



National  
Museums  
Scotland



National  
Programme  
2020/2021

# National Programme Across Scotland

The enormous challenges faced by museums across the country in the last year due to the outbreak of Covid-19 have put special focus on the importance and value of our National Programme.

Together with colleagues across the sector we navigated periods of closure, staff furlough and remote working. The impact of sudden closure and lockdowns meant that our commitment to working in partnership to share our collections, expertise and audience engagement programmes with museums and their communities across Scotland was re-focused to online delivery.

We worked closely with our sector colleagues to identify their immediate needs and implement solutions. These included a webpage for guidance and resources, an advice line for one-to-one support, moving our National Training Programme online and working together to reschedule planned loans and touring exhibitions. In August 2020, we launched a Special Funding Scheme to target higher levels of support from the National Fund for Acquisitions to areas of greatest need. An increased focus on online delivery allowed our nationwide community engagement to continue, including initiatives such as Scotland 365 and Maths Week Scotland.

Following consultation with colleagues across Scotland during November and December 2019, and further conversations as the impact of the pandemic was felt, we launched an interim [National Strategy 2021–2022](#) in Spring 2021. This shorter, more flexible plan allows us to be nimble in responding to immediate requirements and priorities while we plan for the longer term and consider the strategic framework within which we can continue to make an effective contribution to the challenges faced by the Scottish museum sector. We will continue to develop and broaden the partnerships we have built over the years as we further our ambition to share Scotland's national collections, engage and inspire people and strengthen skills and expertise.





© Heera Kant. Photograph © CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection

## National Programme in numbers

In 2020/2021 we worked in all 32 of Scotland's local authorities. Our work across Scotland included:

- **3,559 objects** on loan from the national collection to 63 organisations in 23 local authorities across Scotland.
- **27 grants** with a total value of £86,354 from the National Fund for Acquisitions, supporting acquisitions worth £215,354 and helping to develop and enhance the collections of 17 organisations in 13 local authorities across Scotland.
- **595 people** engaged through our online community outreach programme.
- **354 learning experiences** delivered to staff and volunteers in partner museums in 19 online training sessions.
- **25,281 participants** from 1,031 schools in 31 local authorities across Scotland in our Digital Schools Sessions.
- **Three national collection reviews** of ancient Egyptian, East Asian and fossil collections across Scotland.
- **40,000 pupils**, from every local authority in Scotland, involved in Maths Week Scotland, from 28 September to 4 October 2020 and more than 100 schools and learning organisations supported with grants.

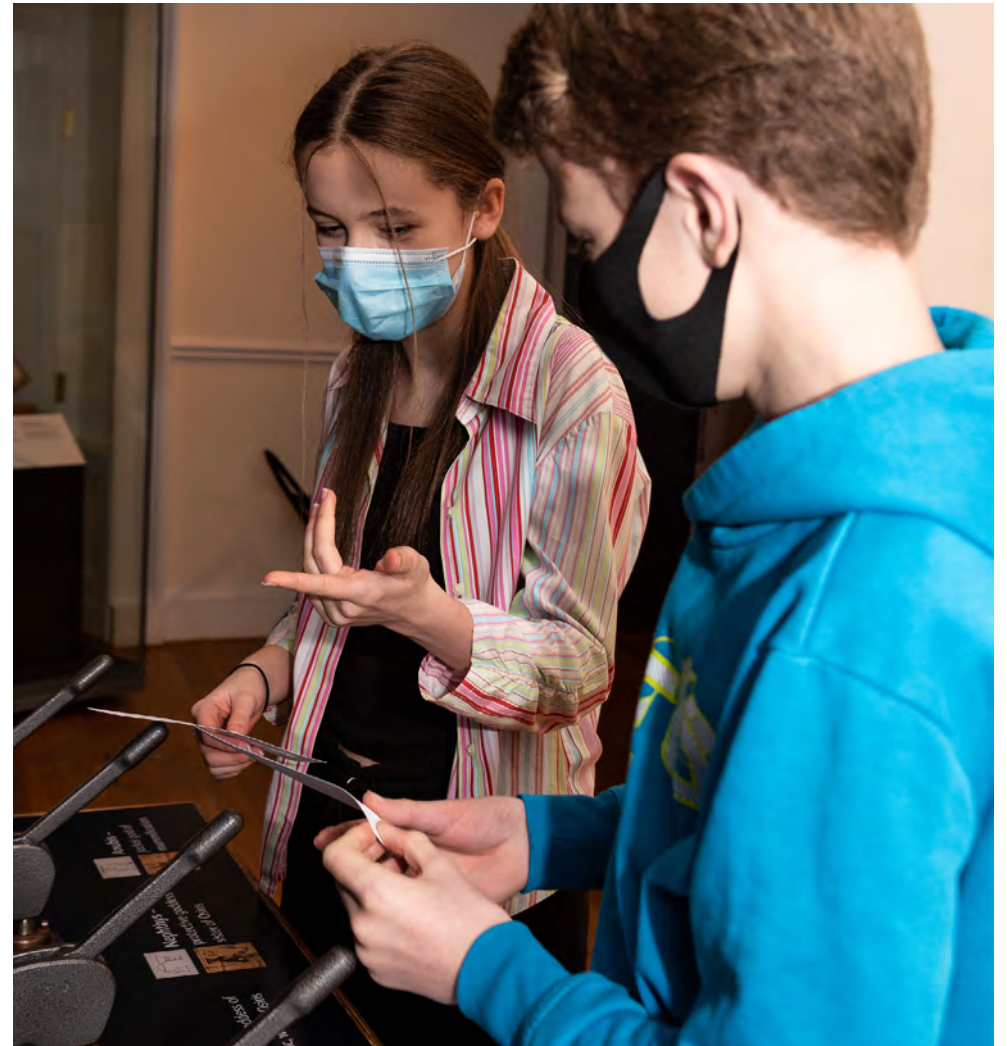
# Sharing Scotland's Collections

## Touring exhibitions

At the beginning of the first Covid-19 lockdown our national touring exhibition, *Discovering Ancient Egypt*, was on display at Perth Museum and Art Gallery where it opened on 25 January 2020. We worked closely with the venue to extend the exhibition from August, when easing of restrictions allowed the museum to reopen, until 4 October 2020. As well as a welcome opportunity to extend the run, this also helped the venue to accommodate capacity pressures relating to Covid-19 compliance. During the period prior to lockdown the exhibition drew a 68% increase in visitors compared to the preceding year's equivalent period, providing a significant draw at a time of year when footfall tends to be lower.

The exhibition opened at its fifth and final venue, the John Gray Centre Haddington, on 2 December 2020. In the lead up to opening we provided support to our colleagues at East Lothian Council Museums Service in developing marketing materials and visitor evaluation, providing photography, issuing a media release and implementing new booking systems. Following the closure of museums again in January 2021, we revised this support to focus on redeveloping their ancient Egyptian handling collection and the creation of learning resources for schools. We also worked with our colleagues in East Lothian to extend the exhibition's run from its original closing date of 19 April to 24 July 2021.

Across all five touring venues, the exhibition welcomed 19,634 visitors. The exhibition was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Hugh Fraser Foundation.



© Tracey Largue

## Loans

In 2020/21, 3,559 objects were on loan from the national collection to 63 organisations in 23 local authorities across Scotland. We worked closely with our partners to offer advice and support and carry out necessary conservation to deliver our loans programme despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.

### Biggar & Upper Clydesdale Museum

In March 2020 a motor car built in 1900 by the Albion Motor Car Company Ltd, Glasgow, went on long-term loan to Biggar & Upper Clydesdale Museum. In rare original condition, this was only the second car built by the company and was displayed at the Motor Museum in London before being presented to the national collection in 1922. The car was owned by company founder Thomas Blackwood Murray and has great significance for the local area; the prototype of the original Albion automobile was developed by the Murray family at Heaviside Farm, Biggar.

### Dovecot Studios

Six tapestries by Archie Brennan (1931–2019) were loaned to Dovecot Studios for the first major retrospective exhibition of his work, *Archie Brennan: Tapestry Goes Pop!* (26 April–30 August 2021). Lisa Mason, Assistant Curator of Art and Design, and Dovecot curator Kate Grenyer co-curated the exhibition and received an Art Fund Jonathan Ruffer curatorial grant to undertake extensive research for the project which included an exhibition catalogue. Brennan, who was apprenticed to Dovecot Studios where he later served as Artistic Director, explored contemporary culture through the medium of classical tapestry weaving, often using wit and humour to produce highly original designs which can be found in public and private collections throughout the world. He was an influential teacher who established the Department of Tapestry and Fibre Arts at Edinburgh College of Art and worked in North America, Australia and Papua New Guinea. Among the tapestries loaned from National Museums Scotland's small but internationally significant collection of Brennan's work were *Mohammad Ali*, 1973, and *Burn*, 1978. The exhibition received extensive media coverage and 5-star reviews in the *Times* and *Scotsman*.



© Phil Wilkinson

### Trimontium Museum

A major loan of over 200 objects is included in new displays at Trimontium Museum in Melrose which opened following redevelopment on 2 August 2021. We worked closely with the Trimontium Trust to identify suitable objects from the national collection and undertook extensive conservation to prepare them for display. They help to tell the story of the Roman fort and settlement at Trimontium (modern Newstead), one of the pivotal Roman sites north of Hadrian's Wall with one of the greatest collections of Roman military-related finds in the British Isles. As well as Roman material, the loan includes Iron Age objects and items dating from after the Roman period which expand the story of settlement at this site. Our collaboration with the Trust has also inspired new [Romans in Scotland online resources](#) based on the national collection as well as new learning resources for schools.

### Kilmartin Museum

Over 70 objects which had been on display at Kilmartin Museum since 2009 were returned to National Museums Scotland in November 2020. We are working with the Museum as they prepare new displays to tell the story of Kilmartin Glen and Mid Argyll as part of their redevelopment project. We anticipate that much of this material, along with other items from the local area, will return to Kilmartin Museum to join displays ahead of its planned reopening in 2023.



© Trimontium Trust



© The Scottish Maritime Museum

## National Fund for Acquisitions

National Museums Scotland administers the [National Fund for Acquisitions](#), an annual grant of £150,000 provided by Scottish Government to help museums throughout Scotland to acquire objects for their collections. In 2020/21 the Fund contributed 27 grants worth £86,354, helping to develop and enhance the collections of 17 organisations in 13 local authorities across Scotland. The total purchase value of the objects to which the Fund contributed was £215,354. By 31 March 2021, a further 13 grants with a total value of £49,172 had been committed and were awaiting payment.

We continued to accept applications during lockdown and the subsequent period of remote working and in August 2020 we launched a [Special Funding Scheme](#) to support museums struggling to raise the necessary match funding to enable them to apply to the NFA. The Scheme, which can offer grants of up to 100%, operates alongside our normal funding stream which offers up to 50% of purchase price. Among the acquisitions which the Fund supported were:

- £7,579 to the Scottish Maritime Museum for an 80-year-old bottle of whisky and other items recovered from the wreck of the *SS Politician* which ran aground on the Isle of Eriskay in 1941 en route to America with a cargo to raise funds for the war effort. Subsequent attempts by islanders to salvage the whisky inspired Compton Mackenzie's 1947 novel *Whisky Galore!* and the popular Ealing Studio comedy of the same title.
- £6,110 to Leisure and Culture Dundee for a pair of oil paintings, *Portrait of Captain James Neish* and *Portrait of Mrs Katherine Ann Neish*, by George Chinnery. Captain Neish was master of the vessel which brought the first jute to Dundee in around 1832, giving rise to an industry which would eventually employ most of the city's working population.
- £1,107 to Glasgow Museums for a collection of five artworks on the theme of the Covid-19 pandemic by Indian folk artists, part of Glasgow Life's project to document the pandemic both locally and globally.

# Engaging and Inspiring People

## Maths Week Scotland

Maths Week Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government, aims to raise the profile of maths across the country with events and activities for schools, adults and families which celebrate the importance of maths in our everyday lives. National Museums Scotland co-ordinates communications and a programme of year-round events as well as the focus week delivered by partners which include museums, science centres, universities, mathematical associations and community groups. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the fourth annual Maths Week Scotland from 28 September to 4 October 2020 was a great success. The emphasis on online and outdoor activities as well as an enhanced social media presence resulted in a wider range of activities and increased geographical reach. Many local activities were funded by the Maths Week Scotland Small Grants Fund, established by Scottish Government, the Edinburgh Mathematical Society and Glasgow Mathematical Journal Trust to encourage innovation and participation. More than 100 schools and learning organisations received grants to develop projects and many adapted maths learning to their local environment. A total of 40,000 pupils, from every local authority in Scotland, were registered to take part via the website. The outdoor maths theme was embraced by teachers with maths trails, take-home kits and resource packs ensuring that outdoor learning, learning at home and socially-distanced learning were accommodated within the programme. In collaboration with Science Skills Academy, outdoor maths kits were created with 174 kits reaching every primary school in the Highland Council area, supported by online training for teachers. We're working with museums across Scotland to encourage them to integrate more maths into their programming. Our workshop, *Maths in Museums*, on 4 February 2021 shared ideas for activities and we offered grants of up to £1,000 to enable up to ten museums to take part in Maths Week Scotland 2021.



© Rachel Patterson



## Digital Schools Sessions

The first Covid-19 lockdown saw the closure of Scottish schools on 20 March 2020 and a move to digital, home-based learning. In June 2020, National Museums Scotland launched a survey to capture the experience of teachers providing digital learning and ideas for ongoing engagement in the new school year. Findings were shared widely to support development and delivery of online programming across the museum sector. National Museums Scotland established a new programme of Digital Schools Sessions in November 2020 to engage directly with schools while they were unable to visit in person. In November and December we delivered 22 live online schools workshops. During the second lockdown and the return to learning from home in January 2021, we adapted this offer to a more flexible format incorporating pre-recorded sessions and associated resources and developed new 'Themed Weeks'. The programme, including sessions on dinosaurs, ancient Egypt, the Romans, the Second World War and biodiversity, engaged 1,031 schools and 25,281 participants. By the end of the academic year, we had delivered Digital Schools Sessions in 31 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas, reaching 23% of primary schools in Scotland. Delivering digitally reduced inequality by providing greater accessibility and opportunity, attracting audiences which had not booked a session at any of our sites in the previous two years. Compared to in-person sessions in 2019/20, we received more school bookings from the four highest categories of deprivation (those with 80–95%+ of pupils living in the 20% most deprived data zones according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation), and we received some great feedback:

*'Thank you for thinking outside the box and providing some interdisciplinary learning support through this pandemic.'*

*'Love that online sessions are available as our school's location means it can be costly and a long trip to visit museums.'*

*'Thank you very much for supporting us at this difficult time.'*



© Ruth Armstrong

## Climate emergency films for secondary schools

We worked with Castlebrae Community High School in Edinburgh to create three short films for secondary schools focusing on the climate emergency. Supported by the ScottishPower Foundation, the films use objects from our collections to tell the stories of *Pollution and Waste*, *Animal Extinction and Habitat Loss*, and *Climate Change and Ice Melt*: [nms.ac.uk/climate-emergency-films](https://nms.ac.uk/climate-emergency-films) Accompanied by teachers' notes with an emphasis on related careers, they demonstrate how objects collected hundreds of years ago give a unique glimpse into the weather patterns of the past while contemporary collections highlight ongoing work to measure and track changes in our environment and search for solutions to the problems we face. The resources were launched in September 2021 ahead of COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in November, and promoted to schools across Scotland to support classroom learning and teaching.

## Online events

Through a new series of online events, we were able to engage audiences at a time when Covid restrictions meant it was not possible to hold in-person events. In January 2021 Dr Fraser Hunter, Principal Curator, Prehistory and Roman Archaeology, and Dr Dan Potter, Assistant Curator of Ancient Mediterranean collections, were joined by award-winning historian, author and broadcaster Professor Bettany Hughes at *An Egyptian Luxury in Roman Scotland*. The event attracted 322 attendees with a further 1,351 watching on our YouTube channel. In March 2021 an 'in conversation' event on the Galloway Hoard was led by broadcaster James Naughtie. Dr Martin Goldberg, Principal Curator of Medieval Archaeology and History, and *Vikings* creator, writer and producer Michael Hirst discussed how the Galloway Hoard is transforming our understanding of Viking-age Scotland. This event attracted 1,348 attendees with a further 830 watching on YouTube. Both events, which included live captioning for D/deaf and hard of hearing audiences, are recorded and hosted at [nms.ac.uk/catchup](https://nms.ac.uk/catchup) Here is some of the feedback we received:

*'I loved the event. The presenters were so passionate, descriptive and love what they are doing. One of the best presentations I have watched live. Thank you.'*

*'Your program is definitely in the top five for me. Quality photos, great visuals and passionate knowledgeable speakers. Thank you for bringing objects I would never have the opportunity to see into my home during this time of isolation.'*

*'I enjoyed hearing peoples' stories and passions and engaging with other attendees online via social media.'*

Our curators also contributed their specialist knowledge to online events hosted by other organisations. Dr Adrián Maldonado, Glenmorangie Research Fellow, gave a talk, *The last days of Fortriu? The Croy Hoard revisited*, for North of Scotland Archaeological Society on 30 July 2020. Dr Anna Groundwater, Principal Curator, Renaissance and Early Modern History, was 'in conversation' with Deborah Clarke, Senior Curator at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, in *Life at the Court of Mary, Queen of Scots*, live from Holyroodhouse for the Royal Collections Trust on 28 October 2020. Dr Fraser Hunter, Principal Curator, Prehistory and Roman Archaeology, gave a talk, *War and diplomacy on Rome's northern frontier*, for the Perth Museum/University of the Highlands and Islands public seminar series on 25 February 2021 and Dr Dan Potter, Assistant Curator, Ancient Mediterranean collections, gave a talk, *Ancient Egypt across Scotland: The National Museums Scotland Collections Review*, for the Abertay Historical Society on 10 March 2021. Sophie Goggins, Senior Curator of Biomedical Sciences, contributed to a number of discussions about Covid collecting, including an online public event organised by the Public History Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research on 16 March 2021.

# Community engagement

## Scotland 365

Scotland 365, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is exploring new ways to engage young people aged 16–25 with our museums and heritage. After a pause due to Covid-19, the activity plan was redesigned to deliver the programme digitally and will run until March 2022. We recruited 30 enthusiastic young people to our national Youth Engagement Team and are currently working in partnership with Young Scot to explore and test the design of a range of projects that reflect themes flagged by young people in our 2019 consultation. The team will work with staff across our organisation to consider ideas for improving visitor experiences for young people, develop creative digital projects, marketing campaigns and events and assist in developing a youth engagement strategy for National Museums Scotland. We plan to deliver a project working with local young people and community groups in the Granton area of Edinburgh where the National Museums Collection Centre is sited. A school project will explore how young people can help shape a meaningful first experience of our museums through school visits. Three young evaluators have been recruited to work alongside the project's external evaluators Research Scotland to explore the impact of the project. We hope to continue welcoming more young visitors to our museums, enabling the youth team to connect with other young people and test some of their ideas.

## Additional support and inclusive programmes

Our Museum Socials for people living with dementia, their relatives, friends and carers and Friday Friends for visually impaired and D/deaf children began to be delivered online from October 2020. Museum Socials, in partnership with the National Galleries of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh Zoo and the University of Edinburgh Museums, included a session on the Galloway Hoard with Dr Martin Goldberg, Principal Curator of Medieval Archaeology and History. Friday Friends included sessions on dinosaurs, winter festivals and ancient Egypt. We held an online event for members of Edinburgh's South Asian community as part of a wider project on Scottish religion and beliefs, and hosted



© Neil Hanna

mindfulness art sessions for adults with the Thistle foundation in Craigmillar, Edinburgh, which supports people with long-term health conditions. We worked with the City of Edinburgh Council's Discover programme which supports vulnerable children and families over the school holiday period, delivering online mindfulness sketching and music sessions inspired by our collections, and facilitated online sessions with young people from arts organisation Impact Arts to support the co-creation of a trail exploring hidden LGBTQIA+ histories within our collections.

## Measuring Social Impact Report and Toolkit

To draw our Ancient Egypt and East Asia National Programme (2018–2020) to a close we looked in greater detail at the impact of the programmes we had collaborated on with our audiences and partners. With funding from the Museums Association’s Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund and People’s Postcode Lottery, we developed projects around the country intended to have a social impact through targeted and tailored activities with young people, individuals with autism and their families or individuals with dementia and their families. To examine the impact on these audiences of working with museum collections we worked with partner museums in Aberdeen, Perth, Glasgow, Fife, Montrose, Hawick, Inverclyde and West Lothian and our evaluation demonstrated similar impacts experienced by audiences across the offer. We gathered evidence in three key areas:

- Cultural citizenship: Through taking part in experiences at a museum, participants made repeated visits, they felt that it was a valuable space where they feel welcome and confident to visit.
- Enriching learning experiences: Participants gained knowledge, skills and/or enthusiasm for learning, motivating further engagement in learning and self-development.
- Mental health and wellbeing: Involvement had a positive impact on participants’ health and wellbeing.

With continued funding from the Museums Association’s Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund we have refined the evaluation tools we used with partners to create a [Measuring Social Impact Toolkit](#). We hope that by using these evaluation tools museums will generate evidence to help make the case for greater investment in opportunities to add social value through their work with these audiences.



© Neil Hanna

# Strengthening Skills and Expertise

## Advice and training

In response to the impact of Covid-19 we worked closely with colleagues in other museums to provide support and guidance tailored to their requirements. In spring 2020 we surveyed museums to gauge their most pressing needs and the best mechanisms for providing support both during lockdown and within Covid-19 restrictions for reopening to visitors. We created a webpage with guidance and advice on the areas that museums told us were the most critical areas of need. They included monitoring collections during museum closure, waking up collections prior to reopening, advice on managing loans during the pandemic, developing ways to work with schools remotely and guidance on key business skills such as fundraising. In 2020/21 the webpage was accessed by 1,500 users. We also set up an advice line to provide one-to-one support, directing queries to colleagues across National Museums Scotland to give specific advice by phone, email or video call. Following announcements of further lockdown restrictions in 2021, we contacted museums again for information on the support most needed and set up informal video calls providing opportunities to network and let us know how best to support them during this challenging time. We also collaborated with Museums Galleries Scotland to deliver targeted online support and training sessions and participated in webinars hosted by other organisations to share advice and guidance.

## National Training Programme

Our National Training Programme offers free collections knowledge and skills training for staff and volunteers in museums across Scotland. In response to Covid-19 we adapted our programme to deliver online content and are grateful to the Hugh Fraser Foundation for supporting us to test new models of online delivery which will have a long-term impact on how we work with museums, enabling us to engage with more partners right across the country. In 2020/21 we facilitated 19 events, providing 354 learning experiences. The following are some examples of the events delivered and the responses we received from participants.



© Neil Hanna

## Documentation of natural science collections

Our first online training event, *Introduction to the Documentation of Fossils and other Natural Science Collections* on 27 January 2021, was delivered as part of our *Natural Science Collections Across Scotland* project, funded by John Ellerman Foundation. The event, led by Dr Sue Beardmore, John Ellerman Project Curator, and Jo Thomson, Collections Information Officer, aimed to develop participants' confidence in documenting natural science collections. It covered basic stratigraphy (geological ages), the main fossil groups, taxonomic hierarchy and how to write scientific names correctly, commonly used abbreviations, which units of information to record, the importance of consistency, how to clean existing data, and a guide to reference resources. Recordings of the presentations are available on our website, allowing even more people to access the resource: [nms.ac.uk/natural-science-collections-across-scotland](https://nms.ac.uk/natural-science-collections-across-scotland)

## Collections care training

Our popular series of workshops themed around collections care includes sessions on object handling, object packing, object labelling and integrated pest management. We created a set of [online self-guided training resources](#) on each subject, including video demonstrations and further reading. On 29 March 2021 we shared the new training resources at an online event with 30 colleagues from museums across Scotland. We received the following feedback:

*'I wanted to say how pleased and grateful I am to see the huge amount of information staff at NMS have put together about Collections Care. Today's workshop reminded us of how important the seemingly small things are – correct labelling, basic housekeeping, simple solutions for effective storage ... What I like best is that it is straightforward information and it is the latest in best practice.'*

## Maths in Museums

*Maths in Museums* on 4 February 2021 encouraged museums to integrate more maths into their programming and take part in Maths Week Scotland 2021. Katie Oldfield, Maths Week Coordinator, shared some of the work undertaken in the last few years and looked at the Curriculum for Excellence, sharing feedback from teachers on the type of maths resources they are looking for. Victoria Robb, Education Manager at the National Mining Museum Scotland, and Claire Munro, Learning and Access Manager at the Scottish Maritime Museum, shared the maths programming on offer at their venues. We added a recording of the event to our website and created a hub for maths resources. We received the following feedback from participants:

*'I just want to express my sincere thanks for a brilliant workshop. I found it so informative and stimulating and am very much looking forward to taking part in Maths Week Scotland.'*

*'I can't tell you how inspirational I found the Museums and Maths event a few weeks ago. I came away with a huge list of ideas that I'm excited to incorporate into our education service.'*



© Neil Hanna

## Industrial Museums Scotland

We worked closely with Industrial Museums Scotland to target advice and support to a network of museums via action learning sets. We facilitated online discussions to share knowledge and experience on topics of shared interest. An event on 9 March 2021 focused on fundraising for museums, covering topics such as developing membership schemes, legacy campaigns, attracting corporate sponsorship and the infrastructure required to support fundraising activities. A workshop on 16 March 2021 looked at developing and delivering digital schools sessions to support museums engaging with schools remotely. We also created opportunities for partner museums to learn from a wider range of experts, commissioning Jon Gill of Playful Communications to run his *Made on a Mobile* workshop online. The session enabled participants to create informative videos to welcome visitors back to their sites and explain the new safety measures in place.

David Mann, Chair of Industrial Museums Scotland, gave the following feedback on the support National Museums Scotland provided to the group over the year:

*'In a year of uncertainty and ever-changing needs, Industrial Museums Scotland members have appreciated the support of National Museums Scotland's National Programme. Being able to create and adapt sessions at short notice has been invaluable. Our teams benefited hugely from dedicated sessions with colleagues in NMS's learning/engagement and marketing/social teams, crucially being able to talk about what future provision might look like in these very altered times.'*



© National Mining Museum Scotland Trust

# Collaboration and Capacity Building

## Ancient Egypt and East Asia Collection Reviews

In May 2020 we published two national collection reviews as part of our Ancient Egypt and East Asia National Programme, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Museums Association's Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund. [Ancient Egyptian Collections in Scottish Museums](#) and [East Asian Collections in Scottish Museums](#) revealed detailed insights into collections held in museums across Scotland. The reviews provided the impetus for further research in the form of two PhD projects to study the history of the collection and display of ancient Egyptian, Sudanese and Chinese material in Scottish museums, including the national collection. Co-supervised by the University of Glasgow and National Museums Scotland, this research is funded by the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities (SGSAH) Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Collaborative Doctoral Awards scheme.

### *Imagining Ancient Egypt in the Age of Empire: Identity and Power in Scottish Museum Displays of Egyptian Objects, 1860 to 1930*

Co-supervised by Dr Margaret Maitland, Principal Curator of the Ancient Mediterranean, and Dr John Giblin, Keeper of World Cultures, this study will examine the extent to which displays of ancient Egyptian and Sudanese material in Scottish museums were influenced by, and served to reinforce, imperialist ideas and will challenge the persistence of such narratives. National Museums Scotland holds almost 6,000 ancient Egyptian and Sudanese objects and extensive archives relating to past displays and collecting. The research will also draw on material relating to our national review of ancient Egyptian collections held by museums across Scotland.



© Aberdeen City Council (Archives, Gallery & Museums Collection)

*Shaping Taste, Building Knowledge: Collecting China in Scotland in the Early 20th Century*  
Co-supervised by Dr Qin Cao, Curator of Chinese Collections, and Dr John Giblin, Keeper of World Cultures, this research will focus on Scottish collecting of Chinese objects in the early twentieth century at a time when international interest in, and a market for, Chinese material culture was growing. National Museums Scotland holds around 11,000 Chinese objects as well as extensive archives. The study will look at how China was perceived through these and other selected museum collections in Scotland and the role this played in framing Scottish impressions of China at that time and subsequently. With reference to current decolonisation debates, research will investigate how collecting in this era continues to influence perceptions of China and Chinese material culture, as well as informing how these collections should be presented, interpreted and used.



## Scottish Museums Archaeology Strategy Group

The Scottish Museums Archaeology Strategy Group, initiated by National Museums Scotland and ALGAO Scotland (Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers) and supported by Museums Galleries Scotland and the Treasure Trove Unit, aims to support archaeological collections in Scotland. In recent years, the loss of archaeological expertise, conservation and preservation challenges, documentation backlogs, lack of storage space and missed opportunities for collaborative working have created challenges for the sector. This voluntary group of representatives from museums across Scotland has identified three focus areas: To improve the process for archaeology finds before they enter museums; improve care and management of archaeology collections held by museums; and tackle skills gaps and training. We delivered our first project, *Before the Museum*, funded by Historic Environment Scotland and managed by ALGAO Scotland. We consulted museums, universities, commercial archaeology companies and national organisations involved with archaeology collections in Scotland to inform new guidance documents to support the processing of archaeological material and make sure it is 'museum ready'. Despite the challenges members faced during the period of development, the group maintained its efforts and is now focusing on harnessing funds for future collaborative projects. To support the aims of the group, National Museums Scotland has identified core skills training areas and is currently developing new advice and online training.

## Natural Science Collections Across Scotland

This two-year project, funded by John Ellerman Foundation, reviewed natural science collections across Scotland with a particular focus on fossil collections. Project curator Dr Sue Beardmore visited over 70 collections throughout Scotland, examining specimens, collecting data and giving advice. The resulting [Review of Fossil Collections in Scotland](#), launched in May 2021, documented over a quarter of a million specimens in 57 museum collections from the Shetland Islands to the Scottish Borders. It highlights specimens which have played an important role in advancing our understanding of the development and diversity of life on our planet over millions of years. A second report, *Priorities for Future Support and Development of Natural Science Collections in Scottish Museums*, looks at



© Perth Museum & Art Gallery, Perth & Kinross Council

natural science collections more broadly. The project, supported by a training programme for staff and volunteers working with natural science collections, aimed to create greater awareness of and engagement with Scotland's fossil collections and help museums to care for these remarkable collections in the long term. With the agreement of our funder, underspend from the project, resulting from activity which could not be undertaken owing to Covid-19 restrictions, was used to fund fossil collection development projects at eight partner museums.

