



SEASON'S GREETINGS

From

Elginia and all at

Elgin Museum

President's Message



I attended the volunteers' lunch last week and we welcomed a record attendance. All are worthy of our thanks and praise for ensuring that Elgin Museum remains open, relevant, and exciting. Bill Dalgarno highlighted a hugely important point. On social media people say that we WELCOME them and that they enjoy being with us. I can vouch for that because our grandchildren have been to the museum and loved it. I cannot resist adding that Mrs Johnston has been delighted, as part of the Member's art group, to have sold her paintings and cards in aid of the museum.

Heather has achieved 20 years working with us and for us. It was a delight to surprise her with a gift to recognise this. I repeat what I said about her. She is determined in her task but she is such a happy person and has brought much support and brightness to our volunteer tasks. I thank her warmly and much look forward to a further 25/30/years!

You may have read in the press that the Museum has been awarded funding of just over £23,000 for a fossil project celebrating the Scottish Government's *Year of Coasts and Waters*. Well done to Alison and the Geology Group for achieving this – it is a national recognition of how good Elgin Museum is. Of the 13 projects funded through the scheme run by the prestigious UK Art Fund, we were the only recipient north of the border. The award will provide new state of the art display cases and environmental monitoring equipment enabling not only the loan of *Elginerpeton* but also other objects from national museums in future.

So we enter the winter period and there is always lots to do. Conservation, cataloguing, preparation of new exhibits for next year. If you have volunteered already, thank you. If you have not and fancy some good friendship and interesting work apply now!

Concerns over the condition of the Museum buildings continue to be at the forefront of our minds. The primary aim is to ensure the main building can remain open to visitors. We are also exploring options on how to make the best use of the Side Hall and No. 3 High Street, creating spaces which help the Museum to be more financially secure and sustainable in the longer term. As you may imagine, the costs involved are high - initial estimates are in the range of £600,000. If you can help us with this, please do get in touch.

Finally thank you all who read this for your help and support over 2019. Have a Happy Christmas and a Good New Year.

Grenville S Johnston
Hon President



CONGRATULATIONS, HEATHER

Heather Townsend, our Museum Assistant has been working in the Museum for 20 years as at 16th November. Heather started out working with Susan Bennett back in 1999 and has seen many changes in her time and says that she cannot believe it is so long as the time seems to have flown by.

At the volunteers' end of season get together on Tuesday 12th November, Heather was presented with an Elgin BID cash voucher by Grenville Johnston on behalf of the Moray Society and a floral arrangement and a very large bar of chocolate by Bill Dalgarno on behalf of the volunteers. Grenville thanked Heather on behalf of the Society and the volunteers for her dedication to the Museum.

End of Season Lunch



It was wonderful to have such a big turnout for our end of season lunch in November and so good to see so many new volunteers. Many will be carrying on working behind the scenes through the winter but it is hoped that everyone will be available to see us through 2020.

Museum Learning

Family events at the Museum continued into autumn with our fun-filled October holiday programme! We welcomed more than 100 youngsters and their families for our Autumn Crafts session, where bats, hedgehogs, spiders' webs and crowns were all made with natural materials. A massive thank you to volunteers Mabel Rennie and Fiona Bing for their assistance on the day – luckily we had plentiful pinecones, leaves and twigs and everybody left very happy! Later that week we dooked for apples (thank you Edna Cameron for the massive box of apples from your garden!) and made them into some spooktacular shrunken heads – I think some will be gracing Christmas trees this year!



We also ran some smaller, bookable CSI Skeleton excavation sessions – an archaeological murder mystery if you will – we dug up a full sized skeleton and gathered the clues to see if we could work out how he'd come a cropper! Suggestions ranged from 'pecked to death by a giant seagull who was after his Greggs sausage roll' to 'slipped on a toy car and bumped his head'; all good fun but with the amount of soil and clean up involved, a one-time only event!



There's been lots of work on going with schools coming in to find out about various topics from Medieval Times to Natural History and Evolution. We've also been out at careers fairs across the region promoting the Museum as a resource for budding archaeologists, geologist, historians and curators. Excitingly this year we've been working closely with Moray College UHI on several projects covering Time-Based Media, Animation and Computer Science. Stay tuned for updates in 2020 which will hopefully include an exhibition and database of more of our historic images and a time-lapse video animation of *Elginerpeton* covering the last 375 million years or so!

Jen Kelshaw

Learning and Access Officer

Acquisition



As British Telecom no longer wants to retain it as a phone box, the Museum was offered the opportunity to adopt this Category B listed structure. The process is almost complete and we intend to use the box to help promote the Museum and its activities. We had hoped to move it to a more prominent space on the High Street but, at the moment, the logistics and financing of this means that we will leave it in situ.

PS. Thanks are due to McDonald and Munro for their generous help with the electricity supply in the box and also for their help in the museum throughout the year.

Museum opening



Two Red Shoes 9th December 1961

The Museum is now closed for the season (unless by appointment) and will reopen for 2020 on Saturday 28th March. Among the new displays will be two cases which will celebrate what would have been the 100th birthday of local impresario, Albert Bonici and also the 60th birthday of the Two Red Shoes ballroom. It is hoped that one of the 1960s/70s bands will be able to come along to enliven the Museum on opening day. Check on our website next year for further details.

As well as the season long exhibition in the Museum, a benefit night for Elgin Town Hall is to be held in Elgin Town Hall on Saturday 18th July featuring musicians and music of the era. Watch out in the local press for details.



Albert Bonici

Bill Dalgarno

Doors Open Day



The weather proved beautiful for the annual Doors Open Day in which we participated. While this year we only offered the Museum, albeit with tours, special displays and activities in addition to the welcome to admire the architecture, it is hoped that our Coffee Morning at Austins' will return next year.

Meet Your Maker

A Craft Scotland, Historical Scotland and UHI Collaboration

As part of our studies for a BA Fine Arts degree at Moray Art School, our 3rd year cohort were invited to participate in the above project. Our brief, supported by two artists, Catriona Meighan, printmaker, and Megan Falconer, silversmith, was to make work which related to Elgin Cathedral.

I chose as my theme, John Shanks, The Drouthy Cobbler, a significant individual who, single-handedly, was responsible for the initial preservation of the cathedral and is worthy of prominence in the history of Elgin.



Elgin Museum proved instrumental to my research. There, not only did I find pieces directly relating to John Shanks on display as part of the museum collection but, I had a lovely few hours in one of the back rooms where I was able to peruse documents that related to his life and times. This research was intriguing since it gave me a fuller picture of the man and how he was linked, not only to the cathedral but, to the fuller life of Elgin.

I am really grateful for the support of Elgin Museum staff with my studies. This is a wonderful resource, available to all, which I would urge others to make use of to further their knowledge of our past.

Moira Downie, Moray College.

Footnote: It was great to be able to assist Fiona with her project. We have such a wealth of local stories tucked away in the Museum as well as on display. For me it is certainly one of the lighter sides of volunteering in the Museum, to be able to answer questions and facilitate research, whether for specialist academics or anyone on a quest for knowledge. Feedback on what the enquirer did with the information shared is especially welcomed: a simple thank you is always nice! A copy of any resulting research paper is essential to keep our "Object History" and "Collections" files up to date.

In this case, I was very pleased to receive Moira's invitation to the opening of the College's "Meet Your Maker" exhibition where her excellent work is on show. I recommend a visit as it continues into January.

Moira kindly introduced me to Gillian MacNee, the Learning Officer for Historic Environment Scotland whose patch includes Moray; I hope she will make contact with our Jen.

Janet Trythall

Urgent call!!

Does anyone out there have a spare chest freezer they do not need? Our museum freezer, which is used in conservation projects has come to the end of its life and we urgently require to replace it. If anyone can help please contact

curator@elginmuseum.org.uk

Elgin Museum Geology Group

Geology Group Report - Autumn 2019

The Geology Group has successfully secured finance from Museums Galleries Scotland Recognition Fund to host a weekend of public engagement events 25th-26th April 2020. Entitled 'Fossil Finders' the activities will be linked to the Scottish Government's *Year of Coast and Waters* (#YCW2020) and will involve palaeontologists from National Museums Scotland (NMS) helping to identify fossils brought in by visitors - this is an ideal time to look out things that you've collected and stuck in a box because you weren't sure what to do with your find! We also plan to run an excursion along the Moray Coastal path to Clashach Quarry to look at the reptile footprints; more details will appear in due course.

Also linked to #YCW2020 is a temporary exhibition highlighting one of the world's earliest tetrapods: *Elginerpeton pachei*. Fragmentary fossils of this animal were found at Scaat Craig, near Fogwatt, in the late 19th Century - by Elgin Museum's first curator, John Martin - but assumed to be fish finds. Consequently none of the fossil material is now in Elgin, making this an ambitious project to bring together material from three different institutions. It will also involve replacing some existing display material with new interpretation panels and new cases will be used to display the fossils and replica models. Fortunately we will be supported by museum volunteers with a wide skill-set and by professionals who will help create the exhibition and make sure that we get the science right!

In preparation for receiving loan material from NMS, Alison has attended two separate training events in Edinburgh. These have been extremely useful and allowed her to learn from professional colleagues across the museum sector.



As part of the tetrapod story, we have also been investigating the history of an enigmatic footprint slab (ELGNM 1863.3), held in the West Store; this trackway is in Old Red Sandstone from the Portmahomack area. We know that tetrapod footprints have been found on the Tarbat Ness peninsula in the past but, sadly, our slab appears to show an arthropod track. Dave has made one visit to the area but we plan further trips to try to pinpoint the find localities and, indeed, to see if we can discover more!

We have also been working with a 4th Year student studying 3D animation at Moray College (UHI) who is hoping to produce a short clip starting with *Elginerpeton* swimming in the Devonian lake ~ 375 million years ago and ending with fossils being extracted from the rocks in 1992. He is still at the storyboard stage but this has the potential to be a really interesting piece of work.

An unexpected, but highly welcome, visitor to the Museum was John Shaw-Dunn who is an Honorary Research Fellow in Anatomy at the University of Glasgow. John has an anatomy student interested in studying Permian reptile footprints from both the Clashach area and from Dumfries and we hope to be involved next year.

Research centred on material from the Recognised Collection continues apace:

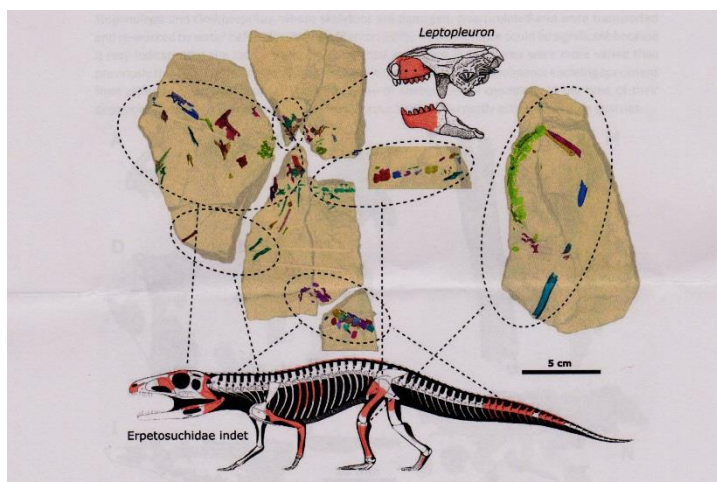


Diagram reproduced with the permission of Davide Foffa

Davide Foffa, a paleontologist at NMS, has had a busy year studying μ CT (Micro-Computerised Tomography) scans of reptile fossils, some of which are in our collection. This work has been extremely successful - the blocks shown in the diagram only have a few bones visible on the surface but scanning has allowed Davide to identify 100 bones from two species of reptile! Consequently his 1851 Royal Commission Fellowship has been extended by a year and we hope to see him back in the museum next year.

Emily Keeble's paper on the *Stagonolepis* fossils found by Dave last summer should be published shortly. Using scanning techniques, she has been able to determine the exact shape of tail bones from an aetosaur, the first time that this has been done, and confirming a prediction that Thomas Huxley made almost 150 years ago! She also intends to do further scanning of aetosaurs in the near future.

Marta Zaher is continuing her studies into *Elginia* at Bristol University; in early November Dave was invited to the British Geological Survey building in Edinburgh and took the opportunity to photograph the Elgin Reptile collection that BGS hold, mainly specimens of *Elginia* and *Gordonia*. This information will be added to the museum archive and may also help Marta track down specimens for further research.

Dave has been giving talks on local geology and quarrying to the SpeyBay BALL group, Moray Field Club, and the Forres 41 Club, with more planned over the winter months.



Finally, Dave recently found an interesting glacial deposit in Clashach quarry. Jon Merritt and Clive Aughton, glaciologists at BGS, have identified it as a cross section of a "Da Greer" moraine, formed at the edge of the Moray Firth glacier in the final phase of the most recent glaciation. This is an uncommon find which the glaciologists hope to examine next year.

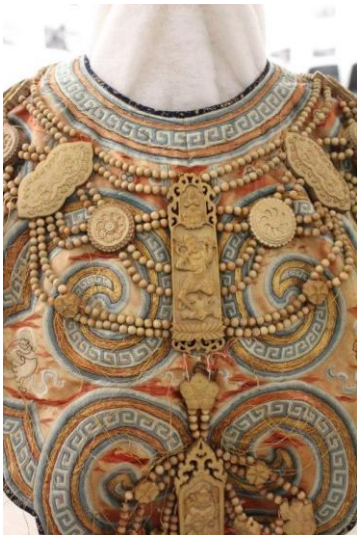
Alison Wright

East Asian Collections Review project

We were delighted to welcome Vanessa Tothill to the Museum to study part of our collection. Vanessa is an Assistant Curator of the East Asian Collections Review Project of National Museums Scotland. Vanessa was delighted to see our collection and has viewed the pieces and is in process of further study.



Vanessa at work in the Museum



Dalai Lama neckpiece

The most exciting find at Elgin Museum was the c 19th century Dalai Lama neckpiece from Tibet or North India that entered the collection in 1866. Several collections possess similar neck pieces and several collections possess carved bone ornaments but Elgin's is unique in that it features both together.



Japanese Jewel Box

According to museum records a 'jewel box' covered in ornaments is 400 years old and once belonged to a Japanese princess. The box is made from wood, metal, stone, ivory and glass. The box is late-Edo (c. 1603-1868) to Meiji-period (1868-1912) and reveals the owner's interest in shamisen performances. The large script on the box reads *Onna renchū* 女連中 meaning 'Women's troupe'. This item was a gift from Mr James Reid in 1884

Art UK – Sculpture Project

As part of the above nationwide project, Elgin Museum was asked to participate by allowing a team to come to the Museum to photograph and catalogue all of the sculpture items in the collection. This meant much work by Heather to list all of the works and, on the photography day, to seek out all of the items for recording. The Art UK charity's mission is to open up art in public collections across the UK for enjoyment, learning and research so participation means that our sculptured objects in the collection will be digitally accessible to others.



Rob and Neil placing a sculpture ready for photography

Art Collection

Earlier this year, the Museum applied for funding from AIM and from the Art Fund to allow us to build new racking for our art collection which, at present, is stored on home made wooden racking which is unsuitable for purpose. As at late November, we had given up hope of hearing of a successful outcome to our application from Art Fund, though £1300 had been offered by AIM. We were therefore surprised to hear, on 25th November that the remainder required has been agreed by the Art Fund. After hurried negotiations, we decided to go ahead with the project this winter, and new racking has now been ordered and will be fitted in early January. As this means decanting the collection and dismantling the present racking, much work requires to be done in December! Rob is leading on the dismantling but anyone able to help with the project, please contact Jen Kelshaw in person or via elginmuseumlearning@gmail.com. Work will continue in the New Year, once the racking is in place and – yes! – the paintings all need to go back again before the Museum reopens. We have two days of conservator time in the budget, so this will be a learning opportunity for volunteers wanting to help with the repackaging, labelling and catalogue updating of the paintings – some 230 of them.

Shrunken Head

Through Dr Toby Houlton, ex Dundee University, who came to study our tsantsa (shrunken head), we have heard from Mercer University of Macon, Georgia, USA, who have asked permission of Toby and ourselves to view the CT data from that study. Their intention is to make a 3D print of the head to be used in an undergraduate anatomy and physiology course. It is great to know that, in so many fields, academics are coming to Elgin Museum to further the knowledge of the world.



**Viktoria on a Junior Pictish Day
15th October.**

**What's a girl to do after a hard day
'Picting'?**

Winter Lecture Series

"Bridgescapes - a journey through Scotland's bridge-building heritage".

Thursday 30th January



Come along to Elgin Museum Hall at 2.30pm (doors open 2.00pm) on Thursday 30th January for a talk about Scotland's large variety of bridges given by L Bruce Keith, author of a book of the same title.

The Moray Society Prize Draw

The Prize Draw has been running since April 2000 and has raised over £8000 for Elgin Museum. This helps with the day to day running costs and the Society is very grateful for this income. Sales of the Draw tickets are strictly limited to Moray Society members and income from the sale of tickets is paid directly into the Moray Society Prize Draw account. All proceeds are used for the exclusive benefit of the Moray Society.

Tickets are priced at £10 each per annum and are valid for 4 draws. Draws are held quarterly with prizes of £25, £15 and £10 respectively for the first 3 numbers drawn, in sequence, at each draw. These prizes are based on an income of £1000 in tickets sold ie. 100 tickets. Many members have annual standing orders with their banks, which greatly reduces our costs. Standing orders can only be amended or cancelled by the persons concerned. Mandates for standing orders are available from the Museum, or myself, on request. Cash, or cheques made payable to the Moray Society Prize Draw, are also accepted. There is no limit imposed by the Society on the number of tickets that may be held by individual members. Please contact me at the museum for queries about the draw or for application forms. Mary Shand (Prize Draw Organiser) Museum Tel. No. 01343 543675 Email curator@elginmuseum.org.uk

Moray Society Prize Draw

Please allocate me tickets in the Moray Society Prize Draw @ £10 each.

*I enclose my payment of £ *Please forward me a standing order mandate *Delete as appropriate

Name

Address

Post Code

Email address

A Great Christmas Gift Idea

As you can see from the newsletter, there are lots of activities happening for members of the Moray Society. Why not share this by giving a gift membership for Christmas? All you have to do is fill in a standing order (page 14) and send it to The Membership Secretary, Elgin Museum, 1 High St., Elgin, IV30 1EQ. Membership rates, if paid by standing order) are £25 for a single membership and £40 for a family of up to two adults and three children.

As a very special offer, we are offering membership for £10 for a single person and £20 for a family in the first year as long as a standing order for the full amount is payable from 2021.

GIFT MEMBERSHIP I would like to apply for membership for the undernoted. The membership secretary will send a membership pack to the recipient after Christmas and will send an acknowledgement to the subscriber. Below are my bank details. The membership is in favour of:

Name.....

Address.....

..... Post code.....

Recipients email address.....

* * * * *



**STANDING ORDER
MANDATE**

To _____ Bank (Your bank)

Please set up the following Standing Order and debit my/our account accordingly

.....

1. Your account details

Account name _____ Account number _____

Account holding branch _____ Sort code ____-____-____

.....

2. Payee details

Organisation you are paying: The Moray Society

Payment reference (to be completed by Moray Society) _____

Bank of Scotland, Elgin Sort code 80-06-66

Account No 00476195

.....

3. About the payment

Date and amount of first payment Date_1st January 2020 £ _____

Annually from January 2021 £ _____

(allow 3 working days for receipt)

.....

4. Confirmation

Customer signature(s)

1. _____ 2. _____ Date _____

The Plainstones through time



Diary Dates

2020

Thursday 30TH January, 2.30 pm – Lecture – L Bruce Keith – “Bridgescapes - a journey through Scotland's bridge-building heritage”.

Friday 28th February, 2.30pm – Lecture - Angus Gordon – Lennox – “Gordon Castle”

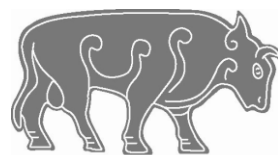
Saturday 28th March, 7.30 pm – Museum reopens for 2020. Watch for details of activities on the day.

Friday 24th April – Moray Society AGM followed by refreshments and a talk to introduce our Geology weekend.

Saturday 25th April - ‘Fossil Finders’ - activities linked to the Scottish Government’s *Year of Coast and Waters*, involving palaeontologists from National Museums Scotland (NMS) helping to identify fossils brought in by visitors - this is an ideal time to look out things that you’ve collected and stuck in a box because you weren’t sure what to do with your find!

Sunday 26th April – As part of the geology weekend, we plan to run an excursion along the Moray Coastal path to Clashach Quarry to look at the reptile footprints; more details will appear in due course

Much more is in process of being arranged and will be publicised in the next newsletter. Please also keep watch on the Museum website and our regular messages on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the “Town and Country” column under “Elgin” in *The Northern Scot*.



THE MORAY
SOCIETY
ELGIN
MUSEUM

1 High Street, Elgin, Moray, IV30 1EQ – Tel: 01343 543 675 – Email: curator@elginmuseum.org.uk
ELGIN MUSEUM – Scotland’s oldest independent Museum – Established 1836

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