

WEDDING TRADITIONS AND SUPERSTITIONS

THE GREETING

When it comes to Weddings, everyone's superstitious.

Even if you're the kind of person who walks under ladders on point of principle, or laughs their socks off when friends touch wood, you can bet that, when your wedding day dawns, wild horses couldn't stop you clutching something old and donning something blue. And that's just for starters.

We guarantee that you wouldn't dream of seeing your fiancé on the morning of the wedding. And will you expect to be carried across the threshold? Of course you will!

“Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue and a Silver Sixpence in her Shoe”

This rhyme originated in Victorian times. 'Something Old' signifies that the Couple's friends will stay with them.

In one version of the tradition the 'Something Old' was an old garter which was given to the bride by a happily married woman so that the new bride would also enjoy a happy marriage. 'Something New' looks to the future for health, happiness and success.

'Something Borrowed' is an opportunity for the Bride's family to give her something as a token of their love (it must be returned to ensure Good Luck), and 'Something Blue' is thought lucky because Blue represents fidelity and constancy. The custom began in ancient Israel where brides wore a blue ribbon in their hair to symbolize their fidelity. A sixpence was placed in the shoe to bring the couple wealth in their married life. Some brides still place a penny in their shoe during the marriage ceremony.

FLOWER POWER

Flowers have always been a big feature at Weddings.

The Groom is supposed to wear a flower that appears in the Bridal Bouquet in his button-hole. This stems from the Medieval tradition of a Knight wearing his Lady's colours, as a declaration of his love. Each flower has its own meaning and can display a special message. Orange Blossom, for instance, signifies chastity, purity and loveliness, while red chrysanthemum means " I love you ".

BRIDAL FLOWERS

In ancient times bouquets were made with herbs and spices, because it was thought that strong smelling herbs would ward off and drive away evil spirits, bad luck and ill health.

Garlic and chives were also popular for the same reason. During Victorian times, flowers took on an additional significance, due to the fashion of the flower language.

THE TIME & THE PLACE

Sunday used to be the most popular wedding day, as it was the one day most people were free from work. Puritans in the Seventeenth Century put a stop to this, however, believing it was improper to be festive on the Sabbath. Today, Saturdays are the busiest, despite the rhyme "Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth, Wednesday best of all, Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses, Saturday for no luck at all".

As for the time of year, the saying 'Marry in the month of May, and you'll live to rue the day' dates back to Pagan times. May, the start of summer, was dedicated to outdoor orgies (i.e. the summer festival Beltane), hardly the best way to begin married life! Queen Victoria is said to have banned her children from marrying in May, and Nineteenth Century Vicars were rushed of their feet on April 30th because Brides refused to marry during May. The sun has always been associated with sexual stimulation and, therefore future fertility.

In Scotland it was traditional for the Bride to 'walk with the sun', proceeding from east to west on the south side of the church and then circling the Church three times 'sunwise' for good luck.

*Married when the year is new, he'll be loving, kind & true,
When February birds do mate, You wed nor dread your fate.
If you wed when March winds blow, joy and sorrow both you'll know.
Marry in April when you can, Joy for Maiden & for Man.
Marry in the month of May, and you'll surely rue the day.
Marry when June roses grow, over land and sea you'll go.
Those who in July do wed, must labour for their daily bred.
Whoever wed in August be, many a change is sure to see
Marry in September's shrine, your living will be rich and fine.
If in October you do marry, love will come but riches tarry.
If you wed in bleak November, only joys will come, remember.
When December snows fall fast, marry and true love will last.*

THE WEDDING CAKE

The Wedding Cake was originally lots of little wheat cakes that were broken over the Bride's head to bestow good luck and fertility. Traditionally the newly-weds should make the first cut to signify sharing their life. Every guest then eats a crumb to ensure good luck. And sleeping with a piece under her pillow is said to make a single woman dream of her future husband.

The giving of almond favors is connected with the motto:

'A gift of five almonds represents health, wealth, long life, fertility and happiness'

The throwing of confetti, meanwhile, is an ancient fertility rite. Handfuls of grain or nuts were traditionally thrown because they are 'life-giving' seeds.

CUTTING THE CAKE

Cutting the cake has come to symbolize the first task in the couple's life together.

Immediately after the cutting, the bride and groom feed each other the first slice. This action symbolizes the commitment to provide for each other that the bride and groom have undertaken. Today the first slice is cut by both bride and groom, but in the past this task was performed by the bride only: she had to show her ability in distributing food without waste, thus proving herself a good housekeeper.

DRESSING UP

Until the nineteenth century Brides hardly ever bought a special Wedding Dress, opting for their best outfit instead. Green was always avoided, as it was thought to be unlucky.

To say a girl 'had a green gown' also implied that she was of loose morals, because her dress would be grass-stained due to rolling around in the fields! Hence *'Marry in Green, ashamed to be seen'*. White Dresses were made popular by Queen Victoria, who broke the tradition of royals marrying in Silver. Symbolizing purity and virginity, white was also thought to ward off evil spirits. Other traditions are that the bride should never make her own dress, that the final stitch should not be completed until she is departing for the Church and that she should never try on the entire outfit before the day.

This was because it was felt dangerous for the Bride to count her chickens. For the same reason, a Bride should never practice signing her new name until it is legally hers, and wedding linen was marked with the Brides maiden rather than married initials. The tradition of Bridesmaids is evolved from the custom of surrounding the Bride with other richly dressed women, in order to confuse evil spirits.

*Married in White, you have chosen right
Married in Grey, you will go far away,
Married in Black, you will wish yourself back,
Married in Red, you will wish yourself dead,*

*Married in Green, ashamed to be seen,
Married in Blue, you will always be true,
Married in Pearl, you will live in a whirl,
Married in Yellow, ashamed of your fellow,
Married in Brown, you will live in the town,
Married in Pink, you spirit will sink.*

BRIDAL BOUQUET

The bridal bouquet has its origins deep in our history. The final choice of flowers incorporated in the bouquet is only reached after much thought and care.

LUCKY HORSESHOE

It is quite usual for the modern bride to carry a lucky horseshoe on her wedding day.

LEAVING HOME

Bride should exit her house from the front door and step out right foot first. Why bride and groom avoid seeing each other on the morning of the wedding day? Perhaps has something to do with the period of arranging marriages! The bride's father, probably, feared the groom would stop the engagement if his fiancé wasn't beauty.

GETTING TO THE CHURCH

Walking was thought to be the best way of getting to Church, as there was more chance to see lucky omens.

Meeting a black cat, seeing a rainbow, having the sun shine on the Bride meant all lucky things to come. Bad omens were seeing a pig crossing the road or meet a funeral procession.

BRIDAL GOWN SUPERSTITIONS

Other superstitions are that the bride should never make her own dress, that the final stitch should not be completed until she is departing for the Church.

The bride should never try on the entire outfit before the wedding day. Usually, brides would put their gowns in sections: looking at herself fully dressed was considered unlucky. Even on the wedding day it was advised to leave off a part of the bridal outfit, such as a glove, when the bride checked her appearance in the mirror.

BRIDESMAIDS

Bridesmaids and best men originate from the Roman law that demanded ten witnesses to be present at a wedding.

In ancient times it was also believed that evil spirits could attend marriages with the purpose to cause mischief and disharmony. The attendants all dressed in identical clothing to the bride and groom so that the evil spirits wouldn't know who was getting married. That's why today bridesmaids and best men wear clothes that are similar to the bride's and groom's.

WHY DOES THE BRIDE STAND ON THE LEFT?

Brides stand on the left because in ancient times grooms used to capture their bride by kidnapping her. If the groom had to fight off other men who also wanted the same woman, he would hold his bride-to-be with his left hand and fight with his sword in the right.

WEDDING FAVORS

Today, the tradition of wedding favors has evolved to giving each guest five sugar coated almonds (in Italian *confetti*) as a symbol of health, fertility, wealth, joy and long-life.

Why almonds? A Greek legend tells the story of a young man called Demophon, who fell in love with a Tracian princess, Phyllis.

Before the marriage ceremony Demophon is informed that his father has died in Athens and he must return for the funeral. He promises to come back by a certain day but cannot return until three months later.

By this time Phyllis is sure that she will never see her lover again and hangs herself. The Gods, touched by her love, transform her into an almond tree. The desperate Demophon offers a sacrifice to the almond tree, declaring his undying love. In response, the almond tree blossoms. Therefore the almond came to symbolize impetuous youth and immortal love.

THE WEDDING RINGS

The circle is the symbol of the sun, love, the earth, the universe and perfection. It is worn on the left third finger because of an ancient Greek belief that a vein from that finger goes directly to the heart.