

**The Battle of Prestonpans**

**1745 LIVING HISTORY CENTRE**

**What it might be ……**

**& what it might yet become!**

**Vision Scoping 2017**

**Introduction**

Since its foundation in 2006 the *Battle of Prestonpans (1745) Heritage Trust* has been working tirelessly for the increased awareness, understanding and interpretation of the internationally significant Battle of Prestonpans, fought on 20-21 September 1745 between the Jacobite Army of Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) and the Government forces of King George II.

That work has involved commissioning and publishing academic research, archaeological survey, new artworks, songs and plays, the programming of a wide range of activities aimed at both adult and school audiences, the hosting of living history, re-enactment and commemorative events; and the creation and exhibition of the now world-famous Prestonpans Tapestry. There has also been considerable work undertaken to increase access and signage with on-site interpretation around the battlefield landscape itself and at Bankton Doocot, culminating in the creation of a free mobile App for self-guided walkers.

After more than a decade of activity, the Trust is evaluating where its work might lead and how best to consolidate, strengthen and continue its work in bringing this important story to new and diverse audiences in a unique and engaging manner. This scoping vision considers the possible activities and interpretive themes which would facilitate that if the Trust chose to develop a purpose-built visitor attraction close to the battlefield.

Whilst not intended as an in-depth business plan or audience analysis, this document presents a potential vision for what such a Living History Centre might be able to achieve, and how it could build on the established ethos of the Trust to become a unique and highly engaging focus for the study of the Battle of Prestonpans, the Jacobites in general, the local area and associated themes, community arts and heritage, and contemporary embroidery.

**Centre Approach**

The Trust serves as an important exemplar for grass-roots battlefield interpretation and programming, unique in Scotland and possibly the wider UK also. This has created a distinctive and imaginative approach to the promotion of battlefield heritage which, if carried through into the execution and operation of a permanent attraction, holds the potential to form a Centre quite different to the few existing comparable sites in the country and unique in the region.

The Trust’s approach is based on a number of key elements:

* **Quality and authenticity:** the interpretation must of the highest quality and based on the latest research and understanding of the historical narrative, engagingly and sensitively promoted with appropriate balance.
* **Engaging:** energetic levels of programming and activity maintain a sense of momentum, designed to draw new audiences and re-engage existing/past visitors.
* **Interactive:** whether it is living history, costumed guiding, theatrical performance or community art, the approach involves audiences proactively as much as possible.
* **Cultural as well as Military/Political:** the Battle has left a diverse cultural legacy which the Trust has sought to harness and build upon, widening potential themes beyond the immediate military and political events of the campaign.
* **Local themes in a national context:** the Trust’s approach is designed both to face inwards to the local community and outwards towards tourists and visitors from elsewhere, an approach which is strengthened by the uniqueness of the battlefield landscape, its connections to local figures and industries, and the significance of its events in 1745 on the national and global stage.
* **“Victory, Hope and Ambition”:** the motto of the Trust demonstrates an approach to the narrative of 1745 which is uniquely appropriate to the nature of the location and the Prince’s youthfulness. Victory at Prestonpans was one of the high-water marks of Jacobite achievement. It creates the potential for a distinct character to the interpretation, filling an important interpretative gap in relation to the renowned interpretation centre at Culloden Battlefield.

These strands of approach inform the Trust’s programming activities and it is expected that they are carried through into the content and activity of a Centre.

**Centre Audiences**

The putative Battle of Prestonpans Living History Centre would be potentially capable of engaging a series of connected and discrete audiences, based both on the nature of the heritage and the importance of the associated contemporary tapestries. These should be explored in greater statistical detail, but can be summarised as follows:

*General Scottish history/tourism interest*

Situated close to the capital city and easily accessible by both private and public transport, the development of a high quality heritage attraction could appeal to both domestic and overseas tourism markets, particularly the day-trip market basing out of Edinburgh. Both the Jacobites (primary) and Scottish emigration (secondary) appear in the current Scottish schools’ curriculum.

*Specifically Stuart/Jacobite interest*

The Royal Stuarts and in particular Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites, are the source of considerable domestic and international interest. The presence of Prince Charlie in Prestonpans and the significance of his victory there is a clear promotional asset. This has been demonstrated by the success of the Scotland-wide tourism initiative in 2017 which specifically sought to tap into that market, which is currently further boosted the popular fiction and television series *Outlander* which features the Battle of Prestonpans. There has been a significant rise in the last two years in coach tours to the battlefield from overseas, largely on account of the “*Outlander* effect” and the proximity of filming locations elsewhere in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Prestonpans’ closeness to Edinburgh and its castle, palace and museum collections increases connectivity between a future interpretation centre at Prestonpans and relevant attractions promoting directly associated heritage.

*Battlefield/military interest*

Prestonpans battlefield is largely unique in that it was a proto-industrial landscape, on which two very distinct and differently trained/equipped forces jockeyed for advantage until the final surprising result. It is therefore a site of particular interest to historians and battlefield walkers most especially since almost all the site is still accessible today. Connectivity between an interpretation centre and its wider landscapes enhances their appeal to specialist military audiences as well as to the local community and broadly interested public who wish to associate their learned knowledge with the physical environment.

*Diaspora/ancestral tourism interest*

The Battle of Prestonpans is known internationally, as evidenced by the overseas support for recent conservation campaigns. This appeal is further reinforced by the connection of the battle to identified Highland Clans, which potentially connects strongly to the genealogical interests of ancestral tourists, identified by Visit Scotland as an economically important and significant market. The inclusion in the centre of exhibition space for the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry (see subsequent sections), furthers this potential considerably and provides content with direct relevance to both reverse and overseas diaspora communities in countries right across the globe.

*Embroidery/creative arts interest*

A quite distinct audience is available through the presentation of the two tapestries, which draw important and committed embroidery and crafts audiences. This expands the potential reach of the centre into different age groups and brings a predominantly female audience (although the categories above are diverse in appeal and certainly far from exclusively male). The loyalty and commitment of this audience has been demonstrated through the touring activities of the tapestries and should be harnessed in the Centre, which should also aim to maintain and enrich further the connection between the creative arts and the core heritage.

*Performing arts interest*

The Trust’s use of re-enactment, plays, music and song – both in harnessing the rich and recognisable musical heritage of the Jacobite movement, and in the commissioning of new works from local contributors such as Andrew Dalmeyer – has maintained the cultural legacy of the battle. This also includes the potential literary audiences interested as a result of the battle’s connectivity to the works of Walter Scott and R L Stevenson, giants of Scottish literature. This opens important opportunities for widening audiences and participation through appropriately imagined programming.

*Local interest*

As well as the national significance of the Jacobite narrative and the cultural legacy of the battle, the relationships between the battle and local personalities, landmarks and industries provide themes which can facilitate ongoing local interest. This will be important in not only harnessing the Centre’s ability to become a hub for visitors into the county but also in sustaining local engagement, especially outside the tourist season.

**Suggested Site Criteria**

The Trust has previously considered the creation of a permanent visitor attraction at (1) Meadowmill Battlefield Viewpoint area and (2) Prestongrange Industrial Museum. The first became outdated by the sports developments there and by creation and popularity of the Prestonpans Tapestry; the latter, based on a determined strategy to collocate with Prestonpans’ mining heritage, foundered largely due to the constraints of the existing site and its distance from the battlefield.

Revised proposals focussing on a new site should consider the following issues when identifying potential locations:

* Proximity and access to existing and future Battlefield trails and Walking routes
* Views across the Battlefield
* Parking and Transport links
* Visibility and landscaping potential
* Potential for secure associated outdoor space
* Appropriate footprint to accommodate the Prestonpans Tapestry in full
* Appropriate space for core activities and subsequent development including displays of the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry
* Potential for evening openings

**Principal Exhibition(s)**

Previous iterations of the Trust’s interest in creating a permanent Living History Centre relating to the Battle, which would also serve as a home for the Prestonpans Tapestry and the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry, have been guided from the outset by professional advice that a high-quality and ambitious approach is the only one likely to prove economically sustainable. The remainder of this document therefore separates the potential exhibition and programming activities into core/essential elements which form the base of the Centre’s work, and the additional/potential elements which would help elevate the centre to its optimum.

The putative Centre would have at its core three principal exhibition elements:

1. The Battle of Prestonpans interpretation area
2. The Prestonpans Tapestry
3. Sufficient additional exhibition space to present sections of the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry and other temporary or touring exhibitions
4. *The Battle of Prestonpans interpretation area*

The purpose of this area is to create an engaging self-guided experience which immerses the visitor in the events of 1745 and explores what happened at the Battle of Prestonpans and how. The interpretation would be based on a vibrant mix of:

* Traditional museum artefact display
* Cutting-edge interactive systems (e.g. allowing visitors to “contribute” to Councils of War in the rival camps using digital map tables and “exploring” how Cope might win)
* High-quality video projection and audio which creates immersive spaces and immediacy
* Life-sized diorama figures which create a sense of life and activity around the centre
* The latter being augmented by regular programming of live-action interpretation within dedicated small performance zones within the main exhibition routes
* Access to and/or views and digitally augmented panoramas of the actual battlefield

1. *The Prestonpans Tapestry*

Displayed in full as a continuous narrative, as it was designed but how it has never before been seen. This would require appropriate pre-display conservation and atmospheric conditions/monitoring.

* Space to interpret the design and creation process behind the tapestry and potentially exhibit the artist’s early design drawings
* Space to handle fabric samples etc., and to witness/participate in stitching demonstrations
* Appropriately imaginative accompanying interpretation (including ambient sound) to incorporate the tapestry into the wider historical interpretation
* Facility to return to the beginning to facilitate repeat exploration of the tapestry, as regularly observed at touring exhibitions

**Core Activities**

Supporting the above would be a core activities programme which would be expected to include the following:

*School visits and education workshops* – particularly harnessing the visual power of the tapestry as an interpretation device

*Battlefield Tours –* connecting the centre to the historic landscape along the signed and interpreted trails and including the Battle Bing and Bankton Doocot and Garden of Remembrance

*Commemoration* – sensitive and balanced programming around relevant anniversaries

*Living History days/Live action interpretation* – using high quality societies/interpreters

*Lecture programmes* – pitched both at general interest and sustaining series research credibility at the centre. Themes could be as diverse as the Jacobites, other associated local heritage (e.g. 81 witches, the 1722 waggonway); Scottish battlefield heritage generally; community arts; Jacobite-era literature and culture

*Interactive craft sessions* – of wide-ranging types and pitched at diverse audiences

*Embroidery workshops*

**Anticipated Additional Activities**

*Re-enactment Days –* outdoor encampments/displays, as opposed to the frequent indoor performances of live action interpretation

*Gaelic workshops/classes* – an acknowledgement of the high numbers of Gaelic speakers present at the battle, and a means of supporting and promoting Gaelic cultural heritage

*Access events* – providing specialist support for visitors with additional needs

*Historical clothing workshops/courses* – supporting the living history community and encouraging connectivity between the creative arts and history audiences

*Theatre/music workshops and performances –* tapping into the existing cultural legacy, the previously commissioned works of the Trust, and a new generation of potential creations

*Local support days* – special activity days for those within local postcode areas e.g. Clan and Redcoat eponymous street residents

*Archaeological surveys including detectorists and/or workshops*

*Temporary and touring exhibitions (incoming)* e.g. tapestries created in the Prestonpans tradition since 2010

*Evening openings/special events hire*

*Conference/meeting room hire*

**Essential Facilities**

In order to fulfil the above functions effectively, a Centre would require the following:

1. Entrance point, reception facilities and visitor conveniences
2. Exhibition spaces suitable for the tapestries and the wider interpretation
3. Heritage-themed shop facilities
4. High-quality and affordable café and catering facilities
5. Rear-of-house facilities for staff
6. Office provision for curatorial and management staff
7. Meeting room(s) with publicly accessible research library/study space
8. Education studio
9. Theatre/auditorium space
10. Designated indoor performance spaces within exhibition design
11. Secure outdoor event space
12. Suitable inventory and collections store with archive
13. Loading areas, parking facilities and coach drop-off
14. Dedicated embroidery/costume workshop space
15. Changing rooms and/or costume store
16. Headquarters space for *Scottish Battlefields Trust* as well as the *Battle of Prestonpans (1745) Heritage Trust*.

Clearly, some of the activities and facilities listed here may be able to overlap in spatial use, but as presented they provide an introduction to the flexibilities a commitment to creating a genuinely programmes-driven Centre would require. Since this is indeed to be a “Living” History Centre, then the requirement for adequate multi-use behind-scenes spaces and appropriate exhibition design should be incorporated in planning from an early stage.

**Such a putative Battle of Prestonpans Experience would therefore be a progressive evolution beyond existing visitor centre models, combining appropriate but restrained use of cutting edge technology with traditional museum displays and the immediacy of live action interpretation and ongoing active programming.**

**Such as Centre has the potential to become not just a centre for interpreting the Battle of Prestonpans, or visiting the remarkable tapestries it inspired, but also a centre of excellence for living history, Jacobite and Battlefield studies, and participatory museum programming.**

**Potential Interpretation Comparisons**

The most obvious comparators are the *National Trust for Scotland* visitor centres at Culloden Battlefield and Bannockburn. There is a smaller site at Killiecrankie, which incorporates non-battle related content.

In England, there is an established battlefield centre at Bosworth, Leicestershire, and a connected visitor attraction on Richard III in Leicester itself.

A National Civil War Centre has opened in Newark, Nottinghamshire.

There is a modest privately-run centre at Shrewsbury Battlefield which has recently been developed.

At Warwick Castle, a large area is dedicated to the build-up to the Battle of Barnet, despite this being fought a considerable distance away.

*English Heritage* operates a battlefield site at Hastings 1066.

There is a visitor centre at the Boyne in Ireland, which might well provide an interesting study in the need for balance and sensitivity in interpretation.

Most of the above make some use of costumed interpretation as part of their programming. At the Royal Armouries in Leeds there are dedicated indoor performance spaces at key areas throughout the exhibition, with timetabled live-action displays.

Elements from all of the above will be relevant as comparative studies, as will the Trust’s existing appraisal of the Bayeux Tapestry exhibition in Normandy with support from CreativeScotland. The refurbished exhibition of the Overlord Embroidery in Portsmouth may provide interpretation insights, as might the Trafalgar and Mary Rose centres elsewhere in that city.