



Friends of The Falconer Museum

assisting the falconer museum, forres
Scottish charity SC 023649

Patron: The Earl of Moray

Honorary President: Mr Rex McIntosh MBE

Honorary Patron: Mr John Falconer Steele

Newsletter 2017/8

The Tortiphant is coming!

The bizarre image of an elephant on the back of a tortoise has been creeping into Falconer Museum publicity and publications for a couple of years now. Visitors and locals often ask: "Where does the image come from? Isn't it just copied from the Terry Pratchett novels? Why is it relevant to the Falconer Museum?"

This image – popularly known as the Falconer Tortiphant – belongs, tooth and claw, to the Falconer Museum. The Tortiphant first appeared as an affectionate caricature enlivening the dry matter of a Victorian scientific correspondence. And the cartoon was subsequently published as an illustration in the sturdy synoptical academic analysis of Falconer's palaeontological work. (Charles Murchison, *Palaeontological Memoirs and Notes of the Late Hugh Falconer, A. M., M. D.*, London 1868)



But look carefully. The elephant seems to be one of the straight-tusked mastodons (possibly *Elephas ganesa*) that Falconer discovered in the Siwalik Hills of Northern India. And the tortoise is the gigantic *Colossochelys atlas*. This reptile was surely Falconer's most dramatic discovery. It stood up to eight feet tall and might grow to nearly twenty feet in length. And at that size it might indeed have borne a moderate-sized elephant on its back.

Now look again. The elephant is wearing spectacles and quaffing a foaming tankard of India Ale. The elephant is Hugh Falconer: not the ponderously austere Victorian academic of the carved bust who surmounts the pediment of the Falconer Museum façade, but a lively hilarious, thoroughly human Forresian who delighted in his life and his discoveries.

The Tortiphant belongs to Falconer's experience as a naturalist and colonial explorer in the service of the East India Company. Falconer embraced the rich exoticism of Indian culture. (On occasion he would dress in a gorgeous silken native costume – on display in the museum during 2017). And the Tortiphant image is drawn from the ancient Indian mythology and culture that has inspired creative western imaginations from Kipling to the Beatles.

Now the Friends of the Falconer are bringing the Tortiphant into the foreground. The Friends have commissioned sculptor Dom Buxton of Gartly to create a model Tortiphant. The Tortiphant sculpture will be installed as a centrepiece in the Museum. The Tortiphant will provide a focus for future

exhibitions on palaeontology, ecology, The British Empire, Indian (and World) religions, cross-cultural art and design, and (with Terry Pratchett in mind) story-telling and modern creative writing.

The Tortiphant sculpture will be constructed during the winter. We look forward to unveiling the Tortiphant when the Museum reopens in the Spring of 2018. All Friends will be invited to the event. Be prepared to be astonished.



Ross Dalziel, Dr John Barrett, Gordon Scott, Eileen Fitzpatrick, and Dom Buxton the artist with some samples of his work in the Falconer museum on Friday 16th June 2017

Doors open – the store's open

The 2017 Doors Open Day invited the people of Moray to explore buildings that are not often to the public. Among the premises specially opened for the day were a lighthouse, a courthouse, a dozen churches and the Falconer Museum store.

The store was originally a chapel for the nonconformist Seceder congregation. It is an austere anonymous building closing the vista at the top of a council car park. Most people pass by the store without giving it a second glance or a single thought. The old chapel now contains staff offices and a large laboratory/workshop space (downstairs); with (upstairs) ranks of rolling stacks containing the treasures of the Falconer Museum.

The Falconer Museum in the High Street displays only the tip of a cultural iceberg. The storehouses the research collections from which exhibition objects are selected. Occasionally museum staff will conduct privileged groups of children and Friends on tours of the store. But mostly (and quite rightly) the store is a secure, closed, climate-controlled environment. Public access is strictly controlled.

For Door Open Day – the brainchild of Friends committee member Gordon Scott – the store doors were opened to the public. In the downstairs workroom special displays and were mounted. Visitors were invited to hold a Neolithic stone axe; to stroke a stegodont tooth; to put a hand in the crocodile's mouth. Children were encouraged to search for diamonds in archaeological residues. A vintage gramophone blared scratchy popular tunes as an incongruous background to an archaeological slide show and the museum collections database uploaded to PCs in the workroom.

And throughout the Doors Open Day groups of visitors were guided by Friends, up the steep steps to the dim store – to explore. The stacks were rolled open at random to reveal: a lion's skin; a Victorian herbarium; a box of magic lantern slides; spiders, scorpions, butterflies; flint tools from Culbin; swords, spears and kitchenalia; Peter Anson's charming watercolours; ponderous provosts in oils; ship models; exotic birds in glass cases; native animals – stuffed foxes, stuffed otters, stuffed badgers, stuffed weasels.

The store was abuzz with visitors all day. The success of the Doors Open event has encouraged us to think about offering similar open days during the 2018 season.



Dr John Barrett and Gordon Scott placing the Doors Open Banner on the outside of the Falconer Store on Saturday 23 September 2017

Not Just Stuffed Weasels

The cash-strapped Moray Council is constantly searching for services that may be cut or reconfigured to save money. And, as in previous financial crises, cultural services are seen as a soft target. Some Council operations (social work, education, &c.) are statutory essential services; others are more exposed when it comes to saving money. Councillors rightly regard history and heritage as luxuries. Thus local libraries (across Moray) have been closed. And the archives (housed in Forres) were rigorously weeded and the service reduced to a bare minimum. Professional staff posts and professional expertise have been lost. Nonetheless the Council is able to assert that it still provides 'adequate' services.

A couple of years ago the cutting edge of Moray Council spending reviews focused upon the Museum service. Staff had already been reduced a good deal from what it was in the past. The council's proposals, however, foundered: partly upon the determination of the Friends of the Falconer; partly upon the wise counsel and support provided by our Falconer Trustees.

Now there is a new concern. In advance of a meeting of the Moray Council to consider Museum services, Councillor George Alexander questioned the value of a Museum founded upon 'stuffed weasels'. A statement that was instantly regretted. Nonetheless a report approved by The Moray Council on 27 September 2017 contained the key recommendation to:

approve the development of options to create a sustainable future for the service including the engagement of auction houses to explore possible sales of items from the collections

Leading academics including Dr Fraser Hunter of NMS and Professor Leif Isaksen of Exeter University have expressed concern regarding the Moray Council's plans. The Friends of the Falconer will be monitoring the situation very closely. We must ensure that nothing unethical is done. We will be supported in this by the Museums & Galleries of Scotland (MGS), which has already taken an active interest in the Falconer Museum.

Of course, in the end, we get the heritage services that we deserve. And if we are not willing to invest in historic buildings and landscapes, fund academic research, support archive and museum collections – then perhaps we should not complain when these things are destroyed, damaged or diminished. The Friends of the Falconer will do all that is possible to ensure that the Falconer Museum, its services to the community, and its priceless collections, are preserved and enhanced: a precious inheritance from Moray's past for the delight and education of Moray folk in the future.



Jo Stavart and Dr John Barrett with a Falconer Fossil

Winter Talks

Our programme of winter talks is now well under way. This is a new initiative for the Friends, making use of the Museum during the closed season and also earning income for Friend's activities in support of the Museum. We have been successful in recruiting high-profile academic experts to give popular lectures on aspects of Moray history and heritage.

Most talks will be presented in the Falconer Museum on a Tuesday afternoon. Admission price £3 (Friends £2).

The Winter Talks season was inaugurated by professional archivist, historian and archaeologist, Dr John Barrett. His talk focused upon the astonishing memoirs of Mr James Allan – 'the most famous Moravian you've never heard of'. James Allan's 'book of remembrance' (formerly a jewel in the crown of the Moray Archives in the Tolbooth, Forres) documented, in stunning detail, a troublous time of civil war, social unrest, witchery and religious fundamentalism. And Forres swam in the mainstream of a current of conflict and change that shaped the Scottish nation during the seventeenth century.

In the second talk (organised as a joint endeavour with the Forres Heritage Trust), Professor Leif Isaksen of Exeter University described the 2017 archaeological excavations on Cluny Hill. The dig confirmed the existence of a hillfort surrounding the Nelson Tower summit. And subsequent analysis of samples confirmed a surprisingly early (late-Bronze-Age/early Iron-Age) date for the enormous ditches of the enclosure. The excavation also revealed intriguing hints of subsequent occupation and industrial activity on the hill.

The full programme of the remaining Winter Talks comprises:

2.00pm Tuesday 9th January 2018 Dr Gordon Noble,
Update on Northern Picts research Programme undertaken by Aberdeen University.

2.00pm Tuesday 6th February 2018 Charlie Phillips
On a rising Tide-the resident population of Bottlenose Dolphins

March 2018
Glasgow School of Art (Altyre Campus) - Topic to be confirmed



Professor Leif Isaksen in the Tolbooth talking about the Cluny Hill dig on
Tuesday 7th November 2017

Monday MAFA

Every Monday the Museum Store workshop is taken over by a gang of archaeologists working under the Moray Archaeology for All (MAFA) project, led by professional archaeologist, Dave Anderson. The Museum workroom is put to proper use.

Most of the Monday archaeologists are amateurs who have dug on local excavations across Moray – for example at Clarkly Hill, Birnie, Danadaleith, Burghead and Cluny Hill. The Monday archaeologists also include members of fieldwalking teams who have trudged the Moray ploughland to plot and collect scatters of artefacts (flint, slag, pottery) that pepper the soil surface as evidence of human activity in the past. But when the walking is finished, and when the digging stops, there is still much to be done. And so the Monday MAFA team assembles for post-excavation (post-ex) activities.

Finds from fieldwalking and from archaeological excavation are sorted, cleaned and documented. This essential preliminary processing prepares artefacts for subsequent detailed examination by experts; or for consideration under treasure trove regulations.

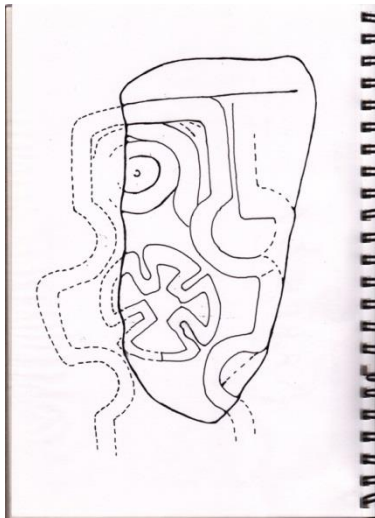
A large amount of Monday MAFA energy is devoted to sample processing. Archaeological samples comprise boxes and bags of the different soils and deposits encountered during excavation. Each bag of dirt is first processed by flotation in a tank of gently running water. The finest soil washes away leaving a residue (of gravel), and charcoal (the flot) that floats free to be collected. Flot and residue are dried. The flot of blackened wood and burned seeds is packaged and sent for detailed analysis including radio-carbon dating. The residue belongs to the Monday MAFAs. Trays of gravel are sorted grain by grain. It is a quiet and vaguely Zen activity – like watching the grass grow. The sorters work with tweezers to extract pieces of bone and charcoal, magnetic material. The fragile finds and subsamples are bagged and recorded. The quiet concentration of residue sorting is interrupted occasionally by a sherd of pottery, a lump of metal-working slag, a fragment of bronze-casting crucible, or most exciting (and most rare) a gorgeous glass bead.

And then there is the paperwork. The residue sorting is meticulously documented in a welter of numbers: find number, context number, sample number, subsample number, feature number. Drawings and photographs from archaeological digs need to be collated. Sample sheets, feature sheets, registers of finds, contexts, features, photos, drawings – soggy, muddy, and ragged from the rainy trenches – must be checked and corrected.

We wonder sometimes: what would Dr Fraser Hunter of the National Museums do if the Falconer workroom were not available for this valuable behind-the-scenes archaeological activity? Certainly the history of Moray would be the poorer. And what would Dr Hunter do without MAFA to back up his excavations? Most MAFA members are content to work for biscuits and the simple joy of archaeology; and for some, the privilege of working for handsome Dr Hunter is reward enough.

Pictish Trail

The Friends of the Falconer Museum have expressed an interest in being involved in the forthcoming collaborative project to develop a Pictish Trail in the Moray area. The Falconer Museum holds a few pictish stone fragments which could be included in this trail. In addition we have been involved in a correspondence with Historic Environment Scotland (HES). (A merger between the former Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments and Historic Scotland). HES have agreed to return to Forres to undertake a further scan of the Sueno Stone. This scan will be made available for study and as a community resource.



fragment of decorated stone found of the beach at Findhorn,

Drawn by C Clerk

This fragment of stone is awaiting collection by Treasure Trove and is at present in the Falconer Museum Store. The fragment has been identified by John Borland of HES as being stylistically similar to fragments from the Drainie assemblage at present in Elgin Museum.



Cross slab fragment Drainie No 32 (ELGNM 2009.11) in Elgin Museum



Fragment for Treasure Trove.



Sueno Stone, Forres, with Nelson Tower on Cluny Hill in the background

Friends outing to the Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore

The Friday Friends went to the Highland Folk Museum on Friday 17th November to visit Liz Trevethick former Museum Officer with the Falconer Museum who is now working as a Curator with the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore. Liz is based in *AmFasgadh* (Gaelic for The Shelter) . This modern building houses the collections of the Museum and Liz was keen to show the Friday Friends round the facility. Here you can see a variety of agricultural implements, toys, and vintage shop fittings. In addition there is a recreated 1700s Township Baille Gean which is the location for many scenes from the TV programme *Outlander*. There are a variety of agricultural and domestic buildings interpreted in a range of time periods from the 1700s - Baille Gean township to a 1930s working croft.



Liz Trevethick- Curator of Large Collections at Newtonmore Highland Folk Museum



Baille Gean township at the Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore

Staff Report from the Falconer Museum

2017 Exhibition

Our 'Indian Adventures' museum exhibition showcased a variety of items from our Indian collections, including Falconer's Sewalik fossils, the story of tea growing in India and local 19thC traveller Constance Frederica Gordon Cumming's Indian collection of books, paintings and ephemera.



During the weekend of the 'Festival of Museums' in May, we invited internationally renowned Indian storyteller Peter Shand to entertain us with his lively and humorous tales during museum drop-in sessions and at our own, hugely successful, mini 'Holi' celebration in Grant Park. We brought his stories to life with complimentary creative family workshops in the museum, making bright, traditional Indian decorations with tissue paper. The friends made beautifully authentic Indian costumes for the children's dressing up corner and a shadow puppet theatre which were much admired by everyone. We celebrated the stories, colours and traditions of India with drumming, dance, song, music and food during the Holi festival which was a particularly fun and vivid celebration of the cultural connection between India and the UK.

Special thanks to Cardamom Spice who provided a plentiful supply of wonderfully aromatic Indian food and to Marion Normand who helped to plan the weekend, providing artistic direction and of course, the all-important colour-run materials! To watch a video of the Holi festival click here: <http://falconermuseum.co.uk/>



Family Drop-ins

Popular as ever, our free school holiday drop-ins continue to attract lots of young people to enjoy themed craft activities. Thanks to our volunteers we are able to run the sessions during each week

of the holidays including Christmas. Activities this year included Indian themed shadow puppets, flower garlands, felt elephants and Diwali candle pots to name just a few! The children have been delighted with their makes and most also spent time exploring the museum during their visits which is always lovely to see.

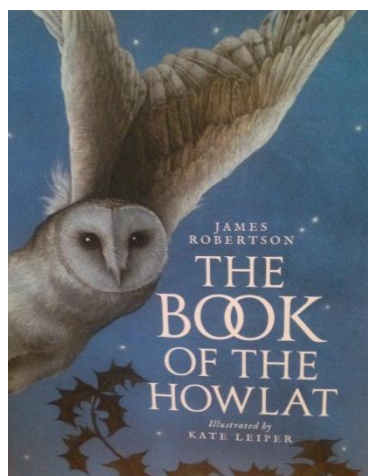


Outreach

We took a stall at Piping Hot this year and brought along some objects of local history. We offered free hands-on activities for families including making spool cars. We also took our bike and the wee 'Power to The people' exhibition to stand alongside it. The opening of Logie Wind Farm was an opportunity to display the Power to the People exhibition. In September we were invited to the Harvest Festival, Newbold House. This was the perfect setting to display a selection of our woodland handling animals and to make fun paper propellers similar to the twirling sycamore seeds of autumn.

We hosted several young explorer workshops in the store for local school groups and carried out mystery object handling sessions for older groups which were lively, full of discussion and memories.

2018 Exhibition



We have applied to Museums Galleries Scotland for funding towards a storytelling event during the Festival of Museums in May. This event will tie in with our 2018 exhibition which will take inspiration from the Book of the Howlat by James Robertson. The newly adapted story for children is taken from a poem which was written in Older Scots in the 1440s by Richard Holland, set in and around Darnaway Castle. It tells the tale of a young owl and the challenges he faces on his journey from childhood to adolescence. We plan to work in partnership with Findhorn Bay Arts, the National Library of Scotland and Kate Leiper (illustrator of the Book of the Howlat) to create the exhibition which will of course provide us with a fantastic opportunity to display some of our own feathery friends.

Prepared by Anne Owen and Kirsty Conti ,Development project officers – heritage and tourism, Moray Council.

Cluny Hill Dig update: 14 November 2017

This is a brief update for those of you who may not have heard the latest news about the Cluny Hill Dig of June this year. The aim of the dig was to see if we could find evidence of the fort that supposedly once graced the top of the hill. A few weeks ago we received the results of the radiocarbon dating, and I think it's safe to say we were all a little surprised. A piece of charred hardwood from the bank-like feature downhill of the ditch on the south side of the hill (trench C) was dated to approximately 800 B.C., which means we may have a Late Bronze Age hillfort on our hands. Charred wood from trench E, near the top of the hill, and apparently associated with metal smelting, was dated to the first four centuries B.C., solidly in the Iron Age. The third sample was from trench D, which bisected the ditch on the North side of the hill. This returned an early Neolithic date. This sample was less secure than the other two, and so may not relate to the hillfort, if indeed that's what it was. With luck, and funding, we shall return next year to further our explorations.

Michael Sharpe, Archaeologist



L to R Mike Sharpe, Leanne Demay, Dr Christine Markussen, Professor Leif Isaksen, Dr Mary Saunders, Dave Anderson- The Consortium who managed the Cluny Hill Dig.