

Irish Kilts

Most of our assumptions are based on myth, legend and the anachronistic Hollywood film industry. They are infamous for using objects, customs and wardrobes that have no business being in some of the movies. For example, the costumer on the movie Braveheart didn't do much historical research by fitting Mel Gibson with a kilt. He was playing the role of a 13th century warrior, wearing a 17th century garment and painting a blue face from the 2nd century.

There is no evidence in early Irish records to support the theory that the kilt was worn in Ireland. Many stone carvings on crosses and monuments in Ireland, dating before the 11th century, claim that the figures are wearing kilts. This is inaccurate because what is actually pictured is called a leine, or Irish tunic. The leine may have a skirt reaching to the knee but it is simply the lower part of the tunic, not a separate garment as the kilt is. It is not related to the kilt in any way, nor can it be said to be an early one.

There is also some confusion about the garments worn by soldiers and knights. They were wearing quilted armor from the Middle Ages known as cotuns in Irish. They are long, heavy, quilted and padded tunics that serve as light armor. In ancient carvings, the quilting is depicted with vertical lines running down the tunic, which is often mistaken for pleating, and the knee length garments are often claimed to be kilts.

In the 16th century, again we find representations of Irish men that are supposed to be wearing kilts. There are depictions of many figures wearing garments with heavily pleated skirts. These are not modern kilts, but leines, which by this time had evolved into wrap around shirts with wide, hanging sleeves and elaborately pleated skirts.

Nowhere has good solid evidence been found to support the kilt being worn in Ireland. At the earliest, only since the middle of the 19th century, has it even been suggested that the kilt was worn in Ireland. Irish writers of the time never mention the wearing of the kilt at all. The addition of Irish Kilts to the world is fairly recent. Most of the Irish Tartans were created in the late 19th Century and the 20th Century and woolen mills.