Scottish Wedding Traditions

Luckenbooth brooches are of late 19th or early 20th century origin. This Scottish brooch, usually of engraved silver in the shape of two hearts entwined surmounted by a crown, is used chiefly as a love token or betrothal (engagement) brooch. The heart (love) and crown (loyalty) both also appear on the claddagh ring (although traditionally Irish, it's becoming increasingly popular in Scotland too). Sometimes the luckenbooth brooch would be pinned to the couple's firstborn's blanket as a good luck charm, and sometimes passed on to sons when the time came to betroth their future brides.

The "stag party" and "hen's night" (bachelor and bachelorette parties) are both time-honored traditions in Scotland. However, it should be stressed in the strongest possible terms that it is the solemn duty of the groomsmen and bridesmaids to *without fail* get their charges to the altar sober and presentable the following day. A rampaging hangover is a very cruel trick to inflict on your best friend on their wedding day.

The most popular way to incorporate Celtic tradition into a wedding ceremony is to have the bride ceremoniously piped down the aisle, and the couple piped out again. There may also be processionals for the bridesmaids and mothers, piping as guests leave for the reception, and piping at the reception, too. Preludes should be kept short, if used at all, so the piper will be fresh and well tuned for the bride's big entrance.

Modern Scottish brides will usually wear a traditional or contemporary white wedding gown, although blue is the more ancient traditional color. The groom often dresses in kilt, kilt jacket and sporran. The

traditional Scottish token of good luck for weddings is to wear a sprig of white heather (Calluna Vulgaris), often with the symbolic Scottish thistle, usually as buttonholes and incorporated into corsages and bouquets.

The groom might not be the only one wearing tartan. Edmund Bert writing in the 1720s would point out:

"The plaid is the undress of the ladies; and to a genteel woman, who adjusts it with good air, is a becoming veil. It is made of silk or fine worsted, checkered with various colors; is brought over the head, and may hide or discover the face according to the wearer's fancy or occasion; it reaches the waist behind; one corner falls as low as the ankle on one side; the other part, in folds, hangs down from the opposite arm".

Arisaids (women's plaids) are often of what are known today as "dress" tartans, with lots of white in them, much brighter and woven in brighter colors than men's plaids.

Following the exchange of vows and rings the groom often pins a sash of his clan's tartan to the bride's wedding dress to signify that she is now a member of his clan (the *right* shoulder unless they are marrying a clan chief or a colonel of a Scottish regiment). Besides long over-the-shoulder sashes, there are shorter ones with decorative rosettes which can highlight a clan brooch in the center, which are very nice for this purpose. A groom wearing a fly plaid my also remove his plaid and either pin it to his bride, or wrap her shoulders as a shawl.

An adaptation of the Celtic tradition of handfasting can be a highly symbolic part of the ceremony, as the hands of the bride and groom are joined by a cord or ribbon. In olden days the priest or minister would wrap the clasped hands in the end of his stole to symbolize the trinity of marriage; man and woman joined by God. With God's grace in time another trinity would be manifest; mother, father and child (The Celts have always been good at seeing things in threes). This symbolic binding together in marriage evolved into the practice of wrapping the clasped hands with a cord or an embroidered cloth, usually made especially for that purpose, another version of "tying the knot". It's usually done after the exchange of rings and tartans (if any), using the bride and grooms left hands while facing each other. Following a final blessing or benediction they can then both turn outwards to face the congregation to be presented as husband and wife, still holding hands, bound each to the other.

At the typical Scottish reception you can count on the bride and groom being piped to the head table, where the bride will cut the first slice of wedding cake using a Scottish dirk that is provided to her by the piper. As the bride slices the first piece of wedding cake, custom dictates that the hand of her new husband guides her hand. Of course, their first dance can be to the pipes as well, either a waltz air, or more traditionally, a reel.

The Scottish quaich or loving cup is a traditional way of involving all your family and friends in the ceremony. At the reception, this two-handled silver bowl is filled with whisky, usually by the bride, and passed around the guests so all can drink in celebration. It's traditional once the piping's done to "pay the piper"; for the head table, usually the bride, to offer the piper (the Pipe Major, if a band) a ceremonial dram, in return for a traditional blessing.

A traditional response to ceremonial toasts is *Sláinte Mhath!* (Slanzh-va); Scots Gaelic for “To your health!”

The “Grushie” is an old custom found in many of the Celtic countries. The groom tosses a handful of coins into the crowd as the couple is leaving. It is believed to bring good luck to the newly married couple.