**THE MODERN KILT INVENTED LOCHABER 1723**

**PANEL 50 OF THE GREAT TAPESTRY OF SCOTLAND**

This panel tells the story of Invergarry Ironworks and Thomas Rawlinson in the early days of the Industrial Revolution in Scotland. Rawlinson was an Englishman from Lancashire and a Quaker, who originally went to the Highlands when the government was opening them to outside exploitation after the Jacobite campaign of 1715. He later went on to set up the ironworks at Invergarry . The attraction was the plentiful supply of coaling wood, but it would appear that the venture was not a success and that lack of familiarity with the area and its culture led to hostility on the part of the local people. The furnace was intermittently operational for about 10 years, finally closing in 1736 due to difficulties in transporting ore and pig iron and possibly also due to a drought impacting on the water supply.

It was difficult to get information on what the forge might have looked like, what the workers would have used to pour the molten metal, what they would have used to carry iron ore. We failed to find any pictures so a certain amount of creative thinking was required. We thought the poles the men are holding must have been made of wood as metal would have conducted heat and made them impossible to hold. The forge seemed to have been made of stone – or should that perhaps have been “stones”? The buckets have been stitched so that they could be interpreted as wood or metal, and the box into which the molten metal is being poured has received the same treatment. A helpful geologist advised on the type of iron ore which would have been available, so that at least might be right.

Thomas Rawlinson is often credited with inventing the kilt as we know it today, having realised that the great kilt, or belted plaid, was not suitable for ironworks environment. This view is not without controversy among historians, but it would appear that at the very least he played a significant role in promoting the “little kilt”.

Tartan as we know it today had not been invented in 1723. It was not linked to clans, and there were none of the proscribed thread patterns which authentic tartans require today. The men in our panel will have worn various weaves, almost certainly in strong colours and woven in small scale domestic production. This gave us the freedom to produce a colourful panel.

The three boxes across the top of the panel were blank for our ideas. Having already failed to find out much about the ironworks, we started looking at the material of which the kilt was made, thinking we might do something on 18th century fabric production. On the internet we came across Dr Anita Quiye, a lecturer at the University of Glasgow and expert in historic fabrics and their dyes. She kindly offered to come to Smailholm one evening to tell us the fascinating story of ancient dyes. Coming from a chemistry background, she had been able to work with other chemists and historians, analysing fragments of ancient fabric and finding references to tartan in the literature of the time. It has been possible to conclusively establish that in 18th century Scotland the use of imported dyes would be common and widespread, and the result would be vibrantly coloured kilts, a quality product. The top left hand box of our panel illustrates imported dyes (madder, cochineal, indigo and weld) and in the box on the right hand side we have stitched the local plants from which dyes were obtained, ie gorse, heather and berries. The rectangular box in the centre illustrates the dyes being transported between Fort William and Inverness by boat, the preferred transport method in the days before a road network existed. Lastly, as our stitching had turned to the botanical, we added a Smailholm pansy, a tiny viola-like flower unique to the area. It occurs on the crags by Smailholm Tower and has nothing to do with dyes, but we liked the botanical link to our village.

A search for a poem about tartan led us to “The Weaving of the Tartan” by Alice MacDonell of Keppoch. Both the MacDonells of Keppoch and the MacDonells of Glengarry were descendants of John of Islay, Lord of the Isles. This linked Alice MacDonell to the Macdonells of Glengarry, the landlords at the time of the establishment of the ironworks, but the poem was especially appropriate for its references to the bright colours used in tartan making.

We had already used Smailholm Tower as the obvious tag for our Border Reivers panel and have used it again here. We have also reused our clock, indicating history and the passage of time, with initials for each of our team members in place of the hours. The clock is set to 8 o’clock, the time we used to meet on a Monday evening.

We delivered our finished panel on 17th June 2013.

Veronica Ross

Smailholm Stitchers

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