



Moray Museums Service Collections Overview

February 2024

Researched & compiled by
Helen Avenell Heritage Associates



Acknowledgments

Helen Avenell Heritage Associates thanks the following individuals and organisations for their time and contributions to this report:

The Friends of The Falconer Museum

Anne Owen

Alistair Joyce

Peter Taylor, Trustee of The Falconer Museum Trust

George Alexander, Forres Heritage Trust

Contact

Helen Avenell - Director

Jim Dunn Associate - photographer

Jo Clements Associate - collection data research

Helen Avenell Heritage Associates

25 St. Leonards Road,

Forres IV36 1DN

helen.avenell@haha.scot

mob: 07909 913558

Contents

| | Page |
|------------------------------|------|
| Introduction | 4 |
| The buildings | 5 |
| The founder & his life | 8 |
| Exploring the Collections | 10 |
| Rationalisation | 20 |
| Potential for the Collection | 22 |
| Appendices | 31 |
| References & Further Reading | 34 |

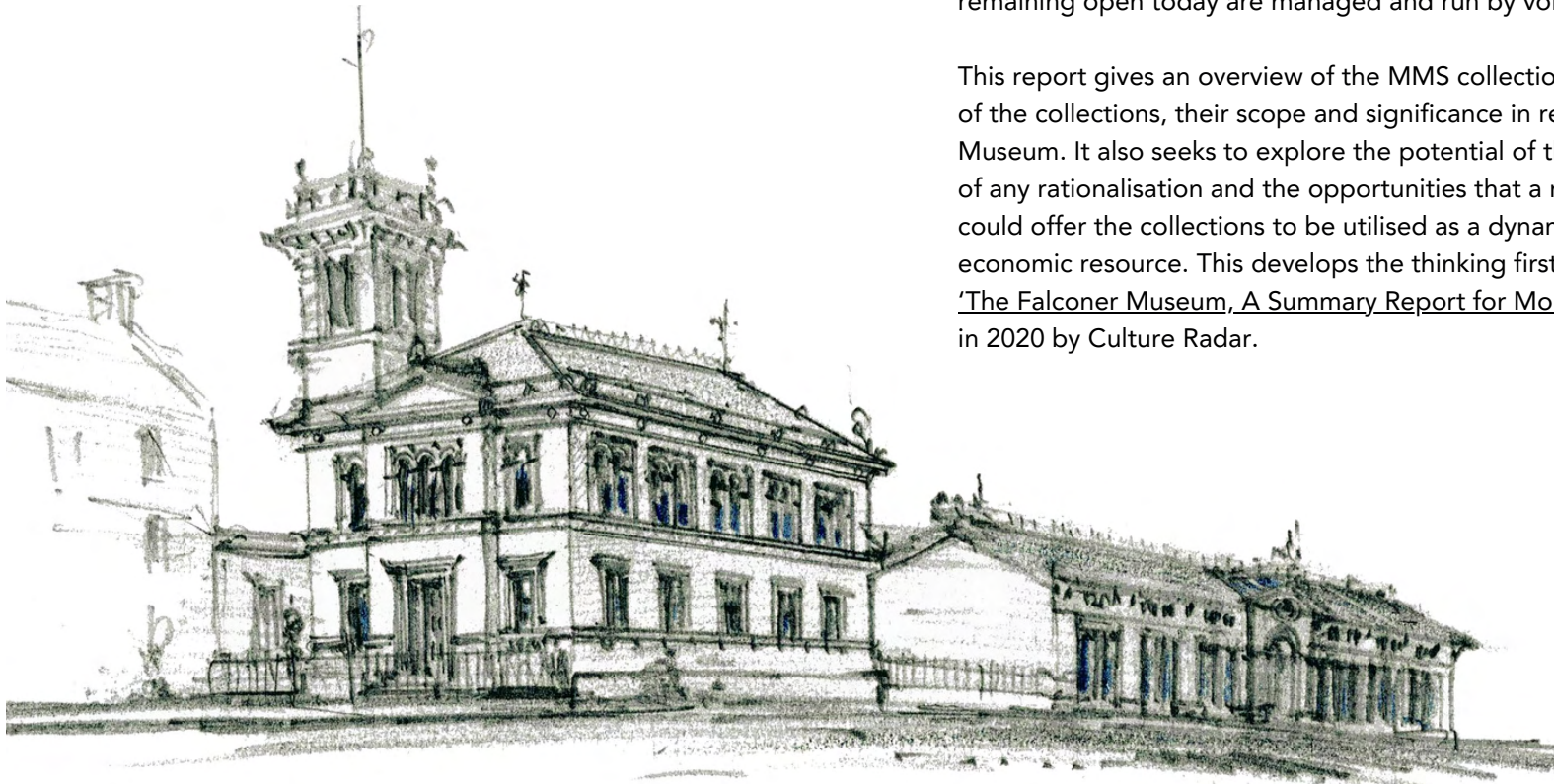


Introduction

The Moray Museums Service (MMS) Collections encompass approximately 50000 objects of local, national and international significance. The Falconer Museum was established in 1871 and grew to include collections of local history, archaeology, botany, geology, natural history, ethnography and palaeontology. In 1975, Moray District Council took over the running of Falconer Museum from The Falconer Museum Trust and a more defined collecting policy was adopted with a focus on local and regional history.

The Falconer Museum was always the principal museum in the Moray Museums Service but at times between 1975 and 2019, eight other heritage venues in the district were also supported (see Appendix 1). Some were directly managed by Moray Council, whilst others were independently run and supported with professional advice from the Museums Service. Objects from these venues were accessioned into the MMS Collections although some have since been returned to these organisations. The Falconer Museum was always the only Accredited Museum and the other venues remaining open today are managed and run by volunteers.

This report gives an overview of the MMS collections, examining the history of the collections, their scope and significance in relation to the Falconer Museum. It also seeks to explore the potential of the collection, the effects of any rationalisation and the opportunities that a new operating model could offer the collections to be utilised as a dynamic heritage, cultural and economic resource. This develops the thinking first as explored through 'The Falconer Museum, A Summary Report for Moray Council' produced in 2020 by Culture Radar.



Sketch of the original design proposal for Falconer Museum

The Buildings

Falconer Museum

The Falconer Museum is named after two Forres born brothers, Hugh and Alexander Falconer. Hugh Falconer (29th February 1808 - 31st January 1865) was a polymath who became an important figure in the Victorian science community. Older brother Alexander Falconer (1797-1856) was a merchant in Calcutta. After his death, Alexander's will granted £1000 to establish a 'public museum in Forres for objects of art and science inclusive of a library and lecture room'. Following Hugh's death nine years later, a Trust was established with the intention of building a museum to commemorate the benefactors.

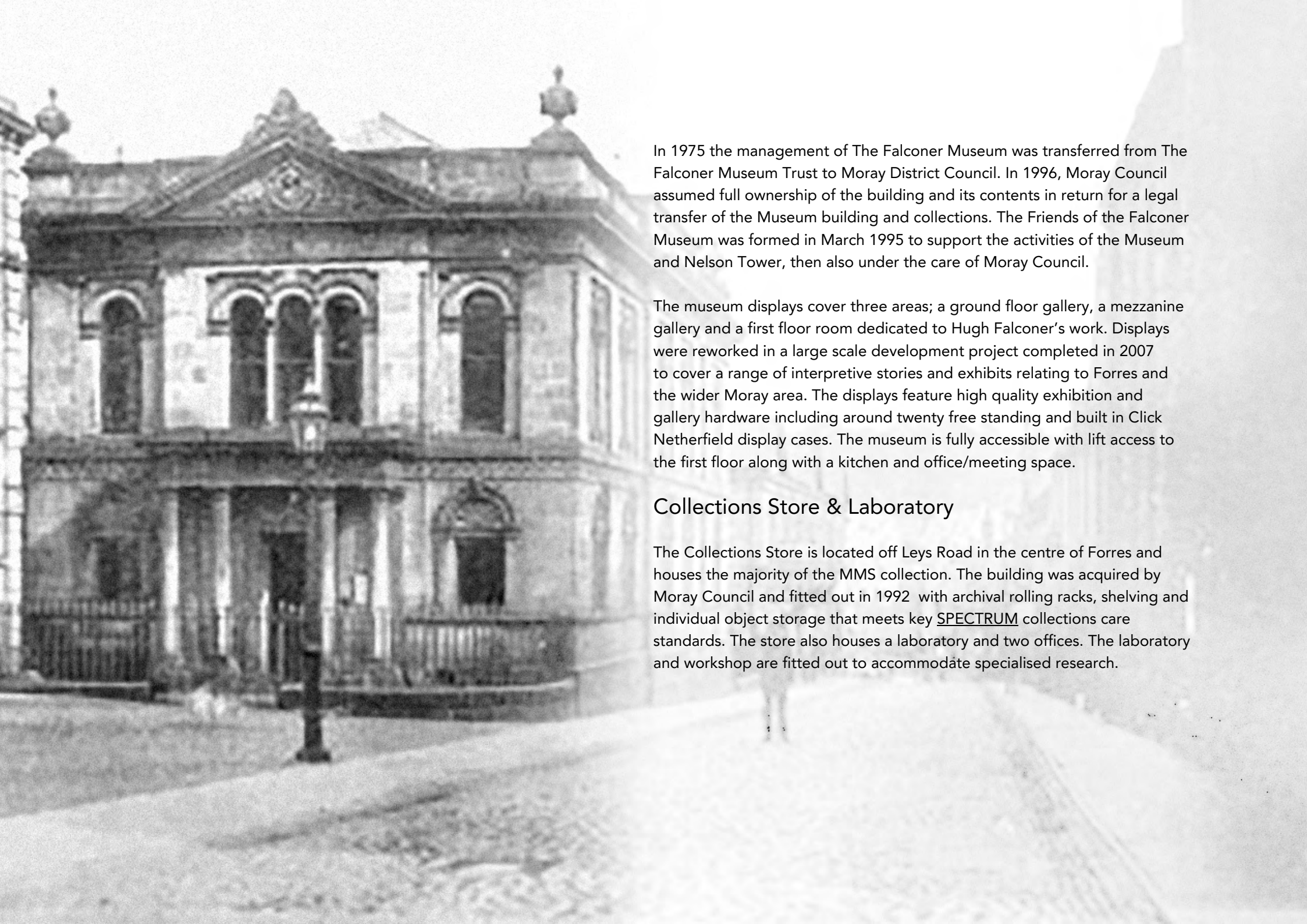
The original design of Falconer Museum was to have featured a tower and possibly a dome, but this was deemed too expensive. The agreed design included additional embellishments of carved stone figureheads above each window depicting eminent British figures (see Appendix 2) with Dr. Hugh Falconer's bust at the apex of the building.

The final cost of the museum was £1564 and this absorbed all the funds of the Trust. An admission charge of six shillings was imposed, modified to three shillings for 'members of the working classes'. Further bequests of money came to the Museum over the next twenty five years, including from Charles, brother of the founders and later from nieces of the family. However the financial position of the museum remained insecure. Building works to deal with dry rot in 1924 and 1955 further depleted the finances of The Falconer Museum Trust.



N O R T H E L E V A T I O N -

Plan sketch of Falconer Museum, 1871



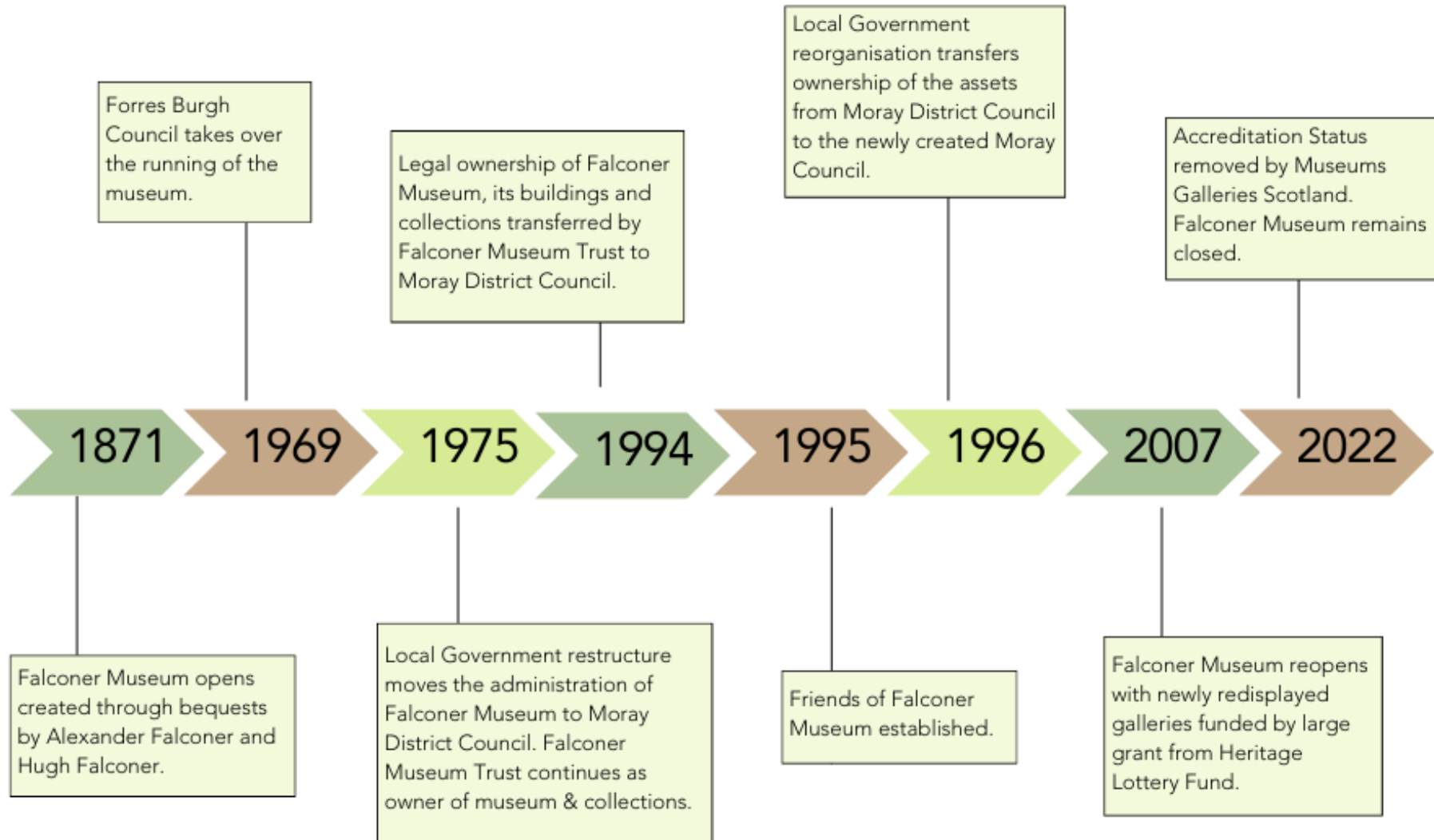
In 1975 the management of The Falconer Museum was transferred from The Falconer Museum Trust to Moray District Council. In 1996, Moray Council assumed full ownership of the building and its contents in return for a legal transfer of the Museum building and collections. The Friends of the Falconer Museum was formed in March 1995 to support the activities of the Museum and Nelson Tower, then also under the care of Moray Council.

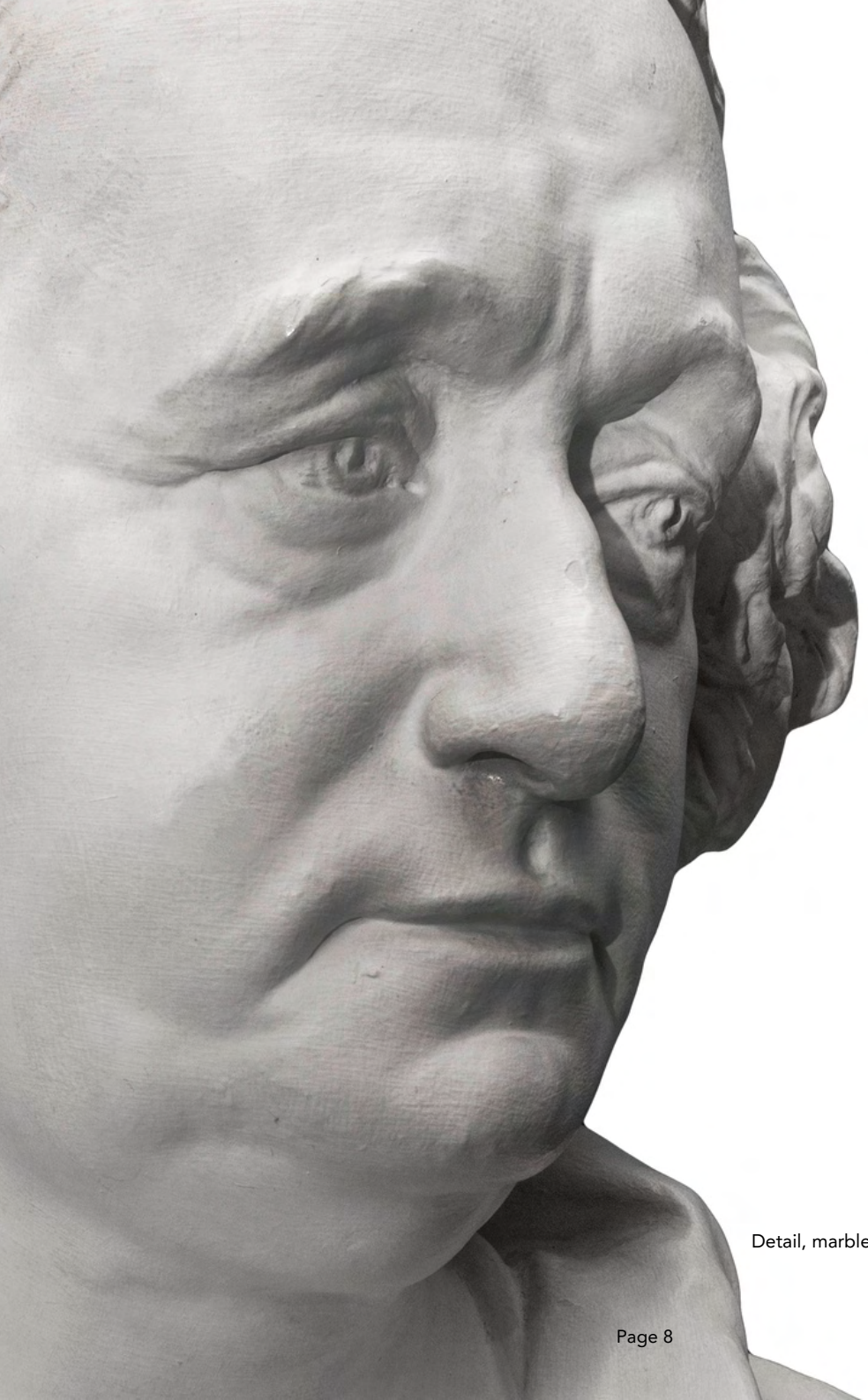
The museum displays cover three areas; a ground floor gallery, a mezzanine gallery and a first floor room dedicated to Hugh Falconer's work. Displays were reworked in a large scale development project completed in 2007 to cover a range of interpretive stories and exhibits relating to Forres and the wider Moray area. The displays feature high quality exhibition and gallery hardware including around twenty free standing and built in Click Netherfield display cases. The museum is fully accessible with lift access to the first floor along with a kitchen and office/meeting space.

Collections Store & Laboratory

The Collections Store is located off Leys Road in the centre of Forres and houses the majority of the MMS collection. The building was acquired by Moray Council and fitted out in 1992 with archival rolling racks, shelving and individual object storage that meets key SPECTRUM collections care standards. The store also houses a laboratory and two offices. The laboratory and workshop are fitted out to accommodate specialised research.

TIMELINE OF FALCONER MUSEUM





The Founder & his life

The Falconer Museum is a rare example of a museum founded by a bequest and housing the collections gathered by its benefactor. Hugh Falconer MD FRS was born in 1808 on Tolbooth St, Forres, only a few metres from the museum that now bears his name. He was a distinguished geologist and botanist, and a central figure in the development of palaeontology and natural sciences. Hugh was a friend and colleague to the most notable scientists of his generation including Charles Darwin, whose work on the theory of evolution was supported by Falconer's scientific insights and contributions. Hugh Falconer spent much of his career in India and his work on fossils led to the creation of the new discipline of palaeontology, evidencing revolutionary ideas about the age of the human race.

Falconer studied natural history at the University of Aberdeen and graduated in 1826. He then studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, graduating as a doctor in 1829. In 1830, at the age of just twenty two, Hugh Falconer became an assistant-surgeon with the British East India Company. From his base in Bengal Falconer first began collecting, examining and documenting fossil bones. He branched out from his role as an Army surgeon into botany, becoming Superintendent of the Saharanpur Botanical Gardens in 1832.

Falconer spent the next ten years exploring the Siwalik Hills, at the foothills of the Himalayas. He published geological papers and discovered the first examples of fossilised bones of extinct animals including crocodiles and giant tortoise. In 1837, Falconer and his colleague Proby Cautley were awarded the Woolaston Medal, the highest award of the Royal Geological Society.

Detail, marble bust of Hugh Falconer. 1881.004b

During his time in India, Falconer amassed a vast personal collection of fossils. His research on these objects advanced new theories on evolutionary biology that would come to be defined over a century later as 'punctuated equilibrium'. This hypothesis used fossil evidence to show that species developed rapidly in between long intervals of time, countering Darwin's theories that evolution occurred at an even pace.

Falconer left India due to ill health in 1842. He brought home more than a hundred large chests of dried plants, fossils, bones and geological specimens. A new wing of the Natural History Museum in London was built to house his donation of several tons of fossils from the Siwalik Hills. A representative sample of the collection is held in Forres. Falconer's botanical discoveries were donated to Kew Botanic Gardens in London.

Hugh Falconer spent a second period in India between 1847 and 1855, settling in Calcutta where his brother Alexander was based as a merchant. He took the role of Superintendent of Calcutta Botanical Garden and Professor of Botany at the Calcutta Medical School. In 1855, he returned to the United Kingdom again because of ill health. He spent the remainder of his life researching fossil species in England and on the Continent. Falconer made notable animal fossil finds in Sicily and Malta and he gathered collections of human artefacts from across England and the Mediterranean. The hand axes he collected from St. Acheul in France date from at least 200,000 years ago, made by some of the earliest humans to colonise Europe. These unique discoveries helped to drive new thinking on evolution and theories that human beings evolved with other species over millions of years, rather than a generally accepted Biblical timescale of a few thousand years.

Falconer's interests extended beyond geology and ancient artefacts. He used his botanical experience to advise on the development of commercial tea growing in India. He also submitted proposals to the Indian colonial government on the cultivation of cinchona or 'fever tree' plant, the bark of which is a source of quinine to treat malaria. Falconer was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1845 and served as the Vice-President of the Royal Society between 1863 and 1864.

Hugh Falconer died from rheumatic disease of the heart and lungs on 31st January 1865 aged just fifty seven. He is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery in London.



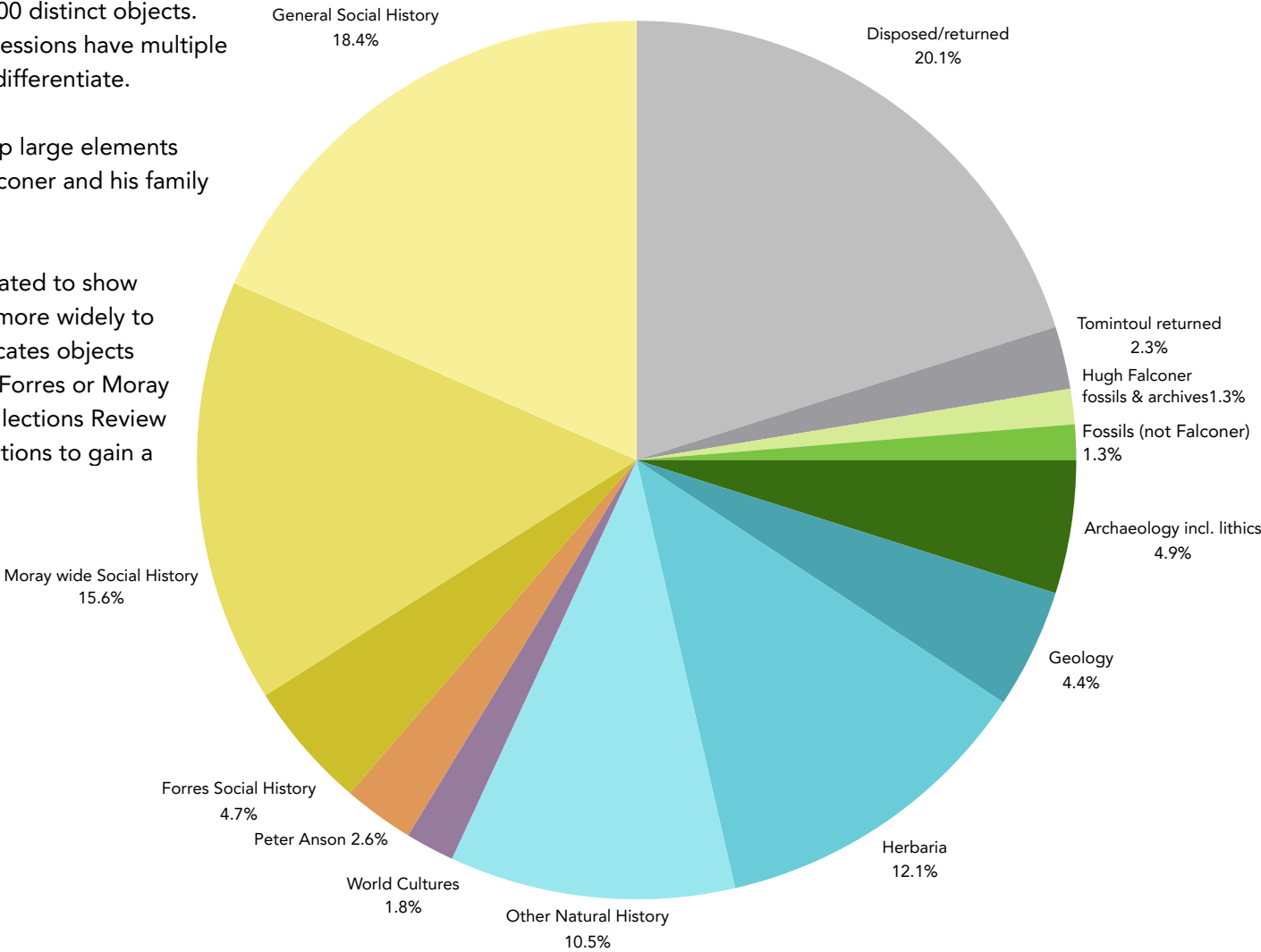
Crocodile skull collected
by Hugh Falconer in Egypt 1841.101

Exploring the Collections

The MMS Collections number approximately 50000 distinct objects. This number is a best guess estimate as some accessions have multiple objects within them that available data does not differentiate.

Natural history, geology and archaeology make up large elements of the collection and objects relating to Hugh Falconer and his family stretch across these areas.

The social history collections have been differentiated to show geographic interest relating directly to Forres or more widely to Moray. The 'General Social History' segment indicates objects that on initial review, have no direct reference to Forres or Moray in their top level descriptors. A more detailed Collections Review in the future could focus on this area of the collections to gain a better understanding of the object range.



Collections of Significance

The collections of significance outlined in this report have been identified primarily using desk based research along with three site visits to the MMS stores and Falconer Museum. The Significance Review value was developed following consideration of elements from the UCL Collections Review Rubric and the Renaissance East Midlands Significance Assessment Toolkit (see Appendix 4). It should be noted that significance has been attached to collection areas rather than individual objects and additional work in the form of a detailed Collections Review would be required if any collections rationalisation was to be undertaken. If the collections were to be moved as a whole into a new operating model, then a full Collections Review would not be necessary. However, this would be on the presumption that Moray Council retains legal ownership of the collection (see the section on 'Rationalisation').

The Significance Assessment Process uses the premise that all material will have different levels of value, meaning and usefulness for different audiences and purposes. The grid row sequence is not intended to be hierarchical and 'international' or 'national' significance should not be seen as having greater importance than 'community' or 'site specific'.

Benefits of a Significance Review

- To offer a better understanding of the value of collections to stakeholders.
- To provide a systematic, group based approach to selecting material for new displays, education, outreach, digital development.
- To support rational, evidence based decision making when considering material for acquisition, rationalisation or disposal.
- To provide an evidence base to inform and justify resource investment
- To offer a better understanding of how different collection elements can complement and illuminate each other.
- To identify knowledge gaps where further research is required.
- To develop the case for Recognition of a collection's significance.
- To develop the case for funding grants.



The Falconer Collection

The Falconer collection of objects, archives and library are an important part of the MMS collections overall. They are relatively well documented and provide not only an important research resource, but also great opportunity for creative engagement in celebrating Hugh Falconer and encouraging the sharing of his unique story to a wide range of audiences.

Falconer Fossils

Dr. Hugh Falconer's collection, description and research of his Siwalik Hills fossils represent one of his greatest contributions to science. It was this work that helped define him as one of the founders of the science of palaeontology. The majority of the material he collected now resides in the Natural History Museum in London, but the examples held by the Falconer Museum have been identified by academics as scientifically and historically irreplaceable. The collection consists of 412 specimens; 407 are in the collections store and 5 objects remain in display cases in Falconer Museum.

Rationalisation of the original assemblage of Siwalik fossils of the Falconer collection was undertaken in the 1970s, with some selected specimens being relocated to the Geological Society of London. Further work is needed to establish the historical provenance of these objects and whether they were sent on loan or de-accessioned. The collection in Forres is therefore now fragmentary but a range of mammals including elephants, extinct hippopotamus and reptiles such as crocodiles and tortoise are represented. The taxonomy of many of these extinct animals is not yet fully understood and therefore the Falconer fossil collection is both scientifically valuable and historically significant. The collection has been examined by academic specialists who advise further research to establish significance and relation to other collections held across the UK and India (see Appendix 3).

Falconer lithics

The term 'lithics' is used by archaeologists to describe any stone that has been used or worked into a tool by humans. These objects might be more commonly known as arrowheads, axes, knives and spears. Lithics are some of the most important sources we have of evidence for the evolution of early human technology and cultural development. The shift from simple hand axes to more sophisticated tools can provide insight into human development and early human societies.

The Falconer collection of lithics is small but significant, and should be seen in relation to the larger archaeology collection. The St. Acheul hand axes are stunning examples of their type and individually played a role in providing evidence about the evolution of the human race and theories on 'deep time'. The Falconer lithics collection is an internationally significant collection. Similar objects reside in the British Museum and the Natural History Museum in London and the Falconer lithics have been the subject of numerous requests for academic research.



Acheulian early Palaeolithic flint,
Hugh Falconer collection. 1981.81.ao

Falconer Archive & Library

The Falconer archives contain letters, manuscripts and material relating to Hugh Falconer's work and life, including correspondence with Charles Darwin. His letters are mostly concerned with aspects of scientific research and thinking, but the collection also includes a substantial number of personal letters from his time in India. These letters were likely donated by Lady Grace Prestwich, nee Grace Anne Milne.

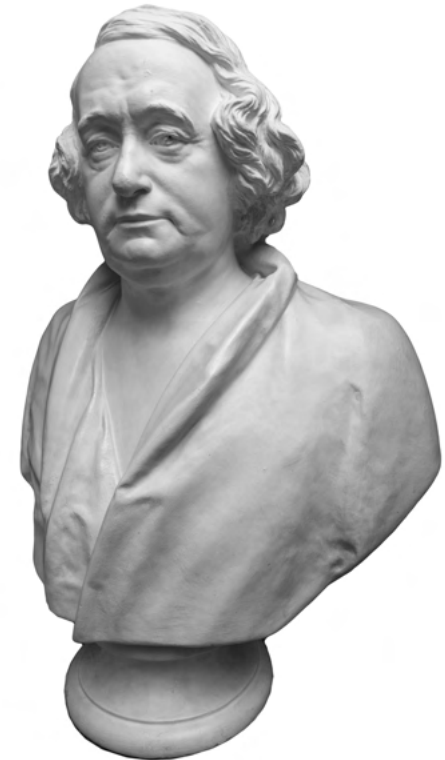
Lady Grace Anne Prestwich (1832-1899) was the niece of Hugh Falconer. Born in Findhorn, she became an important figure in Hugh Falconer's life. At the age of twenty four, following the death of both her husband and baby son, her uncle Hugh Falconer invited Grace to tour the Continent with him to help alleviate her grief. Grace accompanied Hugh on collection visits to museums and caves, she collected fossil teeth and sketched many specimens.

Grace later published works on geology, two novels and a biography of her second husband, the pioneering geologist Joseph Prestwich whom she met through her uncle Hugh. Falconer encouraged Prestwich to visit sites at St. Acheul to collect specimens. Prestwich's published report of his visit to these gravel beds is held to mark the birth of modern scientific archaeology.

The Falconer letters therefore not only provide a unique resource for research into Hugh Falconer but also to Joseph Prestwich and the wider story of theories around 'deep time' and human evolution. The collection also provides an as yet under researched resource on Grace herself, and her contribution to nineteenth century science.

The Falconer Archives include an important collection of letters written in Persian. Some are written on gold leaf flecked paper and others have annotations by Hugh Falconer. Correspondence in recent years between members of the Friends of Falconer Museum and Dr Baburi of the British Library indicate the letters have significant research value, but they have yet to be translated and therefore their significance cannot yet be quantified.

The library is made up of approximately 300 works which formed the antiquarian working library of the Museum following its foundation in 1871. The library includes rare, hand illustrated books on natural history and forms an integral part of the museum's history. Many of the books were donated by the first Trustees of The Falconer Museum and the library as a whole should be viewed as a distinct collection.



Marble bust of Dr. Hugh Falconer.
1881.004b



Miniature Daoist shrine, donated by Admiral Hood. 1951.6b

World Cultures

The MMS holds a small but significant world cultures collection including objects from Africa, Canada and East Asia. Many were collected by people from the local area who had the means to travel overseas and were inspired by Hugh Falconer to bring home exotic or rare objects. The Falconer Museum was a 'window into the world' for local folk at a time when few people had means to travel abroad.

The Gordon-Cumming family were instrumental in adding to the World Cultures collection. Miss Constance Frederica Gordon-Cumming (1837-1924) and her brother Roualeyn George Gordon-Cumming (1820-1866) were two of thirteen children born to Eliza Maria, Lady Gordon-Cumming. Both were explorers and travellers who between them, contributed some of the more significant objects to the MMS World Cultures collections. Constance 'Eka' Gordon-Cumming travelled the world and donated objects from her visits to China and Japan. Her brother Roualeyn became an infamous big game hunter in Africa where he met David Livingstone. His collection of hunting trophies was displayed at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851. The collection was sold after his death in 1866, but some objects made their way into the MMS collections.

Over recent years, museums have increasingly reviewed their ethnographic collections with particular reference to objects with special significance to First Nations communities. The MMS was at the forefront of this in 2016 when a special ceremony was held in Falconer Museum to repatriate a Maori skull to representatives from the Museum of New Zealand. The skull had been donated by Mr. John Hugh Mackenzie in the late 1800s, along with his collection of ethnographic objects. The repatriation illustrates the proactive stance taken by the MMS to review its collections and to act ethically to return objects where appropriate.

Great W. I. Calman

Triandra Monggynia

Herbaria

An herbarium (plural herbaria) is a collection of preserved plant specimens used for scientific study. Plants collected in the field are dried and mounted on sheets and then organised in a standardised system of folders. Herbarium collections can have great significance and value to science. Herbarium specimens may be used to catalogue or identify the flora of an area, preserve an historical record of change or extinction in vegetation and track changes in climate and human impact. They can be a source of plant DNA or a repository of viable seeds for rare species.

The MMS herbaria collections number approximately 6000, although this does not necessarily account for each individual specimen. They include several important distinct collections, some with national or possibly international significance. The collections have never been researched in depth but we know they include species that are now rare or endangered and some that may be extinct. There are examples of plants from local land that has since been drained, farmed, built on or otherwise changed beyond recognition. The specimens provide a unique archive of plant DNA and a rich, irreplaceable resource for understanding biodiversity and the history of the local natural environment.

The significant collections include the following:

- Straith Herbarium
- Innes Herbaria
- Keith Herbaria
- Dunbar Herbaria
- Richter Herbarium

Detail of page from the Keith Herbaria.
1978.197



- The Straith Collection

James Straith (1765-1815) was a botanist and physician who lived and worked in Forres. This small herbarium consists of a flowering plant collection dating from the last decades of the 1700s and early years of the 1800s. They are the oldest known preserved plant specimens from Forres and possibly amongst the oldest herbarium collections of Scottish plants.

- The Innes Herbarium

Dr J G Innes (1815-1881) was a plant collector active in Forres from the 1830s. Innes later became a Trustee of the Falconer Museum and donated his herbarium to the museum. The collection numbers over a thousand individual specimens and represents a unique DNA archive of plant material from Moray and the north of Scotland from almost two hundred years ago.

- The Keith Herbaria

Dr. J. Keith (1825-1905) was an enthusiastic local botanist collected around the 1860s and 1870s. His collection includes specimens from Forres, the British Isles and Scandinavia.

- The Dunbar Herbaria

This collection from the very early 1900s consists of specimens gathered together by Rev. J.A.D Dunbar of Kinloss from a number of collectors.

- The Richter Herbarium

Roland Richter was a biology teacher at Gordonstoun School whose active collecting period was the late twentieth century. He was a leading naturalist in Moray and this collection provides an important extension to the DNA database of the local ecology. Richter's collection mostly consists of mosses and liverworts, a much under-studied group of plants. The collection also includes a large number of insect specimens and his books and papers.



Page from the Keith Herbaria. 1978.197

Archaeology

The MMS archaeology collection comprises more than 2000 objects spanning the depth of human history. Defined alongside Falconer's lithics collection, the objects include finds from the many of the major prehistoric cultures of Europe and is unmatched in any regional collections in Scotland. The collection includes objects donated by Lady Grace Prestwich of fossilised deer antlers, teeth and flint fragments from France and Great Britain. Objects such as the St Acheul axes from Hugh Falconer's collection and Grace's objects are among the very earliest objects to prove the existence of humans alongside extinct prehistoric animals. Later dated objects include tools used by early settlers of post Ice Age Scotland and descendants through the Neolithic and Bronze Ages.

The most recent examples held in the museum are North American flints that probably date to the late 1700s. lithic cultures were brought to an abrupt end shortly after these objects were made when contact began with Europeans who traded iron. The archaeology collection also includes Bronze Age pot sherds, Roman finds including a finely made brooch, jet and glass beads, early weapons of axe heads and swords.

Social History

These collections comprise approximately 39% of the overall MMS collections and include objects both with a defined connection to Forres and/or Moray more widely, and objects with a broader social history value.

The collection includes personal possessions, ephemera, tools, furniture, uniforms, transport and civic memorabilia, all reflecting aspects of the cultural, social and economic lives of Moray's people. Much of the collection dates from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries although there are some objects from earlier periods such as those relating to the Forres Tolbooth. The social history collections represent a broad span of objects that represent the identity, place and lives of the people of Moray.



Taxidermy

The art of taxidermy was first made popular in Great Britain by the Victorians, who were enthralled by representations of exotic travel and wilderness. The MMS taxidermy collection is small but significant and while not comprehensive, should be considered as useful for engagement and educational use. The earliest of the taxidermy collection was acquired shortly after the museum opened. James Brown was a barber in Forres and taxidermist working in Forres in the late 1800s. His collection includes contemporary birdlife and other fauna from the local area but a significant proportion of his collection was disposed of in the early 2000s due to the poor condition of the specimens and their preservation using poisonous arsenic oxide.

The remainder of the taxidermy collection mostly comprises objects collected during the 1990s and early 2000s and preserved by Alistair Joyce, museum technician, conservation officer and latterly Senior Museums Officer. The collection comprises mostly roadkill from Moray and Sutherland, including examples of local birds and animals prepared as study skins and mounted specimens.



Goliath beetle, found across tropical African forests



Domed glass case of mounted humming birds and finches. 1979.095

Peter Anson Collection

This collection of approximately 800 watercolour paintings and sketches was created by the maritime author and artist Peter Anson (1889-1975). Peter Anson spent much of his adulthood among the fishing communities of North East Scotland recording their way of life in his work. Anson painted a way of life that has now disappeared, with a distinctive artistic style based on his original training as an architect. In 1938 he settled on the Moray coast, first at Portsoy and later at Macduff. He was friends with Compton Mackenzie and the famous Scottish author Neil Gunn, who was inspired by the Moray fishing industry in his 1941 book 'The Silver Darlings'. Anson was a prolific writer publishing more than forty books ranging from specialist studies on fishermen in Scotland, to works on church and ecclesiastical history.

In 1973, Peter Anson offered 400 of his paintings to the people of Buckie for display in the Maritime Museum which was then located in the Town House. An additional 430 of Peter Anson's works were bequeathed to the care of Moray District Council in 1979, four years after his death. The collection includes Anson's archive of diaries, letters, manuscripts and his library.



Watercolours from the collection
by artist Peter Anson



Rationalisation

Current situation of MMS Collections

The Falconer Museum remains closed pending a new operating model for the Moray Museums Service and the Museum. MMS lost its Accreditation status in 2022 following the museum's closure. The museum and collections stores continue to be managed by Moray Council supported with visits and advice from the conservation staff at Highlife Highland.

Principles of Rationalisation

Collections rationalisation is a procedure where a museum improves its understanding of a collection so that it can be used more effectively for the benefit of its users. Controlled rationalisation can enable museums to develop a systematic, strategic approach to effectively manage and support increased use of their collections, maximise resources and refocus collecting activity. Museums should use an agreed process to undertake rationalisation using the premise of 'guarding against the loss of historical, educational and commercial value and the breach of trust to donors'.

The approach to rationalisation for MMS is articulated in its most recently adopted Collections Development Policy (2015) which defines parameters for any collections rationalisation of MMS objects. Any rationalisation programme should be underpinned by the use of this policy alongside the current [UK Museums Association Code of Ethics](#).

The Moray Council is the legal owner of both The Falconer Museum building and the MMS collections. If rationalisation is considered to be part of any work on finding a new operating model, there will be a significant capacity requirement as the process will need to follow appropriate ethical transfer, reuse and disposal, outlined by the [Museums Association Disposal Toolkit](#).

Rationalisation of any part of a museum collection raises a range of ethical, legal and professional issues for governing bodies. A key challenge is the effect it can have on donors and other stakeholders. Collections are held for the public as a whole, not for the benefit of individual institutions. The MMS collections have been acquired by gift, purchase, fieldwork and excavation over generations with donors often motivated by a desire for a lasting memorial as well as a wish to confer public benefit.

When rationalisation is undertaken by museums, it is critical that the messaging is clear and process is transparent. Without this, it may be more difficult to persuade people to give or leave their treasured possessions to museums if they suspect that in the long-term the objects which meant so much to them may be traded, sold or otherwise disposed of.

The Museums Association considers rationalisation or disposal of objects reasonable when this will better ensure their preservation, ensure that they are more widely used and enjoyed, or will place them in a context where they are more valued and better understood. For disposal to be successful it must be properly resourced, carefully conducted and done in a way that maintains public access.

Some rationalisation of the MMS collections has occurred over the past ten years. In 2013, research by museum staff assessed that there were 63990 individual items in the collection in a total of 12,603 accessions not including any loans. Quantifying the collection using the object excel list provided by Moray Council for this report shows a total of approximately 50000 objects. The collections pie chart (see page 10) shows a breakdown of the collection including a total of 22.4% of the collection that has been disposed of. A large proportion of the James Brown taxidermy collection was disposed of in the early twenty first century because of toxicity.

Around 1200 objects relating to Tomintoul were moved to the newly developed Tomintoul & Glenlivet Discovery Centre in 2018. Other parts of local collections were also returned however, as these were MMS accessioned objects, it is not clear that the appropriate deaccessioning process was always undertaken.

It is not safe to rationalise or dispose of objects unless they are well understood but this can clearly cost a great deal of money and time. Without sufficient research, the rationalisation process itself is likely, particularly in the case of imperfectly understood historic collections, to separate objects from other related objects or documents which might throw valuable light on them. The motivation to rationalise or dispose may be driven by a lack of resources necessary to care for, display and provide access to collections, it is unsafe to dispose of objects in the absence of the resources required to understand them properly, or to transfer them to a recipient without the resources to house and make them accessible.

Detail of G&G Kynoch cloth sample
pattern book. 1994.058



Potential for the MMS Collections


Museum objects tell stories; about ourselves, our communities and the wider world. They help us explore the past but also our present and the future. Objects can stir emotions, inspire connections, stimulate ideas and offer opportunities for learning and research. Heritage, arts and culture can help tackle social injustice by bringing communities together and contributing to a vibrant economy that stimulates creativity, industry and supports place making. The MMS collections contain huge opportunities for new thinking around engaging with audiences, developing what is a distinctive collection and contributing to a dynamic cultural, arts and heritage sector for Moray.

The following section assumes that the governance structure of MMS is clear with a new operating model established, that the Falconer Museum is open and that the organisation has re-entered the Museum Accreditation Scheme. The [UK Museum Accreditation Scheme](#) is the industry standard for the museum and heritage sector. The requirements for inclusion around Organisational Health, Managing Collections and User Experience offer essential parameters to ensure shared, ethical decision making.

Re-acquiring Accreditation Status may not be fully achieved until governance and public access are fully resolved but using the principles and policy structure of Accreditation can offer a framework to feed into business plans and a new operating model for MMS.



Scottish Chamber Orchestra family workshop visit, 2016



The power of collections should never be underestimated, but they need to be far better understood. Understanding comes from knowledge, intelligent decision making and confidence.

'Collections for the Future'
Museums Association, 2005

Engagement

Over the first two decades of the 2000s, a wide range of creative community based projects were developed around different elements of the MMS collections (see Appendix 5). A staff member with a dedicated education and outreach remit also oversaw collaborative projects, managed regular 'behind the scenes' visits from schools, an education loan box service and other community engagement work. Developing new thinking for engagement with the MMS collections could be adopted by extending this engagement work around a policy of 'active use' as defined by the [National Museums Director's Council](#). This term describes the opportunities people have to engage with museum collections through exhibitions and projects, online access to objects, publications, scholarship, loans between museums or other venues, open storage, study tours and handling sessions.

Museums can be important drivers to support community health and wellbeing. The need to improve our communities' health and quality of life has never been more critical as we emerge in a new post-Covid landscape. The negative effects on health as a result of physical and social isolation are increasingly understood along with new research on the benefits of delivering health through culture, defined as 'social prescribing'. There are huge positives in reframing the thinking around MMS collections and buildings as conduits through which to deliver to our communities in wide ranging ways. Many opportunities could be unlocked for the MMS collections through building and nurturing meaningful relationships with volunteers, community groups, other arts, culture and Third Sector organisations. Measuring social impact is something that should be embedded in a new operating model for MMS using frameworks such as the Museums Association's ['Measuring Socially Engaged Practice: A Tool Kit for Museums'](#).



Holi Celebration event in Grant Park with Peter Chand, 2017

Temporary Exhibitions & Projects

Temporary exhibitions and projects conceived around a particular part of the collection are a key element of many museums' services operations. Projects developed by MMS could be used as a basis upon which to develop an expansive, creative long term programme of activity that improves the understanding of the collections, increases audience reach and improves community outcomes. Exhibition projects can also attract distinct funding streams that offer additional capacity to research, display and publicise objects in different ways to existing and new audiences. Depending on the new operating model for The Falconer Museum, there may be ways to collaborate across Moray to develop temporary exhibitions and projects with a range of partner organisations.

Open Storage

The MMS stores are fitted out to a very high quality and are well organised, the collections are well documented and stored according to the Collections Trust SPECTRUM procedures. Most are stored on the first floor with stair access, but a small internal lift ensures objects can be safely moved to the ground floor. Few alterations would be needed to make the MMS Store suitable for public access through store tours. Many museums now have dedicated open storage for their collections, designed to allow public access and there are differing operating models that could be examined as a best fit. These could range from regular open sessions for local community or educational groups, to 'bespoke tours' for visitors that may be provided as part of a wider tour package that could attract a substantial fee. The collections store and laboratory also offer excellent spaces to accommodate researchers. Access could also be widened to offer the use of the museum laboratory to the commercial sector.

Digitisation

Although some parts of the MMS collections have been photographed to basic record standard, there has never been a programme of digitisation for the collections. The MMS participated in the BBC supported Art UK schemes of 2003 and 2016 which mapped and photographed the painting and sculpture collections of museums across the United Kingdom. Objects from the MMS collection selected as part of the programme are freely accessible online, providing access for everyone, anywhere in the world.

Digitisation could open up many new ways for audiences to engage with the MMS collections and fulfil the principle that museums hold collections so that people can benefit from them. Liberating objects that may never easily be displayed but which have stories to tell can be achieved through digitisation. There are numerous examples of successful projects across the regional sector that could be reviewed such as the Museums & Heritage Highland projects 'Highland Threads' and 'Museum of the Highlands'. Digitisation of the collections would also allow researchers anywhere in the world to study the collections, unlocking the potential for collaborative data sharing around academic projects and improved understanding of the collections. Collections digitisation also offers a range of income generation opportunities through commercial, academic and public purchase of images.



Butterfly detail from natural history cabinet collection. 1984.064

Objects in the Community

The MMS collections, particularly the social history collections, contain objects of relevance to people across Moray, offering engagement opportunities across local geographic areas and communities of interest. Finding ways to get more collections out of the store and into community settings would allow MMS museum objects to be part of the wider public realm. There are well established models in the sector such as the [Open Museum](#) in Glasgow and [Norfolk Museums Service](#) that could be adapted for a new operating model for MMS. Practical approaches might include rethinking of the display hardware in The Falconer Museum as part of a wider review of that space. Requisitioning several of the secure Click Netherfield cases to non-museum venues could effectively create 'mini museums' in community settings across Moray.

The existing MMS education loans boxes that were specifically designed for schools' use could be developed as a more widely accessed resource. The MMS loans box service was managed by the Museums Officer with boxes delivered to schools and available for free for a four week period. The service in this form may no longer be feasible or fit for purpose but could be reviewed for wider use in other community settings such as nursing homes, youth groups and colleges

Charging models are now common in many museums' services ranging from free to upwards of £55 such as at Birmingham Museum & Art Galleries. As with any service, the quality of the product should be matched to the cost to users.

Further thinking around how the MMS Collections, particularly the social history collections, could be more dynamically used should be seen as a priority if the decision is made to keep the whole collection together (see Section 'Rationalisation'). There are benefits to considering the wider social history collections as an opportunity rather than a challenge, and to develop a dynamic approach to making these collections 'work harder' to deliver to a wider range of audiences.



Small brass goblet with inscription. 1978.161

Collections Knowledge, Capacity & Research

Museums need people with skills and knowledge to bring their collections to life, alongside excellent communicators who can ensure they reach wide and diverse audiences. The MMS collections require access to specialist knowledge and expertise but how this is defined should be examined within the thinking for a new operating model. Careful consideration should be given to where staffing could best support both collections care and access. Access to collaborative working groups within the museum sector and expert knowledge from academic institutions could be developed and nurtured from the baseline work already achieved.

The role of volunteers should also not be underestimated. The MMS has benefited from nearly three decades of dedicated research time from The Friends of the Falconer Museum. Their 2023 publication 'Science & Imagination, Tales from Falconer Museum' showcases the cumulative efforts of their research as a group alongside the relationships they developed with academic researchers.

Re-engaging this immense bank of knowledge held by the Friends of the Falconer Museum would provide the collections with an important additional voice in the conversation around new operating models for MMS. In the medium term, harnessing a wider body of volunteers to act as champions for the collections and the building could also be a positive way to develop authentic and sustainable community engagement and support. Nurturing volunteering supported by professional capacity could be an important conduit for underpinning a new operating model. More importantly it could foster a feeling of community ownership of the heritage held within the collections.

Specific parts of the MMS collections should be considered for application to Scotland's [Recognition Scheme](#). The Scheme celebrates, promotes and invests in Nationally Significant Collections beyond those held in national museums and galleries. Scotland currently has fifty one Recognised collections spread across the country with the scheme being managed by Museums Galleries Scotland. Status as a Nationally Significant Collection offers improved visibility, opportunities to partner with national collections and an elevated status for the operating museum service.

Detail of Persian letters in the
Hugh Falconer collection





Collaborative approaches with local Accredited museums such as Elgin Museum and Nairn Museum could also ensure a more joined up approach to both collecting and research around the relevant collections strengths. There is significant potential for developing academic partnerships to support MMS collections research and activity. Relationships formed by visits from academics over the past decade evidence the interest that the MMS collections hold, in particular the Falconer collections (see Appendix 3). Establishing more formal links with the higher education sector could offer funding income through partnership projects that in turn, could support capacity. Glasgow School of Art, Altyre Campus and University of the Highlands & Islands are two potential partners with Universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh also having historic links to Hugh Falconer.

The MMS herbarium collections may well have valuable data to offer national and even international researchers and scientists, particularly in work around tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis. Capacity to enhance the taxonomic knowledge of the MMS herbarium collections could be provided through academic research partnership in projects around digitisation, which in turn would open up access to a collaborative scientific community.

Hand painted image on pith dating from 1800s, produced in China for export. 1873.6au

A Dynamic Collection

The MMS Collections represent excellent opportunities for new thinking around display, research, engagement and showcasing a unique story that has potentially international interest. The fossil collection and link to Hugh Falconer which opens up the possibility of creating a 'destination museum' for Forres if considered thoughtfully within the wider development plans for a Heritage Quarter and a larger destination management plan for Forres. The link to Darwin, theories around deep time and Hugh Falconer's work and the collections he amassed have a story that could be packaged to national and international audiences whilst at the same time, fostering a sense of ownership amongst the local community of this special Forres individual.

There is value in looking at how new proposals for MMS collections could work closely with the multi-million Moray Growth Deal Elgin Cultural Quarter project as it develops. The proposals for Grant Lodge offer the chance for MMS collections to be displayed there in the form of temporary exhibitions or displays. Depending on plans for The Falconer Museum and the opportunity for it to be a more flexible space, these two venues could be partners in attracting large-scale, national touring exhibitions as well as more regional offers. From a tourism perspective, if there were two high-quality venues operating with Government Indemnity Status, the region could attract loans and travelling exhibitions from national and international institutions.

Increased collaboration would support investment into the heritage and cultural sector which in turn, could help training, development and succession planning. Forres Heritage Trust is a successful volunteer-led and run organisation caring for two heritage buildings whose objects are formally accessioned into the MMS collections. Building relationships with other organisations could offer support with external sources of knowledge and expertise, harnessing a volunteer cohort of passionate community supporters who can act as 'heritage champions'.

Going forward in an environment where both resourcing and funding streams are increasingly stretched, working together collaboratively may be seen as essential to securing the future potential of the MMS collections. The MMS buildings and collections are heritage assets that belong to the people of Forres and wider Moray. Ensuring that this unique heritage can be effectively accessed by them, and by wider audiences who can, in turn, support that cultural capital. Developing a business plan with the MMS collections and The Falconer Museum at the centre could offer a viable future for the collections around a principle that curating can be a form of care, not just of objects but also of people.

All options for the MMS collections will require investment, resources and capacity but as part of a wider business plan, provide ways forward to maximise the potential of this unique museum collection.

Image on following page: 'chirimen-gami-e' crepe paper print donated by H Mackenzie. 1873.6as



Museums can increase our sense of wellbeing, help us feel proud of where we came from, can inspire, challenge and stimulate us and make us healthier. They can enhance everyone's life chances by breaking down barriers to access and inclusion.

'Museums Change Lives'

Museums Association, 2017

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Venues under MMS care 1975-2019

Nelson Tower, Forres

Community Asset Transfer to Forres Heritage Trust 2013

Old Mills, Elgin

Renovated and opened 1980, closed 1997

Tomintoul Museum

Founded 1976, now community owned and run as Tomintoul & Glenlivet Discovery Centre

The Buckie Drifter Maritime Heritage Centre

Opened 1994, closed 2005 and some collections now reside with Buckie & District Fishing Heritage Centre

Ladycroft Agricultural Museum, Archiestown

Previously known as Little Haugh Agricultural Museum, closed 1994

Old Burghead Harbourmaster's Office

Now run by Burghead Headland Trust

Lossie Fisheries & Community Museum

Opened 1985 and run by volunteers

Appendix 2 - Figures on the Falconer Museum facade

Sir David Brewster Philosopher and scientist

Georges Cuvier French Baron and naturalist

Dr John Malcolmson Geologist

Hugh Miller Geologist from Cromarty

Edward Forbes Professor of Natural History

Sir Isaac Newton Mathematician and philosopher

Sir Walter Scott Novelist and poet

James Watt Inventor of the steam engine

Appendix 3 - Academic Contact 2015-2023

Oxford University Museum of Natural History: Fossils & Grace Milne research

National Museums Scotland: Natural history & Falconer collections

Natural History Museum: Falconer fossils, Dr Torri Herridge

Dr Torben Balin – Lithics

Pune University, India - Dr Vijay Sathe

Kew Botanic Gardens

Appendix 4 - Significance Review Toolkit

| | Significance | Public Engagement Potential | Formal Learning | Research Use | Ownership | Condition |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|---|
| A | Of international importance making a fundamental and long term contribution to intellectual thought or the study of a discipline, and integral to the organisation's collections e.g. through its iconic status or outstanding historical/cultural value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considered a 'star' object & focal point of key exhibition space High 'wow' factor Deemed 'iconic' by visitors Strongly identified in public mind with organisation/location Regularly used in public events or outreach teaching Stimulates strong responses from visitors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can actively be used as a learning aid Fosters interdisciplinary teaching & learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of a specifically created research collection Regularly used by researchers Strong potential for international or national research use Regularly subject of or cited in responses to public enquiries | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned & owned by the organisation Proof of purchase/ letters of ownership/ documentation On a documented loan with a clear time line | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material Good condition No conservation problems |
| B | Of national importance making a significant or short term contribution to the study of a discipline and integral to the stories that the museum tells. Does it contribute to changing the course of national history? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages visitor interest and stimulates gallery discussion and enquiries Important support object in an exhibition space Occasionally used in public events, talks, handling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has recognised potential for use in outreach and learning activities Has potential to foster aspects of learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique to museum & site Occasionally used by researchers, cited in enquiries Clear potential for research use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned/regarded as owned by organisation No letters/documentation as incorporated into the organisation over time On a regularly renewed documented loan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material Minor cleaning: stable and not at risk |
| C | Of clear site specific importance making a significant or short term contribution to the study of a discipline, and integral to the museum's themes and the site's educational & social purpose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Useful support object for display and handling No current public focus, but potential for future public focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Originally collected and used as a learning/education aid but is no longer used. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique to the museum but similar objects held by other museums Collected as part of research collection but no longer used Future use - some potential | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not accessioned but proved/known to be owned by the organisation Collected by museum staff for research/teaching with no letters of ownership On a documented loan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material but needs monitoring Some risk: restoration or repair conservation desirable |
| D | Of clear community importance, whether a local community or community of interest. Does it embody or symbolise beliefs, ideas or customs that are important to a community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not known to have been used in a public focus capacity Issues around access to the object need to be overcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little potential for current use but could be relevant in the future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duplicate objects, one of a number in the collections Little potential for current use poss. relevant in future | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned but not regarded as owned by the organisation On a documented indefinite loan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unstable material Specialist conservation req Major restoration, additions or loss |
| E | Not deemed to have historical interest OR provenance/identity unknown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No potential for public focus Not suitable for display or handling use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is not known to have been used in a learning capacity No future value in learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample of a common type or types Multiple objects held by the museum Never used for research and no potential to do so | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not accessioned or provenance undocumented Believed to be on a long term/indefinite loan but not documented. Mis-accessioned (i.e. room setting material/prop/replica) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very unstable material Beyond repair Poses immediate risk to other specimens |

Review grid was developed following consideration of elements from the UCL Collections Review Rubric and the Renaissance East Midlands Significance Assessment Toolkit.

Appendix 5 - Examples of MMS education/outreach programming

2004 History of Pantomime

Delivered in partnership with Eden Court providing a festive look at the history of panto. Workshops with local schools.

2004 Landful

Contemporary art, midden project and associated workshops delivered in partnership with Moray Waste Busters.

2010 Local Hero

Royal Academy funded programme to celebrate Falconer's life through art. Local artist Lynne Strachan worked with local schools to create banners.

2014 Holingshed Chronicles

Holingshed's Chronicles was a comprehensive history of Britain originally published in 1577. The revised 1587 edition was used as a source by Shakespeare for many of his history plays including Macbeth. An original copy was borrowed from The University of Edinburgh (thanks to Accreditation agreement) Associated printing & Macbeth workshops.

2015 I-Art

Delivered as part of the national Festival of Museums programme. Thinking about the science of the eye, made camera obscuras, hosted the caravan obscura and made Nelson Tower into a giant obscura.

2015 Scot's Safari

Victorian Explorers workshop highlighting Hugh Falconer & Roulleyn Gordon-Cumming Partnered with NMS on careful interpretation.

2016 Power to The People

History of energy and electricity, free workshops delivered through Hands on Science and Science Museum London, 'Danger High Voltage' workshops at Forres Town Hall.

2017 Holi Weekend

Storytelling weekend with Peter Chand including crafts and event in Grant Park as part of the International Year of Indian Culture. Funding through 'Creative Place' FBA partnership.

2018 Birds and Wirts

Partnered with (FBA) Forres Business Association and Brodie Castle. Showcased Bird collection & dioramas, school workshops on adaptation and Scots' language. Included a visit from Scots Scriever.

2018 GSA Tangible Sounds

2019 Future Falconer

Two projects working with Glasgow School of Art (Altyre Campus) students.

2019 Snapshot of History

Reflection of past & future of Falconer Museum.

Selected References & Further Reading

'Museums Matter', National Museums Directors' Council, 2015

'Collections for the Future', Museums Association, 2005

'Measuring Socially Engaged Practice: A Tool Kit for Museums', Museums Association, 2017

'Off the Shelf, A Toolkit for Ethical Transfer, Reuse and Disposal', Museums Association, 2020

'Museums Change Lives', Museums Association, 2017

'The UK's Ageing Population: Challenges and opportunities for museums and Galleries, Dr. Kate A. Hamblin & Prof. Sarah Harper, Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, University of Oxford

'Museums as Spaces for Wellbeing: A Second Report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing, 2018

'Too Much Stuff?', National Museums Directors' Council, 2003

'Siwalik fossils; state & status visit to Falconer Museum, Christopher Stimpson, Grace Exley & Emma Nicholls, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, 2023. Produced with support of the Falconer 150 Research Grant led by Friends of the Falconer Museum.

'Science & Imagination, True Stories from the Falconer Museum' ed. by Christiane H. Friaf and published by Friends of the Falconer Museum, 2022

'Why Collect? A report on Museum Collecting Today' by David Cannadine. Published by Art Fund with support from the Wolfson Foundation, 2018

'Pleasure, Connection and Purpose: How museums can leverage emotions to build greater public support', Art Fund, 2023

'Empowering Collections', Museums Association, 2018

'Museums Audience Report', The Audience Agency, 2018