



# FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 43, Winter 2018

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## **Annual General Meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

### **Convener's Report**

It is customary to begin the Convener's report by stating the aims of Friends of John Muir Birthplace (FoJMB) as given in our constitution. These aims are:

to advance the education of the public concerning John Muir, as the Dunbar-born pioneer of world nature conservation, and his belief in the unique and irreplaceable value of wild places and wild creatures;

to implement John Muir's philosophy practically by conserving, restoring and enhancing landscape and wildlife in East Lothian and Scotland;

to support the ongoing work of the John Muir Birthplace Charitable Trust and the staff of John Muir's Birthplace.

Over the past year we have continued to further these objectives by:

- Delivering a programme of talks and other events on John Muir and environmental topics, both within and outwith John Muir's Birthplace.
- Publishing regular newsletters containing items regarding John Muir, environmental issues and the work of JMB; circulated to members, available at the Birthplace and online on the Friends website<sup>1</sup>.
- Liaising with people and organisations of influence both locally and nationally. Including: John Muir Birthplace Charitable Trust; John Muir Trust; VisitScotland; US National Parks Service; Sierra Club.
- Production of exhibitions for the JMB.
- Providing volunteers on a regular and ad hoc basis to support JMB staff and to promote JMB both locally and further afield.
- Welcoming fellow Muir groups/enthusiasts to Dunbar.
- Donations and fund-raising initiatives.

Full details of the highlights over the past year have been given in the newsletters published during 2018 and the archive of all past issues is available via the FoJMB website<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk>

<sup>2</sup> <http://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/past/>

The events that FoJMB have helped to organise and deliver since the 2017 AGM include:

- February 26<sup>th</sup>: Participation in the John Muir Trust's 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of their John Muir Award.
- March 31<sup>st</sup> to August 30<sup>th</sup>: FoJMB exhibition about the life of artist William Keith and his friendship with John Muir - ***William Keith and John Muir: Kindred Souls***.
- April: Presentation of Wee Books to S5/6 students at Dunbar Grammar School in advance of their trip to California.
- August: Meeting with artists working on a sculpture for the courtyard at the new East Lothian Community Hospital.
- Outreach talks/events.
  - September: U3A Edinburgh Scottish History Group - JM Life and Legacy
  - November: John Muir: Spirituality, Politics and Psychology Conference – ***Inspired by Muir*** talk.
  - November: ***William Keith and John Muir: Kindred Souls*** exhibited at Garioch Heritage Centre, Inverurie until February 24<sup>th</sup>. A digital version will also be put on the Aberdeenshire Library Service website with access restricted to Aberdeenshire libraries and schools.
  - November: ***Inspired by Muir*** Photo Competition in conjunction with the Dunbar in Pictures Facebook group<sup>3</sup>.

The success of the Birthplace is due, of course, to the hard work and dedication of the museum staff and, also, the Friends that help out on a voluntary basis. Their heroic efforts have maintained the museum's Gold 'Green Tourism' award and the Scottish Tourist Board five star visitor attraction status.

I'd like to thank all my fellow Council members - past and present - for their tireless efforts in promoting Friends and the Birthplace.

Best wishes for 2019.

Duncan Smeed, FoJMB Convener

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DunbarinPictures/>

## Dunbar Grammar School Visit to California 2018



After the AGM business Friends' members were joined by non-members for an illustrated talk by DGS pupils about their trip to California. The talk was a fascinating insight into the adventures the pupils (and staff) experienced and provided further insight into the trip report that was published in the last newsletter. Many thanks to all involved for such a good, personal, presentation and best wishes to them and to

subsequent groups of students and staff that may have the opportunity to participate in a 2020 trip.

### Friends' Next Birthplace Exhibition

As announced in our Autumn 2018 newsletter<sup>4</sup> Friends next temporary exhibition will explore the development of John Muir from a boy denied access to all books save the Bible to one of America's most influential writers on nature and conservation. Council members are currently preparing '*John Muir – Writer*' to be ready for the Birthplace's return to summer opening hours on 1 April.

There will be panels on '*Letters*', '*Journals*', '*Newspapers and Magazines*' and '*Books*' as well as ones on his boyhood love of books and his lasting legacy. It's a huge topic and books can be, and have been, written about John Muir as a writer. However, this is usually contained within the bigger picture – of Muir as an explorer, a scientist, a glaciologist and so on. Yet in the days before radio, film, television and the rest, it was the printed word that communicated with the largest numbers of the population. And Muir was in the forefront.

However his was an ambivalent attitude. Muir liked writing letters to friends and family – they were like a long distance conversation. His journals were for his eyes only. Articles in newspapers and magazines were a useful source of

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<sup>4</sup> [https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2018/11/FoJMB\\_Newsletter\\_2018\\_Autumn.pdf](https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/files/2018/11/FoJMB_Newsletter_2018_Autumn.pdf)

income and later a way of reaching a lot of folk quickly, as in the Hetch Hetchy Campaign. But he did not enjoy ‘book writing’.

Books were for keeping, like one of Willie Keith’s paintings, and so had to be as perfect as he could make them. In a letter to sister Sarah in 1876, he wrote, “*Writing is like the life of a glacier; one eternal grind . . . and soon I’ll throw down my pen, and take up my heels to go mountaineering once more. My first book is taking shape now, and is mostly written, but still far from complete. I hope to see it in print, rubbed, and scrubbed, and elaborated, some time next year.*” His first book, ‘Mountains of California’, was not published until 1894!

Still he did leave a wonderful legacy and perversely he didn’t perish in the ice and snow of Alaska or by falling from some unclimbable cliff face but in bed working on his latest book, ‘*Travels in Alaska*’. Come along to see ‘**John Muir – Writer**’ and tell your friends.

Will Collin

## **Great granddaughter and great great granddaughter to visit Dunbar**

Friends are looking forward to welcoming Susan Flynn and her daughter Allison Latus, both from California, to Dunbar in May. They will be spending a few days in Edinburgh and coming to visit the boyhood home of Susan’s famous great grandfather.

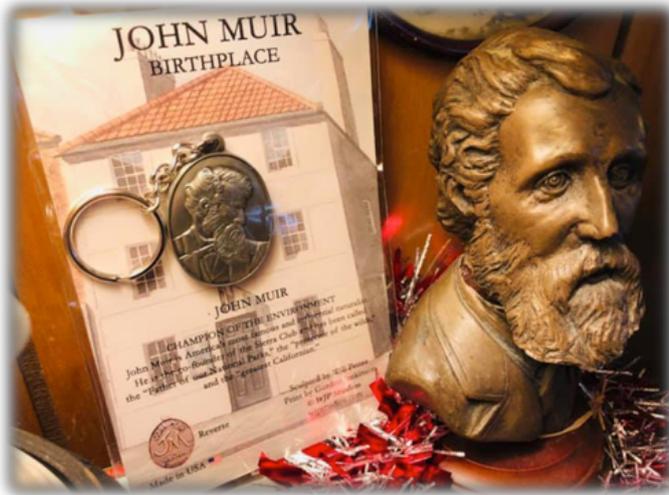
Susan’s father Strentzel Hanna was the oldest of the eight children of Muir’s daughter Wanda and her husband Tom Hanna. Strentzel was also the oldest grandchild of John Muir and Louisa Strentzel.

Susan, who recently celebrated her eightieth birthday, was married to Terry Flynn and Allison (middle name Muir) is one of their twin daughters – the other is Maureen and they have a brother Mike. Sadly, Susan’s husband Terry died a couple of years ago. She is a retired schoolteacher and lives in Lakeside, a large rural community of 20,000 or so folk to the east of San Diego. Allison resides in El Cajon, somewhere in between.

We hope that Dunbar will live up to her reputation as Sunny Dunny for their first visit.

Will Collin

## John Muir Keyrings



In late-December 2018 a package from US resident – and Muir enthusiast - Timmy Womick was delivered to John Muir’s Birthplace. The package contained 72 limited-edition Muir-themed keyrings as a fund-raising gift to Friends. Earlier in the year Timmy had been in e-mail contact with Jim Thompson with the offer of the donation (and a photo [left] of one the keyring

presentation packs alongside the bust of John Muir by the artist/sculptor Will Pettee<sup>5</sup>). Included in the donation of keyrings was a hand-written card:

*Hello Jim,*

*John Muir inspires us every day to be better stewards of the environment and to do our best to preserve and protect it.*

*We would like to share this inspiration with others. We are devoted to keeping the memory of John Muir alive through art.*

*Being an artist, this has been thru sculptures of different sizes. Our new John Muir keychain is an affordable way for people all over the world to bring home a daily reminder of his to us all ~ nature protection. Be a champion like John Muir ~ carry him with you for inspiration.*

*Wishing you a joyous & bright New Year. Blessings ~ Will and Karen Pettee.*

[The keyrings are now on sale in John Muir’s Birthplace. But be quick, there’s not that many of them. And don’t forget that members of Friends’ get a 10% discount on any purchases from the Birthplace shop! Ed.]



**Keyrings now on sale in JMB!**

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wjpestudios.com>

# ***silva*: a meditation on trees and woodland in eleven photographs**

**February 20<sup>th</sup> – March 24<sup>th</sup> 2019**

[An exhibition<sup>6</sup> in John Muir's Birthplace by photographer Chris W. Thomas<sup>7</sup>. Ed.]



Humankind has had an intimate relationship with trees and woodland since the days of our earliest ancestors – on the one hand, practical and prosaic, on another, a deeply-felt sense of their intrinsic value as living things, expressed spiritually by some. The importance of trees and woodland as part of a sustainable, richly-biodiverse and resilient future environments is well-

recognised, but our attachment goes beyond this: trees and woodland are just as important to us psychologically and physically, simply by being.

Arising from his own fascination with trees and woodlands, Chris's sequence of black and white film photographs seeks to invite visitors to the exhibition simply to reflect upon the 'being' of trees and woods: their 'essence' expressed in their architectures, textures and forms, the way they create light and shade and space, how these phenomena change daily, or through the seasons – and how we respond ourselves, consciously or subliminally, to our trees and woodlands.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/event/silva-by-chris-thomas/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.christhomasphotographer.co.uk>

# John Muir's Birthplace – News

## Online Presence

As reported in previous newsletters John Muir's Birthplace staff are increasingly turning to social media and other online opportunities to promote exhibitions and events. The website<sup>8</sup> for the John Muir Birthplace Trust is the cornerstone of the online presence of John Muir's Birthplace. If you would also like to keep in touch through social media please follow John Muir's Birthplace on Facebook<sup>9</sup> or @JM\_Birthplace on Twitter<sup>10</sup> using #JohnMuirDunbar #EastLothian hashtags. Feedback via social media is always appreciated.

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 a number of new Tripadvisor review for John Muir's Birthplace<sup>11</sup> have been submitted and several highlights are quoted below.

*5/5 Very informative and thought provoking visit: Absolute must if you want to learn the history of John Muir the man who gave America the national parks. From learning about the hardships he suffered as a young man to emigrating to America and being one of the founders of the National Parks was very informative and thought provoking. If you visit Dunbar then this is a must.*

*5/5 Most excellent museum!: Well worth a trip to Dunbar: We wanted to visit the Birthplace of one of the most spectacular historical figures the world is lucky to have, so we took the train out of Edinburgh and 20 mins later, we were in Dunbar. The museum is a lovely telling of the tale of John Muir - just the right amount of information, with magnificent Muir quotes interspersed. The staff were so helpful and passionate in sharing their knowledge.*

*This really is a lovely museum and the fact it is free, gives you no excuse not to visit. Though please do donate, as it would have an associated fee if it was anywhere else or owned by a UK heritage company.*

*John Muir was a special man and exploring the wilds of the Dunbar surrounds really did give him the passion for what he loved. The US is a better place*

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.jmbt.org.uk>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/JMBirthplace>

<sup>10</sup> [https://twitter.com/JM\\_Birthplace](https://twitter.com/JM_Birthplace)

<sup>11</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/yc28xfv3>

*because of him and his conservation work. If you don't know who he is, you should! So pay a visit here.*

*There is a lovely clean loo, accessible elevator and a great little selection of gifts in the front.*

*Dunbar itself is a gorgeous and historical little town. Highlight of our trip to Edinburgh, so don't hesitate to take a few hours out to visit this gem of a museum in this great town.*

*4/5 Quirky interesting museum: Really interesting museum. I had no idea who John Muir was before visiting here with my three year old daughter. I wish he was more well known in Scotland and in England (where I'm from). We should be proud to have him as part of our history and celebrate him as he is in America. Welcoming informed staff who were very good with my little girl too. Excellent changing facilities for little ones.*

## **FREE Weekend Activities with EAST Lothian Council Museums**

All our museums have FREE ADMISSION and lots of drop-in crafts and activities that are perfect for that last-minute day trip. For details please see [www.eastlothian.gov.uk/museums](http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/museums)

### **Fun & Crafty Weekend Drop-in Activities in February/March**

From Friday lunchtime to Sunday afternoon and during school holidays, 1pm-4pm please join us in John Muir's Birthplace for fun drop-in crafts and activities! Suggested donation £1 per craft.

**Butterfly clips**<sup>12</sup>: Friday, February 22 / 13:00 - Sunday, February 24 / 17:00

**RSPB Activity Day**<sup>13</sup>: Saturday, March 9, 2019 / 10:30 - 16:00

### **Exhibitions in February/March**

**'Silva' by Chris Thomas**: Wednesday, February 20 - Sunday, March 24

Follow us on Facebook at East Lothian Council Museums Service<sup>14</sup> or John Muir's Birthplace<sup>15</sup> to find out more.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/event/weekend-family-fun-butterfly-clips/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/event/rspb-activity-day/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/EastLothianCouncilMuseumsService/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.jmbt.org.uk/whats-on/>

## Muir News:

### *In the Footsteps of John Muir*

[This exhibition is currently on display at Stirling Castle<sup>16</sup> until April 28<sup>th</sup>. Ed.]

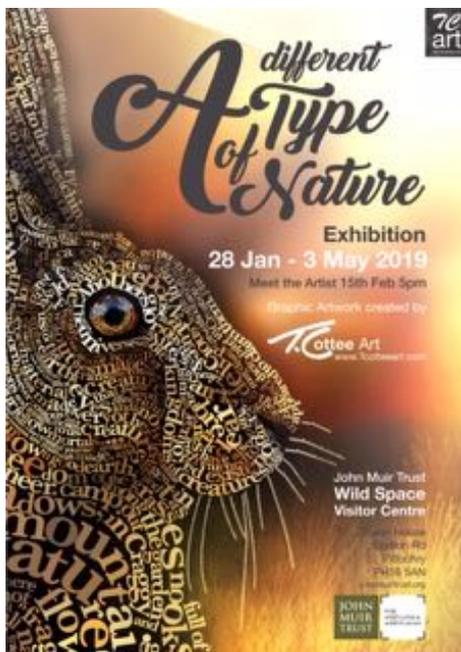


Exploring the landscape that inspired John Muir, a leading Scottish American environmental conservationist and known in America as the "Father of the National Parks", this photography exhibition traces Muir's travels from his childhood in Dunbar to the American

National Parks he helped to establish. Presented by the American Scottish Foundation, the works of Scottish photographer Ken Paterson shares the beauty of both Scottish and American wilderness that John Muir was so passionate about.

### *A Different Type of Nature*

[This exhibition is on display until May 3<sup>rd</sup> at the John Muir Trust Wild Space visitor centre's Allan Reece Gallery<sup>17</sup> in Pitlochry. There may be an opportunity in the future to bring the artwork to the Birthplace as part of its temporary exhibition programme. Ed.]



Nature and Scotland's beauty has always amazed me. I am drawn to the sea (predominantly), the wild and the great outdoors and enjoy nothing more than exploring the untouched wonders that exist around our country. Being an avid surfer, many of my missions to find waves have taken me off the well travelled paths and introduced me to the wonders of the unknown. I find the landscapes, the changes and the wildlife that can be found whilst exploring Scotland captivating and try to recreate this within my work. I believe Scotland to be a truly unique country, with natural habitats unlike those found anywhere else. John Muir recognised the value, beauty and healing of

nature and I hope that my work can remind and inspire people of this.

Tim Cottee<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.stirlingcastle.scot/whatson/events/footsteps/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/our-work/wild-space-visitor-centre/current-exhibition>

# John Muir Day Celebrations

## 20-28 April 2019



John Muir Day Celebrations offer an annual opportunity to mark John Muir's birthday, 21st April 1838. Events, resources and activities are set up and promoted that help connect people with Muir's legacy and relevance today. It's an opportunity to share

and celebrate how people are engaging with Muir's ethos, stories and adventures in their studies, work and leisure time.

The John Muir Trust will host details of relevant activity and resources on the Discover John Muir website<sup>19</sup>. The hashtag #JohnMuirDay will also yield relevant resources/news on social media.

## Year of Green Action



The Year of Green Action<sup>20</sup> (YoGA) 2019 aims to see more people taking action that improves the natural world. In turn encouraging and inspiring others to do the same. In addition the #iwill4nature<sup>21</sup> campaign places young people at the heart of the year that focuses on three themes – connect, protect and enhance.

The John Muir Trust is also supporting YoGA<sup>22</sup> and #iwill4nature as part of its **Young people and nature** initiative<sup>23</sup>. These campaigns to encourage more young people to become involved in active conservation and protection of the natural world are to be applauded and Friends of John Muir's Birthplace will actively promote and support these efforts wherever it can.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.tcotteeart.com>

<sup>19</sup> <https://discoverjohnmuir.com/muir-events/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.yearofgreenaction.org>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.iwill.org.uk/environment/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/youngpeople/year-of-green-action-2019>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/youngpeople>

# **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 version<sup>24</sup> 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 page<sup>25</sup> and, for local events, on the Dunbar Events Facebook page<sup>26</sup>. 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](mailto:info@muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)**

**Friends Website: [www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk](http://www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk)**

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<sup>24</sup> <https://muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk/newsletters/current/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/fojmb/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/497808383660101/>