This was used by Mrs Rebecca Noble when laying the corner stone of the new Noble’s Hospital building on the 26th July 1886. It was the first purpose built hospital on the Isle of Man and was funded by her husband, the local benefactor Henry Bloom Noble. Henry Bloom Noble (1816-1903) made a vast fortune through mining, banking and property. Following the death of his wife in 1888 he established the Henry Bloom Noble Trust and used his great wealth to fund many charitable schemes including the Douglas library and Noble’s park. The first Noble’s Hospital closed in 1911 and was replaced by a new building on the outskirts of Douglas, again funded by Henry Bloom Noble’s Trust. The old building lay empty for several years but found a new lease of life in 1922 when it opened its doors as the Manx Museum. You are standing in the original hospital, in an area that was once the nurse’s office next to the male ward.

When you leave the Museum, look closely at the walls outside and you will find the corner stone that was laid in July 1886 using this ceremonial trowel and mallet.

Accession number: 1954-1389
This metal key came from the ecclesiastical or church prison, which was located in the crypt under the old St German’s Cathedral in Peel Castle. The ecclesiastical prison was used to hold people who had broken church laws. This might include not attending church, gambling, swearing or playing sports on the Sabbath (Sunday) or not paying tithes (church taxes). The prison was in use from at least the 15th century until 1780.

One of the most famous people to be held in the prison was Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester. She was convicted of witchcraft in 1441 when she consulted astrologers who had predicted the King’s possible death.

The key has had a varied life since it was last used to lock up prisoners in 1780. It even ended up in Cleveland, Ohio for a time. The key was safely returned to the Island when Mrs Stage (a member of the Kerruish family living in Cleveland) brought it back during the 1928 Manx Homecoming visit for Tynwald Day and presented the key to the Manx Museum.

Accession number: 1954-2650
This cast iron model of a hand was originally catalogued as ‘a female dwarf’s hand’, possibly a performer in a circus. Comparable casts are known of the hand of Arthur Caley, the Manx giant, who was exhibited by the famous circus proprietor P.T. Barnum. But the hand may just be a miniature model of a hand or a small child’s hand and at least two copies were made. The hand was found in the stomach of a large cod, which was caught twenty miles off Ramsey in 1932.

How it came to be there is a mystery, however the cod is like a marine vacuum cleaner. The fish scours the sea bottom for edible morsels: shellfish, marine worms and fish all form part of its normal diet. Indeed there is very little they will not eat. When gutted, some have even been found to have munched their way through a plastic cup just before being caught! The large mouth enables these voracious feeders to eat quite large prey. Cod of 7lb can swallow a whiting of over 1lb whole, so it would not have been impossible for this fish to have swallowed the hand.

In essence however this object raises more questions than answers, for example how did the hand come to be in the water for the fish to find it?

Accession numbers: 1954-3116 and 1954-3100X
This is the figurehead of the schooner Reaper, built on the Island c.1868. She spent much of her working life transporting cargo around the Irish Sea. She would bring coal to the Island from Whitehaven and potato and turnip manure from Ireland. She was purchased by Joseph Qualtrough, a Castletown ship builder, in 1888 and converted into a fishing trawler. After lying disused for several years, the Reaper was rebuilt and lengthened in 1907 and relaunched as one of the fastest schooners on the Island.

Ship building was an important Manx industry in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, and there were yards in most of the Island’s ports. The largest surviving Manx-built vessel is now the Star of India (formerly Euterpe) which was built at Ramsey, and the oldest is the shallop Peggy, built for George Quayle in 1789.

The Reaper was almost lost in a storm during the First World War when she ran aground at Holyhead. Her sailing career ended in 1923 as traditional schooners were replaced by modern trading vessels. After she was broken up, Joseph Qualtrough (by now Speaker of the House of Keys) presented the Reaper’s figurehead to the Manx Museum as a reminder of the three masted schooners that used to crowd Castletown harbour. The custom of carving figureheads for ships dates back to ancient times. Many are of women, as it was widely believed that a beautiful female form could calm a violent sea.

Accession numbers: 1954-3909
Arthur Caley, the so-called Manx Giant, was born at Sulby. A popular myth has it that the doorways of the Sulby Glen Hotel were raised in order for him to pass through, but in fact the hotel post-dates Caley by some years! He was a true giant in the sense that his limbs were in proportion to his body, and he is reported to have reached a height of 7 foot 8 inches. He soon attracted attention because of his height, and found work in a circus where he would often appear alongside dwarves, in order to further emphasise his stature.

It was falsely reported that he died in Paris in 1853, and this may have been some sort of fraud on the part of his manager, because Caley later appeared in the United States under the pseudonym of Colonel Ruth Goshen, the Palestine Giant. He joined a circus there under the management of the celebrated impresario P.T. Barnum, and toured the country. He is believed to have died in 1889, and is buried in Middlebush, New Jersey.

The cast of the hand was probably made to cash in on Caley’s fame, or to publicise the circus, and several examples are known to exist. They are now highly sought after by collectors of circus or freak show memorabilia.

Accession number: 1954-7289
In the Nineteenth Century electricity was not fully understood, though as Mary Shelley showed with her novel Frankenstein, it was thought to be powerful enough to induce life. Electricity was also widely believed to have medicinal properties, and electric shock machines such as this were commonly used in quack medicine, for a variety of ailments. As late as the First World War, electricity was being used to try to treat victims of Shell Shock, and even further into the Twentieth Century electric shocks were still used to combat depression and nervous disorders.

By turning the handle, the machine generates a current, which was experienced as an electric shock by anyone touching the electrodes. This example came from Brearey’s Chemists in Douglas. W.A. Brearey established his business on the North Quay around 1850, taking over the premises and stock of W. Gell. It survived until the 1960s, when small independent chemists began to come under pressure from the growth of large chemist chains on the high street.

Today machines such as this are most likely to be encountered as film or theatre props, in the laboratory of a mad scientist.

Accession number: 1959-0261
This mannequin was used to display the latest fashionable hats and accessories in the shop window of Moore’s Milliners in Douglas. The mannequin’s head shows a happy and glamorous looking young girl wearing make-up and sporting the latest short haircut. This would be just the sort of fashionable person that the shop would want to attract as a customer.

This mannequin head was made of a patented plaster composition trademarked as ‘Co-Wax’ and this particular model was called Bettina. The model shows the influence of Art Deco and has a long neck. She is relatively more stylised in appearance than earlier more life-like models, although she still has the realistic glass eyes.

Moore’s milliners shop was first opened in 1882 by Mrs R. Moore at 62 Strand Street in Douglas. By 1934, the shop had moved to 25 Duke Street and had been taken over by her daughter, Miss Roma Moore. It is quite likely that Roma purchased Bettina when she took over the family business. Her first advertisement in 1934 promised ‘a nice Selection of Matrons’ and Young Ladies’ new Spring Millinery. Also, Jumpers, Scarves, Hosiery, etc.’

Accession number: 1967-0237
The sea was once the only way to get to the Isle of Man and sometimes a heavy price was paid for a journey. Hundreds of ships and lives have been lost around the coast of the Island. These ships carried goods for trade and passengers but some were also heavily armed.

HMS Racehorse sank in 1822 in a storm and took with her 18 cannon. Six crew and three local men, who had attempted a rescue, were also lost. A Manx resident, William Hillary, realised that more needed to be done to help the families of those lost trying to rescue others at sea. He set up the National Institution for the Preservation of Life from Shipwreck. In 1854, this was renamed the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, a charity that has saved people from many nations in trouble in British waters ever since.

In 1968, the wreck of HMS Racehorse was located by a team of local divers. Although little remained of the hull of the ship, hundreds of artefacts were recovered and donated to the national collections. These included brass railings, parts of the rigging, arms and ammunition and even shoes and other personal effects of the crew. Today, the site of this important wreck is protected by a restricted area.

Accession number: 1968-0273
These small white quartz pebbles have not been carved, decorated or altered in any way. They can be found on most Manx beaches and are shaped by being rolled around as the tide washes in and out. Despite these humble origins, they have been found in archaeological sites that date from 6000 years ago, right up to 500 years ago.

We don’t know what their purpose was, but we do know that they were deliberately placed in domestic and burial sites, sometimes in an ordered pattern. Pebbles like this were often placed inside early Christian chapels known as keeills and have also been found in Viking Age graves.

At Keeill Vael near Castletown a large number had been placed in the area of the altar, almost like a mosaic. At Knock e Doonee near Andreas, a layer of these pebbles was part of a mound covering a Viking ship burial. In ancient Greece, the giving of a white stone was a sign of a sin forgiven or an obligation lifted. Perhaps these stones were symbols that the dead were now free from sin and responsibility.

Accession numbers: 1982-0002 – 0012
Flightless Great Auks became extinct in the mid-1800s due to the high demand for their down and the relative ease of hunting them.

Excavations in Perwick Cave in 1969 uncovered the remains of an Iron Age habitation site dating to between AD35 and 275. There were traces of cooked food and cooking fires, along with bones of fifteen species of bird (including the Great Auk), shellfish, a seal, a pony and a human burial. The reasons for the remains being in the cave are unclear. If the site was purely a domestic place, then the Iron Age people could have just thrown their rubbish into the nearby sea rather than let it pile up in the cave.

There is a possibility that the deposits at Perwick are the result of ritual activity rather than domestic. Whichever the reason, the remains are proof that the Great Auk once occupied the Manx coastline.

Accession number: 1982-0211
A number of these tiny beads were found in graves on St Patrick’s Isle during archaeological excavations in the 1980s. Some were found in graves of women and at least one man was buried with beads. But this type of bead seems to have been mostly associated with children and young people. One child had been buried with a necklace of six glass beads and two amber beads, another with around 22 of these blue beads.

We don't know what, or if, they symbolised anything in particular, but they are a relatively rare flash of colour from the past and are as bright and colourful as the day they were buried with their owners. The past wasn’t all about hand-to-mouth struggles, there were craftspeople around to make attractive accessories.

The beads also highlight the attention to detail needed from archaeologists who excavate sites like this. At St Patrick’s Isle, soil from graves was routinely sieved to recover the smallest pieces of evidence. Otherwise, how easy it would have been to miss this tiny object.

Accession numbers: 1984-0016/122
A conch shell brought home to the Isle of Man by a sailor 150 to 200 years ago. Conch is a common term used for the shells of medium to large sea snails found around the world. The snails are often eaten and their shells used as currency. When a hole is made in the shell, it is possible to blow into it and use it like a trumpet. It is a Manx tradition that conch shells are blown at weddings.

The conch also has a special place in Hindu culture. Conch trumpets are blown by priests during religious ceremonies and in Indian legend warriors sounded conches before battle. It may be that the Manx traditions are the result of the Island’s strong seafaring past, and were brought back to the Island along with the shells by Manx sailors.

This shell originally belonged to the donor’s great grandmother, Mrs Ann Mylchreest of Ronague (c.1825-1921) when she lived at Ballaharra, German. Mrs Mylchreest used the shell as a horn to call the farm workers in for their meals when they were working in the fields at Ballaharra farm.

The conch shell was later used as a garden ornament by the donor.

Accession number: 1990-0009
The miniature cupboard was made by Thomas Craine and is thought to be an apprentice piece that he made as a young man. The arched top has a star design with the date ‘1893’ and the masonic symbols of a set square and dividers. He may have made it to celebrate the end of his joinery apprenticeship, joining a Masonic Lodge or his engagement to Margaret Watterson.

The miniature piece of furniture is one of a group of pieces that Thomas Craine made and gave to his future wife, Margaret Watterson, as presents or love tokens. Other items included a pair of decorative shelves and two wooden boxes, one of which was made to look like a wooden ‘book’ and contained a hidden locked compartment for precious keepsakes.

What all the wooden objects have in common though is a great attention to detail. They reveal a desire by the young joiner to display his skills and patience by making a variety of decorative but miniature objects, often inscribed with his future wife’s name together with hearts and three legs designs.

Accession number: 1993-0076/1
This miniature three masted galleon was made in the 1930s when Philip Faragher was serving in the British merchant navy. The second light bulb with a miniature liner ‘steaming’ away has the date 1934 painted on the back of it and was made when he sailed with the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company.

By 1939, Philip Faragher had become Assistant Harbour Master in Douglas and during the Second World War he was the skipper of the Harbour Board’s dredger, Mannin. The Mannin was referred to as an ‘ugly but useful’ vessel in peacetime, but her work keeping the harbours and berths clear of silt was vital during wartime.

Captain Philip Faragher was also part of the merchant seamen’s pool. He was called up for duty manning merchant shipping on a rota basis. Tragically he and two other Manxmen died when the coastal steamer he was skippering, the S.S. Speke, sank at sea on the 28th September 1943 on a voyage between Liverpool and Preston.

Accession numbers: 1999-0089/1 & 2
The Electric Panoramic Clock was one of the most popular products of Vitascope Industries Ltd in the 1940s and 1950s. The clock was first patented in the early 1940s and went into production in 1946 when Vitascope opened a plastics factory in the Old Cross Hall in Ramsey. Within two years the factory was exporting the clocks around the world with orders going to Hong Kong and America as well as samples being sent to Buenos Aires and Australia.

The unique selling point of the electric clock was that it not only kept accurate time (and did not need winding up) but it was also decorative and lit up. The model ship moved back and forth and appeared to be sailing through the waves. The colour of the sky was constantly changing, over a 2 minute cycle, from a rose tinted dawn to a blood-red sunset. The clock was available in a variety of colours from dark brown and red to a pale cream, blue or pink.

The Vitascope company was part of the post-war transformation and expansion of the plastic industry – anything and everything could now be manufactured in plastic using injection moulding. Vitascope not only made electric clocks, but Three Legs and TT souvenir badges, automatic cigarette boxes and illuminated coloured advertising signs. Always looking for something new, in 1950 Vitascope were making a ‘Flying Saucer Toy’ which could be purchased for 2s 9d and was available in the London shops – have you ever seen one?

Accession number: 2000-0075
A large mint humbug, from the window display at Kelly's Rock Shop, Douglas. The large humbug would have made an impressive centrepiece for the shop display and demonstrated the skill of the people making the sticks of rock and sweets.

A stick of rock has been a staple part of British seaside holidays since the late 19th century. Tourists coming to the Isle of Man could watch different types of sweets being handmade in front of them at Kelly's Rock Shop in Douglas. The most exciting part was when the hot and almost solid sugar mixture was pulled, stretched and folded on the marble worktops to make anything from a striped humbug to sticks of rock.

The Quiggin family, who today make Kendal Mintcake in Cumbria, first made sweets in the Isle of Man. They made over 60 varieties including Coconut Ice, Bullseyes, Mona Cough Drops and Mint Pennants. They also lay claim to having made the first stick of lettered rock and to it being presented to Prince Albert when he visited the Island in the 1840s.

Exactly how did they put the Three Legs of Man into a stick of Manx rock?

Accession number: 2002-0035
Axes were used for many things, including butchering animals, cutting down trees and hollowing out logs to make boats. Some were purely decorative objects as their blades show no sign of wear from being used. They also show that even thousands of years ago ideas, materials and people were moving around. Axes made from Cumbrian stone have been found on the Island and the tin used to make the bronze axehead probably came from Cornwall.

These four axeheads show the technological development of the tools. The flint axehead is around six thousand years older than the bronze one, but there is a visible evolution in these four artefacts. The earliest metal axeheads copied the shape of earlier stone ones, but production technology progressed to use less metal whilst still creating a stronger tool.

Each one would have taken hours of skill and knowledge to produce and would have been very precious to its owner. Despite this connection, axeheads are rarely found with burials. Most that have been donated to the collections are chance finds, by people working the land or by metal detectorists.

Accession numbers: 2003-0297; 2012-0036; 2008-0249/1; 1954-3622
This intricate model of the Laxey Wheel is sculpted in sugar and is believed to have been part of the window display in one of the Douglas rock shops, in the early part of the Twentieth Century. The Laxey Wheel would have been instantly recognisable to the thousands of tourists who flocked to the Isle of Man each summer. It was (and still is) an iconic symbol of the Island, and almost from its completion in 1854 a visit to the Wheel was an essential part of the tourist’s holiday experience.

Sugar sculpture has a long history, and is known at least as far back as the Middle Ages. It peaked in popularity in the Eighteenth Century when elaborate table centrepieces would be created for elegant dinner parties. After the meal guests would be invited to break a piece off to eat or keep as a souvenir.

When combined with water and gum, sugar forms a pliable paste, which a skilled confectioner can shape to an elaborate design. When it dries, it hardens to form an extremely durable material, as this object testifies. Provided it is kept dry, this sculpture should easily last another 100 years.

Accession number: 2006-0238
Today most people are aware that Vikings probably did not have horns on their helmets, but this object owes more to popular myth than historical fact. In the 1960s there was growing interest in Viking culture and history. The 1958 Technicolor film The Vikings starring Kirk Douglas had been a world-wide hit, and many people on the Isle of Man were becoming more aware of their Viking heritage.

The Island had been colonised by Norsemen in the Eleventh Century, and the Norse kingdom of Man and the Isles survived until the 1200s. The last Viking King of Man is believed to be buried at Rushen Abbey.

In Peel in the 1960s a group of enthusiasts formed a re-enactment society, and sought to revive a tradition from the 1930s in which replica Viking longships were built in Peel. Each summer a Viking festival saw Viking encampments on the beach and other attractions for visiting tourists. Chief among the organisers of the revived event was George Cowley of Peel. Cowley regularly posed in Viking costume, including this helmet, and featured in the publicity for the Millennium of Tynwald in 1979 as an archetypal Manx Viking.

Accession number: 2006-0340/2
A taxidermy mount of a short-eared owl. Sadly, we think it had been hit by a car as its body was found on the road.

Birds of moorland and open country, short-eared owls are a little easier than other owls to spot because they are often active in the early morning or evening light. When hunting, they fly fairly low over the ground and can be recognised by their mottled brown, buff and cream colouring and by the large yellowish patch on the upper side of the outstretched wings. The dark smudges around the eyes and bright yellow irises give the owl a rather angry looking stare.

Like other species of owls, short-eared owl populations are getting smaller, probably in part due to loss of habitat. Nevertheless, they are quite widespread across the world. As their favourite prey, voles, are not present in the Isle of Man, our short-eared owls hunt woodmice, shrews and rats (known here as ‘longtails’) and sometimes take other birds.

In Manx, this owl is known as *hullad ny gurreyn*.

Accession number: 2008-0153
This miniature personal television was developed by the British inventor Sir Clive Sinclair, and was sold by Paul Aldridge's electronic shop on Buck's Road. Although maverick inventor Sinclair's company was shortly to go bankrupt, he was on the leading edge of a trend towards miniaturisation and personalisation of entertainment. This really took off with the Sony Walkman and would eventually lead to a range of products we are all familiar with today such as the iPod.

This television featured a miniaturised cathode ray tube, and could be comfortably viewed from one to two feet away. Today, these and other examples of Sinclair's inventions are considered highly collectable by electronics enthusiasts.

The donor of this item was, at the time of purchase, a lawyer working in Douglas. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the rise of the Island's role as an offshore finance centre resulted in growing affluence among the business and professional community, based around Athol Street. There would have been a ready market for high-end electronics such as this, as well as other luxury goods.

Accession number: 2009-0139/1
This wooden ship model was handmade by an Italian, when he was interned as an ‘enemy alien’ on the Isle of Man during the Second World War. A label on the model reads ‘By Mennela Aniello - Prisoner of War - ‘S’ Camp - Douglas (I.O.M.) Dec. 1943.’ ‘S Camp’ was one of several internment camps created around the Isle of Man by the British Government. Hotels and boarding houses were seized and surrounded with barbed wire. Several were on Douglas Promenade (including ‘S Camp’).

The hull of the ship model has been made from separate strips of wood to create a planking effect. Remember that materials were scarce during wartime.

From May 1940, the Isle of Man was a major centre for civilian internment in the British Isles. The majority of German, Austrian and Italian civilians interned would have spent some time on the Isle of Man. Although suspected of being dangerous Fifth Columnists and spies, many of the German and Austrian internees were refugees from Nazi Germany and were eventually released in 1941-2. In contrast many of the Italian internees were economic migrants who had been living in Britain for several years. Some were merchant sailors captured from Italian ships. They found it more difficult to prove they were anti-fascist or chose not to, many were interned until 1944-45 including the maker of this ship model.

Another of Aniello Mennella’s ship models can be seen at the Manx Aviation and Military Museum, next to Ronaldsway Airport.

Accession number: 2009-0150
LEAD TACKS

DATE: c. AD 900
PLACE: ARBORY

These are made from lead and over 200 have been found from one site. Lead is soft, so it can’t be hammered into wood and it bends easily so it seems an odd choice of material to make nails or tacks from. They were found on what we think was a Viking market site.

The Vikings have a reputation for raiding and pillaging but they depended most of all on trade. Temporary market sites were set up by the Vikings in places along main trade routes.

Perhaps if wooden structures in these markets were covered with cloth or hide and if both had pre-drilled holes, then lead tacks could be used to fix them together. The tacks could then be bent to secure the fastening. Lead was an easily available material, it was cheap and didn’t need a lot of skill to work. It wouldn’t matter if a few nails were lost whilst travelling, setting up and dismantling. Maybe these are the remains of Scandinavian “ready-to-assemble” kiosks or pop up shops!

Accession number: 2012-0010/4
These are the delicate heart-shaped shells (tests) of burrowing sea urchins, sometimes known as ‘sea potatoes’. In Manx they are called *crockan traie*.

In life, a heart urchin is covered by short spines which help it to dig its burrow in sand to a depth of 10 to 20 centimetres. Like other sea urchins, it moves about with flexible tube-like feet which protrude through rows of tiny holes in the shell. Extra-long tube feet are extended by the urchin up through its breathing hole to the surface of the sand to collect food, such as fine particles of dead seaweed, then transferring this down to the mouth on the underside of the body.

At low tide it is often possible to detect a heart urchin's burrow by the small circular depression in the surface of the sand which marks the top of its breathing tube. However, we normally see them only when they die and are dislodged from their burrows, for example by stormy weather. These heart urchin tests were found washed up on Port Erin beach in October 2011.

Accession numbers: 2012-0022/1-2
‘QUEEN OF MAN’ SASH

DATE: 1963
PLACE: DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN

This sash was won by Miss Louise Holden who was crowned ‘Queen of Man’ at a beauty contest in Douglas in 1963. Such competitions, though largely discredited now, were a major feature of British seaside resorts in the post war years, before falling foul of changing social attitudes in the 1970s.

Today the prospect of young women in swimwear being judged on their looks and figure by a panel of usually middle aged men is considered distasteful by many. However, contestants were often motivated to take part by the significant cash prizes often on offer to the winner, and indeed Louise had entered a number of such contests around Britain in the 1960s.

The item has a further link to the Manx tourist industry, which was still a major part of the Island’s economy at this time. Louise gave up her beauty career when she married the son of the Gypsy fortune teller at White City amusement park, Onchan. The Gypsy encampment at Douglas Head, and later at Onchan, was a feature of the summer season from the 1880s until the 1960s.

Accession number: 2013-0036
An hour glass was a simple but effective piece of early technology that allowed the user to accurately measure time before the arrival of cheap mass-produced clocks and watches.

A common sight in many churches would be the hour glass stood on the pulpit to serve as ‘stopwatch’ to time the vicar’s sermon. The hourglass would also serve as a symbol of time itself as the congregation watched the ‘sands of time’ run out. As a symbol of life and death, hourglasses were often carved on gravestones although they now symbolise the perfect 3 minute boiled egg or a problem on your computer as the hourglass spins on the screen.

This hour glass was used by three generations of the Cosnahan family to time their sermons when they were vicars at Kirk Braddan. John Cosnahan became vicar in 1733 and was Vicar-General for the Island. Following his death in 1750, his son, Joseph Cosnahan, took on the role until his death in 1768 when he was succeeded by his brother-in-law, Thomas W.J.Woods. The 3rd generation to use the hour glass was Joseph’s son, Julius Cosnahan who became vicar of Braddan in 1785 but died a little over a year later. All three vicars of Braddan are buried under ‘The Great Stone’ at Santon churchyard.

Accession number: 2013-0037
This humble Manx National Heritage pennant has been on an extraordinary journey. In 2011 it was carried by astronaut Nicole Stott aboard the space shuttle Discovery. It was then presented by NASA to Manx National Heritage.

Nicole has relatives from the Isle of Man, but this is not the Island’s only link to space exploration. The so called ‘aerospace-hub’ is a collection of high-tech industries based on the Isle of Man, which provide components and expertise for space flight. As mankind’s knowledge of the universe expands through exploration, and with a future Mars landing often discussed, this is an exciting part of the Island’s economic base.

Furthermore, recent industry analysis stated that the Isle of Man ‘punches above its weight’ in this field, and amazingly rated it as the fifth most likely country in the world to achieve a moon landing in the near future.

Accession number: 2013-0049/1
Beachcombing can reveal many natural treasures, from colourful pebbles and fossils to shark egg cases and sea shells. Once in a while, something unusual turns up, like this very large claw, found by a young boy walking along the beach with his mum. The claw was brought to the Manx Museum and identified as that of a common lobster.

Most people are familiar with lobsters as expensive seafood and just the right size for a dinner plate. However, left undisturbed lobsters can live for 15 to 20 years and reach lengths of more than a metre. This 26 cm long claw must have come from a huge lobster which obviously evaded capture for a long time.

In life, lobsters are dark blue to black and live fairly close to shore at depths of up to 60 metres. They hide in crevices or tunnels under rocks and are scavengers, feeding on almost any dead animals or plants they can find.

There is a long tradition of lobster fishing with pots or creels around the Isle of Man, but fears are growing here as elsewhere that overfishing is damaging the marine environment. To prevent this, pot fishermen have agreed with the Isle of Man Government on measures to protect and manage sustainably the stock of lobsters and crabs off the Island’s south coast.

In Manx, a lobster is called ‘gimmagh’.

Accession number: 2016-0001
MANX MINERALS

DATE: VARIOUS
PLACE: FOXDALE, MAUGHOLD AND LANGNESS

The Isle of Man’s history of mining was built on important reserves of minerals, especially the metal ores of lead, zinc, copper and iron. Other less valuable minerals such as quartz, calcite and dolomite, extracted as a by-product of mining, were regarded as waste. Although those with colourful or impressive crystals were often kept as decorative objects or souvenirs.

Shown here are some examples of copper ore: chalcopyrite (metallic golden yellow with rainbow hints) and green malachite which is shot through with blue azurite. Also on display are two of the many varieties of quartz (also known as spar). The large dark grey crystals are known as smoky quartz and the orange crystals are an iron-stained form.

Accession numbers:
1. 1975-0091 Iron-stained quartz
2. L21012 Smoky quartz
3. 1954-1431/1 Chalcopyrite
4. 1966-0049/13 Malachite
Although 4000 years old, this arrowhead shows that prehistoric weapons weren’t all chunky and merely functional. The ability to make something so fine out of this everyday but quite difficult to work material, enabled our ancestors to thrive. Held up to the light, this arrowhead is translucent and almost glows. The fine crafting also gave a very practical advantage. It made the arrowhead more efficient at moving through the air and hitting the prey.

This arrowhead was found by Alan Skillan. An amateur archaeologist, Alan spent much of his free time walking the fields in the north of the Island. He collected thousands of flint tools of many descriptions and most importantly kept meticulous records of where each one was found. He donated his collection to the nation in 2006 and generosity such as this contributes hugely to the collections and to the knowledge available to people in the future.

Accession numbers: 2006-0056/7
MINER’S CABINET

DATE: c.1880
PLACE: LAXEY, ISLE OF MAN

This object is known as a spar box. They were made by miners from Laxey during their spare time, using waste material from the mining industry. The Laxey mines chiefly produced lead and zinc ore, which were in high demand in Victorian Britain. Zinc in particular is a component of brass. The Laxey mines at their height were the chief producers of this metal in the British Isles.

Along with metal ore, large quantities of quartz and other minerals came to the surface, but were discarded. The miners built these into decorative cabinets, which would catch the light and were reminiscent of the magnificent natural displays of quartz which they came across in underground galleries.

The Laxey Wheel also attracted a significant number of tourists at this time, and a piece of quartz was considered a good souvenir. Some miners were able to earn additional income by selling cabinets like this one to wealthy visitors. This example is of further interest in that it incorporates the Manx Gaelic Ellan Vannin Son Dy Brach, Isle of Man for ever. The Manx language was still widely spoken at this time.

Accession number: R-0836
Puffer Fish are not native to the seas of the Isle of Man, but are found in tropical waters around the world. It is one of the most poisonous creatures known to science, and as part of its defence mechanism against predators can inflate its body by filling its stomach with water, thus exposing its sharp spines.

This specimen illustrates the Victorian fascination with nature, which was expressed through taxidermy. Exotic specimens of birds or fish, often from the far corners of Britain’s empire, would be found carefully mounted and on display in many Victorian drawing rooms.

It was donated to the Manx Museum in 1930 by Miss Emma Caley, of Selborne Road in Douglas. She was the daughter of a retired grocer, one of the wealthiest businessmen in Douglas, who probably had a network of trading contacts around the world. It is quite likely that the Puffer Fish was originally a gift to him, from a business partner in the Far East.

Accession number: R-1289
LIFE BUOY FROM HMS MANXMAN

DATE: c. 1945
PLACE: ISLE OF MAN

This life buoy is from the Royal Navy minelayer HMS Manxman. Launched in 1941, she was remembered as being remarkably fast. Manxman had an eventful war, taking part in operations in the Mediterranean, the capture of Madagascar from Vichy French forces, and later in the Far East as part of the British Pacific Fleet. In the 1950s she was deployed during the Suez Crisis, and in the 1960s was stationed at Singapore. During this time her mascot was a Manx cat named Orry. Manxman was eventually scrapped in 1973.

HMS Manxman made a goodwill visit to the Isle of Man in September 1946, bringing with her a number of official gifts, including a Japanese officer’s sword from the surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay the previous year, and this life ring. Shortly after her launch she had been adopted by the Manx people, who sent a silk white ensign to her to be flown in battle, and there remained a close association between the ship and the Island for the remainder of her service.

Accession number: 2005-0146
Tree sparrows have become alarmingly scarce in north-west Europe over the last 40 to 50 years, at least partly due to loss of farmland feeding habitat with intensification of agriculture. They are not a common sight on the Isle of Man but small flocks can still be seen around the fields of the northern plain. Their Manx name is Jallyn Ny Miljyn or ‘Sparrow of the Tree’.

Tree Sparrows are closely related to the more common house sparrow. Adults of both species eat mainly seeds but also need insects to feed their young. Tree sparrows build their nests in holes in trees, walls and nest boxes.

In 2007, the Manx Bird Atlas found 156 to 240 breeding pairs with just under a thousand birds overwintering on the Island. Although tree sparrows are not thought to be migratory birds, they do move some distance after the breeding season.

Sadly this adult male bird was caught by a domestic cat. Cat kills are unfortunately a common source of specimens for the museum collections.

Accession number: 2007-0042