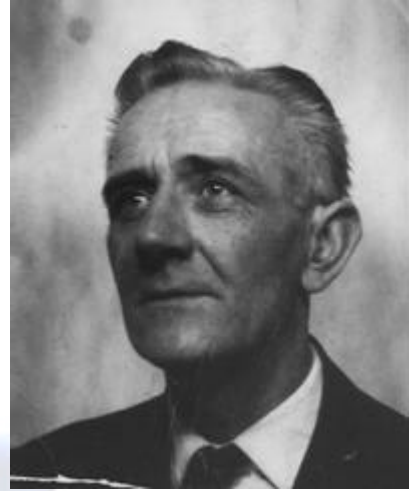


The O'Dinan

The O'Dinan passed to his heavenly reward in 2005.

His full name was Patrick Joseph Dinan and his son Bernard tells us he was a traditional Catholic and member of the British watch and clock maker's guild. Active all his life in addition to his interest in the Irish Kilt he was an artist, member of the heraldry society, the British Westerners Association. He practiced Tai Chi and was an herbalist.

After his death no files were found to provide the background to this view of the kilt but as it was an article in Ireland's Own by the O'Dinan that triggered the formation of the society we proud to reproduce that article in tribute to his memory.



THE IRISH KILT by The O'Dinan

I am one of those few—or perhaps many—people who still cling to the old Celtic way of life. Everything concerning our Irish heritage is of interest to me especially kilts and heraldry.

Many years ago I began serious research into Irish clan life and manner of dress. At that time, like the vast majority of people, I had the impression that our forbears wore saffron coloured kilts only. As I began to dig more and more into our past, I came up with some surprising results.

The first was that Scott's romantic, if misguided claim of an ancient Irish saffron kilt does not tally with historical fact. Indeed, Scott based his assumption on the fact that Irish chiefs usually wore saffron cloaks. Therefore they must have worn saffron kilts. A false assumption.

The evidence is now conclusive that every Irish clan family had its own distinctive kilt colour. Unlike the Scots with their different coloured family tartans, Irish families had a preference for one-colour kilts, and I have collected the authentic colours of 200 Irish clan family kilts and coats of arms. And still the search goes on for the remainder, though I doubt if there are many more.

The Irish clan system was, broadly speaking, similar to the Scottish— both countries were still and are inhabited by the Celtic race. Clan septs were of two classes: clansmen of the clan, who were related by blood and who formed separate branches of the clan; and those families who were related by marriage to other clan families.

This was especially shown in the colours of the kilts. For example: one clan family wearing a red kilt and another family, living perhaps a hundred miles away, wearing a light red kilt, indicated a bond between both families.

Though linen and silk were used in the making of kilts, woollen kilts were also worn during the winter months. I am of the opinion that linen and silk may well have been used more on special occasions than for everyday use, though I feel sure the ladies would feel more comfortable in light clothing.

Generally a single clan inhabited an area of land, but where two or more clans inhabited the same territory, a desire, or a necessity arose which made a differentiation necessary, and this was solved by a change of colours, and also by the wearing of a plant badge on other headgear or next to the heart.

It was a simple yet effective way of denoting one's family, by wearing a sprig of plant or flower. This close association with nature may well be of pre-Christian origin. Chiefs, or those occupying a high position in the clan family, usually had the front of their kilts embroidered with their respective Coats of Arms, a Norman fashion.

Norman knights adorned their coats with their family Arms. Hence the term "Coat of Arms". The following example of my own family may help to make the position clear: Family Name -Dinan. Mediaeval Location - Co. Tipperary. Kilt-Dark Blue. Plant Badge-The Holly.

At the siege of Limerick, one of my ancestors, the clan chief was killed. The clan territory was confiscated and the family moved over the Shannon River into Clare, where it has remained to this day. Though I am entitled to use the hereditary title 'The O'Dinan', it appears incongruous in a Republic.

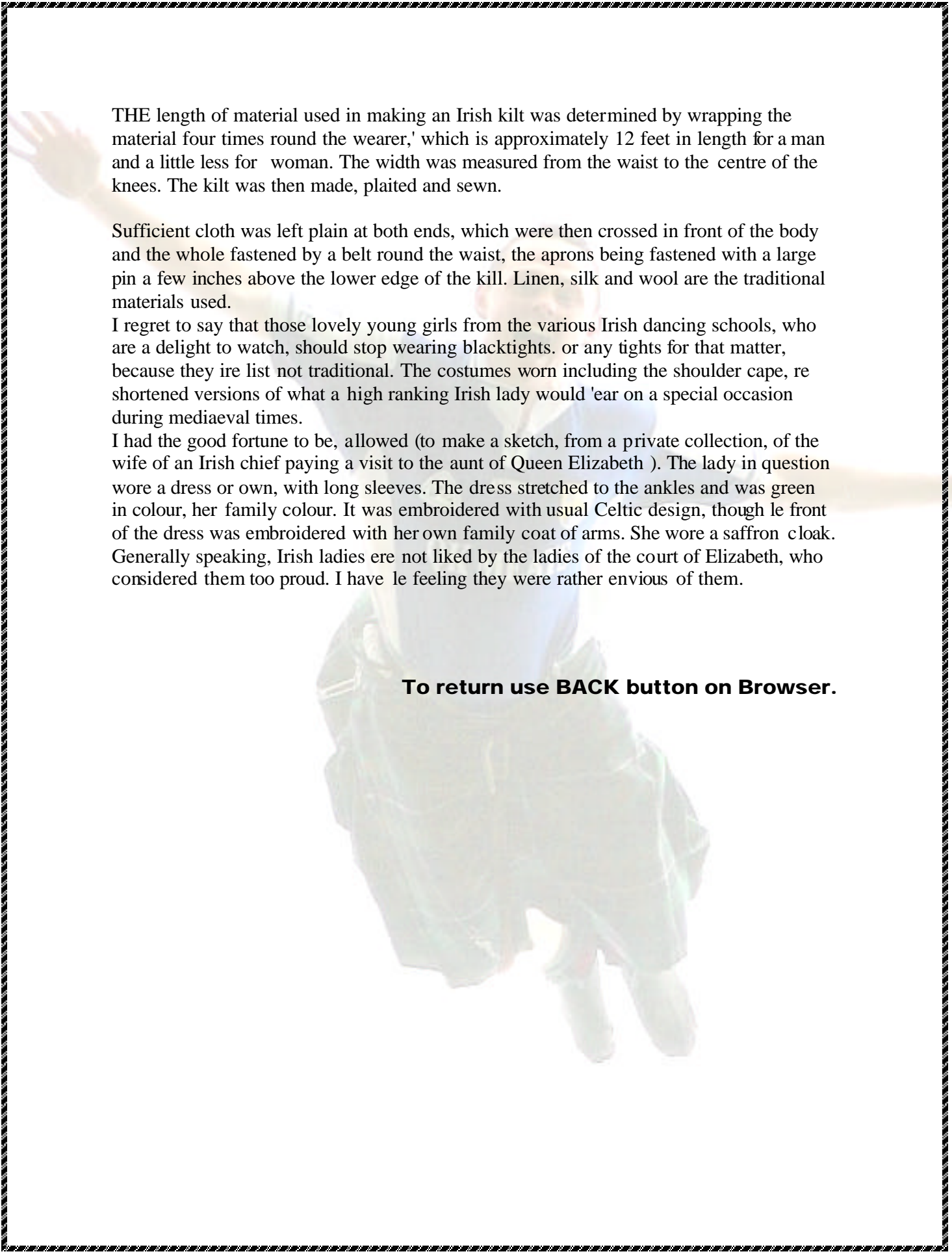
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UP to and including the Norman invasion, the Irish, like the rest of Europe, wore a tunic stretching from the shoulders to the knees, made out of either leather, wool, linen or silk. This applied to both sexes, though breeches may also have been worn by the men. Ireland was a great supplier of linen, and to a lesser extent silk, to some countries, especially to Scotland, which followed the Irish fashion of using linen clothing.

With the turmoil caused by the Elizabethan wars in Ireland, the supply of linen dropped and the Irish, like the Scots, were forced to use the lower part of the tunic that is from the waist to the knees, the upper part being abandoned for lack of material. The lower part became the forerunner of today's kilt.

The Scots, a very enterprising people, began to use wool more and more, and came up with the now famous tartan kilt which they still retain. The Irish still continued to use linen to make kilts, though less and less as wool took over.

By the end of the sixteenth century the country was devastated by the Elizabethan soldiers. The old Celtic way was ended, a way of life that had existed for over two thousand years, and with it went the kilt.



THE length of material used in making an Irish kilt was determined by wrapping the material four times round the wearer,' which is approximately 12 feet in length for a man and a little less for woman. The width was measured from the waist to the centre of the knees. The kilt was then made, plaited and sewn.

Sufficient cloth was left plain at both ends, which were then crossed in front of the body and the whole fastened by a belt round the waist, the aprons being fastened with a large pin a few inches above the lower edge of the kilt. Linen, silk and wool are the traditional materials used.

I regret to say that those lovely young girls from the various Irish dancing schools, who are a delight to watch, should stop wearing blacktights. or any tights for that matter, because they are not traditional. The costumes worn including the shoulder cape, are shortened versions of what a high ranking Irish lady would wear on a special occasion during mediaeval times.

I had the good fortune to be, allowed (to make a sketch, from a private collection, of the wife of an Irish chief paying a visit to the aunt of Queen Elizabeth). The lady in question wore a dress or gown, with long sleeves. The dress stretched to the ankles and was green in colour, her family colour. It was embroidered with usual Celtic design, though the front of the dress was embroidered with her own family coat of arms. She wore a saffron cloak. Generally speaking, Irish ladies are not liked by the ladies of the court of Elizabeth, who considered them too proud. I have the feeling they were rather envious of them.

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