

# WEDDING TRADITIONS THEN AND NOW

WEDDING COLUMN

Everyone loves a wedding, and many will tell you what is “expected” at a wedding, all the rules, superstitions and traditions. A wedding should be planned around the couple’s choices, using only those traditions that suit them.

But where did some of these traditions come from in the first place?



**The word “bride”** is an old English word meaning “cook”. Take that as you will!

**The ring finger** – it was first believed that the vein in the left hand runs directly to the heart. Putting the wedding ring on this finger binds the couple’s hearts and commitment.

Although during times of modern anatomy this long held belief was found not to be so the tradition continues to this day.

**Something old, Something new, Something borrowed, Something blue**

An old tradition but one which many brides still use today.

**Something Old** – to connect the past with the future.

**Something New** – (usually the bridal gown) suggests a wonderfully new and bright future, good fortune and success together for the couple.

**Something Borrowed** – usually a piece of jewellery or handkerchief from a happily married friend or relative signifies the hope that the new couple would also be blessed with a blissful and joyous life together and remembering friends and family are there for help and support.

**Something Blue** – is often the bride’s garter. A symbol of faithfulness, loyalty and love.

**Garter** – In ancient Israel, brides wore a blue ribbon to signify “fidelity”. The garter-throwing itself derives from a bawdy ritual called “flinging the stocking”. Today, some brides will wear two garters. The blue one she wishes to keep as her memento of her wedding day and the other, in the theme colour of the wedding, which is tossed by the groom to all the young unmarried men attending the wedding.

Tossing of the Bouquet is usually done by the bride to her single women friends at the same time as the garter ritual. The single woman who catches the bouquet is meant to be the next bride.

**Bride’s Handkerchief** – early farmers thought a bride’s wedding day tears were lucky and brought rains for their crops. Later, a crying bride meant that she’d never shed another tear about her marriage. Today, we carry a handkerchief to dab away the tears of happiness and joy. How special to keep your wedding day hanky and pass it down from mother to daughter capturing all

the love and emotion of such a special event from one generation to another.

**Wedding photography** of many years ago used to be a very solemn time. The bridegroom often was seated with the bride standing beside him (perhaps to show her gown to full advantage) but certainly no physical nor visual contact and no smiles by either the bride or groom as this time was documented as a record more than for a framed photograph.

There were a number of ritual photographs to be taken: the bride leaving the house, the bride and bridesmaids arriving at the church, the signing of the register, the couple leaving the church, confetti-throwing and the presentation of the lucky horseshoe to the bride.

At the reception the photographer recorded the bride and groom jointly cutting the cake the best man reading the telegrams and the couple leaving for their honeymoon. Only in the 1960s were more photos taken in the church.

**Dress** – High necklines and long sleeves of years gone by are so different to what modern-day brides wear.

Early settler brides wore a plain coloured frock which was then used as her “best dress”.

Today there are many bridal boutiques and suit hire stores in most centres throughout New Zealand where the bride/groom can be outfitted or have an outfit custom made. Last month a new “luxury designer bridal shop” opened in Barcelona – the only difference is – it is for gay men only. Apart from traditional made-to-measure bridal suits (some inlaid with 22-carat gold which will retail for \$2775 - \$11,100) also on offer for the big day, at this Barcelona shop are a collection of rings, boxer shorts and other accessories.

**Transport** – This was not required in the early days as weddings were often held in the family home and when weddings were held in church the bridal party walked to the wedding. Society weddings were the time to use the horse-drawn carriage with driver suitably clad in morning suit and top hat.

Today’s mode of travel may be by car, train, boat or even helicopter.

**The Wedding Cake** is one of the oldest wedding customs but the traditional fruit cake has taken a back seat.

The design, shape and taste of the wedding cake is completely up to the bridal couple. Fruitcake, banana, carrot, lemon, chocolate mud and either tiered, shaped, and decorated with fresh or icing flowers or ornaments. The giant croquembouche (a high cone of profiteroles – choux filled with pastry cream) and also cup cakes are very popular at present.

**Who pays for what?**

There are no longer any hard and fast rules as to who pays for what and unlike a decade ago the lines are no longer rigidly drawn. The burden of paying for the wedding has shifted in recent years from the shoulders of the bride’s family to include the groom’s family. Also, with many couples marrying later and having money of their own, they are sharing in the expenses. I have a traditional breakdown of expenses sheet which I can email to you upon request. Please email me at belinda@theweddingangel.co.nz.

**Is it still appropriate for the father to be asked for his daughter’s hand in marriage?**

Certainly a long-standing tradition is for the groom to ask his future father-in-law for permission to propose to his daughter – on a recent “fun” survey it seems that it is “etiquette, courtesy and good manners” to still carry

“ Love is not a matter of counting the years, it’s making the years count *W. Smith.* ”

on this tradition.

The groom having received the positive response then has the unenviable decision of whether to buy his fiancé-to-be the engagement ring of her dreams or buy a cheaper one before buying the real one together or as happens these days presenting her with the “gems” and going together to have one especially made for them.

As you plan for your wedding, remember to create new family traditions and customs to be handed down to your children and their children.

Just think, maybe someday, your “new custom” will be as unique and exciting as some mentioned in this article. *f*

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