



‘Territory - Fields of Endeavour’

A tapestry for the Scottish Parliament by Maureen Hodge

Commissioned for the Garden Lobby, Scottish Parliament, 2004 (6ft x 15ft)

We may all be Europeans now, but within this ring of stars Scotland is still our own special place - the field of our endeavours. Territory / Home is ultimately where our dead are buried* On a map X marks the place that matters - a cross either way.

In this tapestry I have tried to encapsulate many different strands or levels of meaning to express the complexity and diversity of Scotland’s territory and history. I wanted to make a hanging which would be redolent of the past but also relevant for the present - and the future. At its simplest the black section on the left stands for the mists of time from which the lighter middle section emerges, with all the different fields of endeavour, effort and enterprise represented by each small rectangle, that make Scotland what it is. It ends on the right with the unknown future again becoming a black edge, but more broken and speckled with bright colours - of hopefulness for the future. The middle section gives an impression of flags flying, a little like the Royal Mile in the summer, or perhaps “Braveheart”. It also gives the impression of a myriad of witnesses from the past, with layer upon layer of crosses; some black and strong, others fading into the background; some isolated and alone, others in groups. Many of the symbols have a variety of possible meanings. Every Scottish child of my generation was brought up on Robert the Bruce and the spider (also a symbol of the weaver, Ariadne, in Greek mythology). When he was down on his luck, he watched the spider trying to spin her web again and again and we all knew the phrase, “If at first you don’t succeed - try, try, try again!” which I think is a very Scottish attitude. I have also incorporated into the tapestry a little heart for Bruce - another story of course- which with added ambiguity as today it will be better known as a symbol for “I Love” - in both cases, love for our territory, Scotland.

Often, traditionally, tapestries have lettering incorporated into them, and in this tapestry there are hidden words, in a kind of secret writing bringing together other ‘messages’, though this may not be immediately apparent. The words interwoven into the panel, look a little like signal flags but it is possible to decipher them once you break the key. Just beyond the left-hand black edge are all the names by which Scotland has been known from earliest times - Scotland, Alba, Caledonia, Fortrui, Pictland and Scotia. Further on in another two vertical strips the words say - “We are a family, a tribe, a people” (Edwin Muir), “a faithful nation most worthy of friendship and renown” (Alain Chartier, The Chancellor of Bayeux in 1427), “Act now, unconquered Scotland! minding your fathers and your heirs!” (in his book *Agricola*, the Roman writer Tacitus puts these words into the mouth of the Caledonian leader Calgacus at the Battle of Mons Graupius). So we have a call for inclusiveness, a reminder that we have never been conquered, and an acknowledgement of our longstanding ties with France through The Auld Alliance (and also a link with Bayeux and its tapestry), as well as a declaration of our responsibility to the future and a testimony of what we ourselves owe to our forefathers and their efforts and sacrifices. The last pieces of lettering relate to the people who wove the tapestry, again a tradition of the medium.

It reads - “SP tapestry woven by MH and SM from Perth, at Edinburgh spring/summer MMIV (2004) + EL from Oslo and AH”

*This idea began when I read an article by Neil Ascherson in the ‘Observer’ in which he said that ‘home’ was ultimately where one’s dead were buried.

