

FALCONER MUSEUM & STORE. MORAY COUNCIL

Collections Check: 12th November 2020

INTRODUCTION

The collections check of the material held at the Falconer Museum and the Museum Store, was a preliminary first visit to assess the scope, size and content of the collections and form an overview of current collections condition.

All the display cases in the Museum building were viewed but were not opened /entered.

The storage racks in the museum store were inspected, a percentage of boxes and drawers were opened and checked to gain an indication of packing and condition.

Future checks would aim to focus in greater detail on specific sections of the collections

SUMMARY:

Museum: The collections on display were housed in high specification museum quality cases and appear to be stable and in good condition.

Three items highlighted (badger mount, copper alloy pendant and pewter cup) may require closer inspection and intervention. The taxidermy specimens, the otter and the elk/deer head, that are on open display, are particularly vulnerable to moth infestation. If the museum is closed for a prolonged period, and the displays are left quiet and undisturbed, pest problems could become a serious issue.

Museum Store: Collections in the museum store are well stored and in good condition, however, there are some potential issues:

- packing and stability for the archaeological metalwork,
- open storage of vulnerable natural history
- pest activity in some of the wooden rural /social items.

Certain objects have been highlighted as requiring intervention, either to recondition the silica gel, or to wrap and freeze items affected by woodworm or moth activity.

Currently there do not appear to be any major issues, but prevention and monitoring is advisable especially if the closure is to be longer term.

The following is an overview of the issues with images. For future reports I would set up an excel spread sheet to make things simpler and to keep an accurate record of all actions for each of the objects.

FALCONER MUSEUM BUILDING

The Museum building is heated and all the walls, floors and ceiling are clean and dry. Windows are covered with blinds. There has been a (recent) leak in skylight towards the centre of the room, although no evidence of any damage on the day except for the bin placed below to catch drips.

Ground floor: 10 cases, 1 of which is open (unglazed)



- Advertising ephemera case
- Games/ Sport case
- Schools & Education case
- Shells case
- Fossils case
- Constance Gordon Cumming Collector case
- Religion case
- Medical case
- Leisure case
- Reflections (unglazed with taxidermy)

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

RELIGION CASE, one of the pewter cups has a white efflorescence around the foot area, this suggests potential instability in the pewter. Factors which may affect stability of lead-based items include environment, case materials or adjacent objects. The cases are modern and look to be good museum quality cases of a high specification. The white layer could be a from a previous corrosion episode and therefore may be stable but it is difficult to know from one visit.

- **Monitor condition,**
- **Check other items in the case**

REFLECTIONS DISPLAY, unglazed mixed display, including taxidermy and prosthetics. Open display taxidermy is vulnerable to insect/ moth infestation, especially if the museum is going to be closed for an extended period.

- **Cover vulnerable specimens**

All other case contents appear stable, at this time.

First floor

Falconer Room: 3 Cases

- Large Asian elephant skull (open exhibit, touching allowed)
- Lithics case
- Falconer case some fossil material and ethnographic
- Nelson Tower case

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: NO ACTION REQUIRED

- All the cased collections look to be stable and in good condition.
- The elephant skull is showing wear but as it is a touching exhibit this is to be expected. It may be advisable to cover against dust.

Stairwell & Balcony: 9 cases, plus open displays



- Mounted taxidermy head, deer / elk
- Otter - Open display
- Taxidermy case – mammals
- Birds case
- Archaeology case
- Agriculture case
- Sculpture: Tortiphant
- Old Technology Case
- RAF Officer, open display costume
- RAF case
- Silver / Silversmithing Case
- Commerce and Industry Case
- Transportation Case

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: ONGOING MONITORING

OPEN DISPLAY: OTTER is vulnerable to insect/ moth infestation, especially if the museum is going to be closed for an extended period.

- **Cover specimen & monitor**

OPEN DISPLAY: DEER/ELK HEAD is vulnerable to insect/ moth infestation, especially if the museum is going to be closed for an extended period.

- **Cover specimen & monitor**

TAXIDERMY MAMMALS CASE

The badger may have an issue there is some dust and grit beneath his tail which may suggest pest activity. All the other specimens look to be stable.

- **Open the case and check badger properly, treat by freezing if required**

ARCHAEOLOGY CASE

A small copper alloy pedant on the shelf looks to have a small area of bronze disease, the corrosion is quite pale so may be active. All the other archaeology and bronze items appear stable.

- **Remove the pendant from the case and store with silica gel to stabilise, monitor, conservation treatment may be required.**

AGRICULTURE CASE

Silver medals are tarnished but apart from this all other material is stable.

- **No action required**

All the other case contents appear stable, at this time.

FALCONER MUSEUM STORE

1st Floor Storage Room:

Clean, heated area, fitted out with good quality steel compactor racking storage and sliding art racking. In total there are 15 stacks plus two sets of 11 sliding art racks. Some other material, including some cased taxidermy is stored around the edges of the room.

Environmental monitoring is checked remotely, sensor reading in the room 47%RH and 19.9°C

Many items were boxed, wrapped, or in trays. Some of the shelves have been lined with 'Jiffy' (polyethylene) foam. There are vulnerable organic items on open storage. On this visit a selection of boxes and drawers were opened to give an overview of the main issues. Most of the boxes are of archival quality and in very good condition and the contents appear clean. The allibert storage trays in stack 7: approximately 6 trays per bay were opened and the contents checked. All shelves with unboxed items were checked.

Stack 1: Archives and Books



- Tops of books have dust covers, archives all boxed or rolled in cardboard tubes.
- Some dust visible on the shelves

ACTIONS:

- Clean/ dust/Vacuum the shelves

Stack 2: Textiles and hanging costume



- All costume boxed or in hanging bags made of cotton/ calico
- Judges robe had fallen off its hanger, this was relocated and covered in its bag.
- Some of the protective bags on other Judges gowns ripped and loose, not calico.
- Dust and fibre debris but no evidence of moth or other pests

ACTIONS:

- Clean/ dust/Vacuum the shelves

Stack 3: Rolled and boxed textiles



- The wrapping is not in particularly good condition, old tissue is yellowing and ripped
- No pest issues noted

ACTIONS:

- Replace the affected wrapping on some of the rolled textiles

Stack 4: Handling Collection and Social history



- All appears OK but some of this material is unboxed, various woollen items are not bagged or boxed.
- The pest risk from handling material is high

ACTIONS:

- Vulnerable material should be bagged

Stack 5: Old Exhibitions, Glass Negs, Pattern books Keith Islabank Mills



- The pattern books, leather bindings are in poor condition, not physically supported,
- There is quite a lot of dust and leather debris on the shelf, worm holes through the leather

ACTIONS:

- Clean/ dust/Vacuum the shelves.
- The pattern books (with soft textile or leather spines) may require advice from Richard Aitken
- The beetle exit holes look old, closer inspection advised , freeze treatment may be required.

Stack 6: Temp display loans. Archaeology



ACTIONS:

- The Silica gel with archaeological metal work including the bronze axe-heads needs reconditioning

Stack 7: Social History, Ethnography, Zoology, Entomology, Botany and Osteology



- 5 trays per bay were checked for the preliminary assessment
- Some of the spirit specimens in small glass vials, mostly insect specimens are drying out,
- Two of the boxed entomology specimens (location 7.22.7) have had pest issues, some of the larger moth bodies have been eaten. The lids on the boxes are ill fitting with at least a 5mm gap around the edges.

ACTIONS:

- Spirit (75% alcohol / water) needs to be replenished
- Treat insect boxes by freezing as a precaution

Stack 8: Weaponry, Tools, Weights & Measures



- Large hide Zulu shield, open storage.
- Sword 1978.265 has had episodes of active rust – this may be old corrosion, all the other swords appear stable
- Dust on the shelves from rusted objects, but most appear stable.

ACTIONS:

- Clean/ dust/vacuum the shelves
- Monitor for pest activity, monitor ongoing condition of the sword blade

Stack 9: Domestic, Spinning and Knitting



- Location 9.2.3 spinning wheel fine dust on the shelf suggests potential active woodworm,
- Curling basket in location 9.4.1 has had woodworm, the holes look quite fresh, but no dust visible on the shelf.

ACTION:

- Treat by affected items by freezing.

Stack 10: Furniture china, Musical, Rural, Computing

- All appears to be OK no signs of activity noticed.

Stack 11: Entomology cabinets, lighting, signage and Ethnography



- Wooden entomology cabinets with glass lidded drawers, on the whole, the specimens are in poor condition.
- The small entomology cabinet has no glazed lids, specimens could be easily infested.
- Ethnography all looks to be stable

ACTIONS:

- Monitor for pest activity

Stack 12: Herbarium, lichens, Wartime, Maritime, Prints



- Herbaria and lichens all well boxed and clean
- The Entomology cabinet, the specimens in reasonably good order
- Framed prints and engravings, there is no packing or interleaving, but they are in good condition

ACTIONS:

- Interleave prints with softening

Stack 13: Taxidermy mounts, other Natural History



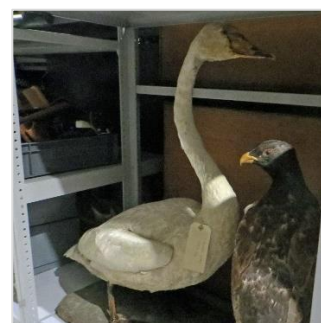
- Wasps nests, fragmenting, these are very fragile and are prone to damage even by air movement.
- 1873.26 Red Legged Grouse (?) the case has woodworm in the rear wooden panel, no dust visible on the shelf but there are bodies of (deceased) adult anobid woodworm in the front of the case.
- Tiger skin, open and rolled on a shelf, wrapped to protect from dust and to reduce chances of insect infestation. None currently noted.

- Other taxidermy mounts in cases all appear stable
- Barrel, bands rusted and flaking

ACTIONS:

- Rolled skins should be wrapped or covered to protect from dust and reduce chances of insect attack.
- Wasps nests require boxes
- Red-legged Grouse case, treat by freezing

Stack 14: Large Taxidermy, Commemorative, Social History



- Lion Skin, open and rolled on shelf, no packing, clean but vulnerable.
- Large taxidermy mounts, Swan and an Eagle, open no protective packing, appear stable.
- Location 14.10.3 basket, this appears to have active woodworm, holes are fresh and there is dust build on the item.
- Location 14.11.3 two wooden slats, appear to have active woodworm

ACTIONS:

- Rolled skins should be wrapped or covered to protect from dust and reduce chances of insect attack.
- Basket and wooden slats should be treated by freezing as a precaution

Stack 15: Taxidermy Mounts



- All of these are open on shelves, there are no obvious problems at the moment.

- Many are old Victorian mounts and heads, these have probably been treated with various heavy metal poisons when originally prepared.
- Some of the heads are shedding hair, through breakage rather than moth, there is a build up of broken hair debris on the shelf
- There is a relief model of a boat, location 15.5.1, it has a film of a fine crystalline deposit, not sure what this is, whether some previous surface treatment or something that it has been exposed to.

ACTIONS:

- It would be advisable to cover the taxidermy mounts and the heads, a clear polythene bag or enclosure would suffice. It helps to stop or slow the spread of pests such as clothes moth
- Clean/ dust/Vacuum the shelves

Large freestanding cabinet of Ducks

- Difficult to access properly the case was behind other items, but it appears to be clean & stable.
- Next visit check this properly.

Cabinet of Australian Ducks

- All looks clean and stable

Freestanding case of Irridescent birds

- The case has a vertical split down the rear panel at least 5mm wide.
- Many of the bird specimens have suffered damage through pest attack, it all looks to be old damage. There are a few feathers on the textured floor of the case, which may indicate problems.

Art Racks

All the art looks stable and in very similar condition to when I carried out a survey in 2016. Some of the racks are in the first set are empty.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To monitor and record any changes and check the ongoing condition of the collections held at the Falconer Museum and Museum Store. Carry out any procedures such as:

- silica gel re-conditioning,
- freeze treatments,
- covering of specimens
- cleaning of shelves

I would suggest we try a one day visit every two months.

Initially, the visits would concentrate on the most vulnerable collections, including on the archaeological metalwork, natural history and the social history highlighted as showing instability.

Later visits would address packing and closer inspection of rolled textiles, costume and it would be good to ask Richard to inspect the books, pattern books and other archive materials

The material on display in the museum, will also need a more detailed check, cases will need to be opened.

Some procedures will take a longer to complete and the assistance of Moray council staff may be required, especially to remove items from the on-site chest freezer, but this can be discussed.

Jeanette Pearson ACR

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High Life Highland Conservation Service

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