

A Plaid given by Prince Charles Edward to the Countess of Eglinton.

In his 1893 workⁱ D. W. Stewart (DWS) included a pattern of which he said was from '.....portions of a plaid worn by Prince Charles Edward during his brief sojourn in Edinburgh in 1745. On his departure he presented the garment to Susanna, Countess of Eglinton, a belle of the day at whose house in the Canongate he was a frequent visitor.'

Later writers, notably D.C. Stewartⁱⁱ and Scarlettⁱⁱⁱ followed DWS's setting (Fig 1), presumably without questioning the setting or attempting to check the original specimens.



Fig 1. D. W. Stewart's reconstruction of the plaid given to the Countess of Eglinton.

DWS didn't say who owned the original pieces, possibly descendents of the Countess, but they are now on display at the Culloden Centre¹. There are six fragments mounted under glass (Fig 2).

The fragments are small and cut from the centre section of a piece of cloth which with no selvedge included meaning it's impossible to determine if the original length was a plaid as claimed in the mounting text *Six fragments of the plaid presented to the Countess of Eglinton by Prince Charles Edward at Holyrood, September 1745.*

Susanna Montgomerie, Countess of Eglinton was a prominent Jacobite supporter and is said to have divided the plaid up amongst her seven daughters and the portions ended up being greatly mutilated (even made into slippers). Of the surviving pieces four are of a similar size and shape suggesting that they are off-cuts/sections from a piece of clothing, furniture covering or the like. The other two pieces



Fig 2. The original fragments of the Prince's Plaid.

¹ The original pieces are on loan to the National Trust for Scotland.

are small rectangular fragments. What's unclear is whether these are remnants from when the (alleged) plaid was cut up and reused or whether they are from some other garment either contemporary or a later one made from the plaid.

The four larger pieces all show the same section of the pattern indicating either that the cloth was folded so that the lines matched before being cut or that four identical pieces were cut from the length. Importantly, the pieces are so small that there is insufficient to derive the sett shown by DWS and this appears to be another example of his careless historical research. The two smaller pieces can be aligned to the larger ones and a slightly simple sett derived (Fig 3)



Fig 3. An alternative reconstruction of the original sett.

Apart from the shades, which I have chosen to be closer to the surviving fragments, the main difference between DWS's setting and my revised one is the lack of blue, which is completely missing in the pieces, and resulting simpler design. It is quite possible that the original sett was bigger or more complex but it's impossible to determine that from the remaining fragments.

The cloth from which the fragments were cut certainly dates from the first half of the 18th century and may well have originally been a plaid however the framing and accompanying text is either late 19th or early 20th century so the plaid claim may be a mistaken family tradition, something which is not uncommon with Jacobite era relics and the material could equally have come from a jacket, dress or some similar garment.

Irrespective of how the original cloth was used this is a fine 18th century tartan and one of the few genuine Jacobite era tartans to survive.

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

ⁱⁱ STEWART D. C. 1972 *The Setts of the Scottish Tartans* Shepheard-Walwyn, London

ⁱⁱⁱ SCARLETT J.S. 1990 *TARTAN The Highland Textile*. Shepheard-Walwyn., London