

The Stewart of Fingask and Drummond of Perth Tartans Are they one and the same?

The so-called *Stewart of Fingask* tartan is among a number of patterns claimed to have been worn by, or associated with, Prince Charles Edward Stuart. The first record we have of this design is in D. W. Stewart's 1893 work where he lists it as *From the Cloak of Prince Charles Edward at Fingask* and of which he goes on to say:

'Of the many valuable relics of the '45 treasured by the Murray-Threipland family at Fingask, few possess greater interest than the cloak of Prince Charles Edward, whence the present representation is taken. It escaped the vandalism of the soldiery engaged in suppressing the rising, and it has since been jealously guarded, so that it is an unusually well-persevered example of the tartan manufactured in the early and middle portions of the last century. '

In reference to the Drummond of Perth, Stewart mentions that *'...save for one fine line, that design is the same as this one'* and that *'The reason of the similarity is hard to find....'* Under his Drummond of Perth tartan, he speculated that the Fingask cloak *'.....belonged to the Duke, or was made for the Prince from some of his tartan.'* by which he meant the Duke's tartan.

The alleged connection between Fingask and the Prince led later writers incorrectly to call this tartan *Stewart of Fingask* whereas in reality, it has no known connection with Clan Stewart. The similarity between the Stewart of Fingask and Drummond of Perth tartans is obvious from the colour strips below (Fig 1).



Fig 1. Comparison of the Stewart of Fingask and Drummond of Perth tartans.

Writing of the Drummond of Perth Stewart says: *Tradition associates this tartan with the amiable, ill-fated James Drummond, Duke of Perth, who was conspicuous in the '45. He goes on to say that 'Portraits of the Duke are in the possession of the Duke of Richmond and Gordon Castle, and of Lord Ancaster at Drummond Castle, but in neither case is the painting sufficiently distinct for the confirmation of details.'* The tartan in the portrait of the Duke of Perth at Drummond Castle (Plate 1) is detailed and it can be stated unequivocally that the tartan in his plaid is neither of the two represented above. Without being able to examine the alleged Fingask cloak, one is left to speculate about the close similarity of the two setts but it seems fanciful to think that they are not in some way connected. Stewart's statements concerning the two patterns leave a number of questions and appear to be examples of his demonstrable sloppy research and perhaps, wishful thinking.

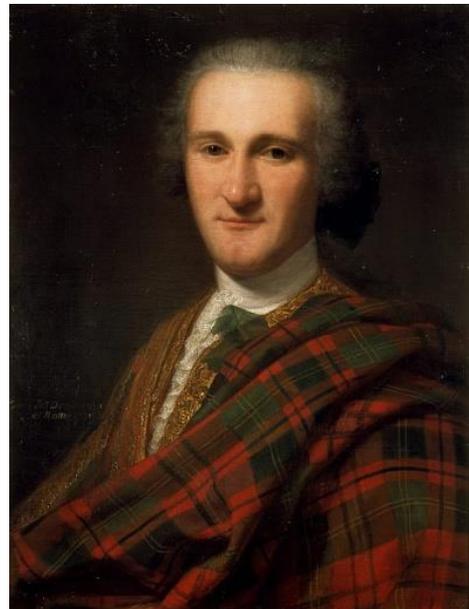


Plate 1. James Drummond, Duke of Perth c1745.

Given its historical significance, one would have thought that something as large as a cloak might have survived into the C20th and beyond but no trace can be found of it. Unlike a number of other pieces of tartan, the cloak was not amongst the offered at the sale of Fingask's contents in 1993, nor do the Murray-Threiplands know anything about the cloak. According to the present head of the family '.....no cloak was left at Fingask by Prince Charles Edward. For a start he never came to Fingask. His father did in 1715 but he didn't leave a cloak either. I think the cloak is a myth.' If the family have no knowledge of a cloak or anything similar, albeit that they are commenting over 100 years after Stewart published his book, one is left to speculate about the latter's source given his unequivocal statement that the cloak was amongst relics '*treasured by the Murray-Threipland family at Fingask*'. Stewart does not say if he examined the cloak at Fingask or elsewhere; or in fact, if he actually saw it or was working from a secondary source.

The concept of an early 18th century tartan cloak is unique and no other reference to such a garment is known. That does not of course preclude their use but may point to such a garment, being of a later date. Plate 2 shows an example of a cloak in Chisholm tartan of a style fashionable c1800-20 but which was incorrectly labelled as mid-18th century in the West Highland Museum collection.



In their 1819 Key Pattern Book the famous weaving firm of Wm. Wilson & son of Bannockburn listed the 'Perth' tartan where they noted that *This is the Clan Drummond Tartan*. The technical date shows that this was one of their late 18th century patterns which they often named after towns and districts. Recent research by the writer found entries dated 1775 in John Wilson's Account Book for several pieces of *New Perth Tartan*. In keeping with some of their other designs of the period the attribution 'New' would have been used to differentiate the sett from their early (old) design of the same name and whilst not conclusive, it seems possible that this 'New Perth' was probably the same sett that by 1819 was simply being called 'Perth' (Plate 3).

Plate 2. Chisholm tartan cloak c1820
Photo: West highland Museum

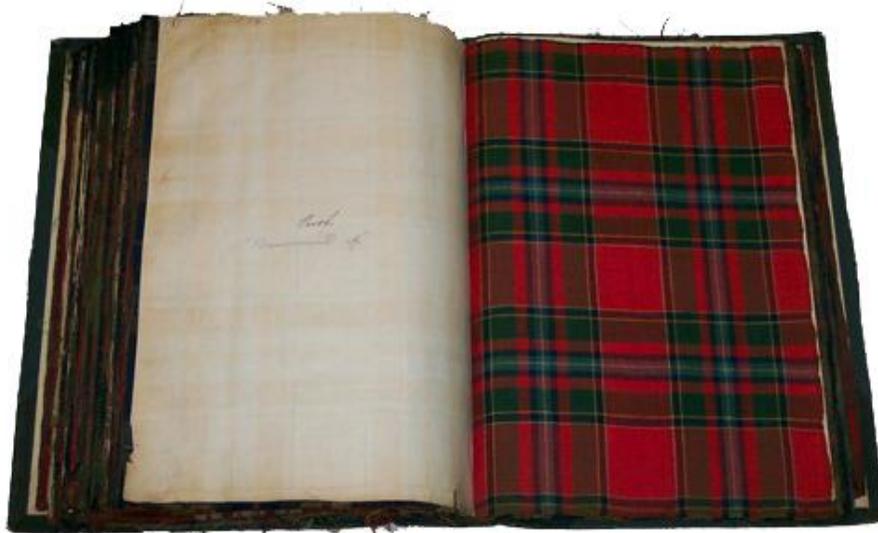


Plate 3. Wilsons' (New?) Perth tartan from a c1830 sample book.
Photo: Matt Newsome, Scottish Tartans Museum.

Often Wilsons' *New* setts were more showy versions of an earlier (old) one of the same name. It's entirely possible, indeed probably, that the so-called Stewart of Fingask was in fact Wilsons' earlier (old) Perth sett and that the family¹² owned a cloak of the tartan which, by c1890, and several generations later, had acquired the tradition that it was a Jacobite artefact. If a museum can get their data wrong by nearly a century then it's entirely possible that a family could similarly have done so and this would not be the first such heirloom that was thought to be much older than it actually was. I have written elsewhere about the Prince's Own tartan³ and the Highland Revival waistcoat that was thought by the family to have been worn at Culloden. Wilsons' reference to the Perth tartan being the Drummond one indicates that it was the sett that the Drummonds were wearing in the early 1800s before they adopted the tartan that they now share with the Grants and which in 1819 was still being called 'New Bruce' by Wilsons. It's therefore possible that the *Old* Perth was used by the Drummonds c1800 and they Stewart's source was a piece of that, perhaps belonging to the Earl of Perth whose home was very close to Fingask.

In conclusion, the Stewart of Fingask and Drummond of Perth tartans are so similar that they must be related. Without access to the cloak that D. W. Stewart allegedly copied one cannot be certain but Wilsons' records of a 'New Perth' lend support to the idea of an older, simpler 'Old Perth' sett and that the so-called Fingask is probably that sett. Thus, in light of present knowledge I believe the link to Charles Edward Stuart to be a romanticised one due to the Murray-Threipland family's association with the Prince⁴ and that the cloak given by D. W. Stewart, irrespective of its provenance, was in fact Wilsons' original (Old) Perth sett c1770. This scenario does not preclude the possibility that Wilsons copied, or more likely designed a variation of, an older historical piece and although no such artefact is known a number of their late 18th century setts share elements of the basic design considered here and probably have a common ancestral design.

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ⁱ STEWART D.W. 1893 *Old & Rare Scottish Tartans*. Geo. P. Johnston., Edinburgh

¹ PersCon Peter Eslea MacDonald – Mark Murray-Threipland dated 10 March 2011.

² Either the Murray-Threiplands or another local family such as the Earl of Perth.

³ <http://www.scottishtartans.co.uk/The%20Prince%27s%20Own-Lumsden.pdf>

⁴ Dr Sir Stuart Threipland (President of the Royal Medical Society 1766-70) was Prince Charles Edward's physician during the '45.