

District ULSTER

Tartan Designer Unknown

Date Late sixteenth or early seventeenth century

Ulster was one of the five states of early Celtic Ireland. During Norman times, it was an earldom comprising approximately the area included in the present counties of Antrim and Down. At the present time, confusion is caused because the word 'Ulster' is often used to refer to the political entity of Northern Ireland, which forms part of the United Kingdom and comprises the Counties of Down, Antrim, Armagh, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. Historically, however, Ulster also includes the three counties of the Republic of Ireland, Cavan, Monagh and Donegal.

The Ulster tartan, as it is known today, owes its origin to the discovery on the 23 April 1956, of remnants of clothing buried beside a lane leading to a farm known as 'The Hill', Flanders Townland, about a mile north of Dungiven in County Londonderry. The farmer, Mr. W. G. Dixon, took the clothing to the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery. Examination showed that the garments, dating from between 1590 and 1650, comprised a semicircular woolen cloak, a tunic, trews, belt and shoes. The trews were made from a fine and regular 2/2, Z spun, tartan twill with occasional reversals to the pattern to form a herringbone. The colors had stained to various shades of brown, but where best preserved, seemed to have comprised four colors, red, dull green, darker brown and orange or yellow. The ground consisted of wide blocks of red and green, divided by narrow lines of orange, dark brown and green. The repeat of the warp stripes was not absolutely regular but the weft was more consistent.

The clothing seems to have lain in a shallow ditch or sheugh with filled with dark peaty loam with a subsoil of turf. This had the effect of staining the garment a deep reddish brown. The modern Ulster tartan is based on the general appearance of the stained fabric and has an overall tan appearance.

Taken from "District Tartans of Scotland", by Gordon Teall & Philip Smith, Shephard-Walwyn (Publishers) Ltd.

This clan information sheet has been prepared by
The Scottish Society of Louisville, Inc.
PO Box 32248
Louisville, KY 40232-2248

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