Briefing Note for Visit by Dr Alasdair Allan, Minister for Scottish Languages

Prestonpans April 2nd 2014

**Gaelic Language Awareness & Action Lines in Prestonpans**

The campaign to raise awareness and action in Prestonpans was launched by the ***Battle of Prestonpans 1745 Heritage Trust*** at our *3rd National Battlefields Biennial Symposium* in 2012. Ronald Black, Gaelic Editor of *The Scotsman,* was a guest speaker exploring the Jacobite expectation for a great Victory at Gladsmuir as foreseen in the *Romance of Thomas the Rhymer* in the 15th century – between Seton and the sea. Two particularly salient points emerged: [i] most of the Highland army spoke Gaelic that day and [ii] Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, perhaps the greatest Scottish Gaelic poet, was present at Prestonpans with the Prince.

Since the Trust is clearly committed to authenticity in all its heritage activities it was readily agreed that steps should be taken that would purposefully reflect these two points. The story of the battle itself would be translated into Gaelic and the poet would be honoured in a new portrait together with the Prince after the battle was won. To address the first, both the visitor guide and the cartoon depiction of the battle via *The* *Prestonpans Tapestry* created by John Unwin were selected. They had already been translated into French by Jean Cevaer of St Nazaire [from where the Prince sailed to Eriskay] for use when we were exhibiting there. Secondly, Ronald Elliot, a local artist, was commissioned to create the portraits – no easy task since none seemingly exist of the poet, only verbal clues.

Great enthusiasm resulted from these two initiatives. We received financial assistance for John MacPhearson’s translation into Gaelic and the printing the cartoon book from the Scots & Gaelic Learning Directorate. It is now in distribution in schools across the Highlands and in Nova Scotia.

When *The* *Prestonpans Tapestry* inspired a second great community artwork, *The Scottish Diaspora Tapestry* in 2012, it was resolved to seek to use the Gaelic language again since a good proportion of Scottish migrants had it as their language when departing, with communities especially in Nova Scotia still using it today. So the Battle Trust’s sister Trust, ***The Prestoungrange Arts Festival,*** has created a mirror website in Gaelic for this second artwork and publications and exhibition material are bilingual with the financial support of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Its official launch is on May 31st 2014 as an integral element of The Homecoming.

Our commitment to the Gaelic language in Prestonpans is to seek authentic ways to raise awareness through its transparent use. It is true that few of us speak or even understand the language without the simultaneous translation being made available. But we do firmly believe that by making our contribution in this way to raise awareness and interest, and taking such actions as are authentically justifiable, our community will have growing respect for the Gaelic. And from such respect, appreciation of the poetry and literature can emerge and a willingness to learn the language. Ronald Black has already led an initial workshop on Gaelic poetry here in Prestonpans.

\*

**Currently, our major initiative is to create Gaelic and English street and footpath signs specifically for the 1745 battlefield, and interpretation boards at the main Battlefield Viewpoint on the Meadowmill Bing - in partnership with East Lothian Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. We are also in discussion with ScotRail to introduce Gaelic at Prestonpans station.**

**It’s not all plain sailing since Transport Scotland is ‘not minded’ to agree to the use of Gaelic in East Lothian. They have a protocol for its use last revised in 2012.**

**Clearly our request is atypical! We are intent on enhancing the authenticity of our heritage interpretation at what is a key battlefield formally protected on the National Inventory by Historic Scotland. More than 25,000 visitors have come to the battlefield since the Trust instituted annual re-enactments in 2007 with some 5,000 in 2013 alone.**

**We will show the Minister what we plan and seek his comments and support for these initiatives, and his suggestions for additional directions we might go. If necessary we shall ask him to raise the issue with the Transport Minister.**