthplace have a tradition of donating to each participant several of our ‘Wee Books’. These books provide some insight into Muir’s life and work and help the pupils appreciate the impact a boy from Dunbar has had on the world.

So, on April 24th, Jim Thompson, Will Collin and Duncan Smeed visited Dunbar Grammar School to uphold this tradition.



Jim and Will made the presentations to the pupils and teachers. The above photo shows Heather Cameron, Head Girl, receiving her books and the second photo includes all the pupils at the presentation (and Duncan, Jim and Will in the background!). [Plans



are afoot for a full trip report in the next newsletter and, perhaps, a talk. Ed.]

⁸ <https://www.edubuzz.org/dunbargrammar/yosemite/>

John Muir's Birthplace – News

Online Presence

As reported in previous newsletters John Muir's Birthplace staff are active users of social media and other online opportunities to promote exhibitions and events. The new version of the website⁹ for the John Muir Birthplace Trust 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 Facebook¹⁰ or @JM_Birthplace on Twitter¹¹ using #JohnMuirDunbar #EastLothian hashtags. Feedback via social media is always appreciated. Further news and announcements are posted to the What's On page¹² of the JMBT website.

#1 of 22 things to do in Dunbar



In addition to these direct means to maintain online contact with (potential) visitors other outlets, such as Tripadvisor, provide a valuable resource. Since the last newsletter many new Tripadvisor reviews for John Muir's Birthplace¹³ have been submitted and the Birthplace is currently #1 of 22 things to

do in Dunbar! There are too many new reviews to include all below but here are some of the highlights from August 2018:

5/5 Excellent visit: We've been to Dunbar a couple of times but didn't know about John Muir, or this museum. With the added advantage of a further exhibition about the artist William Keith we found our visit most informative. Very well presented and plenty of interactive displays spread over three floors it's really very good. A little shop sells a good selection of books and local goods. We would visit again.

5/5 Interesting & interactive!: Interesting little museum with enough to keep the kids engaged. Well presented with enthusiastic staff who told John Muir's story with passion & pride.

⁹ <http://www.jmbt.org.uk>

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace>

¹¹ https://twitter.com/JM_Birthplace

¹² <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/whats-on/>

¹³ <http://tinyurl.com/yc28xfv3>

4/5 Interesting Museum: Having lived in Edinburgh all my life and only now visited this museum am surprised I had never seen this before. Knew very little about John Muir and this museum gives all the information you need to rectify your lack of knowledge about his life. Interesting exhibition and interactive games for the children. Well worth a visit. Free to enter but a donation box located at the door.

4/5 A hidden gem of a museum: A really interesting place. Passionate volunteer staff. This is the starting point for the man who inspired a conservation movement and the protection of American wildernesses.

5/5 World of knowledge about a man I never knew existed: I am a Scot born and reared in Edinburgh now living in the United States. I knew nothing about John Muir until I recently visited Dunbar. I must have spent 3 hours or more in the birthplace of this man. I was fascinated by everything I read. I cannot believe we were not taught about John Muir in school. Scotland should be very proud of the accomplishments of this young man after his family moved to the United States. This is certainly a place worth visiting whether you are a Scot or a foreign visitor to Dunbar.

5/5 Gem of a place: This place really is a gem. A variety of thoughtful displays, some of which are interactive, help to show and tell the story of John Muir; including the huge impact he made and continues to make on the world of conservation. It's rare that I read every information board when visiting galleries but this place was an exception, as the information provided, including John's strict upbringing and unending passion for the environment throughout his life, made for fascinating reading. Highly recommended and welcoming staff too, couldn't be better.

Muir-Themed Sculpture Commission For The New East Lothian Community Hospital

Earlier this year Round Table Projects¹⁴, on behalf of their client NHS Lothian, invited applications from contemporary artists working in three dimensions to explore the rich natural heritage of East Lothian in a period of research to lead to the creation of an ambitious and visually striking sculptural work for permanent installation in the main concourse of the new East Lothian Community Hospital. This initiative is being funded by Edinburgh and Lothians Health Foundation.

¹⁴ <http://roundtableprojects.org/>

NEON¹⁵, a studio that explores the territory between art, design and architecture have been commissioned to deliver this new artwork for the atrium of the main waiting space for the new community hospital in Haddington. The studio will reference the work of John Muir in the artwork, in particular the way that he liked to "immerse" himself in the natural world. As well as meeting with the Friends of John Muir's Birthplace and discussing the work of John Muir, NEON have devised a series of school workshops in which the students explore the local nature using different senses. These activities are inspired by the unique ways Muir liked to experience nature, and they will result in a book entitled "**The archive of sensory experiences**".

After the conclusion of this process, the studio will combine the learnings from the archive with the conversations with the Friend's of John Muir's Birthplace and produce a number of concepts that aim to reduce anxiety in the waiting patients, visitors and staff at the hospital. This will be achieved by analysing the experience of being in nature and trying to emulate these through the manipulation of materials and light.



The photo shows Mark, Viliina and Helen from NEON meeting with Duncan and Will of Friends and Jo from the East Lothian Council Museums Service on Tuesday, 28th August at John Muir's Birthplace.

Left to right: Duncan Smeed, Mark Nixon, Viliina Koivisto, Will Collin, Helen Clover and Jo Mouiin.

Day Conference: John Muir: Spirituality, Politics and Psychology

The Edinburgh International Centre For Spirituality and Peace (EICSP) is organising a day conference entitled **John Muir: Spirituality, Politics and Psychology**¹⁶. This will take place on November 17th, in Edinburgh.

The EICSP conference organisers are canvassing for "*possible presenters, ranging across a variety of perspectives and formats, that might*

¹⁵ <http://www.seeneon.com>

¹⁶ <http://www.eicsp.org/events/event-details/602-day-conference-john-muir-spirituality-politics-and-psychology-17-november-2018>

enthusiastically engage the theme in some way - and relish the prospect of further congenial 'conferring'.

The day conference programming is at quite an early stage, and EICSP would welcome any suggestions/pointers of ... John Muir admirers, aficionados and/or scholars of his work. Ideally these would be people from the Edinburgh area, or those who would be happy to travel into Edinburgh for the day - to gift their offering in exchange for some stimulating dialogue with interested others."

For further details please see the event web page and if here are any members of Friends that would like to contribute then please make direct contact with EICSP. See <http://www.eicsp.org/contact-us/contact-us> for details.

Dunbar Conservation Volunteers: Robin's Walk

[The following article has been contributed by Laura Douglas, Countryside Ranger. Ed]



On 31st May Dunbar Conservation Volunteers undertook a joint litter pick with Dunbar Golf Course between the clubhouse and Whitesands. We gathered a whopping 30 bags of rubbish as well as a tractor trailer full of larger items. Thanks to everyone for their help.

This is now an annual event entitled "Robin's Walk" named after a former member who started the venture but sadly passed away earlier this year. He can be seen in the photo (right) hard at work last year.



If you are interested in joining Dunbar Conservation Volunteers then please contact Laura or Tara at dcv@eastlothian.gov.uk or visit the Ranger Service facebook page¹⁷.

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/East-Lothian-Countryside-Ranger-Service-139367542929212/>

JMB and USA Links

Birthplace Trustee and ELC Provost John McMillan attended the US Independence Day celebrations at the Botanic Garden on Wednesday 4th July. There he met the US Ambassador Robert Wood ‘Woody’ Johnson appointed by President Trump in June 2017.

The Provost, never slow to spot an opportunity, told Mr Johnson about John Muir’s Birthplace (and in his role as Spokesperson for Economic Development about some of the County’s other attractions). The Ambassador was very interested in the Birthplace (and East Lothian golf!). John responded by inviting Mr Johnson to pay a visit to the Birthplace and has since laid down an official request to have him visit us.

One of the speakers at the 4th July event was Susan A Wilson, the Principal Officer for the US Consulate General in Edinburgh. During her speech Ms Wilson singled out John Muir’s contributions to the USA for special mention. Ms Wilson, husband Michael Leath and their two children had attended the John Muir Trust’s birthday celebrations in Dunbar on 21st April this year. During the afternoon Will Collin took them for a walk round part of ‘John Muir’s Dunbar’ when ‘Sunny Dunny’ lived up to its name. Ms Wilson told John how much she and her family had enjoyed that visit, their first to Dunbar during her three years heading the Consulate in Edinburgh.

Membership News

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 page¹⁸ and, for local events, on the Dunbar Events Facebook page¹⁹. Each paper copy of the newsletter that is mailed out to members is a significant expenditure when compared to the membership subscription income. Fortunately, many members make an additional donation when taking out membership and this undoubtedly helps to offset the cost of production and delivery of paper newsletters. 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.

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/>

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/>

General Data Protection Regulation

The EU General Data Protection Regulation came into force on Friday 25th May, 2018. This gives members control on whether and how their personal data is used and held. E-mails were sent out to those members who had opted to opt out of receiving paper copies of the newsletters and/or had given permission to have announcements, etc., e-mailed to them.

This e-mail (of 24th May) assured members that FoJMB only holds their e-mail address for the purpose of infrequent announcements for the likes of newsletter availability and FoJMB events and that their contact information will not be shared with anyone else. In order to stay on the e-mail list recipients were simply asked to reply to the e-mail and write "Yes". Those that did will continue to receive e-mails about newsletters, etc.

The membership form for FoJMB will also be amended before the next round of renewals to comply with the requirements of GDPR. In effect, a check-box that gives permission to FoJMB to collect and maintain contact information for lawful purposes, i.e. to send out newsletters and event announcements and reminders of subscription renewals.

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