**COMBINED REPORT TO CREATIVE SCOTLAND re BAYEUX**

**September/ November 2013**

Grant # CSG12-01967/ GI12242 **International Programme** & Grant # CSL13-05569/LB10480 **Talent Development Programme**

Two Grants were made to enable the visit by artists and presenters from Prestonpans to Bayeux, for International Engagement [£2,500] and for Talent Development [£12,500]. These went alongside In Kind involvement of the artists and contributions from Bayeux and the Battle of Prestonpans 1745 Heritage Trust.

**What we accomplished**

We were invited by the Mayor and the Tapestry Museum in Bayeux to be their autumn guest exhibition for 2013, specifically attending the opening of the eight week display during European Heritage Weekend, September 14th/ 15th. The Museum received 4,000 + visitors that weekend most of whom also visited the Prestonpans Tapestry. Many thousands more have visited since. The hospitality of the Mayor and the support of all Museum staff were magnificent.

Our 33 artists and presenters created a costumed ***Scottish Fest*** at the Museum and in the town itself to heighten awareness of the exhibition and with the support of M Jean Migrenne locally arranged media coverage. Re-enactments of tapestry panels, poetry, music, song and storytelling were presented. We believe that in this way we indeed heightened awareness of Scottish achievement in the arts in a medium well appreciated in Normandy and that the resultant goodwill/ publicity boosted visitor numbers. Particular highlights were Bayeux’s reaffirmation of the Treaty of Fontainbleau, October 1745 [3309 below] and Colin Cruickshank’s Address to the Camembert [3306].

French translation of panel details:

<http://www.prestonpanstapestry.org/tapestry/Documents/TapisseriedePrestponpansTOHANG.pdf>

Comprehensive News Reports on the Web:

<http://www.prestonpanstapestry.org/tapestry/html/news/show_news.aspx?newsid=3301>

<http://www.prestonpanstapestry.org/tapestry/html/news/show_news.aspx?newsid=3308>

<http://www.prestonpanstapestry.org/tapestry/html/news/show_news.aspx?newsid=3310>

<http://www.prestonpanstapestry.org/tapestry/html/news/show_news.aspx?newsid=3306>

<http://www.prestonpanstapestry.org/tapestry/html/news/show_news.aspx?newsid=3309>

**What we learnt**

The major objective of our attendance at the Heritage Weekend was to ‘learn’ from Bayeux on a number of key dimensions. Most especially we wanted to learn how they work with and encourage local craft/artist groups as well as involving them in the educational and tourism activities of the Museum. The benefits of meeting those responsible for, and understanding how Bayeux conducts itself and its community involvement/ talent development, will be applied in Prestonpans in the coming years. [With our second major artwork, the Scottish Diaspora Tapestry, nearing completion, we know full well we need wise input to manage the assets created as well as the continuing aspirations of our local artists/ stitchers. The ‘Friends of the Prestonpans Tapestries will be formally established in January 2014.]

In this respect we learnt that Bayeux’s overwhelming international celebrity status has not worked greatly in favour of the local community’s artists anywhere near as much as we hope can be achieved for our own. Bayeux Museum is seen as primarily a tourism destination with its UNESCO status and visitor numbers often threaten to overwhelm it especially in the summer. Neither is on-site staff assistance provided to educational groups although many of the visitors are indeed school parties on concession entrance fees and much of the exhibition space is there to be enjoyed by young people.

Appendix:

**Summary of information learned via logs during Professional Development Workshop visit to**

**the Bayeux Tapestry Museum, Normandy, for the launch of the Battle of Prestonpans Tapestry Exhibition there: September/ November 2013; and debated and approved at Trustees & Artists at their Review Workshop in Prestonpans, December 6th**

1. **Key Performance Indicators**

Discussions with senior curators at the Bayeux Tapestry Museum revealed that it was not usually practical to officially record key performance indicator statistics, especially regarding the number of school visits. This is on account of the dependably large visitor figures and the consistent popularity of the exhibition with school parties, both domestic and overseas.

Nevertheless, ticket sales for the Bayeux Tapestry do reveal the numbers of visitors and, since they are usually asked their country of origin, there are some useful statistics available. It was explained by representatives from the municipal council (who administer the museum) that:

* On average, there are 450,000 – 500,000 visitors to the Bayeux Tapestry annually, with 2,500-3,000 per day at peak times.
* That equates at busy times to around 1 visitor every 15 seconds.
* 25% of all visitors to the Bayeux Tapestry are British
* Approximately 15,000 of those annual visitors are from Scotland
* Approximately 1,400 school groups, equating to around 60,000 children, visit the Bayeux Tapestry each year. Of these, around one third are domestic visitors.
* The audio guide is available in 14 languages and lasts 20minutes.
* The gift shop makes a profit of between 800,000 and 1million Euros each year.

1. **Education**

There is no dedicated education team based at the Bayeux Tapestry Museum. It is felt by the museum management that there is no requirement to provide supporting workshops or learning activities due to the existing high demand and sheer volume of visitors.

There is a gallery on the first floor of the museum which features a printed version of the Bayeux Tapestry on the walls, scaled down with some basic annotations. This is a public space but can be used by school groups to study the narrative with greater freedom than in the actual display downstairs. It is also used for temporary exhibitions, including the Battle of Prestonpans Tapestry in 2013.

It was something of a surprise for members of our team to discover that there was no dedicated on-staff education staff for the Bayeux Tapestry. The Tapestry benefits greatly from not only being relevant to local and French history but also being identified internationally with the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, which features on the English national curriculum.

By contrast, the Prestonpans Tapestry is more likely to be of educational value to domestic audiences in Scotland/Britain and may therefore be expected to receive fewer educational visits from overseas. It is also unlikely to anticipate the sheer volume of visitors which Bayeux feels prevent it from requiring a dedication educational staff.

It seems sensible therefore to suggest that, whilst schools might well be willing and able to self-guide their visits (as in Bayeux), the Prestonpans Tapestry would benefit considerably in a permanent home from the provision of dedicated education professionals such as a Learning Officer. They would help to interpret the tapestry as a work of art in addition to exploring the narrative history it tells, something not readily dealt with by the educational offering at Bayeux.

It would be possible to develop an education programme for the Prestonpans Tapestry museum in which pupils engage with the Tapestry in different ways throughout their school years to meet all the key stages. If classes visit a few times during their time at school it will then encourage them to return as visitors as young adults and when they have families themselves. This is a process which Bayeux clearly recognises: people tend to visit first as children as part of a group, and return independently as adults. Currently, the visitor experience is not much different on each occasion.

1. **Interpretation**

The Bayeux Tapestry museum is spread over three floors. The tapestry itself is displayed on the ground floor and is usually visited first. The only interpretation on this level is provided by the audio-guide (see below). The second level features a supporting exhibition covering the Norman Conquest of England and its context, along with some information about the creation and history of the tapestry. The third floor comprises a temporary exhibition space (featuring the reduced-scale print of the tapestry with annotations), and a large cinema room with regular showings (alternating between languages) of an informative film about the tapestry and the Norman Conquest.

The general feeling of our party was that the whole experience was effectively up-side-down, and that the real highlight – the tapestry – was visited first, making the rest seem anti-climactic. It would seem preferable to provide the contextual information first, allowing the visitor to appreciate the tapestry all the more once they have a working knowledge of its story. Although the Bayeux Tapestry benefits from a permanent exhibition, it is clear therefore that the site (a converted seventeenth century seminary) is not ideally suited to the presentation of the museum. This supports the Battle of Prestonpans (1745) Heritage Trust’s conviction that a purpose-built facility holds clear interpretive advantages, with the whole museum designed around the tapestry and designed to optimise the experience of seeing it.

1. **Audio Guides**

The Bayeux Tapestry exhibition uses audio guides as its main interpretation tool, although there is a large exhibition room on the upper floor giving background and context information. Audio guides are included in the admission price and are handed out as a matter of course. The museum offers guides in fourteen different languages: French, English, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Czech, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Hebrew. The twenty-minute guide can be paused, but otherwise requires no visitor input. If the visitor lets it run, the tour lasts 20minutes and is clearly used not just to provide information but also to keep the visitor moving through the often busy gallery. No additional interpretation is provided alongside the tapestry itself, and the audio guide focusses very strongly on the narrative elements of the tapestry. It moves at an occasionally uncomfortably fast pace. The feedback from our group strongly inclined to suggest the audio-guide rushed them through the exhibition and discouraged a detailed engagement with the embroidery and the history.

For younger visitors junior audio guides are available, featuring adapted content more accessible for children. On a separate handset to the standard audio guide, these must be provided in sufficient numbers to meet expected school group attendances. If this is the case, then the guide provides a level of flexibility which, for example, would be more difficult if groups had to be escorted around by a member of staff. However, it is an impersonal approach. On several busy occasions with the Prestonpans Tapestry, venues have struggled to combine school parties visiting alongside the general public, suggesting a need for some form of controlled exploration (such as audio-guides can provide), although a permanent exhibition may feature sufficient supporting interpretation for audio-guides not to be necessary (except for foreign languages). Regarding school visits, it seems likely that a combined approach would be best: controlled exploration of the tapestry itself, leading to follow-up activities with education staff in a private space.

1. **Film**

As part of the Bayeux Tapestry’s supporting exhibition, there is a cinema showing a short film in both English and French. The film seemed very popular with museum visitors and added another dimension and learning style to the exploration of the tapestry. A particularly striking element of the film was the overlaying of re-enactment footage with shots of maps and scenes from the tapestry, bringing the embroidery visibly to life. This style also assists in maintaining interest levels and accessibility for a wide age range. The film worked well, but being on the top floor of the museum it felt rather dislocated from the rest of the interpretation, and it was clearly not visited by all of those who came to see the tapestry.

1. **Marketing**

The Bayeux Tapestry Museum is one of three local authority museums in the city. The tapestry itself is already internationally famous by virtue of its long history and widespread interest and publication over the generations. It was recently added to the UNESCO “Memory of the World” Register.

Marketing for the Bayeux Tapestry is primarily done within the museum in conjunction with the local tourist office. It was highlighted to representatives of our group that the international fame of the Bayeux Tapestry meant that extensive or particularly innovative ways of promoting the museum were not necessary, and so no special marketing measures are undertaken. In effect, it is felt that the tapestry sells itself, and is effectively a “must-see” for those visiting the region (including as part of packages to visit the nearby D-Day beaches). The price mechanism is actively used to seek to manage visits away from the busy season.

The museum is in the centre of the town, with local shops selling a wide variety of souvenirs which themselves promote the Tapestry and demonstrate a clear ‘commercial’ sense of communal ownership. The museum is not particularly accessibly to coaches or by car, and some approaches to the museum on foot are a little obscure. Nevertheless, it is easy to find by following either the signage or the crowds.

Clearly the marketing challenges of the Prestonpans Tapestry are initially very different, and even in its permanent home it will be important for a marketing team to make the case for bringing coaches and visitors into Prestonpans. In both cases, however, it is the object itself, the tapestry, which is the driving force and provides the iconic imagery around which the tourism is built.

1. **Supporting Events & Activities**

The Bayeux Tapestry Museum does not host a programme of supporting events. The museum does occasionally host temporary exhibitions, like the Prestonpans Tapestry, when there is a link to the Bayeux Tapestry. These are not seen however as being a significant part of the museum’s work. Limited numbers of curatorial staff were cited as one reason why more supporting events are not held, as was the already large and consistent visitor flow.

However, it was clear from our own performances of Scottish music, storytelling, costumed living history and sword fighting, that these activities drew a lot of attention and considerable audiences, even when held on a restricted scale. Whilst they may not in themselves have brought large numbers of additional visitors into the Bayeux Tapestry, they did provide a more dynamic atmosphere to greet visitors and increased sense of colour and engagement. This was clearly appreciated by visitors, and at peak times would surely be diverting for visitors who were waiting/queuing for admission. It also highlighted how impersonal some aspects of the visitor experience were within. This sense of direct interaction and engagement has always been central to the Prestonpans Tapestry’s touring activities, and surely should be incorporated into its long-term vision also.

The museum shop does host occasional embroidery demonstrations, which are used to encourage purchase of embroidery kits as well as promoting knowledge of how the tapestry was originally stitched. This is something which could clearly be expanded upon, as it fits with existing ideas the Trust has had in Prestonpans about stitching workshops. Our own experiences have shown that there is considerably interest in how the Prestonpans Tapestry was made, as well as in the history that it narrates. *More than that, however, the opportunity exists in Prestonpans to actively ‘encourage’ more stitchers to take up the craft.* [Specifically, the Trustees with Prestoungrange Arts Festival have resolved to establish formally in January 2014 a ‘Friends of the Prestonpans tapestries – both to care for the artworks we have created and to encourage the embroidery more widely across our community.]

Each July, Bayeux does host a medieval festival weekend which involves activities across the town centre. The Tapestry is clearly a big part of the town’s identity. Similarly, Prestonpans hosts a large re-enactment event each year, and it is clear that a fully developed inter-relationship between the tapestry’s eventual home, the town itself, the battlefield, and annual re-enactment events, will all play an important role in developing a sense of the Prestonpans Tapestry’s place in its community.