

# UNIQUELY SCOTTISH

## Whisky

Ask people what they associate most with Scotland and you'll probably get a variety of answers – tartan, golf and Robert Burns would certainly all be mentioned. But the most common answer is likely to be whisky.

Acknowledged as Scotland's national drink, whisky – in the Gaelic, *uisge beatha* (pronounced oosh-ga beh-huh), meaning water of life – has been produced here for longer than anyone can remember. Something that began centuries ago as a way of using up rain-soaked barley after a wet harvest, the whisky industry has now grown into one of the country's biggest earners, bringing in hundreds of millions of pounds every year.

## Gaelic

Gaelic is the longest-standing language used in Scotland and can boast one of the richest song and oral traditions in Europe. It is part of a family of Celtic languages which today are spoken in six separate areas: Scotland, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Wales, Cornwall and Brittany in France.

## Celtic roots

Scots Gaelic emerged from the vast pan-European commonwealth of Celtic nations that eventually succumbed to the might of the conquering Roman Empire. The Celts in both Scotland and Ireland remained outwith Rome's influence and it was from Ireland that the Gaels were to come to Scotland.

The first Irish Gaels, the Scots, arrived in Scotland around 450 AD and settled in Argyll (*Earra Ghàidheal*), which they called *Dal Riata*, after the homeland they had left. While establishing themselves, they were fiercely resisted by the established Pictish people and it was not until 843 that the Gaelic leader, Kenneth MacAlpin united the Picts and the Gaels and became the first ruler of *Alba* which comprised most of Scotland north of Forth and Clyde. *Alba* has since remained the Gaelic name for Scotland. The culture of the Gaels spread throughout the country, and their language became the language of the king, court and most of the common people. James IV (1473-1513) was the last Scottish monarch to speak Gaelic.

## The slow road to decline

With the growth of urban centres and the emergence of Scots as the language of the royal court in the 15th and 16th centuries, Gaelic began to lose its dominance. This was accelerated by the adoption in turn of English as the official language of the country following the 1707 Act of Union which confirmed what had been the de facto position in the more populous Lowlands for several generations. Gaelic also suffered severely in the 18th and 19th centuries as a result of the Government attack on all aspects of Highland culture following the defeat of the Jacobites in 1746, and from the effects of the Clearances which destroyed many Gaelic-speaking communities throughout the Highlands.

## Renaissance

By the middle of the 20th century, the language was at a very low ebb but in the mid 1970s, there began a grass-roots renaissance which aimed to create new generations of Gaelic-speakers. There are now numerous Gaelic playgroups, Gaelic units in primary schools, *Sradagan* (Gaelic Youth Clubs) and many Gaelic television programmes. Internationally renowned bands like Runrig and Capercaillie make Gaelic language and music interesting to a younger audience, and the *fèisean* (Gaelic tuition festivals) and Mods (Gaelic competitive festivals) attract hundreds of young musicians. Gaelic writing is flourishing, and the National Gaelic Arts Project is involved in a wide range of cultural activities.

Yet perhaps the real success of this movement can be seen in the way in which Gaelic is gradually being reincorporated into public life for the first time in over 200 years. Until recently, the naming of official bodies in Gaelic was virtually unknown whereas there are now over a hundred bodies, including national organisations, local authorities, banks and commercial organisations who have adopted Gaelic name. There is also a new Gaelic development agency, *Bord na Gaidhlig*, and at *Sabhal Mòr Ostaig* on the Isle of Skye, full-time vocational courses are taught through Gaelic in a Gaelic environment.

## The future

Yet there is still much to be done to ensure that Gaelic is seen to belong not to the past but as having a central role to play in Scotland's vibrant cultural future. The 2001 General Census of Scotland recorded 58,650 Gaelic speakers, most of whom live in the Outer Hebrides, the Central belt and the northern Highlands. In 2003, the SNP MSP Michael Russell introduced a private member's bill in the Scottish Parliament which if ultimately successful will grant Gaelic full legal equality with English in public life and see it revitalised as a living entity in Scotland's social, cultural and political life.

## The Thistle

Alongside tartan, the thistle is perhaps the most identifiable symbols of all things Scottish and nowadays, it can be seen promoting the 'Scottishness' of a wide variety of products, services and organisations.

### The thistle as symbol

The thistle has been an important Scottish symbol for more than 500 years. Perhaps its first recognisable use was on silver coins issued in 1470 during the reign of James III and from the early 16th century, it was incorporated into the Royal Arms of Scotland. Scotland's premier Order of Chivalry, established in 1687, is The Most Ancient and Noble Order of the Thistle and its members wear a collar chain whose links are made of golden thistles. The Knights and Ladies of the Thistle also wear a breast star which bears the thistle emblem and a motto which is regularly associated with it, *Nemo Me Impune Lacessit* – 'no-one provokes me with impunity'.

## The Kilt

The skirt-like kilt which is familiar to us today evolved around the middle of the 18th century from the more commonly worn and functional belted plaid (in Gaelic, *feileadh breacan* or *feileadh mor*, 'the big kilt').

### The original kilt

The *feileadh mor* was a longer untailed garment, around five metres in length, which was gathered and then belted at the waist to provide cover for both the upper and lower body. From the waist down, the *feileadh mor* resembled a modern kilt while the remaining material above the waist was draped over the shoulder and pinned there. This upper portion could be arranged in a variety of ways around the shoulders according to the demands of weather, temperature or freedom of movement required. At the end of day, the belt could be unbuckled to transform the *feileadh mor* into a warm covering for the night. The Gaelic plaid actually means 'blanket'.

### The kilt evolves

The *feileadh mor* was simplified by disposing of its top half, leaving the belt and the skirt below. The resulting creation became known as the *feileadh beg*, or 'little kilt'. This was reputedly at the behest of an Englishman running an ironworks at Invergarry who felt his kilted employees needed a greater freedom of movement to do their work. Whatever the impetus for change was, the kilt now became a tailored garment with sewn-in pleats, making it neater and far more easy to put on and wear. The upper half of the big kilt evolved into the separate plaid (or sash) which is now worn at more formal events.

### Proscription and survival

Following the Jacobite defeat at Culloden in 1746, the kilt and other aspects of Highland dress were outlawed and its continued survival during these years was largely due to its adoption by Highland regiments serving with the British army. Highland regiments still wear the kilt on regular basis (although no longer into battle) but it is not an everyday article of dress in Scotland. Visitors are more likely to see kilt-wearers at formal celebrations such as weddings and at Highland Games or similar gatherings. And although the kilt is typically regarded as being Highland dress, more kilts are now worn in the Lowland cities than in the Highlands.

### The kilt today

Modern kilts have up to eight metres of material which is thickly pleated at the back and sides, with the pleats stitched together only at the waistband. Fashion designers have also tried to update the kilt and make it appeal to a wider audience by using non-tartan designs such as camouflage and material such as leather

## **Tartan**

Tartan is, without doubt, one of the nation's major 'brands' – instantly recognised the world over as uniquely Scottish.

What makes tartan different from other chequered materials is the history and romance of the Highlands that is seemingly woven into every aspect of the fabric. In reality however, this mythologising of tartan is a surprisingly modern development and although tartan has come to be identified as particularly Scottish, any individual, family or institution can commission and register their own tartan.

### **Early history**

Some writers give the origin of term 'tartan' as the French tiretane although this may simply refer to a type of material of French origin, rather than any pattern on the cloth. In earliest times, Highlanders were known to wear clothes dyed with local plants, mosses and berries and woven into distinctive striped or checked patterns. However, the weave of the cloth, and the way it was worn, tended to be dictated by the custom in a particular area, rather than a family or clan.

The use of different patterns and colours of tartan to identify different families and clans is a very contentious issue amongst historians. In the absence of any real evidence to the contrary, it seems that this practice dates back only as far as the early 19th century. Prior to this, clansmen of all standing seemed to have worn a mixture of tartans without any sense of a standardised 'clan' design.

### **The tartan explosion**

The growth of clan and family tartans began with the standardising of the tartans used by Highland regiments in the British army during the years when tartan was proscribed (1747-1782). The principle was given impetus by the romanticisation of the Gael during the early 1800s and by the explosion of tartan weavers seeking new markets for their products. There also emerged from this time the practice of producing a number of variants of a particular tartan such as Ancient, Modern, Reproduction, Weathered or Muted.

### **Which tartan to wear?**

If your clients want to wear a tartan, there are no hard or fast rules or regulations about which pattern you have to choose although many people do prefer to wear a tartan associated with their family name. If you want to check for your clients whether they belong to a clan, contact the Clan Tartan Centre.

## Burns Supper

The Burns Supper is the annual celebration of the life and work of Scotland's national bard, Robert Burns. January in Scotland is a dark and cold month, traditionally perceived to be filled with post-Christmas gloom. So the chance to get together at its end with like-minded individuals to eat, drink and be entertained lifts the spirit in a way Burns himself would surely have approved of.

No-one is exactly certain when the first Burns Supper took place but it's likely that it was held by one of the many Burns Clubs that sprang up across west and central Scotland in the wake of the poet's untimely death in 1796 at the age of only 37. Nowadays, Burns Suppers have followed his popularity around the globe so that, on or around 25 January (Burns's birthday), they can be found everywhere from Moscow to Manhattan, Newfoundland to New Zealand. They also come in all shapes and sizes, from formal affairs in grand surroundings to more intimate gatherings in local clubs and pubs. The only common link between them all – and the only one that really matters – is the desire to commemorate one of the greatest poets the English language has known.

## St Andrew

**St Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland – a task he shares with Greece, Russia and Romania!**

The brother of St Peter and one of the original Apostles, Andrew was reputedly martyred at Patras in Greece, having petitioned the Roman authorities who had sentenced him to death not to crucify him on the same shape of cross as Christ. His request was granted and Andrew was duly crucified on the x-shaped cross (or saltire) which has subsequently become his symbol.

### St Andrew and Scotland

His association with Scotland traditionally stems from either of two legendary sources. Relics of the saint were reputedly brought from Patras to Kinrymont in Fife in the 4th century by St Regulus, following his shipwrecking off the east coast. The church at Kinrymont subsequently became the cathedral of St Andrews and developed into a major centre of medieval pilgrimage. Another version relates that in the 9th century, the Pictish king, Angus mac Fergus adopted St Andrew as patron following the appearance of a saltire in the sky immediately before his victory at Athelstaneford.

### Saints and symbols

Records show that St Andrew was probably the patron of Scotland by the year 1000. In 1286, the Seal of the Guardians of Scotland bore, on the obverse, a representation of St Andrew on his x-shaped cross, with the Latin inscription *Andrea Scotis Dux Eesto Compatriotis* – 'St Andrew be leader of the compatriot Scots'. In 1390, St Andrew was first used as a national symbol on a coin of the realm, a five-shilling piece minted in the reign of Robert III.

## **The Honours of Scotland**

**The Honours of Scotland – Scotland’s crown jewels – have been fought over for centuries, but are now safely ensconced in Edinburgh Castle.**

The Honours of Scotland are the oldest regalia in the British Isles. They comprise a crown, a sword and a sceptre, all of which date from the 15th and 16th centuries. Together with the Stone of Destiny, these symbols of Scottish nationhood are on permanent public display at Edinburgh Castle.

### **Sceptre, sword and crown**

The Sceptre of Scotland and the Sword of State were both gifts given to James IV by the Papacy, the sceptre in 1494 and the sword in 1507. The original silver-gilt sceptre was restyled and lengthened in 1536 to its present design which has a polished rock globe atop a finial featuring various religious figures. The sword is 4.5 feet (1.4 m) in length with an elaborately decorated silver gilt handle and etched blade. It is accompanied by a wooden scabbard covered in velvet and silver and a woven silk and gold thread belt.

The Crown of Scotland was refashioned in 1540 from an earlier crown for James V. The base circlet is made from Scottish gold and encrusted with 22 gemstones and 20 precious stones taken from the previous crown; freshwater pearls from Scotland’s rivers were also used.

### **Buried, lost and found**

The Honours have had a rather chequered history. They were first used together in 1543 for the coronation of the infant Mary, Queen of Scots and then at the coronations of James VI in 1567, Charles I in 1633 and Charles II in 1651. Charles II was in fact the last sovereign to receive the Honours and during the British civil wars of the mid 17th century, they lay buried in Kinneff parish church for nine years to avoid being destroyed as their English counterparts had been at the hands of Oliver Cromwell. Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, they were used at sittings of the Scottish Parliament to represent the monarch (resident in London in 1603 following the Union of the Crowns). After the Treaty of Union in 1707 removed Scotland’s independent parliament, the Honours were considered redundant and were duly locked away in a chest in Edinburgh Castle, where they were literally forgotten about for the next hundred or so years. They did not come to light again until 1818 when, under pressure from Sir Walter Scott, a detailed search of the castle uncovered the box and they have remained in the castle ever since.

## **The Stone of Destiny**

**The Stone of Destiny has been revered for centuries as a holy relic, fought over by the Scottish and English for 700 years.**

The Stone has been used successively by Dalriadic, Scottish, English and British monarchs as an important part of their enthronement ceremonies. At first sight, it is difficult to understand why this plain and rather unremarkable block of sandstone has fired the passion that it has over the past 700 years. Yet the power and importance of the Stone (also known as the Stone of Scone) far outstrips its physical appearance. It is arguably the greatest symbol and touchstone of Scottish nationhood and as such, has been a very potent icon for more than a thousand years.

## Early history

Like much of what is now ‘uniquely Scottish’, the origins of the Stone have been lost to history and typically, there are legends aplenty concerning it. One theory grants it biblical origins while others have it produced in various parts of Ireland and Scotland. In so far as any of its early history is clear, it seems that the Stone was used at Iona, Dunadd, Dunstaffnage and Scone for enthroning a succession of Dalriadic and subsequent monarchs. In 1292 John Balliol became the last king to use the Stone in Scotland as it was captured by Edward I of England in 1296, taken south alongside other important relics of nationhood and placed in Westminster Abbey. There it remained for the next 700 years, a part of the throne of Edward the Confessor on which all new sovereigns sit during their coronation. The last time it was used was at the coronation of HM The Queen in 1953.

## The Stone returns home...

On St Andrews Day, 30 November 1996, the Stone of Destiny returned north of the border and amid much pomp and ceremony, was installed in Edinburgh Castle, taking its place alongside those other symbols of national identity, the Honours of Scotland. About 10,000 people lined the Royal Mile to watch the procession of dignitaries and troops escort the stone from the Palace of Holyroodhouse to the castle. In a service at St Giles cathedral, the Church of Scotland Moderator, the Right Reverend John MacIndoe, formally accepted the Stone’s return, saying it would ‘strengthen the proud distinctiveness of the people of Scotland’.

## ...or does it?

The question is, was it the real Stone that was returned? There have been doubts over the Stone’s authenticity ever since The Hammer of the Scots carried it off as war booty. Some historians claim that by a cunning sleight-of-hand, the Scots actually handed Edward the cess-pit cover from Scone Castle rather than the real Stone (which if true, means that a long succession of English and British monarchs have been crowned while atop a medieval toilet-seat lid!). The picture is further blurred by the fact that on Christmas Day 1950, four nationalist students stole the Stone from Westminster Abbey and drove it north. It resurfaced some four months later following a huge public outcry, having been deposited by the thieves in Arbroath Abbey, draped in a saltire. The rumour mill was quickly in action and it was suggested that the recovered stone, now safely restored beneath the Coronation Throne at Westminster, was in fact a copy. At least one acknowledged copy of the Stone does exist, on public display at Scone Palace in Perthshire, where it serves as a favourite roost for the elegant peacocks and camera-toting tourists who stroll the grounds. As to whether other copies exist, only the Christmas Day thieves know and they’re not saying...

## **The Saltire**

The Scottish national flag is a white-on-blue saltire (i.e. a diagonal cross on a coloured background) and it derives from the shape of the cross on which Scotland's patron saint, St Andrew, was crucified.

### **History and legend**

Tradition has it that in 832 AD near the East Lothian village of Athelstaneford, a battle was fought which led to the adoption of the Saltire as Scotland's national flag. A joint army of Picts and Scots under the High King of Alba, Angus mac Fergus, was invading Lothian which at that time was still Northumbrian territory. Angus's force was surrounded by a larger army of Angles and Saxons and fearing defeat, the king led prayers for deliverance. Angus believed he had received a divine sign when above him in a clear blue sky, he saw a great white cross like that of St Andrew's. The king vowed that if, with the saint's help, he gained the victory, then Andrew would thereafter be the patron saint of Scotland and his cross the flag of Scotland. Angus did win and the Saltire duly became the national flag.

### **National symbol**

Divinely inspired or not, records show the Saltire in regular use by the 14th century, although not always against a blue background. In fact, it wasn't until the 16th century that the plain white Saltire on a blue field became established. Throughout the 17th century, the Saltire continued to be used as a national symbol, particularly by the army and navy and even following its incorporation into the first Union flag in 1606 after the union of the crowns. After the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, however, the widespread use of the Saltire declined and it wasn't until the later 20th century that there was a major resurgence in its use. It has now regained its status as the legally established national flag of Scotland, used by all Scottish teams in international competitions and widely flown on the flag staffs of public buildings, sometimes alone and sometimes side by side with the Union Flag. The Saltire is also used by many bodies, both private and public, as a logo since its simplicity of design makes it ideally suited for use as a brand.

### **The official 'Saltire Blue'**

In 2003, Scotland's politicians nailed their colours to the mast and specified the precise shade of blue to be used on the Saltire. Henceforth, the white St Andrew's Cross should appear on an azure background known as Pantone 300 in the international colour coding system. The MSP's recommendation, however, carries no power of enforcement and it is likely that Saltires will continue to fly in a variety of shades.

### **The Saltire Memorial**

In 1997, a heritage centre was opened in a restored dovecot next to Athelstaneford Church, and visitors are now able to learn much more about Scotland's flag and to enjoy a short audio visual dramatisation of its origins. The Centre is open from 10am till 5pm each day from April till September, and admission is free. The public are also encouraged to visit the Saltire Memorial which was erected in 1965. A Saltire is flown permanently at the Memorial, even during the hours of darkness when it is floodlit.

*Scotland.  
Welcome to our life.*

**Want to know more about Scotland?  
International Marketing Trade Team  
Email: [tradepromotions@visitscotland.com](mailto:tradepromotions@visitscotland.com)**

The information contained in this publication is correct at the time of going to print.  
VisitScotland can accept no responsibility, for any errors or omissions contained in the publication.

October 2009