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## 1. Diary Dates and events to look out for

### **Bill Stanley, A Sailors Story, (another adaptation of a Tale)**

Presented by Far Horizon Voices. 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024 at the Warkworth Memorial Hall. Performances start at 7.30, Bar opens at 7.

Tickets: £10.00 with a concessionary price of £5.00 for young people can be bought from Warkworth Village Store, N and F Young of Amble and from [FHVtickets@yahoo.com](mailto:FHVtickets@yahoo.com) as well as being purchased at the door on the night.

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## **2. Celebrating Wilson**

### **Beans and Bacon Supper**

We again held our celebration of J M Wilson's life on the anniversary of his death on 2<sup>nd</sup>

October. Our annual dinner, themed on his humorous poem Beans & Bacon, or The Tale of Toby Toothpick, was promoted to a wider audience this year and held in the magnificent Assembly Room at The Kings Arms Hotel. Attendees came from as far afield as Suffolk to enjoy the the evening's entertainment.

We continued our tradition of having a Vacant Chair, as a tribute to Wilson's first Tale of that name, as well as a recital of Wilson's theme poem.

We had the premiere of project Director Andrew Ayre's adaptation of "The persecuted Elector" as a radio style play. This was enthusiastically presented by a cast of four local thespians, with the benefit of some expert direction from Jane Houston Green. "





Photographs courtesy of the Projects' Official Photographer, Jill Spence.

### **100 Word Competition**

**2024 International Competition winner announced as Stuart Ritching, with his tale Gypsy Boots.**

The dinner provided the perfect opportunity to announce the winner of this year's 100 word competition. The overall judges comments for this year were as follows:

*The overall standard of entries is even higher than last year. We are continually amazed by how large a story can fit within the 100 word limit. The originals, with their linear stories, serve to demonstrate the degree to which authors and audience have advanced in both language and imagination. J.M.Wilson would be having a ball if he were writing today. As a comic example, we recommend another entry by our winner, Stuart Ritching, 2403 - Billy the Fish.*

*We applaud all the entrants, and look forward to 2025 with great anticipation.*

After the beans & bacon inspired meal, the 100Word Tale competition was summarised, with several examples being presented, each chosen for their entertainment value. The featured entries were all read by Kevin Archer, last year's second placed entrant, and a professional voice artist.



Photograph courtesy of the Projects' Official Photographer, Jill Spence.

We enjoyed entries from around the world, this year welcoming Chile and India into our global reach and a special mention for the entry from Shanghai from 13 year old Katy Han added to Britain, Canada, USA, Middle East, South Africa and Australia. Once again the subjects cover a full range of genres and periods, past, present and future, with entries up by 35% but most encouragingly, the quality of the submissions has once again risen, with the judges having a difficult time making choices. We even have 3 late entries starting next year's list. Especial mention was made of the number of entrants who had travelled to the dinner, the winner having made a journey from Suffolk to attend.

Although there is only one winner, the shortlist contained some excellent Tales, for instance, the judges described this one as "a charming tale of innocence, with a nice twist at the end" from the other side of the globe. Doug Jacquier lives in South Australia. His entry is catalogued as 2483.

### **A Bracing Tale.**

*Walking Wendy, the vicar's daughter, home from the village dance, I made my first fumbling teenage attempts at what I thought taking her virginity would involve.*

*Near her front gate, she stopped and gave me my first kiss, until she said, like a bad ventriloquist, 'Ar aces are uck ether.' She meant 'our braces are stuck together.'*

*She ran off laughing and I began to imagine how quickly her tale would spread around the school.*

*But it seemed she didn't tell anyone, and next week, she waited for me outside the hall and I noticed she'd taken off her braces.*

## The winning entry *Gypsy Boots* by Stuart Ritching

*Old Joe's finest boots were purchased by a London merchant but later stolen by an escaping highwayman.*

*They were exchanged for passage to France where the ship's captain gifted them to his aristocratic cousin returning to Paris.*

*When he was guillotined and his body stripped the boots ended up with a smuggler who eventually returned to England.*

*Leaving a tavern a thief robbed the smuggler taking his loot to the nearest cobbler.*

*His business failing, Old Joe spent his last shilling to recover his old boots.*

*As he removed one worn heel out popped the biggest diamond he'd ever seen.*

The Judge's comments stated "the twisting thread of the story, with unlikely coincidences leading to an amazing, but happy ending has all the ring of a Wilson circumlocutory story that would fit straight in to Tales of the Borders"

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### 3. "Wilson Plays Paxton"

With support of funding from Destination Tweed, we were able to combine with The Borders Pub Theatre Group to bring a selection of Six short plays based on Wilson's Tales to new audiences at Paxton House on 4th October. A selection of Tales that represented their diverse variety. From horror in the depths of the sea in a stranded Diving bell, to the horrors of the aftermath of Culloden, the horrors of child abduction and even the horror realising the greatcoat one had borrowed to impress had been stolen. But all done in an engaging and humorous way that drew the audience into the drama of the event in the intimate setting of the picture gallery.

One happy audience member commented:

"Thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

We really enjoyed the plays. Lighthearted and good fun. Wilson is a discovery!"





Photograph Courtesy of Project Director Andrew Ayre

### **Another piece in the Wilson Jigsaw Hugh Miller and his involvement in the tales.**

Hugh Miller became the one time editor of the Tales following the death of J.M. Wilson in 1843.

A fascinating, gifted and driven character, his own life, achievements and death could justify a tale in themselves. Here is a taste of where he came from, who he was and what he did and a record of how sadly his life ended at a very young age when he was, most likely, plagued by mental poor health from which he could find no relief nor cure.

I have included a short extract from his own autobiography in which he sets out his view of his role as editor and what it meant to him. It is illustrative of his pragmatic nature.

Miller was born in Cromarty, the eldest of three children. His parents were from trading and artisan families in the county. Following his father's death in 1807, Hugh was brought up by his mother and uncles. Educated in a Parish School he reportedly showed a love of reading.

Following his expulsion from School for poor behaviour, aged 17 he was apprenticed to a Stonemason. His work in quarries, together with walks along the local shoreline, led him to the study of geology. It seems this became the start of his self driven and secured

education, spawning as it did many other interests and occupations.

In 1829 he published a volume of poems, and soon afterwards became involved in political and religious controversies.

In 1834 he became accountant in one of the local banks. In 1835 he published *Scenes and Legends in the North of Scotland*. In 1837 he married the children's author, Lydia Fraser.

In 1840 the popular party in the Church, with which he had been associated, started a newspaper, the *Witness*, and Miller was called to be editor in Edinburgh, a position which he retained until the end of his life. He was an influential writer and speaker in the early Free Church.

For most of 1856, Miller had severe headaches and mental distress, the most probable diagnosis is of psychotic depression. Victorian medicine did not help. He feared that he might harm his wife or children because of persecutory delusions.

Miller died by suicide, shooting himself in the chest with a revolver in his house, Shrub Mount, Portobello, Edinburgh on the night of 23/24 December 1856.

His funeral procession, attended by thousands, was amongst the largest in the memory of Edinburgh residents.

The following extract from Miller's own biography throws light upon his contribution of the ongoing publication of the tales.

"THOUGH my wife continued, after our marriage, to teach a few pupils, the united earnings of the household did not much exceed a hundred pounds per annum—not quite so large a sum as I had used to think it a few years before; and so I set myself to try whether I could not turn my leisure hours to some account, by writing for the periodicals. My old inability of pressing for work continued to be as embarrassing as ever, and, save for a chance engagement of no very promising kind, which presented itself to me unsolicited about this time, I might have failed in procuring the employment which I sought. An ingenious self-taught mechanic—the late Mr John Mackay Wilson of Berwick-on-Tweed—after making good his upward way from his original place at the compositor's frame, to the editorship, of a provincial paper, started, in the beginning of 1835, a weekly periodical, consisting of "Border Tales," which as he possessed the story-telling ability, met with considerable success. He did not live, however, to complete the first yearly volume; the forty-ninth weekly number intimated his death; but as the publication had been a not unprofitable one, the publisher resolved on carrying it on; and it was stated in a brief notice, which embodied a few particulars of Mr Wilson's biography, that, his materials being unexhausted, "tales yet untold lay in reserve to keep alive his memory." And in the name of Wilson the publication was kept up for, I believe, five years. It reckoned among its contributors the two Bethunes, John and Alexander, and the late Professor Gillespie, of St Andrews, with several other writers, none of whom seem to have been indebted to any original matter collected by its first editor; and I, who, at the publisher's request, wrote for it, during the first year of my marriage, tales enough to fill an ordinary volume, had certainly to provide all my materials for myself. The whole brought me about twenty-five pounds—a considerable addition to the previous hundred and odds of the household, but, for the work done, as inadequate a remuneration as ever poor writer got in the days of Grub Street. My tales, however, though an English critic did me the honour of selecting

one of them as the best in the monthly part in which it appeared, were not of the highest order: it took a great deal of writing to earn the three guineas, which were the stipulated wages for filling a weekly number; and though poor Wilson may have been a fine enough fellow in his way, one had no great encouragement to do one's very best, in order to "keep alive his memory." In all such matters, according to Sir Walter Scott and the old proverb, "every herring should hang by its own head."

#### **HUGH Miller AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

You can find out more information about Hugh and where to go to visit his home by clicking on the links below:

- [www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/hugh-millers-birthplace](http://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/hugh-millers-birthplace)
- [The Friends of Hugh Miller | Museum and Gardens](#)

#### 4. Note from the Editor

Greetings all.

October has clearly been a month when there has been much celebrating of J.M. Wilson, his life and his legacy, the tales.

It is heartening to learn that the tales are still popular and providing pleasure today and reaching new audiences.

And, there is still one more tale you can catch being performed this month, that of Bill Stanley, the details for which are provided above.

So, as the days continue to shorten and therefore the nights, correspondingly, to lengthen, it might just be a good time to pick up and start revisiting some of these yarns for ourselves.

Wishing you all the best of health for the autumn months.

Denise Bradshaw [newseditor@wilsonstales.co.uk](mailto:newseditor@wilsonstales.co.uk)

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## Stockists

We're delighted to help the cause of local and independent bookshops. Even more so when they stock Wilson's Tales. Now available from these locations;

Slightly Foxed, Bridge Street, Berwick. : <https://business.facebook.com/slightlyfoxedberwick/>



Berwick Heritage Centre, Walkergate, Berwick : <https://berwickhods.org.uk>

Greives, Church St , Berwick : <https://www.facebook.com/Geo-C-Grieve-Ltd-214226152007347/>

Main Street Trading, Main Street, St Boswells : <https://www.mainstreetbooks.co.uk/online-bookshop>

The Reading Room, The Square, Melrose : <https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/thereadingroommelrose>

The Village Shop, Cornhill-on Tweed : <https://www.facebook.com/CornhillVillageShop>

Heron & Willow, Jedburgh : <https://www.facebook.com/heronandwillow/>

and if you missed last year and Volume 7, you may purchase them both together at a reduced price, but only on our website. Go to <https://www.wilsonstales.co.uk/shop/> to purchase, or any of the booksellers above

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