

The Scottish CONSERVATION STUDIO

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Scottish Diaspora Tapestry

Conservation condition and mounting assessment

Client: **The Battle of Prestonpans (1745) Heritage Trust**

Contacts: **Gordon Prestoungrange**

In March 2019 the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry was on display in New Lanark Mills World Heritage Site. Tuula Pardoe conducted a condition assessment of the Tapestry on 13 March 2019 there.

Client brief

Assess the condition and advice only on the mounting and possible future problems of the Tapestry.

Brief tapestry description

The Tapestry is made up of 305 individual panels, each of which measures about 55 x 55cm. Laid all together they would make a width of 164m. The panels are embroidered on a medium-weight plain-weave ground cloth of cotton and linen (?) in plied dyed woollen threads. Each panel is lined with medium-weight unbleached plain-weave cotton fabric. The top back edges of the panels are furnished with a length of hooked Velcro, which is sewn to a length of unbleached cotton webbing of herringbone weave. The cotton webbing also forms a polesleeve at the back of the panels (image 1).

For display the panels are fixed on floor-standing boards that are covered with looped material to which the hooked Velcro of the panels sticks.

Condition

Overall the tapestry panels are in a good condition – the last of the panels were only completed and all then displayed for the first time in 2015. The panels are sound and stable and can currently physically tolerate their display on the stands.

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A number of the panels have slight problems where the heavy embroidery pulls the ground fabric and this reflects as slight puckering in some of the unembroidered areas. That is in the nature of this kind of embroidery and as such it is only an inherent problem.

The type of fabric on which the panels are sewn creases easily. A number of the panels are slightly crumpled from their handling (image 2). A small number shows a slight central vertical crease. Unevenness of some of the panels also causes slight shadows, which in turn interferes slightly with the reading of the panels.

As only the top edges of the panels are fixed to the display stands, many of their unfixed edges and bottom corners lift off the display surface (image 3).

Dust can be expected on panels on open display but as such it has not yet disfigured them by accumulating on them.

Whether the dyes of the panels have faded was impossible to assess without seeing the backs of the panels.

Potential future issues

Should it be necessary to reduce the crumpled look of the panels one day, this would be best done under the guidance of a textile conservator. Textile conservators do not iron historic textiles in order to avoid baking in any dirt and stressing the material with heat. Textiles are rather relaxed with moisture and then dried under slight tension.

It appeared that the ground fabric of the panels may not have been washed before it was cut and sewn. Should it ever become necessary to wet-clean the panels in order to reduce their level of soiling and staining, subject to solubility testing of the dyes, the ground fabric would probably shrink then. This could lead to puckering that might disfigure the panels. It might be necessary to release the linings in order to clean the panels. Fortunately, with over 300 panels it would be possible for a textile conservator to test cleaning on one of the panels in order to assess how it behaves and how to solve any problems before cleaning any more of the panels.

When the panels will be installed for permanent display, it looks likely that the mounting of the panels will need to be re-considered.

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 March 2019

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2. Slightly crumpled ground fabric with a slight vertical creased through its centre.



3. Edges of the panels lift off the display stands.