



1: Men of Vision / By Public Subscription

When the Museum opened in 1843, the displays were in cases similar to these, along with rows of glass topped tables, in which smaller exhibits were housed. As the gallery was lit by gas, it was not very bright and the light from the large upper storey windows was much appreciated. This first display alcove gives an idea of the furnishing of the original museum, or of the study of one of the Victorian founders, his desk surrounded by stuffed birds and cabinets of insects and birds' eggs.

Elgin Museum's collecting policy

Nowadays, collecting by museums tends to be more selective. In line with our Collections Development Policy, we only accept donations of objects and archive with a direct link to Moray: through the owner or user, or the object's find site or place of manufacture. And only in special circumstances would we now take accept natural history, for example.

1. Gyr falcon, *Falco rusticolus candicans*

A bird not usually found in Britain as its normal habitat is further north. One was reported in the Western Isles in spring 1988 but the origin of this bird is not known.

ELGNM: 1958.7

2. Elephant's ear shell - *Cassis cornuta*

Reflecting the Victorians' love of collecting shells, *Cassis cornuta* is the largest of all helmet shells, at up to 35cm. Its habitat is sand and coral rubble, and it can be found in the Indo-Pacific Ocean.

ELGNM: 1978.866

3. Wooden Display Cabinet

The cabinet comprises drawers containing butterflies and moths from around the world. Sadly, many of the specimens in the several such cases in the Museum are no longer in good condition or do not have good provenance. In conjunction with advice from specialists, including National Museums Scotland, we will soon have a restored and re-identified collection, accessible and of real significance for all. ELGNM: Lepidoptera with various museum numbers (*cabinet is not individually numbered*).

4. Glass-fronted Built-in Display Case

This case contains taxidermy and other specimens collected by the early men of vision who successfully "sought to institute in Elgin a Museum for the collection and preservation of objects of Science and Virtue". Elgin Museum is Scotland's oldest independent museum.

The Victorian era was the golden age of taxidermy, when mounted animals became a popular part of interior design and décor; nature study could often involve killing the creature of interest. To quote Arthur Ransome (journalist and author of *Swallows and Amazons*): "*What's hit's history: what's missed's mystery*"!

As follows:

Top shelf, left to right:

- Capercaillie, female, Britain
- Merlin, female, Britain
- Capercaillie
- Kite, female, Britain
- Honey Buzzard, male (juvenile), Britain

ELGNM: 1908.3. 1938.60, 1908.3, 1854.1.3, 1870.13

Second shelf, left to right:

- Little Grebe, winter plumage, Britain
- Shag, male, summer plumage, Britain
- Puffin, female, summer plumage, Britain. "*Puffin found dead at the side of the road near Alves after a hurricane on the night of 27th February 1927.*"
- Ibis (glossy)
- Little Auk, female, winter plumage
- Red breasted merganser, female, Britain

ELGNM: 1930.17, 1913.132, 1927.5, 1909.4, 1978.420, 1978.802

Third shelf, left to right:

- Tawny Owl, male, Britain
- Sparrow Hawk, female
- Razorbill, male, summer plumage
- Jackdaw, albino
- Hooded merganser, male, North America

ELGNM: 1920.4, 1978.1283, 1958.10, 1940.7, 1978.777

Fourth shelf, left to right:

- Grey Plover, male (juvenile), winter plumage
- Common Snipe
- Quail, male
- Waxwing
- Great Crested Grebe, summer plumage

ELGNM: 1871.3, 1930.16, 1871.2, 1978.402, 1928.28

Bottom shelf, left to right, skulls of:

- African warthog, *Phacochoerus aethiopicus*, male, Africa
- Spider monkey, or New World monkey. Found in tropical forests of central and south America, from southern Mexico to Brazil
- Common dolphin, *Delphinus sp.*, from the Moray Firth
- Canadian beaver, *Castor canadensis*, a nocturnal, large, semiaquatic rodent, also known as the North American beaver, Canada and America
- Polar bear, *Thalarctos maritimus*, female, North Polar regions

ELGNM: 1978.462, 1978.510, 1978.466, 1978.493, 1978.461

5. Scottish Wright's chair

Dating from 1820, it was identified by Professor Bernard ("Bill") Cotton, author of *Scottish Vernacular Furniture* (2008). The chair

had been in Elgin Museum for some time but was only accessioned after his identification.

ELGNM: 2003.8.6

6. Wooden Cabinet

Designed to store and display butterflies and moths; their collection was a popular hobby of the Victorians.

ELGNM: Lepidoptera with various museum numbers (*case is not individually numbered*).

7. On Top of Cabinet 6

Taxidermy Curlew. Adult male curlew *N. arquata arquata*. From Cairnbulg & Inverallchy, Buchan.

ELGNM: 1855.2

Spectacles and case. Oak case and metal-framed spectacles belonging to a Patrick Reid. The case is inscribed "*P. R. 1801*"

ELGNM: 1978.640

8. Small cabinet exhibiting stuffed birds

Small cabinets such as these, featuring taxidermy scenes, were - place in wealthy Victorian homes.

ELGNM: Uncatalogued

9. Glass-fronted display case

A typical Victorian collection, displayed for the drawing room rather than for the purpose of scientific study. Note the inclusion of two sea horses among the insects.

ELGNM: Uncatalogued

10. Microscope

A brass microscope, made in Paris, and donated by Dr J. G. Innes from Forres in 1870. It is in good condition and made from mahogany and brass. It came with a full complement of lenses and a box of 144 slides of diatoms (algae) from Moray.

ELGNM: 1870.10

11. Oil Lamp

'Super Aladdin' kerosene oil lamp, with original glass, made in London, England. From Thelma Leslie's collection and discovered on the site of Moray Leisure Centre when it was being built in 1993.

ELGNM: 1995.11.32

12. Portrait

Oil painting of Isaac Forsyth (b. 12.09.1768 – d. 19.05.1859) by Ernest Macandrew. Forsyth was one of the first members of The Elgin and Morayshire Scientific Association, now The Moray Society, the charity that owns and manages Elgin Museum. His circulating library was established in 1789, and based at The Tower, Elgin (103-107 High Street, Elgin, now occupied by Ritsons, Chartered Accountants). He was the founder of the Morayshire Farmers Club in 1799 and an occasional publisher (see *appendix for further information*).

ELGNM: 1964.4



In the glass case 'By Public Subscription':

13. Fossil

Pterichthyodes Milleri: an Old Red Sandstone fossil fish from the Tynet Burn, near Buckie. It is around 375 million years old. There is a model of the fish in the fossil display in the Rear Gallery.

ELGNM: 1978.139.2

14. A Beggar's Badge

This is a pauper's or beggar's badge from the parish of Keith, formerly in Banffshire. It is made of lead and dates from the 18th century. It is stamped 'J.REID' and was donated by Miss Leith, Seafield Street, Elgin.

The growth of a large class of beggars in medieval times led to the necessity for limiting the numbers of those officially entitled to beg.

The first reference to badges in Scotland is an Act of the Scottish Parliament of 1424. The Act forbade begging except by those persons who had official badges, which were worn fixed to the outer clothing. Magistrates, kirk-sessions of parishes and the Sovereign were authorised to issue beggars' badges.

ELGNM: 1953.50.4

15. Medal

Silver, Elgin and Morayshire Horticultural Society medal awarded to Mr. A. Winehouse, Burgie as a prize for "*best 3 heads of seakale*", 6th May 1822.

ELGNM: 1995.20

16. Brooch

Brooch of an iridescent, mounted rose beetle from Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon).

ELGNM: 1953.43

17. Early Medieval Cross-slab Fragment

This sandstone fragment, carved with a key pattern, was found on the headland at Burghead. In the Rear Hall, are other Early Medieval and Pictish stones arranged in a display new for 2016 and with further information and a catalogue.

ELGNM: 1978.124 (*Burghead 9*)

18. Silver Trowel

Ceremonial silver trowel presented to Lord Provost W.B. Munro on the occasion of his laying the foundation stone for the present Elgin Town Hall on 22nd June 1961.

ELGNM: 1989.10.1

19. Weight

Ashanti brass weight in the form of a bird, from the Ashanti region of Ghana, Africa and used for weighing gold dust. It is one of a set of weights and scales, donated by Mr W. Topp of Cape Coast Castle, Ghana and Elgin in 1839 – before the Museum was built.

ELGNM: 1978.1553

20. Early historic copper alloy mount

Circular form with an equal-armed cross and decorated with green and yellow enamel, and Millefiori panels, with a hole through the disc possibly indicating a secondary use; typical of Northern British and Irish metal work of the 8th – 9th centuries AD. Millefiori is a glass work technique, the word coming from the Italian, *mille*, a

thousand, and *fiori*, flowers. The mount was found at Urquhart by metal detectorist Alistair McPherson, declared as Treasure Trove and purchased with the assistance of the National Fund for Acquisitions (TT90/97).

ELGNM: 1998.9

21. Oriental Card Case

Indian visiting card case inlaid with ivory. Donated by Mrs T. S. Levack, Boulah Bembah, Lossiemouth (*see appendix for further information about the Levack family*)

ELGNM: 2011.32

22. Mounted Photograph

Mounted photograph of James Logie, born in Fochabers but who emigrated to New York, where this photo was taken. He was the son of James Logie, a master mason from Fochabers.

ELGNM: 1986.9.5

23. Shell

Murex tribulus, also known as the *Caltrop murex*, a large predatory sea snail from the Indo-Pacific Region.

ELGNM: 1978.803.33.1

24. Rosary

Rosary with beads and metal plaques depicting biblical characters. Donated by Miss Masson, Elgin in 1837 - before the Museum was built.

ELGNM: 1837.2

Men of Vision - Appendix

Item 12 – Portrait of Isaac Forsyth (1768–1859)



Oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm

The original was painted in 1851 by Robert Innes of Edinburgh and is now in the care of Moray Museums Service. This copy was painted about 1930, by Ernest Macandrew, and donated by Miss Lesley Anderson of Lossiemouth, both descendents of the sitter.

The Macandrew family is connected not only to Isaac Forsyth's by marriage, but also with the Johnstons of Newmills, Elgin.

Isaac Forsyth was quite a bit older than the others involved with the founding of Elgin Museum - he was 90 when he died in 1859, and the Museum opened in 1843 - but he introduced a very important

outsider to the group: Hugh Miller. Miller wrote a book of poetry "*Poems of a Journeyman Mason*" in 1829 and so knew of Forsyth the Elgin bookseller, librarian and publisher at least from this time, and probably earlier.

There was a family connection with Cromarty: Isaac's uncle James lived there, and Isaac married James' granddaughter, Catherine, in 1801. Miller knew the Cromarty Forsyths well enough to write a biography of Catherine's father, published in 1839. Before that, Hugh and Lydia came to stay with the Forsyths in Elgin for their two-day honeymoon in 1837. Thus, Miller was also introduced to Patrick Duff, town clerk, fostering his interest in those very early days of the local passion for the discovery and study of fossils.

Forsyth's involvement with the setting up of the Museum was just one of very many of his fingers in pies, to the extent that, according to one of our Museum's historians, the late Ian Keillar, his primary business was never a great financial success.

He had started his working life apprenticed to a bookbinder in Aberdeen. Early on he helped found the Morayshire Farmers' Club and was its secretary for many years. They disbanded only relatively recently, and their magnificent silver trophies are now in Elgin Museum. Forsyth had himself tried farming and experimented with imported seed from the south.

Forsyth was involved in several charitable enterprises: he led the public collections for the families of the sailors lost in the Stotfield storm in 1826 off Lossiemouth, and again after the Moray Flood in 1829 and raised funds for the tidying of Elgin Cathedral ruins.

Forsyth's other main contribution in the early days of Elgin Museum arose through his deafness. He became stone deaf, and carried a slate and pencil, and learned to lip read. The story is that when the debate was going on about the site to be selected for the Museum to be built, he pretended not to hear the meeting's decision and went ahead and purchased the land on which it now stands.

Research by Janet Trythall, Museum Volunteer and Vice President of The Moray Society, 05.02.2013

Item 21

The Levack Ladies and their donations to Elgin Museum

Janet Brander (b. 1842) was the second daughter of Robert Brander. Robert built Rock House in Lossiemouth. Janet married John Levack, a captain in the Mercantile Marine. She accompanied him on many of his voyages around the world collecting many of the objects which have been gifted to the Museum.

Janet settled down in Rock House with her family of three daughters and one son: Margaret Grey Levack (1870-1941), Annie Isobel Levack (1872-1955), Ethel Brander Levack (born in Newcastle, New Zealand 1874-1933) and Robert Brander Levack (1880-1952).

Janet took a keen interest in local matters and had a wonderful stock of stories told with great humour in local dialect. During World War I she knitted garments for soldiers and sailors and organised local knitting parties.

Janet's daughter Ethel became interested in the Girl Guide Movement while she was working in London as a governess. When she returned home in 1912, she founded the Lossiemouth Company with just two members. This was the first company in Moray.

During World War I, Ethel served as a Red Cross nurse with the Voluntary Aid Detachment (or V. A. D.) both in Britain and in France.

Janet's son, Robert married Therese Sophie from France. They were interned in France by the Germans in World War II. After the war, when Robert became ill, they came home to Lossiemouth and lived in Boulah Bembah. Therese died in Aberdeen in 1983.

Robert and Therese's daughter, Minou, took the veil and became Sister Jean d'Arc at the Benedictine Monastery at Craon in France.

It is thanks to the Levack family that the Museum now has many wonderful objects which they had collected on their voyages.

Research by Jan MacWilliam, Museum Volunteer, 16.03.2016