

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition 2019-2020

Poetry Highly Commended

A Stone's Throw from Easdale: Carol Shea

The Hugh Miller Writing Competition carries the name of one of Scotland's most endearing geologists, Hugh Miller (1802-1856), and aims to honour his legacy by inspiring new, original prose and poetry on the theme of Scotland's geoh heritage. The competition is organised by the Scottish Geodiversity Forum and The Friends of Hugh Miller.

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

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A Stone's Throw from Easdale

Crossing the Atlantic Bridge, its south side awash
with fairy foxglove, the call is strong. A lifetime ago
a minibus re-fuelled opposite the Tigh
an Truish. You ate plastic toasties, drank warm lager.
Then, you sought to read the rocks; indigo foliated slates twinkling
with millennia of micrometric mica. Weeks of mapping, skimming
plotting; a bucket of stones, a dusty rock hammer your spoils.
Discarded, one by one, as you grew, moved, changed,
lost, contracted. Just one remains. In your hand, it tells the
human stories of people and place. Formed in
Palaeozoic pressures; split by erupting fault lines,
raging subterranean currents; torn along fragile
grinding tectonic plates; scree wind lashed into silicate
and clay – until Rodinia ruptured. Rains raised Ancient Iapetus;
shores re-shaped by volatile cycles: collisions; divisions; melting;
freezing and melding. Morph in claymation. Formed, re-formed, bent
but not quite broken.

In '45, the Campbells, Netherlorn men, came. Not for princes
or crowns, but rock cleavage and silver pounds.
Castles consolidated with borrowed brides and ransom spoils.
They paid for honest toil, modernised and mechanised.
500 men quarried, split, napped; wedged in watery clefts
on denuded crags, creaking joints engorged as they hewed out
five million princess and duchess-cut tiles, roofing castles
and cathedrals in worlds old and new, building communities.
Spoil filled causeways melded island to island.

One stormy night, its defences breached, core sucked, dreams

submerged, livelihoods cleared by nature's rage, returns declined,
meagre livings scraped. A few endured. Heart still beats to a new tempo.

Now coaches cross the old stone bridge daily. Disgorged tourists
savour tasty fare, buy postcards not petrol, try on the kilt,
giggle in Highland Arts. Plinkety-plink pipes and fiddles
tweed, tartan tat, tablet, warm shortbread and impotent art.
They bounce in fast boats to exhilarating whirlpools, cheer
World Stone Skimming Championships, wheel possessions
in colourful barrows from the tiny quayside.

A bowl of seafood, glass of Chablis, white-washed
holiday lets at your back, you caress the stone one last time
then skim it back into its inky womb.

By Carol Shea