

In praise of TARTAN

With a rich and fascinating history, Scotland's iconic checked cloth is central to celebrating Burns Night in style

No Burns Night festivity is complete without haggis, tatties, whisky... and tartan. Whether celebrating at an organised supper or staying home on 25 January, what better way to give a nod to Robert Burns and Scotland's heritage than to incorporate some terrific tartan into the occasion?

The world's first colour photo, presented to the Royal Institution by James Clerk Maxwell in 1861, was of a tartan ribbon.

There is a wealth of woven colour combinations of the famous criss-cross pattern. Over 3,500 varieties are registered with The Scottish Registry of Tartans. Each is distinguished by its different sett, the repeated sequence of coloured stripes interwoven at right angles, which create new colours where they meet.

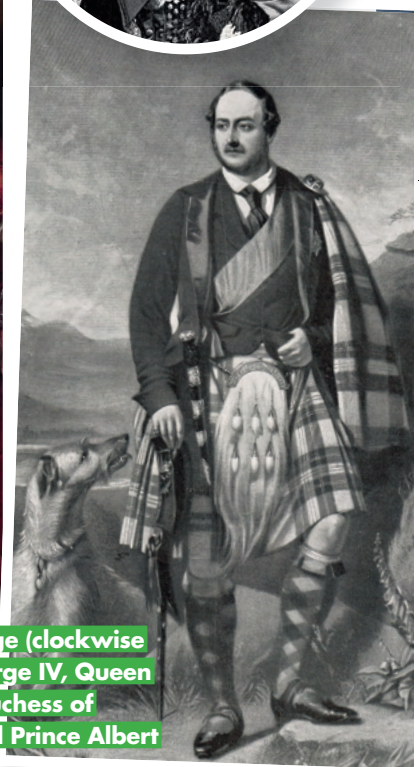
Examples of such weaving have been found in ancient history across the globe, but this style of weaving is believed to have first appeared in Scotland in the 16th century. Originally produced using wool, tartan's popularity spread from the Highlands across the rest of Scotland in the 18th century.

The variation in the natural dyes available in different regions led to colour combinations being linked to certain areas, which later led to tartan becoming a form of identification for clans and families in kilt making.

After the Jacobite Rising under 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', largely led by highlanders, the 1746 Dress Act attempted to control the clans by banning the wearing of tartan outside of the British Army, a ban that remained in place until 1782.

Since then, tartan has gone on to become not only the symbolic national dress of Scotland but also an extremely popular pattern around the world. Its versatility and timelessness see it grace the high street, football terraces, interiors, major fashion house catwalks and royalty.

Early trendsetter: 'Bonnie Prince Charlie'



Royal patronage (clockwise from left): George IV, Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Albert

Tartan & tiaras

Reflecting the British Monarchy's long-standing and particular connection with Scotland, many members of the Royal family, including Her Majesty The Queen, have been photographed in kilts and tartan.

When King George IV visited Scotland in 1822, he arrived resplendent in full Highland dress, made from cashmere in the Royal Stewart sett.

The tartan trend advanced in the latter part of the 19th century, helped by

WORDS: MICHELLE ROWLEY. PHOTOS: ALAMY, GETTY, SCOTTISH REGISTER OF TARTANS



Astronaut Neil Armstrong is reported to have taken a piece of his clan tartan to the moon!

Queen Victoria's preference for wearing tartan when she visited Scotland. Both Queen Victoria and her husband Albert were fans of the pattern, with each designing a tartan of their own.

More recently, Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, has honoured the tradition by wearing a collection of striking tartan coats on her official royal tours of Scotland.



Tribute: The Robert Burns Legacy Tartan



Super setts

While some tartans date back to the 16th century, new tartans continue to be designed and added to The Scottish Registry of Tartans. From fashion designers to families and schools, so long as it meets the design requirements, anyone can register a new tartan.

Searching the registry for your family tartan is interesting, but since tartan

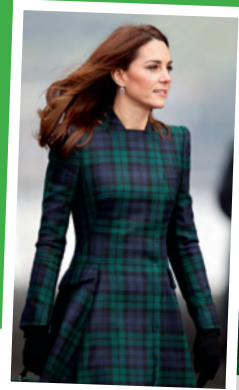
is steeped in tradition rather than rules, you can wear any sett you choose. With so many sett options to choose from, how do you decide which tartan to wear?

ROBERT BURNS LEGACY TARTAN

What better tartan for Burns Night! This beautiful blue variety has criss-crossed lines of black, green and black, with a dash of red!

BLACK WATCH

The navy and green sett of Scotland's 3rd Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland. Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge has worn an Alexander McQueen tartan coat in this historic sett on more than one occasion.



ROYAL STEWART

The official tartan of Queen Elizabeth II, Royal Stewart is the most worn tartan by the Royal Household and perhaps the most well recognised across the world. Officially this tartan can only be worn by those granted permission from the Queen. However, it has been worn

and seen the world over – on the punks of the 1970s and in the iconic designs of Vivienne Westwood.

