

STIRLING BEFORE PYLONS

acting with

FRIENDS OF THE OCHILS

as a Relevant Person Group

for the purposes of the

STIRLING SESSION

**of the Public Inquiry into
Scottish & Southern Energy's proposals for the
Beauly to Denny 400 KV Steel Tower Double Circuit
Overhead Electricity Transmission Line**

PRECOGNITION

Dr Elspeth King

Stirling's Artistic and Literary Landscape

My credentials

I am Elspeth King.

I have been the Director of the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum since 1994. Before that, I was the Director of the Dunfermline Heritage Trust from 1991 to 1994, and set up the Abbot House Heritage Centre. I was the Curator of the People's Palace in Glasgow from 1974 to 1991.

I have a First Class Honours degree in Medieval History, and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Stirling in 2005 for services to Scottish museums. In 2006 I received the Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun Award from the Saltire Society for services to Scottish history. I was also awarded the Provost's Medal for Arts and Culture by Stirling Council in 2004, and the Scots Independence Annual Oliver Award by for contributions to Scottish history in 1998.

Landscape of Stirling

The landscape in and around Stirling is of iconic beauty and significance. From the earliest times it has influenced and shaped the thoughts of those who live here. On a daily basis, it colours and influences the attitudes and perceptions of local people, most of whom are aware of the good fortune they have to live within a place of such scenic beauty, imbued with historical importance. In turn, the beauty of the place has attracted visitors who come to experience that beauty. Significant numbers have added to the experience through painting and sketching the landscape, or through writing about it. Many more have used this landscape, this theatre of Stirling, as an inspiration and as a backdrop for their own creative (though unconnected) work.

The Theatre of Stirling

The majestic landscape was created by the retreating glaciers of the last ice age. There are three crag and tail formations – that on which Stirling Castle and City is

built, the Abbey Craig on which the National Wallace Monument is sited, and Craigforth, heart of the old Craigforth estate where the Prudential Insurance Company is currently housed. The River Forth, like the River Meander of Phrygia, winds alongside all three, and is one of the world's great waterways.

Historically, Stirling is a place of strategic importance, a crossing place between north and south, the only bridgeable point in mediaeval times over what was perceived to be 'the sea of Scotland' (*Scocia ultra marina* on Matthew Paris's map of c.1250).

Although centuries of cultivation transformed the marshland, Stirling remained of strategic significance until the withdrawal of the Army from the Castle in 1964. The maxim 'to take Stirling is to hold Scotland' underscores that significance. Alexander Smith (1829-1867) in his novel *A Summer in Skye* used the more picturesque metaphor: "Stirling, like a huge brooch, clasps Highlands and Lowlands together".

On account of Stirling's strategic position, travellers and visitors came of necessity. A keen appreciation of the aesthetic beauty of the landscape led to the construction of viewpoints throughout the city, at different points in time, including the following:

1. Tower of the Abbey of Cambuskenneth, 1300.
2. Tower of the Church of the Holy Rude, 1470.
3. Tolbooth Tower, 1704.
4. The Back Walk, 1723.
5. Atheneum Tower, 1816.
6. Ladies' Rock viewpoint, Valley Cemetery, 1859.

7. National Wallace Monument, 1869.
8. High School of Stirling Observatory Tower, 1888.
9. Heading Stone viewpoint, Gowan Hill, 1888.
10. Viewing tower of the Old Town Jail, 1994.
11. Viewing platform, Stirling Tolbooth, 2001.

Few places have had such a prolonged, documented appreciation of the landscape in a 700 year period, and the city continues to benefit through tourist visitors.

Stirling in Literature

From the earliest times, and in Latin poetry, the landscape of Stirling has been celebrated by writers. Sir David Lindsay, writing in about 1540, expressed his love of Stirling (or Snowdon, as the poets commonly called it) through the mouth of the King's dying pet parrot, in his *Testament of the Papyngo*:

Adieu, fair Snowdon with thy towers hie
 Thy chapel-royal, park and table round
 May, June and July would I dwell in thee
 Were I ane man, to hear the birdis sound
 Whilk doth against thy Royal rock redound.

Patrick Hume of Polwarth wrote of the glories of the Gowanhill and the abundant flowers of the King's Park to entertain the thirteen year old King James VI in June 1579. Arthur Johnston (1579-1641) praised Stirling in elegant Classical Latin, translated as follows:

Stirling

Who can do Stirling justice? Cradle of kings
 Who set their castle strong on its high ridge
 Its fresh air keeps that great outpost of heaven

Secure there, safe from enemy attack
 Towering on its matched rocks, its own towers match
 The towers of Jove by Rome's Tarpeian Rock
 Nobly the River Forth lets itself flow
 Underneath two fine triumphal arches
 Hesitantly, often turning back,
 Winding like Phrygia's River Maeander
 It moves with a light touch and takes its time
 The town and country smile, gifted with riches
 But Stirling's fame in war is even more
 Worth epic celebration. More than once
 This place repelled the spears of Rome, its river
 Commanded Rome's imperial eagle, *Stop!*

The most sustained poem on the River Forth itself is by Hector MacNeill. His 38 verse poem *The Links of Forth, or a Parting Peep at the Carse of Stirling* was written in 1796 to express his sadness on his departure for the West Indies and is a fine study in the relationship of landscape to national identity.

The Links of Forth have always been one of the great sights of Scotland. If the Forth was our Maeander, it is also our Rubicon, and even a Helicon for poetic inspiration. When Robert Burns visited Stirling, he wrote to his friend Robert Muir (26 August 1787) that:

“I said a fervent prayer for Old Caledonia over the hole of a blue whinstone where Robert de Bruce fixed his royal standard on the banks of Bannockburn; and just now, from Stirling Castle, I have seen by the setting sun the glorious prospect of the windings of the Forth through the rich Carse of Stirling and the equally rich Carse of Falkirk”.

Generation after generation of poets and writers have celebrated this landscape in words. The very outline of the hills, travelling up the M9 from Stirling to Keir forms

the shape of the map which Robert Louis Stevenson created for his novel *Treasure Island*, for this is his “Scenery of Dreams”, the landscape where the Stevenson family spent their holidays.

The landscape has also inspired patriotism and political action. Addressing the foundation meeting of the National Party of Scotland on 23 June 1928, the novelist, poet and politician, Robert Bontine Cunningham Graham said:

“Look around these historic surroundings. Under the Wallace Crag our national hero led his men against Cressingham. Within three miles, Bruce broke the chivalry of England at Bannockburn. Burns has wandered in those hills. In Stirling Castle our historic parliaments stayed for centuries, alternating with Edinburgh and Linlithgow. The eternal hills still look down on us as they looked down on Wallace and Bruce. The same snell wind coming up from the Western Isles still breathes on us today. The same sun pours its rays on us. The same mist fills the corries of the hills. The same spates fill our rivers. And I would fain, my friends, hope that the same spirit fills the heart of every Scotsman in his demand for a parliament in Edinburgh.”

In her autobiography, Wendy Wood wrote *“From the top of the tower of the Wallace Monument, looking across the fertile fields to the high peaks, to the life-giving Forth, to Stirling Castle rising in sudden pride from the plain where Bannockburn was fought, roused a determination in me which neither poverty, mockery nor setbacks have ever been able to extinguish in fifty-five years of work for Scotland’s independence”*.

Stirling and Art

The first landscape paintings of the area were done by Dutch artists in the seventeenth century. As the art of landscape painting developed in the eighteenth century, every artist of note came to paint in Stirling. The English artist Joseph

Farington (1747-1821) thought that Stirling had few rivals for beauty, and he was given the Freedom of the Burgh in 1788 for his artistic work. Visiting painters included Alexander Nasmyth, Thomas Hofland, Thomas Fenwick, Horatio MacCulloch, Thomas Hearne, Edward Dayes, Francis Nicholson, Henry Brocas, Hohn Varley, Copley Fielding, John Glover, Samuel Prout, J.D. Harding, George Fennel Robertson and William Turner. In the period 1890-1920, many of the so-called Glasgow Boys (William Kennedy, James Guthrie, Crawford Shaw, George Henry and A.E. Hornel) spent their summers in Stirling and Cambuskenneth. Joseph Denovan Adam (1842-1896) set up Scotland's only school of animal art, at Craigmill, where he kept a fold of highland cattle and other animals for his students to paint.

William York MacGregor, "the Father of the Glasgow School", lived at Bridge of Allan and is buried in Logie Kirkyard. The artists' colonies were an attraction for other artists too, but the main reason to come to the Stirling area was the iconic landscape. The great master of American landscape, George Innes (1825-1894) came to Bridge of Allan and witnessed the finest sunset he had ever seen, before dying unexpectedly on the same night.

Stirling Castle remained an iconic attraction. In 1934, W.D. and H.O. Wills of Bristol sent their artist Archie White to draw Stirling Castle as part of Imperial Tobacco's promotion of the popular "Three Castles" brand of cigarettes, whilst poster images created by Sir D.Y. Cameron and Maurice Greiffenhagen were used to promote Stirling as a railway destination.

Conclusion

The landscape of Stirling is embedded in our literary and artistic heritage. Each has nurtured the other, and all are part and parcel of our national cultural heritage. To deface or injure this inheritance with a series of giant pylons is, in the twenty-first century, an act of such wanton destruction that it beggars belief. Much effort has gone into reclaiming landscape elsewhere in Central Scotland, scarred and poisoned as it was by the Industrial Revolution. Coal and shale bings have been cleared and contaminated land reclaimed. Twenty five years ago, our power companies were advertising on national television their concern for the environment by featuring their ability to sink power lines underground. We fine people for dropping cigarette ends; what will the fine be for littering our environment with power lines? In a democracy, private or corporate greed and political expediency should never be permitted to take precedence over the rights of the people and of generations of Scots as yet unborn.

[END]