

PRESERVING THE FABRIC OF A NATION

Scottish Tartans Authority Chairman **JOHN McLEISH** explains the Authority's role in promoting, protecting and preserving our beloved national fabric.

Among the flags flying above The Princess Royal and Duke of Fife Memorial Park today is that of The Scottish Tartans Authority.

Tartan and Highland Dress have always taken pride of place at Braemar – and rightly so. As recently as 2015, the Braemar Gathering Annual included a wonderful article by Gordon Casely, writing most eloquently about Tartan in the 21st Century and proving that tartan is very much alive and kicking today.

To say that tartan has had something of a 'checkered' history is true in every sense and its distinct style and associations have helped it become one of the best-known and best-loved fabrics in the world. However, following the battle of Culloden, the Government banned the wearing of traditional Highland Dress in an attempt to

destroy the pride and power of the Jacobite Highland Clans. This thirty-five year Proscription threatened the very existence of tartan. Nonetheless, survive it did and some might say that it returned with a vengeance, spreading from its roots to win the hearts of a whole nation; to acquire Royal approval under King George IV and Queen Victoria, and to witness some memorable and terrible historical moments from Waterloo to the Somme, from Harry Lauder to the Bay City Rollers, and from astronaut Alan Bean's Apollo 12 landing (*he had a swatch of MacBean tartan with him*) to the near luminous march of the Scotland Commonwealth Games team in Glasgow 2014.

So, where does the Scottish Tartans Authority fit into this story? The Authority was constituted as a Registered Charity in 1995 and is the successor organisation to the



The Scottish Tartans Authority's Coat of Arms and official tartan.



former Scottish Tartans Society. The charitable purposes of the Authority are -

(a) to protect, preserve, conserve, promote and explain the culture, traditions and uses of Scottish Tartans and Highland Dress and,

(b) to advance and promote the education of the public about Scottish Tartans and Highland Dress and their respective origins, manufacture, use and development.

This is a wide remit for a small charity and, with the assistance of our members and a number of other supporters, we field hundreds of enquiries each year with our website receiving more than 500,000 unique visits over the course of twelve months. We work in partnership with, and as advisors to, a range of public and private bodies and are always happy to hear from potential new members – individuals and organisations.

Recent collaborations have included working with the Braemar Royal Highland Society in pursuit of common goals and the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo on their “Splash of Tartan” theme for 2017. On behalf of a wider group of tartan interests, the Scottish Tartans Authority is working to establish a contemporary home for Scotland’s most treasured textile (National Tartan Centre) and we are supporting Scottish weavers in their quest to establish a “tartan marque” for their products. It’s also clear that the thirst for information continues to increase and the Scottish Tartans Authority remains the only organisation that is able to provide such comprehensive knowledge sharing about tartan, Highland Dress and related subjects.

In November 2008, the Scottish Parliament passed the Scottish Register of Tartans Act and the Register went live in February 2009. This was a high profile and significant development in recognising the importance of tartan as a

national asset. At this point, the Scottish Tartans Authority relinquished its registration responsibilities, having already passed its core database to National Records of Scotland to assist in the setting up of the Register. Today, the Scottish Register of Tartans and the Scottish Tartans Authority work together to promote, protect and preserve our iconic national cloth. Learn more about tartan and how to support the Scottish Tartans Authority at www.tartansauthority.com and view the Scottish Register of Tartans at www.tartanregister.gov.uk.

Tartan is just as at home on the catwalks of Milan as in the stands of Murrayfield or Hampden; it is worn with equal grace and pride at weddings, funerals, balls, graduations and a wide range of other celebratory events; it is a story of ‘feelings’ versus ‘fabric’ for without the feelings that it evokes, the fabric itself would lack provenance and gravitas. To see it worn as part of Highland Dress in the natural setting of a Highland Gathering is to see it at its best and to think that Highland Dress was, for a period in history, viewed by some as “the sartorial manifestation of disaffection” is scarcely believable when we look around and see the many smiles across the park today.

WEAVE TRUTH WITH TRUST.



The Scottish Register of Tartans' shield and registered tartan.