

Elgin Museum Update August 2020

Dear Museum Volunteers, Moray Society members and other friends of Elgin Museum,

Welcome to our August Update, bringing you all the latest news from Elgin Museum.

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Now and Next at Elgin Museum



Our plans for a phased reopening of the Museum are ongoing, with a Risk Management Plan having been created. Alongside this, a risk assessment has been carried out highlighting the various measures that we need to put in place to allow people to return to work safely in the Museum. It will take some time to get all of these measures put in place, not helped by frequent changes and updates to government and sector guidance! In our phase 1, staff will return to work in the building, followed, if all goes to plan, by a small numbers of volunteers returning under phase 2. These steps all take us closer to our target of reopening to visitors in early 2021.

The Emergency Executive Committee continues to "meet" regularly online, reporting back to the Moray Society Board and Elgin Museum Management Committee (EMMC). The first EMMC meeting since lockdown was held in the first week of August, a virtual meeting online, and we would take this opportunity to thank the Board and EMMC for their ongoing commitment to the Museum.

We've begun to carry out various essential repairs within the Museum, focussing initially on the heating system. The boiler has now been serviced and fixed, and will no longer be heating the

building 24/7! We look forward to much reduced energy bills in future. As part of our re-opening plan, we'll also be having work undertaken on the various loos to get new (and replace broken) electric hot water taps. We're extremely grateful to McDonald & Munro Ltd for their hard work and ongoing support with our various electrical and plumbing issues!

What next? We're delighted to have received financial support from the Scottish Government's Business Support Fund, which will help see us through this closed season. We're now working towards implementing the various mitigations required to enable staff and volunteers to work safely in the building. As a sample of what to expect, we will be re-organising working areas to allow social distancing, installing sanitiser stations (as well as the hot taps mentioned above), the wearing of face coverings in the building will be mandatory and we will be recording data on anyone entering the building for the Scottish Government's COVID-19 Test & Protect programme.

Bill has been busy making plans for the Inventory project, with support from Janet; Graham has been keeping on top of our finances as usual while also emptying gutters, clearing out the cellar and liaising with McDonald & Munro Ltd; Claire has been creating more videos, keeping the website up to date, carrying out risk assessments, sourcing supplies, setting up meetings etc etc; Janet has been attending Spectrum inventory workshops and national archaeology strategy meetings (virtually, of course) as well as working on updating our Health & Safety Policy and overarching risk assessment, both from land and at sea - the benefits of virtual meetings, you can attend from anywhere!

So there is a lot still going on at the Museum, and a lot still to do before we can get people safely back in the building - but we'll get there in the end!

A Message to Elgin Museum's Volunteers



Hello All Volunteers,

I hope you are all keeping busy even although you are not able to come and help out at the museum in your usual way. It seems amazing to me how we people who volunteer have 'busyness' in our

beings and find endless ways to fulfil that need. I have yet to come across someone who is normally busy and perhaps volunteers in one or more organisations, who has been lost for something to do during this pandemic.

Our glorious summer has helped a lot. I personally have enjoyed the great outdoors in the garden, walking, cycling and now playing tennis again and meeting up with friends. There will be many months ahead of us when some of these pursuits may not be so appealing. Enjoy what you can when you can!

However, the museum and those who run it have not been hibernating these last few months as you can see from this and previous Museum Updates. We are moving ahead, slowly, to get staff and even some volunteers, back into the museum. Risk assessment is in place and the plan is for some volunteers to be working in the museum in the not too distant future, but only if and when they feel comfortable to do so.

As a museum volunteer, please stick with us, don't abandon us as we will need you again after this difficult time has passed. Perhaps all this will bring fresh ideas and developments to the museum so we can enjoy and reach for new horizons. Watch this space!

Kindest regards,

Jenny Cook, Volunteers Coordinator

We'd also take this opportunity to thank volunteer Rob Wallen for all of his hard work and dedication to the Museum as he steps down from his role as our Buildings Volunteer.



1 - Happy customers modelling face coverings made by Museum Volunteer Edna

Volunteer and Moray Society Board Member Edna Cameron has been busy over the last few months making face coverings for friends and family. She has been encouraging her happy customers to make donations to the Museum via our [PayPal Donations page](#).

If anyone is interested in placing an order, they are welcome to contact Edna via the Museum at curator@elginmuseum.org.uk

Our "Virtual Museum"



While we won't be opening for the 2020 season, we will be continuing to create new digital content so that you can enjoy Elgin Museum "from home". Keep an eye on the website, and find and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) for more museum fun - use the hashtag [#MuseumFromHome](#), give us a like, share our posts, and help us to tell the world about Elgin Museum!

New on the [Museum Musings](#) blog this month, volunteer and Moray Society Board Member Mary Shand looks into the history of "*Our Daily Bread*" - well worth a read, and if you feel a little peckish afterwards why not try out Mary's historical bread recipes included in this Update! As ever, if you'd like to write a piece for the blog, about a favourite object, a piece of work you've done at the museum, or anything else related to the collection, contact us by email at curator@elginmuseum.org.uk - all contributions are welcomed!

We're delighted to welcome several new subscribers to our [YouTube Channel](#) - we're halfway to our target of 100 followers, which will unlock more tools and functions to help us create even better video content. If you haven't already subscribed, please do consider signing up - and maybe tell a friend! Let us know if there are themes or objects you'd like to see featured in a new video - or even if you'd like to create some video content for us!

More video content will be coming soon, in support of the [Scottish Civic Trust's Doors Open Day](#) (19th September 2020 in Moray - save the date!). Subscribers will receive an automatic notification of new content (another great reason to sign up), or alternatively keep an eye on [Twitter](#) to find out when new videos are live.

Mary's Quiz



How did you fare in last month's quiz? This month, we have "round 2" of Mary's Elgin Museum quiz - all of the answers can be found on the Elgin Museum website, so time to get searching at www.elginmuseum.org.uk! As ever, let us know how you get on via Twitter, Facebook or by email.

Answers at the end - no cheating!

Museum Musings

1. When did Napoleon come to Elgin Museum?
2. Who designed Elgin Museum?
3. Who donated the Parthenon miniatures, by John Henning, to the museum?

Children's Hour

4. What are "The Young Marvels"?
5. What are "petrospheres"? (clue: Activity 8 in Education and Outreach)
6. What is animal 9 in the list of Pictish symbols? (see Activity 1 in Education and Outreach)

Geology



Visitors to the geology section of Elgin Museum are always fascinated by our Permian reptile footprint slabs that are on display. Dave Longstaff, Museum Volunteer and member of the Elgin Museum Geology Group, brings us the fascinating story of our famous fossil footprints over on the *Museum Musings* blog in his post [Footprints in the Sand](#)

"Some of these slabs have been held in the museum almost since the museum's inception having been found in the long-abandoned sandstone quarries of Greenbrae and Maisonhaugh, both near Cummingston. Indeed, quarried blocks displaying such footprints made some 250 million years ago can still be found in and around Clashach quarry..." Head over to [the blog](#) now to read on.

Archaeology



A pile of stones...

But not just any old stones – burnt and fire-cracked stones, mainly quartz, heaped in a pile 7.25m x 6m x 0.8m (max. depth) with charcoal and ash.

The mound was found during an archaeological watching brief for the High Voltage Direct Current cable from Portgordon to Blackhillock substation in 2016; the developers were then required by Aberdeenshire Council Archaeological Service (on behalf of Moray Council) to fund a formal excavation. This is the first burnt mound excavated in Moray.

Over 2000 burnt mounds have been described elsewhere in Scotland, often, as in our case, with some form of water holder. In our example, there is the base of a wooden trough, 1.3m x 0.75m, made with planks of oak and alder. We not only have the continuing question of why were people producing these burnt mounds (particularly in the Early Bronze Age (EBA)*), but why has no evidence for similar activity been described before in our area?

Going back to the purpose of the stones and troughs: the generally accepted view is that the intention was to heat water by adding fire-heated stones, but was this to cook food, or to create a Bronze Age sauna or the ultimate archaeological fall back, part of some ritual?

Also found during this excavation were a probable second burnt mound, a possible refuse pit and a flint blade of Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic type.

**Dating of the construction of the trough was derived from radiocarbon analysis of the planks: 2281 – 1928 BC, and therefore consistent with EBA activity.*

See also the Moray HER site entry for [Raefin, Ryeriggs burnt mound](#). An article by CFA, the archaeological unit who excavated the site, is [available online](#).

Archaeology Volunteer, Janet Trythall

Historical Recipes



We're going even further back in time for this month's historical recipes - to the prehistoric period! Try your hand at these unusual bread recipes - and, of course, some cheese to go with it! A perfect activity for a rainy day - let us know how your bread turns out on Twitter, Facebook or by email.

Barley bread with beer

Ingredients

500g barley flour

500g stone ground wheat flour

1 tsp salt

250g butter

Beer to mix

Method

Mix the flours and salt together. Rub in the butter. Add enough beer to make a soft dough. Shape into small cakes and cook on a hot griddle until firm, turning over to finish. Light because of the beer, this is good with cheese. (You could use half of all the ingredients if this seems too much at once.)

Sweet bread

Ingredients

500g honey

1.5kg stone-ground flour

1 cup shelled, coarsely chopped hazelnuts

1 tsp salt

Milk to mix

Method

Mix all the ingredients together, with enough milk to make a soft dough. Shape into small cakes and cook on a hot griddle which has been dusted with flour, to stop the cakes sticking. When cold spread with butter. (You could use half of all the ingredients if this seems too much at once.)

Soft Cheese (To have with your bread!)

ingredients

1 litre of whole milk

28ml wine vinegar

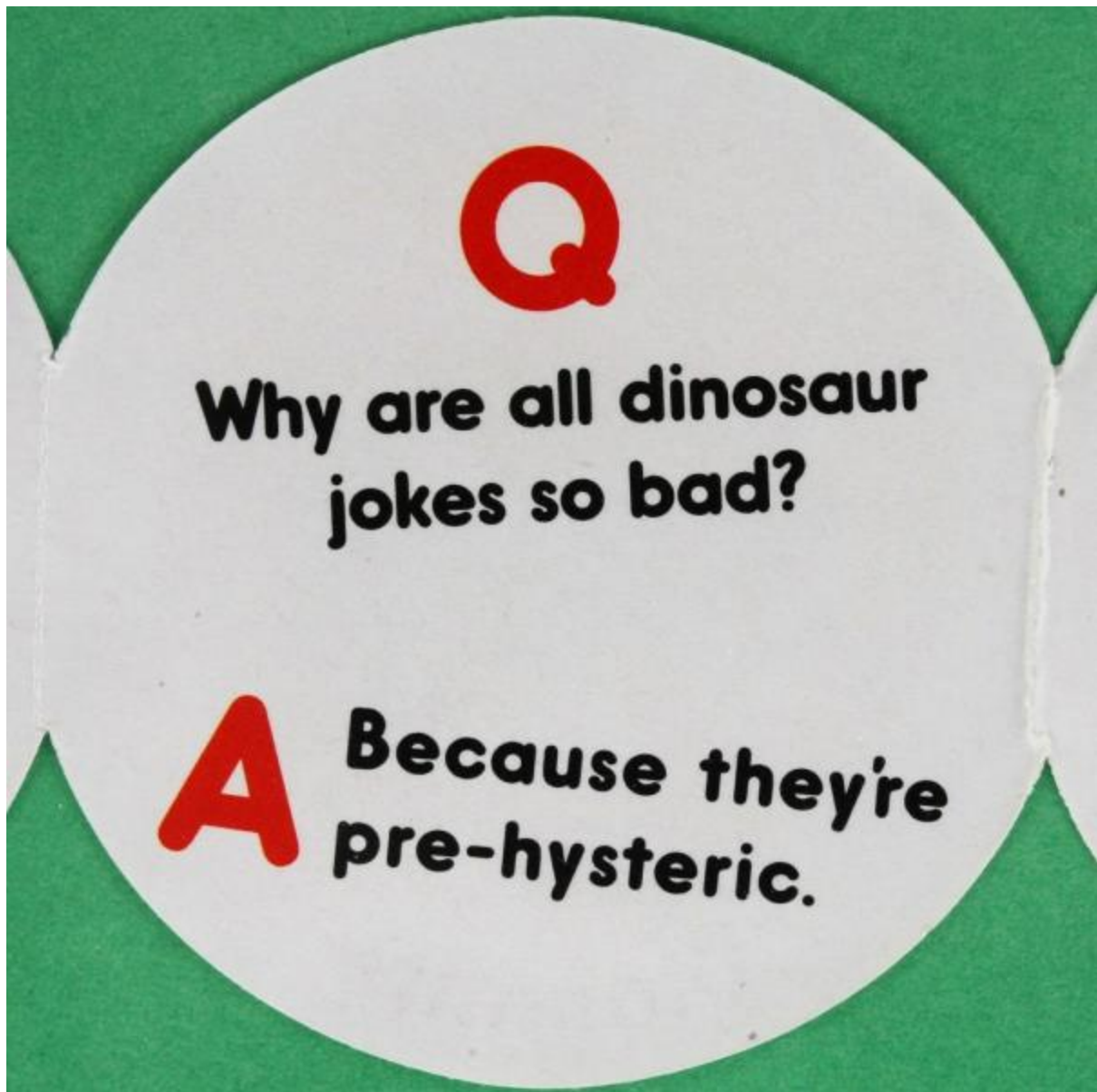
A piece of muslin or loose weave cloth and string, to make a straining bag

Method

Put the milk in a pan and slowly bring to the boil. Turn off the heat, add the vinegar and stir until the curds (the solids) separate from the whey (the liquids). Strain through the muslin, for about an hour, until most of the whey is out. Mix in a little salt before using. Finely chopped herbs or berries can be added to vary the flavour of the cheese.

For more historical recipes, visit the [Museum Musings](#) blog!

Dave's Jokes



Janet's taking a break from her joke book this month, and has handed over the reins to fellow Geology group volunteer Dave:

Wife: I hate geology puns. Me: My sediments exactly.

Q. Why did the tectonic plates break up?

A. It wasn't anyone's fault but there was too much friction between them.

Q. Why was the sedimentary rock extra cheap?

A. Because it was on shale.

Q. What do geologists eat?

A. Pom-a-granites.

Q. What did the motivational speaker say?

A. Don't take things for granite.

Cheerio from Jen



Hi All!

I Just wanted to put in a wee message to say cheerio and thank you to you for all the wonderful moments over the past two and a half years. I am off to do my primary teaching qualification, so with any luck I will be bringing my own rowdy bunch to Elgin Museum in in the next couple of years, to learn about Elginia (a reptile, NOT a dinosaur, yes Janet) and so much more.

I will never forget my first visit to Elgin Museum, it was for my interview, two days after moving to Elgin - flying by the seat of my pants was to prove to be a theme! I don't think I could hide my awe as Mabel gave me my pre-interview tour, there were certainly lots of 'wows' and it's a reaction I've seen in so many others since. It's such a spectacular building, a 'proper' Museum, with a real wunderkammer of objects and it is a treasure not just for Moray but for Scotland. But it's not just the physical aspects of Elgin Museum that are impressive, I and many visitors alike, can't quite get over how the Museum runs predominantly on the passion, grit, determination and professionalism of volunteers. (Not to take away from the oracle that is Heather Townsend, of course!)

I don't have any doubt that Elgin Museum will emerge from the current situation even more resilient and well on its way to securing itself for the community for the next couple of centuries – there's nothing like a global pandemic to test your mettle!

Thank you for the many and varied opportunities, I never thought that I would have kids excavating a full size skeleton, never mind doing it three times in one week! But also for the friendship, laughs and good chats over this time, I have made some lovely friendships and do hope to keep in touch.

All the best, Jen

A small presentation was held to thank Jen for her work at the museum. Museum Convenor Bill Dalgarno, Treasure Graham Robertson and Moray Society Board Member Edna Cameron presented Jen with a photo collage of some of her museum highlights along with an Elgin BID gift card.

Jen has been a great asset to Elgin Museum, and we're sure you'll all join us in wishing her every success with her future endeavours.



The Moray Society



The Moray Society is a membership society which owns and operates Elgin Museum. New members are always welcomed, with any membership subscriptions received going towards the day to day running costs of Elgin Museum, collections care, and more. This year more than ever we'd encourage you to consider joining The Moray Society, to show your support for Elgin Museum and to help ensure the Museum's future. With a large part of our regular income coming from visitor donations, 2020 may be a challenge financially!

Our 2020 introductory offer means that from as little £15 per year (for single membership) you can help to make sure Elgin Museum can stay open for all to enjoy. More details on how to join can be found on the [website](#).

Thank you!



We would also take this opportunity to send a heartfelt thanks all of you who have who have made donations to the Museum this year - all donations are always gratefully received and make a significant difference in helping to secure the future of Elgin Museum.

If you would like to make a donation, please visit our [Paypal donations page](#) or for alternative donation options, please contact us by email: curator@elginmuseum.org.uk

That's all for this Elgin Museum Update!



We hope you enjoyed our August Update, and will take the time to explore some of our Virtual Museum content!

As ever, we end with a note of thanks to you all for your continued support of Elgin Museum - and a request that you keep in touch! Let us know if you have any ideas for online content or fundraising activities, or if you would like to contribute to the next Update or our Museum Blog.

Thank you!

All the best from the Museum Emergency Executive Committee

Please feel free to contact us by email, and do let us know if you enjoyed this Update! Don't forget to visit the [website](#), find and follow us on social media - and why not tell a friend about Elgin Museum online?

Elgin Museum

www.elginmuseum.org.uk

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QUIZ ANSWERS:

How did you do? Let us know, by email or on [twitter](#) or [facebook](#)!

1. *1991*
2. *Thomas Mackenzie*
3. *Louisa, Countess of Seafield, in 1886*
4. *Elgin Museum's under-18 youth group*
5. *Any human-made round, stone objects*
6. *A deer*