

WEDDING TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

Best Man:

As marriages were historically accomplished by capture (the groom would kidnap the woman), a warrior friend was often employed. This Best Man would help the groom fight off other men who wanted the captured woman, and would also help in preventing the woman's family from finding the couple.

Bridal Party:

The bridal party has many origins, not the least of which are the Anglo-Saxon days. When the groom was about to abduct his bride, he needed the help of many friends, the "bridesmen" or "brideknights." The "gentlemen" would make sure the bride got to the ceremony on time and to the groom's house afterwards. The bride also had women to help her. These were known as the "bridesmaids" or "brideswomen."

Bridal Showers:

The Bridal Shower originated with the intent to strengthen friendships between the bride and her friends. In this gathering, the bride's friends would give her moral support and help her prepare for her marriage. The idea to give gifts is fairly new; originating circa the 1890's. At one shower, the bride's friend placed small gifts inside a parasol and opened it over the bride's head so that the presents would "shower" over her. When word of this hit the fashion pages, people were so taken with the idea that they decided to do the same at their showers.

Bride on the left, Groom on the right:

When the groom fought off warriors who also wanted his bride, he would hold onto her with his left hand, while fighting them off with his sword in his right hand (we suppose there were no Southpaws in those days of yore), which is why the bride stands on the left, and the groom on the right.

Diamond Engagement Rings:

These lavish gifts were given by medieval Italians in the belief that the diamond was created in the Flames of Love.

Garner Toss/Bouquet Toss:

In the 14th century, it was customary for the bride to toss her garter to the men, but sometimes the men got too drunk, and would become impatient and try to take the garter off her ahead of time. (Eventually the groom got into the act and saved his bride from the unruly mob. . .we hope). All the same, it got to less trouble for her to toss her bridal bouquet instead.

Honeymoon:

Following the abduction, the groom would put himself and his bride into hiding – the Honeymoon – so that by the time the bride's family found them, the bride would already be pregnant.

Shoes on the Bumper:

Tying shoes to the bumper of the car represents the symbolism and power of shoes in ancient times. Egyptians would exchange sandals when they exchanged goods, so when the father of the bride gave his daughter to the groom, he would also give the bride's sandals to show that she now belonged to the groom. In Anglo-Saxon times, the groom would tap the heel of the bride's shoe to show his authority over her. In later times, people would throw shoes at the couple. Now, thankfully, folks just tie shoes to the new couple's car.

Something Blue:

In continuing with the discussion of the white wedding dress, it should be noted that – in Biblical days – blue represented purity. Thus the bride and groom would wear a blue band around the bottom of their wedding attire, hence something blue.

Stag Parties:

Ancient Spartan soldiers were the first to hold stag parties. The groom would feast with his male friends on the night before his wedding. In this event he would say good-bye to the carefree days of bachelorhood and swear continued allegiance to his comrades.

Tie the Knot:

This wonderful expression originated from Roman times when the bride wore a girdle that were tied in knots which the groom had the fun of untying. As a side note, this phrase can also refer to the tying of the knot in Handfasting Ceremonies, which were often performed without the benefit of a clergy.

Veil:

Along with these kidnappings and bartering, there were also arranged marriages. In these, the groom's family informed him that he was to marry. . .but they very rarely let him see the bride. After all, if the groom didn't like the bride's looks, he might not agree to the marriage. With this in mind, the father of the bride gave the bride away to the groom who then lifted the veil to see his wife of all eternity for the first time. (I have to wonder how many of these grooms voiced their reactions aloud.)

Wedding:

Although the aforementioned events were common, marriage by purchase was preferred. Quite often the bride was exchanged for land, political alliance, social status and/or currency. Indeed, the Anglo-Saxon word "wedd" meant the groom would vow to marry the woman – and that the bartered goods and/or currency would go directly to the bride's father. (Side note: the very word "wedding" comes from the root term meaning "gamble" or "wager".) In short, a wedding seemed little more than the purchase of a bride for breeding purposes. Not a particularly liberated point of view.

Wedding Bands:

It is unknown when wedding bands were first worn. They were probably made of a strong metal such as iron. (One can easily guess the portent of an omen if a wedding band broke.) As far back as the ancient Romans, there was a belief that the vein in the third finger ran directly to the heart, so the wearing of rings on that finger joined the couple's hearts and destinies.

Wedding Cake:

Like most any other ritual handed down from the ages, a wedding wouldn't be complete without fertility symbols, like the wedding cake. Ancient Romans would bake a cake made of wheat or barley and break it over the bride's head as a symbol of her fertility. (Whether this meant cracking the cake above the bride's head or actually bonking her on the noggin with it is rather unclear. We're not sure we want to know. . . .) Over time, it became traditional to stack several cakes atop one another, as tall as possible. The bride and groom would then be charged to kiss over this tower without knocking it over. If they were successful, a lifetime of good fortune was certain for the new couple. Finally, during the reign of King Charles II of England, it became customary for cake to be a palatable palace iced with sugar.

White Wedding Dress:

Anne of Brittany made the white wedding dress popular in 1499. Before that, a woman just wore her best dress. It should be noted that a white wedding dress is in no way indicative of the "purity" of the bride-to-be. Indeed, white is not accorded as a symbol of chastity, but of joy.