

“A Mystical Ritual: Childbirth”

Up until the twentieth century, families tended to be quite large. Especially Scottish families. The announcement of new additions to the family was never a unserious matter. News of expecting mothers and births was greeted with obvious delight but also a mystical seriousness among the women of the community. Childbirth was a woman’s business. Naturally. But the business was taken a little more seriously. To the extent of ensuring all the “correct” customs were carried out before and after the birth of a child.

Scottish townspeople often lived generally uneducated lives. A typical townspeople wouldn’t move and live much farther than a day’s walk from their birth families. Deeming many to lead quite simple and uneducated lives. Due to that fact, many Scottish communities were quite mystical in their beliefs. Beliefs in magic, fairies, witches and magical beasts were among the usual things smaller Scottish communities entertained as facts.

Examples of common customs and rituals performed among community women before and during childbirths are:

A willow branch ‘neath her bed. Nay one knot remain tied in presence of the mother, lest a knot tie her womb shut.

Willow trees were a symbol of fertility and was believed to be the what the wand of St. Bride (the patron saint and goddess of motherhood and birth) was made out of. Another custom that was commonly practiced was the belief that the presence of a corked bottle was bad luck, and similar to the belief of a tied knot, all bottles in the home were to lie uncorked lest the pressure of the corked bottle be passed on to the woman trying to conceive and prevent pregnancy.

He’s pu’ed her a bunch of yon red wee roddins, that grew beside yon thorn.
A charm to help ease the pain of childbirth was the give the mother a type of red nut (red roddins). The bean was called the Virgin’s Nut because it had a faint mark of a cross on its kidney bean shape. The nut could be found growing by any Scottish stream. (Settler’s of Nova Scotia would most likely have brought the bean to Canada to grow here, but it is a rare sight nowadays) The very act of the birthing mother clutching the nut in her hand was believed to have eased the pain of the birth considerably.

Uncovered mirrors were considered a strong form of bad luck for a birthing mother and child. The midwife would come into the home of the expecting mother a few days before the birth and cover all the mirrors with a thick black cloth. The fear that



followed an uncovered mirror in the home of a birthing mother was that the mirror might reflect the new baby's face to the fairies and with it please them to come and steal the newly come child. This would be a common explanation for stillbirths or sickly newborns.