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## Reassessing the Romance: Tartan as a Popular Commodity, c.1770-1830

### ABSTRACT

Through examining the surviving records of tartan manufacturers, William Wilson & Son of Bannockburn, this article looks at the production and use of tartan in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While it does not deny the importance of the various meanings and interpretations attached to tartan since the mid-eighteenth century, this article contends that more practical reasons for tartan's popularity—primarily its functional and aesthetic qualities—merit greater attention. Along with evidence from contemporary newspapers and fashion manuals, this article focuses on evidence from the production and popular consumption of tartan at the turn of the nineteenth century, including its incorporation into fashionable dress and its use beyond the social elite. This article seeks to demonstrate the contemporary understanding of tartan as an attractive and useful commodity.

Since the mid-eighteenth century tartan has been subjected to many varied and often confusing interpretations: it has been used as a symbol of loyalty and rebellion, as representing a fading Highland culture and heritage, as a visual reminder of the might of the British Empire, as a marker of social status, and even as a means of highlighting racial difference. These interpretations have become key elements of tartan's historiography, often driven by tartan's role as an iconic and unavoidable element of modern Scottish identity which leaves it connected inextricably to ongoing discourses that examine the relationship between identity, history and myth.<sup>1</sup> A feature of twentieth-century scholarship was to either refute or assert the myths associated with tartan and Highland dress, with controversy over the invention of the kilt and the antiquity of clan tartans being foregrounded.<sup>2</sup> More recently focus has shifted to more nuanced interpretations of the

meaning and symbolism of tartan from the perspectives of political and social history, history of art and fashion theory. This has led Matthew Dziennik to propose a shift in our conception of tartan from one derived from Lowland Scots and English perceptions of Highlandism to one that foregrounds the promotion of Highlandism as espoused by Highlanders themselves and in which Highland dress played a key role.<sup>3</sup> This approach can also be seen in the analysis of Robin Nicholson and Vicky Coltman who have examined the depiction of tartan in eighteenth-century portraiture and from that its significance for contemporary constructions of identity, self-perception and status.<sup>4</sup> The subsequent incorporation of tartan into fashionable trends in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while complex and often contradictory, indicate to the scholar the clash of tradition and modernity upon cultural institutions and commodities that, in turn, shape identity formation.<sup>5</sup> Indeed it is the ambiguous nature of tartan and its complex history as a commodity, one that contributes to its continued use in modern popular culture and entertainment—from the haute couture catwalk to Hollywood’s adaptations—that imbues tartan with the flexibility to carry multiple and at times diverse identities.<sup>6</sup>

Led by James D. Scarlett, research into tartan as a commodity has focused on the tangible and practical aspects of its history. Such work has been invaluable in re-conceptualising tartan as a useful, versatile product that was part of an extensive commercial network. By tracing out the early history of tartan and its initial methods of production, including thread counts and weaving guidelines, Scarlett has laid important foundations for our understanding of tartan outside the realm of clan tartans and romanticised pageantry. He also argued that tartan needs to be considered as both a fabric and a pattern,<sup>7</sup> an important distinction which expands our understanding of the use of tartan in Scottish society beyond that of the social elite, and away from an understanding of tartan’s cultural influence confined to the elite’s public display of tartan wear. As a traditional woollen fabric tartan was consistently associated with a broad range of activities across Scottish society, particularly in the Highlands. The tightly woven woollen cloth offered durable protection and warmth to the wearer, often serving simultaneously as bedding and clothing, and even being used as

coverings for livestock.<sup>8</sup> As a pattern tartan can appear in different types of materials, from wool to silk, and the varying check sizes and colour combinations meant it was used in many different ways and, while the finished result might appear complex, the premise of the checked pattern was relatively uncomplicated and easily reproduced.<sup>9</sup>

By assessing tartan as a commodity rather than solely a cultural artefact, the historiography has been opened up to scientific analysis of the materials and the dyes used. Hugh Cheape and Anita Quye have examined pieces of tartan associated with Prince Charles Edward Stuart to verify their authenticity, while also using similar techniques upon a range of extant garments to reassert the importance of female Highland dress, the arisaide.<sup>10</sup> Quye, along with Helen Rawson and John Burnett, has also investigated the use of imported dyes in the tartan industry to show that it was part of a complex international trading network that did not rely solely on native dyestuffs as was often thought.<sup>11</sup> This work highlights the importance of combining museum- and archive-based research in this field to shifting analysis away from overly limiting conceptions of tartan designs linked to romanticised conceptions of clan variation. Most recently, Cheape has argued that while the interpretations and connotations extracted from tartan are an integral part of its historiography, they have also ‘mischievously obscured simple human and historical realities like the dynamics of fashion ... and a liking for colour and pattern.’<sup>12</sup> Such a view is particularly pertinent for the turn of the nineteenth century, the period under discussion here. For, although it is clear that tartan’s associations with rebellion were being replaced with ones of valour, loyalty and historicism, this period is also recognised as being a turning point in the use of tartan, when it moved from being a fabric with inherent practical qualities to being a pattern incorporated into a variety of fabrics and uses, when function and fashion were irrevocably blurred within the growing popularity of this commodity.<sup>13</sup>

By looking at the production and consumption of tartan this article expands on this notion of tartan as a commodity and argues that the more tangible characteristics of tartan—the practical and aesthetic features—were just as responsible for tartan’s popularity and entry into the fashionable

world in the early nineteenth century as its politicised and romanticised past. This will be achieved by using the surviving archives of William Wilson & Son, tartan manufacturers of Bannockburn. This firm is mentioned in almost every study of tartan, thanks mainly to their success as suppliers to the Highland regiments and for their part in the creation of a ‘tartan taxonomy’<sup>14</sup> which is still in use today. Scarlett is no lone voice in his recognition of the importance of this firm to understanding the history of tartan and in calling for researchers to utilise the company’s extensive archives, but they are still an underused resource.<sup>15</sup> Consisting of correspondence from military and civilian customers, letter books, ledgers and receipts, the extant archives show how Wilson & Son both responded to and influenced the fashionable trends and socio-political events that impacted their trade. The Wilson & Son archives, along with evidence from newspapers and fashion manuals give a sense of the geographical reaches of this important aspect of the Scottish textile industry, showing how it expanded between 1770 and 1830, and provide insight into a hitherto little studied aspect of tartan—its fashion and function as driven by popular consumption.

*William Wilson & Son, tartan manufacturers of Bannockburn*

William Wilson, founder of the firm that was to bear his name, was born in the parish of St Ninian’s, Stirlingshire, in 1727. Having established himself as a weaver he became a member of the Incorporation of Chapmen in Bannockburn in 1759 which gave him the right to buy and sell goods, including those of his own manufacture.<sup>16</sup> In the early 1750s he married Janet Paterson, the daughter of another local weaver and three of their sons—John, James and Alexander—took an active part in what was to become William Wilson & Son.<sup>17</sup> Conveniently located for trade with both the Highlands and the Lowlands, by the 1760s William Wilson was producing tartan and various other types of woollen cloth including serge, shalloon and camlet.<sup>18</sup> They soon became the largest weavers in Bannockburn—in 1787 they owned twelve looms, accounting for a fifth of the total looms in the village and the largest number owned by one person or business.<sup>19</sup> When their own looms could not cope with demand they employed other local weavers in the village who

worked for them in return for cash and goods in kind. By the end of the eighteenth century the firm relied less on out-workers and more on those they employed directly, many of whom were housed in purpose-built accommodation which was constructed in the 1780s.<sup>20</sup>

From an early stage Wilson & Son were involved in many of the processes of woollen manufacture, not just weaving. They purchased raw wool which they spun themselves, as well as ready-spun yarn from suppliers in the north of England and in the Border region which was one of the few strongholds of the Scottish woollen industry at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The firm dyed the wool using both native and imported dyestuffs, the latter ensuring the firm was part of an established and extensive international trade network.<sup>22</sup> Business was conducted through written correspondence, through word of mouth, and by sending out family members of the firm on reconnaissance missions across mainland Scotland. The sons and grandsons of William Wilson travelled the country, informing customers of new products, collecting orders, dealing with complaints and making general assessments of the economic climate. In 1817, for example, James Wilson, grandson of William Wilson, wrote back to Bannockburn that their plaids were facing strong competition from local manufacturers, while trade in Aberdeen was a 'good deal better' but 'our things does not seem to be in much demand'.<sup>23</sup> These travelling family members established a reliable stream of information in an otherwise potentially unstable environment prone to exaggeration, false information and breaks in communication.<sup>24</sup> This face-to-face contact and promotion through word of mouth via their extensive networks of individual clients, clothiers and regimental customers, were also their primary means of marketing.

It might be expected that Wilson & Son's business was adversely affected by the proscription act against tartan and Highland dress which was introduced after the failure of the Jacobite rising of 1745 (19 Geo. II, c. 39) and lasted until 1782 (22 Geo. III, c. 63). Men and boys in Scotland were banned from wearing this traditional garb but fears that the act would wipe tartan from Scottish culture appear to have been unfounded as there were numerous loopholes, most notably the fact that men in the Highland regiments were exempt. In portraiture members of the Highland elite also

continued to be depicted in tartan and Highland dress and it is generally accepted that prosecution of those who contravened the act had abated by the 1760s.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, nowhere was it stated in the proscription act that the manufacture of tartan was to be halted. Wilson & Son continued to produce tartan throughout the proscription to supply not only the Highland regiments but also civilian customers across Lowland Scotland. A day book from the 1770s shows that tartan was the primary product of the business at this time and was manufactured in a variety of patterns ranging from the simply named 'Hyland Tartan' to the 'Janet Wilson sett'.<sup>26</sup> The latter pattern is thought to be named after William's wife or daughter-in-law and is considered to be one of the earliest known tartans to be associated with a family name.<sup>27</sup>

Although it appears that business was doing well in the second half of the eighteenth century, the surviving correspondence indicates that civilian trade at least was limited to the Lothians and Fife.<sup>28</sup> Trade followed the main communication routes of the region, clustering around the nearest urban centres of Stirling and Edinburgh and showing that, despite popular perceptions, tartan was not just a Highland commodity.<sup>29</sup> The lack of recorded trade west of the Highland line was not necessarily a result of the proscription act, rather it is more likely that this area had a greater reliance on domestic and local industry for textile manufacture and had less need to import fabric from other regions. In the 1780s, Wilson & Son had established connections as far afield as Grenada and Montego Bay, Jamaica, where merchants John and James Christie, likely of Scottish origin or descent, paid for lengths of tartan with large quantities of rum and sugar, selling over £700 worth of Wilsons' tartan in the space of a year.<sup>30</sup> It would appear that such foreign trade links existed in the previous decade but the surviving records are less consistent for the early years of the firm.

While the proscription act had not prevented Wilson & Son from continuing their business, the repeal of the act in 1782 did mean that trade could expand unhindered. By the 1790s trade was still most extensive in the Lothians and Fife but contacts were made further up the east coast, reflecting the growth of the shipping industry that had occurred in the latter half of that century.<sup>31</sup>

Contacts on mainland Scotland extended as far north as Thurso and direct orders were received from the Shetland Islands by at least 1791.<sup>32</sup> The firm had also started to cultivate contacts as far west as the Isle of Rum, while beyond Scotland goods, including tartan and woollen caps, were being sent to England and northern Europe.<sup>33</sup> Wilson & Son continued to produce tartan of various patterns, as well as plain woollen cloth such as serge or camlet which were intended for a variety of uses including blankets, coverlets and hose.<sup>34</sup>

A number of factors contributed to the further expansion of the firm in the early 1800s. Improvements to inland communication meant that Wilson & Son developed a wider distribution of contacts across the country, and by 1812, likely benefitting from the impact on foreign trade from the Napoleonic Wars, trade and contact with the west of Scotland had increased, particularly around Glasgow which acted as a gateway for trade with remoter parts of Scotland and abroad.<sup>35</sup> By the 1820s Wilson & Son's network included customers in Scotland, England, Ireland, Europe, North America, South America and the West Indies. Without any surviving consistent accounts, this network of customers is the best means of assessing the growth and success of the firm, as well as demonstrating the expanding global and commercial appeal of tartan.

This expansion of trade and their growing business was reflected in, and aided by, the growing premises and resources of the firm—much of which was overseen by Alexander Wilson who took over from his father at the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> By 1806 Alexander Wilson had acquired a scribbling machine to remove entanglements from the woollen thread, a teasing machine and a roving billie, all to be powered by a water wheel with a fall of seven feet, and supplementing the twelve looms of the 1780s. To house this extra machinery the firm acquired a lease on Skeoch farm which included a spinning mill which was sixty feet long by twenty feet wide.<sup>37</sup> By 1820 the firm had access to 132 looms, two teasing machines, six scribbling machines, six carding machines, six roving billies, eight spinning jennies, four reeling and twining machines, four twining mills, one waulking house and one dye house.<sup>38</sup> Further expansion occurred in 1822 when they built the Royal George Mill, a three storey building with a waterwheel at one end and



space for both mechanised spinning and handloom weaving.<sup>39</sup> This steady expansion from individual handloom weaving to increasingly mechanised and industrial-scale production is a clear indicator that their products were in demand and that they were catering to a growing, and increasingly diverse, market.

### *The consumption of tartan*

While the expanding trade network of William Wilson & Son shows that at the turn of the nineteenth century there was a noticeable increase in demand for tartan from within and beyond Scotland, the catalysts for this demand should also be considered. One of the primary influencing factors was undoubtedly the growth of romanticism: the search for the sublime and a lost golden age, increasingly thought to be found in the landscape and history of the Scottish Highlands. This phenomenon manifested itself in numerous guises including European-wide fascination with the poems of Ossian and an interest in the ‘historic’ Highland dress.<sup>40</sup> Curiosity about ‘other’ cultures and societies was not unique to the nineteenth century, and the adoption of aspects of these cultures within British dress was pronounced. Turkish dress, as a geographically distant example, was originally popular as masquerade dress but was gradually adopted into mainstream fashions, often in the form of turbans worn by fashionable ladies.<sup>41</sup> The Scottish Highlands, with their culturally remote and ‘primitive’ population, idealised in literature by Sir Walter Scott amongst others,<sup>42</sup> were for many contemporaries just as exotic and fascinating as more distant lands but they had the added advantage of being close enough to experience first-hand, and again aspects of their dress and culture were readily adopted and adapted by wider society.<sup>43</sup>

Yet for all the appeal of romance and exotic otherness to the growing fashion for tartan, more tangible and pragmatic influences were also at work. The early nineteenth-century peak in business and the expanding trade network of Wilson & Son can be attributed at least in part to wider economic trends. The Scottish woollen industry had languished in comparison with its English counterpart throughout the eighteenth century but by the early 1800s it was improving, having

benefited from the technological advances made in cotton and linen manufacture.<sup>44</sup> Wilson & Son took advantage of these developments and acquired significant amounts of equipment in the early nineteenth century. The firm also benefitted from the European and American conflicts, particularly the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, which limited access to imported cloth and had the effect of boosting demand for domestic products and encouraging domestic textile manufacturers to fill the gap.<sup>45</sup> Wilson & Son rose to this challenge, providing cloth for civilian consumers and for the growing number of regular and fencible Highland regiments who were in almost constant employment on distant battlefields.<sup>46</sup>

The influence of the Highland regiments on the production and consumption of tartan was, in effect, twofold. Firstly, through the uniforms themselves, of which tartan was a key component. The importance placed on a smart and uniform military appearance in European armies had been increasing since the seventeenth century and by the 1800s colourful and embellished outfits were a key component of regimental life. This emphasis on military wear was a boon to Wilson & Son's trade, but their success depended on maintaining tight control over the quality of their product.<sup>47</sup> Letters from regimental quartermasters to Wilson & Son show that there was particular concern over the fastness of the colours and overall appearance of the tartan: in 1823 the quartermaster of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment wrote from Ireland complaining that the red dye in the tartan they had recently received was 'so bad' that the men were not allowed to mount guard while wearing it.<sup>48</sup> The colonel of each regiment was responsible for choosing the colour and type of uniform his men would wear and in many cases it was a heightened awareness of personal reputation which dictated the final sartorial outcome, rather than what was for the good of the regiment as a whole.<sup>49</sup> The relationships between Wilson & Son and the Highland regiments have been examined elsewhere,<sup>50</sup> but it is worth reiterating that the woollen tartan produced by Wilsons was eminently suitable as a regimental cloth; not only was it warm, durable and relatively waterproof but Wilsons also produced different qualities of the same pattern to cater for the rank and file and commissioned members of each regiment.<sup>51</sup> While ostensibly the entire regiment would be wearing the same pattern, the ever-

important social strata were maintained through the varying qualities of the fabric and so the use of tartan by the Highland regiments was both a practical and an aesthetic choice made by the individual colonels, directly impacting the output of Wilson & Son.

The second influence on the production and consumption of tartan stemming from the regiments was less direct but no less significant. The frequency, length and prominence of the conflicts at the turn of the nineteenth century meant that the military style infiltrated fashionable dress for men and women throughout Britain at an unprecedented level. Fashion manuals and surviving garments from the period show how the cut and adornments associated with military dress entered civilian fashion on a wide scale, particularly at the upper levels of society.<sup>52</sup> The adoption of military styles, such as epaulettes and braiding, into fashionable dress was seen as both a patriotic and stylish gesture and tartan, thanks to prominent Scots and the Highland regiments, was no exception. In December 1797 the London fashion periodical, *A Gallery of Fashion*, promoted 'Duncan velvet' in a bonnet and as a trimming on a white muslin gown.<sup>53</sup> The bonnet was closely modelled on the shape of what became known as the Glengarry bonnet, also with military associations, while 'Duncan velvet' referred to Viscount Adam Duncan who distinguished himself at the naval Battle of Camperdown in October the same year. Duncan became a national hero and among the accolades he received was having a tartan named after him;<sup>54</sup> this was then translated into fashionable dress as chintz and velvet by the *Gallery of Fashion*. The social elite connected with the regular and volunteer regiments incorporated the regimental style into their clothing: at an inspection of a volunteer regiment raised by her husband, Lady Jane Grant of Rothiemurchus wore an outfit which consisted of a tartan petticoat, laced red jacket and feathered bonnet modelled on the uniform of the regiment.<sup>55</sup>

The fashion manuals of first two decades of the nineteenth century made regular references to the use of tartan as an accessory or accent for fashionable dress. In 1808 the readers of *La Belle Assemblée*, another London publication, were told that 'Plaid scarfs, fancifully disposed ... have a very animated and pleasing effect,'<sup>56</sup> and later plaid parasols and Scotch caps were also

recommended.<sup>57</sup> Similar tartan accessories appeared in Parisian fashions which were considered the driving influence of all fashionable dress for the rest of Europe and were disseminated through the fashion manuals. These references appeared in the spring of 1815 when Paris was occupied by various Highland regiments and Parisian women adorned themselves with ‘ribands and handkerchiefs of Scotch Plaid’ when Napoleon arrived in the city.<sup>58</sup> This adoption of tartan has been interpreted as an expression of support for the Auld Alliance between France and Scotland and a rejection of ‘the English as conquerors of Napoleon’,<sup>59</sup> although satirical prints of the period, such as *Le Prétexte* published in Paris in 1815 (Fig. 1), indicate that it was more likely a curiosity and appreciation for the more novel elements of Highland dress, in particular the kilt, than indicative of any wider political significance. Just a few years earlier an example can be found much closer to home: in 1810, Wilsons were told that the presence of the Sutherland Militia had meant an increase in demand for tartan among the Dornoch locals.<sup>60</sup> The inclination of the Highland regiments to wear tartan was thus providential both in terms of immediate business for Wilson & Son and in terms of creating a more sustained demand by its concomitant influence on fashionable dress. The military associations of the cloth meant that the functional properties of tartan—its warmth, durability and versatility—had become blurred with its fashionable potential as part of a wider military-influenced style and as a result tartan was increasingly evident in elite social circles both within and outside Scotland.

While fashion manuals show the infiltration of tartan into a wider non-Scottish context, the influence of these manuals—typically targeted at the social elite—on the general population is questionable. It can be argued that the non-elite population would not necessarily adopt the suggested fashions on a large scale as they would either not require or could not afford the same amount of clothing and accessories that were deemed necessary for elite living. Correspondence to and from William Wilson & Son however, as well as newspaper advertisements of the period, give a clearer indication of how tartan was being used by a cross section of the population and how, significantly, it was being used to make complete garments and not just accessories or accents.

There is some evidence that Wilson & Son not only provided fabric for retailers and outfitters in Edinburgh, London and beyond, but that they also made up items of clothing from the fabric they manufactured on both a bespoke and a ready-made basis. Such garments were generally outer ones as the woollen tartan Wilson & Son produced was particularly suitable to inclement weather—a further example of how the practical advantages of tartan encouraged its wider use. These outer garments were also simple to construct once the fabric had been woven, with little or no tailoring required and included women's plaids and men's cloaks.<sup>61</sup> Orders ranged from individual commissions for a gentleman in Carlisle whose sleeves had to be extra-long to accommodate his six foot height,<sup>62</sup> to bulk orders of cloaks of different sizes for the Brazilian market. The Brazilian market had specific requirements and Wilson & Son were instructed that the tartan should be 'shewey [sic] and splendid & the greater the proportion of bright colours such as red and yellow with a little light blue & green so much the better. The Brazilians are not fond of dark colours.'<sup>63</sup> Coats of tartan and other woollen fabrics were also produced, although there is no indication of where precisely these garments were made up or who did the work. Such items do not appear to have been a significant line of the business, with a number of references to coats being returned unsold.<sup>64</sup>

The demand for tartan cloaks and mantles is also evident in the newspaper advertisements. Taking advantage of the warmth offered by woollen tartan, a 'tartan season' during the winter months was apparent in the Scottish newspapers, when tartan clothing and lengths of tartan were most often referred to.<sup>65</sup> In November 1818, Adam Luke, a draper on the High Street in Edinburgh, included in his 'WINTER ARTICLES' some 'Scarfs and Plaids' of superfine tartan which was a high quality form of the woollen cloth.<sup>66</sup> Scarves, plaids, cloaks and mantles of tartan made regular appearances in the Scottish press for both gentlemen's and ladies' fashions. These items ranged in quality and price, from those offered to elite sporting gentlemen on generous terms of credit to lower quality items sold only for cash. In 1815 Archibald Torry, a clothier on Parliament Close in Edinburgh who specialised in clothing for hunting and outdoor activities, included 'Highland

plaids' among his wares.<sup>67</sup> Five years later, another Edinburgh merchant was selling off his stock of tartan cloaks for gentlemen.<sup>68</sup> Other merchants, such as George MacKenzie, a draper on Broad Street in Aberdeen, sold ladies' mantles made from tartan.<sup>69</sup> Tartan was also used for women's dresses, as evidenced by advertisements for Gilchrist & Co. in Edinburgh in 1802,<sup>70</sup> and in 1808 a draper promoted the tartan he stocked as being suitable for pelisses, mantles and gowns.<sup>71</sup> The Wilson & Son correspondence further demonstrates how these fashions were spreading: a merchant on the Isle of Skye informed the firm that the 'young Ladies in this Country are so fond of it [tartan] that I expect to see the whole of them rigged in it for winter'.<sup>72</sup> While in 1816 the firm received an order for a variety of tartans which were intended for ladies' dresses in the 'Mediterranean market'.<sup>73</sup>

Tartan's versatility and functionality was further demonstrated in its use for men's morning and nightgowns, loose fitting robes that were worn within the home and were seen as a suitable garment for a gentleman of sociability. In 1796 Wilson & Son received an order for 'the finest Plaid or tartan for Gentlemens morning Gowns', and it is not unreasonable to assume that many yards of their tartan were used in this manner.<sup>74</sup> Orders were also placed for tartan to be used in children's clothing: six pieces of 'Cheap and Neat Plaids' of small patterns were ordered for children's dresses by the paymaster of the 79<sup>th</sup> Regiment in 1811, presumably to be sold to the families of the soldiers, while in 1816 a merchant in Cork ordered eight pieces of tartan 'such as are chearfull [sic] in the Colours' and of small patterns, again intended for children's dresses.<sup>75</sup> Such outfits were the precursors to the popular Victorian children's outfits later in the century, the success of which was helped by endorsement from the royal family and the specification for smaller checks demonstrates the adaptability of tartan as a pattern. The size of the check could also be put to multiple purposes, as shown by a letter from James Romanes in Edinburgh who requested lengths of tartan of a particular pattern which he thought 'more likely to please the Ladies', if he was wrong in this assumption then the same pattern 'will do for childrens wear'.<sup>76</sup>

Many of the clothiers and retailers who advertised the sale of tartan and tartan goods in the Scottish press were customers of Wilson & Son at one point or another and were thus part of a production and distribution chain responsible for the promotion of these tartan wares to a wider audience. One particular example can be found in Romanes & Paterson, a draper and clothier partnership which was established in Edinburgh in 1815. When announcing the relocation of the business to the fashionable South Bridge in the city, the products they offered included cambrics, chintzes, velvets, satins, sarsnets, poplins and bombazeens, but there was no specific reference to tartan.<sup>77</sup> A shift in their marketing strategy was evident in 1821 when they advertised worsted tartans, tartan sarsnets and tartan satins which could make scarves, cloaks, shawls, handkerchiefs and children's dresses.<sup>78</sup> A year later in June 1822, pre-empting the tartan mania that was to result from the visit of George IV to Edinburgh in August, the partnership promoted itself as a 'TARTAN AND SHAWL WAREHOUSE'.<sup>79</sup> This example can be read alongside the Wilson & Son correspondence noted above, as well as with innumerable other newspaper advertisements from the first two decades of the nineteenth century, all of which emphasise the versatility of tartan in both function and form, from silk tartan for ladies' shawls, to worsted tartan plaids and tartan handkerchiefs.<sup>80</sup> The variety of tartan fabrics, as well as the different uses for tartan evident from the newspapers and the Wilson correspondence, shows its widening and diversifying appeal in the early nineteenth century.

Less conventional uses for tartan were also evident in the Wilson correspondence which not only emphasise tartan's versatility but also tarnish its romanticised status and offer a counterpoint to the use of tartan both as a symbol of social prestige in civic institutions and groups such as Highland societies,<sup>81</sup> and as a fashionable item. Orders were placed, for example, for tartan to clothe charity scholars in the early nineteenth century – both in Scotland and further afield in Austria.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, in 1817, Wilson & Son received an order from a company in Glasgow which intended to send tartan to the black population of Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>83</sup> John Telfer Dunbar noted further examples of contact with other slave-trading centres including Rio de Janeiro

and Barbados, the latter correspondence occurring as early as 1802.<sup>84</sup> Unsurprisingly, the fabric ordered in these examples was not of the highest quality and would have been in stark contrast to the merino wool plaids which Wilson & Son produced from 1816 onwards for their higher-paying clients.<sup>85</sup> As with the tartans of the Highland regiments, however, the inherent nature of the woollen cloth, being durable and easily identifiable, made it a practical choice for these customers.

### *The rise of clan tartans*

Recently described as an ‘uneasy fusion of genuine historical associations, family snobbery, marketing and the Victorian idea of the clan system’,<sup>86</sup> clan tartans are an issue where the romantic notions of the history and meaning of tartan fully collide with its commercial viability. The popularity of clan tartans in the nineteenth century in particular, was a key factor in the success of Wilson & Son, and they highlight the firm’s commercial prowess in both responding to and leading consumer demand. The increased interest in clan tartans, arguably facilitated by the collective identities and appearances of the Highland regiments,<sup>87</sup> was also influenced by the growing fascination with the romanticised Scottish past and fuelled by groups such as the Highland Society of London and the Celtic Society of Edinburgh, both of which were concerned with preserving what they saw as Highland social, cultural and economic life. These societies were central to the development of and belief in, the antiquity of clan tartans, encouraging their members to wear the ‘appropriate’ tartan for the societies’ events.<sup>88</sup> In 1815, the Highland Society of London set about creating a comprehensive list of the clan tartans authenticated by the respective clan chiefs, examples of which are in the collection of the National Museum of Scotland and most of them were designed by Wilsons.<sup>89</sup> Smaller provincial societies soon followed this example and also called on Wilsons for guidance. A regular customer, Charles Blair, a merchant in Dunkeld, wrote to the firm in 1822 saying that a Highland society had recently formed in the area, whose members ‘must appear in the garb’ and although ‘it is not ordained that every member appear in the tartan of his clan yet many will from choice’. He continued:



It has therefore occurred to me that you could manufacture to any man his tartan even in the quantity of a single suit, say 8 to 12 yards ... at a little advance in price ... and if you could spare me a sight of your patterns of the various clans—it would perhaps encourage many to take a pretty clan tho' not his own.

In a telling example of the appealing properties of tartan and Highland dress Blair also wrote that 'it will be very attractive to the young chaps—who in nineteen cases out of twenty are attracted more by the fun than by the utility of the thing.'<sup>90</sup> Both Blair and Wilson were thus responding to and exploiting the romanticised sentiment of clan tartans, making tartan very much a commercial venture.

Newspaper advertisements for tartan in the first half of the eighteenth century had made no reference to clan tartans: Edinburgh drapers, Gairdner & Taylor, for instance, simply told their customers in 1745 that they had a 'great choice of Tartans' for sale,<sup>91</sup> and even in the early 1800s, as seen above, greater prominence was given to the forms of fabric that tartan could come in rather than the specific patterns. This suggests that it was the innate flexibility in form, pattern and function that contributed to tartan's popularity and that the categorising and standardising of the clan tartan movement capitalised on this. The early records of Wilson & Son, furthermore, show that numbers rather than names were often used to distinguish between the different patterns.<sup>92</sup> Family names were rare and place names were more common on patterns which are today known as district tartans. Such patterns were the result of weaving being a specialised activity and it is logical that a weaver would have a preference for a particular pattern, as well as being dependent on local dyestuffs which would dictate the colours used.<sup>93</sup> But by the early nineteenth century, encouraged by the efforts of groups such as the Highland Society of London, a shift in language is evident in the newspaper advertisements with retailers increasingly stressing the authenticity, antiquity and familial or clan association of their tartans. Words such as 'true' and 'original' became fundamental elements of the tartan marketing strategy as seen in the advertisement of W. & A. McDonald, silk

merciers and milliners who described their tartan silks as being ‘warranted, original sets’ in 1821,<sup>94</sup> one of many responding to the demand that had been buoyed by the various Highland societies.

The ascription of clan names to tartans thus appears to have been consumer-led and Wilson & Son were quick to respond to this market demand, supplying chiefs, clansmen, merchants and individual customers with what they assumed or told Wilson & Son, was their ancient clan tartan. What is today recognised as the MacPherson tartan, for instance, seems to have originally sold by Wilsons as ‘No. 43 or Kidd’ tartan until it became acknowledged by Duncan MacPherson of Cluny as the clan tartan in 1817. Scarlett observes that this ascription is unusual given that Wilsons already produced a tartan called ‘MacPherson of Cluny’ but notes that the choice was perhaps a result of the ‘MacPherson of Cluny’ tartan being too similar to a Mackintosh tartan, and the two groups were rivals for the leadership of Clan Chattan.<sup>95</sup> Wilson & Son even advised those writing books on Highlanders which patterns were genuinely ancient tartans and which were not. In the case of James Logan, however, who wrote the *Scottish Gael* in 1831, much of this advice was ignored and he included several ‘Fictitious and Fancy Patterns’ in the end product.<sup>96</sup>

In contrast to the desire to authenticate supposedly ancient tartans, new setts were also being created or adapted either to commemorate people and events (as seen with Admiral Duncan) or simply to suit the customer’s wishes. Stripes could be added to an established pattern to create a new one or the size of the check could be altered according to preference, creating infinite opportunities for tartan designers. The Caithness and Sutherland-shire Friendly Highland Society asked Wilson & Son for swatches of various tartans in 1821 for them to choose from, suggesting that Wilson & Son may also ‘make a new Pattern to please; somewhat like the Cobourn pattern, or with red near the Macdonalds, or with a White or Yellow stripe.’<sup>97</sup> New tartans included the Waterloo tartan, a small check pattern that became popular in the years after the battle in 1815,<sup>98</sup> the Rob Roy tartan, and the Wellington tartan. All these patterns were manufactured by Wilson & Son and many were originally designed by them.<sup>99</sup> Without the implied or supposed heritage of the

clan tartans these new patterns ensured that the essentially traditional fabric was kept within the up-to-date fashionable consciousness.

The standardisation of clan tartans, and thus tartan as a commodity in the public domain, cannot be discussed without reference to the visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822. This visit is the definitive example of the use of tartan and Highland dress based on a romanticised notion of the Scottish past and Scottish identity while also bringing the notion of clan tartans to the fore.<sup>100</sup> The event also shows how Wilson & Son had grown as manufacturers since the 1750s. The announcement of the impending visit sparked a flurry of orders for Wilsons from those who were anxious to follow the advice of Sir Walter Scott and appear in what he had deemed the ‘complete national costume’,<sup>101</sup> of Highland dress. As one of the closest and largest tartan manufacturers to Edinburgh, Wilsons’ tartan was in high demand during and after the visit, prompting the building of the Royal George Mill as well as a marked increase in the firm’s consumption of wool. Prior to this year, Wilson & Son had sent orders for around 600lb of wool approximately once a month to one of their suppliers in Darlington in the north of England. In the summer of 1822 orders were placed weekly rather than monthly, still requesting 600lb of wool each time.<sup>102</sup> The resulting ‘plaided panorama’<sup>103</sup> of the visit helped maintain a high level of orders for Wilson & Son in the months that followed including requests for the George IV tartan, newly created to commemorate the event, and tartan continued to be present in the outfits recommended by the fashion manuals.<sup>104</sup>

The visit and the impact it had on the notion of Scottish national dress has received much attention from contemporaries and historians since. Recently it has been argued that the tartanised royal display was the result of an ‘overinterpretation of the function of tartan in a given space’,<sup>105</sup> which is particularly apt when arguing for the consideration of tartan as a practical and aesthetic commodity rather than as a romantic or political emblem. While the significance of this event for Scottish sartorial national identity is undeniable, it should not be seen as an isolated one. The reaction to the royal visit and the creation of what is now considered to be the Scottish national dress of the kilt and jacket, is the culmination of all the processes of the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries—the romanticisation of the Jacobite rebellion, the influence of military dress on fashionable clothing, and the desire to associate with a romanticised (and sanitised) national heritage. Both the promotion of clan tartans and the royal visit are examples of people attaching meaning, real and imagined, to tartan as a fabric and as a pattern. But what is often overlooked is the fact that the inherent practical, aesthetic and versatile qualities of tartan as a fabric and as a pattern, provided the foundation on which the romanticised notions of clan tartans and public excitement of the royal visit were able to capitalise. It is therefore also the result of the growth and development of Wilson & Son of Bannockburn from the 1750s onwards. The commercial motivations and machinations of Wilson & Son, as well as those of the various tartan retailers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which benefited greatly from the innate advantages of tartan, enabled the trend of clan tartans and the interest caused by the royal visit to have the success that they did.

### *Conclusion*

While tartan has been ascribed many meanings in its history, particularly since the mid-eighteenth century, to William Wilson & Son tartan was business and for close to a hundred years they were the preeminent tartan manufacturers of Scotland. Their expanding trade networks from the 1770s to the 1830s, and their acquisition of property and equipment, indicate that tartan was a profitable commodity for them during this period, even in the absence of consistent financial accounts or records.<sup>106</sup> There is no doubt that they capitalised on the romantic and idealised interests in tartan of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and recent studies which have examined this aspect of tartan's history form a cornerstone of the use and interpretation of tartan today. Closer examination of the surviving records of Wilson & Son, however, combined with the advertisements of merchants and retailers, emphasises the fact that tartan as a fabric and as a pattern was aesthetically pleasing and above all, versatile. The pragmatic, even prosaic qualities of tartan were just as responsible for tartan's nineteenth-century status as a popular commodity, as its romantic

and idealised associations. This versatility, furthermore, was reflected in Wilson & Son's practice; from individual commissions of single garments to the clothing of entire regiments, they provided tartan on a global scale, for whoever wanted it and for whatever reason. They catered to all budgets by making tartan in the finest merino wool to coarse wool and linen mixes, the lower quality fabric in particular demonstrating its appeal and use beyond that of the social elite. They were not protective of existing patterns, they were happy to alter them or to create new ones, exploiting patriotic sentiments and feeding on popular, fashionable tendencies.

An examination of the workings of Wilson & Son, and considering tartan as a commercial product which was adapted according to existing materials, technology and market demand rather than as a purely historicised and romanticised emblem, has produced another facet to this important part of Scotland's history. Furthermore, while tartan endures as a symbol of Scottish identity, its versatility ensures its continued use in a wide-range of spaces and places, from school uniforms in Japan to household furnishings in North America.<sup>107</sup> As such, through a study of William Wilson & son, tartan manufacturers of Bannockburn, we have also found the model on which the use and promotion of tartan is based today.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ian Brown (ed.), *From Tartan to Tartanry: Scottish culture, history and myth* (Edinburgh, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> The idea that the kilt was invented by an Englishman, Thomas Rawlinson, in the 1720s has been repeated a number of times since the late eighteenth century. Commentators in the mid-twentieth century such as H. F. McClintock and John Telfer Dunbar recognised that the kilt was likely a relatively modern invention but left their readers to decide on the part played by Rawlinson. See, H. F. McClintock, *Old Irish and Highland Dress, With Notes on that of the Isle of Man* (Dundalk, 1943), 141-167, and John Telfer Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress* (Edinburgh, 1962), 12-14. The

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most vehement supporter of the Rawlinson idea, however, was Hugh Trevor-Roper whose advocacy of the ‘invention of tradition’ in 1983 has sparked much debate since. See, Hugh Trevor-Roper, ‘The invention of tradition: the Highland tradition of Scotland’, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 15-42. For a response to Trevor-Roper’s thesis, see Murray Pittock, ‘Plaiding the invention of Scotland’, Brown (ed.), *From Tartan to Tartanry*, 32-62. The debate over the antiquity of clan tartans started in the early nineteenth century with writers and historians anxious to promote the history of the Gael. See, for example, John Sobieski Stuart, *Vestiarium Scoticum* (Edinburgh, 1842) and John Logan, *Clans of the Scottish Highlands, Illustrated by Appropriate Figures, Displaying their Dress, Tartan, Arms, Armorial Insignia, and Social Occupations* (London, 1845). It is now generally accepted that clan tartans were, in fact, a nineteenth-century invention born out of the expediency of tartan manufacturers. See Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress*, 112-143; James D. Scarlett, *Tartan: The Highland Textile* (London, 1990), 36-7; Hugh Cheape, *Tartan: The Highland Habit* (Edinburgh, 1991; 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2006), 68-72.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Dziennik, ‘Whig tartan: material culture and its use in the Scottish Highlands, 1746-1815’, *Past and Present* 217 (2012) 117-147, at 119.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Nicholson, ‘From Ramsay’s *Flora MacDonald* to Raeburn’s *MacNab*: the use of tartan as a symbol of identity’, *Textile History* 36:2 (2005) 146-167, at 147; Vicky Coltman, ‘Party-coloured plaid? Portraits of eighteenth-century Scots in tartan’, *Textile History* 41:2 (2010) 182-216, at 184.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Faiers, *Tartan* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 9; For discussion of the relationship between tartan and entertainment, see Paul Maloney, “‘Wha’s like us?’: Ethnic representation in music hall and popular theatre and the making of urban Scottish society”, in Brown (ed.), *From Tartan to Tartanry*, 121-149 and Richard Butt, ‘Looking at tartan in film: history, identity and spectacle’, in Brown (ed.), *From Tartan to Tartanry*, 166-179.

<sup>7</sup> James Scarlett, ‘Tartan: the Highland cloth and Highland art form’, in John Butt and Kenneth Ponting (eds), *Scottish Textile History* (Aberdeen, 1987), 71.

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- <sup>8</sup> Andrew Simmons (ed.), *Burt's Letters from the North of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1998), 197-8; Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland [NRS], GD112/15/88/39 (Breadalbane Muniments): vouchers of Alexander Christie, precept of payment for nine ells of tartan for horse sheets, 2 Dec. 1699.
- <sup>9</sup> Hugh Cheape, 'Gheibhte breacain charnaid (scarlet tartans would be got...): the reinvention of Scotland', in Brown (ed.), *From Tartan to Tartanry*, 16.
- <sup>10</sup> Anita Quye and Hugh Cheape, 'Historical and analytical research of dyes in early Scottish tartans', in Rob Janaway and Paul Wyeth (eds), *Scientific Analysis of Ancient and Historic Textiles: Informing preservation, display and interpretation*, AHRC Research Centre for Textile Conservation and Textiles Studies (2005), 202-7; Anita Quye and Hugh Cheape, 'Rediscovering the arisaid', *Costume* 42 (2008) 1-20, at 2-3.
- <sup>11</sup> Helen Rawson, John Burnett and Anita Quye, 'The import of textile dyes to Scotland: the case of William Wilson & Son, tartan weavers of Bannockburn 1780-1820', *Review of Scottish Culture* 13 (2000-2001) 18-29, at 20-1.
- <sup>12</sup> Cheape, 'Gheibhte breacain charnaid', 15.
- <sup>13</sup> Murray Pittock, 'Patriot dress and patriot games: tartan from the Jacobites to Queen Victoria', in Caroline McCracken-Flesher (ed.), *Culture, Nation and the New Scottish Parliament* (Lewisburg, Pa., 2007), 164; Scarlett, 'Tartan: the Highland cloth', 67-8.
- <sup>14</sup> For an account of Wilson & Son's regimental contracts and workings, see N. J. Mills and A. L. Carswell, 'Wilson of Bannockburn and the clothing of the Scottish regiments', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 76:307 (1998), 177-93; Faiers, *Tartan*, 196.
- <sup>15</sup> Scarlett, *Tartan*, 16. The surviving records are currently dispersed between numerous private and public collections, including the National Museums Scotland, the National Library of Scotland and Perth Museum and Art Gallery. These records are extensive but they are not complete as there are significant gaps for the early years of the firm.
- <sup>16</sup> John Telfer Dunbar, *The Costume of Scotland* (London, 1981), 109.

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<sup>17</sup> John and James both predeceased their father and it was Alexander who took over the firm on the death of his father, hence the naming of the firm as William Wilson & Son rather than William Wilson & Sons. For further genealogical information see Marion L. Wilson, 'The Wilsons of Bannockburn: a line of weavers, chapmen and tartan manufacturers', *The Scottish Genealogist* 34:2 (1987) 315-320.

<sup>18</sup> Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland [NLS], MS9672: day book of William Wilson & Son.

<sup>19</sup> NLS, MS6660: list of looms in Bannockburn, 4 Jan. 1787.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson & Son had a long running relationship with Robert Watson, a weaver who owned two looms in Bannockburn and who worked sporadically for Wilson & Son in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Edinburgh, National Museums Scotland [NMS], 1953.918: William Wilson & Son notebook and accounts; NLS, MS9677/58: building estimate and plans; NLS, MS9677/78: plan of works 1835.

<sup>21</sup> NLS, MS9670/21: William Wilson & Son letter book, letter to Edward Pease, Darlington, 29 Aug. 1799; NLS, MS6662/133: invoice from Matthew Hope, Hawick to William Wilson & Son, 30 Apr. 1792; Clifford Gulvin, *The Tweedmakers: A history of the Scottish fancy woollen industry 1600-1914* (Newton Abbot, 1973), 38-46.

<sup>22</sup> NMS, 1953.918: William Wilson & Son notebook and accounts; Rawson, Burnett and Quye, 'Import of textile dyes to Scotland', 25.

<sup>23</sup> NMS, 1953.1313: James Wilson, Aberdeen, to Alexander Wilson, Bannockburn, 30 Sep. 1817.

<sup>24</sup> Mary B. Rose, *Firms, Networks and Business Values: The British and American cotton industries since 1750* (Cambridge, 2000), 60.

<sup>25</sup> Particular examples of portraits include Allan Ramsay, *Hon. Francis Charteris and his wife, Lady Katharine Gordon*, 1747-1748, and William Mosman, *John Campbell*, 1749. See Coltman, 'Party-coloured plaid?'; Nicholson, 'From Ramsey's *Flora MacDonald* to Raeburn's *MacNab*'; Dunbar, *Costume of Scotland*, 53; Cheape, 'Gheibhte breacain charnaid', 20.

<sup>26</sup> NLS, MS9672: William Wilson & Son day book, entries dated 20 Dec. 1771 and 27 Feb. 1776.



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<sup>27</sup> Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress*, 149; Peter MacDonald, *The 1819 Key Pattern Book: One hundred original tartans* (Perth, 1996), 64.

<sup>28</sup> NLS: MS0671, MS6661-3, MS6810-24. For discussion of the military trade see Mills and Carswell 'Wilson of Bannockburn'.

<sup>29</sup> Similar conclusions have been reached through the study of portraits from the early eighteenth century. See Coltman, 'Party-coloured plaid?', 205.

<sup>30</sup> NLS, MS9671: William Wilson & Son ledger book; see also Dunbar, *Costume of Scotland*, 110. By the end of the eighteenth century payments in kind (including whisky and tea) had been replaced by cash or bills of exchange.

<sup>31</sup> S. G. E. Lythe and J. Butt, *An Economic History of Scotland, 1100-1939* (Glasgow, 1975), 144-5.

<sup>32</sup> See NLS, MS6661 for list of merchants and NLS, MS6661/66: Thomas Leisk, Burravoe, Yell to William Wilson & Son, 9 Jul. 1791.

<sup>33</sup> See for example, NMS, 1943.1316: David Ouchterlory, Dundee to William Wilson & Son, 2 Jul. 1793. Ouchterlory ordered goods to be sent to Norway. Wilson & Son also supplied their customers with Kilmarnock bonnets which they outsourced from various bonnet makers, see I. H. Mackay Scobie, 'The Scottish tartan manufacturers and bonnet makers', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 21:82 (1942) 64-70, at 65.

<sup>34</sup> See NLS, MS6661-4; NLS, MS6661/132: Agnes Spankie, Dundee to William Wilson & Son, 18 Jun. 1792; NLS, MS6664/3: Alexander Cheyne, Aberdeen to William Wilson & Son, 23 Mar. 1793.

<sup>35</sup> NLS, MS6723-6.

<sup>36</sup> William Wilson is thought to have died between 1797 and 1802. He was paying window tax until 1797 but a gap in the records prevents further investigation. See NRS, E326/1/117-119 (Assessed Taxes Schedule), window tax for Stirlingshire. By 1802 Alexander Wilson was paying a monthly allowance to his mother, see NMS, 1952.918: Wilson's notebook.

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<sup>37</sup> NLS, MS9676/64: legal papers and miscellaneous documents relating to William Wilson & Son, letter from Alexander Wilson to the Board of Trustees in Edinburgh, 14 Dec. 1806; *Stirlingshire: An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1963), ii. 316.

<sup>38</sup> NRS, NG1/64/29 (Board of Manufactures, General and Manufacturing Records): reports on claims for premiums on machinery etc., 1818-1825. This equipment was shared with John and William Wilson, grandsons of the original William Wilson who had set up their own firm in the village.

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey D. Hay and Geoffrey P. Stell, *Monuments of Industry: An Illustrated Historical Record* (Glasgow, 1986), 68.

<sup>40</sup> H. Gaskell, (ed.), *The Reception of the Ossian Poems in Europe* (London, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester, 2004), 16-32; Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715-1789* (London, 2002), 265-6. Tartan and Highland dress were also used as masquerade outfits at the highest social levels in London from the late 1740s onward. See Aileen Ribeiro, *The Dress Worn at Masquerades in England, 1730-1790, and its Relation to Fancy Portraiture* (London, 1984), 295; Pittock, 'Patriot dress and patriot games', 164.

<sup>42</sup> In Walter Scott's *Waverley*, an old Highlander is described as a 'relic of primitive simplicity' wearing 'no dress but what his estate afforded' made of tartan dyed 'from the herbs and lichens of the hills around him.' Walter Scott, *Waverley* (Edinburgh, 1901), 234.

<sup>43</sup> Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London, 1978), 19; Robert Clyde, *From Rebel to Hero: The image of the Highlander, 1745-1830* (Edinburgh, 1998), chs. 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Donnachie, 'The textile industry in south west Scotland', in Butt and Ponting (eds), *Scottish Textile History*, 19-36; Gulvin, *Tweedmakers*, 38-69.

<sup>45</sup> In 1793 one of the wool suppliers for Wilson & Son wrote informing them that the war had increased demand for wool and as such they would not be able to fulfil their regular order for Wilsons. NLS, MS6664/74: Joseph Pease & Son, Darlington to William Wilson & Son, 6 Feb. 1793.

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- <sup>46</sup> Nine regiments were raised from 1757-61, eight more were created 1793-4, along with a number of fencible regiments. Cheape, 'Gheibhte breacain charnaid', 20.
- <sup>47</sup> Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and fashion in the 'ancien régime'* translated by J. Birrell (Cambridge, 1994), 221-56; Lucy Johnston, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion in Detail* (London, 2009), 14; Austin Gee, *The British Volunteer Movement 1794-1814* (Oxford, 2003), 162-3, 193-6.
- <sup>48</sup> NMS, 1953.1305: Finlay King, Limerick to William Wilson & Son, 15 Apr. 1823. Wilson & Son often received complaints regarding faulty goods, late delivery or a lack of receipt. Such complaints appear to have been part of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century textile trade rhetoric, however, as more often than not a complaint was followed up with a further order.
- <sup>49</sup> Dziennik, 'Whig Tartan', 123.
- <sup>50</sup> Mills and Carswell, 'Wilson of Bannockburn'.
- <sup>51</sup> The difference in cloth was dictated by the thickness of the reed used in the weaving process. Wilson & Son produced officers, sergeants and privates tartans. See MacDonald, *1819 Key Pattern Book*, 9-12.
- <sup>52</sup> Johnston, *Nineteenth-Century Fashion*, 12-20; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 2005), 183-8.
- <sup>53</sup> Nikolaus Innocentius Wilhelm Clemens von Heideloff, *A Gallery of Fashion* (London, Dec. 1797), figures 162 and 163.
- <sup>54</sup> P. K. Cribbin, 'Duncan, Adam, Viscount Duncan (1731-1804)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8211> , accessed 6 Jul. 2010].
- <sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (Edinburgh, 2008), i. 108. See also, Pittock, 'Patriot dress and patriot games', 164.
- <sup>56</sup> *La Belle Assemblée* (London, Dec. 1808), v. 188.
- <sup>57</sup> *La Belle Assemblée* (London, Aug. 1810), ix. 41; *La Belle Assemblée* (London, Jul. 1818), xvii. 277.
- <sup>58</sup> *La Belle Assemblée* (London, Apr. 1815), xi. 181.

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<sup>59</sup> Faiers, *Tartan*, 111-2.

<sup>60</sup> Mills and Carswell, 'Wilson of Bannockburn', 191-2.

<sup>61</sup> NLS, MS6661/12-13: Alexander Duncan, Aberdeen to William Wilson & Son, 1792; NMS, 1953.1312: John Donald, Oldmeldrum to William Wilson & Son, 8 Oct. 1799.

<sup>62</sup> NMS, 1953.1312: M. Duncan, Falkirk to William Wilson & Son, 23 Jan. 1819.

<sup>63</sup> NMS, 1953.1315: John Somers, Mid-Calder to William Wilson & Son, 9 Mar. 1818. The goods sent by Wilson & Son and their agents were part of a slowly increasing woollen export trade to South America. See Manuel Llorca-Jana, *The British Textile Trade in South America in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2012), 31, 45.

<sup>64</sup> NLS, MS6691/132: Thomas Heriot, Edinburgh to William Wilson & Son, 5 Jan. 1801; NMS, 1953.1313, James Wilson: Glasgow to William Wilson & Son, 20 Jan. 1821.

<sup>65</sup> Information taken from a study of the *Caledonian Mercury* and the *Aberdeen Journal* from 1800-30.

<sup>66</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 12 Nov. 1818.

<sup>67</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 22 Apr. 1815. Torry was also a customer of Wilson & Son, in 1810 he ordered four hussar plaids of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment along with various lengths of tartan. NMS, 1953.1312: Archibald Torry, Edinburgh, to William Wilson & Son, 19 Jan. 1810.

<sup>68</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 Mar. 1820.

<sup>69</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 18 Dec. 1811. See also NMS, A.1942.40: woman's woollen cloak of Buchanan tartan, c. 1800-10.

<sup>70</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 Jan. 1802.

<sup>71</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 Nov. 1808.

<sup>72</sup> NMS, 1953.1312: H. McKenzie, Sleat, to William Wilson & Son, 4 Dec. 1813.

<sup>73</sup> NMS, 1953.1316: W. Brown Jnr, Edinburgh, to William Wilson & Son, 13 Aug. 1816.

<sup>74</sup> NMS, 1953.1312: Thomas Heriot, Edinburgh to William Wilson & Son, 23 Jun. 1796; Hugh M. Milne (ed.), *Boswell's Edinburgh Journals 1767-1786* (Edinburgh, 2001), 349; Ribeiro, *Dress in*

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*Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 24; Stana Nenadic, 'The Enlightenment in Scotland and the popular passion for portraits', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 21 (1998) 175-192, at 179.

<sup>75</sup> NMS, 1953.1316: R. Brittain, Glasgow to William Wilson & Son, 8 Dec. 1811; NMS, 1953.1312: Merchant letters 1811-1816, Francis Hoddes, Cork to William Wilson & Son, 10 Sep. 1816.

<sup>76</sup> NLS, MS6728: James Romanes, Edinburgh to William Wilson & Son, 7 Jun. 1813.

<sup>77</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 Nov. 1815.

<sup>78</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 26 May 1821.

<sup>79</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 24 Jun. 1822.

<sup>80</sup> Advertisement for Duguid & Reid, Aberdeen, *Aberdeen Journal*, 15 Nov. 1820; Advertisement for Alexander Roy, haberdasher, Broad Street, Aberdeen, *Aberdeen Journal*, 3 Feb. 1800.

<sup>81</sup> Pittock, 'Plaiding the invention of Scotland', 42.

<sup>82</sup> NMS 1953.1313: Archibald Campbell on behalf of the Duchess of Argyle, to William Wilson & Son, 4 Mar. 1822; NMS 1953.1316: James Cleland, Glasgow to William Wilson & Son, 28 Nov. 1818. See also, Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress*, 151.

<sup>83</sup> NMS 1953.1316: Wilson, Stow and Co., Glasgow to William Wilson & Son, 5 Jun. 1817. For a discussion of tartan as a symbol of oppression see Faiers, *Tartan*, 255-76.

<sup>84</sup> Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress*, 150-1.

<sup>85</sup> MacDonald, *1819 Key Pattern Book*, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Pittock, 'Plaiding the invention of Scotland', 43.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-1.

<sup>88</sup> In his account of the Highland Society of London, Sir John Sinclair asserted that the tartan plaid had been 'made of the peculiar *set* or pattern of tartan belonging to the Clan of the individual who wore it'. Sir John Sinclair, *An Account of the Highland Society of London, from its Establishment in May 1778, to the Commencement of the Year 1813* (London, 1813), 10.

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<sup>89</sup> NMS, L.1985.1: papers and textile archive of the Highland Society of London, on long-term loan to NMS; Cheape, *Tartan*, 63; MacDonald, *1819 Key Pattern Book*, 5. Wilson & Son also profited from the multiple other Highland societies which were established in the early nineteenth century. The Glasgow Highland Society, for instance, ordered a variety of regimental tartans in 1813, probably intended as prizes in their competitions. See NMS, 1953.1316: Glasgow Highland Society to William Wilson & Son, 1813.

<sup>90</sup> NMS, 1953.1312: Charles Blair Junior, Dunkeld to William Wilson & Son, 16 Dec. 1822.

<sup>91</sup> Cited by Walter Biggar Blaikie, 'Edinburgh at the time of the occupation of Prince Charles', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* 2 (1909) 1-60, at 44.

<sup>92</sup> Peter MacDonald's reconstruction of the Wilson & Son 1819 Key Pattern Book gives many examples of patterns which were originally identified by a number, such as what is now known as the Campbell of Cawdor tartan which was listed in Wilson & Son records as 'No. 230' or 'Argyle' after the region. MacDonald, *1819 Key Pattern Book*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Pittock, 'Plaidding the invention of Scotland', 41.

<sup>94</sup> *Caledonian Mercury*, 7 Apr. 1821.

<sup>95</sup> Scarlett, *Tartan*, 138; MacDonald, *1819 Key Pattern Book*, 6.

<sup>96</sup> NMS, 1953.1315: correspondence between James Logan and William Wilson & Son, Dec. 1831. See also Dunbar, *Costume of Scotland*, 88-9.

<sup>97</sup> NMS, 1953.1316: Alexander Sinclair of the Caithness and Sutherland-shire Friendly Highland Society, Thurso to William Wilson & Son, 16 Mar. 1821.

<sup>98</sup> MacDonald, *1819 Key Pattern Book*, 63-4; NMS, 1953.1312: Messrs Scott and Deuchar, Edinburgh to William Wilson & Son, 14 Nov. 1818; Dunbar, *History of Highland Dress*, 147. Tartan was not the only fabric to be manipulated in this manner - Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus was unimpressed with the cloth called 'Waterloo bleu' which was 'copied from the dye used in Flanders for the calico of which the peasantry make their smock frocks or blouses'. Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, ii. 147.

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<sup>99</sup> MacDonald, *1819 Key Pattern Book*, 58, 64.

<sup>100</sup> Cheape, ‘Gheibhte breacain charnaid’, 21.

<sup>101</sup> Walter Scott, *Hints Addressed to the Inhabitants of Edinburgh, and Others, in Prospect of His Majesty’s Visit* (Edinburgh, 1822), 20.

<sup>102</sup> NLS, MS6774: Edward Pease, Darlington to William Wilson & Son, 1819; NLS, MS6831/16: Edward Pease, Darlington to William Wilson & Son, 1822.

<sup>103</sup> John Gibson Lockhart cited by John Prebble, *The King’s Jaunt* (Edinburgh, 2000), 211.

<sup>104</sup> *La Belle Assemblée*, London (Sep. 1822), xxvi. 371; *La Belle Assemblée*, New Series, 1826, iii.

<sup>105</sup> Pittock, ‘Plaiding the invention of Scotland’, 34.

<sup>106</sup> Wilson & Son continued to manufacture tartan and other woollen cloths throughout the nineteenth century, including providing tartan for the Highland regiments during the Crimean War. By the mid-1860s they employed 500-600 people, and were producing £80,000 worth of goods a year. By 1867, however, their fortunes were in decline and the firm amalgamated with a carpet manufacturing business that had been established by two of William Wilson’s grandsons. The business focused on carpet manufacture but eventually went into liquidation in 1924. See, David Bremner, *The Industries of Scotland: Their rise, progress and present condition* (Edinburgh, 1869), 207; Wilson, ‘Wilsons of Bannockburn’, 317;

<sup>107</sup> Faiers, *Tartan*, 116-26.