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**FASHION. THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL COSTUME.**

Countries are easily identified by their national costumes because of its colour and unique artistic design. National costumes of the world serve many purposes: they preserve a country’s cultural heritage, educate the public about their history, unite citizens with a sense of national unity, and express patriotism. When choosing a national costume, most countries opt for highly distinctive designs that can be applied to the majority of the population and will represent the nation’s values and heritage.

National costumes of the world are frequently used for:

Ethnic or cultural festivals

National holiday celebrations

Weddings or other special occasions

Touring dance troupes

Beauty pageants

Cultural dolls

Many fashion influences affect national costumes, and in fact, many nations have several variations of authentic costumes that reflect the nation’s culture. Different factors that can be incorporated into a national costume include:

Climate and geography

Marital status or social class

Profession

National colors or other symbols

Different time periods

**English National Costume**

Although England is a country rich in folklore and traditions, it has no definitive ‘national’ costume. The most well-known folk costumes are those of the Morris dancers. They can be seen in many country villages during the summer months performing folk dances. They have magical meanings associated with the awakening of the earth,

The costumes vary from team to team, but basically consist of white trousers, a white shirt, a pad of bells worn around the calf of the leg, and a hat made of felt or straw, decorated with ribbons and flowers. The bells and ribbons are said to banish harm and bring fertility. Morris dancing was originally an all-male tradition, but now some teams feature women dancers too.

**English National Dress - Female**

This dress is based on English female dress from the 6th Century AD. Any kind of footwear can be worn as per occasion. A woman held a knife on the front. It was the sign of a free English person. She wore a deep Red overdress, which was cut shorter than the light Blue summer dress. Unseen were trousers in the same blue linen, representing the blue of the English King St Edmund. This was a basic finish of design. Embroidery could be added to the light blue drape on the front of the overdress**.**

**Cold weather ‘female’ English National Dress**

The women wore a cloak pinned by a solid silver broach with a design representing the White Dragon of the English etched onto it. It was warm, stylish and practical. The cloak was worn over the standard order of female English National Dress, pinned above the right shoulder.

**English National Dress - Male**

The male standard order of English National Dress is based on a mix of north European and Old English Dress. Thus the deep Red and ‘off’ White reflects both the English national colours of St George, The English White Dragon, and Nordic influences. This acknowledges the Viking and Saxon influence within England. A man wore a knife on his front to denote he was a free Englishman. His trousers and smock were of well spun wool. The male standard order of dress was smart, practical and easy to wear. White linen under shirt or tunic formed the smock for the warm weather order. As an alternative, and like the ‘female’ English National Dress, linens or other materials could be used for the smock and trousers, if wool was not practical.

**The origins of ‘male’ English National Dress.**

The origins of ‘male’ English National Dress are steeped in the origins of the English when the English were dwellers of forest and people of the sea. Like the female version of English National Dress it is designed with the earliest of influences in mind. The representation of the Anglo-Saxon warrior of the early 7th Century wore a beautiful recreation of the Sutton Hood Helmet. He had an Anglo-Saxon sword.

**Cold weather ‘male’ English National Dress**

They wore a cloak pinned by a solid silver broach with a design representing the White Dragon of the English etched onto it. The cloak was worn over the standard order of male English National Dress, pinned above the right shoulder, and was simply cut from deep Red wool. It was actually very warm!

**English Male Axe Necklace**

The necklace worn by the men was a solid silver English battle axe design with a representation of the arrow etched onto its surface.

**English Smock Tunic embroidery and detail**

The two boar designs are embroidered in white wool to give an example of simple designs that can be achieved. Cross of St George, White Horse, White Dragon, or other designs can be achieved. These boars could represent the Viking influence in England or the old Northumbrian kingdoms.

**English Deep Red Trousers**

Cut from deep Red well spun wool these trousers are smart, hard wearing, and easy to cut and make. They are straight cut trousers, with belt loops. This requires another hidden belt to be worn.

**English White Linen Shirt**

The linen under shirt or under tunic forms the basis for the warm weather order of ‘male’ English National Dress. It is cut long enough for the tunic to cover the top part of the trousers and is vented on the sides.

**The National Costume of Scotland**

Perhaps the most famous national costume in Britain is the Scottish kilt with its distinctive tartan pattern.

Each Scottish Clan or family has its own distinctive tartan pattern, made up of different colours, and an official register of tartans is maintained by the Scottish Tartans Society in Perthshire.

The kilt forms a part of the traditional Highland dress, worn by Scottish clansmen and Scottish regiments. In addition to the kilt, a plaid or tartan cloak is worn over one shoulder, and a goatskin pouch or sporran is worn at the front of the kilt. Sometimes tartan trousers or trews are worn instead of a kilt. Women do not have their own distinctive national dress in Scotland, although tartan fabrics are widely used in clothing, and the kilt is also worn.

**Scottish Dress**

The main Scottish costume consists of the Leine (a shirt like that worn in the rest of Europe at this time, which did not lace up the front in fantasy pirate shirt fashion), the Plaid (previously might have been called a 'brat', or cloak; this word has changed in modern Gaelic to mean a rug or carpet), trews, a jacket, and shoes. They also wore knee-breeches like the ones worn in the Lowlands or in England. Women wore several petticoats (skirts), the arisaidh (woman's form of the plaid), stays, and a jacket or a bedgown, as well as a head-covering known as a kertch if they were married.

**The Plaid**

The term plaid here means a blanket or cloak, not the pattern of the material; it can refer to cloth that is white or striped as well as the usual checked cloth. Tartan is the term used for the checked pattern itself.

The plaid is described as being 12 to 18 feet long by about 5 feet wide, being made of two strips of cloth about 30" wide sewn together lengthwise. Those who could afford to do so wore colorful tartans, whereas the poorer folk wore browns and so on, the better to blend with the vegetation. (This is not, however, due to a lack of access to colorful dyes, which were, and are, quite plentiful and readily available throughout Scotland.) White, striped and single-color plaids were also common. In earlier periods, sheep and goat skins seem also to have been worn as mantles, both with and without the hair still attached.

The plaid (usually unbelted) was also worn with trews, and was worn wrapped over one shoulder and under the opposite arm.

Plaids are generally pinned at the shoulder with an iron pin or bodkin which fell out of use about 600 years prior to this period.

**Women's Plaids**

They were about the same size as men's plaids, but sometimes were plain white or striped rather than tartan. (To get the striped fabric, they most likely used the same warp as was used to make the tartans, but used one color for the weft.) Women wore the plaid like a shawl, they were generally fastened at the breast with a ring brooch, which is a brass or silver round ring, decorated with engraving or other ornamentation. At some point, women also started belting their plaids around themselves, very much as men did, pinning both upper ends of the plaid on their breast. Women's plaids, whether belted or unbelted, however, were called arisaids (the Gaelic name for the kilt).

**Trews and Breeches**

Trews were worn in Scotland from the medieval period through the end of the 18th century, usually by men wealthy enough to own and/or ride horses. They are descended either from early Celtic braccae/broc, or from footed hose common throughout Europe in the middle ages and worn elsewhere in the British Isles through the 17th century for casual wear, or both. Knee breeches were also worn in the Highlands, but presumably were not remarked upon very often since they weren't unusual. Three bodies have been found in bogs in Caithness, Lewis, and the Shetlands from the late 1600s/early 1700s, and two are wearing knee breeches, while one (a boy) is wearing a long coat that isn't typical of the short coats we think of Highlanders wearing during this period. He may have been wearing linen breeches, but if he was, the acidity of the bog has eaten them away since linen is a plant material, leaving the protein fibers of his woolen garments untouched.

**Jackets/Coats**

Both men's and women's outerwear seems, as far as we can tell from period portraits, to mirror that worn in England at the time, with the exception of men's coats when they are wearing the belted plaid, in which case they are shorter than usual, reaching only the top of the hip. This is a practical consideration, since it would be impossible to wear a knee-length coat with a belted plaid -- the skirts of the coat would interfere with the belted plaid. Men also wore waistcoats under their coats, either with sleeves or without sleeves (waistcoats in this period often had sleeves, which could be either sewn in, or tied on with lacing). Men would NOT have worn their waistcoats alone without their coats, unless they were engaged in hard physical labor.

Women in Scotland, as in England, seem to be wearing either a jacket like a feminized version of the man's jacket, or (by the mid-1700s) what is called a 'bedgown' -- a more shapeless, mid-hip to knee-length gown. It's possible that women also sometimes wore a sort of waistcoat (over their stays), with sleeves that tied on, like men's waistcoats. However, they did NOT wear these waistcoats as outer garments.

**Stays**

Women would have worn stays. Also worn at home would have been lightly-boned stays called 'jumps,' worn for very informal occasions such as during the confinement after childbirth; they aren't considered proper wear for public. Working women's stays were often of rough linen canvas or of thick leather, which would be scored along the lines where boning goes on a cloth corset; this scoring helps the leather to bend properly around the torso. If the stays were of cloth, the boning could be of materials such as straw (like broom-straw), caning, or other cheap and available stiffeners. Another reason for the wearing of stays is the prevalence of rickets and other diseases causing curvature of the spine - stays were seen as one way of keeping the body from becoming deformed due to illness. A modern, practical consideration for wearing stays is that they make great back support, especially when one is working around camp, lifting heavy pots, firewood, and other things.

**Kertch / hats**

The Hen Wife" by Richard Waitt (1706). Notice the head covering, called a 'kertch' or 'breid', worn by Scottish married women in the 1600s and 1700s. The kertch appears to be worn on top of a close-fitting coif of some kind, held on with a brass pin at the crown of the head.

The Highland bonnet seems to have gradually made its way into the Highlands by the mid-to-late 1700s. It is a direct descendant of the soft-crowned, brimmed hat worn during the 16th century, which over time lost its brim and became the Scottish bonnet we all know today. There are other hats with similar or identical shapes, including the Basque beret, (possibly) the Monmouth cap worn by sailors throughout the middle ages, and a beret-like hat worn by the very early Celts, but apparently this shape died out in the Highlands and was reintroduced.

**Welsh National Costume**

The national costume of Wales is based on the peasant costume of the 18th and 19th centuries. Because Wales was isolated geographically from the rest of Britain, many of the individual traits of costume and materials were retained in Welsh dress long after they had died out elsewhere.

Unlike Scotland, the distinctive folk costume of Wales was worn by the women, consisting of a long gown or skirt, worn with a petticoat and topped with a shawl folded diagonally to form a triangle and draped around the shoulders, with one corner hanging down and two others pinned in front. Aprons were universally worn, sometimes simple, sometimes decorated with colourful embroidery.

The most distinctive part of the costume was the tall black ‘Welsh hat’ or ‘beaver hat’. The hats had a tall crown, cylindrical or conical in shape with a wide brim, and were usually trimmed with a band of silk.

**Welsh Dress**

Welsh National costume evolved in Wales in the late 18th century as a development of costume worn in town and country. The popular image of Welsh "national" dress, of a woman in a red cloak and tall black hat, is one which has developed as a result of various influences which arose in the nineteenth century.

Lady Llanover, the wife of an ironmaster in Gwent, was very influential in encouraging the wearing of "national dress", both in her own home and at eisteddfodau. She felt it was important to encourage the use of the Welsh language and the wearing of an identifiable Welsh costume. She succeeded in developing the Welsh "national dress" because people felt that their national identity was under threat and the wearing of a national costume was one way to declare that identity.

The garments are made of Welsh flannel. The costume regarded as national dress is based on clothing worn by Welsh countrywomen during the early nineteenth century. The tall "chimney" hat did not appear until the late 1840's and seems to be based on an amalgamation of men's top hats and a form of high hat worn during the 1790 - 1820 period in country areas.

Today the costume is usually worn by young girls throughout Wales on St David's Day. The typical female costume, as designed and made popular by Lady Llanover, was made up of the following:

Tall hat, made out of hard board with thin beaver fabric glued on to it.

A white cap, worn under the hat, made of cotton or muslin with long frilled lappets extending down the shoulders.

The popular image of Welsh 'national' dress, of a woman in a red cloak and tall black hat, is one which largely developed during the nineteenth century. It was part of a conscious revival of Welsh culture during a period when traditional values were under threat.

The costume regarded as national dress is based on clothing worn by Welsh countrywomen during the early nineteenth century, which was a striped flannel petticoat, worn under a flannel open-fronted bedgown, with an apron, shawl and kerchief or cap. Style of bedgown varied, with loose coat-like gowns, gowns with a fitted bodice and long skirts and also the short gown, which was very similar to a riding habit style.

The hats generally worn were the same as hats worn by men at the period. The tall 'chimney' hat did not appear until the late 1840s and seems to be based on an amalgamation of men's top hats and a form of high hat worn during the 1790-1820 period in country areas.

Lady Llanover, the wife of an ironmaster in Gwent, was very influential in encouraging the wearing of a 'national' dress, both in her own home and at eisteddfodau. She considered it important to encourage the use of the Welsh language and the wearing of an identifiable Welsh costume. She succeeded in her aim mainly because people felt that their national identity was under threat and the wearing of a national costume was one way to promote that identity.

A further influence was the work of artists producing prints for the rising tourist trade, which had the effect of popularising the idea of a typical Welsh costume, and later the work of photographers who produced thousands of postcards. This contributed to the stereotyping of one style of costume, as opposed to the various styles which were worn earlier in the century.

Is there such a thing as a Welsh kilt?

Although Lady Llanover created 'a weird and wonderful' costume made for her court harpist, she was not particularly concerned with a national costume for men. As a result, Welsh men do not have a national dress, although attempts have been made in recent decades to 'revive' a Welsh kilt which never in fact existed!

Even in Scotland, there is evidence to show that the kilt as we know it today is a comparatively modern development from the belted plaid, which was a more substantial garment worn across the shoulder.

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