

15 Nov 2014

David Stewart MSP
Petitions Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr Stewart

RE: The Tinkers' Heart, Public Petition PE1523

I am writing to you as Convenor of the Petitions Committee as well as your capacity as a Regional MSP for the Highlands and Islands.

I have followed the campaign to have the Tinkers' Heart scheduled and protected by Historic Scotland with real interest. When I moved to Highland in 2004 to work in museums (I was based at the Highland Folk Museum, which at the time was based in Kingussie, and Inverness Museum and Art Gallery) I was very impressed by the Traveller collection held at the Highland Folk Museum. These few rare objects formed the basis and inspiration of a series of projects which were carried out with young Travellers – who were based at the time in Inverness and in Spean Bridge. The projects had a number of aims, including promoting literacy among the group and fostering a sense of pride in their history. Through these projects, as well as through reading I have learned a lot about the community and the important part they have played in the history of our country.

Although no one knows the origins of Scottish Travellers for sure, they have been part of Scotland's history and story for hundreds of years, playing an important role as armourers to the clans, as bringers of news and useful items to communities across the highlands and islands and today as the keepers of oral traditions that were once all of ours, but which have become largely lost in our world so dominated by technology. Their story is an important one within the story of Scotland. Historic Scotland aims to preserve historic sites that help to tell the story of the people who have lived in Scotland over the past 10,000 years. By leaving Travellers out of this history the story of Scotland cannot be complete and an opportunity to recognise the contribution of this community is missed. It also adds to the cycle of discrimination in which Travellers are not visible within the telling of our history and this vacuum allows negative attitudes to this community to flourish unchecked. There is an opportunity here not only to protect and interpret a piece of fascinating history, but also to help tell the story of this community, to celebrate their contribution to our culture and heritage, to tackle misconceptions about Travellers and also to offer a way in to greater engagement with Historic Scotland by this marginalised group.

I was therefore frustrated to read the response made by Historic Scotland themselves (letter from Ian Walford, dated 3 November 2014) and the Scottish Government's letter backing this up (letter from Fiona Hyslop, 3 November 2014). In particular the citing of the Heart as intangible heritage seems to be incongruous. I understand that the Heart is the site of ritual practice (in this case used

for weddings and baptisms, which may count as intangible heritage), but the Heart is no less a physical monument to these intangible elements than the Callanish/Calanais Stones are to the intangible (and indeed unknown) rituals that took place there. I would agree that the Heart does not lie within the current criteria used by Historic Scotland to schedule historic monuments, but I feel that this merely highlights that this criteria is, however unintentionally, discriminatory. As a community with no traditional architecture (either archaeological or extant) and no marine connections, it is currently impossible for this part of the story of Scotland to be protected in any way by Historic Scotland. There is an opportunity here for this criteria to be reviewed and made fit for purpose if it really is meant to protect monuments that represent the story of Scotland.

Scheduling criteria aside, the statement that the Tinkers' Heart is intangible and therefore does not warrant Historic Scotland's protection is surely invalid considering the huge recent investment that Historic Scotland has put into battlefield sites.

Whether this fascinating piece of history, which tells an as yet untold aspect of our shared history in Scotland is ultimately deemed intangible or not, it ought to be recognised, protected and interpreted for all our sakes.

I would appreciate hearing your thoughts.

Yours sincerely,

Rhona Ramsay