

Scottish Women's Fashion of the Past

Researchers of the Scottish people often favour to study the more iconic kilt and clan tartans of the Scottish clansmen and tend to neglect the topic of Scottish Women's clothing.

From the late medieval period onwards, women in Scotland adorned themselves with fashions similar to those donned by their English and French neighbours. However, there must be a general understanding that Scots women were much poorer than their English or Continental counterparts, and this fact would be reflected in their fashion; alongside their obvious Scottishness.

Scottish burgh-dwelling women of the sixteenth century often distinguished themselves by long rectangular plaids of the clan their family or husband belonged too around their heads and shoulders worn much like a shawl. This type of female garment was called Arisaid or Earasaid.

Under their plain, and most times solid coloured wool gowns, a Scottish townswomen would wear a simple white shift that doubled as a nightgown (otherwise known as a chemise) underneath a set of thick ribbon stays and corset. On top, long removable laced sleeves attached to a garment bodice such as a day jacket with lace ties in front or back depending on her class. Aprons and pockets (flat cloth bags that hung from a string tied around the waist) were practical accessories. The poorer classes of womenfolk often couldn't afford leather for outdoor shoes, so they went barefoot most of the time. Most families did, however own wool sock-like shoes that were only worn during special occasions such as a Clan Gathering at the Chieftain's castle.

Both noble and common women were expected to wear an appropriate head covering in that time unless they young or unmarried. A popular type of head covering was the kerchief, a square head scarf made of white linen or cotton with ruffled edges was frequently worn by Scottish women in the 16th-18th centuries.

Noble Scottish women of the 16th and 18th centuries wore the same style of dress as the poorer womenfolk only made with much finer fabrics and made more elegant to establish their social class. Women who were married to the Clan Chieftain, the Chieftain's kin or any of the wealthier Clansmen would wear a long silk or a finer decorated wool (often their clan's tartan) gown over their shift and corsets.



For some women, an additional wire- hoop skirt would be worn under their gown to make the skirts appear wider at the hips. Similar laced-up bodices were worn alongside a long Arisaid of her husband's clan tartan tied around her shoulders with the clan brooch. Unlike the poorer women, noblewomen were wealthy enough to own thin leather shoes that were often adorned with silver buckles with intricate designs like Scottish wreaths that are donned on some Scottish Clan brooches and crests.

Noblewomen also adorned themselves with various jewels and ribbons as another way to establish their wealth. Noblewomen were often seen wearing silk or thin wool ribbons in their hair that at most times matched their tartan Arisaid. Similar silk ribbons were also worn as neck adornment. Much like what is known today as a choker necklace, the silk ribbon would be pinned around their necks, often accompanied with a brooch or jewel of some kind. This was used to make a women's neck look long and thin as a way to attract attention from their husbands or other men. Most of these 'extra' adornments were mainly used by unmarried women who were 'on-the-hunt' for their future husband.

