



FRIENDS of JOHN MUIR'S BIRTHPLACE

Newsletter No. 17, July 2011

Dear Friends,

Summer, so they would have us believe, arrived on 21st June. Well, we shall wait and see. The past few months have been busy and interesting, celebrating JM's 173rd birthday amongst other things. I particularly enjoyed the birthday dinner at a local restaurant in the company of Friends. To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the 'twinning' of Dunbar with Martinez, where JM lived an exhibition was held in the Birthplace and at the same time in Martinez showing illustrated photographs of like for like scenes in both towns and was most interesting. Well done to Pauline Smeed of the History Society for organising this. The current exhibition celebrates the 259th anniversary of another of East Lothian's sons, the famous engineer, John Rennie, born in East Linton just 8 miles from Dunbar.

We continue to welcome interesting visitors to the Birthplace. In mid-June Leroy Lopez, a National Park Ranger, came in and in early July we welcomed Goodwill Ambassadors Frank and Carol Walsh from Martinez. Frank is a past Principal of Alhambra High School and was instrumental in helping to organise the first exchange visits of pupils from his school and Dunbar Grammar.

Enjoy the summer, take part in the sand castle building competition and come in and see us.

Yours Aye,
Jim Thompson

Goodwill Ambassadors

Dunbar Community Council hosted a reception in the Birthplace on Friday 1 July for Frank and Carol Walsh who spent a couple of days in Dunbar in the capacity as Goodwill Ambassadors on behalf of the Martinez city council. Frank was involved in the early years of the twinning in arranging the student exchanges between Alhambra High School and Dunbar Grammar School.

Frank brought a number of commemorative gifts from Martinez and received several in return to take back to his home city. There are several photographs of these ‘ceremonies’ later on in this newsletter.

In addition to their visit to the Birthplace, Frank and Carol also thoroughly enjoyed a short off-shore excursion on *Fisher Lassie* courtesy of local fisherman, and Chairman of Dunbar and District History Society, Gordon Easingwood.

By all accounts, Frank and Carol had a most enjoyable two days and have returned to California very highly impressed with the warm welcome they received in Dunbar.

Other visitors to the Birthplace Museum

JMB visitor numbers are great! Up by 14% (January-June), with a fantastic April seeing 1630 visitors (an increase of 25% over previous years) and the museum has been very busy over the first two weeks of the school summer break.

Notable visitors have included:

- Joanne Orr, CEO Museums Galleries Scotland and East Lothian resident who has commented “*Fantastic work – think we should be calling it John Muir Country!*”
- Darleen Leialoha & Leroy Lopez who are US National Park Service Rangers at the John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez.
- Abbey St Bathans WRI

In addition, here are some of the most notable comments that have been written in the Visitors’ Book since the publication of the last newsletter:

- *“Inspirational to visit the origins of the subject I have taught and continue to enthuse people. Do encourage locals to visit Carrifran which is a masterpiece in rewilding the Borders on a massive scale”* - visitors from Herfordshire.
- Two contrasting quotes from visitors from Canada on different days:
 - *“What a wonderful house to visit! Very informative and inspiring!”*
 - *“Disappointed in lack of mention of time in Meaford, tramping around Georgian Bay and founding of Canadian National Parks in 1885”.*
- *“Interesting connection to make! Incredible new perspective on Yosemite and NPS!”* - a visitor from California.
- *“Been meaning to visit for many years and not disappointed now we have”* – visitors from Balerno

At the other end of the Way

Working as I do at both the Birthplace and Prestongrange¹, it is sometimes hard to see any similarities between those two, very different, very distinct places. I suppose the main one that unites them is the John Muir Way, which passes both en route from Dunglass to Fisherrow Harbour. When catching a bus home from Prestongrange, I stand at Morrison’s Haven right on the Way, spending a few minutes admiring that unbeatable vista, from Arthur’s Seat and the roofs and spires of Edinburgh to the islands of the Forth and Fife beyond, before the red 26 bus rolls up and scoots me off over yonder. As I spend days talking about the details of 800 years of industry, my thoughts sometimes turn to Morrison’s Haven itself, now filled in but once a significant harbour where locally produced coal, bricks, chemicals, pottery, salt and more besides went out and fine goods came in from Europe, Russia and beyond. On a beautiful day, there are few nicer places to stand, even as cars whoosh by. Still I get to stand and ponder my surroundings and their great history as well as where I could saunter, given time.

Kevin Addies²

¹ Prestongrange is an Industrial Heritage Museum run by East Lothian Council. It is located by Morrison’s Haven on the coast road between Musselburgh and Prestonpans. Free guided tours and audio tours are available. Open 11.30am to 4.30pm April to October.

² Kevin is a Friends Council member and museum assistant at John Muir’s Birthplace and Prestongrange Museum.

John Muir Banners

Several months ago classes at Dunbar Primary School started work on banners to decorate the main hall from Dec '10 through to June '11. The theme chosen was John Muir. Many different ideas were translated to banners through a variety of media including paint, crayon and pencil. John Muir the Geologist, Dunbar coastline, Yosemite Valley, Waterfalls, Giant Redwoods and many other scenes appeared along with many iconic Muir quotes.

Well done Dunbar Primary! Many children, parents and visitors have had great pleasure viewing your work. Here are photos of a few of the banners.



John Muir's Birthplace Museum – News

Past Events

As mentioned in the last newsletter Birthplace staff were looking forward(!) to the 1980s themed Breakdancing Workshop. This event was linked in with the 30th anniversary of the Martinez Twinning and attracted 28 children and 21 adults. Friends will be pleased to learn that the staff survived!



Summer Events

A wide variety of events are running over the summer at the museum. Details of these are available in leaflets available at the Birthplace (and other visitor attractions throughout East Lothian and Edinburgh) and from the Visit East Lothian Events web page at <http://www.visiteastlothian.org/events.asp> and the John Muir's Birthplace Museum website at <http://www.jmbt.org.uk/>

Exhibitions

Friends members still have time to see the already popular John Rennie exhibition in the Birthplace's back room, The exhibition closes on 31st July. Produced by the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists' Society, the exhibition showcases the life of John Rennie, an engineer born 250 years ago at Phantassie (near East Linton) and went on to greatness designing bridges, canals, breakwaters, harbours and aqueducts the length and breadth of the



A part of the John Rennie exhibition

British Isles, from the New Bridge in Musselburgh to the Plymouth Breakwater and London Bridge, now to be found in the rather unlikely location of Arizona in the United States. He is another of East Lothian's famous sons, though one not well known even here, which this exhibition seeks to correct and rightly so.

Also running again from mid-July in the back room will be our summer exhibition '*An Ingenious Whittler: John Muir the Inventor*', an exhibition that begat the Loafer's chair that has given many a child (and grown up) a chuckle or a fright (or both) over the last four years. Muir is better known for his work to campaign for the protection of wild places but lesser known about him is that he was a talented inventor and engineer whose creations, devised by night, eventually got him into the University of Wisconsin.

News



including the following.

On July 1st members of Friends's Council attended the reception for the Martinez Goodwill Ambassadors – Frank and Carol Walsh. Many photographs were taken,



Frank and Carol Walsh being presented with Dunbar plaques by Dunbar Community Council Chairman, Stephen Bunyan (right)



Some of the commemorative gifts exchanged between Dunbar and Martinez

Sand Sculpture Competition 2011

Hooray! It's that time again. Get out your buckets and spades and put your thinking caps on! Our popular Friends of John Muir's Birthplace Sand Sculpture Competition will take place this year on Saturday 6th August from 11am – 3pm at the East Beach, Dunbar. Come along and make a sea creature ... a mermaid ... a boat ... historic landmark etc. Let your imagination run wild! You may like to bring a picnic.

'Community' judging and award of prizes will take place at 3pm. There will be adult, child and family/group categories. Entry will be £2 per adult, £1 per child and £5 per family.

We trust that summer will truly have arrived by August, but if the weather is poor on the day, please phone John Muir's Birthplace - 01368 865899 - after 10am to find out if the event has been postponed.

Please note that the nearest toilet facilities to East Beach are a 10 minute walk away near Dunbar Leisure Pool.

PS East Lothian Tourist Attraction Group is running a sandcastle competition this year. Details at <http://www.visiteastlothian.org/sandcastle.asp> and the closing date for entries is 30th September.



The winning family 'sandcastle' under construction in 2010!

Membership Reminders

April was the month that most membership renewals fell due. Renewal forms were included with the April newsletter for Friends who had taken out their membership on an annual basis and whose renewals are not automatically paid by standing order. 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. It's still not too late to renew a lapsed membership and if our records show that your membership has lapsed then a subscription form will be included in this newsletter mailing.

Friends of John Muir's Birthplace on the Internet

As part of the preparations for the Dunbar & Martinez 30th Anniversary celebrations in April, the Friends web presence was revamped and moved to become part of the local ourlocality.org – Dunbar Initiative - web hosting service. The Friends website address is still www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk and we hope that Friends like the new updated look and content.

Facebook has also become an important medium for community groups and charities like Friends to disseminate news and to organise and promote their events. Recently a Facebook page has been created to help raise the profile of Friends and to help promote Muir's life and work. A (shortened) link to the Facebook page is <http://www.tinyurl.com/fbfojmb>

This Facebook page will also be kept updated with news, events and links to other Muir-related web resources. Friends (of the Birthplace sort!) are encouraged to 'like' the page as a certain number of fans are required before a more memorable 'username' – e.g. <http://www.facebook.com/fojmb> - is enabled.

FRIENDS CONTACTS

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

Friends Website: www.muirbirthplacefriends.org.uk

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Convener: Jim Thompson, Secretary: Susan Panton, Membership Sec: Duncan Smeed, Treasurer: Will Collin. All can be contacted through the Birthplace.