

SCOTISH JEWELLERY

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My specialty is “Technology of art treatment of materials”. Therefore I would like to tell you about jewellery, traditional Scottish jewellery, dirks and sgian-dubhs.

At first I have to tell about Scotland, as a country for review and introduction to the topic.

Scotland, administrative division of the kingdom of Great Britain, occupying the northern third of the island of Great Britain. Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland as well as a major industrial area and seaport.

The people of Scotland, like those of Great Britain in general, are descendants of various racial stocks, including the Picts, Celts, Scandinavians, and Romans. Scotland is a mixed rural-industrial society. Scots divide themselves into Highlanders, who consider themselves of purer Celtic blood and retain a stronger feeling. And Lowlanders, who are largely of Teutonic blood. The highest density is in the Central Lowlands, where nearly three-quarters of the Scots live, and the lowest is in the Highlands. About two-thirds of the population are urban dwellers.

Clans, the traditional keystone of Scottish society, are no longer powerful. Originally, the clan, a grouping of an entire family with one head, or laird, was also important as a fighting unit. The solidarity associated with clan membership has been expanded into a strong national pride. The Puritan zeal of Scottish Presbyterianism, which is traceable to John Knox, the 16th-century religious reformer and statesman, is also strong. Popular sports of Scottish origin include curling and golf. Bagpipes, usually associated with Scottish music, were probably introduced by the Romans, who acquired them in the Middle East. Scottish music is noted for the wide use of a five-tone, or pentatonic, scale. Folk tunes are not standardized, and a single song may have hundreds of variations in lyrics and music.

Dirks and sgian-dubhs.

Every Highlander carried arms – a dirk or dagger suspended from his belt, a large or shield and, if he could afford them, a claymore or “big sword”, a pair of Highlander pistols and a gun. These weapons were carried as a matter of course, helping to account for their belligerence and pride and also the respect which they paid to each other.

Contemporary wearers of the Highland dress forego the carrying of powder-horns, terges or pistols, but a few may carry a dirk, and most will wear the sgian-dubh (skene-dhu) in the stocking. The dirk is much longer than the sgian-dubh, and often incorporates a small fork and knife as well as a large blade.

Originally, the handles were heavily carved with intricate Celtic knotwork pattering, acting both as decoration and serving as a firm grip. By Victorian times the pattern had lost its original practical purpose and had assumed a thistle shape, while other decorative features such as cairngorms began to appear. The dirk had degenerated into an ornament.