

# HISTORIC BATTLEFIELDS OF SCOTLAND

## Preamble

In essence this 'slight' Consultation Paper by Historic Scotland must be seen as a very great disappointment to those who have been campaigning, not least the SNP in its election manifesto, for their proper preservation. This is the view we arrived at initially as Trustees per se and which was echoed in extended debate at the Open Consultation we convened in Prestonpans on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008. That Consultation attracted more than 30 interested 'individuals' being East Lothian Council Members and Officers, East Lothian Antiquarians, Dunbar and Prestonpans Community Councillors, Old Musselburgh Club Pinkie Group members, Prestonpans Historical Society and Prestoungrange Arts Festival Members.

There are four fundamental dimensions to this profound disappointment.

- Talk of an inventory is *already* history. It exists, can readily be recited by dozens of scholars and most recently was compiled for Historic Scotland itself by the Battlefields Trust.
- To suggest that the same public institutions which are currently responsible, but paying perhaps a tad more care and attention, can take care of the matter is to avoid the challenge.
- To fail to include 'the local community' which is host to the battlefield in the consideration of stakeholders is incomprehensible.
- To suggest that 'protection' for battlefields should only prevail if they can be geographically delineated and if at least 500 combatants took part ignores their educational meaning and interpretation, their social significance for the 'host' community and for the nation.

## On the Questions Posed

- [i] Is protection necessary? YES
- [ii] Do you agree with the given definition of a battlefield? NO
- [iii] Are there overlooked reasons for valuing battlefields? YES
- [iv] Do you support a non-statutory inventory? NO. IT MUST BE STATUTORY
- [v] Should battlefields have the same status as Gardens and Designated Landscapes?  
NO. IT SHOULD BE UNIQUE TO BATTLEFIELDS
- [vi] Do you agree the purpose of the proposed inventory? NO
- [vii] Do you believe the criteria proposed are suitable? NO
- [viii] Do you agree with the definition of area of interest? NO
- [ix] Do you believe that policies are needed for [a] the overall and [b] the specifics within a battlefield area? [a] YES [b] NO
- [x] Do you agree Best Practice Guidance would be useful? NO
- [xi] Do you agree with the Roles allocated for the policies outlined? NO

## Trenchant Observations on what we are being 'Consulted' about

*As the Irishman asked for directions sagely observed, we would not have started from here!*

1. There is little controversy about what are the 'significant' battlefields as they relate to national and local Scottish history. The Battlefield Trust completed a study more than two years ago. As such, discussion of bureaucratic process whilst of concern, is *not* the issue. A small Panel can speedily resolve the matter with borderline instances open to further debate. There should clearly be A, B and C classes of battlefield and each will require different levels of commitment and scope for additions and movement between classes is necessarily required.
2. The inventory should be statutory as a statement of the seriousness of the government's intent.
3. The issue debated must be: **What is Going to be Done about the Listed Battlefields and by Whom?** It should not be an issue about how can we draw up an accepted inventory and stop bad news happening to them. That should go without saying ... but the only valid reason for stopping development of a battlefield should be a coherent viable strategy towards that battlefield.

4. Firstly, Preservation must be defined as having an absolute minimum of [a] delineation and protection; [b] authenticated interpretation and story telling; and [c] access for and educational presentation to the public. Simply to preserve a battlefield without telling the authentic story and the public being able to learn the lessons should be deemed an unacceptable basis for protection or conservation.
5. Secondly, the communities where the battlefields lie and their local planning authorities should be held accountable at 4. above directly to the First Minister [as is the case in the USA where significant battlefields are managed by the Department of National Parks, established it will be recalled on the initiative of John Muir, and on direct report to The President].
6. Thirdly, every local community and planning authority should be required through the medium of a Heritage 'Trust' or similarly recognised institution, and within a given timescale, to create a strategy to accomplish all that is sensibly required at 4. above, *notwithstanding that resources may or may not be available at the time to accomplish it*. To ensure good stewardship, the strategy should be achievable on an incremental basis as resources do become available. It should be required to be revisited for progress say every five years.
7. Best Practice is of course highly desirable but must never be allowed, as it so often does, to become an arbiter or constraint on what can be achieved. It should be inspirational but each battlefield Heritage 'Trust' should fashion its own strategy to the satisfaction of the First Minister and the host community. The search for Best Practice ideas should be across the globe and should capture case histories not just of effective outcomes but of the ways and means by which they have been achieved.
8. The above propositions should be applicable to Classes A, B and C but with lighter touch for the lesser classes. For Class A battlefields, which may be as few as 10, it should be a matter of national prioritisation that Preservation as defined at 4. above be accomplished within 5/ 10 years. In Classes B and C communities and local planning authorities should make what progress they can reasonably make but with a necessary penchant for action.

## **Worms' Eye View from Prestonpans**

In 2006 The Battlefields Trust, on report to Historic Scotland, identified Prestonpans as the most at risk significant battlefield in Scotland. Moreover a goodly portion but not all the context of the battlefield has been lost to Scottish Power's Cockenzie Power Station and Council estate building at Preston House. The historic Waggonway is un-interpreted but lives on in part as a footpath. The Riggonhead Defile has been obliterated by open cast mining and Blindwells, a fashionable eco-town, beckons.

The East Lothian Council staged an excellent re-enactment for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a pyramidal battle memorial bing has been constructed with interpretation plates at its summit. But the site is wrongly signed and un-maintained as such. There was no dynamic. Then one retired history teacher began walking the battlefield each year on September 21<sup>st</sup>.

Around him a local consensus grew [first from the nascent Arts Festival and then with added fillip from a localised RSA Coffee House Challenge] that an initiative was called for and, if it was ever going to happen, it would have to come from the community itself. Hence our Battle Trust was launched. The rest of our campaign has followed. From the outset it has been committed to Public Access to Local History and the Lessons to Be Learnt – not planning blight or protection per se. The message was and is Preservation as set down at 4. above.

Furthermore, many experts from many fields have been drawn into our Trust's work, not to 'tell us what to do or even what is good for us', but to help us on our own initiative to arrive at a comprehensively authentic preservation as set down at 4. above.

Our main lesson to date is that given a sense of purpose all manner of local energy, initiatives and volunteer services are available. We are fortunate to be an urban battlefield with a strong community that identifies with its battlefield history – although which side each of us is on remains problematic and of course a key element of the learning. But more than that, we have not bemoaned the 'ruination' of 50% of the battlefield context. We have accepted that as the nature of the community's evolving best interests.

We are delighted in fact that we have found, with the arrival of virtual reality, that what had seemingly been 'ruined' can be recreated virtually. Which is not to gainsay our actuality programme of annual re-enactments which all can watch and the enthusiast can directly participate in with our Alan Breck Prestonpans Volunteer Regiment. Our battle is even being re-fought in our example via gaming sequences where Cope is given a chance to win – with very substantial opportunities available for learning by youngsters in this way.

But more importantly perhaps, we have discerned that Prince Charles Edward's Victory in the Battle of Prestonpans was as unique a moment in Scottish history as his subsequent defeat at Culloden. It inspired a wave of literary work both at the time and later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century once George IV and Queen Victoria had come under our nation's spell. Through the medium of our town's Arts Festival plays, poetry, painting and song have all been created.

The lessons and the cultural significance of the Battle of Prestonpans stretch far beyond the tangibles of battlefield tactics and topography, the numbers present, today's level of ruination per se and any artefacts that archaeologists may discover – notwithstanding their important role.

## **National Action Lines**

In response to the Consultation tabled by Historic Scotland, we call for a far more Hopeful and Ambitious approach to the issues raised. We do not support 'government expenditure' on an Inventory assembling process which will duplicate what already exists.

We propose that the First Minister should himself establish a Working Group of those who are currently actively engaged in Protecting, Conserving, Interpreting and Presenting Scotland's Battlefields to distil from their experiences and with comparative perspectives around the globe, what can now be done to maximise the contribution they can make to Scotland's culture, national self esteem and self confidence.

We fully accept that 'grand' capital funding can only be made available when circumstances permit, but that should never justify a failure across Scotland to envision what can be constructively achieved on modest budgets to accomplish the approach we have set down in clause 4. above. There are spectacular examples of this latter point not least at Glenfinnan and Athelstaneford.

[Whilst not allowing ourselves to be distracted from our primary espoused responsibilities in Prestonpans, we have every intention to give succour to fellow 'clause 4 preservationists' in Pinkie [1547's Rough Wooing] and Dunbar [1650's Cromwellian tour de force] as we proceed.]