

STROUPSTER PLI

STATEMENT FROM LUKE WALTON

I am the Arts Development Officer for the registered charity 'Bible Society'. Established in 1804 by William Wilberforce, John Newton and associates, this is one of the oldest and most active charities in Britain and the Society is involved in many areas of public life, including education, politics, science, academia and the arts. My own work leads me into close engagement with artists working in film, TV, theatre, fine art, installations, sculpture and every aspect of the Media. Although I work for the programme team in England and Wales, I work alongside our sister organisations in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the United States and around the world. For example, I am working with movie industry colleagues in Hollywood, creative connections in New York, reconciliation arts projects in Israel and the West Bank, and the development of links with artists in Albania and across the Baltic nations. A great deal of this work has found its creative and conceptual inspiration whilst staying in Freswick.

My own experience therefore, both as a guest and as a professional arts person at Freswick, has been significant. I had the good fortune to have been directed by Murray Watts when working as an actor and at the commencement of my work with the Society I chose to visit Murray and reflect on my journey ahead. Freswick was the perfect location for such a venture, a supportive community, a fresh environment and something intangible from the timeless beauty of the surroundings. The story from the Gospel of Saint Luke that Murray and I discussed on that occasion (something that Murray had dramatised in the film 'The Miracle Maker') continues to undergird everything I do. Indeed the experience of that first visit was so deep and significant that I have come back every year and sometimes several times in the year.

I was the executive producer for a film project launched and filmed here. This film is now shown as part of the introduction to our head offices for all our international visitors to see. I have brought both British and American film producers to visit the castle, an experience and time which I know has had a lasting and profound impact upon them. I have commissioned art from the artist in residence and formed working relationships with other arts professionals that have been fruitful in subsequent ventures. In 2008 I was finally able to return to Freswick for a holiday with my wife and two daughters. They, like myself, delighted in the unique and irreplaceable experience that Freswick Castle and its surrounding area provides.

So although it might be hard to imagine why artists from all over the world might want to beat a path to this corner of Scotland, I believe that there is an exceptional and distinctive quality to this location. The current flow of visitors only represents the tip of an iceberg, a vast number of creative people who could want to spend time in Caithness from a base at Freswick Castle. Artists of all descriptions value good space and time to think and assess current and future work. Freswick has that rare feature of connecting this type of work with the surrounding environment, one that promotes a reflective, original and

imaginative thinking. The light and landscape are of a singular and powerful nature for the fine artist and photographer. The castle and its surrounding wins a place in the heart of artists because such places are sadly in short supply, especially where both the location and the conceptual foundation are so well aligned. We need to keep such places of reflection and creativity for future generations, this is good stewardship of our resources.

The arrival of artists has already meant investment in the life and work of the area, visits to restaurants, purchase of gifts and the use of a wide range of services. It could mean a very great deal more of this investment, both direct and indirect.

I have travelled a great deal with my work, as do many people in my role, particularly producers. All of this travel has increasingly convinced me of the significance of this project and this place for myself, the wider artistic community and the communities of Caithness.

I give more than lip service to climate change issues, and am critically aware of the issues that my business travel raises. I am actively entering off set schemes and supporting developments at work to partner and develop best practice in this area. Domestically we have halved the size of our appliances, chosen to holiday in the UK for several years and are currently looking to fit Solar Voltaic cells to generate a significant proportion of our domestic electricity. Wind power is a part of our national investment for power solutions. However it is only one of the solutions available and my opposition in this case relates to insensitive location of the proposed development.

I have now been asked by the chairman of the Wayfarer Trust, Jock Stein, to become a Trustee of the Trust. In November I shall be meeting with other trustees, who include a lawyer, a media lecturer at Edinburgh University and an author and university guidance counsellor, as well as Jock Stein himself. Jock is well known for his work as the warden of one of Scotland's biggest retreat centres, and his own philanthropic projects, which have included theatre companies and arts organisations in the past.

It is a great privilege to be invited to support and develop this vision, especially coming to the work from another country. However the proposal to build the wind farm in the current location has put a shadow across the Freswick Project for several years now. It has had a serious impact on the Wayfarer Trust, and significantly reduced the possibility of raising funding – despite the initial interest shown by a number of foundations. It is simply not possible to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds to pour into an uncertain future. As the trustees gather in late November, there will be many positive discussions about the enormous potential for Freswick and its work. There will be lively and positive deliberations over strategy and contacts. Yet despite this, we will have to wait until the issue of the Stroupster development is decided before there is any possibility of moving ahead with the big picture outlined in the precognition of Murray Watts.

The trustees of the Wayfarer Trust have made it clear that they do not consider the wind farm development compatible in any way with development of the Freswick Castle project.

If the Freswick project were to finish here, it would be a great loss to Caithness and the potential for arts, education and the creative industries here; and it would be a great loss to hundreds, indeed thousands, of creative people around the country and the world; many things would never happen, many projects would never be made, and many lives never touched.

It would be a great loss to me personally, because I am one of those whose life it has touched.