

Duke of Rothesay Tartans

The Duke of Rothesay is a dynastic title of the heir apparent to the British throne (David Stewart, son of Robert III, became the first Duke of Rothesay in 1398 and was heir apparent to the throne of the Kingdom of Scotland). Between the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and Edward VIII's time as heir apparent (1910 to 1936), the style *Duke of Rothesay* appears to have dropped out in favour of *Prince of Wales*, the premier British title for the eldest son. Queen Victoria is said to have requested that the Rothesay title be used to refer to the eldest son and heir apparent when he was in Scotland but it does not appear to have been used as the primary title until the current holder, HRH The Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay (1952).

Rothesay Tartans

There are six Rothesay tartans recorded by The Scottish Tartans Authority. For the purposes of this paper, only those associated with the Royal title will be considered, there being two versions each of the Duke of Rothesay, and the Duke of Rothesay Hunting tartans¹.

Duke of Rothesay Tartan



Plate 1. The Prince of Rothesay tartan.
Vestiarium Scoticum

The Duke of Rothesay tartan, sometimes referred to as the Red Rothesay, is one of the few non-clan patterns included in the *Vestiarium Scoticum* (VS) of 1842ⁱ where it was named *Prince of Rothesay* (Plate 1). Its inclusion, together with the Clan Stewart and Royal Stuart tartans, was probably aimed at ingratiating the authors' work with Queen Victoria and the Royal Family. The Sobieski Stuarts' unpublished version of the VS, the Cromarty Manuscript (CM), thought to date to 1829, contains details of a different Rothesay tartan which, although nothing like the published VS version, clearly showed their early intent to appropriate the Rothesay name. The final design contains elements of a number of the VS designs and appears to have been one of a number of the Brothers' variations on a theme. It has also been suggested that this version arose due to a mistranscription of the earlier record.ⁱⁱ

The development of the design from concept to publication gives a good insight into the Sobieski Brothers'² design process. Starting with a well-known existing tartan, the Royal Stewart, they produced a variation *with no white or yellow on the black* and which they called 'Stewart of Rothesay'. The unpublished version of the VS (the CM) included a drawing for a 'Prince of Rothesay' tartan with a description that linked it to a white based version of the Royal Stewart. Like the 'Stewart of Rothesay', it was described as having *no white or yellow*, but in this case had *white between the black and green*. However, by the time of the publication of the VS in 1842 the description of the 'Prince of Rothesay' had changed further and now had *no white or yellow between the black, a white stripe in the middle of the red, the black and blue were all green*, and there was another white stripe (on the red) with finer ones on the

¹ The Scottish Tartans Authority has a record of two Canadian fashion tartans named Rothesay. They date from the 1960-70s.

² John Carter Allen and Charles Manning Allen claimed to be the illegitimate grandsons of Prince Charles Edward Stuart. They took the name Sobieski in reference to the mother of Prince Charles Edward.

outside. The development of the tartan is shown in the colour strips (Fig 1). The link between the unpublished Prince of Rothesay (in the CM) tartan and the Royal Stewart is easily understood, the introduction of the alternating single and triple white lines in the published version much less so. Whether by design or error, the effect is to double the approximate size of the pattern's repeat compared with the earlier designs.

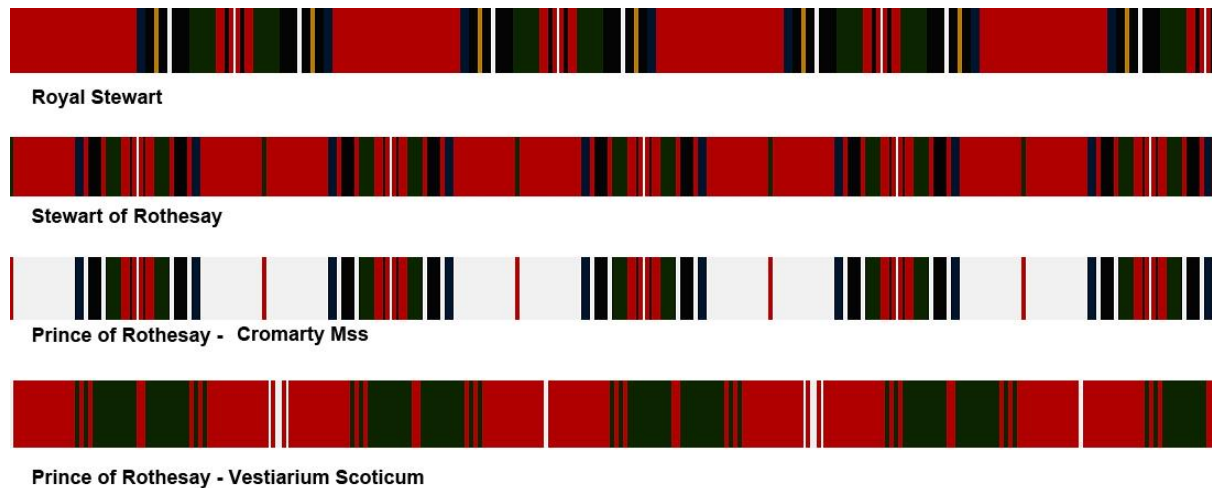


Fig 1. Development of the Prince (Duke) of Rothesay tartan from the Royal Stewart with a full sett marked.
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An early example of this tartan can be seen in a kilt in the collection of the West Highland Museum, Fort William³ (Plate 2). It has been dated to c1840-50ⁱⁱⁱ and was made from a length of cloth woven by Wilsons of Bannockburn. The sett of this piece is huge, the cloth is 21 inches wide and includes one half repeat across the width; the single white pivot stripe on one selvedge, the triple white (second pivot) on the other. A broad waistband was added to make the cloth long enough. It has been claimed that the kilt belonged to one of the Sobieski Stuarts⁴ and whilst the evidence of them owning it is unproven, it is certainly contemporary with them and their connection with the design makes it likely.



Plate 2. Rothesay kilt c1830-40.
Photo: University of Edinburgh (Carmichael Watson Project).

³ The kilt was loaned to the Museum as part of the Carmichael Collection between 1948 and 1992. In 1992 objects from the Carmichael Collection were gifted to the Museum.

⁴ "Inventory and Valuation of Effects within Logierait Manse belonging to the Estate of the late Professor J.C. Watson who died on the 26th March 1942." The kilt is not listed specifically, but appears to be part of "2 cardboard boxes containing 8 pieces Old tartan clothing". Martin, Vanessa. "Re: Kilt Details." Message to Peter MacDonald. 15 May 2015. Email.

Adoption by the Royal Family

During the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, her eldest son, Albert Edward (Prince of Wales and later, Edward VII) was often painted wearing the Lord of the Isles tartan in reference to one of his other Scottish titles. There is an intriguing entry in Queen Victoria's Diary for 9th November 1844 in which she wrote '*...Bertie, who was in his Highland dress, wearing the Rothsay (sic) Tartan..*' This was only two years after the publication of the Sobieski Stuart's VS and whilst there is no pictorial confirmation of the tartan, it may be assumed that it was the VS sett. It confirms just how influential the Stuart Brothers were. The earliest pictorial evidence of the royal use of the Rothsay tartan is an 1859 picture of the then 18-year-old Prince Albert Edward, heir apparent and therefore Duke of Rothsay (Plate 3). The first photographic evidence of the Prince of Wales wearing the Rothsay tartan is a series of portraits taken in 1866 (Plate 5).



Plate 3. The Prince of Wales (wearing Rothsay), 1859.
Illustrated London News



Plate 4. The Prince of Wales (wearing Rothsay), 1866. Image: The RCT.

The same year, 1866, the artist Kenneth Macleay painted William MacDonald, Piper to the Prince of Wales, in the Rothsay tartan (Plate 5) and the following year MacDonald was photographed wearing the exact same outfit (Plate 6).



Plate 5. William MacDonald, Piper to the Prince of Wales by Kenneth Macleay 1866. Image: The STA.



Plate 6. William MacDonald, Piper to the Prince of Wales, Osborne 1867. Image: The RCT

By the late 1860s Prince Albert Edward was dressing his own sons in the Rothesay tartan, not just Prince Albert Victor, the future heir apparent (Plate 7), but also his bother George Fredrick, later King George V (Plate 8).



Plate 7. Prince Albert Victor, Rothesay tartan c1869 Photo: National Portrait Gallery



Plate 8. Prince George Frederick, later George V, Rothesay tartan 1869 Photo: The RCT.

It might be assumed that the adoption of the tartan was a visual reference to the Queen's direction that the heir to the throne should use the title Duke of Rothesay when in Scotland. That may have been the case, however, it was not just the heir to the throne and his children that took to wearing the Rothesay; the future King's brothers wore it during the late 19th century too (Plate 9). This wider use is particularly interesting as it coincides with the period when the adult members of the Royal Family began wearing the Balmoral tartan which had hitherto been reserved for the children, Gillies and Balmoral Estate workers.



Plate 9. Princes Albert Edward of Wales (and Duke of Rothesay), Alfred, Duke of Saxe Coburg and Gotha, Arthur, Duke of Connaught (wearing Rothesay) and Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany (wearing Hunting Stewart), Abergeldie 1881. Photo: RCT.

The Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, continued to wear the Rothesay tartan through the remainder of the 19th century (Plates 10 and 11).



Plate 10. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales at Mar Lodge c.1885 Photo: The RCT.



Plate 11. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales c.1895 Photo: The RCT.

The Hunting Tartan

The Duke of Rothesay Hunting tartan is produced by reversing the red and green of the original tartan (Fig 2).

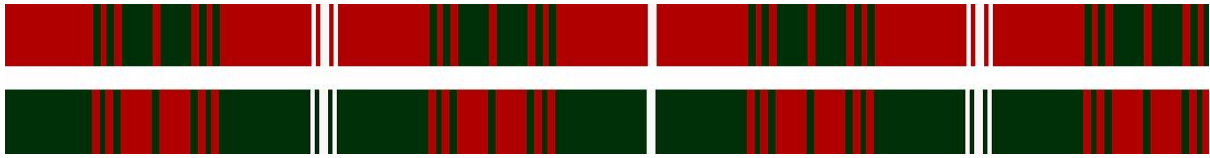


Fig 2. Comparison of the setting of the Duke of Rothesay (Red) and Hunting tartans. © The Author

In 1897 the Duke of York, later King George V, had an evening suit made in the Hunting tartan. The suit was subsequently altered to fit the Duke of Windsor, although it is possible that the alterations may have taken place during his reign as Edward VIII (Plate 12). How much earlier the Hunting sett existed, if not designed specifically for George, Duke of York, is unknown. He became Duke of Rothesay in 1901⁵ after which time his sons, the future Kings Edward VIII and George VI started to wear the Rothesay tartan (Plate 13), as did PM Henry Forsyth following his appointment as Piper to the Duke in 1905⁶ (Plate 14). It is impossible to tell from the black and white photographs whether any of these post-1900 kilts were the Hunting tartan. Although the Hunting tartan of the suit is dark, experiments by the author demonstrate that it is entirely possible for the red sett to appear dark when rendered in black and white (Plate 15). A portrait from 1923 shows the Prince of Wales (Duke of Rothesay and later, Edward VIII) wearing a kilt in the Hunting sett (Plate 16).



Plate 12. Suit in Rothesay Hunting tartan made for George, Duke of York in 1897.

Photo: Pinterest accessed 29 May 2019



Plate 13. Mary, Princess of Wales with her sons, Edward Prince of Wales and Prince Albert, both wearing Rothesay tartan) c1906. Photo: Pinterest accessed 29 May 2019

⁵ On the accession of Edward VII following the death of Queen Victoria.

⁶ PM Forsyth was appointed Piper to the Sovereign on the accession as George V and served until 1941. He holds the distinction of being the longest serving Piper to the Sovereign.



Plate 14. PM Forsyth wearing Rothesay tartan in 1905. Photo: RCT



Plate 15. Colour and Black & White comparison of the Rothesay (Red) tartan. © The Author



Plate 16. Edward, Prince of Wales by Alfred Edward Borthwick, 1923. He is shown wearing the Rothesay Hunting tartan. Photo: GMRC

Both tartans were included in the 1906 publication by W & AK Johnston^{iv} (Plate 17) after which it began to be produced for sale commercially.



Plate 17. The Duke of Rothesay and Rothesay Hunting tartans from W & AK Johnstons' 1906 work.
© The Author

The original setting of the Duke of Rothesay tartan was included in the 1992 book *District Tartans*^v. In recent years both versions, usually in their simplified form (see below), have been promoted as Rothesay District tartans despite the fact that neither has been adopted by the town of the same name or the Isle of Bute.

Simplified Settings

James Cant, a tartan researcher working in the 1950s, includes a note in his archive that states: *"This tartan, along with the red form, was issued by the Vyella Co. It was originally meant for the Rothesay but the division showing the single white line was omitted by mistake. Instead of withdrawing the material, the pattern was given the name 'Prince of Wales'"*.

These erroneous settings were taken up by other tartan manufacturers and have become the standard versions sold today under the original names 'Duke of Rothesay' and 'Duke of Rothesay, Hunting'. The versions effectively half the sett size and are therefore attractive to kilt makers because they allow a kilt to be pleated to sett as opposed to the older style of pleating to stripe. The effect is a less expansive and a visually less pleasing setting compared with the original (Fig. 3).

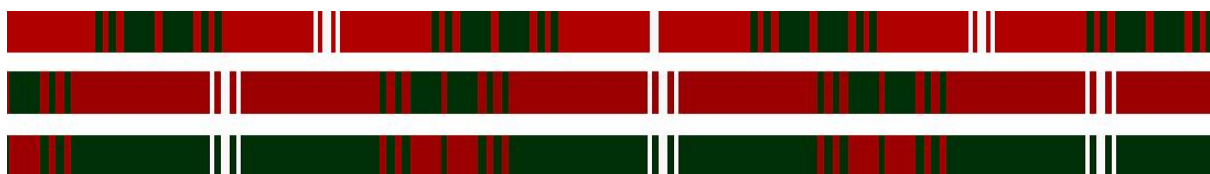


Fig 3. Comparison of the original setting of the Duke of Rothesay with the modern simplified versions.
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Cant may have been correct in stating that the Vyella versions arose by mistake but in the case of the red sett, it had been woven c.1870, in silk⁷ for a dress made for Princess Alexandra (Plate 18). Edward, Prince of Wales and later, Duke of Windsor, was the last of the Royal Family known to have worn either the original setting of the Duke of Rothesay or Rothesay Hunting tartans. The current Duke, HRH The Prince Charles, wears the simplified Hunting sett (Plate 19).



Plate 18. Princess Alexandra's simplified Duke of Rothesay, tartan.
Photo: Bath Fashion Museum



Plate 19. HRH The Prince Chares wearing the simplified Duke of Rothesay, Hunting tartan.
Photo: Angus Mackay

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that the original Prince of Rothesay tartan was the work of the Sobieski Stuart brothers. Despite their claims about the antiquity of the patterns included in the *Vestiarium Scoticum* (1842), it is generally accepted that they were the authors of the unpublished version, the *Cromarty Manuscript* (c1829). Like a number of their designs, the Prince of Rothesay was based on the older Royal Stewart tartan. The published Rothesay tartan differed from the Brothers' original design which was a white based design.

The Stuart brothers referred to the design as both the *Prince of* and *Duke of* Rothesay before settling on *Prince of Rothesay* for the published version. With their claimed descent from a Duke of Rothesay⁸, it highly likely that the c1840-50 kilt (Plate 2) was made for one of the brothers.

The Royal Family had adopted the tartan by the mid-1844 at which time its name was probably formalised as the Duke of Rothesay. During the remainder of the 19th century and into the early 20th century the tartan appears to have been worn exclusively by male members of the Royal Family (the incumbent Duke of Rothesay, his brothers and his sons) and the Piper to the Prince of Wales. Judging by Victorian and early Edwardian photographs there must have

⁷ The style of silk tartan commonly woven in the Victorian period was a warp-faced material in which a pattern was often simplified in order to fit the type of loom used.

⁸ King James II through their claimed descent from his grandson, Prince Charles Edward Stuart.

been a number of adults' and children's kilts in the Rothesay tartan at one time. It is possible that one or more of these survive in the Royal Collection.

In the painting and photograph of William MacDonal produced in 1866 and 1867 respectively he is wearing the same outfit. It is interesting that Macleay, generally thought of as an accurate artist, gets the arrangement of the white stripes hopelessly wrong. Taken together the two provide evidence that the red tartan of the Victorian and early Edwardian eras appeared as a very dark pattern in photographs (Plate 20).



Plate 20. Comparison of Macleay's 1866 painting and the 1867 photograph of William MacDonal.
© The Author with acknowledgement to The STA and the RCT.

In 1897 the Duke of York, later King George V, had a suit made in the Rothesay, Hunting sett. Referring to the suit, the Duke of Windsor wrote^{vi} "I had this altered to fit me, substituting zip-flies - which I fear would have horrified my father - for buttons. It still contains, in the pocket, a tab bearing my father's name - HRH The Duke of York - and the date 1897." There is no evidence that this version existed earlier and it's possible that the tartan was designed for him and later worn by his son, Edward, Prince of Wales.

Neither the original version of the Duke of Rothesay, or the Rothesay Hunting tartan are commonly seen today. The previous Duke of Rothesay, later Edward VIII, last wore a kilt and an evening suit in the Hunting sett in the early part of the 20th century. By contrast, the original Duke of Rothesay tartan had not been worn by the title holder in nearly a century. In

September 2020 HRH The Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay wore a kilt in this sett when he attended a Virtual Highland Games event at Braemar. It is fitting that the Duke of Rothesay has been reunited with the tartan that bears his name⁹. (Plate 21).



Plate 21. HRH The Prince Chares wearing the Duke of Rothesay tartan. Photo: © Courtesy Steven Rennie

Acknowledgement:

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ⁱ **SOBIESKI-STUART J.S.S. and C. E.** 1842 *Vestiarium Scoticum*. William Tait, Edinburgh

ⁱⁱ **STEWART D.C. and THOMPSON J.C.** 1980 *Scotland's Forged Tartans*. Paul Harris Publishing, Edinburgh

ⁱⁱⁱ **MARTIN R.** All About Your Kilt

^{iv} **JOHNSTON W. & A.K.** 1906 *The Scottish Clans and their tartans*. Edinburgh

^v **TEALL of Teallach D.G. and SMITH P.D.** 1992 *District Tartans*. Shepheard-Walwyn, London

^{vi} **WINDSOR, THE DUKE OF.** 1960 *A Family Album*. Cassell & Company Ltd, London

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⁹ In January 2020 The Scottish Tartans Authority presented a unique run of the original version of the Duke of Rothesay tartan, complete with a herringbone selvedge mark, to their Royal Patron, HRH The Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay.