

Conserving and Learning our Nation's History through The Prestonpans Tapestry

by Fiona Campbell

The Message

The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 is deeply embedded in the heritage of the British nation, and an important chapter in its history. It reads as a captivating tale of dynastic nationalism, clan loyalty and rivalry, momentous victories and colossal defeats. It is set against the backdrop of tradition and modernisations, cultural change, and social restructuring. It is also a story of human endeavour, from the lowliest clansman or red-coated soldier, to the lofty ambitions and gritty will of Charles Edward Stuart. The Prince, fondly remembered by the world as *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, set sail from France to Scotland in order to defend his own family heritage, to offer an alternative to the world as it was. For too long, the telling of the '45 has been dominated by the tragedy of Culloden, and the sense of loss engendered by the failure of the Rising, the destruction of the clan system, and the subsequent persecution and depopulation of the Highlands and their culture. Although significant, the tendency to dwell on defeat, to read the story as some sad inevitable tragedy, can overshadow some of the more motivational, enduring, and exciting messages of the '45.

The time has come, then, to remember the other side of the campaigns: the human stories, the local stories, and the important message of Victory, Hope, and Ambition. This is the message of the Battle of Prestonpans, of Charles Edward's efforts and his successes, and it is as important as his ultimate failure. It is also the unofficial motto of the Battle of Prestonpans (1745) Heritage Trust, and of The Prestonpans Tapestry. Regardless of whether your viewpoint might be Jacobite or Hanoverian, this is a message which can captivate and inspire, and which needs to be shared.

The Prestonpans Tapestry is Scotland's latest endeavour to provide detailed and accessible interpretation of the events which led to Bonnie Prince Charlie's triumphant victory on September 21st 1745. This pivotal moment

in the Prince's campaign represents the success of a young (only twenty-five years old at the time of the battle), courageous man, filled with ambition and supported by loyal clansmen. Significantly, the Tapestry ends soon after the battle, and does not continue to the end of the Rising. Its lasting message is one of hope.

The Prestonpans Tapestry is a project which combines local stories and traditions regarding the '45, and the talents of diverse individuals, and creates from them a single entity to tell a continuous story. In this regard, it has always been about bringing the story of the Battle of Prestonpans out into the wider national community. The next step is to ensure that the stories and experiences which have been concentrated in it are now spread to as broad an audience as possible. Crucial to this mission, and the Tapestry's role as a nationally important project, is its relevance and effectiveness in an educational context.

The Precedents

This Tapestry is, of course, not the first of its type. Rather, it builds upon a well-established artistic heritage and, more recently, a proven track-record of successful appeal. For centuries tapestries have been created as artistic decorations, and to promote moral and political messages. They were praised for their ability to be easily transported, and to capture beauty, intricate detail, and vivid colour. The design and techniques used to create such works of art changed depending upon where and when they were created. The Bayeux Tapestry for instance, is not a classically woven tapestry but rather a piece of embroidery. That it is known as a tapestry creates the artistic precedent which Prestonpans is following.

In the present day, the thought of a tapestry transports our minds back into the medieval, renaissance, or arts and crafts periods. Tapestries were usually the preserve of the wealthy, of kings and aristocrats, often

portraying mottos and emblems, and crucially able to be transported when royalty relocated around their numerous households and castles. These are also themes relevant to The Prestonpans Tapestry, dealing with themes of dynastic struggle, and designed for ease of transportation in anticipation of touring exhibitions. In addition to the aesthetic appeal of tapestries, it must also be remembered that they also held a more practical function; tapestries provided insulation and often helped to ensure privacy within the household. These are perhaps less relevant to the modern tapestry.

In the twentieth century, tapestries are first and foremost intended to display a narrative history, and to preserve a tradition or story. They not only preserve the art of their physical creation, but also have a role as educational resources to inform and engage the public. In this, they have a proven track record. Take for instance *The Last Invasion* tapestry, created by the Fishguard Arts Society, which depicts a failed French landing in Wales in 1797. Once a little known event, great credit is now given to the tapestry for helping to ensure that the event is now an internationally recognised episode. The Quaker Tapestry, housed in Kendal, and the respected Overlord Embroidery in Portsmouth are both also highly regarded. The message of the latter was of such significance that the original watercolours are now housed within the Pentagon in the United States of America. The Prestonpans Tapestry, once launched in the summer of 2010 has every chance of following in these footsteps. The Tapestry has the potential, being as portable as tapestries were always intended, to visit to cross national boundaries as well as to appeal beyond them.

Heritage tapestries have therefore demonstrated the potential appeal of tapestries as artworks. British school children not only cross the Channel to visit Bayeux, but there is also a substantial appetite for the faithful nineteenth century copy of it in Reading (and there are further copies too, across the globe). Major tapestries like Bayeux, Reading, and Overlord have all proven their worth and popularity, gaining widespread recognition, and also each preparing appropriate educational programmes to support them. All have provided lessons and inspiration for the Prestonpans project.

Relevance and Appeal

This new Tapestry can assist in the preservation of a significant moment in the nation's history, whilst connecting individuals together by identifying

their national heritage. In order to join the time-tested Bayeux Tapestry, or the more recent but equally remarkable Overlord Embroidery (commissioned in 1968) on the pedestal of internationally recognised projects, The Prestonpans Tapestry must prove itself to be an effective means of engaging audiences of all ages in its subject matter. The means of achieving this have been built into the project from its inception.

Similarly to other such artworks, The Prestonpans Tapestry follows events in a narrative sequence, in this case beginning with Charles Edward Stuart's departure from Rome to his victory at the Battle of Prestonpans in 1745. Unlike Bayeux, the image is not continuous but presented as a series of individual panels, or scenes, in a variety of dimensions and perspectives but all in a unified style and colour scheme. This preserves the integrity of the whole body, whilst allowing the visitor to segregate events into neat parcels, making the Tapestry easy to navigate. It also allows the Tapestry to scene-change, from one army to another, importantly allowing a balanced portrayal of events within both armies as they marched towards a shared climax. Viewing and exploring the Tapestry is therefore easy to enjoy, and the chronological sequence (helped by the thorough labelling of people, dates, and places) creates a helpful environment for learning. Effectively, The Prestonpans Tapestry represents a giant comic-strip of the '45, a comparison which should not be overlooked when it is presented to the younger generation.

Of course, if people are to learn from the Tapestry then they cannot simply be enjoying a comic: they must be receiving an accurate interpretation of events. The historical authenticity of the scenes which have been captured within the elegant stitches of this embroidery has been overseen by the Battle Trust, supported by Martin Margulies and Arran Johnston, both of whom are published writers on the '45. The intended result is an accurate depiction of Bonnie Prince Charlie's epic journey, the people and cultures involved, and the landscape in which it all took place. In addition to depicting the key moments of the campaign – the raising of the Prince's standard by the Duke of Atholl, the fall of Edinburgh, or indeed the Battle of Prestonpans itself – Creative Director Andrew Crummy has successfully designed the Tapestry to contain images of daily life in the eighteenth century: the clothing of different social ranks, the transportation and weaponry available, the architecture of castles, towns and villages, and the changeable terrain and climate of Scotland. All these can be sought, identified, and recognised in The Prestonpans Tapestry. Some things are

Education and The Prestonpans Tapestry: A Summary

An Educational Resource:

- Depicting one of Scotland's most significant battles of the eighteenth century, and preserving the stories which surround it.
- Represents the importance of 1745 in the development and perception of a Scottish identity.
- By ending with the Prince's victory, the Tapestry offers a message of hope and ambition, encouraging personal endeavour.
- Showing scenes of eighteenth century Scotland's material culture, architecture and landscape, the Tapestry is a vibrant visual aid to Scottish heritage studies.
- The Tapestry supports the National Curriculum of Excellence through its use of supporting resources (worksheets, crafts, object handling) in order to develop personal skills, independent problem solving, investigation and discovery.
- It is truly cross-curricular in what can be gained from a supported study of the Tapestry.

A National Stimulus:

- The Battle of Prestonpans was a stimulus for creative activity. The Tapestry can do the same.
- The scenes of the Tapestry can work as a spring-board for a celebration and study of Scottish song and folklore, as well as art, craft and design.
- Supporting activities born from the Tapestry can increase the understanding of Scots language, the role of music in motivation and identity creation, and the works of national figures such as Burns and Scott.
- The Tapestry provides a context for other existing resources, including the BattleGame which provides an entertaining, competitive and informative way of understanding the process of the Battle, whilst building numeracy skills. Living History classroom visits help bring the Tapestry to life, and permit children to interact with the history.
- The Prestonpans Tapestry is national in its coverage, in its creation, and in its appeal. It has the potential to become internationally significant and generated fresh waves of interest.

familiar, some things have changed. All these details combine to enhance the Tapestry, becoming not just a national community art project, but an educational resource for the '45 and eighteenth century Scotland. The Prestonpans Tapestry thus has a role in developing our understanding of the nation's heritage, with a value easily discernible in a self-aware nation such as modern Scotland.

The 1745 Rising is not only important to British heritage, but it also has a well-established appeal. Certainly visitors to Scotland are frequently exposed to the '45, either by the images of the Bonnie Prince on their shortbread tins or the wide selection of Jacobite museum collections scattered across the county. The narrative of the event, however, crosses national boundaries: plaques and monuments can be found in Kendal, Derby, and even London. The Prestonpans Tapestry takes us further still, with scenes in France and Italy also. The appeal of the '45 has also

followed Scots emigrant culture across the world, and finds bases in Canada, America, Australasia, and beyond. Accordingly, as an asset of cultural significance the Prestonpans Tapestry appeals to international audiences by exemplifying awareness of Scotland and the Scots, particularly in the wake of the *Year of the Homecoming*. By capturing a narrative of the people and conditions of the nation in the period, The Prestonpans Tapestry can provide an insight into the lives of these people and characterise the political climate which provided the catalyst for dramatic social change. Certainly, since the Tapestry is designed in order to be transportable, it has the potential to unite nations with a common heritage by exploring their shared association with the '45.

The Prestonpans Tapestry, then, has an extremely broad appeal simply in terms of the significance of the subject matter it portrays. On top of this, it is an exceptional example of a broad-based collaborative community

initiative across the nation. Each panel has been created by highly skilled and dedicated volunteers from diverse communities, which together chart the route of Charles Edward Stuart and his opponents. Celebrating the work of these communities and individuals across Scotland, traditional needlework techniques have been put to excellent use in creating an artwork of national importance. As a result, each of the one hundred and four panels of the Tapestry reveals its own unique story, and as can be seen from the pages of this book, it is as much a social document for 2010 as 1745. For those interested in life-long learning, the Tapestry has a value which therefore goes beyond a focus on Britain in the eighteenth century, but also embraces aspects of traditional craft, oral history, and contemporary art. All this expands and enhances its value as a resource for knowledge and understanding, for a wide audience of varied age and background.

The Tapestry as an Educational Tool

However, it is perhaps the younger generations who have most to gain from The Prestonpans Tapestry. There is perhaps no better narrative presentation of the first stages of the 1745 Rising, in terms of visual presentation, thoroughness, and accuracy. The style of the artwork and the bright vivid colours mean the Tapestry has the required appeal to engage the primary school audience. They will see a giant comic-strip, not an embroidery. It will also impress with its scale, and the diversity of the images portrayed. However, The Prestonpans Tapestry is not just to be seen as a means of telling a story: it is cross-curricular, and this is crucial in the current educational environment.

In order to lay the foundations for such engagement, and in order for it to achieve its full educational potential, the Prestonpans Tapestry will be supported from its opening tour by a wide range of activity sheets, aimed mainly at primary school audiences. A developing catalogue of educational worksheets will support the Tapestry in order to provide both entertainment and quality of educational services. As the Tapestry travels on tour, a loan box containing replica artefacts and clothing will accompany it. In the earliest stages of the Tapestry's life, the aims are limited, but in the longer term this is the basis for a programme of richly rewarding school visits. The Prestonpans Tapestry has all the potential to become the stimulus for a whole package of educational experiences.

The role of the Tapestry as a stimulus for further learning is vital to its

long-term significance on a national stage. Due to its scale, it is not likely that the Tapestry will be able to visit individual schools, and so it is important that it finds a residence which permits access to school groups. There are numerous activity-sheet based tasks, such as a Tapestry trail, which can be used to engage the children with the Tapestry. Established techniques of museum education programmes can be enacted to encourage individuals to work both within teams and independently, to enhance the confidence of the learners and to promote wider independent learning and social skills.

The nature of the National Curriculum and educational techniques in historical studies are developing constantly, with an increasing emphasis on activities which develop skill sets beyond simply knowledge of a particular subject-matter. Fortunately, the Tapestry has within it a significant amount of potential for developing education programmes based on these expectations. It lends itself to an interactive, creative form of primary education, due to its flexible educational prospective.

The topics included within the Scottish History curriculum are those which are considered important in the development of a sense of national identity, including of course the '45. The Tapestry is relevant to the Scottish curriculum's *The Jacobite* module, for those schools which choose to teach it, and the general requirement of Key Stage 2 History to help, 'build a picture of Scotland's heritage.' It is also able to assist in a more general appreciation of Scottish culture and geography, amongst other things. Therefore, the Tapestry is a useful resource in supporting the National Curriculum of Excellence, which is currently of pivotal importance in the strategy for primary development. This strategy applies not only to the schools themselves, but it also has implications for museums and exhibitions, which are now expected to provide support to the wider campaign for cross-curricular skills development. In order to engage children effectively, and indeed to encourage schools to promote visiting it, The Prestonpans Tapestry needs to fulfil these requirements.

Fortunately, the Tapestry is able to enhance the education process by moving away from book-based learning and encouraging children to learn their history through the artwork of the Tapestry. Nor is it just history which can be learned. Children should be encouraged to follow the progress of the armies through the landscape of Scotland, exploring how the terrain – well researched and accurately presented – affects events and

cultures. How does the Tapestry's portrayal of Invergarry Castle, resplendent in its loch-side location, compare to the tumbled ruins visible today? Are the landmarks of eighteenth century Edinburgh recognisable in the modern city? These are the tasks which make the children focus on the smaller details of the Tapestry, and which make it relevant to their own lives. In an ideal world, a visit to the Tapestry would be the stimulus for visits elsewhere, to discover the physical remains of the '45 story. The advantage of the nationwide coverage of the events described is that there should be something relevant within reach of most communities.

The Prestonpans Tapestry is the latest incarnation of the Battle of Prestonpans' established role as a stimulus for literature and art. This is a point which should be developed through the Tapestry's education programme. Art is an obvious subject, emphasising the Tapestry's importance as an artwork as well as a heritage project, and all manner of artistic activities are able to support it. In particular, children will be encouraged to make their own drawings of scenes, or perhaps to show a scene from their own life in the style of the Tapestry. Music and poetry are, however, equally important. Charles Edward Stuart himself was a capable



musician, whilst there is a wide repertoire of songs and poetry which has been inspired by the Battle: here are skills which can be developed and encouraged through the use of the Tapestry. The exploration of famous Scottish tunes such as *Hey Johnny Cope*, and the national anthem, and the works of iconic national figures such as Robert Burns and Walter Scott, can all be facilitated on the back of the Tapestry. Individuals can thus explore the Scots language and the ways history can be transmitted through music and popular literature. This form of learning will capture young imaginations, promoting the importance of oral history as well as the more familiar document-based narrative. A study of Scottish music would highlight how music can be morale-boosting at the time, can portray a certain political message, but could also show how modern national identity has its roots in the past. Again, the relevance of the '45 and the legacy of the Battle of Prestonpans are made obvious and engaging.

The Future

Of course, it is not anticipated that the Prestonpans Tapestry will exist in isolation. Whether visiting as a family or as a school, the learner will need supporting resources like the activity sheets and handling boxes to direct their education experience and channel their engagement. On the next level, a school visit would be supported by follow-up activities along the lines advised by the Tapestry's Teacher's Notes. Further still, there has also been an increasing emphasis of 'living history' presentation as an educational tool in museums and schools, and the Battle of Prestonpans (1745) Heritage Trust has made important progress in developing their own professional programme of visits to local schools. These dramatic appearances further explain the context of the '45, and their use of the purpose-built battle-game table adds to the entertainment and learning experience. When they are eventually combined with the Tapestry itself, these resources come together to create an extremely engaging package. At the moment, the Trust's schools programme performs at the school itself, something unsuited to the Tapestry. When the Tapestry is installed in a longer-term home, however, and the other resources are put in place around it, the educational potential of the Battle of Prestonpans becomes immense.

Although much attention has been given to the Tapestry's value to Primary Schools, it must be considered that there is no age restriction on its value. There is also a significant opportunity for the Tapestry to be re-visited by

pupils as part of a Secondary curriculum. It is perhaps then that it might be used as an educational resource through its role as an artwork, relevant to craft and design courses. Teenage audiences are likely to have a more developed historical understanding, and would be less reliant on the narrative form of the Tapestry, but might find an alternative value in it. If the pupil had visited as part of their primary education, a repeat visit at a later date would provide a linking force within a learner's longer term experience, and offer a sense of familiarity for pupils during their transition of schooling.

The Battle of Prestonpans has already witnessed significant forward progress in terms of its interpretation and accessibility. With roots established in supporting events like the annual re-enactments and living history encampments, the production of children's guides to the battle, and the growing popularity of interpretive school visits, the educational value of the Battle can only increase in the coming years. The centre-piece to all future programmes, the fundamental narrative resource which will act as both focus and stimulus, will be the Prestonpans Tapestry.

The Tapestry holds an appeal which is tangible on a local, national, and even international level. Through this, surely one of Scotland's largest community artworks, the legacy of the 1745 campaign may now be preserved in a dynamic and timeless manner. Like other embroideries and tapestries of its type, the Prestonpans Tapestry has the potential to develop the understanding of our nation's heritage, and provide a crucial role in its teaching. Used effectively, it can provide a deeper insight into topics within the curriculum, help to build creative skills, confidence, and an ability to identify with the past. By supporting the aims of national educational strategies, whilst remaining flexible within a fluid system, such learning resources encourage children to learn about their nation's history, whilst also contributing to their development as individuals. The Prestonpans Tapestry offers learning opportunities which are both informal and formal, for schools and parents alike, cross-curricular and cross-generational. The Prestonpans Tapestry will surely prove itself to be an integral asset for the preservation and promotion of Scotland's national heritage, and the smaller details of which it is composed.