

42nd Regiment Band or Musicians' Tartan

Introduction

Regimental Bands have been part of Highland Regiments since the late 18th century; however, they, unlike pipers, were not part of the official regimental establishment until later. Until shortly after Waterloo (1815) bandsmen wore the standard regimental uniform and were accounted for in the muster rolls as rank and file (but noted as musicians) and fought as soldiers. For reasons that are not clear the *Band of Music*, as it was known, went to white jackets in the 1820's and sometime after were clothed in a red tartan. A variety of tartans were used by various regimental bands until they became part of the official establishment in the 1850s, at which time they generally adopted either the regimental, or the Royal Stewart tartan.

The Band Tartan

In their 1819 Key Pattern Book the weaving firm Wm. Wilson & Son of Bannockburn include the following comment under their instructions for the 42nd Regiment tartan:

To make the band or musicians Plaids you have only to put Scarlet in place of the Black in the Sergts Plaids. The band and the Sergeants' are of the same quality.

The effect of replacing the black of the Government tartan (commonly called the Black Watch) to make this 'red' sett is shown below (Plate 1). The resulting blue, green and red tartan is striking and makes the blue appear dominant compared with the standard 42nd setting.



Plate 1. The 42nd or Government tartan and colour change to form the Band or Music tartan. © The Author

Wilson's details for the Sergeants' plaids show that the Band tartan was woven 26 inches wide with '.....3 half Setts and so much of the 4th until all the green in it is put on after which conclude with the red selvedge mark'. The selvedge mark was approximately two inches and was a feature of early military tartan used for plaiding. The only known surviving specimen of Wilson's cloth shows a portion (2 half setts) of this setting (Plate 2).



Plate 2. Specimen of Wilson's 42nd Band tartan c1820. Photo: National Museum of Scotland via [SCRAN](#).

Unlike the standard Government sett, the Band tartan was a purely military one and was never adopted as a civilian pattern.

Use by the 42nd Regiment¹

From details given elsewhere by Wilsons it is known that they wove the tartan for the 42nd Band from 1780, possibly earlier. Orders for that year indicate that two different qualities were woven, one for Sergeants' Plaids (see Wilsons' note – above), the other for Privates' Plaids; the latter being cheaper would have been of a lower quality. One order indicates that the Drum Major's plaid was made of 12 yards of 26" wide cloth meaning that the joined plaid would have been 6 yards x 52 inches. Writing in 1822 the regimental historian, Stewart of Garthⁱ stated that the Band wore a red tartan from the founding of the regiment in 1739². A few years later Loganⁱⁱ said of the 42nd that *'The band continue to wear tartan of the same red pattern which formed the original dress of the pipers and drummers'*. Neither author provides evidence for their statement, nor is it certain that the Band was part of the original regiment. There are however two subsequent images and a portrait that to show 42nd Regt pipers wearing the Band tartan. Cannon's 1836 Historical recordⁱⁱⁱ includes a coloured plate that shows a piper wearing a Government tartan coat and a kilt and plaid of the Band tartan. (Plate 3). The same arrangement of a 42nd Piper wearing a kilt and plaid of the Band tartan is seen in an 1854 watercolour (Plate 4) and a portrait c1858 (Plate 5). These images are evidence of the continued use of the Band sett into the mid-19th century.

¹ The 42nd Regiment of Foot (The Royal Highland Regiment), or Black Watch as they later became known.

² There is no evidence that the 42nd had a 'Music' or Band when they were formed, just Pipers and Drummers.



Plate 3. 42nd Piper wearing the Music tartan c1836.
Cannon, Historical record of the Forty Second.



Plate 4. 42nd Piper wearing the Music tartan c1854.
Courtesy of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum



Plate 5. Private and Piper, 42nd Regiment of Foot, Unknown artist c1858.
© National Museum of Scotland

Shortly after the 1858 portrait regimental bands became part of the official establishment and, in the case of the 42nd, the Band adopted the standard Government tartan which they wore until disbanded in the 1990s (Plate 6).

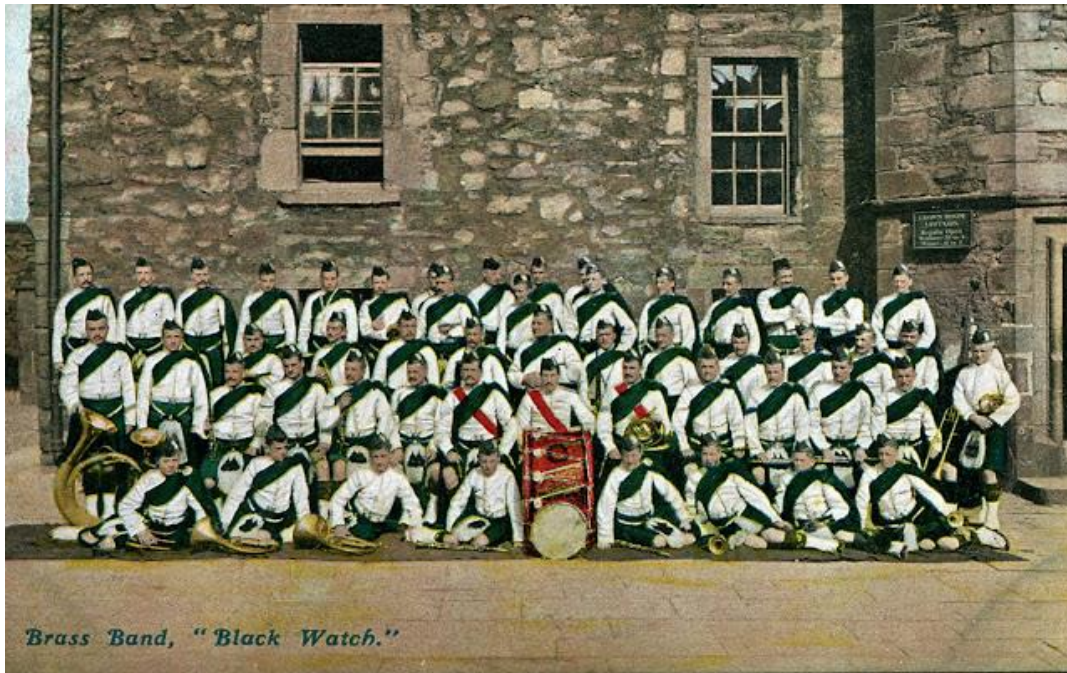


Plate 6. The Black Watch Band c1900. From the collection of Mike Brubaker,
TempoSenzaTempo.blogspot.com

Use by the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders

The regiment was raised in 1800 and wore the standard Government tartan. Although nothing in Wilsons' records indicates that the 93rd 'Music' also wore the Band tartan, it is clear from a series of portraits and watercolours that the regiment's musicians wore a number of tartans during the first half of the 19th century, including the Band sett. First evidence of the use by the 93rd is the c1837 portrait of the Bandmaster, George McKenzie (Plate 7). McKenzie served as Bandmaster 1835-39 so it's possible that the 93rd used this tartan from the earlier date. The claim (Dispatch No.71^{iv}) that this was the *MacGregor of Glengyle* tartan is erroneous and the extrapolation of the sett by Nisbett^v fanciful and illogical given Wilsons' records which were available to the author.

Watercolours from the late 1840s-1850s show that the 93rd musicians wore Ross tartan whilst some at least of their number continued to wear the Band sett until the early 1850s. It is shown worn by the trumpet player in Poate's watercolour (Plate 8).



Plate 7. Bandmaster George McKenzie 1837
Unknown artist. © The Author



Plate 8. Extract of a 93rd watercolour by Poate c1852.
Courtesy of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum

Without doubt, the best depiction of the Band tartan being worn is in Culiffe's *The Sword Dance* (Plates 9 and 10). The portrait was painted in 1853 when the 93rd and 42nd were at Chobham³. It shows a number of different tartans worn by the group of soldiers and onlookers, including the dancer, Bandsman McKenzie, whom wears the Band tartan. The Ross tartan is worn by the hammer thrower. It is said that some of the clothing for this portrait was lent by the 42nd so it is possible that McKenzie's kilt was a Black Watch rather than a Sutherland Highlanders' one.

³ Chobham, a town in Surrey, England with a Common that used to be a military camp.



Plate 9. The Sword Dance by David Cunliffe c1853. The dancer wears the Band tartan.
Courtesy of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum

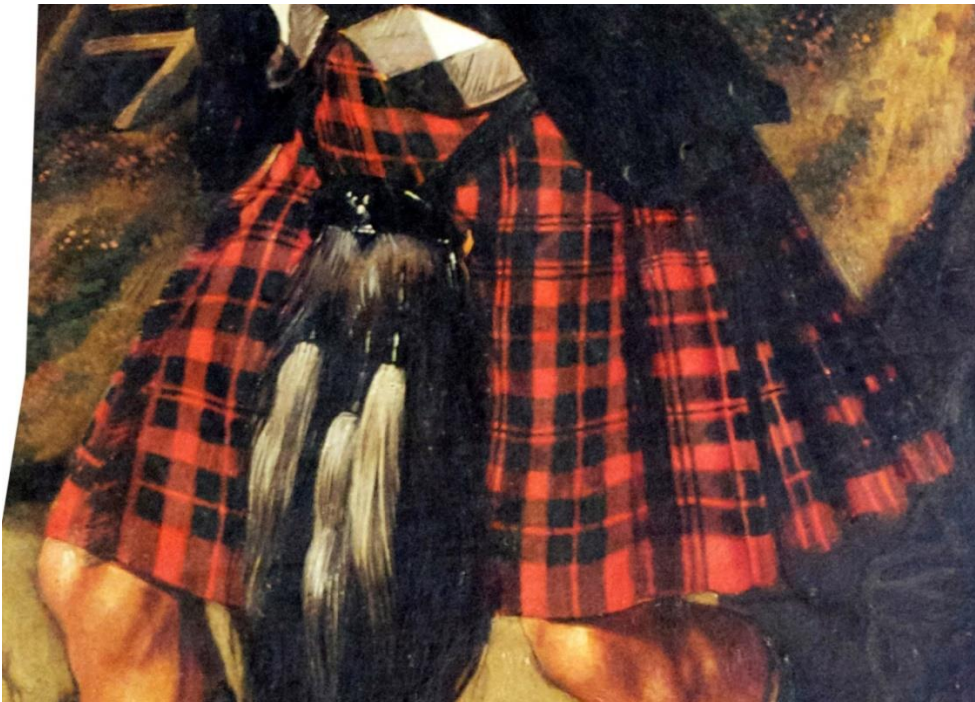


Plate 10. Detail of the dancer's kilt from the Sword Dance by David Cunliffe c1853 showing Wilsons' Band tartan.
Picture courtesy of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum

Both regiments appear to have stopped using the Band tartan at about the same time. The exact date is unclear, as is whether it continued to be worn at the same time as other tartans. Pipers of the 42nd were granted permission to wear the Royal Stewart by Queen Victoria in 1865 from which time the Band used the standard Government tartan and the use of the Band sett ceased completely.

Conclusion

Wilson's records show the use of the Band tartan by the 42nd from c1780. How much earlier it was used is unproven and whilst both Garth and Logan were of the view that it was worn from the formation of the regiment in 1739, they offer no evidence. They may have conflated the use by the regiment in the late 18th century of a simplified government tartan with red lines with a 'red tartan'.

The colonel of the 93rd (Sutherland Highlanders) seems to have chosen the same Band tartan for his 'Music' in the mid-1830s and both regiments continued to use it for their Band, and possibly some pipers, until the mid-1850s. Once the Bands became part of the official regimental establishment use of the Band tartan by the 42nd and 93rd was dropped in favour of the uniform government tartan which was retained until their disbandment in the 1990s.

Once the regimental bands stopped using the red Band tartan it seems to have fallen completely out of production, a fact reinforced because, unlike other military tartans, it had not been adopted for civilian use outside the Army. The tartan remained largely unknown until scholars began to examine Wilson's records in the late 20th century since when there has been a revival of interest (Plate 11).



Plate 11. Rear view of a modern box-pleated kilt in the Band tartan.

Picture courtesy of [New House Highland](#).

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ⁱ **STEWART OF GARTH D**, 1822 *The Sketches of the Highlanders of Scotland*, Constable & Co, Edinburgh.

ⁱⁱ **LOGAN J.** 1831 *The Scottish Gael*. Smith, Eldar & Co., London

ⁱⁱⁱ **CANNON R.** 1836 *Historical record of the Forty-second, or, the Royal Highland of Foot*, Parker, Furnivall, and Parker, Whitehall.

^{iv} **The Journal of the Scottish Military Historical Society.**

^v **NISBETT A.** *93rd Highlanders – Band Tartan*, A paper for the Scottish Tartans Society.