



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01523

Name of petitioner

Jess Smith

Petition title

Give the Tinkers' Heart of Argyll back to the Travelling People

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to direct Historic Scotland to investigate what action can be taken to ensure the restoration and preservation of the Heart of Quartz stones positioned in a field next to the A815, opposite the junction of the B839, overlooking Loch Fyne, known as the Gypsy Wedding Place, referred to locally as the *Tinkers' Heart*.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

Early failed attempts to have the area restored by writing to local councillors, Loch Fynne 'Here we are' group from Cairndu, land owners and associates led to me approaching Michael Russell MSP. Mr Russell has been extremely helpful and 'hands on' in this matter. He has written to various bodies. He has met with the Landowner, councillors, Historic Scotland, written to Fiona Hyslop and several groups to resolve this matter without success.

I did receive encouragement when Archaeology Scotland, through their 'Adopt A Monument' scheme, offered to help but although a representative and I have met on several occasions (Phil Richardson) nothing has materialised.

RCAHMS were more forthcoming by photographing the area and recording its position. However, this simply dictates its location. The landowner has the final say. Kate Howe (landowner) lives in England and has mostly been negative in her views regarding the culture of the people that the *Tinkers' Heart* represents.

I wrote and sent all relevant info to the present Duke of Argyll, who also lives in the south of England, but he refuses to help on the grounds of his friendship with Ms Howe.

Mrs Howe and her associates have not answered my emails but they have conversed with Michael Russell MSP - but only to voice their views on the cultural significance in a negative manner.

In June 28th 2013 I met with Mike Russell MSP, Councillor Louise Glen-Lee, a rep from Visit Scotland and Historic Scotland at A&B council offices at Kilmory, Lochgilhead but once again no positive outcome.

The Rep from Visit Scotland queried how his organisation would benefit from supporting the project. I told him the area was not about tourism but about an entire culture that had been overlooked for centuries and that the *Tinkers' Heart* was all they

had as a marker of their ancestors. I did add that many of the Diaspora came from these humble beginnings and would be more than satisfied to see their culture protected by law.

The Historic Scotland rep said they would not go against the wishes of the landowner.

Time and events march on without a positive outcome therefore I have been left with no choice but to raise awareness through petitioning which I hope shall reach a wider audience and allow me to gauge how the public respond to such a request.

Petition background information

It is the only monument that Scottish Travellers have, indicating their timeline and presence in Scotland. Excluded by church and state these ancient people have visited the Heart to marry and christen babies for centuries. The site was still used for Tinkers' weddings as late as 1978 and it seems that its importance as a place of beginnings is still understood today by couples who visit the Heart on their wedding day; as the beautiful photograph on page 19 of the 2012 report from Cairndow's *Here We Are* rural communities group shows:

<http://tinyurl.com/q6nk63o>

It is also a sacred place to remember the dead, evident by the coins and flowers that lie scattered at the Heart: some people still visit to pay respect and honour their ancestors.

In 1928 the nearby road was resurfaced by workmen from the local council, who covered the Heart. Both Tinkers and local landowners objected to this action and Lady George Campbell insisted that the tar be removed from the site. Not only was the Heart restored, this episode showed the importance of the Heart to both a distinct Scottish cultural group and to the local gentry. By protecting this site, Lady Campbell showed her appreciation of the diverse cultures within the Scotland of her time and her appreciation of the people farmers relied on as seasonal agricultural workers. She understood that the land and its entire people are intertwined: the land shapes the people as much as people shape the land.

The layout of the road was changed in the 1970s and the main road was realigned, leaving the heart in a field instead of at the junction of the roads. The RCHAMS record of the site clearly documents that it was the road that was moved to the east, whilst the Tinkers' Heart remained in its original position:

<http://tinyurl.com/ovzkk9z>.

In 2008 Argyll & Bute council drew up plans for restoration work and money was allocated to the project. However, local residents considered that the £34,500 cost was too much and promised to take care of the area. They erected three posts and wire. This was damaged. There are now cattle feeding and tramping on the Heart, leading to its destruction: <http://tinyurl.com/qf6qflv>, thus prompting this petition for the restoration and listing of this historical place.

How long the Heart has been in Argyll is not known but stories of Caird men (Tinkers from the area) who fought and did not return from the Battle of Culloden of 1745, were remembered by their kinsfolk, in way of the ancient practice of laying a quartz stone for each one lost, culminating in the heart shape and its significance both to the area and the culture. The same understanding of the *Tinkers' Heart* as a place of memory to honour those who travelled away to war and never came home is still extant in tales told of those who went to war in the 20th c and never came home again.

The *Tinkers' Heart* is not a huge site in physical terms, but in terms of love, of memory and of sacred significance, it is a site of enormous proportions and cultural, historical and religious significance.

The Travelling people who have lived and contributed to Scottish culture for centuries have only this little place as proof of our existence.

In his famous book 'Guy Mannering,' Sir Walter Scott wrote fluently about them. In

Poosie Nancy's Tinkers' Howf pub at Mauchline, Ayrshire, Burns recorded the many ballads he'd heard being sung by Scottish Travellers who were the keepers of those songs. Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn mentions the help he received from the 'wee folk.' The Duke of Atholl's secretary mentions the brave 'caird' (tinkers) soldiers, in the black book of Taymouth. Their history intertwines with the soul of Scotland and has added to the strength of the people.

The demise of traditional Gypsies and Travellers in Scotland has long been predicted. It would be tragic if the nomadic history of these / my people who have helped to colour the culture of Scotland, should end in such a way without a tiny little spot being scheduled and listed as our place.

We only ask for our thumb print on the earth; our Tinkers' Heart. We owe it to the sacrifices made by our ancestors.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01523>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

1

Closing date for collecting signatures online

28 / 05 / 2014

Comments to stimulate online discussion

The ethos of the Scottish Government's campaign One Scotland Many Cultures is admirable. The historical and present contributions made to our country by various groups of people is something to celebrate and be proud of – we would not be the Scotland we are today without them. A strong country is made by strong people who love this land. And its people - **all** of its people - always have been Scotland's strength.

Please help us convince the Scottish Government to acknowledge the historical and present importance of one of those groups by signing this petition asking them to schedule the *Tinkers' Heart* as a monument. What could be a more fitting reminder of the Tinkers' part in Scottish life than a heart created from love and memories in the rural landscape at a point where the roads meet?