



THE ATHELSTANEFORD SALTIRE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SCOTTISH FLAG TRUST

No.10 • AUTUMN 2006

REHARLING OF DOOCOT



Approaching Athelstaneford from the west, one of the first things to catch the eye is the 16th century Hepburn Doocot which houses the Flag Heritage Centre. The structure stands out, both because it sits beyond the building line and because of its distinctive pale pink colour.

Recently, the Trustees noticed that the harling on the east elevation of the Doocot was starting to spall badly – the most likely explanation being frost damage at the time the harling was applied back in 1997. Clearly, the problem needed to be tackled.

Quotations were therefore sought for scaffolding, reharling the east elevation, and applying a colour wash

to all four exterior walls. Jedburgh firm, John Laidlaw & Son Ltd, has been appointed to carry out the works during November (provided it is frost free!) at a cost of just under £5,000.

The Trust has successfully put together a funding package for the project, and particular thanks are due to Viridor Waste Management for a contribution of £3,675 through landfill tax, of which the third party 10% requirement is being met by the St Andrew Society. Thanks are also due to East Lothian Council for a tourism grant of £1,137, and to a donation of £100 from "Friend" George Reid. Once complete, the refreshed Doocot should continue to stand out as a landmark within the East Lothian countryside.

Charlie Blair applying sample shades of pink lime wash to the Doocot, prior to a final decision on the colour being taken.

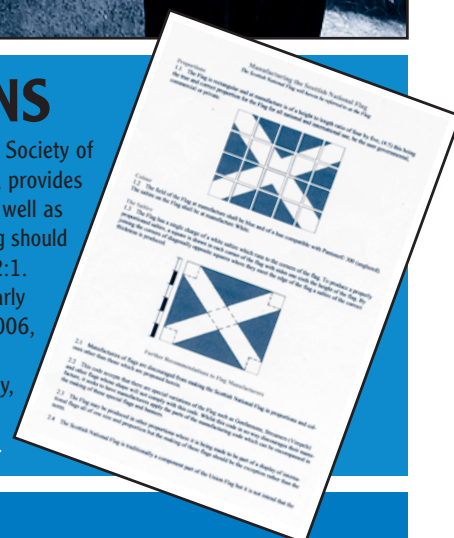


SALTIRE ON A1

The 2005 Newsletter carried an article about the wrong flags flying at the northbound lay-by on the A1 border crossing. The Trust is delighted to report that the Scottish Executive has now confirmed in writing that, in future, only the St Andrew's Cross will be flown there. Furthermore, the Executive has just funded a comprehensive upgrading of the lay-by, incorporating 3 new tall flagpoles with Saltires, and this provides an eye-catching welcome and sense of arrival for visitors to Scotland.

FLAG PROPORTIONS

The Flag Code, jointly produced in 2004 by the Heraldry Society of Scotland, the St Andrew Society and the Saltire Society, provides advice on the proper dimensions of the Scottish flag as well as stipulating the proper colour. The guidance is that the flag should be in the proportions 5:4 length to height, rather than 2:1. This is considered to better reflect the proportions of early Scottish flags, rather than modern day naval flags. In 2006, the Trust followed the guidance and introduced at Athelstaneford a Saltire in the 5:4 proportions. Interestingly, this has resulted in less wear compared to the longer version. Copies of the Flag Code are available on request.



VISITOR UPDATE

In June 2006, VisitScotland carried out its biennial grading inspection of the Athelstaneford site. Happily the outcome was positive, with the inspector stating he was "pleased to confirm that the Flag Heritage Centre and Saltire Memorial continues to score as a strong **four star attraction**". Inspections are unannounced, and this year new grading rules were in force. There were a number of suggested improvements in the report, and the Trustees will be following these up in order to ensure that the high grading is maintained.

Charlie Blair reports that the month of August 2006 achieved the highest ever number of people visiting the Heritage Centre, as measured by way of entries in the visitors book. This included in particular an increase in overseas visitors. The numbers may reflect the exceptionally good summer we have enjoyed.

VISIT THE WEBSITE

Information about Athelstaneford can be found via the St Andrew Society Website at

www.st-andrew.org.uk

SITE OF THE BATTLE

The Trust is often asked about historical evidence for the St Andrew's Cross appearing in the sky above the battle at Athelstaneford. The reality, however, is that there is little documentation relating to the 9th century, and we have to rely on the work of early medieval historians such as Boece, Buchanan, Leslie and Spottiswoode, all of whom record the story even though details vary.

In a recent query, "Friend" Stewart Connor asked about map evidence for the location of the battle. This prompted a visit to the National Map Library in Edinburgh, where a thorough inspection of the records held revealed:-

- None of the early East Lothian land ownership maps from 1630 to 1844 refer to the battle.
 - The first OS map in 1854 (6 inches to 1 mile) refers to "*Supposed Site of Battle (9th century)*" on fields to the north east of buildings at Needless, half a mile north of Athelstaneford.
 - The second OS map in 1908 refers to "*Supposed Site of Battle*" on fields slightly further from Needless, two thirds of a mile north of Athelstaneford.
 - Later OS maps in 1958 and 1968 make no reference to the battle.
- Intriguingly, both the 1854 and 1908 maps refer to "*Site of Ford (supposed spot where Athelstan was slain)*" on the Cogtail Burn, 150 yards west of Athelstaneford Mains Farm to the south east of the village.

The 1854 map also refers to "*Bloody Side*" on fields between Prora Farm and the Peffer Burn, a mile and a half north of Athelstaneford. The late author and historian Nigel Tranter firmly believed this to be



Panoramic view northwards from Heritage Centre, with North Berwick Law on skyline. The group of buildings at Needless can be seen on the right of the shot; Prora Farm is on the far left; and the Peffer Burn lies in the middle distance beyond the ridge.

the site of the battle, and the interpretative panel by the Heritage Centre highlights this location. The 1854 map also shows, between Prora and West Fortune Farms, the site of a "*Boar Stone*", though the 1992 OS map (1:25000) instead refers to a "*Boar Stone (moved)*" at Prora Farm. A boar stone (or bore-stane) is generally defined as a stone bored for the reception of a flag staff.

The 1854 and 1908 map references derive from detailed site work carried out by the OS surveyors of the day, and this would have involved dialogue with villagers, farmers and landowners. The location of the battle site shown on these early maps therefore reflects the commonly held view of people living in and around Athelstaneford, as handed down through the generations.

Vandalism

Sadly, this year, for the first time, the Athelstaneford site was subjected to vandalism. Between 14/15 March, someone deliberately defaced the Saltire Memorial that stands in the churchyard, painting the words "our father would not want this" in bright blue letters over the main panel. The East Lothian press reported the matter, but despite this and local inquiries Police have been unable to establish who might have been involved.

It proved particularly difficult to remove the paint from the roughened parts of the panel surface, as it had become ingrained. Nevertheless, and thanks to the efforts of Charlie Blair and Malcolm Duncan, the panel was thoroughly cleaned, and all that remains is a very slight blue tinge. This may disappear completely in time. The incident mystified the Trustees, the Rev Kenneth Walker, and the villagers, as the Memorial has been in existence for 40 years without any previous incident. While the Heritage Centre is covered by CCTV, this had never been thought necessary for the Memorial, given its well lit and prominent location by the road.



Thankfully nothing has happened subsequently, and the hope is that this was a one-off that will not be repeated.

CONTACT DETAILS

The Scottish Flag Trust, which is a registered charity (No: SC002778), was established in 1984. Its objectives are:-

- to maintain and upgrade the Athelstaneford Heritage Centre and Saltire Memorial
- to raise public awareness about the origins of Scotland's national flag.

For information, or to order a school information pack, mouse mat or T-shirt, write to the Scottish Flag Trust at PO Box 84, Edinburgh EH3 8LG. Key contacts are:-

David Williamson, Chairman
(Tel:01368.863.239)
Charlie Blair, Custodian
(Tel:01620.880.297)
Malcolm Duncan, Treasurer
(Tel:01620.880.306)

VISIT THE WEBSITE

Information about Athelstaneford can be found via the St Andrew Society Website at

www.st-andrew.org.uk