

Newsletter No. 42, Autumn 2018

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Notice of Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018 at 6:45pm for 7:00pm
Council Chambers, Dunbar Town House, High Street, Dunbar



# Notice of Annual General Meeting Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018 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 Council<sup>1</sup>
  - (iii) Other competent business

Non-members will be warmly welcomed and after the AGM business – at 7:30pm in the Community Room - Staff and Students from Dunbar Grammar School will give an illustrated talk about their adventures on:

#### The Dunbar Grammar School Visit to California 2018

## **Inspired by Muir**

'Inspired by Muir' has been a common theme for many newsletters and is certainly the case for this one. The members of Friends of John Muir's Birthplace (FoJMB) also find inspiration from Muir's life and work and actively promote and support initiatives that bring Muir and his legacy to the attention of a wider public.

In 2019 FoJMB celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In July 1994 Dunbar's John Muir Association – as FoJMB was then known – was established. Much has been achieved by the charity since then but what will the next 25 years bring? Continuing to support the work of the Birthplace and actively collaborating with the other partners in the John Muir Birthplace Trust is a given. If anyone who is reading this would like to contribute their time and expertise to furthering the aims and objectives of FoJMB please consider standing for Council. I also encourage all members to 'recruit' others to our cause if at all possible.

Best wishes, Duncan Smeed, FoJMB Convener

<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> 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 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018.

# Dunbar Grammar School Visit to California 2018: Trip Report

[The following trip report is courtesy of Elaine Fell, one of the members of staff from DGS who accompanied the students on their Californian adventure. Thanks Elaine. Ed.]

The reputation of the bi-annual school visit in the footsteps of John Muir has grown over the years since 2004, with former students have enthusing about the amazing experiences they have had in California. And so it was with much excitement and anticipation that the twenty S5 and S6 students and five staff boarded the bus in the school car park around 2am, setting off on what was to become a most memorable and enjoyable two week adventure.

Students and staff were greeted at the airport by their respective host families, a group of kind hearted volunteer families from in and around Martinez, who showed wonderful hospitality and kindness to our students. They incorporated the Dunbar teenagers in their day to day lives and visited places of interest with them, including a group tour of John Muir House. Here students learned much about the life of Dunbar's most famous son and got to imagine his life farming on that very same land. The host family visit ended with a party where the heavy accordion, trailed all the way from Scotland, played a few Scottish



tunes to bring a touch of Scotland to their homes. It was part of the trip which students hugely enjoyed and our gratitude goes to each and every family, along with organiser Sue Hammond, for the kindness and hospitality shown to our students.

Then it was off to Yosemite for a six day adventure in the breathtakingly beautiful glacial mountains. Our accommodation was the picturesque Primary School, nestled within the narrow valley, with a view over the Yosemite Falls. Students were divided in two groups across the assembly hall for sleeping, with the staff having the space behind a curtain on the stage! Not exactly luxury but a few days later we were to see it as exactly that, after three days trekking in the mountains with no toilet or washing provisions at all.

Students loved the freedom of Yosemite Village and the chance to enjoy some down time together in such a stunning location.



Then it was time for the main event and our three days of hiking and camping out under the stars. Students were taught how to pack and carry their own large backpacks given advice on managing the conditions very hot and group altitude. Each was accompanied by two DGS staff but the excursion was managed and run by Nature Bridge, a US company which

specialises in student trips. One group headed by bus to Glacier View at over 7,000ft and the other to the Mist Trail, a double waterfall climb with its notorious granite steps. Both proved very challenging but hugely rewarding. Stunning scenery and a real sense of isolation in the wilderness, saw students

rise to the challenge in a most impressive effort by all. Insects, heat and altitude combined to pose extra obstacles in addition to the terrain and elevation. The sense of achievement was an enormous reward for the endurance shown.

The final day in Yosemite took us to the base of El Capitan where we stared in awe at the 3,000ft granite monolith and learned about the dangerous challenging climbs that take place there. A relaxing walk in the Yosemite Meadow was a peaceful end to the most amazing few days for everyone involved.

Our final stage saw us head west to San Fransisco to enjoy three fully filled days of sight seeing and walking, basing ourselves in a Youth Hostel which proved an excellent facility for the group.



Students got some real experience of America's social inequality whilst staying in the country's most economically divided city. However, this was temporarily overlooked on the first night on a visit to the famous Cheesecake Factory on Union Square where no-one succeeded in finishing their portion!

One highlight was a boat trip to Alcatraz Prison and an extremely informative tour of The Rock. No-one will forget the demonstration we experienced of the sound of the cell doors locking in unison each night and the stories of attempted escapes. Day two took us by foot across the city to Haight Ashbury where students enjoyed some shopping time and picked up many bargains from the charity clothes shops.



Finally, our last day in the city saw us cycle across the iconic Golden Gate Bridge, a very memorable and exciting challenge, returning via a sun bathed boat journey back to the city from Sausilito. The final evening was capped off by a truly unique viewing of the city's Independence Day fireworks - from the rooftop of a carpark! This turned out to be both spectacular and convenient, plus relieved many very tired feet at this stage.

We boarded the flight home with heavy hearts and with memories that will always remain. A group of more mature rounded people after such a range of shared experiences, new friendships and more educated minds. The group were great company, bonded so well and were an absolute pleasure to be with from start to finish.



# Dunbar Grammar School Visit to California 2018: Trip Report by Heather Cameron

[This trip report is courtesy of Heather Cameron, then Head Girl. Thanks Heather. Ed.]

I will never forget our school trip to California. It was almost like three separate trips because each part was so different; the first weekend with host families in Martinez area, then the week in Yosemite valley and our wilderness trek, and finally our time exploring San Francisco. Each part of the trip was both fun and eye opening and I would love to have the experience all over again! Although at first apprehensive about staying with another family who I didn't know, by the end of our time with the hosts I didn't want to leave! It was fantastic to become part of another family for a few days and to learn about the Californian lifestyle and culture, and they were so hospitable and generous. On our last night with the hosts, we had a pool party with all the students and teachers and their host families too. One of the students had brought his accordion all the way from Dunbar, so we could all enjoy some familiar Scottish tunes and a bit of ceilidh dancing. We finished off the evening with Auld Lang Syne around the pool, and my host mum and I jumped in at the end!

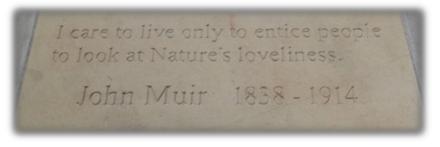
Our time in San Francisco flew by because there is so much to see and do. Highlights included cycling over the Golden Gate Bridge, visiting Alcatraz, and trying out American food such as pancakes and milkshakes! It was interesting to explore the different cultural sectors of the city such as China Town and Haight Ashbury, the 'hippie district' with thrift and record shops. On our last night we watched the 4 July fireworks from a rooftop car park!

However, I think the most unique part of the trip was our time in Yosemite, because of our connection with John Muir. It was very inspiring to remember that this incredible man was born and grew up in Dunbar, and that his games and explorations around our home town helped to establish his love of nature and his curiosity. I remember walking along the familiar clifftop route by Winterfield the night before we flew to California, and considering that the sights, sounds, and places that I associate with growing up in Dunbar would not be all that different to his own memories of childhood. During the trip I learnt a lot about John Muir, while also learning about myself. So now when someone asks me the timeless question of which historical figure I would invite to my dinner party, I respond by changing the question: I would choose to go for a 'wander' with John Muir!

#### John Muir – Writer?

Back in 2013 the John Muir Birthplace Trust applied to have a commemorative stone placed in Makar's Court in Lady Stair's Close off Edinburgh's High Street. The centenary of John Muir's death was little more than a year away. Makars' Court already paid tribute to 37 writers as diverse in time and style as 14th century poet John Barbour and 20th century novelist Muriel Spark. The Close also contains the Scottish Writers' Museum dedicated to Burns, Scott and Stevenson and had housed an exhibition on Muir for six months in 2003. The application seemed straightforward but it was turned down!

The rejection letter said ". . . Makars' Court is dedicated to Scottish writers and poets who are principally known as such, rather than people from other professions who may also happen to write extremely well about their principal subject." It seemed a strange ruling. After all, in 1898 Muir became one of the first members of the American Academy of Arts and Letters but was also made a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Muir attended the University of Wisconsin in the 1860s but never graduated. Among the honorary degrees later bestowed on him was a Litt.D., a Doctor of Letters, from Yale in 1911. Yale could have chosen to award him an honorary Doctor of Science, yet chose to recognise his literary contribution to the USA.



Fortunately, JMBT's appeal to a higher authority was successful and on 29 April 2014 John Muir became the 38th Scot to be commemorated in Makars'

Court, joining his literary heroes Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scot. His stone carries the quotation "I care to live only to entice people to look at Nature's loveliness" taken from a letter sent to his mentor Jeanne Carr from Yosemite Valley in 1874. Edinburgh's Culture and Sport Convenor Councillor Richard Lewis said, "It was always our intention that Makars' Court could be encouraged to grow and develop into a Scottish national literary monument to celebrate Scotland's greatest writer. . . Pioneer of the modern conservation movement, John Muir's influence on national parks and nature writing gives him a much-deserved position within Makars' Court."

So what was Muir's principal line of work? In 1911, he described his occupation to a reporter in Buenos Aires as "tramp" adding he had been one all his life and was "still good at it". He has been described as an explorer, botanist, geologist, glaciologist, conservationist, political activist, even an inventor, an artist and an environmental philosopher! But the truth is that, apart form the early years of his marriage when he managed the Strentzel fruit farm, from 1872 till 1914 his main, and often his only, source of income was from his writings. Friends of John Muir's Birthplace have decided to explore how that came about.

We are aiming to have our next temporary exhibition, 'John Muir – Writer' in place in the Birthplace in time for his birthday on 21 April 2019. It will start with his journals and his letter writing and examine how they evolved into writing for newspapers and magazines. It will trace his reluctant development into a writer of books and in the process discover his own favourite writers, which ones he quotes most; explore his sense of humour; and try to answer questions such as "Was he a racist?", "Did he neglect his wife and daughters?", "Were his preservationist policies realistic?" and, one I keep asking myself, "Was he too good to be true?"

Will Collin, November 2018

# STOP PRESS: Grant Awarded for the 'John Muir – Writer' Project

On November 6<sup>th</sup> Friends of John Muir's Birthplace received the good news that a grant application by ELC Museums Service to Museums Galleries Scotland had been successful and that a grant of just over £2500 (75% of the total project cost) had been offered towards the 2019 project 'John Muir - Writer'. The remaining 25% is budgeted as the contribution of the exhibition by FoJMB. The project will include:

- a John Muir the Writer exhibition produced by Friends of JMB and a new case for the display of three first edition books by John Muir, including one with his signature. The books were kindly donated by Ronnie Skea in celebration of his mother's 100th birthday in 2014;
- a writing competition inspired by Muir for East Lothian secondary school students;
- recognition of young peoples work in the footsteps of Muir;

ELC Museums will work with Friends of JMB, JMB Trust, East Lothian Council Libraries – Young Peoples Services and the secondary schools to deliver the project.

# A Long Life Lived to the Full



Janet Skea with Ronnie Skea (I) and Will Collin (r)

Back in January of this year a few of us were delighted to meet Mrs Janet Skea, the Birthplace's oldest visitor by a long way. She had been brought by her son Ronald and his wife Anthea to see the small display three books and a few sharing space photographs with Friends' William Keith and John Muir exhibition 'Kindred Souls' in the temporary exhibition room. The books were two first edition copies of Muir's 'Boyhood and Youth' and first edition 'Mountains California' gifted by Mr Skea in celebration of his mother's 100th birthday on 8 April 2014.

'Jane' was one of these folk that brightened the day and belied her great age for she was 103. She and John Muir shared the same birth month, a love of nature and of books (she had been a librarian). Both had a sense of fun and I suspect part of each stayed forever young. Mrs Jane Skea passed away peacefully at Roodlands Hospital on 15th September and on the 26th a celebration of her life took place in St Mary's Church in Haddington. Our condolences go out to her family.

# **Inspired to Spiritual Saunters**

[The following 'letter' is a contribution by Jamie Hinrichs - a PhD student of Environmental History at the University of St Andrews. Thanks Jamie. Ed.]

Hello John,

I recently dove deep into a century-old essay of yours, one that you wrote in support of American national parks. In this 1901 piece, you insisted that 'Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home ... that mountain parks and reservations ... are fountains of life'. I wonder if you knew how oft-repeated these lines would become.

While this quotation has become famous in present-day preservation campaigns, a line that appears later on in the same passage has not. A few sentences later, you say that the discovery of this rejuvenating function of mountains came by 'sauntering ... in whole-souled exercise.'

I am captivated by this notion of walking as a 'whole-souled exercise', and how you included it within your endorsement for mountain preservation. This has catalysed a chapter of my PhD thesis, in which I set out to investigate whether your contemporary British brethren also discussed the spiritual value of mountain walking within their own endorsements for preserving mountains. This is a sort of intellectual 'pilgrimage' I'm still engaged in.

This sentiment of yours, however, has done much more than inspire my academic exploration of the past. Your written reflections regarding the ways in which the natural world provides spiritual renewal prompts me to get outside and away from 'the screen' for a spiritual saunter. In our digital, distraction-filled age this type of open-air rejuvenation seems to me most vital. Now, when I'm wandering afoot in wild places, I look to encounter (as you put it) the 'divine lessons' and 'water and stone sermons' of the Creator. Quite frankly, I see the natural world through new eyes, and I am made better by it.

I hope you know that your 'scribblings' have stood the test of time. So, thank you for leaving us this concept of 'sauntering ... in whole-souled exercise'. It has become a method of pedestrianism that remains equally applicable to the spiritual low-altitude sickness of our present.

### Visitors to the Birthplace

A group of East Dunbartonshire walkers completed the 134-mile John Muir Way after splitting it into manageable sections over the past 18 months.



Sixteen members of the Kirkintilloch Leisure Centre Walking Group celebrated walking the final section of their coast-to-coast challenge.

The walkers, who have an average age of 71, took on the last stage in late-August which

saw them walk seven-and-a-half miles from East Linton to Dunbar.

Learning about John Muir and his passion for protecting the environment has also inspired the Kirkintilloch walking group to tackle environmental problems in their town.

[Further details of this achievement have been reported in the Paths For All website.<sup>2</sup> Ed.]

#### #1 of 22 things to do in Dunbar



Tripadvisor reviews<sup>3</sup> from visitors to the John Muir's Birthplace continue to be submitted and the Birthplace is still #1 of 22 things to do in Dunbar! There are too many new reviews to include all below but here are a selection from the past two months from people inspired by their visit:

5/5 Lots of interest from early Dunbar to the USA: The museum is on three floors and I was surprised at how interesting it was. The ground floor covers his early life in a very strict Presbyterian household, there are details of his inventions and writings, his interest in conservation and his travels to America. There are 3 interesting videos and lots of information on Dunbar during his childhood when the new harbour was being constructed. All of that and it is free!

3 http://tinyurl.com/yc28xfv3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/news/news-post/east-dunbartonshire-walkers-divide-and-conquer-john-muir-way

5/5 A Very interesting place indeed!: Did not have chance to visit the fantastic place on my last visit to Dunbar. The museum itself is split into three floors which are packed with both interactive and visual exhibits. The shop is lovely and the staff there are extremely knowledgeable and pleasant! Well worth a visit.

5/5 John Muir's Birthplace, A Fitting Rememberance: While visiting family in Scotland, we spent one day driving out to the East Coast of Scotland. We visited the town of Dunbar, which happens to be the birthplace of the Environmentalist, John Muir. While there we were walking down High Street, and came across John Muir's Birthplace.

This is a great wee museum, and I found it especially interesting as I was born and grew up in California, and have made many trips to Yosemite Ntl. Park, which I would say was one of John Muir's favorite spots. The museum comprises three floors of history and memoirs of Muir's life and work. So many names and places, which I am familiar with, came to mind as I read and listened to the displays on Muir's life.

This museum is free, and the two hosts did a wonderful job introducing us to the various floors of artifacts. It covers the full scope of Muir's life from young man to aging adult. His efforts to protect the environment is an example to us all. In the busy life so many of us lead, I've always found natures beauty calming for the soul.

One display that really caught my attention was Muir's effort to stop the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir project. This reservoir is the water supply for the greater city San Francisco, CA. Muir tried to prevent its completion ... but failed. Come to the museum and find out the implications of that defeat.

A great little museum, please don't miss it, (it may inspire you to learn more about this pioneer of environmentalism).

Highly recommended - Cheers!

5/5 Super!: I spent over 2 hrs in this little house/museum. A treasure of riches on 3 floors. The personal story of Muir plus the educational ones beautifully combined. That day included guided walk along coast of Dunbar w geologist Angus Miller, both museum & walk hghlights of my month in Scotland. Expect to return for more of both.

## John Muir's Birthplace - News



Please remember John Muir's when Birthplace you planning Christmas your shopping. In addition to lots of Muir, nature and wildness inspired books, we beautiful handmade stationery, local gifts including Back From the Beach Seaglass jewellery, Chain Bridge Honey Farm toiletries. Lothian Lavender

gifts and candles, and Sheila Sim Photography and John Muir Trust Christmas Cards. Not forgetting that Friends of John Muir's Birthplace get 10% off all purchases - what's not to love?

#### Fun & Crafty Drop-in Activities in November

Join us for fun drop-in crafts during weekends and holidays! Suggested donation £1 per craft



# Time, Leaf Crafts and Natural Decorations at John Muir's Birthplace:

Our November activities will be available Friday lunchtime to Sunday afternoon. Follow us on Facebook at East Lothian Council Museums Service<sup>4</sup>, John Muir's Birthplace<sup>5</sup> to find out more.

#### **Online Presence**

John Muir's Birthplace staff are active users of social media and other online opportunities to promote exhibitions and events. If you would like to keep in touch through social media please follow John Muir's Birthplace on Facebook or @JM\_Birthplace on Twitter<sup>6</sup> using #JohnMuirDunbar #EastLothian hashtags. Feedback via social media is always appreciated. Further news and announcements are posted to the What's On page<sup>7</sup> of the JMBT website.

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<sup>4</sup> https://www.facebook.com/EastLothianCouncilMuseumsService/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace

https://twitter.com/JM\_Birthplace
 https://www.imbt.org.uk/whats-on/

# John Muir: Spirituality, Politics and Psychology

As reported in the Summer newsletter the Edinburgh International Centre For Spirituality and Peace (EICSP) is organising a day conference entitled **John Muir: Spirituality, Politics and Psychology**<sup>8</sup>. Full details of the conference programme have recently been published on the event web page. In summary:

Venue: Sanctuary, Augustine United Church, 41 George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH1 1EL

Date: Saturday 17 November 2018.

Time: Registration: 9.30am-10am. Event: 10am-4.30pm.

10am-10.10am: Welcome, Introductions and Opening Remarks by the

Chair: Dr Ian Wight.

Into Our Wilds: Going Inside ~ Getting Outside With John Muir as Our

Guide.

10.10am-10.40am: Plenary address: Professor Cairns Craig.

John Muir and the Landscapes of God.

10.40am-10.55am: Discussion.

11am-11.20am: Plenary address: Duncan Macniven.

A Presbyterian View of John Muir.

11.20am-11.30am: Discussion.

11.30am-11.40am: Tea/coffee break.

11.40am-12noon: Plenary address: Lilian Helen Brzoska.

In the Footsteps of John Muir: An Activist Soul.

12noon-12.10pm: Discussion.

12.10pm-12.30pm: Plenary address: Ken Cockburn.

**Journeying Forth.** 

12.30pm-12.40pm: Discussion.

12.40pm-1.45pm: Lunch.

1.45pm-2.05pm: Plenary address: Rev Dr Richard Frazer.

The Spirituality of Walking: Sauntering with John Muir.

2.05pm-2.15pm: Discussion.

2.15pm-2.35pm: Plenary address: Duncan Smeed.

**Inspired by Muir.** 

2.35pm-2.45pm: Discussion.

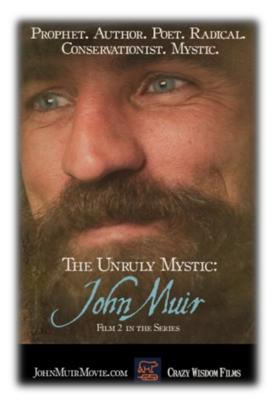
2.45pm-3pm: Tea/coffee break.

3pm-4.10pm: Film: The Unruly Mystic: John Muir.

4.10pm-4.30pm: Discussion of the Film

<sup>8</sup> http://www.eicsp.org/events/event-details/602-day-conference-john-muir-spirituality-politics-and-psychology-17-november-2018

# The Unruly Mystic: John Muir



The last event in the John Muir: Spirituality, Politics and Psychology conference [see previous page] is the first Scottish showing of *The Unruly Mystic: John Muir*<sup>9</sup>. This feature documentary, directed by Michael M. Conti (USA), explores the remarkable life and influential works of 'the patron saint of environmental activism'. Conti, through his own personal journey, entices people to appreciate nature's beauty, and connect to its abundance on a deep intrinsic level. A short trailer of the film may be accessed here: https://theunrulymystic.com/johnmuir-movie/

[FoJMB hope to arrange a showing of this film in Dunbar at some future date. Ed.]

# Muir Wilderness-Discovery eBooks

[Vertebrate Publishing recently made contact with FoJMB with the following news. Ed.]

This autumn sees Vertebrate Publishing complete the John Muir Wilderness-



Discovery Series in eBook<sup>10</sup> format with all eight titles now available.

The newly published titles continue to showcase the power of Muir's words – embedded with stunning metaphors, vivid descriptions and an infectious love of Mother Nature, they continue to be impactful throughout generations.

Muir expert Terry Gifford, who provided the forewords for each title, said of the series: 'We have never needed nature more than now. At a time when our relationship with our home planet is under stress, the positive words of John Muir can help us to reconnect, retune, and readjust what it is that we should value for the survival of our species'

<sup>10</sup> https://tinyurl.com/MuirWDEbooks

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http://johnmuir.theunrulymystic.com

# **Dunbar In Pictures Photo Competition**

In conjunction with JMB the Facebook group Dunbar In Pictures are running an exciting new Photo Competition<sup>11</sup> for all professional & keen amateur photographers. The theme for the competition is 'Inspired by John Muir'. The competition winners will have the honour of having their photos displayed in the 'INSPIRED BY JOHN MUIR' PHOTO EXHIBITION during normal opening hours at JMB from Sunday 25th Nov to Friday 21st Dec 2018.

[A fuller report on this competition and the winning entries will appear in the next newsletter. In the meantime an album of all entries is available online <sup>12</sup>. Ed]

# **Membership 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 page<sup>13</sup> and, for local events, on the Dunbar Events Facebook page<sup>14</sup>. 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.

#### **Membership Renewal Reminders**

FoJMB 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

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<sup>11</sup> https://www.facebook.com/groups/DunbarinPictures/permalink/2052821778111816/

<sup>12</sup> https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=oa.2056028591124468&type=3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/

<sup>14</sup> https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/