

Case 12 The Elgin Marbles

For many years this cabinet has been dedicated to the Elgin Marbles, the sculptures, named for the 7th Earl of Elgin. Our focus has been on the link between the Bruce family in Fife, home of the Elgin Earlship, and the drawings and innovative miniatures of the Parthenon frieze, as created by John Henning.

Two Henning sketches were donated by the 11th Earl of Elgin. Our casts were owned by Louisa, Countess of Seafield who also donated Henning casts from the Bassae Frieze and Raphael's Sistine Chapel.

Today these are the stories of Henning, the Paisley craftsman and artist, and the Countess, who lived at Grant Lodge, Elgin.

Janet Trythall, Elgin Museum Volunteer, 2024

1. Parthenon North Frieze Slab, XLVI

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/66/Parthenon_frieze_north_XLVI.JPG

2. Parthenon North Frieze Slab, XLVII

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/da/Parthenon_frieze_north-XLVII.JPG

3. Drawing from the Parthenon North Frieze, Slab XLVI by John Henning. The original sculpture is in the British Museum. Drawing donated by Andrew Bruce, 11th Earl of Elgin (1924 -) with copies of Henning's correspondence. Agnes Meadows, daughter of John Henning, gave a portfolio of her by then deceased father's drawings to the 7th Earl in 1851.

ELGNM: 2004.2.2

4. Parthenon Frieze miniature cast by John Henning (stamped Henning 1818). An example from the set donated by Louisa, Countess of

Seafield of Grant Lodge, Elgin. This cast is of North Frieze Slab XLVI (see drawing), in the British Museum (1816,0610.46) and part of Slab XLVII, in the Acropolis Museum, Athens (Ακρ. 1145), to the right.

ELGNM: 2003.35.36

5. John Henning self-portrait – from the portfolio of drawings – see **3**.

6. Phidias, the 5th Century BC Greek sculptor who designed the Parthenon frieze, showing the frieze to his friends (1868 painting)

7. John Henning oil portrait (n.d.) by Robert Scott-Lauder as dust jacket to Henning's biography by John Wall (original in Scottish National Portrait Gallery)

ELGNM: 2018.14

8. Studio portrait of John Henning with full-size cast of a horseman from the Parthenon Frieze. Taken at Rock House, Edinburgh, (n.d.). Note the magnifying glass on long tape around Henning's neck and large portfolio under left arm. Robert Adamson and David Octavius Hill, salted paper print. The Met, Accession Number: 43.10.42 (Open Access)

9. Portrait of Louisa Emma Loftus, Countess of Seafield: a typical customer for Henning's miniatures

Sitter's proof. Mixed method mezzotint

Sir Francis Grant, A.R.A., Painter. William Overend Geller, Engraver.

British Museum number: 2010,7081.4274

© **The Trustees of the British Museum**. Shared under a

Creative [Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

10. Post cards of Grant Lodge, Elgin home of the Countess of Seafield.

11. Francis William Ogilvy-Grant, 6th Earl of Seafield (1778 – 1853), Louisa's first husband, n.d. (Public domain)

12. Original donation card and copy of Elgin Museum Accession Book record for the Henning miniatures

John Henning (1771 - 1851)

John Henning was born in Paisley, eldest of 11 children. Like his father, he was involved in radical politics particularly workers' rights; in 1794 he was on a list to be imprisoned under the repeal of the Habeas Corpus Act. Formal schooling ended at the age of 13 when he became apprenticed to his father, a carpenter and 'architect' or draughtsman.

Despite never having any education in art, John Henning proceeded to evolve his craftsmanship in cast making of relief sculptures. Through poverty, he was schoolmaster to his own children. This led to a chance breakthrough. In an arithmetic lesson, son John was not concentrating but carving a head *intaglio* on his slate using his father's knife. In future all the casts were made with slate moulds giving them 'their unrivalled, crisp precision' and he soon made a name as an artist-in-miniature, his 'doll-making'.

Patronage for a young man in his modest position was essential for progress in a career in the arts. In 1811, considering a move to London, by chance he was introduced to the Elgin Marbles and Lord Elgin. Permission to draw the sculptures was almost refused thanks to the elitist advice of the President of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West: "My Lord, to allow Mr. Henning to Draw from your Lordship's Marbles would be like sending a boy to the University before he had learned his letters."

Following an introduction by the actress, Mrs Siddons, he was commissioned to create a cameo likeness of the teenage Princess Charlotte in 1812. Perhaps fancying herself captured in Grecian pose, she showed interest in Henning's preparatory life size drawings from the Elgin Marbles: the catalyst for his decision to reproduce the whole of the Parthenon frieze in miniature.

Henning never went to Athens. His sources were the sculptures housed at Burlington House and later the British Museum, using 17th century drawings and measurements to fill in pieces by then missing from the original 5th century BC carvings of Phidias, Φειδίας.

Sadly, without patent laws, cheap and inaccurate imitations were made of his miniatures. Despite his original success, Henning, 'That Most Ingenious Modeller', experienced extreme poverty in his old age. He and his wife Catherine (Kate, 'my rib') spent their last years with a son, Archibald, in Islington. Henning died aged 79 of cancer of the lip and throat.

Louisa, Countess of Seafield (c. 1818 – 1884)

Louisa, Countess of Seafield, Grant Lodge, Elgin was probably typical of John Henning's customers. The miniature casts of the Elgin Marbles were produced at the height of the Greek Revival in 19th Century Britain and would have been displayed in the drawing rooms of the wealthy. She continued to use her title even though her husband, the 6th Earl of Seafield, predeceased her and she married again twice, each husband predeceasing her.

Born in County Limerick, one of ten children, she was in her early 20s when she married the Earl, a widower in his late 60s. On his death ten years later, 'she was left as jointure the fine house of Grant Lodge, an annuity of £2000 and the shootings of Birnie'. The 7th Earl was born to her husband's first wife, and also died before his stepmother.

Louisa married next in 1856 to Godfrey Massy of Tipperary, a Major in the 19th Regiment of Foot. Their only child, who provided her grave stone, was born the same year. He continued the connection with the British Army in Ireland, retiring as a Captain in the Connaught Rangers. In 1864, still only 40 years old, Louisa married Lord Henry Loftus, a son of the 2nd Marquis of Ely, and an Irish cricketer, from whom she was later divorced.

Grant Lodge was Louisa's main place of residence. She 'was very kind to all the poor people in the neighbourhood of it' and was 'a liberal contributor to local charities'. We can imagine how Elgin Museum, built in 1842, would have been her neighbour across what is now Cooper Park. Latterly she 'lived a comparatively retired life' and is described as being 'socially of a bright and lively disposition, and in every respect a most estimable lady'.

She died at Grant Lodge after a series of 'paralytic shocks'. The funeral was conducted by an Episcopalian minister, and the oak coffin carried by a hearse drawn by four beautiful horses and accompanied by nobility and gentry to Elgin New Cemetery.



The jointure passed to the then current Dowager Countess, but it sounds as if the family soon lost interest in Grant Lodge. The Seafeld estates and name still continue but based principally at Cullen. By 1902, Grant Lodge had been purchased by George A. Cooper, North College and donated to the people of Elgin.

Louisa's set of Henning casts, donated to the Museum in 1866, subsequently disappeared to resurface in an attic in Elgin in 2003, wrapped in a 1936 Daily Express, complete with their original donation slip.

Janet Trythall, Elgin Museum Volunteer, February 2024