

## ***An Unnamed Plaid dated 1775***

A recent discovery has unearthed what might well be the oldest surviving example of Wilsons of Bannockburn's tartan and only complete example known of one of their C18th Superfine Plaids.

In 2003 The Scottish Tartans Authority was donated a length of old tartan into one end of which was embroidered 'Donnald 1775'. The Canadian donor inherited it from her father, the Rev. George W. Hunter, who had been a minister in Aberdeen. It is not known who 'Donnald' was, whether the family were originally from Aberdeen or elsewhere in Scotland, nor where Rev Hunter acquired the cloth.

The piece is a plaid/shawl 6' 6" long x 19" wide finely woven at 72epi. The width and quality of the material, together with the colours, are typical Wilsons' *Old Superfine* cloth, a number of setting for which were included in their 1819 Key Pattern Book.



These Superfine patterns were often very complex as in this case where the sett has 8 colours and 68 colour<sup>1</sup> changes in a half repeat and the wide requires a complete full repeat. As the selvedge finishes in the middle of a pivot the material was probably meant to be joined to make a double width plaid which would be the only way to see full sett as can be seen below.



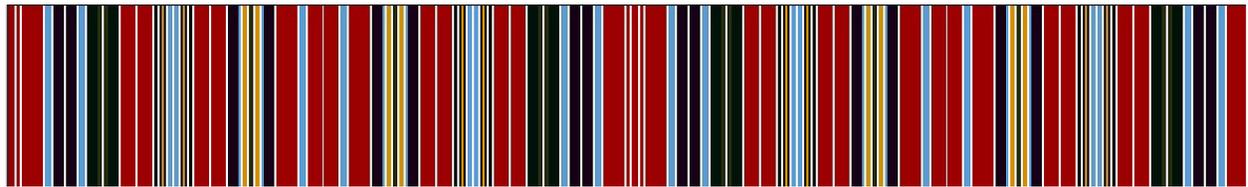
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<sup>1</sup> The apparent colour differences are simply the result of photographs being taken by different cameras under different conditions.

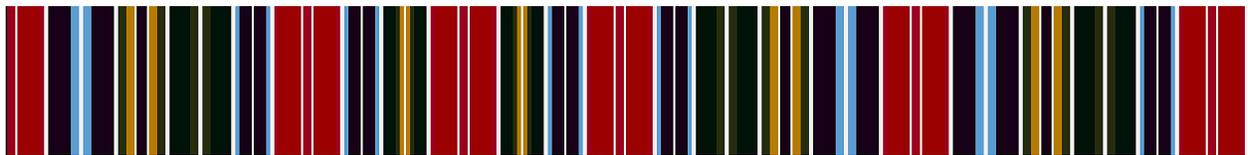
The pattern has striking similarities with Wilsons' *Ritch* and *Waggrall* tartans, both Old Superfine patterns detailed in their 1819 Key Pattern Book and which they were weaving from c1780 onwards. As the colour stripes below demonstrate, the similarity is so close that the accuracy of the 1819 count must be questioned.



1775 Unnamed Plaid



Wilsons' Ritch Tartan c1780



Wilsons' Waggrall Tartan c1780

What conclusions can be drawn about the 1775 plaid? Obviously the date places the material and thus the pattern to the beginning of the last quarter of the C18th. The name on the length was probably that of the original owner and it is likely to have been a gift or commemorative piece for example; for a coming of age, engagement of the like.

The width, setting, density and colours are consistent with those of Wilsons of Banockburn's *Old Superfine* tartans of which I have no doubt that this is an example and as such is the oldest known Wilsons' piece and one of very few of their pre-1800 specimens in existence. At that time it's probable that Wilsons had named the pattern but we have no idea of what it was and unless extremely lucky and some corroboration is discovered it's unlikely that we will ever know.