

# Stitching The Prestonpans Tapestry

by Dorie Wilkie

My own awareness that our tapestry was to be created arose from seeing an appeal for volunteer stitchers on the outside rear cover of the 3Harbours 2009 programme. And as my volunteering at the National Trust for Scotland was just coming to an end I felt such a project might be ideal. So I emailed the contact and by return Gordon, the Baron of Prestoungrange responded with a brief message of 'welcome'. Curiosity aroused as I had no idea there was a feudal Baron in Prestonpans but still not hugely convinced this was a serious project, I asked for further information and that was precisely what I received – all the notes from planning meetings, sketch drawings, grand ideas. I was convinced. This was indeed serious and potentially very intriguing!

Prior to my involvement the Baron had commissioned a leading local artist from the Prestoungrange Arts Festival, Andrew Crummy, to 'create a tapestry like that in Bayeux'. His wife Carmel and friend Kate researched wools, and linen in preparation for such an ambitious project. Along with several other lady stitchers, I attended the first meeting at the Prestoungrange Gothenburg in Prestonpans where the Baron enthusiastically gave us a history lesson about the Battle in Prestonpans in 1745, the route the Prince and Cope had taken to that conflict, and an outline of the vision for the panels accompanying regular re-enactments in the future.

The intended outcome for Prestonpans at large was a Living History Centre where tourists, specialist visitors and school parties could come and see the finished work and learn the history it recounted. The Baron had visited Bayeux and bought back a d-i-y embroidery kit which had fired off the original notion. And at this point it is appropriate that I should clarify that what we have created is in fact an 'embroidery' but, like the Bayeux Tapestry, although neither were woven on a loom we've called our's a tapestry too.

Early sketches of most panels had already been drawn by Andrew Crummy and they were laid out for us to choose a panel which might interest us. Reasons for the choices we made varied from being located in an area where someone had personally lived or of which they had ancestral or own fond memories. Or we simply liked the sketch. For example Esther Sharpley's panel is set where she and her late husband camped and walked all around Glenfinnan; and Jacquie McNally's parents were married in the Salutation Inn Perth depicted on her panel. My first choice was a panel with Fife in the background as my husband's family hail from there.

One of Andrew's earliest 'final' sketches – although 'final' as we were all soon to find out was open to further interpretation – was a cityscape of Edinburgh depicting that part of the story when General Sir John Cope, the Prince's adversary in the field, asked Edinburgh to bake bread in a hurry for all his soldiers as they departed into the Highlands shortly after the Prince landed in Eriskay. Andrew Crummy asked that I stitch it as a sample. So, after a successful cataract operation I took it on holiday with me and stitched all the outlines and brought it back to show him. He just looked at it in silence. Nervously I asked him if it was alright, perhaps I had misunderstood what I was to do.....? Finally he observed that he had never seen his work stitched in wool and how very different a drawing on white paper looked when placed on a soft grey coloured linen! Then, fortunately he said he liked it greatly and wanted to use it in the final line-up! This 'sample' over time developed into *my* panel and I had to hand over that Fife panel I had initially coveted to another embroiderer who has made a lovely job of it.

## Co-ordinating Ourselves

As time moved on I got to wondering how 'they' were going to co-ordinate the stitchers, keep proper uniformity across the work, determine precise colours, type of wool and linen and the required levels of workmanship.

After offering to help out once too often I was invited to do just that and the grand title of 'chief/ lead stitcher' was conferred on me!

From childhood I had drawn and sewn things like dolls clothes, graduating to sewing clothes for myself, commissions for others and selling at craft fairs over the years. After having my two daughters I was able to study for my City and Guild in Embroidery and Design at Telford College in the mid 1980s learning traditional stitchery then making contemporary examples. Later I attended Leith School of Art for several years when it first opened. Along the way I had also trained as a counsellor so I felt reasonably confident about filling the role but it was certainly going to be more of a co-ordinating leader than a chief!

It must be said that, although the long standing Arts Festival team were vastly experienced at mobilising volunteers and mounting painting and pottery exhibitions and other varied events, none of them were yet aware how different sewing is in comparison to these mediums especially in the time needed to complete the task. Hand sewing is not a quick thing to do and people vary in the speed and the confidence with which they work. And once the panels are completed the 'end' stitching team has to address the processes of blocking, backing, joining and preparing for exhibition. So I have to confess to some very considerable anxiety for a while both with the plans and expectations they had for a completely different arts discipline and the time scale envisaged. Originally the tapestry was to be finished by 1st September 2010 but that was brought forward to the end



*The Prestonpans Tapestry – Hope Ambition and Victory!*

of June 2010. It is to the huge credit of nigh on two hundred volunteer stitchers across the country who have put in hundreds of hours of work to achieve their fantastic panels in record time. We have produced currently the longest 'tapestry' in the world although not the largest, that honour going to the World Tapestry now housed in British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol which took 23 years to make.

### Who were our stitchers?

How did we recruit our wonderful team of stitchers? By the time I came on board the Baron, artist Andrew Crummy and colleagues had already visited Nantes and St Nazaire in France, Eriskay and a host of other locations along the route that Bonnie Prince Charlie took, recruiting stitchers along the way. This initial group plus those brought in like myself via the the 3Harbours publicity continued to grow through local press articles, friends and family and networks spreading the word. We even ended up with a waiting list of people keen to take a panel. This proved valuable as one or two panels were returned where the original stitcher

was not able to complete the panel due to unforeseen circumstances. It was invaluable when Andrew Crummy decided yet another panel was required which he continued to do as late as April 2010. The original remit of 79 x 1000mm x 461mm panels which I initially thought so daunting has eventually ended up with the 104 presented in this book, plus a logo panel and Stitchers' Roll.

Behind every panel there is of course a human story about our volunteers. They range across all ages, (the eldest is Bettine who is 88 years young,) social backgrounds, needlework abilities, full /part time workers – everyone with differing family situations from many locations across Scotland then to Ireland, England, France, the USA and Australia. This has all necessarily influenced their approach to their work as you will discover as you read their biographies on the pages facing their panels. Some had never embroidered before but wanted to be part of the project, or had limited experience having only stitched kits, or had vague memories of making aprons at school. On the other hand we had more than a few very experienced stitchers who had attended various courses, were active



*left to right some of our stitchers  
Liz Neilson, Anne Dickson, Mary Clements  
and Isabel Weaver*

makers, and were able to adapt more easily to the freer style of embroidery required for the panels. The more experienced helped others with their expertise at the noisy Thursday morning drop-in sessions we set up for nine months in Andrew Crummy's studio in Cockenzie and in specially convened groups across the country. Sadly we only have one man stitching a whole panel, Michal Dalaigh in Ireland.

For some of our stitchers the project offered them a grand chance to meet new friends and continue in small groups afterwards, for others it has been a therapeutic process after a bereavement, illness or a reason to leave their homes and meet others, a focus for their creativity. We discovered there were many individuals and stitching groups around the various areas who weren't aware of one another but are now. The word I shall always remember being most bandied about over the months was 'addicted' and apart from setting up another project..... I'm not sure how to detox our stitchers. Many husbands and partners have been neglected as we have threaded up and the hours slipped by getting that shield right.

218

Some have gone to extraordinary lengths to get accurate information about their part in the story e.g. Vennetta Evans wanted to get the moon and stars on the night of September 21st 1745 right for her panel as the Highlanders marched along the Riggonhead Defile. Her search led her to the Astronomer Royal and from him to his French equivalent who actually had the necessary records. Sandra Casey persuaded today's Cameron of Lochiel to add a few stitches to the panel the Fort William Group worked on which was telling of his ancestor's role. Jacquie McNally involved Viscount Strathallan, who commanded the Prince's horsemen. Others spent hours scanning books and paintings for plaids and tartans of the time sharing their ideas.

### **Early Highland military uniform.**

For the Highlanders their clan systems, clothes, colour and weaponry were a mark of distinction among themselves and a contrast to the Lowland Scots. To outsiders they were seen as 'exotic'. There are contemporary pictures held at Windsor Castle of the rank and file Highlanders as they appeared in 1746 painted by Morier for the Duke of Cumberland. A Swiss artist, Morier was commissioned to paint a complete series of the regiments of the British army as well as Royal portraits and his work has always been considered extremely accurate. In the 'Incident of the Scottish

Rebellion 1745' the Highlanders represented were derived from prisoners taken at the time and give a good idea of their dress.<sup>1</sup> John Telfer Dunbar examined the picture and describes their dress in detail. One has his trews being fastened with red garters and black over-lines, in varying thickness and regular pattern his waistcoat darker in pattern, red and black unlike the trews. The jacket has a red background with dark green and white stripes underneath wearing a white shirt and brown undergarment. Blue bonnet, white cockade and black sporran. Others very similar but wearing slightly different woven tartans, wearing a kilt of red with blue and black lines, and light red waistcoat, red, black, and green hose'. Each figure is described in detail all wearing a variety of tartans on their kilts, plaids,



*Detail of a shield*

trews and hose. They were wielding broadswords, bill-hooks, pistols and holding circular targes with central spikes (half an ell in length). These images and descriptions are a pictorial record of at least 23 tartans worn by eight Highlanders, none of which are recognized by experts as 'clan' tartans.

The Highlander's habit was a belted plaid called *breacan* woven in fine wool or *eileadh* when referring to the pleated long kilt – the Gaelic word for tartan being *breacan*<sup>2</sup> – which was a large piece of tartan cloth approximately 10 x 2 yards. Generally a plaid – Gaelic *plaid* meaning blanket – was woven in one direction and tartan referring to checked or coloured cloth with lines woven in both directions forming a sett.<sup>2</sup> There was no uniformity of 'clan or district' tartans with symmetrical designs people think of today until the late eighteenth even early nineteenth century. There is no mention by Jacobite bards at the time of 'clan' tartans<sup>3</sup> the tartans referring only to differing colours and patterns (setts), created and varying by the thickness of line in the warp or weft in the weaving.

However 20 years earlier, General Wade in 1725 when employed to demilitarize the Highlands, tried to create some form of uniformity for recruits, by directing his officers to provide plain clothing and bonnets in Highland dress for non-commissioned officers, and the plaid for soldiers of each company to be as near as they can of 'sort and colour'.<sup>1</sup>

The pleated part of the long kilt hung below the waist while the rest of it was pinned at the shoulder with silver, brass or iron, and it doubled as a blanket at night as the winter plaids were extremely warm and in the summer, light and airy. It was suggested this gave the Highlander greater freedom of movement over rocky landscapes, crossing bogs and rivers unlike breeches which would have to be removed to keep them dry to prevent ill health.<sup>4</sup> Apart from being practical and cheap they were classless. This evolved through practicality to the *feileadh beag* (small kilt) phillabeg worn with stockings of the same tartan or plain and coloured garters (sometimes with with hay or straw garters). There are however also many references to trews or short hose of wool and tartans which sometimes lengthened into tight trousers or *triubhus*.

*A fighting Highlander*





Some Highland plaids

Under their plaids and tartans they wore a belted shirt made of wool or linen called a *lenicroich* or large shirt, some dyed a saffron colour and apparently not washed too frequently. Many Highland men wore a short coat or *cota-goirid* described as closing with gilt clips worn over waistcoats often of different tartans, as well as plain fabrics worn with trews or breeches under the large shirt.<sup>1</sup> Stocks or neckerchiefs were worn not only for fashion or warmth but for some protection against sword blades, while gentlemen wore lace jabots and cuffs representing their status. A 'Short History of the Highland Regiment' published 1743 describes the Highlander 'wearing a sort of thin pump or brogue so light it did not impede his running, or ability to advance or retreat with swiftness. A small leather purse/pouch or sporran with semi-circular brass clasp could hang from the belt sometimes made from badger, goat or seal skins and in certain portraits embellished with designs. The leather was dressed with birch bark and made into goods by each house in smaller communities'.

However it was the Gaelic tradition of wearing a ribbon, rosette or piece of silk on their bonnets that identified friend from foe not their tartans. J. Ray<sup>5</sup> quotes coming upon a young Highlander who stated he was a Campbell, and was asked to identify himself by his bonnet. The Highland bonnet was therefore a very important item of clothing in a man's wardrobe. They were predominantly blue wool, sometimes dark green or dark red, and were not made of tartan. They were usually worn flat on the head and around 1745 were generally at least 12 inches across and decorated as follows:

A white cockade (ribbon or fabric in a bow or rose shape) for Jacobites, worn in front. Red or yellow crosses of cloth or ribbon for the Loyalists. Clan – a sprig of your Clan's plant badge identified you, worn in front. Feathers – worn only by chiefs, sub-chiefs, cadets, or senior Clan officials in some clans.

Boss – (the wool pom-pom) rare, possibly occasionally worn by those in military command positions so they can be identified from behind by the men following them.

Metal Clan badges – not worn in the 18th Century<sup>6</sup>

*I'll sell my rock, I'll sell my reel,  
My rippling-kame and spinning wheel,  
To buy my lad a tartan plaid,  
A braid sword, durk, and white cockade.* **By Robert Burns**

## The Highland Army's dress

Prince Charles Edward Stuart adopted Highland dress for 'uniforms' for his army in 1745 and thereafter tartan became a potent symbol for Jacobitism perhaps as a result of a gift of Highland dress from Scottish Jacobites before he arrived in Scotland. A repeated phrase in Jacobite songs of his soldiers describes blue bonnets and tartan plaid, or tartan trews and 'laigh-heeled shoes'.<sup>2</sup> However while a fugitive later in the campaign Hugh McDonald of Baleshare described meeting Prince Charles on Uist wearing borrowed clothes from Lady Clanranald, 'a tartan short coat and vest, a linen nightcap, face and hands with soot drops, a short kilt, tartan hose and brogues, his upper coat of English cloth'.<sup>1</sup> Another recorded story of the time whilst the Prince was a fugitive in the Hebrides was that having been provided with a kilt he leapt in the air saying 'he only required an



*Blue bonnets and white cockades*





*Copes redcoats*

itch to feel a complete Highlander'!<sup>1a</sup> A letter written by an attorney of Macclesfield in 1745 describes the Highland army 'walking in regular order' with bagpipes playing instead of drums at the head of each column of their respective regiments. All in Highland dress except 'ye body Guards who wore Blue bound with red. The Prince was in Highland dress with a blue waistcoat bound with silver, a blue cap. He was a very handsome person of a man rather tall, exactly proportioned and walks well'.<sup>1b</sup>

We can see from contemporary portraits what those of status wore, embellishing their tartans with heavy gold lace and ornamented belts and the shirts ruffled with delicate white lace. A description of Alexander MacDonnel of Glengarry returning from France to take part in the Jacobite Rising has him wearing a 'short coat and belted plaid of red and black, richly embroidered with gold and faced with white silk. The waistcoat made of white silk and gold embroidered, with ornamented buttons like those of the coat, richly chased and gilt. The belt is ornamented with silver mountings set with jewels. His attendant/carnach holds the chief's small flat blue bonnet distinguished by the red and white cockade. The attendant is dressed in scarlet cloth 'short coat', waistcoat and a red tartan feile-beag, reckoned to be the first image of the short kilt 1747.'<sup>6</sup> Also Lord George Murray is depicted in a painting in Blair Castle as wearing a blue bonnet with white cockade, belted plaid of green, blue and red tartan the warp only having red. Looking at the paintings sometimes the figure is recorded wearing a combination of several tartans, as well as patterned hose and garters.

The first recorded example of kilt is 1692 and is in the collection of the Scottish Tartans Society. By 1749 the Act of Proscription<sup>7</sup> banned the wearing of tartans, Highland dress, speaking Gaelic and playing bagpipes, except by government troops, but it was repealed in 1785. This ban had perhaps the greatest effect on the evolution Highland dress with Lowland influences, the loss of expertise in weaving and dying during that time all contributing. A Gaelic song in 1746 in praise of Highland dress warned King George of the loss of revenue from customs when there would be a lack of demand for the imported dyestuffs.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the panels there is a selection of wigs which were worn at the time by a variety of people on different occasions and treated in a variety of stitches – discussed later. During this time various colours were worn although white was becoming more popular and the curls were getting





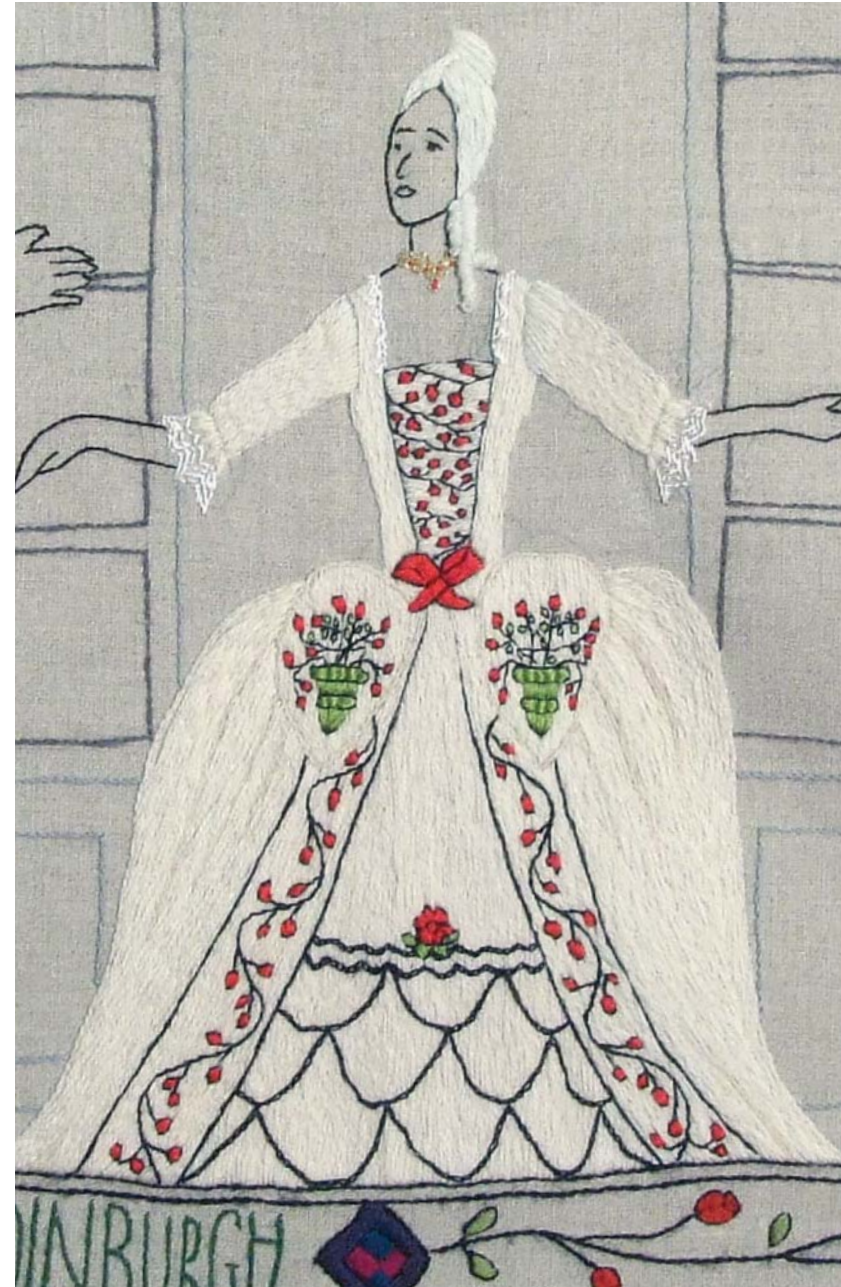
*Fabulous wigs!*

tighter. Later wigs or the natural hair were worn long, brushed back from the forehead and *clubbed* or tied back at the nape of the neck with a black ribbon. A bag wig gathered the back hair in a black silk bag worn by higher social classes.<sup>5</sup>

We don't have too many ladies featured throughout the story but *earasoids* (lady's shawl or horse blanket), or *arisoids* were commonly worn by women in the Highlands and Islands as an outer or over garment over either a short or long gown with a waistcoat over two petticoats, of stripes or tartan. Some *arisoids* may be seen in the Highland Folk Museum or Inverness Museum, also one dated 1726 in the Scottish Tartans collection. A plaid consisted of a rectangular piece of finer woollen material two by three yards and sometimes for those of wealth and status, wool lined with silk, or silk for best wear.<sup>8</sup> Described as usually having a white ground with red, yellow and dark green coloured stripes. Depending on status fastened with a silver, iron or brass large buckle with celtic designs and set with stones quite often. A description of the time the '*undress of the ladies*' was the plaid. '*It is made of silk or fine worsted, chequered with various lively colours, two breadths wide, and three yards in length; it is brought over the head, and may hide or discover the face, according to the wearer's fancy or occasion; it reaches to the waist behind; one corner falls as low as the ankle on one side; and the other part, in folds, hangs down from the opposite arm?*'<sup>2</sup> 'while around the head was still worn a kerchief of fine linen, closely fitting, with its loose ends tapering down the back. The women of this class went barefoot during the greater part of the year.' Young girls wore a ribbon around their hair until they were married or had a child when they wore a form of linen cap, *am breid*, white tied on by silk or pinned. Edmund Burt also mentions that women mostly went bare foot but servants were given an allowance for shoes to be worn on Sundays!<sup>2</sup>

However, Burt also noted '*Highland women of fashion ... generally well-dressed in the English mode*' when they wore a simple chemise or sark with a striped, plain or unusually tartan petticoat under hooped, open fronted skirts. Or depending how fashionable the circles were that they moved in,

*A fine lady in Palace of Holyroodhouse*





Lady Lude

corseted bodices with panniers holding the skirts out over the hips. This evolved into sack backed gowns, closed skirts with low necks filled with a lacy fichu, the fullness falling from the box pleats at the back of the neckline into a small train. We have a magnificent example of one such in Marietta di Ciacca's panel 98 as the Prince held Balls at Holyrood Palace.

Alan Ramsay painted Flora MacDonald in a white wide sleeved chemise, tied with a pink bow at the elbows; a sky blue sleeveless top over a wide skirt, and a tartan stole fastened around her back shoulders on her right shoulder, with white roses in her hair and bosom (in the Bodleian Library). An early painting of about 1745 shows the daughter of Sir Patrick Murray of Ochertyre, Helen, wearing a tartan dress with a red background and dark blue, green and black stripes. Her dress is corseted with a stomacher, and the neckline is low with a lace fichu, the three quarter sleeves show her sark underneath edged with deep lace and had a full skirt. She holds a white rose for the Jacobite cause.

Sylvia Robertson and the Robertson stitchers of the Prince's visit to Blair Castle in panel 36 chose to embroider Charlotte Lady Lude's ball gown with violets, showing faithfulness, and primroses for youthful hope of new beginnings.

### The designs, materials and stitches

Andrew Crummy has described in the previous chapter how he created the images on each panel and the interactions he had with the embroiderers, which would regularly produce tweaks as the stitching progressed. The images on the panels each measure 1000mm x 461mm and as can readily be seen each panel varies in complexity. Initially, once the panels were designed the future stitcher was asked to sign it off after checking locally all the key details such as the buildings, hill contours, sea in the right place for the area depicted, and then the 'final' drawing was completed.

The 'final drawings', all 104 of them, were then routinely placed on a large light box and traced on to the cut linen lengths. A stitcher's 'kit' of the necessary wools was then assembled with the artist's drawing and the traced linen so that packs in a cardboard tube could be despatched to the volunteers. Sheer volume of panels meant of course that there was a considerable lag between the first and last reaching the individual stitchers. Two got lost in the post and others took longer to travel to

France, Ireland Australia and USA. Those last receivers in Spring 2010 who managed to complete their panels on time deserve particular praise.

It then became apparent that it was sometimes a tad overwhelming for volunteers to receive this large piece of linen with the traced image, wools, a few instructions and not much else. More than a few concerns were raised regarding getting the traced lines exactly correct especially where they wore off, following the exact colours and personal interpretation. Not everyone was comfortable to make decisions about techniques or colours without the opportunity of a discussion. So we realised we needed to arrange support remotely by email and phone hotline and/or by arranging visits to groups. Together these two approaches proved effective. Meantime Andrew Crummy also offered his studio for a regular Thursday morning drop in sewing clinic which grew and grew as enthusiastic embroiderers shared their ideas.

The website for the Battle of Prestonpans 1745 Heritage Trust was already up and running so Gordon Prestoungrange created a continuous work-in-progress field there for the embroiderers to access and see phased instructions with images. Firstly, brief stitch suggestions such as stem stitch for the parallel outline on all the panels, filling stitches and contact details for myself and Andrew Crummy were provided. Later we added photographs of worked examples as they were done to inspire others. This again proved much appreciated and invaluable as a reference source especially for the more geographically remote ladies and a great morale booster as we could all see the whole tapestry starting to emerge from the linen and wool kits. The website in due course also became the accessible structured archive for stitcher's completed panels, their biographical details and the history blurbs explaining each of the panels – the critical ingredients for providing a global internet presentation for years to come.

### **Influences, techniques and light history**

*Of Colours:* The only Highland towns in the eighteenth century where trading of skins for dyes, salt and linens took place were Inverness and Dunkeld, so the woollen cloth had to be spun and dyed locally by the women. The domestic dyeing of wools occurred for centuries before commercial ventures using many locally grown plants such as ragwort, lichen or larch needles, water lily for blacks. The fixative or mordant used was iron or alum which helped the wool absorb the colours. In Scotland



*Andrew using a lightbox on Celia Mainlands panel*

iron was mined and found in black bogs but there is also reference to iron imported to Leith in 1491.

The end results of dyeing depended on a number of variables such as time of year plants were picked, amount of rain, slow burning peat fires and the quantity dyed at one time. All these elements gave rise to differing shades. If no alum was available for example then fir-club moss was used. The fibre of Highland wool was hard and fine and did not take dyes as easily as Lowland wool, so it had to be steeped in dye liquor (stale urine) to prepare it for days or weeks. Foreign trade allowed for difficult colours to be obtained such as madder for reds or Mexican cochineal, woad and indigo imported from Holland as a paste or powder. Dying on different grounds giving shades made them more exclusive and desirable. Scientific analysis

*Top-bottom right details of stitches used for clothing; couching, split, straight and running. Bottom left – all panels were outlined along the pencil lines with black stem stitch*



of dyes on archival materials, especially fragments attributed to Bonnie Prince Charlie, at the National Museum of Scotland since 1995 has confirmed this.<sup>8</sup> Aniline dyes were not introduced until the mid nineteenth century.

Although written in 1689, over half a century before the Prince's campaign, the following description from Grameid<sup>8</sup> gives us an idea of colours worn. 'Glengarry's men were in scarlet hose and plaids crossed with purple stripe ; Cameron chief in his tri-coloured tunic trimmed with gold lace; MacMartin had saffron ribbons and tunic embroidered by his sister in red and gold; Duart's tunic dyed red embroidered with gold and a flowing plaid with yellow stripes; and finally Stewart displaying many colours woven into his plaid like a rainbow! All were displaying their importance, telling us of the Gaelic tradition of emphasizing bright rather than muted colours'.

*Crewel Embroidery:* The word crewel originally referred to the type of 2-ply wool used in embroidery making chain, tent and stem stitches as we have. Crewel work in Florentine designs (geometric ) or Jacobean has a long history but in the sixteenth century crewel work was understood as decorative embroidery in wool on the surface of a closely woven fabric, white fustian (linen and cotton twill weave)<sup>11</sup> – the character chosen to support the weight of the work and for its durability. A pre-eminent example of crewel work is the Bayeux tapestry which inspired our own panels.

'Jacobean' embroidery in the seventeenth century describes the floral design style or the depiction of animals in rolling landscapes, or vines which we often see worked in wool on chairs, fire screens and bed curtains in many of Scotland's castles, stately homes and museums. In the Elizabethan era it appeared much on clothing. Crewel workers were heavily employed in the middle ages to stitch huge wall hangings to help keep rooms warm, sumptuous bed hangings for privacy and to exclude draughts, and for embellishing numerous everyday objects. [Image opposite right of work being sewn for Culross Palace 2010]

Prior to the Union in 1707 Scots exported and imported with the Baltic and across the continent especially France and the Netherlands, so traditional local designs were influenced by the textiles and designs brought back by merchants and travellers. Textiles made for the European

market in China and India, particularly Indian wall hangings called palampores, became popular. However there were distinguished local Scottish artists – Lord Cullen's daughter commissioned work dated 1750 from an Aberdeenshire artist<sup>11</sup> – and designs and embroidery materials were being ordered from London at that time.

With further improvements in trade, and the availability of silk threads, 2ply wool crewel work became less popular. When the wealthy required embroidered suits or wedding dresses they were worked professionally and made up by tailors or bought abroad. Professional embroiderers were men who became members of guilds after a seven year apprenticeship. Across the centuries they embroidered ecclesiastical furnishings, vestments and court regalia, but after the Reformation the demand for ecclesiastic embroidery was greatly reduced and they moved their



*Crewel work sewn by a group for bed covers for Culross*

emphasis to secular domestic items. Generally domestic furnishings continued to be designed and embroidered by amateurs and it was imperative for ladies of noble birth to add this to their accomplishments. Many were taught by their governesses or by nuns from abroad, while servant girls did the plain sewing.

Crewel work employs various stitches in wool giving a slightly raised effect, and there is an element of freedom for the embroiderer in the choice of stitch within an outlined shape. We ensured our stitchers had this choice for their panels too. Embroidery techniques have evolved over the centuries and, apart from ecclesiastical embroidery, no fixed conventions are adhered to among contemporary mixed media textile makers.

Our Prestonpans Tapestry panels are a free style of embroidery worked in wool with an element of restrictions on a lovely fine linen with no obvious grid. The linen we used was from Brodie and Middleton, called Ecu, a Scottish linen with a very close weave, the linen's colour complementing the dyes of the Appleton's wools we selected.

An embroidery frame or hoop was required hold the linen at an even tension while working as this helps the end result. Some used fixed rectangular embroidery frames but the obvious problem here is continually unlacing the attached linen and re-attaching to move along the linen as you sewed. Mostly people used a variety of sizes of hooped frames which they moved around areas within the panels. Some however used newer plastic frames where the plastic side bars snap over and hold the linen onto a fixed rectangular frame.

Most embroiderers were familiar with the Quaker tapestry in Kendal which is slightly shorter than ours with 77 panels depicting the history of Quakers and the D Day Overlord Tapestry at Portsmouth, but there are many other examples of similar community projects created particularly for the Millennium across the UK. We were especially fascinated by the

*Left detail stitching of a redcoat jacket, and a cannon*





*Trees couched , angled straight stitch used for waves, hills and smoke, and a fine example of a house from the Dunblane panel*



Fishguard Tapestry telling of The Last Invasion of Britain by the French in Pembrokeshire in 1797; Leeds Tapestry, the History of Gotham and the Ipswich Charter Hangings. We have also shared processes with Newfoundland's French Shore Tapestry which is still being worked as well as exploring the story behind The Apocalypse at Angers in France – for many centuries the longest tapestry in the world at 140 metres until nearly 40 metres were lost.

Unlike many artists, Andrew Crummy was deliberately generous in allowing the stitchers to adapt his designs, after consultation, whether to re-design elements or use particular colours they preferred. His 21st century designs are strong images, heavily researched, depicting men preparing for or in battle in 1745 yet envisioned 255 years after the event and conditioned by myth. As with the Bayeux, the Prestonpans Tapestry is intended to be hung in public. Like the Bayeux designed at Canterbury in 11th century England, the Prestonpans Tapestry tells its story as a mediaeval strip cartoon. But for the Prestonpans Tapestry Andrew Crummy begged to differ from Bayeux by deliberately giving a perspective on



*Lovely legs and socks!*



contemporary Scottish life. Bayeux's main purpose had of course been religious to show 'the fulfilment of God's judgement on the violated oath sworn by Harold at Bayeux'.<sup>10</sup>

*On individuality:* Originally Andrew Crummy wanted everyone to interpret their panels as they wished to allow the individual's character to come through in their stitchery. However the need quickly emerged for considered 'continuity' e.g. in the colour of Bonnie Prince Charlie's attire in connected panels. Nevertheless the Prince was gifted so many different items of clothing at different stages of his campaign that such engineered continuity might well contradict then reality. Despite such 'rules' I do consider that each panel displays the stitcher's individuality Andrew Crummy was so keen to encourage. In common with the Bayeux we began by limiting the number of stitches to be used i.e. Stem stitch for outlining in black to bind the colours together, split, back and laid, couching or filling stitch for rather more. This was because Andrew Crummy designed initially as an artist not an embroiderer, creating rather large areas to be infilled requiring more stitches and we had the timescale we were following. Along came satin, long and short, seeding, fly, herringbone, French knots, buttonhole, Quaker, chain stitch and maybe one or two made-up for the occasion.

We tried to encourage everyone to sew the outlines first starting with the parallel lines on three sides, and then the shapes within. Firstly to 'catch' the lines before they rubbed off, and secondly, we all got used to the character of the wool and created a rhythm to our sewing. The wool varied slightly in quality, so some used a wax block to run the wool through but another suggestion was to run the wool across the lead of a soft pencil, so that the fibres smoothed out. Stitches 'evolved' for various reasons, and the plaids and tartans brought out the ingenuity in our ladies, inspiring each other's own interpretation.

Who knew how to stitch smoke, grass, strawberries or bog land?

Stranded cotton was used for the fire in the Edinburgh oven for smoothness and colour intensity, and we introduced black cotton for the

*Top pictures show panels being 'blocked' on our stretchers made from carpet grips, very effective! Below-cannon fire!*

finer details such as rigging, small objects and figures. Then the idea of gold and silver thread for buttons and rings happened. Suddenly we had to be careful this didn't get out of hand to keep a certain uniformity and not detract from the flow of the story telling. It is hard when a stitcher has a whole directory of stitches and ideas, plus ability, to reign in and keep to a limited 'vocabulary' but still allow each individual to shine. It was very exciting when someone brought their panel and unrolled it for discussion, to see each stage of their beautiful work growing, such a privilege. We all needless to say unpicked areas we were not happy with or decided a better method of stitching.

Once we received the completed panels, often prized from stitchers hands, we had to block them. This means we were stretching the embroidered piece in all directions, evenly, to re-align the fibres of both the linen and wool. Mary Richardson's husband Dave came up with the idea of making boards with carpet gripper nailed on in a slightly larger area than a panel. The panel was then stretched onto the grips checking the embroidered inner measurement was accurate. In some cases this required a good tug! The other method was to pin them out onto clean carpet, with a layer of paper between. Finally we soaked them with a spray bottle of water, which was quite scary until we became used to the groans and twisting pins as the linen shrunk and dried! Every panel benefitted from blocking. Finally we trimmed the panels to a set size before they were machined together and backed with calico. We had a great team of ladies preparing each step required.

*How to sew bog land and strawberries!*



I mentioned wigs earlier, and what fun was had sewing them! Depending on the scale of the head, bullion knots, split stitch, French knots in varying thickness of threads, were all worked so effectively.

This stunning Prestonpans Tapestry was embroidered in record time, just 15 months, with the greatest loving care and commitment to tell the story of the Battle of Prestonpans. All who designed and stitched it sincerely hope that over the coming centuries thousands even millions will enjoy and learn from it as much as we have in its creation.

## References

- 1 J. Telfer Dunbar, *The History of Highland Dress*, (1962).  
(1a) p89 *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, Henrietta Tayler, London 1845  
(1b) Reproduced from the *Scottish Historical Review*, 1908
- 2 Hugh Cheape, *Tartan – The Highland Habit*, 1991
- 3 Captain Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland* (1730). He was a civil engineer surveying roads for General Wade 1720s
- 4 James Logan, *The Scottish Gael*, vol. 1 (1831)
- 5 J Ray, *Complete History of Rebellion*, (1749).
- 6 [www.macfarlanescompany.org](http://www.macfarlanescompany.org)
- 7 Act of Proscription: "That from and after the First Day of August 1747, no man or boy within that part of Great Britain called Scotland, other than such as shall be employed as Officers and Soldiers of His Majesty's Forces, shall on any pretext whatsoever, wear or put on the clothes, commonly called Highland clothes (that is to say) the Plaid, Philabeg, or little kilt, Trowes, Shoulder-Belts, or any part whatever of what peculiarly belongs to the Highland Garb; and that no tartan or party-coloured plaid or stuff shall be used for Great coats or upper coats, and if any such person shall presume after the first said day of August, to wear or put on the aforesaid garments or any part of them, every person so offending... shall be liable to be transported to any of His Majesty's plantations beyond the seas, there to remain for the space of seven years."  
The exception was made in the Act for those serving in the army where the Highland regiments wore the 'Government pattern'.
- 8 Anita Quye and Hugh Cheape, *Costume*, vol.42, (2008).
- 9 James Philip of Almericlose, *Grameid* (1691)
10. B. Snook, *English Embroidery*: Bell & Hyman; 1974.
11. Margaret Swain, *Scottish Embroidery Medieval to Modern*, Batsford 1986.

## Further reading

Avril Hart and Susan North, *Historical Fashion in Detail*, V&A Publications; 2002.

Hugh Cheape, *Tartan The Highland Habit*, National Museums Scotland; 1991.

J. Telfer Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress*, Universtiy Press Glasgow; 1962.

Jan Messant, *The Bayeux Tapestry Embroiderers' Story*, Redwood Books Ltd.; 1999.

*The Times Newspaper*, June 17th, 1995: Hugh Cheape, the museum's curator, was asked in 1987 to authenticate a piece of tartan from the archives of Stonyhurst College in Lancashire (northwest England). We know about a kilt given to Prince Charles researched by Mr Hugh Cheape, one of the previous curators at the National Museum of Scotland, which resulted in the tracing and reconstruction of the tartan worn by Bonnie Prince Charlie after his flight from Culloden. The blue-green tartan, with red, black and yellow stripes is different from any of those known today, which were introduced in the 19th Century. There was a piece of paper with the cloth stating that it was part of a kilt left by Bonnie Prince Charlie on the Island of Glass on April 30th. 1746. This was identified as the Hebridean island of Scalpay, known as Eilean Glas in Gaelic, and it was discovered that the Prince had sheltered there with a taxman called Campbell.

There was also documentary evidence that the Prince had been given a "sute of cloaths" at the home of the MacDonalds of Kingsburgh by Catriona MacDonald (a MacGregor) who welcomed him there. Several days after he left government troops destroyed the house. Campbell, the taxman, was reported to the English by the minister on Scalpay, but when they arrived they were unable to land. The scrap of tartan is believed to be from the kilt given to the Prince by Catriona MacDonald and left at the house of Campbell. It was analyzed by Dr. Anita Quye of the museum's conservation unit who identified the dyes in the tartan using liquid chromatography and spectroscopy – all the dyes are natural ones used in the 18th Century.

234



*Here's to new friends!!*