

QUOTES CONCERNING SCOTTISH CLOTHES

CONTEMPORARY QUOTES ABOUT SCOTTISH MEN'S CLOTHING

Note: Based upon material from the original SCOTWARS web site, copyright 2011, and used with permission. Additional material from other sources has been added.

MEN'S HIGHLAND DRESS:

“From the middle of the thigh to the foot they have no covering for the leg, clothing themselves with a mantle instead of an upper garment and a shirt dyed with saffron. . . . In time of war they cover their whole body with a shirt of mail of iron rings, and fight in that. The common people of Highland (*lit.* ‘wild’) Scots rush into battle having their body clothed with a linen garment manifoldly sewed and painted or daubed with pitch, with a covering of deerskin.” --1521, John Major, as quoted in McClintock.

“They wear no clothes except their dyed shirts and a sort of light woolen rug of several colors.” --1556, Jean de Beaugué, *L'histoire de la Guerre d'Ecosse*, as quoted in McClintock.

“All, both nobles and common people, wore mantles of one sort (except that the nobles preferred those of several colors). These were long and flowing, but capable of being neatly gathered up at pleasure into folds. I am inclined to believe that they were the same as those to which the ancients gave the name of *brachæ*. . . . The rest of their garments consisted of a short woolen jacket, with the sleeves open below for the convenience of throwing their darts [javelins], and a covering for the thighs of the simplest kind, more for decency than for show or defense against the cold. They made also of linen very large shirts, with numerous folds and wide sleeves, which flowed abroad loosely to the knees.” --1578, Bishop Lesley, *De Origine, Moribus et Rebus Gestis Scotorum*, as quoted in McClintock.

“They delight in variegated garments, especially stripes, and their favorite colors are purple and blue. Their ancestors wore *plaids* of many colors, and numbers still retain this custom but the majority now in their dress prefer a dark brown, imitating nearly the leaves of the heather, that when lying upon the heath in the day, they may not be discovered by the appearance of their clothes; in these wrapped rather than covered, they brave the severest storms in the open air, and sometimes lay themselves down to sleep even in the midst of snow.” --1581, George Buchanan, *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, as quoted in McClintock.

“Their exterior dress was mottled cloaks of many colors with a fringe to their shins and calves; their belts were over their loins outside their cloaks.” --1594, Lughaidh O’Clerigh, *The Life of Hugh Roe O’Donnell*, as quoted in Thompson. [*This description is generally recognized as the first verifiable mention of the féileadh mór or great kilt.*]

“The wild Scots are clothed after the Irish fashion, in striped mantles, with their hair long and thick.” --1607, Camden, *Britannia*.

“Lady Montgomery, wife of Sir Hugh Montgomery, 'set up and encouraged linen and woolen manufactory (in Ulster), which soon brought down the prices of the *breakens* (tartans) and narrow cloths of both sorts.' The beginning of such (manu-)factories might be part of the reason woolens were replacing the linen shirts, brats and animal skins around the turn of the century.” --1613

It appears that the desire for uniformity in the colours of tartan used by a clan was beginning in the early 1600's: "remove the red and white lines from the *plaides* of his men so as to bring their dress into harmony with that of other septs. --1618, Letter from Sir Rbt. Gordon of Gordonstoun to Murray of Pulrossie

"Many Highlanders were observed in this town (Leith), in their plaids, many without doublets, and those who have doublets have a kind of loose flap garment about their breech, their knees bare. They inure themselves to cold, hardship, and will not diswont themselves. Proper personable well-completed men, and of able men: the very gentlemen in their blue caps and plaids.” --1635, Sir William Brereton

MEN'S LOWLAND DRESS:

The husbandmen in Scotland, the servants, and almost all in the country did wear coarse cloth made at home, of grey or sky-color, and flat blue caps, very broad. The merchants in cities were attired in English or French cloth, of pale color, or mingled black and blue. The gentlemen did wear English cloth, or silk, or light stuffs, little or nothing adorned with silk lace, much less with lace of silver or gold, and all followed at this time the French fashion, especially at court. –1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*. (Whalebone sleeves: sleeves stretched on whalebone hoops. Falling bands: A deep linen collar, turned down.)

“Myself was at a knight’s house, who had many servants to attend him, that brought in his meat their heads covered with blue caps. . . .” –1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*, quoted in Rae.

CONTEMPORARY QUOTES ABOUT SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CLOTHING

WOMEN'S HIGHLAND DRESS:

"The dress of the women among them is most becoming, for over a gown reaching the feet, and very richly adorned by the Phrygian art (embroidery), they wear very full cloaks, of several colours, such as I have described - loose and flowing, yet gracefully drawn into folds, as they will. With their arms tastefully adorned with bracelets, and their throats with necklaces they have great grace and beauty. –1570s, Bishop Lesley. (The original is in Latin, and uses the word tunica, for gown, which may suggest a straight-hanging fullness of more Medieval style, in contrast to the more fashionable farthingale. The description seems to describe the ersaid, a women’s version of the great kilt.)

WOMEN'S FASHIONS, EDINBURGH:

[*Note: The original paragraph has been broken up by social class to help make the descriptions distinct from each other.*] "The women here wear and use upon festival days six or seven several habits and fashions, some for distinction of widows, wives and maids, others apparelled according to their own humor and fantasy. Many wear (especially the meaner sort) plaids, which is a garment of the same woollen stuff whereof saddle cloths in England are made (A close felt-like cloth the would keep out rain), which is cast over their heads and covers their faces on both sides, and would reach almost to the ground, but that they pluck them up and wear them cast under their arms."

Some ancient women and citizens wear satin straight-bodied gowns, short little cloaks with great capes, and a broad bonegrace coming over their brows and going out with a corner behind their heads: and this bonegrace is as it were lined with a white starched cambric suitable thereto." (Bonegrace: a silk, or cloth hood over a starched under-coif projecting around the face like the headgear of some religious orders?)

"Young maids not married all are bare-headed, some with broad thin shag ruffs, which lie flat to their shoulders, and others with half bands, with wide necks, either much stiffened or set with wire, which come only behind: and these shag ruffs, some are more broad and thick than others." --1635, Sir William Brereton

Bands with wide necks seem to be the broad lawn collars on each side of a square décolletage, as in the paintings of Van Dyck. These seem to have reached Scotland sooner than England. Van Dyck's portrait of Mevrouw Leerse shows this collar, with the tilted back cut separate, and edged in lace. It is shown with deep cuffs to match on a black satin dress. His portrait of Marie-Louise de Tassis has another, with the back part pleated. Later the stiffening went, and it lay flat. The "shag ruff" is a puzzlement. According to the Oxford Dictionary, shag was cloth of wool or silk, with a velvet nap similar to a modern velour. The true ruff was of linen, perhaps with lace, and did not lie flat. The author may be describing a pleated tippet, worn for warmth above the low-cut dress of the day.

"The ancient dress wore by the women, and which is yet wore by some of the vulgar, called arisad, is a white **plaid**, having a few small stripes of black, blue and red; it reached from the neck to the heels, and was tied before on the breast with a buckle of silver or brass, according to the quality of the person. . . . The plaid being **pleated** all round, was tied with a **belt** below the breast; the belt was of leather, and several pieces of silver intermixed with the leather like a **chain**. . . . The head dress was a fine kerchief of linen (tight) about the head, hanging down the back taper-wise; a large lock of hair hangs down their cheeks above their breast, the lower end tied with a knot of **ribbands**." – Martin Martin, *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, (1703).

WOMEN'S LOWLAND DRESS:

[Note: The original paragraph has been broken up by social class to help make the descriptions distinct from each other.] Gentlewomen married, did wear close upper bodies, after the German manner, with large whalebone sleeves, after the French manner, short cloaks like the Germans, French hoods, and large soft falling bands about their necks. The unmarried of all sorts did go bareheaded and wear short cloaks with most close linen sleeves upon their arms, like the virgins of Germany.

The inferior sort of citizen's wives and the women of the country did wear cloaks made of coarse stuff, of two or three colors of checker-work, vulgarly called *ploddan*.

To conclude, in general they would not at this time be attired after the English fashion in any sort, but the men, especially at court, followed the French fashion, and the women, both in court and city, as well as in cloaks as naked heads and close sleeves on the arms and all other garments follow the fashion of the women of Germany. – 1598, Fynes Morison, *Itinerary*. (Whalebone sleeves: sleeves stretched on whalebone hoops; falling bands: a deep linen collar, turned down.)

Sources:

Grange, R.M.D. *A Short History of the Scottish Dress*. London: Burke's Peerage Limited, 1966.

MacKenzie, Agnes Mure. *The Scottish Pageant 1513-1625*. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1948.

MacKenzie, Agnes Mure. *The Scottish Pageant 1513-1707*. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1949.

McClintock, H.F. *Old Irish and Highland Dress*. Dundalk: W. Tempest, 1943.

Rae, T.I. *Scotland in the Time of Shakespeare*, Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965.

Thompson, Derick S., ed. *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*. Glasgow: Gairm Publications, 1994.