

Tartan facts

Tartan refers to the pattern of interlocking stripes, running in both the warp and weft in the cloth (horizontal and vertical), or any representation of such a woven design in other media (printed, painted, or otherwise rendered). Typically today one thinks of “clan tartans” — that is, tartan designs that represent certain Scottish clans and families. While this is typical, it was not always so.

Tartan has an ancient history. The earliest known tartan in Scotland can be dated to the third or fourth century AD. In other parts of the world, tartan cloth has been found dating to approximately 3000 BC. Yet only in Scotland have they been given such cultural significance.

Originally, tartan designs had no names, and no symbolic meaning. All tartan cloth was hand woven, and usually supplied locally. While it may have been true that certain colors or pattern motifs were more common in some areas than others, no regulated or defined “clan tartan” system ever existed. Tartan, in general, however came to be extremely popular in Scottish Highland culture. So much so that by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, tartan clothing is seen to be characteristic of Highland dress.

Tartan was so identified with the Highland Gael that after the Battle of Culloden in 1746, the British government, in the Act of Proscription, forbade the wearing of tartan (among other things) in the Highlands, in an attempt to suppress the rebellious Scottish culture.

A clan tartan represents your clan. It is not necessarily the tartan that your ancestors would have worn hundreds of years ago. However, tartans today have meaning, and when you wear a tartan you are identifying yourself with what that tartan represents, be it a clan, district, or what have you. Most today would select a tartan that they feel identifies with some part of your heritage.

— Matthew Newsome

Clan Maxwell

The Clan Maxwell Society was organized in 1964 at Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina, by a few Maxwells who had been meeting informally each year at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games. Our first President, prominent New Orleans architect Murvan M. (Scotty) Maxwell, put together the framework for what became a nationwide association of Maxwells and allied families.

Today the Society sponsors Clan Maxwell tents at Scottish festivals throughout the nation, publishes the House of Maxwell newsletter, maintains an information-packed website, and sponsors research into Maxwell-related history.

Applications for Clan Maxwell membership can be downloaded from our website and are available by mail on request from:

Clan Maxwell Society
P.O. Box 4061
Mount Holly, NJ 08060

Or email clan.maxwell.co@gmail.com



Which tartan is right for Maxwells?



Maxwells and tartan

by Larry Long, Kingsport, TN

Maxwell tartans

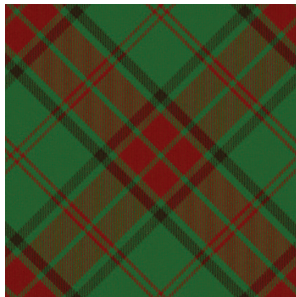
Like people of Scottish descent everywhere, many Maxwells and members of allied families enjoy showing the family colors by wearing or displaying their family tartans.

Which tartan to wear is simple for Maxwells, because there is only one pattern (or sett) which is generally recognized. This “red Maxwell” pattern can be authenticated to the middle of the 19th century and can be seen in all three of the usual color variations, referred to as modern, ancient, and weathered.

There is another Maxwell pattern of very recent origin, the “hunting Maxwell,” which was developed by our first President and Chieftain, the late Scotty Maxwell. It is the same pattern as the “red” sett but with the red and green colors switched, resulting in a green sett with prominent red lines.



Maxwell



Maxwell hunting

Tartan trivia

The *Vestiarium Scoticum* was first published by William Tait of Edinburgh in a limited edition in 1842. The book itself purported to be a reproduction, with colour illustrations, of an ancient manuscript on the clan tartans of Scottish families. Shortly after its publication, it was denounced as a forgery and the “Stuart” brothers who brought it forth, and who claimed to be the grandsons of Bonnie Prince Charlie himself, were likewise denounced as imposters. It is indeed generally accepted today that neither the brothers themselves nor the *Vestiarium* are what they were purported to be. Nevertheless, the role of the book in the history of Scottish tartans is immense, with many of the designs and patterns contained therein passing into the realm of “official” clan tartans. Maxwell is one such tartan.

Allied family tartans

Two of the allied families in Clan Maxwell USA also have their own tartans.

Clan Pollock adapted the “hunting Maxwell” sett, differentiated by a white oversett.

The Blackstock family organized a Society and engaged a Fellow of the Scottish Tartan Society to design two tartans for them, a dress tartan and a hunting tartan.

In addition to those tartans which were designed for formally organized groups of our allied families, three individuals have commissioned tartans, all of which are relatively new.

Maxton tartan was designed at the request of L.E. Maxton, of California. It was done by the Tartan Educational and Cultural Authority (TECA) and based on the “hunting Maxwell.”

Kirk tartan, also designed by the TECA, is based on the “red Maxwell” sett.

Dinwiddie tartan is a new sett designed by a New England weaver for W.J. Dinwiddie, of California. This is an original design with no obvious connection to the Maxwell sett.



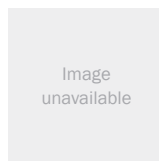
Pollock



Blackstock dress



Blackstock hunting



Maxton



Kirk



Dinwiddie hunting

Clearly, there are many possible tartans from which to choose. Let your individual taste dictate your choice — which seems to be the way Maxwells have always done.

District tartans

If none of these patterns appeal to you, there is another approach which may especially interest our allied families. Several district tartans have been devised for use by those who do not wish to wear a tartan bearing a family name not their own — and for those who simply would prefer a different tartan for aesthetic preferences. Several of these patterns relate to areas connected with Maxwells and allied families.

Nithsdale tartan is an obvious choice because of the Nithsdale area’s strong Maxwell and Dinwiddie connections. It is a darker pattern comprised roughly of equal parts of red, blue, and green. It was introduced in 1930.

Galloway tartan comes in two patterns which were introduced in 1950. The more popular version is red and blue with five green and yellow lines. The other consists of two shades of green with five lines of red and yellow.

Glasgow tartan is a very attractive pattern which predates 1819 and the Maxwell tartan by more than 20 years.

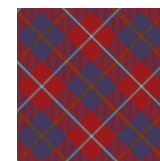
Paisley tartan, designed in 1952, might be appropriate if your family can be traced to the area near Glasgow. This district pattern has been adopted by the Paisley Clan Society as their tartan, so it is less recognized as a district tartan.

East Kilbride tartan was designed in 1990 with elements to symbolize the Maxwells of Calderwood.

Roxburgh tartan reflects the place in the middle marches with the earliest identifiable traces of the Maxwell family. This tartan predates 1850.



Nithsdale



Galloway



Glasgow



Paisley



East Kilbride



Roxburgh