

The Challenge in Context

The Coffee House Challenge discussion in Prestonpans was easily determined. Almost everyone knew that September 21st 1745 was the best known date in the town calendar, but it was also one of the best kept secrets! Those of us living in the town were unclear what actually took place and visitors were dismayed at being able to find only scant information when they asked.

In fact of course, it was the date of the spectacularly simple 9 minute victory over the Hanoverian army in Scotland for the now romanticised Bonnie Prince Charlie as he sought to regain the throne of Scotland and England for the Jacobites, aided by many a Highland Chief.

It was not that endeavours had not been made in the past to record this significant element of Scotland's heritage. There is indeed a statue to a local Hanoverian commander, a cairn, the restored period Bankton House and a memorial byng with some tarnished interpretation panels. And 'Battle Site' road signage that peters out. And in 1995 an excellent 250th re-enactment took place, with a goodly number of artefacts being gathered together. But it was all ad hoc and the hopes for major initiatives following 1995 had taken more steps backward than forwards. A lone local history teacher, distressed at the ignorance of his own students, had taken them out to explore the battle site and then personally championed an annual battlefield walk each September 21st for the last five years.

It was that teacher's direct action approach that had perhaps more than anything else engendered the determination to 'do something'. The question was what? **How could the battle field and all the battle implied, be better interpreted and presented in future? And how could it be done so it was always accessible to indwellers and visitors alike?**

The Big Picture *Must* Be Boldly Painted

As chance would have it, The UK Battlefield Trust had reported at the end of 2005 to Historic Scotland that the battlefield at Prestonpans was indeed a woefully neglected heritage site. The indwellers were not aware of this until the Coffee House Challenge focus was adopted, but it clearly meant any debate and community initiative would be working 'with the grain'. But it begged the question what could or should be done and indwellers wanted to make their own contribution early on. After all, quite apart

from the benefits of preserving Scotland's heritage there was a very real opportunity to create local employment and to accelerate the renaissance of resilient community self esteem that had been going on since all the town's industries based on coal had collapsed in the 1960s.

The participants at the Challenge discussions on June 29th affirmed that they believed no matter what specific 'improvements' or modest 'innovations' might be immediately achievable, the heritage issue made it absolutely vital that they 'thought very big', just as Bonnie Prince Charlie had in 1745. They resolved that the community should act to envision an all-encompassing *Dream* of what might be accomplished to provide a world class centre astride the A1. It should be a *Dream* where indwellers and visitors alike could in either 20 minutes, or 2 hours, or 4 hours be given a clearly presented interpretation of the battle.

It should have as its hub an architecturally memorable Interpretation Centre; and the battlefield itself and the route which Bonnie Prince Charlie took on September 20th from Birsley Brae and into battle on the 21st should be preserved for posterity and restored to the agricultural patterns prevailing at that time.

It should invite the descendants of the Clan Chiefs and the current Representatives of the Hanoverian leaders as present on the day to join a Committee of High Patronage and to work with them all to ensure that each contributed their own interpretation of the battle including all manner of artefacts.

It should further ensure that in according such a world class interpretation and presentation of the battle, the opportunity should also be taken to tell out the secondary layers of Scottish heritage present in the vicinity of the battle e.g. the Ancient Monument of Birsley Brae, Tranent Tower, the gravity Waggonway from Tranent to Cockenzie that ran across the battlefield, the coal industry/ environmental improvement significance of the Battle Byng, the agricultural patterns of the 18th century and the apple orchards which bordered the battlefield.

Finally, that the extensive literary collection associated with the battle including Adam Skirving, Philip Doddridge, Robert Louis Stevenson and Walter Scott's *Waverley* should be encompassed.

Taken altogether, a quite splendid opportunity exists for the community of Prestonpans to play a significant role in enhancing Scotland's national consciousness and confidence in the years leading to 2009's HomeComing from the Scottish Diaspora.

All Manner of Specific *ad hoc* Ideas Should Be Explored

All understood that the determination set out above for a Big Picture Approach would take some considerable time to achieve and that extensive funding on the scale recently achieved by the National Trust for Scotland for the Culloden battlefield would be required. But they were not prepared to wait for that. Immediate incremental 'improvements' within the framework of the *Dream* could be acted on.

1. Top of the list was the requirement to better present the *ad hoc*/ fragmentary elements that are already offered. This involves proper and comprehensive signage to the Battle Byng and the thorough renewal of the interpretation plates atop thereof. The vegetation on the four faces of the pyramidal byng should also be restored to the condition they aspired to when it was first created and seating put in place.
2. An inventory of all the artefacts in store and on occasional view arising from the battle should be compiled and made available on the internet.
3. The annual celebration of Bonnie Prince Charlie's victory on September 21st and the Battlefield Walk should be more widely publicised.
4. The damage to the obelisque to the honour of Hanoverian Colonel Gardiner should be restored.
5. Archaeological surveys and digs as appropriate should be set in hand on the battlefield to gather further evidence and artefacts.
6. Re-enactment of some or all of the battle should be given each year on September 20th / 21st.

A number of modest 'innovations' could be undertaken on an ad hoc basis including the following:

7. Markers should be placed along the battlefield to identify the particular spots where the Clans and Hanoverians stood and along the route taken by Bonnie Prince Charlie on September 20th.
8. The iconic white thorn tree and associated apple orchards should be replanted at their precise locations.
9. The A1 access roads to the Battle Site should be especially adorned with grand wrought iron outline statues of Highlanders, Hanoverians, the Prince and other images of the time.
10. The Battlefield Walk should be supported and resourced by additional/ interactive information points and/ or Walkman-style services.
11. Schools should be formally invited to join in the annual celebrations and to include in their curriculum.
12. A mobile Information/ Interpretation Centre should be created to ensure a comprehensive understanding throughout the community and to visit other communities to share the interpretation.
13. Bonnie Prince Charlie's battle flag should be flown from the top of the Battle Byng.
14. A number of murals should be painted on the Prestonpans Murals Trail in appropriate locations.

Action Lines Adopted towards September 21st 2006

It was resolved [i] to meet again on July 23rd to evaluate and assist progress and [ii] to effect a major community and public relations initiative that will launch the *Dream* on September 21st 2006.

A series of specific action lines were agreed upon and individuals asked to act on them as soon as possible:

A.1 That Planning and Heritage Officers of East Lothian Council be asked through the good offices of The Provost to clarify the 'protection' currently accorded to the battlefield and the route taken on September 20th 1745 by Bonnie Prince Charlie, and to ensure that any necessary actions to achieve 100% protection are set in hand at once.

A.2 That subsequent to A.1 above discussions should be opened with Historic Scotland to ensure that local community input is made to their processes.

A.3 That the *Dream* should be captured together with the secondary layering both in a comprehensive booklet and at a dedicated website before September 21st including most especially the proposal for a world class Interpretation Centre and the myriad ideas for interpretation and presentation that have arisen through the Challenge;

A.4 That a major public relations campaign be launched on September 21st 2006 to bring this world class opportunity to preserve the heritage of the battle and create a significant visitor attraction with year round access, to the attention of local, national and international audiences;

A.5 That recruitment of the descendants of Clan Chiefs and Representatives of Hanoverian commanders present on the field of battle to the Committee of High Patronage should be pursued with vigour;

A.6 That appropriate community groups and societies e.g. The Royal Stuart Society and the 1745 Association be invited to contribute to the fulfilment of the *Dream*.

A.7 That the offer by the RSA Scottish Chairman Bob Porrer [who joined us throughout our discussions] to do all that he could properly do to help us follow the Challenge's outcomes to their conclusions in line with the RSA's Manifesto, be taken up with enthusiasm.

A.8 That The Battle of Prestonpans [1745] Heritage Trust be registered forthwith as a Scottish Charity to act as the organisational locus for carrying forward these actions and the campaign to enable the *Dream* to come true by 2009 for The HomeComing.

And that:

A.9 In order to advance the awareness of and realisation of the *Dream* application should be made after the July 23rd meeting but before the September 1st deadline for a RSA/ Starbucks Coffee House Challenge £1000 Award to assist the host of volunteer efforts. Such 'external' recognition from the RSA/ Starbucks will greatly assist in the need to create the maximum awareness for and support for the *Dream*. We firmly assert that what we are seeking to achieve for the better interpretation and presentation of our town's heritage battle which took place just 9 years before the RSA was founded in London, and the ability such success will have to further enhance the resilience of our community brought low in the 1960s by the comprehensive loss of its integrated industrial base, are wholly congruent with the RSA's Manifesto goals.

A.10 Yet even if we are not to be so publicly recognised by the RSA/ Starbucks, we do all wish to record our gratitude for their Coffee House Challenge initiative that got us rolling with our *Dream* as set down above, and for the facilitating/ support materials provided as we talked over coffee [and buffet lunch!]