



The Balmoral Tartan: *It's Taboo!*

The Balmoral tartan was designed in 1853 by Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. The tartan was worn by Victoria, and every monarch since.

The tartan's tri-coloured sett – grey, red, and black – resembles the granite in Aberdeenshire, seat of the Balmoral Estate. It was designed purely as a family tartan.

In January 1937, ninety-four years after its

creation, a ban was enacted stating that only members of the Royal family could wear this tartan. Numerous requests from non-royals wishing to purchase the tartan were ceremoniously denied. The Manager of the Privy Purse at the time stated:

I write to you that the tartan that the King and Royal family have adopted is purely personal and private to His Majesty and the Royal family and can, in no circumstances, be worn by other people, or purchased by them from any source and cannot, therefore, be manufactured for general sale.

The decree is extant even today. Balmoral tartan is woven by Royal warrant for the Royal family exclusively. Not even those who work diligently on the Balmoral estate can wear this tartan. They can wear the Balmoral tweed, but never the tartan. Only one person outside the Royal family is permitted to wear Balmoral tartan—that is the sovereign's piper. The tradition of sovereign's piper began in 1843, and the current piper is Pipe Major David Rodgers of the Irish Guards.

Queen Victoria adored Scotland and used tartan in furnishing Balmoral castle. While Victoria and Albert both loved tartans, it was Prince Albert who was struck with *Tartanitis*:

In addition to designing the royal tartan, he decked out Balmoral castle in no fewer than three different tartans: Royal Stewart and the green Hunting Stewart tartans for the carpets, and Dress Stewart tartans for curtains and upholstery—a crime against interior decoration that even the most tasteless Scottish hotel would avoid. (Ben MacIntyre, *Australian Times*)

Currently, Prince Charles demonstrates his abiding love of Scotland and specifically Balmoral. He accompanies this love of the place with an ardour for its dress. More often than not Prince Charles is photographed on the Estate wearing a Balmoral kilt, a natural garment in promise of good health in the great outdoors.

With the kilt, leaving the legs free, the wearer has the advantage of an air bath, which is so invigorating to the human frame, the friction of the lower part of the kilt maintains the warmth in cold weather, and the upper part fitting closely round the waist, supports the loins in a manner especially beneficial in warm climates...

(McIntyre North, *True Highlanders*, 1881)

Who would deny Prince Charles enjoying an air bath? Commando in Chief, indeed.

...Donald E. Holmes

[This dance was found in the Grant Family Archive, undated, from an unknown publication with the column headline: "Scottish Country Dance Corner"

The charming drawing below was part of the document. The devisor, Marie Boehmer, of Kitchener, Ontario, died in 2010. She was a prolific dance devisor. TACbooks still sells 21 of her [Cameo Collection series of dance books.](#)]



The Balmoral Tartan (8r32)

by Marie Boehmer, Kitchener, Ontario

1-4: 1st and 2nd women dance over to partners' right. 1st woman takes hands with 1st and 2nd men, 2nd woman takes hands with 2nd and 3rd men, and balance in line.

5-8: 1st and 2nd women dance round partners with right shoulders back to places.

9-16: 2nd and 3rd women repeat bars 1-8, dancing over to partners' left, giving left shoulders to places.

17-24: 1st couple, followed by 2nd and 3rd couples, who dance up the sides, lead down the middle and up again to places.

25-28: 1st couple cross over right hands and cast off 1 place; 2nd couple step up on bars 27 and 28.

29-32: 1st couple, taking left hands, lead down the middle, cross over and cast up round 3rd couple into 2nd place.

Repeat having passed a couple.

Suggested Music: "Cromarties Rant"

For those using records: "Cromarties Rant" from RSCDS Music for Eight Scottish Country Dances, Book 31.

Since Victoria Day is not long past...

By the time Victoria and Albert took up residence at Balmoral... and held their first Ghillies Ball for estate workers and neighbours, everyone north of the border was reeling.

It's hard to imagine the elderly image we have of Victoria... letting rip on the dance floor... her favourite dance tune was Hoolichan's Jig, to accompany the *Dashing White Sergeant*.

