



Working together on the Prestonpans Tapestry.

As the Tapestry followed the Prince's 1745 campaign trail from July/September across the Highlands and East Coast more than 10,000 visitors came to see it. **Gordon Prestoungrange** comments on this remarkable achievement.

As the project progressed, nicknames emerged and were adopted. The core team of stitchers proclaimed they were 'panel beaters' whilst individuals admitted to becoming stitch-addicts or junkies with earnest discussion of detox routines. 'Some weeks I couldn't put it down, other weeks I couldn't pick it up'.

'Lemsip Linda' had to start her tapestry panel all over when she spilt the medicine on her linen! Others more prosaically talked of 'stitching during the long winter months' – and it was a tough winter. Whilst a poet amongst them mused: 'stitching frees yet challenges the mind'.

Habitual behaviours developed – one group that could have imbibed whisky galore opted to take Earl Grey tea; another ate McGhee's cakes when they

met every Tuesday. Others reported just how far their panels had travelled, not only on holidays to France or Norfolk but to Glen Nevis and Portsoy – the latter when a coterie of Port Seton and Cockenzie stitchers became obsessed with rowing their Boatie Blest, their crews becoming 2010 World Champions in their class!

Husbands (all but one stitcher were female) came in for many a compliment, and sympathy, as did the occasional cat and dog. All watched patiently and husbands attended to domestic duties many stitchers would normally have done. Fellow embroiderers were greatly valued for their mutual contributions, suggesting stitching ideas and showing what they'd achieved at the Thursday drop-in and Midway workshops.



Lynne Schroder and Elizabeth Jones at work on their panels.

The website also played a significant role here even though only two thirds of stitchers were au fait with the technology.

'But where were the moon and the stars?'

All stitchers were determined to get 'their panel' as right as possible and from the outset were given every encouragement to do so. Andrew Crummy and his history counsellors had done their best to get all the details historically correct, but there were lots of details that are subject to interpretation or that have been lost in time.

Perhaps the most spectacular instance of correctly second guessing was at Blair Castle where the Roberstons had the panel in hand. The Prince stayed several days watching bowls and evidently eating his first pineapple. There are several stories of his sojourn but few gave proper precedence to the exiled Jacobite William, Duke of Atholl and his cousin Lady Lude – who organised a Ball.

Stitching frees yet challenges the mind.

Another stitcher was greatly taxed as to the position in the sky of the moon and the stars on 20/21 September. No less an authority than the French Astronomical Society was successfully consulted.

At Glenfinnan debate raged and remains unresolved, as to where precisely the Prince's Standard was raised. The present Cameron of Lochiel (a Founding Patron of the Battle Trust) was consulted and added a stitch or two to the panel himself.

At Dunbar the stitcher's husband was despatched to the harbour to locate 'Cope's Steps' which he successfully did; at Fassfern the bedroom where the Prince slept was explored to see just how easily he could have plucked the iconic white rose outside the window. Others, as on Eriskay, questioned and corrected the disposition of the islands offshore, and yet more adjusted the architecture of the buildings.

Alas it's finished!

This community 'arts' project, creating the world's longest tapestry, reaped all the benefits that could have been hoped for. For some it provided an absorbing opportunity to help forget for a while a current sadness or to distract a little from a debilitating illness.

The sheer beauty of what was emerging raised the spirits and the souls of all concerned. Elderly mothers and daughters worked together on panels, in one case mother was losing her sight but was made to still feel useful by helping with this project. Grandchildren watched,

often puzzled, but learned many lessons in Scottish history and sometimes added a stitch or two.

Everyone said they couldn't wait to see it finished and that they desperately wanted to see the entire tapestry once it was stitched together. They'd fly in from America, or Ireland or France, or descend from the Highlands to the Lowlands, for that sight. A 'private viewing for everyone who stitched, was a must. So was the publication of a book of the Tapestry as a keepsake.

Because we all recognise the uniqueness of embroidery as a medium the Trust further resolved that the real McCoy must be toured, paraded across the nation and in due course the Diaspora. It was resolved to carry it across the Highlands in triumph to the very places the Prince visited in 1745 on the very dates he was there. It had to travel to Eriskay and Arisaig and Glenfinnan and Fort William (although the Prince never took that Fort!), to Blair Castle, Perth,



Hilary Williams relaxes besides her High Bridge embroidery.

Dunblane and Sterling. In each of these locations the stitchers' friends and family and their local communities have been able to see what together 'they' have accomplished and perhaps learn a little more of their history. The simple message is that so very much can be achieved by 'voluntarism'. What we behold is quite simply astonishing, amazing, incredible.

Legacies from the Legacy.

At the Battle Trust we anticipate several major outcomes – legacies of our legacy from the Prince.

First and foremost we expect to heighten national awareness of our campaign to create a vibrant Living History Centre in Prestonpans with the Tapestry as a prime exhibit.

Secondly, we expect to see a surge of interest in and involvement with sewing/ stitching/ embroidery. Seeing what has been achieved will certainly trigger ideas and aspirations amongst others to create a similarly beautiful artwork.

Thirdly we expect to see the Tapestry visited by a host of young students as they study the Scottish History curriculum with it becoming a powerful new medium that supplements the Trust's existing programme of re-enactments and BattleGaming.

10 million thanks to everyone who stitched a stitch and to everyone who made their stitching possible.

Fourthly, we shall trumpet the cause of 'voluntarism'. It can move mountains – of linen and wool – and it can move hearts and minds.

Fifthly, we expect to see a greater surge in the continuing re-assertion of our community self-esteem in Prestonpans and our neighbours in Port Seton and Cockenzie, through the arts, as we all



Gillian Curtis-Hart and Margaret McCabe ponder colour ideas for their panels.

make our way in the 21st century.

There is every right to be immensely proud of the sense of place our heritage has afforded our community – not only arising from this iconic battle in 1745 but from The Pans' industrial contribution to the Scottish nation across a thousand years.

An international charitable appeal has now been launched to help fund the creation of a permanent home for the Tapestry in Prestonpans.

Donations to the Battle of Prestonpans charitable trust can be made by mail to Battle Trust 1745, 227/ 229 High Street, Prestonpans EH32 9BE.

A comprehensive full colour 272pp Guidebook is available from the above address for £20 + £6 p&p; a CD from Greentrax of the Songs and Music of the Tapestry and a 25 minute DVD of Stitches for Charlie for £12 each + £2 p&p.



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