

Bonnie Prince Charlie's crushing defeat at Culloden is one of the best-known episodes in Scottish history – but now the story of his greatest victory is to be told in Scotland's very own version of the Bayeux Tapestry.



Original photograph by Gillian Hart.

David Lee and **Gaynor Allen** explain how the project came about and the organisers' appeal for East Lothian volunteer embroiderers.

EMBROIDERERS WANTED FOR EPIC BATTLE TAPESTRY

The Bayeux Tapestry is one of the greatest and best-known historical artworks. Now an 80 metre-long tapestry commemorating Bonnie Prince Charlie's glorious campaign, up to an including his victory at the Battle of Prestonpans in September 1745, is taking shape – and will find a permanent home in East Lothian.

The project is being co-ordinated by the Battle of Prestonpans 1745 Heritage Trust as a way of portraying the youthful hope and ambition of Charles Edward Stuart and his men, rather than concentrating on the slaughter at Culloden the following spring.

Community groups across Scotland will be recreating over 80 different scenes

for the huge tapestry, a key part of an ambitious £15m campaign to build a living history visitor centre in Prestonpans – and to protect the battlefield site from development.

Although over half the panels have already been allocated, volunteer embroiderers are still being sought in communities along the route of both

armies. The Battle Trust is especially keen to hear from individuals and groups around Dunbar and Haddington who are willing to embroider the panels relating to John Cope's route in the days before the battle.

Prestonpans was the first battle of the second major Jacobite rebellion, which began when Charles Edward Stuart came to Scotland to raise troops and reclaim the crown for his deposed father James from George II. The crushing victory, which saw the Hanoverians flee in less than ten minutes, was a huge morale boost for the Jacobites, who marched towards London, getting as far as Derby before returning to Scotland only to be finally defeated at Culloden.



BATTLE OF PRESTONPANS TAPESTRY PANEL

The panel designs have been created by East Lothian artist Andrew Crummy.

Original photograph by Gillian Hart.



Professor Martin Margulies, who wrote the definitive historical account of the Battle of Prestonpans, said the tapestry was a wonderful idea – and that it was impossible to study Culloden without understanding the earlier battle.

‘Prestonpans set the stage for one of the most dramatic and crucial moments in history: the turnabout at Derby,’ he explained. ‘If Charles had kept on going, instead of retreating at the chiefs’ insistence, would he have won? Then would he have kept his promise to break the Union? Likewise, if Prestonpans had gone the other way there never would have been a Culloden, or Prince-in-the-Heather, the saga of which has played an important role in defining Scottish identity. Prestonpans was an integral component of that saga.’

Each panel tells a particular phase of the Prince’s journey.

Dr Gordon Prestoungrange, Baron of Prestoungrange and chair of the Heritage Trust, came up with the idea of the tapestry while visiting Bayeux in France. ‘I saw the tapestry and saw no reason why we could not do something similar in Scotland,’ he said.

The tapestry will focus on Charles’ campaign from St Nazaire in France across to Eriskay in the Western Isles, and then to Prestonpans between July and September 1745. Places to be depicted along the way include Glenfinnan, Fort Augustus, Perth, Falkirk and Edinburgh. The majority of scenes, however, focus on events in East Lothian.

Later sections concentrate on rejoicing in Edinburgh at the Jacobite victory.

Dr Prestoungrange defended the decision to end the tapestry on a high note for Charles and to leave out Culloden. He said: ‘The story of the Prince’s eventual defeat at Culloden is oft told – but his greatest success is not. His arrival from France with just seven men and raising of the clans leading to victory at Prestonpans symbolised the youthful hope and ambition of Charles. He was just 26 at the time.

Each panel will take up to 100 hours to complete.

‘We want to mark the event by building a living history visitor centre to tell the story of the battle and its message today – and to work with the Scottish Government to protect our heritage site.’

The Trust is recruiting embroiderers across Scotland to complete a tapestry panel over the winter. It is hoped each one will be crafted by groups from the area depicted or with some connection to it. Communities in Nantes and St Nazaire are also helping out with early segments depicting Charles’ departure from France.

The panel designs have been created by East Lothian artist Andrew Crummy in the manner of the 1745 cartoon in which Sir John Cope, Commander of the Government forces, confirmed his own defeat to his superiors at Berwick, as Colonel Gardiner, the Hanoverian hero, lay dying in Tranent Manse.

‘We needed something simple that would be achievable for different individuals to embroider, so a cartoon style was perfect,’ explains Mr Crummy. ‘This is a very ambitious project, but we have had a fantastic response.’

Mr Crummy has already spent nine months researching the project and has a rough draft of all the panels. ‘It is a huge undertaking,’ he added. ‘We have to get it as historically accurate as it’s possible to be. There are 400-500 historical references and getting all the facts has involved extensive research.’

It is a fantastic idea, and wonderful to think that like the Bayeux Tapestry it could last over 1000 years.

‘Each panel tells a particular phase of the Prince’s journey, and the Trust is determined to ask each community represented to give its opinion on the way it is represented,’ said Dr Prestoungrange. ‘Communities can make suggestions to improve what is depicted.’

In Eriskay, islanders raised questions about the depiction of a three-masted ship and the geography of the islands and the design was changed when it was pointed out that Barra was in the wrong place relative to the beach where the Prince landed.

Each panel will take up to 100 hours to complete and will be embroidered onto unbleached linen with woollen yarn from New Lanark Mill. Strict guidelines about how the panels should be completed have been laid down to ensure the finished tapestry has a consistency about it.

Laura Young, a community artist and

mother-of-two, is helping to embroider two panels with her friends in the Musselburgh Craft Clinic. She said: ‘We are all very excited about the tapestry. It is a fantastic idea, and wonderful to think that like the Bayeux Tapestry it could last over 1,000 years.’

‘We are doing two panels, the Prince staying overnight at Pinkie House and the Highland army march to Carberry Hill and Birsllie Brae. Our group is delighted to be a part of this venture and can’t wait to get started.’

The creation of the Prestonpans Tapestry is just one of part of the work of the Battle Trust.

It is hoped the sections will be ready to be collected and sewn together in June 2010. The Trust plans to parade the completed tapestry in France, then through Scotland to Edinburgh following the same Prince’s route. It will be brought back to Prestonpans for its permanent home – eventually in the new living history visitor centre, campaigners hope.

The creation of the Prestonpans Tapestry is just one part of the work of the Battle Trust, formed in 2006. It also carries out annual re-enactments of the battle every September – with cannon and musket fire and a Highland charge creating mayhem in Cuthill Park, Prestonpans.

The weekend’s events also included storytelling and weapons demonstrations, a battle ceilidh and wreath laying at the Gardiner Obelisk and the Battle Cairn, close to Meadowmill Sports Centre.

Grants have been received from the Heritage Lottery for a battlefield archaeological study and from the Arts Council and Awards for All for storytelling and school visits. Guided tours of the battlesite are regularly given and interpretation boards and markers are being placed.

If any individual or group is interested in helping please contact Gillian Hart at the Prestoungrange Gothenburg in Prestonpans on 01875 819922. www.battleofprestonpans1745.org



Original photograph by Garry Menzies.