

Testimonies of the Rocks: the Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2015-16

Joint 3rd place in poetry

Jim Mackintosh: Old is tomorrow

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2015-2016 invited entries inspired by the geological and landscape writings of Hugh Miller, Scotland's celebrated self-taught geologist. The competition was organised by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, the Friends of Hugh Miller and many other partners.

Further details of the competition, and all the winning entries, are available at www.scottishgeology.com/hughmiller/

We hope that this writing competition has encouraged a renewed interest in Miller's work, a catalogue of superb new writings inspired by one of Scotland's greatest nature writers and greater awareness and appreciation of Scotland's geodiversity.

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OLD IS TOMORROW

You can see it clearly, if you allow yourself, to pause, to breathe out
for the briefest of moments away from the grub
that befuddles our imagination, the digital bleed of information.

*life itself is a school
and Nature
always a fresh study*

layers of past generations
mulch of past millenniums
the openings, the chasms
the marks of ancient furrows

successive soils laid bare in stratified gravel, moraines of memory unpicked
by him, to be scooped up, understood - learning
the memorial of time, a clock ticking past our fragile existence barely
a thin layer of history visible, relevant – brushed
by the frequent eddy of tides where humanity shifted along the shore
and in that shallow glimpse of our past, man
emptied his mouth of gravel and found the plough to till his story

*and that the man
who keeps his eyes
and his mind open
will always find fitting*

How long have we stumbled and understood nothing? Not him.
He walked with a steady pace: noticed the difference,
even a section of a few feet, our two lines of pointless text message lost
where in that time, he would find an archipelago
of islands, brushed by frequent icebergs, and the lift of creatures
sub-arctic molluscs, sand floods, a belief
in all that's left under our feet, belongs in our minds, in our imaginations

*though it may be
hard school masters
to speed him
on his lifelong education*

I am sure of this – Hugh Miller's stride was unbroken, in seeing our story.
His footprints apparent today in the unravelling
of our tomorrows, the unfurling coil of our layers, the unlocking of ourselves
to place fresh words on the shelf next to his.

Note: The words in italics are the last four lines from Hugh Miller's book, My Schools and Schoolchildren