

Bruced up in time for Bannockburn's 700th anniversary

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The iconic 1960s Pilkington Jackson equestrian statue of King Robert the Bruce, originally unveiled by Her Majesty the Queen on the occasion of the 650th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn, was today revealed to the public after a series of repair and conservation works have restored the monument to its original condition in time for the 700th anniversary of the battle in 2014.

Originally cast in bronze the famous monument, The Bruce, which depicts an axe-wielding Bruce on his war horse, had corroded over the decades, slowly turning green.

Work to clean, repair and apply a protective coating to the statue was commissioned in 2012 as part of the Battle of Bannockburn project, enhancing the visitor experience at the historic site which has long been a place for commemoration.

In addition to the exciting and innovative interpretation of the battle in the new visitor centre, the partnership project between the National Trust for Scotland and Historic Scotland has seen a series of conservation, enhancement and remedial works to the Category A listed monuments at the site including the Bruce statue, Rotunda and flagpole, which are now nearing completion. Landscaping works currently remain underway to open up views of the site from Glasgow Road, and connect the monuments via a central pathway.

The monuments are being restored to the condition and appearance commensurate with the design, significance and quality of work created by their respective creators; craftsmen, engineers, sculptor and architects.

Rotunda works include an installation to commemorate the location of the original Borestone, where Bruce is said to have planted his battle standard; inspirational text by Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie inscribed to a replacement ringbeam, a design aspect originally intended by architect Eric Stevenson; and repair works to the flagpole enabling the site to fly the saltire once again with pride. Works are nearing completion with final landscaping developments and the illumination of the equestrian statue.

Sculptor Charles d'Orville Pilkington Jackson's 1960s design depicts Bruce holding the axe with which he famously cleft the head of English Knight Sir Henry de Bohun. Bruce's head was modeled by Jackson on measurements of his skull following the re-discovery of his remains in Dunfermline Abbey in 1818.

Almost 50 years after the statue was originally unveiled to the public in 1964, head of the Bruce family, the 11th Earl of Elgin and 15th Earl of Kincardine, whose lineage runs back to King Robert, was at the Bannockburn heritage site alongside members of his direct family and descendants of Pilkington Jackson in an intimate ceremony to reveal the newly-conserved statue to the world.

An excerpt from the Earl of Elgin's speech: "When Her Majesty the Queen unveiled the statue, at the 650th Anniversary of the Battle, three generations of the Bruce family were present - my father, myself and my eldest sons. Once more I am happy that three generations are present for this event.

"We should not forget the message which King Robert gave at his enthronement at Scone 700 years ago. He told his followers to go out and spread friendship over the land. Next year, I trust that all who come here to see the monument and encounter the information in the new visitor centre, will reflect on his magnanimity. Those who died in battle he honoured in a vigil; then he feasted and entertained the others, sending several home freely without payment of ransom. This astonished the courts of Europe. Battlefields are places of both joy and sorrow. May all those who come here find these two magnanimously blended into a lasting and understanding friendship with Scotland."

Kirsty Jackson, granddaughter of sculptor Pilkington Jackson said: "My grandfather took great pride in his work and the Bruce statue represents to our family the culmination of his work as a sculptor which he began in 1910. The Bruce statue was his biggest and most physically demanding masterpiece; he worked on it in his 70s and took great pains to ensure every element of Bruce from his face to his armour to his battle-axe was as historically accurate as possible. My mother missed out on the original unveiling of the statue, but my sister was taken along aged six as a treat. For the three of us to be here for this moment is very special."

Sir Kenneth Calman, Chairman of the National Trust for Scotland said: "This is a very significant milestone for the project to restore the National Trust for Scotland's Bannockburn heritage site. With the conservation and restoration of the historic monuments nearing completion, the site will once more be a place which reflects its significance in Scottish history. Our contemporary works remain consistent with the designs created by the original architects who developed the monuments since the Trust acquired the site in the 1930s. We hope that our new additions to further enhance the site will encourage more people to visit, reflect and remember the Battle of Bannockburn for generations to come."

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, added: "For nearly 50 years the Robert the Bruce statue has been symbolic of the Bannockburn heritage site. Now resplendent in its original glory, it is a symbol of the new life being breathed into the visitor experience. I look forward to the story of Bannockburn being told in an exciting, engaging and interactive way, yet maintaining the dignity to remember the fallen as they are watched over by this imposing statue."

Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop said: "The Robert the Bruce statue is an iconic part of the Bannockburn site, and a poignant reminder of the battle. It is extremely moving to visit the battlefield and see the statue of Bruce who is so synonymous with Scotland's history. The statue has been painstakingly conserved to return it to its original condition so it can once again be appreciated by both Scots and visitors from around the world. The Scottish government is pleased to have supported this flagship project as we mark the countdown to the 700th anniversary next year."