



Friends of The Falconer Museum Christmas Newsletter 2016

assisting the Falconer Museum,
Forres

Patron: The Earl of Moray

Honorary President: Rex McIntosh, MBE, JP

Scottish Charity No. SC02364

First things first:

We wish all our Friends a joyful Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Committee News

A new Committee of Friends convened during the summer. The Committee comprised several familiar faces and a seasoning of new enthusiasts. The Committee is able to call upon a kaleidoscope of transferable skills from members experienced in many disciplines and occupations (administration, business, science, history, archives, archaeology, hospitality ...)

A Note from the Chairman Michael Rhind

Merry Christmas! Another year is coming to an end and I must say what a busy year it has been for the whole of our Charity. I am proud to now stand at the helm of this Charity as we look into the future as you will find out reading through this newsletter we have filled 2016 with a selection of different activities and events this is only the beginning as the Committee and I are already busy working on a program for next year to get many more of our members involved and back through our doors. 2017 is shaping up to be a great year for both the museum and The Friends and I look forward to meeting more of our members as the year goes on. Remember our annual AGM will be in April and every single member is welcome to attend. Finally I must thank you all for kindly supporting The Friends and the Museum as without our members and volunteers we would not be the organization we are today.



Mr Michael Rhind

The committee members are

Rex Mackintosh (honorary president), Michael Rhind (chair), John Barrett (vice chair)
Christine Clerk (secretary), Eleanor Symon (treasurer), Alasdair Morton (membership secretary)

Dr Alison Wright, Gordon Scott, Dave MacFarquhar, Joan Taylor, Michael Sharpe, Ruth Fishkin, Samantha Fraser. Attendees from other organisations - Heather Shaw (Community council Representative) Liz Trevethick and Anne Owen (Development Project Officers (Heritage and Tourism)), Alex Pollock (Falconer Trust Representative).

Scottish Prehistoric Arrows Fly Across the Atlantic, Strike Bull's-eye

2014's review of the Falconer lithics collection is still reverberating.

Early in that year we had the privilege of a visit from Torben Ballin, a specialist in struck or 'knapped' stone tools such as flint knives, scrapers, & arrowheads. The museum houses an important collection of flint tools, including extremely early hand-axes brought back by Hugh Falconer from France in the 1860. (These were made by early human species a quarter of a million years ago, when Scotland was under half a mile of ice). We also have many beautiful and instructive examples of stone technology made by members of our own species living in postglacial Scotland. There were roughly 8000 years between the retreat of the ice, and the gradual replacement of stone by metal technologies in the last couple of thousand years BC. So by the time of the Roman incursions, when bronze and iron had finally taken over from stone for most tools and weapons, an awful lot of flint had been struck in Scotland! Lying about for a few thousand years does flint no harm at all, so our ancestors' objects can still be picked up, any time a field is ploughed or a dune erodes in the wind. Many have found their way into the Falconer collection. Since Torben's visit we have a vastly improved understanding of what, in fact, we have.



Ruth Fishkin with the completed arrow head

Among the several thousand flint pieces in the Falconer were found five beautiful little Neolithic and Bronze Age arrowheads which had never been accessioned. 'Gee....' we thought. Next thing you know, Ruth the flint-fancying volunteer is going to visit her relatives in the USA, carrying a small stony parcel in her suitcase, for among her mother's circle of friends is Mike Smith, West Virginia park ranger, craftsman, and DIY frontiersman.

After a winding drive in the Allegheny Mountains, there followed an extremely instructive afternoon spent in Mike and Chris Smith's Pocahontas County cabin. Mike turns out to be a one-man master class in Native American fletching – which, given the universality of materials including deer sinew, hide glue and spruce glue, is essentially identical with prehistoric Scottish fletching.

The Scottish points are back in the museum, now displayed as they would have looked in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. They are beautiful, and, if you're a deer and Mike Smith's behind a tree with his bow strung, quite deadly. They may well have brought down red deer on the slopes of the Spey four or five thousand years ago. Now they're set up and ready to fly again, but for the present, they'll bring down no more game. For this epoch, the arrows are staying with us.

One arrow is in the Lithics case in the Falconer Room and one in the archaeology case, where they can be viewed at any time when the museum reopens in Spring.



The completed arrows back in the Falconer Museum

The Professionals' paragraphs

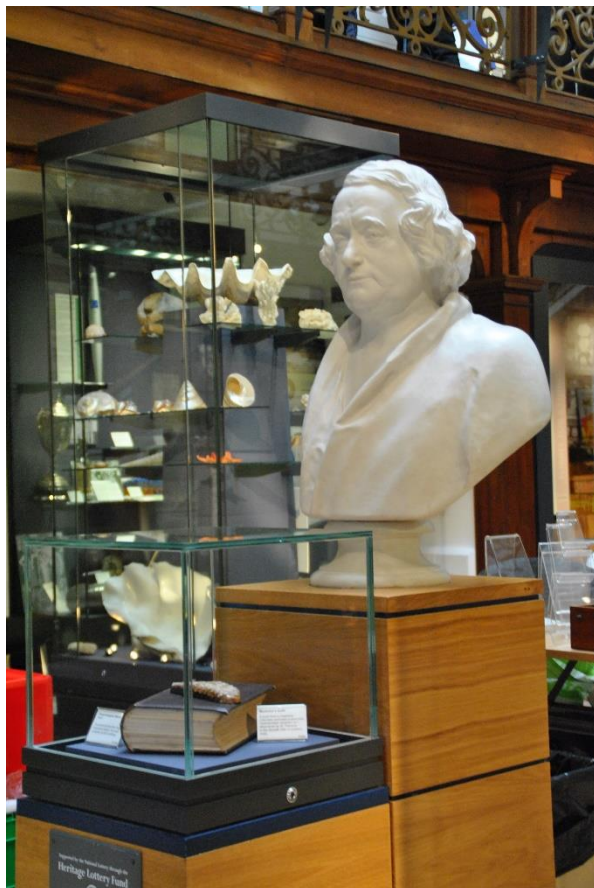
Anne Owen and Liz Trevethick (Project Development Officers (Heritage and Tourism))

2017 is *The UK Year of Indian Culture*. The Falconer Museum will to celebrate this by exploring the strong ties Moray and Scotland has with the Subcontinent.

Our collection includes many Indian items, including Dr Hugh Falconer's (1808- 1865) Sewalik Hills fossil collection, along with figurines, costume, jewellery and books from Lady Constance Frederica Gordon Cumming (1837 - 1924) from Altyre.

We are hoping to borrow from National Museums of Scotland the ethnographic figurines commissioned by Margaret Tytler (1785 – 1822) when she lived in northern India. These would add to our interpretation of Scot-Indian links and help us to interpret the science, technology and life in 19th Century India. So often, the Enlightenment and Victorian adventurers we celebrate are men. It would be lovely and fitting to include Margaret Tytler's collection, alongside Lady Gordon Cumming's to celebrate women's contributions and begin to tell their story also.

Hosts of supporting community events and partnerships for the exhibition are possible. We are planning dance, music, costume, shadow puppets, storytelling, and the story of tea, cooking and Inter-faith events and family drop-ins. We are also in contact with The Glasgow Mask and Puppet Theatre. It would be wonderful to have an addition of Indian items from NMS.



Dr Hugh Falconer in the Falconer Museum

Danger! High Voltage



Demonstration of the operation of the Tesla coil to generate lightening by Ronan Bullock of the Science Museum

The Falconer Museum (kindly supported by The Friends of the Falconer Museum and Berry Burn Community Fund) brought the Science Museum of London and their *Danger! High Voltage* show to Forres Town Hall on 21st and 22nd September. The event was about the history and development of using electricity and magnetism to produce Power. There was a public session on Wednesday 21st September and schools sessions on both days. This was complemented with the Falconer Museum exhibition *Power to the People* about the past present and future of energy consumption and production.

Scanning Project

The Friends Committee is currently investigating possibilities for digital scanning of the Museum building. A digital scan will serve several purposes. The digital record will provide an accurate image of the building: a modern depiction to set alongside the elegant 1:96 scale original plans hand-drawn and watercolour by A & W Reid in the 1860s. The digital scan will allow us to appreciate the elegant and intricate masonry of the Museum, and to examine and appreciate details including the carved heads of scientific worthies that dignify keystones above the windows. The sculptures are by Thomas Goodwillie – who also crafted the sculptures on the Forres Market building and the Duke of Gordon Monument, Elgin.



Falconer Museum, Forres

The digital scan will also assist in monitoring the condition of the stonework and in the early identification of any structural problems as the building matures into its second century.

Monday MAFA

On Mondays the museum workshop buzzes with the energy of local archaeologists, working under the banner of MAFA (Moray Archaeology for All).

The archaeologists include professionals and volunteer amateurs who meet to discuss recent digs and other fieldwork, while processing finds, samples and excavation records.

Surprisingly, this work requires little in the way of special equipment and everything the archaeologists need is available in the workroom. The Falconer Museum computer is used to digitise archaeological records. The museum workshop is an ideal space for sorting, cleaning and cataloguing artefacts recovered during field walking. The assemblages represent a range of historical and prehistorical activity. Lithics (stone artefacts) range from burly saddle querns (used in prehistory to grind grain) and worked flint including exquisite arrowheads (leaf-shaped from the Neolithic; barbed-and-tanged from the Bronze Age); flint knives, scrapers and fragments of knappers' waste (debitage); and gun flints from military or sporting firearms. The pottery ranges from crumbly dark sherds of Iron-Age ceramic through green-glazed medieval ware to blue-and-white Victorian crockery and broken bits of clay tobacco pipes. Then there is metal working waste: bubbly, blobby, vitrified, melted furnace slag and pieces of crucible, that evidence an industrial history that extends to the four thousand years back into the Bronze Age.

The team also sorts the residues that are saved from the flotation of soil samples gathered during professional excavations at Birnie, Clarkly Hill, Cromarty and Belladrum. Carbonised organic material (charcoal, seeds, nut shell) is separated out and sent for expert analysis and scientific dating. The MAFA enthusiasts patiently sort trays of midden material or simple gravel to separate out magnetic material (evidence of metal working), organic remains (bone, shell, seeds, nutshell), flintdebitage, and rare treasure such as fragments of prehistoric glass beads.

A carved stone once catalogued as a tile from Kinloss Abbey has now been recatalogued as part of a panel from Pictish shrine – close cousin of an example in the Rosemarkie museum.



Barbed and tanged arrow head made from local silcrete



Pictish Stone fragment

Friday and Thursday Friends

On Fridays and Thursdays a team of Falconer Friends pursue particular projects that support the work of the museum professionals. A selection of some of these exciting projects are; The old style museum catalogue (compiled on record cards) is now being updated, and refreshed and digitised. The digital catalogue will be more accessible and flexible than the old paper record.

Friends are busy cataloguing the Peter Anson collection. This historically important (and artistically gorgeous) collection of illustrations (pen-and-ink and watercolour) particularly depicts, in affectionate detail, the fishing industry and fisher folk of the Moray coast. Peter Anson was also an important figure in the Christian community of Moray, notably the Apostleship of the Sea.

As Forres welcomes the proposed upgrading of Forres railway station, Friday Friends are preserving a record of what will be lost. Ross Dalziel has constructed a detailed scale model of the old Forres Station – a major junction (before Beeching), when the line from Speyside via Grantown connected with the Inverness-Aberdeen route on the unusual triangular platform of Forres station. Further research may explain why British Rail chose to upgrade Forres station in the 1960s with an eye catching modern terminal building – to a design in brick that would be more at home on the London Underground. The model is presently displayed in the Forres Railway Station and it is hoped that it will find a home in within the new Forres station which is due to be completed in Winter 2017.

A group of the Friday Friends were on site during the demolition of the Forres Mart building on Tytler Street. Our chairman, Michael Rhind was able to arrange for the Falconer Museum to receive parts of the wooden Market Frieze of farm animals and also some iron railings from the stairs and landing. These will be preserved for use in exhibitions.



Animal friezes at the Forres Mart

Future projects for the Friday Friends are the creation of a photographic record of the work of the Friday Friends throughout the year. This will be in the form of a photo album and will also be available on line as a digital book. In addition the work on digitising the catalogue will continue.



The theatre performance group the Varis Players donated £300 to the Friends of the Falconer Museum. Their next production Cinderella will open in the Forres Town Hall in January 2017.

Friday Friends receive the cheque for £300 from the Varis Players

Moray Querners

The Falconer stores were recently raided by The Moray Querners. This group – including several Falconer Friends – is engaged on a project for Dr Fraser Hunter at the National Museums of Scotland. The Moray Quern Survey is searching out domestic grinding stones wherever they lie in Moray. Some querns lie neglected in farmyards, or are built into drystone dykes; others are dignified and loved as decorative heritage artefacts - built into rockeries or proudly displayed as garden ornaments.



Moray Querners sorting the Falconer Museum Store Quern Collection

The Moray Querners spent several days drawing, photographing, weighing and measuring, the collection of some two dozen domestic grinding stones in the museum collection. The Falconer querns include a range of types. There are prehistoric saddle querns; and disk-

shaped rotary querns that were used in ordinary households to grind barley meal and oatmeal from the early middle ages until Victorian times. The collection also includes several elegant small pot querns used to grind herbs and snuff. The Querners expertise helped Museum staff to reunite a Falconer pot quern with its grinding stone.

The Moray Quern Survey is keen to hear of any querns in the Forres area. Please contact the Falconer Museum. The Querners will not take your querns away, but they would welcome any opportunity to record querns *in situ*.



Pot Quern with circular centre for grinding stone

Friends of Friends

The Falconer Museum always welcomes new Friends. The heritage-aware people of Forres are already active in supporting their unique local museum. But there is always room for more Friends. Existing Friends are urged to recruit new Friends from among their circle of family and friends. Perhaps existing Friends have acquaintances among the business community in west Moray – who may wish to support the Falconer Museum as Corporate Friends.

The Falconer Museum looks forward to the future, but that future will be brighter and more secure if the Museum is supported by numerous and vigorous Friends.

2017

The committee is considering plans for a programme of evening talks during 2017. Local historians and academics will be invited to give illustrated lectures focusing on Forres history, heritage, and archaeology. Other experts will be invited to deliver talks on natural history and local landscape, supported by material from the Museum collections.

Admission charges will be used to support other museum activities. Friends of the Falconer will, of course, enjoy a discount.